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## Private Lives



When the recently married Elyot Chase whistles the tune of "Someday I'll Find You," little did he know that the woman across the balcony from him would start singing the lyrics: "I'll leave you never, love you for ever, all our past sorrow redeeming." Such is how two newlyweds meet their old flames on the same honeymoon in France, the premise of a play about love, and even more so, about hate, and about how love comes from hate, the crux of our very private lives.

Luke Yankee and Caryn Desai's production of Noel Coward's "Private Lives" is a fast-paced romp through many dimensions of human emotions, chiefly those of excitement, gratification, jealousy, and brief but engaging happiness. It's indeed the champagne glass with a bomb type of production that appears on the play bill.

Elyot (Freddy Douglas) and Sibyl (Jennice Butler) Chase just married, but Sibyl can't stop asking about Elyot's ex-wife "Mandy", and while Elyot doesn't mind Sibyl, she is rather simple. Amanda (Caroline Kinsolving) and Victor (Adam J. Smith) Prynne just married, but Victor can't stop interrogating her about her ex-husband, and while Amanda can rely on Victor to take care of her, he is rather a bore. Both Elyot and Amanda love to gamble and drink, but not their spouses. They meet each other under the familiar music and fall in love all over again, and decide soon that they must escape together to Paris.

On their second honeymoon, Elyot and Amanda invent the phrase "Solomon Isaacs", or "Sollocks" for short, to stop any arguments they may have going for two minutes. Initially, it works, as Elyot would begin to play the piano while Amanda listens to the radio, and things would calm down. Eventually, the jealousy they have for each others' lovers during their five year hiatus are too much to bear. They are seen wrestling with each other and throwing records, vases, and pillows on the ground, as Sibyl and Victor enter their apartment. The French maid servant Louise (Wendy Cutler) is hilariously perturbed, and Victor finds Elyot much too "flippant" for his own good.

Yankee's production is bland in terms of set design, but Coward's play requires not visual brilliance but verbal ones. Douglas's British accent is brilliant, and he gives an imitation of a young Rex Harrison while onstage. He has great chemistry with Kinsolving, especially when they are in their jumpers enjoying the evening, little knowing that their private emotions will lead to yet another brawl. It is clear from their performance it is a love built on hate.

The neglected heroes of this tragicomedy are played with a subdued tone by Butler and Smith, but by no means are they forgotten. Smith's Victor has a set of mannerisms that serve to typecast him, such as arranging pillows and moving chairs, and they go beyond just what Coward put down on the page. Butler's Sibyl is very annoying, but as annoying characters go, she is extremely effective. Thus when Sibyl and Victor argue with each other near the end, we are not surprised. In fact, we may have been secretly wishing it all along.

Coward's brilliant dialogues are delivered almost flawlessly by the cast, and no small joke will be missed. But don't take this play too seriously, or you risk hating rather than loving this flippant effort.

"Private Lives" is performed at International City theatre (<http://ictlongbeach.org/>) in Long Beach, California, until 18 of September, 2011.