

# Los Angeles Times

## *THE MAN WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK*

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*By Michael Phillips*

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If you don't think smart actors can invigorate an odd, recalcitrant play, just swing over to the Ivy Substation in Culver City. The theater space is currently taken up with a vibrantly acted production of Arthur Miller's early fable "The Man Who Had All the Luck."

David Beeves (Paul Gutrecht), the fortunate son serving as Miller's protagonist, has WINNER plastered across his all-American mug. His disapproving future father-in-law (Nicholas Saunders) wants to stop his daughter (Kellie Waymire) from marrying David—poof, his nemesis gets hit by a car. Twists of fate continually twist in David's favor, until his good luck starts eating him up inside. His brother, Amos (Mark Doerr), trained by their father (Philip Proctor) since childhood for a baseball career, can't cut a break. Why does the sun shine on one son and not the other? Must the luck someday run out?

A four-performance belly-flop in its 1944 Broadway debut, "The Man Who Had All the Luck" exists outside a world clouded by World War II. Its prewar evocation isn't lit by lightning, to use a phrase from another play of that era, "The Glass Menagerie." Adapted from his own unpublished novel, Miller's inchoate but intriguing effort is set in a folkloric Depression-era haze of its own.

On the page, it doesn't seem theatrically promising. Miller's plotting grinds its gears, and his reverse-Job premise is more premise than fleshed-out creation. But it's fascinating to trace lifelong Miller obsessions, brother-brother and father-son issues familiar from "All My Sons" and "Death of a Salesman," back to this early work.

And there's such zip and commitment in the co-production of Finesilver Shows and the Antaeus Company, this "All the Luck"—the first American revival since 1944—truly has enjoyed a lucky break.

Mainly, producer-director Dan Fields has found the actors he needed to make "All the Luck" work on its own terms—as an unwieldy but affecting tall tale, somehow rooted in real life, even though its setting is akin to Grover's Corners after Arthur Miller has moved to town.

A successful garage mechanic, David has a perfect little life in the making. A potential business rival (Marcelo Tubert) becomes a colleague. Mink farmer Dan Dibble (Peter Van Norden) believes in him, and sells him a lot of mink. David's wife, Hester (Waymire), is told initially that they'll be unable to produce children—and then. . . .

Can one soul handle so much good news? No use even worrying about plans and what you deserve in life, says feed store owner Shory (Terry J Evans), a disabled World War I veteran. "A man is a jellyfish," he says. "The tide goes in and the tide goes out. About what happens to him, a man has very little to say."

Throughout his career Miller has wrestled with the tortures of the guilt-ridden. The tone of the writing wobbles here. You can sense the compression of events (adapted from novel to play); even so, you're often 10 minutes ahead of the next development.

Wisely, director Fields and scenic designer Katherine Ferwerda keep the action tightly focused and nicely charged. Certain performances capture an ineffable '30s quality. Waymire's feisty Hester is a charmer. As luckless Amos, Doerr makes his comeuppance genuinely affecting. Van Norden, a superb character actor, is outfitted by costume designer Dean Cameron with a black hat so imposingly right, it deserves its own curtain call. And Dakin Matthews provides a fine, gruff cameo as the baseball scout who disfavors the already disfavored Amos.

Gutrecht, a solid presence, plays Mr. Lucky as a dogged good man who becomes unhinged. There's something missing from the performance— a hint of recklessness earlier on, perhaps. But the writing's at fault; for decades, Miller went back and forth about whether David should live or die. There's a point near the end where an alternate ending presents itself. The happy ending we get may not be the better option.

But it's the happier one. At any rate, "The Man Who Had All the Luck" may be a few miles from perfect, but this production is quite a pleasure.

\* "The Man Who Had All the Luck," Ivy Substation, 9070 Venice Blvd., Culver City. Thursdays-Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 7 p.m. Ends May 21. \$20-\$24 (\$12 student rush 15 minutes before curtain). (818) 506-8462. Running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes.

Paul Gutrecht: David Beeves

John Apicella: J.B. Feller

Terry J Evans: Shory

Dawn Didawick: Aunt Belle

Philip Proctor: Patterson Beeves

Mark Doerr: Amos Beeves

Kellie Waymire: Hester Feller

Kenne Whitney. Peter Falk

Peter Van Norden: Dan Dibble

Nicholas Saunders: Andrew Falk

Marcelo Tubert: Gustav Eberson

Dakin Matthews: Augie Belfast

Written by Arthur Miller. Directed by Dan Fields. Set by Katherine Ferwerda. Costumes by Dean Cameron. Lighting by Matthew O'Donnell. Composer Chris Ward. Production stage manager Sarah Cathcart.