



BY EVAN HENERSON
THEATER CRITIC

By billing their product as a rock opera, composer Mark Governor, director Janet Roston and the aptly named Los Angeles Rock Opera Company aren't whistling "Dixie" or "Rent" either. L.A.ROCs "Shame" is a pulsating study in scarlet. Imagine the oh so straight-laced Puritans of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Salem turned inside-out so all their repressed urges are on the surface. Then supply them with smoke, some cheap, anachronistic multimedia and presto! It's Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" made not exactly current, but consistently diverting. There are more than a few giggles, but the evening is vibrant.

Director/choreographer Roston uses nearly every

square inch of Hollywood's King King nightclub to pilot Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth to their respective destinies.

Those who remember their freshman English will know what's coming plot-wise, but chances are they've never seen the "Letter" delivered like this. Examples? I give you Puritan busybodies Constance (played by Kelly Becerra), Prudence (Erin Zaruba) and Felicity (Trina Taylor) lusting giddily over Reverend Dimmesdale (Mark Luna) in a song titled "Cute and Holy" with the lyric "He may be a saint, but he's also single." A few scenes later, these three ladies transform into lingerie-wearing temptresses who bump and grind along with Chillingworth (Danny Shorago) singing

'SHAME'

In a nutshell: When Puritans defrock to power ballads.

"Revenge." Shorago, whose every number is spiced with a malevolent tango beat, plays the vengeance-minded doctor with all guns blazing. This portrayal may not exactly jibe with the dried up and hard-hearted crone that Hawthorne envisioned, but for a rock operatic villain, the actor more than meets the need. Katrina Lenk's Hester is the only performer permitted to play things even close to low key. Lenk's got a smoky voice than kicks up to an unexpectedly charged belt when necessary, but the actress does well in her quiet and observing moments, too, especially with adolescent daughter, Pearl (an equally strong Laura Darrell).

It takes a while for "Shame" to fully declare itself a tale of thwarted passion between Hester -



who wears the scarlet A because she had a child out of wedlock - and Dimmesdale, her lover whose transgression Hester has gone to elaborate lengths to protect. These lost souls may be destined to unite., but Governor and Roston supply an awful lot of huffing, puffing, self abasement and moralizing in Governor's tale before we get to the romance. Fair enough. We've come for shame, after all.

King King's evening includes a post show "Nights of Shame" featuring DJs, live music and some of the actors who we just saw perform. Given all the not-so-puritanical histrionics of the previous two hours, its rather amazing the "Shame"ers have any energy left to party.



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