

Paul Myrvold's Theatre Notes

October 19, 2015 October 19, 2015

“Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company – Mermaids Cast

| c



(<https://paulmyrvoldstheatre.com/files.wordpress.com/2015/10/mermaidse28093sonya-and-vanya.jpg>)

Rebekah Tripp and Don R. McManus as Sonya and Vanya in “Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company through December 6.

Photo: Karianne Flaathen

Antaeus Theatre Company has the most unusual production scheme of double casting their shows while rehearsing both casts in ensemble. Eschewing the dull names of Cast A or Cast B, the company draws the names of its casts from the text of the current play, in this case, Anton Chekhov’s “Uncle Vanya.” You will hear one character referring to another as “mermaid” and later as “vixen.” The casts alternate performances intact except for the third cast, Madmen (also from the text), which mix the players of the two casts differently for each performance.

When I was wanting to check a passage of the script, I pulled my well worn copy of "Chekhov: The Major Plays" off my shelf and was a little surprised to see that the famous map scene in which Doctor Astrov tries to convey his passion for the Russian forests to the beautifully vacant Yelena, the too-young wife of the too-old Professor Serebryakov, I found the lines of Astrov highlighted. I knew the scene was familiar, but I had forgotten that I had played the scene in an acting class at A. C. T., a decade and a half too young for the role. I think I must have played it in deadly earnest, finding nothing funny in "Uncle Vanya." But, as demonstrated by the Vixens cast, played a certain way, a tremendous amount of wry humor can be revealed.



(<https://paulmyrvoldstheatrenotes.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/mermaids-e28093-yelena.jpg>)

Linda Park as Yelena in "Uncle Vanya" at Antaeus Theatre Company through December 6.

Photo: Karianne Flaathen

As must be expected, “Uncle Vanya” is a very different show with different actors. The excellent Mermaid cast renders the Chekhov text in a straightforward, dramatic fashion. The characters lock eyes with their interlocutors as they pour forth their angst, passion and boredom. There are light moments of humor that evoke chuckles from the audience, but the show is far more melodrama than comedy. Indeed, it is the way the show is most often played.



(<https://paulmyrvoldstheatrenotes.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/mermaidse28093astrov.jpg>)

Jeffrey Nordling as Astrov in “Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company through December 6.

Photo: Karianne Flaathen

As Vanya, **Don R. McManus** is a tortured soul, smitten by the beautiful minx, Yelena (the indeed beautiful and provocative **Linda Park**), who suffers under his unwanted attention. Handsome, charismatic **Jeffrey Nordling** makes Astrov a virile outdoorsman, passionate in defense of the forest, who falls like ripe fruit for the idle beauty of Yelena. **Rebekah Tripp** as Sonya, the professor’s daughter, creates a com-

elling character, affecting in her hopeless longing for Astrov. As Serebryakov, **Lawrence Pressman** is grounded in the text making his a character a timorous tyrant, cranky and petulant.



(<https://paulmyrvoldstheatrenotes.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/mermaidse28093serebryakov.jpg>)

Lawrence Pressman as Serebryakov in “Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company through December 6.

Photo: Karianne Flaathen

Lynn Milgrim, as Marina the old “nanny,” the heartbeat of the household, comforts all with simple food and bromides and **Anne Gee Byrd** is just right in an airy, wraith-like performance as Vanya’s cruelly ignored mother, Maria.

Morlan Higgins and **John Allee** as household retainers Telegin and Yefim are fine in their limited roles and extraordinary as musicians.

Mandolinist Higgins and accordionist Allee set the tone of the show singing and playing the excellent original songs of **Marvin Etzioni** that serve to introduce the show at opening and at the act break as well as providing thoughtful, pertinent interludes between scenes.



(<https://paulmyrvoldstheatre.com/files.wordpress.com/2015/10/mermaidse28093yefim-and-telegin.jpg>)

John Allee and Morlan Higgins as Yefim and Telegin in “Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company through December 6.

Photo: Karianne Flaathen

The play, with script adapted by **Annie Baker** working with a literal translation by **Margarita Shalina** and the original Russian text, is thoughtfully directed by **Robin Larsen**. The production boasts a handsome set designed by **Micahael B. Raidford** with lighting by **Leigh Allen**. Costumes by **Jocelyn Hublau Parker** are excellent as is the sound design of **Christopher Moscatiello**.

I am wondering if the contrasting styles of the two casts are a strategy of the director. Makes sense in a way. I think people have certain expectations when it comes to Chekhov. At the opening night of the Vixens cast, my wife and I were sitting next to a young Russian couple that was clearly not pleased. “It’s too silly,” the Russian woman scorned. “This is American Chekhov, not Russian Chekhov.”

My wife then told the story about a production of the “The Sea Gull” she attended. At intermission, a man behind her complained about it not being a comedy as billed. His companion explained, “It’s Russian comedy; only one person dies.” That got an amused snort from the disgruntled Russian girl.

I am very curious to see the Madmen cast this coming Friday. Stay tuned.

“Uncle Vanya,” an acknowledge masterpiece, runs through December 6 at Antaeus Theatre Company, 5112 Lankershim, North Hollywood.



Published by

Paul Myrvold

View all posts by Paul Myrvold

⌘ [Uncategorized](#) ⌘ [Antaeus Theatre Company](#), [Chekhov](#), [Los Angeles Theater](#), [LA Theater](#), [Los Angeles Theatre](#), [Mermaid Cast](#), [North Hollywood](#), [Paul Myrvold](#), [Paul Myrvold's Theatre Notes](#), [Theater Reviews](#), [Theatre Reviews](#), [Uncle Vanya](#) [1 Comment](#)

One thought on ““Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company – Mermaids Cast”

1. Pingback: “Uncle Vanya” at Antaeus Theatre Company – Mermaids Cast | Paul Myrvold's Theatre Notes

Blog at WordPress.com. | The Resonar Theme.