

ers & Sisters regular Look Macfarlane mines Scott's brio and vulnerability to winning ef-

turning also heighten the at- [See Theater, Page E19]

## THEATER REVIEW

# Delightful gallows humor in 'Divorce'

F. KATHLEEN FOLEY

If you think the premise for "Divorce! The Musical," now in its world premiere at the Hudson Mainstage, sounds a bit broad and simplistic, you couldn't be more wrong. Erin Kamler, who wrote the book, music and lyrics for the show, skillfully negotiates her slippery subject and scores a theatrical hat trick.

The opening number, "Til Death Do Us Part," takes place at the wedding of Rich and Penny Hughes (Rick Segall and Lowe Taylor), rapturous newlyweds caught in the first flush of connubial commitment. Fast forward to four years later, as the two air their grievances to a marriage therapist (Gabrielle Wagner). It seems that Rich, a successful doctor and consultant on a popular medical show, is ready to start a family, while Penny, a wannabe actress, wants to concentrate on her career. That rending difference starts an inexorable unraveling.

Twice married before the age of 30, and twice divorced, Kamler tackles her subject with authoritative bitterness and a delightful gallows humor sans any hint of the self-pitying or self-serving. The one area in which Kamler seemingly allows her personal feelings to interrupt the arc of her story is in her treatment of the couple's carrion-crow attorneys, played by Wagner and Leslie Stevens.

## 'Divorce! The Musical'

Where: Hudson Mainstage, 6539 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays to Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays

Price: \$25 to \$34.99

Contact: (323) 960-1056

Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Although certainly apt, that didactic subplot steals focus from the real business of the show, namely, the couple's emotional journey, from denial to rancor to exhausted acceptance.

Director Rick Sparks and his uniformly amazing cast suffer no such slip-ups en route to a practically perfect staging. Musical director and arranger David O, who also helms the lively on-stage band, makes Kamler's score soar; the superb technical elements — Danny Cistone's set, Denitsa Bliznakova's costumes, Cricket Myers' sound and Jeremy Pivnick's lighting — are all essential to the show's rich ambience. Solidly backed by Wagner, Stevens and Gregory Franklin, who all play multiple roles, Taylor and Segall are simply terrific, brimming with a raw emotionalism that is heart-rending.

As for Sparks, he assembles the show's challenging components with the skill of a puzzle master. What results is genuinely artful, a vivid mosaic assembled from the cracked pieces of a shattered relationship.

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