

The Star Without A Name

In "**The Star Without A Name**" at the Dragon Theatre, a mysterious, glamorous woman is thrown from a late-night train and into the welcoming arms of a lonely eccentric. The only thing we get when we hang around late-night train stations is a mugging, so that's how you can tell this is theater.

This is a new translation of a 1942 play by Romanian Mihail Sebastian. The centerpiece Unknown Woman (Marjorie Hazeltine) is unknown because she refuses to tell anyone who she is, where she's going or why she has diamond earrings and a dress worth more than most people's student loan debt but no cash for a ticket, which of course is why she was thrown off.

The rural town she ends up in is so small that it doesn't matter whether the clocks run and people gather simply to watch elegant rich folks ride by in trains that don't stop there. If ever there was a community desperately in need of your HBO Go password, this is it.

With a mystery on our hands, the male half of our love story comes in the form of the local math teacher (Myles Rowland). He's a small-time eccentric with an obsessive love of antique books and amateur astronomy. The Unknown Woman initially considers him a provincial weirdo... which he is. But of course she warms up to him eventually, and of course so do we. She agrees to crash at his place for the night, on the grounds that it just barely beats her original plan of killing herself instead. (That's the show's joke, not ours.)

Like most stage couples, they're complementary opposites: He's highly erudite but totally unworldly. She's urbane and cosmopolitan but ignorant of even such basic book-learnin' as what a constellation is. He has passion but nothing to spend it on; she has everything in the world except something to care about. They spend a night and a morning together, and you can do the math on this one without even having to count on your fingers.

It has to be acknowledged that the Dragon's "The Star Without a Name" gets stuck with some notable duds in the supporting cast. There's an oddball stationmaster who carts

around a cane for a limp he only occasionally seems to have, and a town busybody who seems to be channeling Margaret Hamilton's bike-riding scenes in "The Wizard of Oz," and many other folks who just don't seem to know what to do.

In fact, of the ancillary actors, only the great Tom Bleecker, as the heroically hangdog music teacher, has the spark and verve the material needs. A lot of stage time burns up around these folks trying to be funny without much going, and it's a drag.

But our leads are very good together, and when they're finally alone they coax some magic out of this one. Hazeltine in particular is simply wonderful: haughty but provocative, sometimes pained and sometimes downright girlish. It's a romance you can envy, but in the end it's a tragedy of a very particular sort and one that, sadly, most of us will recognize.

"The Star Without A Name" is unwieldy even in its best moments, but when the lights finally come down you're left with a very real sense of melancholy and regret that affirms some of the best principles of what live theater can do.

"The Star Without a Name" plays through May 3 at the Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway in Redwood City. For tickets and information, call 650-493-2006 or go to DragonProductions.net