

The Lunts Are Alive And Well And Living In Hollywood

Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontaine were the original Show Business Power Couple. Long before the witty genius of terms like Brangelina and Bennifer, The Lunts maintained their own identities as performers, (she didn't even take his name!) and upheld a staggering artistic integrity by insisting they always worked together. From 1928 to their retirement in 1960, Lynne never appeared on stage without Albert. It's difficult to imagine Hollywood's star duos refusing to accept their next blockbuster paycheck unless their momentary fling starred opposite them. Maybe it has something to do with a 'long term relationship' in Hollywood being anything over 5 years. The Lunts, however, were in it for the long haul - with each other, and with their careers. Their gravestone at their Ten Chimneys Estate reads "Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne were universally regarded as the greatest acting team in the history of the English speaking theatre. They were married for 55 years and were inseparable both on and off the stage."

This kind of commitment is actually alive and well in Hollywood today, in the refreshingly funny Erik and Stephanie Ann Davies, who effortlessly evoke the classy duos of yesteryear. The born-again Lunts have moved from stage to screen in an acting/producing/writing team with a penchant for hard work and some serious romance.

The Davies' Hollywood apartment looks like a mini-version of the Lunts' vacation estate in Genessee Depot, Wisconsin. Each room and wall space is filled with personal trinkets, drawings, and treasures that define the decorator's inner artist. A bedroom closet is entirely devoted to personal affirmations, mantras and career goals for Stephanie, Erik, and the powerhouse that is Eristephanie. (I just coined that. Watch out *US Weekly*).

Their most recent project is the feature length comedy *High Society: A Pot Boiler*. Okay, so maybe the Lunts never did a play about smoking the ganja, but they were no prudes either. One time during a rehearsal, Lynne's dress came unbuttoned, leaving her left breast exposed for cast and crew to ogle. Alfred, alarmed, stopped the rehearsal immediately and hauled Lynne off stage. When she asked why he'd interrupted her, he pointed urgently to her chest. Annoyed, Lynne buttoned up, saying 'Is that all? Darling, don't interrupt my rehearsal unless it's something important.'

Eristephanie produced and financed their film completely on their own - no studio, no investors...heck, they didn't even have much of a crew! Though Stephanie, in the biting wit of Lynne Fontaine, insists "It's not like we had to hold our own boom mic off camera."

Me: Where did the first seeds – ha ha, get it? Seeds? of *High Society* come from?

E: [My brother Kristian] (the film's writer/director) is an exceptional writer. He's a published author of two books. He gobbles up volumes of books and writes hundreds and hundreds of pages consistently all the time, so he was in a flurry of creativity after he got back home [from visiting me in LA]. He spit out the first version of *High Society* which was like 240 pages. It could have been a mini series!

R laughs

E: And so that's really where it came from. Some of the characters, some of the things that happened were sort of directly or loosely based on people we knew, events that really happened.

S: And from what I understand it's several nights rolled in to one

E: More than several.

R: A lifetime

E: It's the [summation] of a number of personality traits and things that really happened for, let's say, hundreds of evenings, that kind of thing... all occurring in the course of *one night*.

R: So is [Kristian] the pothead? Because I understand the two of you aren't.

We laugh

E: We're definitely not stoners. He's definitely not a stoner. All of us, everyone has smoked, but you know, he's very healthy. So that aspect to him, is not the way he lives or chooses to live. [But] there's a lot of his personality in the TRAJAN character.

R: Which is what I love, because the film has so much going on for it besides the smoking.

S: And for every interview, my lawyer told me to say that I'm allergic.

R: (laughs) Can I say that?

S: Oh yeah. So for every interview that's what I say now. I'm like, "My lawyer said I'm allergic, so I don't know what you're talking about."

R: So what's it like working together as a couple?

They both speak at the same time

We laugh

E; I thought it was wonderful, I mean it was the first chance we had to work together. We met in film school, but we were never in class together so we never worked together. So it was a blast. There weren't any tensions that can emerge from being on set, and [reveal themselves in a person's character].

R: (coughs) Christian Bale.

We laugh

E: It didn't seem to cause anything negative between us or cause any rifts or difficulty. It was very smooth and wonderful.

S: It was so fun! We'd wake up at 7:30, grab a Starbucks, grab a bagel, head on over to set. I'd clean up the kitchen from the night before because Kristian never cleaned it up and we didn't have a PA that would clean up stuff. Erik was eating breakfast, I'd straighten up the kitchen again for the day.

E: And [Kristian] lived in that house while we shot the movie.

S: He lived in that house. So we'd have craft service three times a day in that kitchen and the next morning I'd have to go in there. Straighten it all up –

E: It was like a bomb went off.

S: (*overlapping*) It was like a bomb went off, but it was so awesome! And then for the next 14 hours we would just be hanging out. It was a dream come true, obviously.

R: Making a movie.

S; Making a movie, but then also being able to make a movie with your husband! We get to see each other a lot anyway, but just being able to be around each other *and* being in your element [as an actor] – it's even more amazing.

R: Did you have a separate crew, or did you find yourselves playing multiple roles besides acting?

E: I definitely wore a number of hats, helping with the various edits of the script and reading it through with Kristian and making suggestions. We did bring on a full time producer, Eric David, who was very intelligent, aware and extremely instrumental in making everything happen. I worked on the duller aspects: contracts and paper work and forms that you have to fill out and forming an LLC, all of that stuff, work rights to shoot a film in the state of California...

S: We put together a bare bones crew, so we had everything we needed. Granted, I didn't have my stand in, which *really* upset me. Cause I had to sit through my own lighting.

Stephanie huffs, mock indignant

S: We had to do our own make up and hair.

R: Which looked great!

S: But I get snotty anyway about my hair and make up and I'd rather do it myself. But it was really fun because we had this one room sectioned off for the actors so we'd all just go in there to get ready.

E: What would pass for the actors' – not quite lounge, but you know, *area*.

S: Right. A mattress in there. But it was one of those things where it's like you hurry up and wait. You have your twenty minutes and then you wait for ten hours. They maybe get you again before the end of the day. But it was so fun.

E: I definitely recognize how rare and just awesome an experience it was to be able to do it with your brother, with your fiancée, with old friends, most of the cast were people that either Kristian or I or Stephanie knew and brought into this, so that sort of tight bond coming in to it was definitely a very cool thing, it doesn't happen on any ordinary production.

S: Usually everyone says "Oh, you've become a family" but it was like [we already kind of were].

R: Was there a particular scene or section of the film that was the most challenging to shoot?

Silence.

They both burst out laughing.

S: Wait, hold on. I'm trying to think of the day that we tried to build the steady cam. What was that about? Remember that day..?

E: Yeah, we tried to use a steady cam –

S: Oh God! We rented some steady cam that the DP and the producer claimed that they knew how to build. And we're not talking like, WB, Sony Pictures, FOX Searchlight...any of the nice beautiful steady cams that glide smoothly, they fit on your back. This is something they had to build and put together so I think they burned what, two to six hours trying to put this thing together! And it looked like this gigantic, like six-foot-long thing, remember?

E: It was an enormous contraption that just pretty much didn't even fit in the room, it was so big. So it was just completely impractical to try and use this thing to shoot in a small

living room. It didn't work.

S: I thought it was hilarious. It was like 200 pounds or something so our DP could barely hold it!

R: Have you had any challenges that are particular to the subject matter as far as getting distribution or film festivals?

E: Its been tough with the festivals cause its definitely not a typical festival movie. I've been amazed at how few straight comedy festivals exist, I could count them on one hand. I would've thought that there would've been more, or at least a comedy category in ordinary festivals. And that doesn't exist either. Its all "features" and they're all lumped together. Typically in film festivals if it's a comedy and a drama going head to head , its really sort of apples and oranges. I don't think you evaluate them the same way. It's been a tough road with the film festivals, but we know that there's a market for it, its just not a typical festival movie.

S: I don't think people have seen the light. Because *Scarface* wasn't a big hit but then as soon as people started seeing the light, and enjoying the F-word, *Scarface* took off. And now that poster is in every gangster's living room and pool room from here to Atlanta, Georgia. So I feel like we just have to have people see the light and appreciate the F-word for what it is. Maybe they will in England - they will definitely appreciate the C-word. And as soon as that happens, I feel our movie will, as Bush would say, its "wings will take dream."

We laugh.

S; We were just joking about that the other day. That's the quote. 'Where wings take dream.' Bush said that.

Me: Of course he does.

S: So our wings will take dream on our movie. When people appreciate how many times the F-word is said.

Me: What kind of wings, ideally?

E: DVD distribution. I mean it's really hard to get theatrical unless you have stars in it. So we're definitely not trying to play that angle cause we don't have any household names in this.

Me: Not yet

S: Um...are you guys forgetting that *I'm* in the movie?

We laugh.

S: I want to be shopping, doing my usual 2-3 hours at Target, and all of a sudden pull up to the DVD section and go “Gasp! that’s *High Society!*” Or be flipping through TV one day and see it on Comedy Central. That’s my dream. And to be able to have people buy it or rent it.

E: I think if it were able to have an appeal to the target market of college age males 17-30 that would be great.

S: If more people could have it then my mom, I think that would be great.

We laugh

Me: What’s next for the two of you, do you plan on working together again as producers?

Both: Eh...

E: Well. I know we’re both very much anxious to go back to just acting. It’s been a great experience, and certainly I’ve learned a lot but I’m not anxious to jump in to producing something again any time soon.

S: Yeah I think that as much energy and cost, everything that’s gone in to this project, it’s not easy to want to go do it again and make a good one. As you know it takes so much money.

E: It’d be nice to just focus on acting for a little while.

S: Like I say in other interviews too, if there are any agents reading this article my name is Stephanie Ann Davies, this is Erik Davies, and we both are available for representation. We’re hard workers. And our websites are our names. Thank you.

We laugh.

Me: (*laughing*) You made me forget my next question

S: I have said that every time and no one ever prints it.

Me: I will. I promise you.

S: And I’m in between agents. That’s most important. We’re not looking, we’re ‘in between.’ Because I want someone that will give me Michael Mann’s next project. I don’t want *Charmed* auditions anymore. The show’s cancelled!

Me: What would you say to someone who says “Oh, it’s a pot movie, I wouldn’t like it.” Because it’s so different from the typical pot movie. So what would you say to

like, my grandma? Maybe not my Grandma....

E: I know that we definitely set out to try and distinguish it from other pot movies so that it wasn't as stereotypical, as far as the characters that you would normally see in them. It still is rough and profane but I think there's definitely a surreal and totally absurd aspect to what happens in the story. It is a linear story that I suppose, taken in a certain context, is more believable than some of the strange journeys that other pot movies go on. Like being abducted by aliens or having the FBI chase you or even traveling through five states to try and find cheeseburgers at 3 in the morning. This is a little more condensed. It takes place over the course of an evening of friends talking, which is usually what happens when people get together and hang out. Maybe that's one of the distinguishing aspects to the film.

S: I think two of the coolest parts in the movie are the montages. Like the tulip joint and the bong cam. Which are set to music, with slow-mo cool effects. And the rest of the movie is a bunch of funny people hanging out with funny characters and funny dialogue. I would tell my friends, its not just people sitting around and getting high. The dialogue's quite intelligent, and the characters are hilarious.

E It is a dialogue-driven, character exposition story, not a crazy plot-driven [film].

Me: So you don't have to be a pothead to enjoy this.

E: I don't think so. If you like your comedy raw and profane and edgy and not safe-

S: -If you're a male between the ages of 17 and 37, and if you're a girl who's not a typical girl, like a *guy's* girl, you'd really like the movie too.

Biographer Maurice Zolotow wrote, "Lynn and Alfred projected an animal vitality, a spirit of gaiety and intense pleasure in being alive and in being in love. Separately, they had been original and brilliant actors. Together, they were an irresistible expression of the life force – of the joy of living."

The Davies' joy in their work and in each other are a continuing tribute to this life force. Alfred and Lynne, eat your heart out.

Quotes and citations courtesy of The Ten Chimneys Foundation, www.tenchimneys.org

Rebekah Voss, *Acted By Magazine*

