

Antaeus Theatre kicks off season with Lillian Hellman's 'Little Foxes'

By LILA SEIDMAN OCT 19, 2018 | 5:05 PM



Mike McShane and Deborah Puette co-star in Lillian Hellman's "Little Foxes," opening at the Antaeus Theatre on Oct. 25. (Courtesy of Geoffrey Wade Photography)

What do the post-Reconstructionist South and the present day have in common?

According to the director of 1900 Alabama-set "Little Foxes," Antaeus Theatre's first play of the season, more than you might expect.

"It's been pretty powerful, [seeing] how such an old play still has such resonance today," said Cameron Watson, director of the Glendale production opening Oct. 25. "Some things just keep on just cycling around for us humans."

Powerful, but not necessarily positive, suggested lead actress Deborah Puette.

"We have come a long way, and yet there are so many things that haven't changed nearly enough," said Puette of the work written by pioneering female playwright Lillian Hellman in 1939.

Puette plays Regina Hubbard, a suffer-no-fools type of woman, who, along with two equally conniving brothers (Mike McShane, Rob Nagle), are attempting to get richer than they already are— no matter who has to suffer.

Regina's black maid, Addie (Judy Louise Johnson), sums it up in one of the play's most-referenced lines: "Well, there are people who eat the earth and eat all the people on it, like in the Bible with the locusts. Then there are people who stand around and watch them eat it."

Puette, who feels the play is inherently political, said audience members won't be able to help drawing a connection to the current political climate.

"I think they're going to draw a pretty clear line between the Hubbards and another family that is in the forefront of most of our minds these days," Puette said.

While there are themes in the play extending beyond the action at hand, Watson said he sees it primarily as a play about family.

And in all the treachery that suffuses a plot, there's a silver lining, Watson pointed out. At the end, Regina's daughter Alexandra (Kristin Couture) states she's not going to sit around and watch people eat the earth — she's going to fight back.

"There's a real feminist cry coming out of the play," Watson said.

(Also notable in the production is Jocelyn Towne, who plays Regina's high-strunk but heartfelt sister-in-law Birdie with passion and nuance.)

Contemporary parallels notwithstanding, Watson said he made the decision to stage in the time, place and mind frame Hellman "intended it to live."

After all, Watson said, there's a reason why Hellman set the play in 1900, as the South was beginning to transition from the Reconstruction and a primarily agrarian way of life to join the quickly industrializing world.

"I just didn't want to get in its way," Watson said. "The play is so beautifully crafted and the arch of the play is so beautiful. My approach to it all was, let's tell the story exactly the way Lillian Hellman intended it to be told."

The result is a lush, period-specific set and costumes that contrast starkly with the world outside the theater located in bustling downtown Glendale.

Still, there's something fresh about Watson's take, Puette said.

A successful 1941 film version featured Bette Davis playing Regina as an arch villainess.

Both Puette and Watson said in this production —the first in Los Angeles in 15 years — they tried to dig deeper into the character and reveal that Hellman didn't intend such a one-dimensional reading of the play's anti-heroine.

Kiki & David Gindler Performing Arts Center is located at 110 East Broadway. "Little Foxes" opens Oct. 25 and runs through Dec. 10.

For more information, call (818) 506-1983 or go to antaeus.org.
