

Alluring images of stardom, smoking and sex

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OP CONTRIBUTOR

Emphysema
Vancouver East Cultural Centre
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Touchstone Theatre premiered Janet Munsil's *Emphysema* (A Love Story) at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre this month. The play is based on the sensational article British drama critic Kenneth Tynan wrote about silent film star Louise Brooks for the New Yorker in 1978, titled "The Girl in the

Black Helmet." Munsil intertwines the spirited, three-day long interview between Tynan (Donald Adams) and Brooks (Shelia Paterson) with Tynan's obsessive fantasy revolving around 'Lulu' (Erin Wells), a character Brooks played in a 1928 film *Pandora's Box*. *Emphysema* is a spellbinding story filled with imagination, passion, and intrigue.

A black box with a movable screen fills the back stage. Throughout the play, pictures of Brooks and images from her movies are projected on the screen. When it is lifted it reveals the cur-

rent apartment of Brooks. The front of the stage, which consists of a couch at one end and a bar at the other, represents Tynan's mind (or as the program describes it, "places in the imagination").

With the exception of a few minutes at the start of the play, Adams is on stage for the entire 85 minutes of the play. He plays two characters, the stuttering, nervous reviewer meeting his idol for the first time, and the sophisticated, sexual lover of Lulu. Adams' lucid transformations and flawless delivery bring a vital energy and elegance to the stage. Paterson's portrayal of

the aged Brooks is equally compelling. Together they develop a dynamic relationship that results in a fascinating clash of wits. Wells' young and sensual Lulu is a perfect contrast to Paterson's old and bitter Brooks. Wells adds a unique flavour to the threesome, embodying the alluring image of stardom, smoking and sex.

Emphysema is one of the most exciting new plays I've seen. It combines a solid script with energetic performances and insightful direction. *Emphysema* is a wonderful introduction to Touchstone Theatre's season.

