



BWW Review: A Solid UNCLE VANYA Showcases Some Incredible Talents

BROADWAYWORLD TV

October 19 6:24 AM 2015

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Rebekah Tripp and Don R. McManus Photo by Karianne Flaathen

UNCLE VANYA/by Anton Chekhov/adapted by Annie Baker/directed by Robin Larsen/ Antaeus Theater/thru December 6, 2015

The West Coast premiere of Annie Baker's translation of Anton Chekhov's classic **UNCLE VANYA** receives a brilliant mounting from the Antaeus Theatre Company. Robin Larsen directs her talented cast in a steady, flowing pace with just enough quiet moments to contrast the volatile, high emotional ones.

The quiet humdrum of Vanya's country estate receives quite a jolt of excitement when his brother-in-law Professor Serebryakov arrives for a stay with

his much younger bride Yelena. For years now, Vanya and Serebryakov's daughter Sonya have been managing the estate while providing Serebryakov a monthly stipend.



In Antaeus' tradition of double casting; one set of actors comprise the "Vixens" cast, another set the "Mermaids." This incredible cast being

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Linda Park
Photo by Karianne Flaathen

reviewed: Mermaids.

Don R. McManus completely inhabits Vanya as a totally bitter, despondent mess of a human being. He's entirely in awe of Serebryakov's accomplishments, both in his academia and his success with women. Living in the shadow of Serebryakov's accolades, Vanya deems himself an utter failure and doomed to unhappiness, unless, of course, Yelena would leave Serebryakov for him. McManus' Vanya perfectly at times lecherous, passionate, pathetic, articulate, frustrated.

No one at the estate has any good things to say about the newly-arrived Yelena. In fact, Yelena remains a cipher as the audience first learns of her as a do-nothing, lazy, gold-digger of a wife. When **Linda Park** as the beautiful young Yelena does begin to speak, the many layers of her personality reveal themselves, maybe not lazy but privileged, not gold-digging but fallen out of love with her husband. Park handles Yelena's many moods very well.

Lawrence Pressman's perfectly crotchety, bitter and constantly complaining as Serebryakov. His many physical maladies include a "liver inflamed with envy and regret." When Serebryakov's leg repeatedly bothers him (gout?), Vanya's doctor friend Astrov gets summoned.



Jeffrey Nordling

Jeffrey Nordling gives a tour de force performance as the eccentric, pro-forest, always hard-working doctor Astrov. Nordling finds the very thin line to play drunk very realistically and convincingly, handling all his other scenes with effortless aplomb.

Rebekah Tripp embodies Serebryakov's daughter Sonya, responsible beyond her young age, yet still unsophisticated in matters of love. The scene in which Tripp's Sonya shares her crush details with Park's Yelena - charmingly precious. To add to the daisy chain of unrequited love, Sonya's crush happens to be Doctor Astrov, who also with Vanya, would die for the hand of Yelena, who's still committed/married to Serebryakov.

UNCLE VANYA opens intriguingly with **Morlan Higgins** as estate keeper Telegin on mandolin, accompanied by **John Allee** as Yefim, another estate staffer, on accordion. Higgins and Allee also serenade with appropriate risqué lyrics (by Marvin Etzioni) through the various smooth, actors-moving set changes.



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Other minor characters receiving their individual moments to shine --

Anne Gee Byrd as the Maria, Vanya's mother and object of continuous contention; and Lynn Milgrim, as the charismatic Marina, Telegin's wife, who can charm a combatant Serebryakov to calm down.



John Allee and Morlan Higgins

Photo by Karianne Flaathen

UNCLE VANYA's climatic second act scene in lesser talented hands would have been way over the top.

Top-notch production elements complement the actions. Michael B. Raiford's Russian-influenced set contains a rear wall window frequently back-lit by Leigh Allen to indicate various times of the day . Allen also makes effectual use of framed window pane lighting for various character's soliloquies. Christopher Moscatiello effectively designed the rain and lightning sound effects.

Minor quibble-- since Baker has gone to all the efforts to adapt Chekhov, possibly changing the


character's names to less sound-alike and confusing would made characters off-set references clearer.

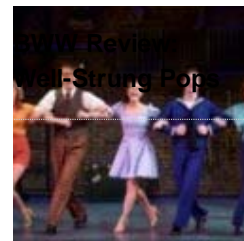
All in all, a well-worth, very entertaining two-and-a-half hours. Antaeus, ya did it again!

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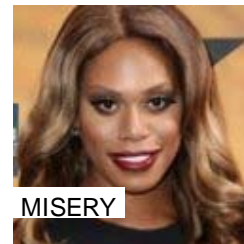
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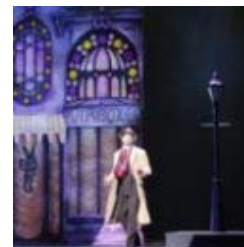
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Gil Kaan, a former Managing Editor of the now-defunct Genre magazine, has had the privilege of photographing and interviewing some major divas of film, television, and stage in his career; including Ann-Margret, Diana Ross, Faye Dunaway, Carol

Channing, Shirley MacLaine, Catherine Deneuve, Liza Minnelli, Sandra Bernhard, Glenn Close, Anna Nicole Smith, Margaret Cho, and three Catwomen—Eartha Kitt, Lee Meriwether and Julie Newmar. He had the fortuitous opportunity to conduct Lily Tomlin's coming out interview. Gil has since reviewed movies and theatre for a number of local Los Angeles and national outlets. Check out his video interviews with the talented participants of S.T.A.G.E. @ http://apla.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=STAGE_Video

A montage of Gil's Halloween Carnavale photos through the first decade of 2000 was selected to be included in the WeHo@ 25 juried exhibition in West Hollywood.

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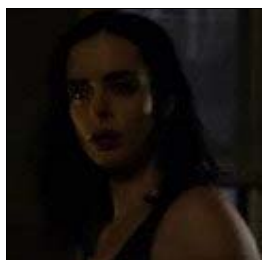
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