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Moonlight and Magnolias

(Odyssey Theater Ensemble; 99 seats; \$25 top) An Odyssey Theater Ensemble of a play in two acts by Ron Hutchinson. Directed by Scott Cummins.

David O. Selznick - Rob Nagle
Ben Hecht - Kip Gilman
Victor Fleming - Greg Mullavey
Miss Poppengul - Lynda Lenet

By [TERRY MORGAN](#)

The longest film to ever win the best picture Academy Award was "Gone With the Wind," an epic that regularly shows up near the top of any list of the best movies ever made. According to Ron Hutchinson's "Moonlight and Magnolias," these achievements are all the more remarkable because the classic screenplay was cranked out in a mere five days. Regardless of the veracity of such a claim, this play is a hoot. The L.A. premiere at the Odyssey Theater Ensemble gets a spirited production under the lively direction of Scott Cummins, and the cast creates a formidable engine of chaotic glee.

As the story begins, famed producer David O. Selznick (Rob Nagle) is in trouble. After putting up a tremendous amount of money to make "GWTW" and an inordinate amount of time to cast it, he halts production soon after it gets going and fires the original director.

He pulls director Victor Fleming (Greg Mullavey) off of "The Wizard of Oz" to take over, but his real concern is the script. To this end he hires Ben Hecht (Kip Gilman), a talented writer but unfortunately one of the few people in America who's never read bestseller "Gone With the Wind."

Selznick locks himself and the two other men in his office, and over one work week -- on a diet of nuts, bananas and burgeoning mania -- tomorrow becomes another day.

Nagle is sympathetic and convincing as Selznick, conveying both the man's desperation and his genuine desire to do the story justice in a funny and forceful perf.

Gilman is dazzling as Hecht, combining laid-back cool and pugnacious wit in seamless and thoroughly enjoyable fashion. Mullavey seems slightly miscast as the larger-than-life Fleming, but he brings an amusing sense of rising exasperation all the same. Lynda Lenet is fine as the harried assistant Miss Poppengul, although the role is a bit repetitious.

Hutchinson's writing is clever and sharp, as in Hecht's description of the story: "A heroine whose morals would be remarked upon in a two-dollar whorehouse, a hero who would shoot his own grandmother in the belly and a plot that makes 'Finnegan's Wake' look like a model of lucidity."

Cummins keeps the pacing swift and excels at set pieces, such as a slapping bout that becomes a total brawl.

Laura Fine's Hollywood office set deteriorates nicely as the play progresses, and Gelareh Khalioun's costumes are elegant, understated and completely believable.

Sets, Laura Fine; costumes, Gelareh Khalioun; lighting, Derrick McDaniel; sound, Lindsay Jones; production stage manager, David Parke. Opened, reviewed Sept. 2, 2006; runs through Nov. 5. Running time: 2 HOURS, 10 MIN.