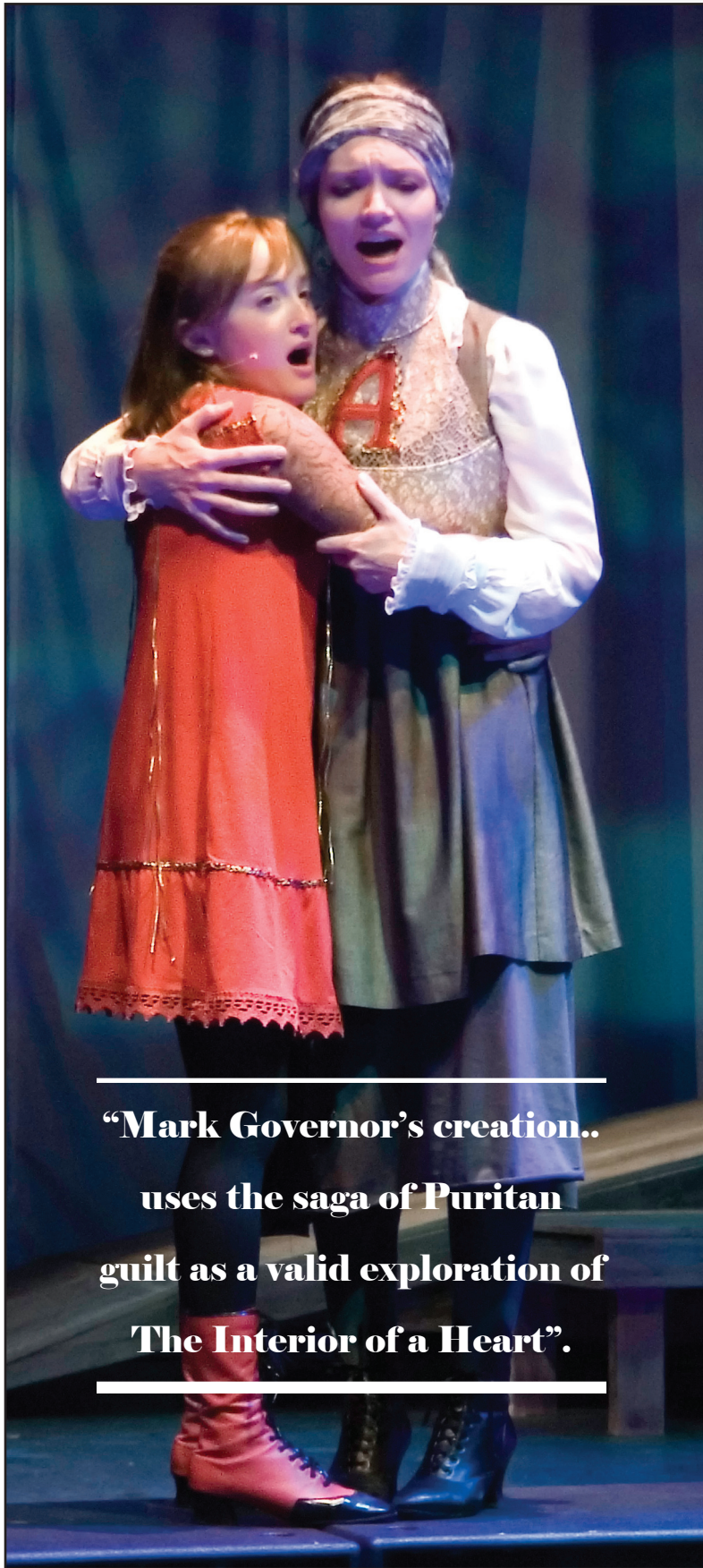


LA WEEKLY



**“Mark Governor’s creation..
uses the saga of Puritan
guilt as a valid exploration of
The Interior of a Heart”.**

JUNE 12, 2008 - Who'd have guessed that Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* would be a ripe fruit for an adaptation into a rock opera? Yet Mark Governor's creation for an ensemble of 10 uses the saga of Puritan guilt as a valid exploration of "The Interior of a Heart" (one of the song titles). The story's righteous cruelty and persecution, often tethered to hypocrisy, are threads of the American psyche that extend from our Puritan heritage, and may partly explain contemporary gulfs of incomprehension between the United States and the rest of the world. Governor's focus, however, is on intimate relations, pondering in song why people must hate, while the larger ramifications are mere spinoffs. Katrina Lenk plays outcast adulteress Hester Prynne, stuck in 1645 Boston, with dour elegance and a quavering soprano that sounds a bit like Joni Mitchell's. The secret of her lover's identity drives the plot, while her diabolical husband (Danny Shorago, in a performance that suggests a Hell's Angel in 300 years to come) devotes his energies to making her life, and that of the man he suspects of having cuckolded him, a living hell. Condensed into a musical-theater frame, Hawthorne's story emerges as overly melodramatic and sentimental, until Hester's daughter (Laura Darrell) spurns her own mother, causing our lead characters to start to define morality in terms larger than their own persecution. Mark Luna's gentle, self-tortured Rev. Dimmesdale holds his own vocally, under director-choreographer Janet Roston's snappy staging, largely defined by Leah Piehl's costumes, which transform the era's work boots into tall, lacy, fetishy things you can find in your local galleria. Even the buttons and laces of the neck-high blouses get replaced by rubbery attire for some fleshy dances by some sprites in the woods. KING KING, 6555 Hollywood Blvd., Hlywd.; Wed., 8 p.m.; thru July 16. (323) 960-5775 or www.plays411.com/shame. A Los Angeles Rock Opera Company production.

(Steven Leigh Morris)