

AZ NIGHT BUZZ

Kathleen Allen, Arizona Daily Star | January 30, 2011

Chekhov meets Coward in ATC's *Ten Chimneys*

Ten Chimneys is *The Seagull* with a Cowardly touch.

Honest. If Noël Coward and Anton Chekhov collaborated on a play, they'd have come up with *Ten Chimneys*, making its world premiere at Arizona Theatre Company.

The play, about the great 20th century stage acting duo Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt and a summer they spent rehearsing Chekhov's "Seagull," combines the charm and wit of Coward's frothy hits during the 1930s and '40s, with the complexity and intensity of *Seagull*.



Suzanne Bouchard & Steve Hendrickson

Playwright Jeffrey Hatcher deserves some sort of reward for this delicious script, and director David Ira Goldstein deserves one for his tight and knowing guidance.

And one mustn't forget the actors, especially [Steve Hendrickson](#) and Suzanne Bouchard as Lunt and Fontanne. But more on them in a bit.

In the summer of 1938, Sydney Greenstreet and a young Uta Hagen met the Lunts at Ten Chimneys, the Lunt's summer place in Wisconsin. It was there that they did the preliminary rehearsals for "Seagull," a show slated to open in New York and tour the country.

It was that true-life incident that Hatcher used as the launching pad for his story. In his creative mind, life at Ten Chimneys began to mirror - albeit a distorted mirror - the happenings at the country estate in *Seagull*.

Between chirpy one-liners with accents of Coward, Hatcher has planted the intensity, betrayal and desires that so beautifully shape Chekhov's play. If you know *Seagull* you'll recognize the parallels in the Lunt storyline: A young, ambitious and manipulative actress; an older actress who sees her youth and love slipping away; an



Anna Bullard & Steve Hendrickson

older man with a wandering eye; a country manor; a play within a play. Chekhov's *Seagull* was a comedy - a pretty darn grim comedy. Hatcher's play is a comedy without the grim.

If you know diddly squat about *Seagull*, *Ten Chimneys* is still a tasty piece of theater that'll be easy to understand and embrace. Much of that is because of Bouchard, who shimmies into the skin of the sophisticated, over-the-top Fontanne with a tongue dipped in acid and a fierce love for her husband and their reputation. Hendrickson kept up with her and carried himself with a debonair style.

Michael Winters was spot-on as Sydney Greenstreet and Linda Stephens was a hoot as Hattie, Alfred's conniving and clever mother.

Another character in this play is the house, Ten Chimneys, and scenic designer John Ezell nailed it. The rustic and rambling estate amidst towering trees felt lived in and was homey with touches of odd opulence - in short, it echoed Ten Chimneys.

Marcia Dixcy Jory's flowing, fashionable costumes smacked of the '30s and '40s, money, and the style one would expect theater folk to embrace. Goldstein moved the production along at a steady pace, allowing the play to breath without stuttering.

Hatcher's script is smart and funny. It no doubt will have a life beyond Tucson. And if this production is any indication, it will be a good life, indeed.