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Antaeus Company at Deaf West
Peace in Our Time

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Theatre | 5112 Lankershim Blvd.,
NoHo | Through Dec. 11 | Tickets
\$30-34 | antaeus.org

Who would have thought that at a time when America is still engaged in two seemingly endless wars and the Middle East is a cauldron of instability that the most provocative and powerful wartime drama in recent memory would be an obscure, 65-year-old play by Noel Coward? Such is the case, however, with this magnificent production from the estimable Antaeus Company.



L to R: Jason Dechert, Lily Knight, Danielle Jones, Steve Hofvendahl

Photo by Geoffrey Wade

The troupe has workshopped Barry Creyton's taut adaptation—which incorporates some of Coward's delightful songs—over a couple of years, and that work has paid rich theatrical dividends. Under Casey Stangl's silky smooth and perfectly executed staging, an exceedingly talented cast inhabits designer Tom Buderwitz's gloriously detailed London pub set to explore what might have happened if the Nazis had blitzed Britain into submission and occupied England in the early 1940s.

Coward's expertly crafted script shows us the many shades of human response to conflict, as regulars at the neighborhood pub owned by Fred and Nora Shattock run the gamut from resistance fighters to outright collaborators. Early references to the shooting of Churchill and a concentration camp on the Isle of Wight are chilling, and the frozen silence resulting from the first entrance of Gestapo officer Albrecht Richter is one of Stangl's many affecting moments. Creyton has cleverly woven some of Coward's Music Hall-style songs directly into the action, allowing us to glimpse the pain and pride behind the characters' staunch British reserve.

As is Antaeus' tradition, the production is double-cast. I saw the "Epps Cocoas," but trust that the "Stubbs Specials" are equally fine. With 23 gifted performers (in each cast), it's difficult to pick standouts. Special mention must be made for Steve Hofvendahl and Lily Knight, whose salt-of-the-earth publicans are so richly inhabited that they come to stand for all of England in their quietly ferocious determination to simply carry on. Emily Chase's

barbed Janet delivers the play's most stirring condemnation of the collaborators, while John Combs and Amelia White offer movingly nuanced portrayals of a couple aching for their missing son.

Enough cannot be said for the production values. In addition to Buderwitz's set, Jessica Olson's sumptuous period costumes, Jeremy Pivnick's atmospheric lighting and John Zaleski's unsettling sound are all top-notch, and John Apicella's projections set the scene and the tone with clarity and care.

Given the scale of *Peace in Our Time*, it's unlikely that you'll have a chance to see this moving what-might-have-been drama performed again anytime soon. It's certain you won't see it done better. —*Christopher Cappiello*