

Review: In 'The Little Foxes,' all's fair in love and post-Civil War Alabama



By MARGARET GRAY NOV 09, 2018 | 8:00 AM



Jocelyn Towne, left, and Deborah Puette in Antaeus Theatre Company's revival of "The Little Foxes" by Lillian Helman. (Geoffrey Wade Photography)

Say your husband, whom you had never liked, suffered from an ill-defined but dangerous heart condition. And say he happened to mention — in not a very nice way — that he was about to take a step that would scuttle all your hopes and dreams and leave you penniless. And imagine that at that very moment, overexcited by triumph, he reached for his medicine bottle and found it empty.

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We all know how a good wife, an unselfish, loving, dutiful wife, would react. Regina Hubbard Giddens, the protagonist of Lillian Hellman's gorgeously constructed 1939 play "The Little Foxes," now at Antaeus Theatre Company in Glendale, certainly knows what's expected of her.

Regina doesn't say anything at this pivotal moment to suggest that a war is raging in her soul. Indeed, as played by Deborah Puette in Cameron Watson's luscious and gripping production, Regina barely moves a muscle. She sits decorously still, as if listening to a somewhat dull concert. Only her glittering eyes send dispatches from the battlefield behind her frozen face: Regina vs. the Patriarchy. Only her eyes let us know it's a bloodbath in there.

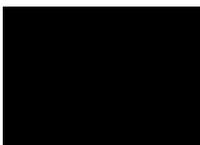
As wonderful as Puette is as this divine, despicable anti-heroine, "The Little Foxes" is a true ensemble piece. Just as Regina's character wouldn't make sense outside of the play's milieu — post-Civil War Alabama, circa 1900 — Puette's performance flourishes in the emotional reality generated by her wonderful costars. They supply the steel on which she sharpens her blade.

Regina is unhappily married to an unhealthy banker, Horace (John DeMita), who doesn't appear until late in the play, leaving her a good long time to scheme for profit with her brothers, Ben and Oscar Hubbard (Mike McShane and Rob Nagle). Since the war, the Hubbards have made enough money — unethically — to act like aristocrats, but as McShane and Nagle vibrantly convey, they're thugs. McShane plays Ben as a cordial, chuckling good old boy, with a smile that doesn't quite cover the ice in his heart. Nagle's Oscar is both crueler than Ben and worse at hiding it. Judging by the ham-handed con jobs he works up with his silly, spoiled son, Leo — wonderfully played by Calvin Picou — he's also not nearly as smart. Oscar's battered wife, Birdie (Jocelyn Towne), on the other hand, is a lady, from one of the Old South's elite families. The first time she saw Oscar, she recalls, he was riding past her house during a party he had not been invited to. He later bought her family's failing cotton plantation — and her. Towne's rendering of this woman whose upbringing has left her helpless provides a compelling argument

for Regina's choices, not to mention those of her daughter, Alexandra (Kristin Couture). (At the end of the play, the Hubbards' monstrous greed seems ensured for generations to come; indeed, we can find evidence of this legacy today.) The only exemplars of human goodness onstage are the household's two servants, Cal (William L. Warren) and Addie (Judy Louise Johnson).

Watson, one of L.A.'s busiest intimate-theater directors, has a particular skill for calibrating the emotional clockwork of a group scene. His actors know what to do, where to look, how to react at every moment, so they're just as entertaining in the background as they are at center stage. John Iacovelli's sets are almost always spectacular, but the perfection of this one — through a set of glass doors off to the right, he has placed an ingeniously foreshortened dining room, which somehow seats most of the cast — attests to how thoughtfully the Antaeus team conceived and realized this mesmerizing, subtly topical revival.

*"The Little Foxes." Antaeus Theatre Company, Kiki & David Gindler
Performing Arts Center, 110 East Broadway, Glendale. 8 p.m. Fridays and
Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, 8 p.m. Mondays. Ends Dec. 10. \$35. (818)
506-1983 or www.Antaeus.org. Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes.*



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