

LOS ANGELES TIMES

'Love' is adultery and extortion

November 23, 2007

BY CHARLOTTE STOUDT

Harassed by "Daily Show" reruns, turkey leftovers or how much Steve Jobs will make off you this holiday season? Circle X offers the perfect theatrical antidote with "Love Loves a Pornographer," Jeff Goode's deeply silly, thoroughly enjoyable period satire on sexual hypocrisy now running at [Inside] the Ford.

Gary Smoot's gorgeous Victorian drawing room set is bedecked floor to ceiling with gilt-framed oil paintings; carefully cultivated image -- and the undignified reality behind what we present to others -- is the target of Circle X Theatre's witty romp.

Faintly successful novelist Lord Loveworthy (William Salyers) has invited his neighbor, literary critic and man of the cloth Miles Monger (Jim Anzide), and his beleaguered wife (Johanna McKay) for tea. The ostensible occasion is the return of the Loveworthys' errant daughter, Emily (Kathleen Rose Perkins), who has just become engaged to an earl.

Of course, it's actually extortion, adultery and dueling pistols that are to be served up with the crust-free cucumber sandwiches. Goode ("The Eight: Reindeer Monologues") can tease the bejesus out of a comic premise, and his gleeful dismantling of the British gentry's corseted mores spins into an unhinged anarchy that would please past masters Wilde and Coward.

Director Jillian Armenante paces the play like a fox hunt, and the actors jump on their cues with fevered relish. As Lady Lillian, wide-eyed Gillian Doyle raises started hauteur to an art form, while McKay's turn as the trembling, put-upon Mrs. Monger offers an object lesson in deferential but relentless scene theft. Sure, there are relevant themes here -- the wide stance of the morally smug, the cost of creative and marital stultification -- but the fun is the ride itself. As Lord Loveworthy urges his imminent son-in-law, "Speak freely . . . for you are very soon to be family and lose that luxury once and for all." Happily, Goode and Circle X don't seem to be settling down any time soon.

"Love Loves a Pornographer," [Inside] the Ford at the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. E., Hollywood. 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sundays. No performances Dec. 23. Ends Jan. 20. \$20 and \$25. Contact: (323) 461-3673. Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes.