

LA Weekly

Snake in the Grass

By Steven Mikulan

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If you like double-cross genre plays with twists, you'll thoroughly enjoy Alan Ayckbourn's 2002 divertissement — even though, unlike in *Sleuth* and *Death Trap*, you can see those twists coming a mile away. Annabel Chester (Pamela Salem) returns to England to claim her inheritance, now that her father has died after a long illness. Unfortunately, his former nurse, Alice (Nicola Bertram), is blackmailing Annabel's sister, Miriam (Claire Jacobs), for helping with her father's demise. If the sisters come up with £100,000, Alice will turn over a letter the dying man scribbled accusing Miriam of trying to murder him. On the other hand, it might be more cost-effective for the two to get rid of Alice than this damning bit of evidence. *Snake* is an old-fashioned thriller capable of wowing modern audiences, and this cast proves itself more than capable. Salem especially shines as the prissy scold whose flawed heart condition suggests a deeper moral condition. Director Mark Rosenblatt emphasizes atmospherics, and these pay off to give us a chill even as we judge the characters. The Matrix's wide stage accommodates Laura Fine Hawkes' nicely detailed garden set that establishes the lay of the land in three defined spaces. Eric Snodgrass' sound design is crisp and subtle, touching the senses like a layer of night fog. Prerecorded music is usually intrusive in nonmusicals, but Hal Lindes' restrained score fortifies the story's unsettling mood. Matrix Theater, 7657 Melrose Ave., W. Hlywd.; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; thru May 4. (323) 960-4420. A Salem K Theater Co. Production.