

# Pacifica Tribune



Lance Huntley photo

Film noir hero Stone (Ben Ball) considers the price he has to pay for rescuing Mallory Kingsley (Lauren Arnold), who is more lost than found.

## THEATER REVIEW

### Gumshoe musical delivers the goods

By Jean Bartlett

Tribune Writer

Tough-talking heroes, heels with the drop on smooth, nice girls who didn't listen to what mama said, lethal ladies who could sweet talk a viper, you're going to find them all, right now, steaming, striding and singing their way through the film noir musical comedy "City of Angels" – currently playing the mainstage of the Pacifica Spindrift Players. Directed by Amy Wares Edelson, costumed by Erin Gallagher, choreographed by Maggie Martin and sung out under the rehearsal music direction of Jad Bernardo and the performance music direction of Louis Lagalante, "City of Angels" rolls like a winning 8-ball, down through the thrilling mess of 1940s private-eye pulp fiction and into the waiting pocket of audience "wow."

"City of Angels" (music by Cy Coleman, lyrics by David Zippel, and book by Larry Gelbart) is set in Hollywood in the late 1940s. It's got two stories going on simultaneously. The first is about an East Coast novelist named Stine. Stine is in Hollywood to pound out his "big paycheck" picture deal on an Underwood typewriter. But it comes at a cost. He's got Hollywood producer/director Buddy Fiddler hovering over his plotline like a pigeon on a picnic. And so Stine's screenplay "City of Angels," which Stine is writing in real time, becomes the "reel" to Stine's actual life.

In Stine's "reel" life, we meet Stone, an ex-cop turned private detective. Women swoon for Stone, but Stone's heart will always belong to Bobbie, the nightclub singer who got away. In Stine's real life, his wife Gabby wishes Stine had never given up novel writing for Tinsel Town. She leaves Stine when she learns he is having an affair with Donna, Buddy Fidler's secretary. But Gabby will always be Stine's true love. In Stine's screenplay we meet Irwin S. Irving, Buddy Fidler's film counterpart, a slimy movie mogul who knows how to make a buck.

In real life, Buddy is married to Carla Haywood. In Stine's screenplay Carla becomes Alaura Kingsley, a double-dealing femme fatale with all the best lines and the structure to deliver them. Alaura is married to Luther Kingsley, a man her senior by many years. She claims devotion. Luther is encased in an iron lung. Luther is devoted to his daughter, Mallory. Mallory is a troubled girl and she's gone missing at the film's start, which is why PI Stone has been hired to find her.

Stine's screenplay plot, just like his life, pivots. It's a ring toss in the proverbial carnival of life – more than 40 scenes worth. But both "real" and "reel" play like a fiddle with a tune you want to keep playing. No wonder "City of Angels," which opened on Broadway in 1989, nabbed three Tony Awards: Best Musical, Best Book and Best Score.



Lance Huntley photo. **Sycophant movie mogul Buddy Fidler/Irwin S. Irving (Lindsay Kelliher) is just too comfortable.**

How did Pacifica's cut do? From its snappy start, it's a sexy, high-speed romp into jazz-infused film noir, where performers sing like angels even when they are very bad, and the band swings. Here's the skinny.

Gary Schoenfeld as Stine, the well-paid screenwriter battling his novelist ideals, was tops – vocals easy on the ears and quality diction. Ben Ball as PI Stone, the hero of Stine's screenplay, was all charisma and vocal charm. Lindsay Schulz, as waning wife Gabby and Stone's lost love Bobbie, is a stage natural with a beautiful voice. Morgan Cross, as Buddy's secretary Donna and Stone's trusted Girl Friday Oolie, was excellent throughout but an absolute marvel when she sang "You Can Always Count On Me."

Lindsay Kelliher as Buddy Fidler and Irwin S. Irving, director in both the "real" and "reel," gives a dazzling, subtly hilarious performance of a jerk blowhard. Lauren Arnold, as troubled Hollywood starlet Avril Raines and troubled missing daughter Mallory Kingsley, grabs hold of her characters' color, and ability to dance and deliver a song, and soars with it. Then there is Cat Imperato. She plays Carla Haywood, Buddy's wife who is having an affair with pop singer Jimmy Powers, and she also plays the calculating screen vixen Alaura Kingsley. She is deliciously good – as cool as a cucumber at playing bad. Brava.

Loved the deadpanning and vocal finesse of the play's Greek Chorus – the Angel City Four. They back the play's pop singer Jimmy Powers, played by Greyson Murray and everyone wants to know Greyson, when are you coming out with a record? We are so there.

"City of Angels" plays weekends at PSP Theater, 1050 Crespi Drive, Pacifica, through February 17. Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Sunday at 2 p.m. Box Office: 650-359-8002 or online at [www.pacificaspindriftplayers.org](http://www.pacificaspindriftplayers.org). Tickets: \$30/adults, \$25 seniors and students.

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