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## THE HOTHOUSE

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WOW!

The nuts are running the nuthouse in the darkly comedic, rarely performed Harold Pinter gem that is the latest from Antaeus Theatre Company, written when Pinter was a mere twenty-seven but shelved till he turned fifty, and perhaps more than any other partner-cast Antaeus gem before it, one that truly merits a second visit.

Meet the staff of the government-run "rest home" in whose offices, stairways, and sitting rooms Pinter's *The Hothouse* is set.



Institution director Roote (Josh Clark,

Peter Van Norden): Has managed to confuse Patient 6457, who died Thursday of heart failure, with Patient 6459, who's just given birth. Refuses to even consider changing rules set up by his predecessor. ("The patients are to be given numbers and called by those numbers. And that's how it's got to remain!")



Second-in-command Gibbs (Leo

Marks, Graham Hamilton): More than willing to fill his boss in on what he's learned about who the father of 6459's baby might be. ("She said she couldn't be entirely sure since most of the staff have had relations with her in the last year.")



Pulchritudinous Miss Cutts (Melanie

Lora, Jocelyn Towne): Can't fathom why Gibbs will talk shop with her but never converse socially. ("Do you think that he just finds me too attractive to look at?")



Underling Lamb (Steve Hofvendahl,

JD Cullum): Loves his job. ("I have to see that all the gates are locked outside the building and that all the patients' doors are locked inside the building. It gives me exercise, I'll say that.")

If I've expended more than a few words quoting from Pinter's script, written in 1958 when the playwright had not yet hit thirty, but not staged until plays like *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, and *Betrayal* had made him a playwriting superstar, it's to give a taste of the dry, absurdist humor that a pair of partner-cast ensembles bring to the dark comedy's pitch-perfect 2018 Antaeus Company debut, directed with inspired flair by Nike Doukas.



Not that Pinter doesn't have

disquieting matters on his mind: bureaucracy gone mad, civil servants risen dangerously far above their level of competence, and mental health practitioners more in need of therapy than those they've been charged to heal.



Add to that the suggestion that the

locked-up "residents" may be there for sinister political reasons and subjected to "treatments" that could drive a sane person mad and you've got some serious stuff beneath the laughs.



Indeed, Pinter serves up so much food for thought that even without two extraordinary casts (completed by Adrian LaTourelle and Rob Nagle as the insubordination-prone Lush, John Bobek and Paul Eiding as the eager-to-please Tubb, and Gregory Itzen and John Apicella as the eleventh-hour-appearing Lobb) to pick from, *The Hothouse* is worth, indeed almost demands, a repeat visit.

That Antaeus's trademark "partner casting" allows audiences to experience at alternate performances the more subtly droll Pelicans (names listed first here) or the more overtly outrageous Ducks (supercharged by Van Norden's unbridled brilliance as Roote) should provide added impetus to return for more madness and mayhem.



The stark realism with which Ginevra Lombardo lights scenic designer Se Hyun Oh's deliberately uninviting shades-of-metallic-gray rest home set goes deliciously deranged post-intermission as sound designer Jeff Gardner backs the action with ominous screams, sensual moans, and other insanity-inducing effects

Julie Keen's two sets of character-defining costumes, Erin Walley's ingenious props (including electrodes, plugs, and headphones for a particularly disquieting experiment in terror), and Orlando de la Paz's as always impeccable scenic painting complete *The Hothouse's* Grade-A production design.

Dialect coast Lauren Lovett-Cohen deserves particular mention for the cast's variety of pitch-perfect British accents from posh to Cockney to Yorkshire, and Bo Foxworth for some of the wildest fight choreography in memory.

Sasha Valarino and Tess O'Sullivan are assistant directors. Jeanne Valleroy is production stage manager and Jessica Osorio is assistant stage manager. Adam Meyer is production manager and technical director and Rene Parras Jr. is assistant technical director.

It may be his more celebrated plays (*The Birthday Party*, *Betrayal*, and *The Homecoming* among them) or his equally acclaimed screenplays (*The Servant*, *The Go-Between*, *Sleuth*, and more) that brought Harold Pinter fame and fortune, but it's a little-known Pinter that makes a visit to *Antaeus* a must. Expect *Hothouse* tickets to be selling like hotcakes.

Kiki & David Gindler Performing Arts Center, 110 East Broadway, Glendale. Through March 11. Thursdays and Fridays at 8:00. Saturdays at 2:00 and 8:00. Sundays at 2:00. See [website](http://www.Antaeus.org) for casts and schedules. Reservations: 818 506-1983  
[www.Antaeus.org](http://www.Antaeus.org)

—Steven Stanley  
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Photos: Geoffrey Wade