

**Autumn Canticle**  
*Celebration Theatre*  
Through Nov. 29  
323/957-1884



Reflective dramas about gay relationships aren't very common, and those exploring the issues of middle-aged male couples are even rarer. John W. Lowell's witty and heartrending "Autumn Canticle" is as refreshing as a crisp fall breeze and as aesthetically pleasing as a lovely classical composition. In its West Coast premiere, Lowell's literate 1997 script is among the Celebration's most astute choices of material in recent years, and veteran director Randy Brenner stages it with taste and sensitivity. Lowell loosely based his story on the real-life romance between famous composer Benjamin Britten and his partner, Peter Pears. Set in 1972, the story begins as renowned 52-year-old composer Peter (William McCauley) returns to his lavish home in Croton, N.Y., following open-heart surgery. Greeting him there are his longtime lover, David (Alan Brooks), who's a professional singer and his frequent collaborator, and the young undergraduate music student Walker (Seth Resnick), their live-in assistant. The initially pleasant homecoming gradually becomes tense, as several festering issues surface. David and Peter differ on whether David should do a concert tour by himself. This, coupled with Peter's ongoing creative drought and health issues, point to problems for the couple's essentially codependent professional alliance. The conflicts escalate when Walker appears to be more than an innocent bystander, with intimations of marital infidelity and opportunism. McCauley delivers a finely shaded performance, in the beginning seeming rather easygoing and fragile, then becoming more caustic when certain secrets are revealed. He's well complemented by Brooks, whose smug and manipulative nature mellows out when it becomes clear his relationship is threatened. Resnick offers fine support, serving as a catalyst and offering a comparative portrait of the seemingly unstoppable promise of youth versus the unanticipated problems that come up as the years slip away. Keith E. Mitchell's lovely interior set and Andrea Housh's smoothly textured lighting are impressive. In its quiet way, this humorous and poignant play packs a powerful punch.