

The Liar

Antaeus Theatre

Reviewed by Bob Verini



Graham Hamilton and Karen Malina White
Photo by Geoffrey Wade

This production is a buoyant treat from first to last. Full disclosure, this is coming from someone with a lifelong antipathy to mistaken-identity plots—you know, the ones in which one opportune word from a character would set everything right immediately, but that word is arbitrarily withheld until the 11th hour. That’s exactly how David Ives’s rhymed couplet version of a 1644 Corneille play operates, and yet such is the magic of this production that it never feels labored.

Our dashing hero Dorante (Graham Hamilton in the “Cherries” cast in this double-cast production) has not one but two Achilles heels in his quest to hit upon fortune and romance in beau monde Paris: reckless impulsiveness, and a congenital disinclination to truth-telling. The former has him assume that given two first names, the woman of his dreams must be called Lucrece rather than Clarice—cf. tedious identity confusions, above—while the latter trait causes him to muck everything else up despite the best endeavors of cynical servant Cliton (Brian Staten).

Clearly this is *commedia dell’arte* stuff, a fact that Ives emphasizes through self-conscious asides on “this is only a play,” and that director

Casey Stangl exploits with controlled tomfoolery and audience participation. Tech elements are solidly professional and eye-pleasing, creating a blithe air wholly appropriate to the textual goings-on.

On press night, some of the “Cherries” comedy suffered from muddy execution—that will surely work itself out in time, irrespective of what goes on with the “Tangerines” cast on alternate nights—but happily, three key performances avoided a bunch of deadly traps.

The play requires a Dorante totally committed to mendacity yet capable of an act of sincere 11th hour repentance, as inspired by father Geronte, who could be easily tossed away as a bumbling Pantalone. Hamilton’s classical training and apparently innate sense of whimsy put both halves of our hero in splendid hands, while Robert Pine earns Geronte’s laughs yet maintains the moral authority to bring the audience to a hush when he gives his son his deserved late-inning what-for.

Moreover, a show like *The Liar* needs at least one reliable, dazzling farceur or farceuse on the premises, and the “Cherries” cherry atop the sundae is Karen Malina White as our heroines’ twin maids. The lady careens between impish Isabelle and severe Sabine with total concentration, nary an eyebrow raised, and she kills every time in two of the funniest performances I’ve seen on any LA stage this year.

October 16, 2013

Oct. 10-Dec. 1. 5112 Lankershim Blvd.
Parking available for \$7 in the lot at 5125
Lankershim Blvd. (west side of the
street), just south of Magnolia. Thu-Fri
8pm, Sat 2pm & 8pm, Sun 2pm. \$30-34.
(818) 506-1983.

www.Antaeus.org

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