

LA WEEKLY

HOTEL C'EST L'AMOUR Director-conceiver Daniel Henning seamlessly knits together this collection of pre-existing songs by Michael John LaChiusa. Still dressed in wedding finery, a Bride (Jennifer Malenke) and Groom (Rick Cornette) joyfully enter the honeymoon suite at a posh hotel (the Japanese-inspired set design by Kurtis Bedford). All is well until the groom re-enters with Marie (America Olivo), who's wearing a white veil and a black wedding dress. While the Bride and Groom sing "A Lovely Wedding," Marie joins in, opening the wedding gifts, tossing each aside, undercutting the couple's pledge of eternal devotion. As Marie insists that "happily ever after is a lie," the newlyweds begin to experience doubt, as evidenced by their frozen smiles. The hotel staff, Mimi (Vicki Lewis) and Maman (Daren A. Herbert), insert themselves into the proceedings, with Lewis providing the vocal pyrotechnics and Herbert the beefcake. Most of the songs deal with various types of disillusionment, but the lyrics are so bouncy that the story, oddly enough, stays upbeat. Christy Crowl's musical direction is superb, and the ensemble is pitch perfect. Brisk direction by Henning makes the piece entirely engaging. **THE BLANK'S SECOND STAGE THEATRE**, 6500 Santa Monica Blvd., Hlywd.; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; thru Nov. 5. (323) 661-9827 or www.theblank.com. (Sandra Ross)

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