

The Liar



Anteaus provides a sophisticated take on Corneille's original comedy, now fashioned by contemporary David Ives in clever verse couplets that we have come to associate with 17th Century French farce. *The Liar* is different, however. We are confronted with a series of tongue and cheek, sophisticated references that we recognize: At one point late in the play, one character begins, "Let not to the marriage of true minds..." which draws the retort, "No Shakespeare, please!"

Incidentally, all references to the actors involved in Anteaus' bare bones yet effective production of *The Liar* refer to the night I saw the show. Instead of rotating plays as in repertory, Anteaus is noted for its rounds of rotating casts; the freshest ones are "luck of the draw" mixed casts that are organized for Thursday and Friday shows.

Corneille's plot for *The Liar* is simple enough with overtones of *commedia dell'arte*, streamlined by Ives' smart "transadaptation" (as he calls it). Dorante (Nicholas D'Agosto) sees a beautiful young woman from a distance and falls madly in love. But then, this is a normal occurrence. His servant, Cliton (Rob Nagle) gets her identity mixed up with one of the girls in her entourage, and the fun begins. Clarice (Jules Willcox) is the woman he saw, but Lucrece (Joanna Strapp) is the name that Cliton brings back to him.

Clarice's fiancé, Alcippe (Bob Foxworth in the make-up of a cuckold), plays the part with exaggerated angst, but Dorante eases his mind by supplying the wrong name as his hearts' desire. To compound matters, Dorante is accustomed to embellishing the truth even when its not necessary (hence the title).

Casey Stangl directs two sets of casts with precision and keeps the comedy crisp, right down to a revolving set of maids played to hilarious effect by a single actor (on the night I saw the play, Gigi Bermingham).

To advance the never/never feel of the production, set designer Keith Mitchell has devised a utilitarian, structure enhanced by blotches of bright pinwheels of color (by lighting designer François-Pierre Couture) reminiscent of Bordello 60s chic.

This simple approach is continued in the black color palette utilized by Angela Balogh Calin's costumes, a move that seems to recess the characters into the dark background.

Ultimately, though, the pacing and evident enjoyment by the cast makes the characters stand out.

One of the advantages of Antaeus' art is the subtle change in evidence from one performance by one set of characters (Cherries) to another (Tangerines). Take my word, whichever cast you see, you'll always be surprised.

PHOTO: D'Agosto and Foxworth in *The Liar* at Antaeus Company in North Hollywood.

The Liar continues Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. through December 1st at 5112 Lankershim Blvd. North Hollywood 91601. Tickets are \$30 to \$34. For reservations phone (818) 506-1983 or online at www.antaeus.org.