

## **Valentino**

Words, Book & Music by Gail Morgan

Directed by A Kernaghan and Gail Morgan

The New Australian Theatre Company

Henry Street Settlement – Harry De Jur Playhouse

Reviewed by John Jordan

Rudolph Valentino is and always will be known as "the world's greatest lover." The New Australian Theatre Company brings to the 2001 Fringe Festival a two-act original play with original music entitled *Valentino*. Written by Gail Morgan, this venture into the past is ambitiously original. It doesn't try to copy Broadway musicals. It doesn't try to copy old Hollywood. What it does do is entertain.

Rudolph Valentino defines the Roaring Twenties. Born in 1895 in Italy, he was one of the most magnetic and charismatic stars of the silent screen. But what really happened to him? Was he gay? Was he a bigamist? Was he a murderer? Was he murdered? He wants to know. So he sets out to find these answers.

Robert Martin plays Rudolph Valentino with sophisticated allure. Though his accent was a bit too British, and his voice projected a deep resonance, I was drawn to his performance. (I was led to believe Mr. Valentino had quite a high-pitched voice.) Angelina Elkin plays Natacha Rambova, perhaps Mr. Valentino's one true love, with fun energy. When she was not onstage, I missed her. Finally, Victor Kline plays George Sidney Ullman, Mr. Valentino's personal business manager, as well as Mr. Valentino's first wife, Jean Acker. When he briefly plays the part of Ms. Acker, he does not need a wig or a costume change, he just does it. And he's very funny. And very real.

The music is witty and sophisticated, and all three players handle it with elegance.

The costumes are magnificent, with the exception of Mr. Kline's footwear. I think they were Dr. Martens, and since they were created in 1960, I do not believe it to be too fitting for the Valentino era. Both Ms. Elkin and Mr. Martin were ravishing in their black tuxedos for Act I. Act II had Ms. Elkin redefine elegance à la Norma Desmond. Simply beautiful was she.

The stage was bare, except for a piano draped with a black and white material that completed the perfect picture of the past we were taken to.