

LAWEEKLY

LAND OF THE TIGERS IS THIS WEEK'S PICK

Land of the Tigers Photo by Jon Beauregard

Noises On Cool Cats and Hot Actors Act 1 of the Burglars of Hamm's hilarious and thought provoking comedy, *Land of the Tigers*, outlandishly crosses *Cats* with *Planet of the Apes*. In a whimsical world where felines walk upright and speak English (but thankfully don't caterwaul "Memory") a veritable Kingdom of Tigers prance around in feathered wigs and top coats, while debating important matters (to cats, anyway) in the Tigressional Congress. Amongst this group, the great warrior Sabertooth (Hugo Armstrong) goes into lustful cat heat for sultry she-tiger Sheba (Devin Sidell), which outrages Sheba's fierce brother Fang Stalkington (Tim Sheridan), who has already fathered several litters with the young beauty (remember, this is the Tiger World, we're talking about). Full of bizarre cat mating dances, and scenes in which characters shift instantly from conversing into snarling Tiger-style, the Burglars' comedy is staged by Matt Almos with acrobatic dexterity, a tongue-in-cheek tone, and perfect comic timing. The reasons for slight touches of campiness become evident in Act Two, however, which follows the cast of dimwitted and absurdly self important actors as they are increasingly brainwashed by their tyrannical, ego tripping director (a fabulous Dean Gregory), whose eyes glitter with madness). Although the concept possesses slight echoes of *Noises Off*, the Burglars cunningly explore a totally different avenue, elegantly satirizing the sense of collective delusion that frequently befalls performers in a mediocre show. The acting work is particularly sprightly, and it's delightful how the bumbling tiger actors of Act 1 are subsequently revealed as the optimistic, dedicated, yet benighted ensemble of Act 2. The end result, more than calculatedly dippy comedy about cats, is an often compelling meditation on the creation of theater itself, and how the audience will never glimpse the many dramas within a play's production. Sacred Fools theater, 660 N. Heliotrope Dr., Hollywood; Fri.-Sat., 8, p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; through May 3. (310) 281-8337. A Burglars of Hamm, Sacred Fools Co-Production. --Paul Birchall