

# *Birthday Suite*

A review by C. Kish  
San Diego Theatre Scene

It wouldn't be a bad idea to head over to OnStage Playhouse and help Bob celebrate his birthday with Bambi in their latest production called *Birthday Suite*. This one will easily tickle your funny bone.



Robin Hawdon's *Birthday Suite* is a farce that pairs up bodies with hotel suites and deliciously scrambles up the names of the birthday suite participants. Luckily for OnStage audiences it's then up to an Italian hotel waiter (**Charley Miller**) to make matters worse with his flamboyant ministrations and can-do-everything attitude.

Hawdon has been blessed with a successful career: playwright, novelist, soap actor, film star and director. His first major success was *The Mating Game*, followed by others such as *Perfect Wedding* and *Don't Dress for Dinner*. His latest novel (published in 2002) is called *The Journey*.

**Bob Christiansen**, in his Director's Notes, gives credit for finding this play to Artistic Director, Teri Brown. It is interesting to note that this is only the second production of *Birthday Suite* to be performed in the United States.



CAROLYN WHEAT KOENIG

Charles Nichols' set design gave us two look-alike, medium -class hotel suites with a working Murphy Bed in one of the rooms. It nicely sets up the playing field for the quite remarkable cast of five: Bob (**Jerry Young**), Kate (**Carolyn Wheat Koenig--Left**), Dick (**Michael C. Burgess**), Liz (**Karina Montgomery**), and Tony.

I have seen very few Community Theatre farces consistently hit their comedic mark, but Christiansen and his splendid comedy troupe happily join that short list of such productions. Kudos to both director and cast for consistent vocal and physical timing that received a live and enthusiastic laugh track by its audience.

Miller's Tony character entertained from the moment he took stage until his last exit. He grabbed onto some high energy and wrestled with it throughout the show. His animation was all encompassing: on-fire eyes, hands and arms that spoke a separate language, and rapid-fire apologies, dutiful explanations and an uncompromising effort to please (both hotel tenants and audience). His mangled English delivery was pure farcical poetry.

Young plays the part of Bob with just the right touch for his role as a less-than-exciting civil servant whose marriage is sliding into oblivion faster than melting candles on a birthday cake. Bob's awaiting a visit from Bambi, a hard working gal purchased by his friend, to enliven his celebratory spirits. We are quite taken with his ordinary lack of ambitiousness and his nice-guy demeanor.

The role of Kate is perfectly understated by Koenig; she's a young woman of fine British substance who works in a boutique, loves country walks, antiques, and cats. Her balance of nice and naughty is inviting, especially for Bob, who falls hard for this newly found playmate. She seems to make the best of a bad 'lonely hearts' situation, coming to the hotel straight from the camps of "Soul-Mates Unlimited." Hers was a voice of some reason turned into a semi-wild woman.

Burgess plays Dick with the air of a slow moving, thoughtfully pondering, British gent. As a psychiatrist with his own share of neuroses, he's a pleasant, comfortable foil for the other actors. His slow gaited, bow-tied, tallish form underscored his character's push towards a respectable but prudish interior. His was a reasoned delivery full of comic undertones that entertained on many levels.

The character of Liz comes with an AKA (Bambi), but I won't give up the entire plot. Montgomery gets into the character of the betrayed woman with a mild burn; she is not the typical hysterical wife that must reach hyena vocal levels to properly berate her man and ascertain her imploding fury. Hawdon's script allows for a calmer, more relaxed British discussion of her bottled emotions and she delivers.

As with most farces you will observe the constant entrances and exits of the principal players; the opening and closing of doors, the hiding, ducking, misplacing of possessions, et al. It all comes with the price of any ticket to a comedy/farce. What is interesting in this production is that the comedy remains accessible; somehow more grounded and closer to our American sensitivity to humor, rather than one grounded in purely British witticism.

OnStage's *Birthday Suite* is one to celebrate, no matter how many candles you find decorating your own birthday cake; it's a farce that's nicely delivered to any age group; go and celebrate.

Rating: KKK

(*Birthday Suite* plays thru December 4; ring them up for tickets @ 619-422-7787. Or request a reservation on their web site, [www.onstageplayhouse.org](http://www.onstageplayhouse.org))