

Gay Theatre

Autumn Canticle

by Ted Flagg

John W. Lowell's intelligent and wonderfully literate play is loosely based on the lives of noted British composer Benjamin Britten, and his long-time lover/companion Peter Pears, the tenor for whom he wrote the title roles in his operas *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*.

Renowned composer Peter Billings (William McCauley) and his life-partner David Williams (Alan Brooks) have had a stunning mutual career, with each supporting the other's efforts. Now, Billings has had to undergo heart by-pass surgery. In his debilitated state, he has ceased to believe in his talent, and for a time at least, he needs almost full time care.

Young composer Walker (Seth Resnick) joins the household as companion and caretaker for Billings. He does his best to keep Billings happy, and encourage him to resume his composing, but Williams feels increasingly shut-out, jealous and resentful. (As the saying goes, all triangles are competitive—and in all directions!) When it emerges that one of the men has had a furtive sexual fling with Walker, tensions between them come to a head. But Walker is also a catalyst, whose disturbing presence forces the men to confront all the lies, compromises, evasions, and frustrations of a life-long relationship.

The play is on the talky side, but it is extremely good talk. And it is particularly fascinating because it knowingly examines the seldom-seen lives of professional classical musicians. And it looks long and carefully at the problems and complexities in the lives of older gays. (How often do you see a play that honestly looks at the problems of long-term gay relationships?)

Randy Brenner directs with a careful and delicate hand, letting the play proceed at its own unforced pace. Brooks, as the glib, handsome, waspishly witty Williams, is respon-



L-R: Seth Resnik, William McCauley, and Alan Brook.  
(photo: Maximilian Noah.)

sible for much of the comedy, delivering his clever barbs with elan. But he also skillfully plumbs the tangled emotional underpinnings. McCauley starts out quietly, simply, and seemingly effortlessly, but by the end he has etched a moving and sharply defined portrait. (He also plays a mean piano!) Scenes between the two actors are a fine-honed, sure-footed duet, and the play is much enhanced by their contrasting personalities. Resnick adds a proper note of youthful ardor as the ambitious mentor/acolyte who finds himself trapped in a web of conflicting loyalties.

Keith E. Mitchell provides a handsome set, full of homey, lived-in detail, and Milsa Watson's costumes are unshowy but right.

*Autumn Canticle*, by John W. Lowell. Celebration Theater, 7051B Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood. Thurs.-Sat. at 8 p.m., Sun. at 3 p.m., through November 29. \$20. (323) 957-1884.



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