

# City of Angels

**Music** Cy Coleman

**Lyrics** David Zippel

**Book** Larry Gelbart

**Director** Colin Peter

**Produced by** Tempo Musical Productions: Norma and Kenny Kinnear - Executive Producers

**Principals** James Dickson (Stone-Movie); Norma Kinnear (Donna-Hollywood & Oolie-Movie); Lesley Rooney (Carla Haywood-Hollywood & Alaura Kingsley-Movie); Ian McInnes (Stine-Hollywood); Alex Kemp (Buddy Fidler-Hollywood & Irwin S Irving-Movie); Pauline Dickson (Gabby-Hollywood & Bobbi-Movie); Chris Crosbie (Jimmy Powers-Hollywood & Movie); Katy Elvin (Avril Raines-Hollywood & Mallory Kingsley-Movie); Donald Budge (Pancho Vargas-Hollywood & Lt. Munoz-Movie)

**Music played by** Angel City Sextet

**Musical Director** Simon Hanson

**Venue** Church Hill Theatre Edinburgh

**Address** Morningside Road

**Reviewer** Jonas Green

Tempo is a talented amateur company who are not afraid of a challenge and *City of Angels* may be their biggest one to date. The score by Cy Coleman (also known for *Sweet Charity* and *Barnum*) is predominantly jazz of the big-band/swing variety. The ingenious and witty script interweaves two stories: a Raymond-Chandler-type detective story as it would appear on film, and the 'real lives' of its troubled Hollywood writer and those around him. The show has nearly 40 scenes, 9 principals - most of them appearing as two different people - and the usual complement of minor characters, dancers and large chorus. Plus sudden flashbacks, several scenes replayed with amended dialogue, and staged performances of musical numbers as they are heard on radio.

The show opened in 1989 in the U.S. where it was reckoned a success, but in the early 90's it sadly failed to take off commercially in London's West End. You can partly see why. However this Tempo production has got all that complexity pretty well beat (I found it easier to follow than the London version). They achieve this largely by using contrasting styles, colours, and stage areas to separate the two stories. A lot of thought in other ways has gone to help the audience make sense of the twisting storylines.



James Dickson (Stone)

All of the individual performances are good, and each succeeds in making polished entertainment from demanding material. Three performances are outstanding: James Dickson as the fictional hard-boiled detective Stone, Lesley Rooney as Alaura/Carla, the femme fatale, and Alex Kemp as Buddy Fidler the megalomaniac Hollywood producer. The simple but innuendo-laden *Tennis Song* number between the first two is a highlight.

The singing is generally outstanding from all of the principals, also from a specialist backing sextet, and from the large chorus (usually, that is; they were sometimes oddly flabby in medium-paced numbers). This is despite the difficult jazz style involving close harmonies and passages of scat singing. The staged production numbers mostly came off well although a big Mexican number near the close of Act I was disappointing (the dance trio should use *real* maracas and hang the noise!).

The music is in the expert hands of Simon Hanson, who combines live brass and reeds with other pre-programmed sound, never missing a beat. All the other technical departments also worked well. However the ultimate goal with this show must be to sing and act its tricky material effortlessly, while keeping the audience abreast of the fast-moving narrative, and also maintaining an unflagging pace.

This production gets full marks for the first two, and that is a great credit to Director Colin Peter. When it comes to the requisite cracking pace, they are up against the Church Hill Theatre's limitations: little wing space and practically no room to fly scenery above. Even here the stage crew did remarkably well, but the evening felt on the long side. The solution: they should cut out fifteen minutes, however carefully it has been prepared. That is what the professional theatre would ruthlessly do - and in many respects that is the only difference between the two.

(P.S. There is apparently an unconnected movie of the same name involving Nicolas Cage and Meg Ryan. This show is better. They need bigger audiences. Go and see it) For more information go to [www.tempo.org.uk](http://www.tempo.org.uk)

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