



An obscure melodrama – Peace in Our Time at Antaeus

By [Pauline Adamek](#)

Sunday, October 23rd, 2011



You have to wonder if filmmaker **Quentin Tarantino** ever read *Peace in our Time*, this odd and seldom performed play written by **Noël Coward**, now playing with two alternating casts at **Antaeus Theatre** in North Hollywood. It's unlikely that **Tarantino** saw it on stage, seeing as the play apparently has not been performed in Los Angeles since it was staged at the Pasadena Playhouse in 1950. (It was last staged in London in 2006.) Yet there is certainly more than one inspirational similarity to be detected, starting with the fanciful 'what if...?' premise. What if the Nazis had successfully invaded and taken over Britain? What unfolds over two acts is a chilling glimpse into how altered British life becomes during wartime under enemy occupation.

First published in 1947 and set in a London Pub during the 1940s, *Peace in our Time* is **Noël Coward's** study of a small and diverse group of Londoners, examining how they respond to their beloved country being occupied by victorious Nazi forces. As tensions mount, so does an underground resistance movement, furtively working to overthrow and defeat the occupied forces.

This is a new adaptation by **Antaeus** company member **Barry Creyton** that also incorporates nine of **Coward's** lesser-known songs. Reportedly **Creyton** cut 40 minutes of dialogue and eliminated 12 characters from the play in order to fit in all the

songs, but I'm not entirely sure this was such a good idea.

Directed by **Casey Stangl**, with musical direction by **Richard Levinson**, at one hour and forty, the play feels like it runs too long. There are far too many song interludes (thirteen, including reprises) and unfortunately these frequently dissipate the dramatic tension, to the detriment of the experience. It doesn't help, either, that the songs are very similar, running the gamut from rousing pub singalongs to nostalgic, treacly ballads.

I should add that the singing from all is quite lovely. As a member of the "Epps Cocoa" cast, songbird Lyia Vivian, **Raleigh Holmes** delighted the audience with her haunting renditions of the often sentimental tunes.

Emily Chase also shone as the feisty writer Janet, who riveted the audience with her blistering attack on the Noel Coward-type character, a weaselly writer Chorley played by **JD Cullum**.



About the play.

Eschewing his trademark sparkling witticisms, **Coward's** drama is a work of deep passion. It's a tribute to patriotism and the British sense of fair play and staunch cultural bravado.

According to wikipedia, **Coward** was inspired to write the play by seeing the effects of the occupation of France in Paris, writing "The idea of *Peace in Our Time* was conceived in Paris shortly after the Liberation... I began to suspect that the physical effect of four years intermittent bombing is far less damaging to the intrinsic character of a nation than the spiritual effect of four years enemy occupation."

The set design by **Tom Buderwitz** beautifully recreates an early 19th century cozy London pub in great detail, with solid-looking dark wood and paintings crowding the walls.

Peace in Our Time is a handsome – though overly melodramatic and drawn out – production with strong performances and decent British accents from all.

*All production photos by **Geoffrey Wade**.*