



## *CurtainUp*

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### *A CurtainUp Los Angeles Review* *Peace In Our Time*

By [Laura Hitchcock](#)

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"London Pride means our own dear town to us." — Lyia Vivian

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Rebecca Mozo, Daniel Bess, Josh Clark, Jason Henning, Bill Brochtrup (Photo: Steven Brand)

What would happen if the Germans had won World War II and invaded London? That's the premise of Noel Coward's *Peace In Our Time*, written in 1946 and revived by The Antaeus Company. Known primarily for his comedies, it comes as somewhat of a shock to find this melodrama among the canon and even more when, despite poor reviews, it ran in London for 167 performances. Poor reviews or not, it has unmistakable Coward verve, pace and shrewd construction.

Set in a London pub cunningly called The Shy Gazelle during the war years (1940-45), the piece betrays its age by a cast of 23, almost unthinkable in this day and age. (Although double casting has been an Antaeus practice since the company was formed in 1991, I'm listing solely the performance viewed in the production notes). The characters played are the pub's denizens and a few Nazis. The show is sprinkled with Coward tunes (as opposed to songs) as it dives into the war years. The mood and setting are abetted by John Zalewski's sound design of carefully orchestrated blasts from crashing bombs, one that made one jump in one's chair.

The pub's owners, Fred Shattuck (Josh Clark) and wife Nora (Eve Gordon) with

their daughter Doris (Abby Wilde), play host to the regulars who have made the pub their second home for years. Prominently displayed front and center table are Mr. Grainger (Philip Proctor, with a superb singing voice) and Mrs. Grainger (Anna Mathias, also a fine singer).

George Bourne (Daniel Bess) remains a mystery figure until the play's end and sinister Chorley Bannister (Bill Brochtrup) with a sneer and a snarl is an undisputed villain. Ann Noble plays Alma and Rebecca Mozo as Lyia sings most of Coward's numbers in a sweet strong voice. Rebekah Tripp is Janet Braid, who flees to Cornwall but comes back to tough it out with her friends. Rob Nagle portrays Albrecht Richter, the Gestapo heavy who closes the show, literally.

Coward pulls no punches when it comes to wartime atrocities. Billy Grainger (John Francis O'Brien) turns up with letters carved on his forehead by the Nazis as a deserter and Doris's tortured body is graphic. He also tells of wartime pranks, letting Mrs. Blake recount the story of a film where "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" is substituted for Hitler's voice.

By the time the denouement comes when Janet tells Cholly off and not long afterwards, the Gestapo descend on the pub, it's close to May 1945 so it looks as if everyone, or almost everyone will, get out in time.

With the exception of "London Pride," the songs are not well known. They are Music Hall style ditties with clever lyrics and the piano is an authentic touch, as most pubs had them then. It's believable that after a few brews the regulars burst into song, so nothing seems out of place.

Casey Stangl performed the mammoth task of directing two casts with shrewdness and grace on the small stage of the Antaeus at the Deaf West Theatre. Barry Creyton's adaptation tightens the play and gives it a gleaming whole.

A bravo for Tom Buderwitz's truly splendid scenic design which catches the pub from carved ceiling to pictures to fine details. And thanks to Noel Coward for taking time off from musicals to give us this!

Title: Peace In Out Time

Playwright/Composer: Noel Coward

Director: Casey Stangl

Adapter: Barry Creyton

Cast: Archie (piano player), John Allee; Lyia (Rebecca Mozo); Fred Shattuck (Josh Clark); Mr. Grainger (Philip Proctor); Nora Shattuck (Eve Gordon); Mrs. Grainger (Anna Mathias); George Bourne (Daniel Bess); Chorley Bannister (Bill Brochtrup); Doris Shattuck (Abby Wilde), Alfie Blake (Buck Zachary), Lily Blake (Karianne Flaathen), Alma (Ann Noble), Janet Braid (Rebekah Tripp), Albrecht Richter (Rob Nagle), Phyllis Mere (Rosalyn Mitchell), Bobby Paxton/Gestapo (Paul Culos), Gladys Mott (Belen Greene), Soldier (Chris Clowers), Kurt Foster/Gestapo (Patrick Wenk-Wolff), Billy Grainger (John Francis O'Brien), Dr. Venning (Mark Doerr), Stevie Shattuck (Brian Tichnell), Mrs. Massiter (Melinda Peterson).

When: Oct. 20-Dec. 11, 2011

Where: The Antaeus Company @ Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. Reservations: (818) 506-1983.

Reviewed by Laura Hitchcock on Oct. 21.