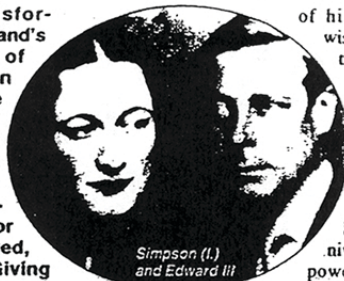


# REGIONAL THEATRE NEWS

The recent misfortunes of England's ruling House of Windsor pale in comparison to the soap opera of 1936 when Edward VIII, the soon-to-be crowned Duke of Windsor, abdicated the throne for the woman he loved, Wallis Simpson. Giving musical form to this enduring twentieth-century royal romance is *Only a Kingdom*, a musical with book and lyrics by Judith Shubow Steir and direction by Scott Schwartz, which plays from Nov. 6 to Dec. 20 at the Pasadena Playhouse in California.

Steir says that she wanted to look at the story from a "psychological aspect," to answer the question that fascinated the entire world at the time and which shook the British monarchy to its core: Why would a man give up a kingdom for a woman, a commoner and someone who was not particularly attractive? Steir says that she found clues in the biography of Simpson who—after her marriage to the Duke—became the Duchess of Windsor. "He always told her that she was the first to pierce through his loneliness," says the writer. "She was an American, so she was much more forthright with him than his British subjects, most of whom were inhibited in his presence. She made him feel alive and human."

Edward, whom Steir describes as decent, honorable, naïve and emotionally needy, had the misfortune to fall in love with the one woman who was anathema to the Royal Family and the British Parliament: a twice-divorced American who was in no way suitable to be the future queen and consort to the man who would be Defender of the Anglican Faith, which did not sanction divorce. Torn between love and what he knew to be his duty, Edward VIII chose to follow the dictates



Simpson (l.) and Edward III

of his heart, against the wishes of his lover. "She tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn't hear of it," says Steir. "He was obsessed with her."

Of course, in some historical accounts, Simpson has emerged as a cunning and manipulative power-mad schemer who tried to talk him out of his abdication because she was so intent on becoming Queen of England. The vilification, which the British press heaped upon her was magnified during World War II when Edward VIII and Simpson, then the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, were perceived to be pro-German.

"These people were not perfect or saints," says Steir, "but they have been unjustly maligned. People can be very bitchy, so I took my research only from their close friends and associates. Much of the bad press was engineered by the Buckingham Palace in an effort to improve the image of his successor [George VI, father to Queen Elizabeth II]. You have to understand that Edward was phenomenally popular in his day, every bit as popular as Princess Diana was. Every young woman in the world kept a picture of him in her diary."

While the musical covers only from 1936 to 1953 (the story by Elsa Maxwell, the legendary hostess, is told in flashback beginning with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth), it does describe the foundation of what was to be an enduring union spent in exile. "They were married for 35 years," says Steir. "Their relationship to this day is proof that love does, finally, conquer all." □



Judith Shubow Steir

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