



Steve DiBartolomeo/
Contributed photo

Gene Gillette and Yvonne Woods burn up the stage.

Complex and funny 'Burn This' lights up SSC stage

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If you thought that Romeo and Juliet were the ultimate in star-crossed lovers, don't miss "Burn This," Shakespeare Santa Cruz's second non-Shakespeare offering. While "Romeo and Juliet" may remain the unrivaled account of the tragic consequences of unwise romantic liaisons, "Burn This" will give you a whole new perspective on the perversity of human nature when it comes to love.

Lanford Wilson's edgy and complex play looks, without reservation, at the psychology of relationships and the vulnerability of individuals.

The quartet of characters is drawn with clarity and honesty, and not much compassion. They are four real people, with complicated and intricate lives and dreams, and the love affair that finally consumes two of them is, if not tragic, certainly compelling. The playwright's view is of passionate inevitability, but not necessarily the "happily-ever-after" kind. In "Burn This," the lovers may be more likely embarking on a future of mutual destruction.

But "Burn This" is not just a

Burn

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dramatic look at the complexities of human relationships, it's also a wildly funny comedy with deliciously hilarious lines and fine visual jokes. Wilson's ability to stir unexpected laughs into the cauldron of carnal knowledge is one of the show's best features.

Under the taut and impressive direction of Michael Barakiva, the play is fast-paced and beautifully constructed. Timing is excellent, sometimes frenzied and sometimes slyly parodying the cliches of romantic drama. The superb cast moves comfortably and with exceptional confidence, and every gesture and conversation is perfectly natural.

The four characters in the play are unique in their individual personalities, and each is drawn with fine care. Yvonne Woods is the lovely and graceful Anna, an ambitious dancer and choreographer whose happy and stable romantic life is suddenly imploded by an unlikely encounter — and Woods handles the role with perfect control, moving skillfully through her emotional upheavals with alternating confidence and passion.

Larry, who shares an apartment with Anna (and, until recently, with Robbie, who died in a tragic accident), is played to perfection by the very talented Stephen Bel Davies whose stage presence is splendid. As the "gay roommate," he is both

participant in the drama and narrator to it as necessary, and every gesture and line is delivered with perfect ease.

In the role of Anna's screenwriter boyfriend, Burton, David Arrow is rich, secure and caring, a really sweet guy who comes and goes in the apartment with casual confidence, happy with their relationship and romantically attentive. He's pretty much what every woman would be delighted with, and together they are apparently an ideal couple.

Gene Gillette is outstanding as Pale, the brother of the deceased Robbie; he is a dangerous eruption into the complacent loveliness of the apartment and a chaotic interloper into the lives of the others. Gillette is superb at portraying the barely suppressed rage and controlled frustration of his character, and when he is on the stage, his energy is savage and magnetic.

All of the intensely emotional action takes place on a spacious and wonderfully appointed set designed by Jon Iacovelli, who has created everybody's fantasy of a yuppie New York apartment. Costumes by Olivera Gajic are totally appropriate, adding to the same cosmopolitan image, and lighting by David Lee Cuthbert perfectly emphasizes the drama.

"Burn This" is a deeply engrossing look at four individuals and their interactions, both verbally and physically, and their ability and inability to share and communicate their dreams and frustrations. It is both beautiful and violent,