

# Review In 'Wedding Band,' Antaeus walks interracial love down the aisle



In 1918, a local resident (Nadege August) tries to comfort her new neighbor (Verilyn Jones) amid the fallout from a scandalous interracial love affair. (Geoffrey Wade Photography)

By **PHILIP BRANDES**

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**W**ho among us wouldn't like to think we'd have the integrity to honor our feelings for someone despite disapproving social norms? In 1962, African American playwright Alice Childress' "Wedding Band" threw sobering cold water on the illusion that love could conquer prejudice, courageously breaking theatrical taboos with its frank depiction of a forbidden interracial love affair. The Antaeus Company's skillfully staged revival brings clarity and passion to the play's lofty issues of race, class and politics, but it remains earthbound by its dated construction and overheated rhetoric.

The drama, the full title of which is "Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black & White," unfolds over three sweltering days in 1918 South Carolina amid a harrowing historical trifecta: World War I, a lethal influenza pandemic and laws criminalizing unions between black and white people — threads woven prominently, though not always elegantly, into Childress' narrative.

Following Antaeus tradition, the production was developed with two separate casts alternating as the “Sweet Potatoes” and “Honey Bunches”; the reviewed performance was one of the company’s periodic “Dear Hearts” mash-ups of both. If anything, the consistently vivid characterizations and impeccably timed interplay between randomly paired performers underscored the depth of the Antaeus casting bench — and director Gregg T. Daniel’s ability to align their talents within a unified theatrical vision.

On the plus side, longings and frustrations are palpable as Julia (Veralyn Jones) tries to hide her white lover, Herman (Leo Marks), from the prying eyes of her new landlord (Karen Malina White) and nosy neighbors (Saundra McClain, Nadege August). That bigotry runs in both directions is an observation Childress makes amusingly at first, then more ominously when Herman’s icy domineering mother (Anne Gee Byrd) arrives to collect him.

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In a post-August Wilson era of theatrical sophistication, Childress’ tendency to trade naturalism for polemics can frustrate. At some of the most intensely personal moments, we get speeches rather than speech. Nevertheless, “Wedding Band” offers both historic significance and implicit thematic resonance, as marriage equality controversies continue to rage.

**“Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black & White”** Antaeus Company, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays. Ends Dec. 7. \$30-\$34. (818) 506-1983 or [www.antaeus.org](http://www.antaeus.org). Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes.

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