

THE SACRAMENTO BEE sacbee.com

Theater review: 'Enron' at Capital Stage is a 4-star account of a 5-star accounting scandal

mcrowder@sacbee.com

Published Tuesday, Sep. 25, 2012

Remember those head-spinning days at the turn of the century when the Enron energy trading scandal made the news? Something on that scale will never happen again, we thought. But to paraphrase a concept: Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

That our government and our financial institutions subsequently made the Enron malfeasance look like petty theft makes the dramatic satire "Enron" all the more sobering.

The ambitious, rewarding new production of British playwright Lucy Prebble's "Enron" at Capital Stage personalizes the historic shell game of financial manipulation that led to what was at the time the largest bankruptcy reorganization in American history. Collateral damage included the largest-ever audit failure by the Arthur Andersen company and the Enron shareholders who lost nearly \$11 billion when the company's stock, valued at \$90 per share in mid-2000, plunged to less than \$1 by the end of November 2001.

Prebble re-creates the story through the parallel rise and fall of the two men most responsible for the debacle, company president Jeffrey Skilling and the man he hired as chief financial officer, Andrew Fastow.

The galvanizing, pitch-perfect performances of Jonathan Rhys Williams as Skilling and Aaron Wilton as Fastow unleash the play's meditation on arrogance and hubris. Greed is nearly an afterthought for the two men, who obsessively want to be smarter than anyone else. Making money in energy trading is how they show off. California's rolling blackouts, which resulted from the energy deregulation they pushed for, are payoffs justified by their ingenuity.

Prebble contrasts their twin ascents within the company against the naive, benevolent guidance of Enron founder Kenneth Lay. The sly performance by Gary S. Martinez as Lay never lets us quite know how much he really understands what Skilling and Fastow are doing with their three-card monte mark-to-market accounting or their mysterious shadow companies. Also contrasted with Skilling and Fastow is the excellent Shannon Mahoney's Claudia Roe. Roe is a composite character based on women in Enron's upper management who opposed Skilling's ideas and ultimately helped expose his corruption.

The strong ensemble of entertaining side characters and imaginary creatures includes Michael Stevenson, Lucinda Hitchcock Cone, Alexandra Ralph and Andrew J. Perez.

The fascinating production receives innovative top-shelf support. Composer Gregg Coffin's original music continually binds the shifting tones of the play while propelling the narrative's creeping senses of urgency and dread. Scene designer Stephen C. Jones, lighting designer Steve Decker, and video designers Decker and Will Klundt create some of the most cohesive and inventive design elements ever seen regionally.

Director Stephanie Gularte presents a sprawling, tragic fantasia as an entertainment spectacle. As big a show as this often is, she allows us to feel the human tragedy as well. The narrative cranks up to the top of a mountain and then careens down the road like a convertible with no brakes, throwing screaming passengers out of the car on each hairpin turn.

ENRON

Four stars (out of four)

What: British playwright Lucy Prebble has created a satirical fantasia based on the Texas energy company that created the first financial crisis of the millennium.

When: Continuing 7 p.m. Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, and 2 p.m. Sundays, through Oct. 21

Where: Capital Stage, 2215 J St., Sacramento

Tickets: \$18-\$32 general

Information: (916) 995-5464 or www.capstage.org

Running time: Two hours and 20 minutes including one intermission

© Copyright *The Sacramento Bee*. All rights reserved.



Share

Facebook

Twitter

Share

StumbleUpon

Email



Order Reprint

Call *The Bee's* Marcus Crowder, (916) 321-1120.

- Read more articles by Marcus Crowder