

LAWEEKLY

theater

LAST TRAIN TO NIBROC

RECOMMENDED

As a world war looms in 1940, an earthy soldier and a pious Sunday-school teacher are thrown together on a crowded train leaving Los Angeles. Raleigh (Gary Clemmer) and May (Staci Michelle Armao) rub each other the wrong way until they learn they're both nursing dashed dreams, and that they are from the same area in Kentucky, so, of course, they fall in love. But May's aspirations to become a missionary and her insufferably judgmental ways ("I'm not mean, I'm religious," she explains) as well as Raleigh's wanderlust and desire to become a writer are obstacles to their romance. (Despite his impoverished rural background, Raleigh worships city slickers Nathanael West and F. Scott Fitzgerald.) While fairly predictable, Arlene Hutton's one-act is an absorbing and bittersweet character study of two lonely people struggling to overcome the hurt they've suffered at each other's hands and to fulfill their destinies. Hutton tempers the piece's sentimentality with abundant humor, which, under director Nan McNamara's deft staging and her actors' chemistry and superlative performances, brings great empathy for the bickering star-crossed lovers. Actors Co-op at the Crossley Theater, 1760 Gower St., Hlywd.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2:30 p.m. (2:30 p.m. mat replaces eve perf Aug. 27); thru Sept. 4. (323) 462-8460. **Written 08/25/2005** (Martín Hernández)