

'Peace in Our Time' is More Than a Play, It's an Experience

I wasn't going to write a review of the Antaeus production of Noel Coward's "Peace in Our Time". I'd been there, done that, and to be honest, I didn't want people to know I was that old. Who would? But I was sideswiped by the experience of watching my life pass before me on stage. I was a child when my little friend's father came up to the playroom in my childhood friend's house and said, "I want you girls to come listen to this. It will be a part of your history." We didn't know what we were listening to on Mr. Gallagher's radio, but it was nevertheless a turning point in our lives.

It was Sept. 3, 1939, about 11 a.m., British Standard Time. It was Prime Minister of Britain, Neville Chamberlain's broadcast of England and France's declaration of war on Germany. And, age three, or seven or 39, we were Brits and what it meant was that we were at war with the Huns, the horrible Huns, and furthermore, they were anxious to kill the Jews.

and like it or not, I was a Jew. How could I not feel offended? Maybe I overreacted, but the next feeling I had was that I wanted to kill them first! I was scared of even stepping on a snail, or swatting a fly, but I was braced to kill every German I encountered. Hiding under my Aunt's stairs, or shuffling down to the cellars of the Smithers Hall, which were considered safe havens when the air raid sirens announced an attack. I wasn't sure what Smithers were, or why we would be safe within the walls of their cellar hideouts, but we all gathered there almost every night, with our blankets and gas masks, so that when our houses were bombed, we wouldn't be in them. When we heard the Huns' planes, we sang our rude songs louder and interpolated words like, "Run rabbit, run rabbit,

run, run, run, here comes Tommy with his gun, gun, gun." Poetic? Not. Prophetic, yes! We hissed, "You missed!" when we heard a bomb hitting the sod in Queen's Park and missing our homes and our children. We didn't sleep much, but who needs sleep when there's a war on? And we were winning! Or so Winnie (Churchill), our beloved prophet told us.

And what would've happened if the Germans had won the war? That's what the inimitable Noel Coward asked his fertile brain, but didn't stay for an answer. Instead he wrote "Peace in Our Time", a hugely populated play about how the Brits would have fared if Hitler and his 'orrible nasties' had managed to get across the Channel and stormed and occupied Britain as overlords. It was, of course, unthinkable to the indomitable Brit, but at the same time, many of us were creeping around like threatened mice circling what we feared might be a future of domination by men who looked like the pictures we'd seen of Hitler's Storm Troopers.

Well, of course, it didn't happen, although Britain, or at least England, was pretty well bombed and battered, especially around industrial towns, certainly around London, and Manchester and Coventry, which were essentially flattened, and our manpower was considerably lowered, but never beaten.

Coward's play takes place in a lessened London, which reflected those post-war years of intense shortages that lasted well into the time, almost seven years later, when I entered college, in almost every aspect, except for the actual presence in England of martial German overlords in our towns and cities, and of course it takes place in a pub, perfectly designed and reproduced by the amazing Tom

Mad About Theater



by Madeleine Shaner

Budewitz. Where else would you look for a True Brit? Barry Creyton's masterful adaptation of the Coward script, now with the talented Richard Levinson as music director, Casey Stangl directing with valor and with style, and a couple of the lovely ladies, all in perfect period costume, immaculately designed by Jessica Olson, singing the catchy Coward music hall lynes that put the audience right there, in a London pub, during the unthinkable German occupation, take this Brit back so completely to that tense period in England's history that time slipped away from me and I was quite ready to belly up to the bar during intermission and grab a watery pint.

Individual performances are all brilliant and true, true, true — too many to individualize and double



photo courtesy of Geoffrey Wade

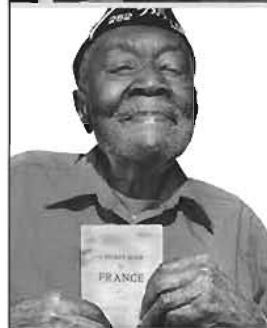
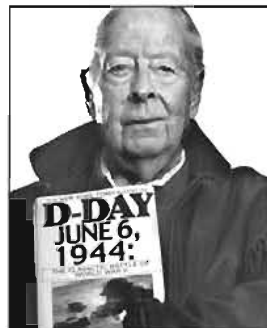
From left, Jason Dechert, Lily Knight, Danielle Jones and Steve Hofvendahl perform in 'Peace in Our Time'.

cast, as many of Antaeus Company's productions are — and if you don't leave the theatre with a tear in your eye, and a glad feeling in your heart that you just watched some truly wonderful theatre, then don't leave that London pub until you've seen the play again.

You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll maybe live it again, as I did.

The Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. For information, call (818)506-1983 or visit www.Antaeus.org.

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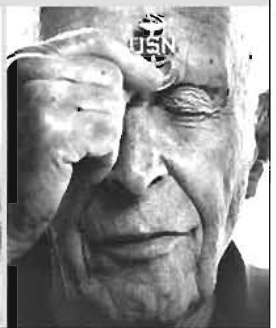
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