

## Theater Reviews: *DIETRICH AND CHEVALIER: THE MUSICAL*

Also, *Great Expectations*, *Snake in the Grass* and more

By L.A. Weekly Theater Critics

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Photo by Haven Hartman



**TALLGRASS GOTHIC** There's not much happening in the backwater farm community where Melanie Marnich's steamy drama unfolds: Folks go to church, get drunk, tell ghost stories, maybe "fool around." In this narrow cultural enclave of rough beer-swilling farmers, pretty, coquettish Laura (Carrie Wiita) stands out. Married to the carnally brutish and domineering Tin (Gregory Sims), she's caught up in a passionate affair with a strapping buck named Daniel (RJ Debard) — but inexplicably hedges when he implores her to run away with him. Her life implodes after the local psycho (Kevin Meoak) — who is hot for her himself — commits a shocking act. Marnich's spare storytelling style eschews the background details of these people's lives; we're never told how the lovers met, or why the scrupulous Laura remains married to a man she so evidently despises. This leaves the performers plenty of

leeway to connect the dots — an opportunity Wiita seizes with delectably captivating skill, but which other performers unhappily leave undone. This doesn't include Sims, whose multilayered performance bares the need beneath his character's explosive anger, or JJ Maynes, on target as the neighbor who nervously tries to clue him in on Laura's hanky-panky. Under Jaime L. Robledo's direction, the show's uncredited music, Yancey Dunham's lighting and Ben Rock's sound design come together to create a sense of spooky desolation. Sacred Fools Theater, 660 N. Heliotrope Dr., Hlywd.; Tues.-Wed., 8 p.m.; thru May 7. (310) 281-8337. (Deborah Klugman)