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LOS ANGELES THEATRE REVIEWS

SHAME

THEATRE REVIEW BY WENZEL JONES

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The longest year of my life was the two weeks we spent during 10th-grade English, plowing through *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's dry rumination on the intersection of hypocrisy and Puritan morality, an experience that almost put me off the printed word entirely. Who knew that all the material needed was an eclectic rock score by Mark Governor and a little direction and choreography, both achieved with clarity and wit on the part of Janet Roston (assisted by Liz Sroka), to kick its dry old husk into life? In best rock opera fashion, musical styles and behavioral anachronisms pile on in service to the central story and the overall effect is impressive indeed.

The first minutes are admittedly rough: There's too much exposition and too little sound quality to understand it, and combined with remarkably pedestrian music and dance, one

is given pause. The arrival of the cuckolded Roger Chillingworth -- a visceral performance by Danny Shorago -- rouses the production, which begins to soar once we finally hear from Hester Prynne. Katrina Lenk is an arresting presence who gives this crucial role life, and her voice is an intoxicating combination of strength, beauty,

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and pain. Arthur Dimmesdale (Mark Luna) is the weasel I remember -- but this time with a voice that can cut glass. The role of the adolescent Pearl Prynne is played with an appealing mix

of brattiness and burgeoning maturity by Laura Darrell.

Michael Wells is to be commended for his vocal direction, as he shows this fine collection of voices to advantage. The stylistic demands of Governor's score are challenging, but whether it's full-on rock or a crystalline a cappella harmony, the singing is exemplary, particularly from the actors who complete the cast and who form the male (Daniel Lujan, Joe Donohoe, James W. Lynch) and female (Kelly Becerra, Erin Zaruba, Trina Taylor) choruses. Were there a CD for sale afterward, I'd spring for it. The spare, functional set (Adam Haas Hunter) is accessorized by a multimedia design (Jesse Bonnel) that serves an energetic, but never obtrusive, wallpaper. One often sees shows that show promise but need work. It's rare indeed to be present as the pieces fall into place.