

# Times Square Angel

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## *He Done Her Right*

By LAURIE STONE

### High-Stepping It

TIMES SQUARE ANGEL, by Charles Busch; directed by Kenneth Elliott; scenic design by B.T. Whitehill; costume design by Debra Tennenbaum; wig design by Elizabeth Katherine Carr, lighting design by Vivien Leone; production stage manager Elizabeth Katherine Carr, choreography by Jeff Veazey. Presented by Mr. Elliott and Gerald A. Davis. At the Provincetown Playhouse, 133 Macdougall Street.

CAST: Andy Halliday (Eddie), Robert Carey (Johnny the Noodle, Georgie), Tom Aulino (Reporter, Mrs. Paine, Milton Keisler, Agnes), Arnie Kolodner (Abe Kesselman, Albert), Charles Busch (Irish O'Flanagan), Meghan Robinson (Miss Ellerbee, Olive Sanborn, Old Mag), Ralph Buckley (Duke O'Flanagan, Chick LaFountain), Julie Halston (Mrs. Tooley, Stella), Theresa Marlowe (Cookie Gibbs, Valerie Waverly), Michael Belanger (Dexter Paine 3d), Yvonne Singh (Peona).



Times Square Angel dances on its pins. (Robert Carey and Charles Busch)

In his book *Alienated Affections*, Seymour Kleinberg, speculating on the appeal of woman-centered melodramas of the '30s and '40s - especially the Warner Bros. brews starring Bette Davis and Ida Lupino - says that the heroines' enormous energy, regardless of how it's directed, comes across as free-flying libido. The characters represent sex; their ambitiousness is erotic. They're punished, in accordance with the moralistic conventions of these movies, but the audience roots for them. Whatever else traps them, they're not victims of

their femininity, and their eroticism and centrality invite women and men, straights and gays, to identify with them.

Charles Busch, who wrote *Times Square Angel* and also plays its diva, Irish O'Flanagan, shares Kleinberg's take in this witty, knowing, and deeply affectionate gloss on these movies. "Rich people got to stay rich and poor people got to get rich," Irish proclaims before the footlights. It's the depression. She has brains - she even won a scholarship to a fancy boarding school - but her rotten, boozing father made her work in a zipper factory. So she became a stripper (being good at unzipping), and was ready to marry Dexter Paine III, when his mater said she'd cut him off without a cent. "Your figure will spread like many an Irish immigrant's," mater forecast for Irish. Our heroine then nixed it with Dex, pocketed mater's tidy check, and became hard-boiled.

The dialogue is 24-carat Leo Gorcey. Legs are "pins," money is "scratch." The characters are 200-proof Hollywood: an all-heart USO girl; a mixed-up senator's daughter looking for kicks in the lower depths; a new-recruit angel with one chance to earn his wings. *Times Square Angel* is a drag show, but of genre, not gender. It doesn't matter whether men or women play the parts; the attitude toward the material is the thing, and it's beautifully consistent, entirely of a place and not for one moment hostile to women, as is sentimental, nostalgic drag.

With his gangly legs (pardon, "pins"), expressing centuries of scabbling- dame sinew and vulnerability, Busch is sweet, clownish, and vampy. It's impossible not to watch him, though he doesn't eat the scenery or the fine supporting ensemble. Many in the cast, under Kenneth Elliot's direction, play two and three parts, yet bring surprises and sprightliness to each. As sinister mobster Chick LaFountain, Ralph Buckley makes George Raft look meek. Arnie Kolodner lives so thoroughly in his angel role, he's downright stirring when he pleads for time to save Irish.

Plot is the evening's only problem. Borrowing loosely from *A Christmas Carol* and *It's a Wonderful Life*, Busch doesn't refashion these stories as imaginatively as he does the characters. Scenes in the middle, especially, are predictable. The production's vigor, however, is unflaggingly entertaining, and the ending brilliantly cheats the old production code. We're allowed to love Irish for all the reasons Hollywood would have punished her, and then she's saved! She even gets to keep her mink and red-gash mouth.