

STAGEsceneLA

STEVEN STANLEY'S STAGESCENELA.COM: SPOTLIGHTING THE BEST IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA THEATER

THE LITTLE FOXES

STAGEsceneLA
WOW!

Lillian Hellman might have written *The Little Foxes* in post-Depression 1939, but her tale of the Alabama Hubbard clan's quest for even more filthy lucre hasn't aged a day, just one reason her three-act Southern-fried melodrama makes for an especially scrumptious Antaeus Theatre Company three-course meal.



Another is the tour-de-force star turn delivered by Deborah Puette as Regina Hubbard Giddens, the rapacious vixen (or feminist heroine, you take your pick) trapped in a boring marriage to banker Horace (John DeMita).

Deciding to take advantage of her husband's hospitalization up north, Regina conspires with her brothers (Mike McShane as Ben and Rob Nagle as Oscar, who's married to Jocelyn Towne's browbeaten Birdie) to seal a deal with visiting northerner William Marshall (Timothy Adam Venable) to build a new cotton mill and become millionaires* in the bargain.



Unfortunately for Ben and Oscar, who'd much rather sign the contract without their sister's cooperation, a desire to keep the mill in the family makes Regina's husband's fortune so essential that Sis wangles from them a promise of 51% control, assuring them she will secure funds from her ailing hubby whether he likes it or not.



There's no honor among thieves, however, and Oscar comes up with his own scheme to use his debonair but dimwitted son Leo (Calvin Picou) to secure a two-thirds' share in the mill without Ben, Horace, or Regina's knowledge.

Leo will simply "borrow" \$88,000** worth of Union Pacific bonds from Horace's safe deposit box, a worry-free venture since according to Leo, Horace only checks the box every six months or so, ample time for the bonds to be put to good use and returned with no one the wiser, that is if all goes according to plan...

Few in the union-strong late 1930s could have predicted that eight decades later, the disparity between the super-rich and the rest of us would be greater than ever, just one reason *The Little Foxes* has only gained in relevance in the seventy-nine years since its Broadway debut, and with the always inspired Cameron Watson directing for Antaeus, performances are as cutting-edge as any you'd see in a 2018 World Premiere.



Puette dazzles throughout, playing Regina as the victim of a sexist society seeking only what should what by rights have been hers had she not had to marry for money. That the L.A. stage star adds surprising bits of humor and palpable charm to the requisite cold blood is icing on the cake.



A superb Towne breaks hearts as the tragically tyrannized Birdie and never more so than when she confesses her secret shame.



Nagle's despicably despotic Oscar and Picou's cute-but-dumb Leo earn as many laughs as hisses in one particularly deliciously played scene.

Equally outstanding are McShane's outwardly charming but inwardly abominable Ben, DeMita's long-suffering yet staunchly determined Horace, Venable's dynamic Yankee charmer of a William, and Couture's devotedly loving Zan, who just might be the family's saving grace.



Last but not least, Judy Louise

Johnson (Addie) and William L. Warren (Cal) bring dignity to a couple of African-American servants written with refreshingly little 1930s stereotyping.



Scenic designer John Iacovelli and props master David Saewert give us quite possibly the most elegant Antaeus set ever, its 99-seat intimacy adding fly-on-the-wall impact.

Jared A. Sayeg's lighting bathes the Hubbard manse in a burnished oil-lamp glow, Terri A. Lewis's detailed turn-of-the-century costumes are as gorgeous as can be and topped by Jessica Mills' just-right hair and wigs, and sound designer Jeff Gardner provides suitably ominous effects while integrating Ellen Mandel's moody original music.



Dialect coach Michael Thomas Walker

ensures authentic Alabama drawls. Bo Foxworth is fight choreographer. Liz Lanier is assistant director. Ryan McRee is dramaturg.

Taylor Anne Cullen is production stage manager and Jessica Osorio is assistant stage manager. Adam Meyer is production manager and technical director and Cuyler Perry is assistant technical director.

Lillian Hellman must have had a crystal ball when she wrote *The Little Foxes* in 1939, more frighteningly true than ever in the "Greed Is Good" 2010s and revived to absolute perfection by Antaeus.

*\$1,000,000 in 1900 = \$30 million in 2018

**worth \$2.6 million today