



LUCILLE AND LEE
SANDRA DICKINSON AND MATTHEW SCOTT IN THE LONDON PRODUCTION OF *I LOVED LUCY*.

STILL HAVING A BALL

QUEEN OF COMEDY, POP-CULTURE ICON AND SITCOM PIONEER,
THE PRIVATE LIFE OF LUCILLE BALL'S FINAL YEARS
ARE REVEALED IN *I LOVED LUCY*.

WHEN IT comes to comedy greatness it's hard to look past Lucille Ball. With her trademark red hair, wide-eyed expressions and goofball antics, her humor paved the way for other TV comedy queens such as Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams (*Laverne And Shirley*), Fran Drescher, Debra Messing and, let's face it, half the contestants on *Drag Race*.

From 1951 to the mid-'70s Ball self-produced and starred in her own sitcoms including *I Love Lucy*, *The Lucy Show*, *Here's Lucy* and others. While her persona was zany, she was a shrewd businesswoman and the first woman in Hollywood to head a major studio, Desilu Productions, which made *Mission: Impossible* and *Star Trek*.

I Loved Lucy, currently playing at the Arts Theatre, London is based on the published memoirs of Lee Tannen, who befriended the actress in the last ten years of her life. With a mutual love of backgammon, the two spent many afternoons playing, bantering and confiding in each other. This two-hander delves into that relationship, particularly drawing on Ball's quick wit and Lee's coming-out to the veteran star.

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Playing the role of Lee Tannen (who wrote the play) is Broadway actor Matthew Scott (*An American In Paris*) with Lucy played by Sandra Dickinson (*A Streetcar Named Desire*).

Some critics believe the story's spotlight should fall less on Tannen and more on Ball, but this is Tannen's cathartic adventure, and his forth-wall-breaking dialogue is pivotal to the story. In fact, the majority of reviews for this production have been positive, pointing out how well Dickinson channels the cranky, wisecracking Ball. *Stage Review* called it a tour-de-force, *Broadway World* labelled it a masterclass in acting, and *The Stage* went all out to say it's "a miracle to watch"!

Apart from the comedy and bittersweet moments (Ball and Tannen have a major falling out), there are great fly-on-the-wall moments when Lucy delves into such Hollywood gossip as the size of Clark Gable's dick and reflects on her feud with Richard Burton. We also see the darker side of the star, facing the effects of time, the loss of husband Desi Arnaz, and her failed comeback attempt at a sitcom.

There is a moment in the play where Tannen makes comparisons to the Norma Desmond and Joe Gilles relationship of *Sunset Boulevard*, however, *I Loved Lucy* is more like a reversal of *Buyer And Cellar*, where an unlikely and ill-fated friendship occurs between Barbra Streisand and her caretaker. But, unlike *Buyer And Cellar* or *Sunset Boulevard*, *I Loved Lucy* is based on a lived experience, giving it a pure and anticipated edge; truth being stranger than fiction.

Some thirty years after her death it seems the larger-than-life persona of Lucille Ball is still enough to draw crowds to the theatre. The world still loves Lucy.

MORE: *I Loved Lucy* plays the Arts Theatre London until September 2. Go to artstheatrewestend.co.uk