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Antaeus Theatre Company's production of Caryl Churchill's "Cloud 9"

Written by [Radomir Vojtech Luza](#)

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Deborah Puette as Betty and Abigail Marks as Lin

Photo by Geoffrey Wade Photography

If you are interested in a play about misunderstandings, contradictions and

convoluted relationships, look no further than the Antaeus Theatre Company's production of Caryl Churchill's "Cloud 9" running through April 24th in the North Hollywood Arts District.

This is the story of seven actors who inhabit at least two roles a piece in what amounts to a role call of mixed up and mismatched gender, age, race and familial bonding and breaking set in two completely different times and places.

The wonderfully clever and biting satire is a tour-de-force of everyday needs, desires and ideals set to a beautifully written soundtrack of the human soul.

Churchill infuses each character with enough depth and wisdom to make the relationships real and the dialogue unforced.

Whether in the wilds of 19th century colonial Africa or London in 1979, this dramatically unstructured sexual and carnal romp shows humanity at its worst and best, while balancing theology, philosophy and sociology in a thoughtful yet provocative manner.

This is play writing at not only its most hilarious and outrageous, but unique, eye-opening and thought-provoking.

We, the audience, do not know when and where each character begins and ends or who they are.

This dichotomy between our private and public selves is a key entree in this smorgasbord of mistaken, manipulated and malevolent identities drawn to each other through their own strengths and weaknesses.

The Obie award-winning play boasts an extraordinarily courageous, imaginative and strong playwright in Churchill.

This play is nothing less than a reflection of a raw, ribald, raucous and often romantic sense of humor and point of view that few writers ever develop or possess.



Abigail Marks as Lin, Liza de Weerd as Victoria, Bo Foxworth as Cathy, Deborah Puette as Betty Photo by Geoffrey Wade Photography

Casey Stangl's direction is effortless and wildly effective. It allows the actors to reach the stars while caressing the sea. It also lets the importance of each moment shine like a beacon on the hill.

This is direction at its most electric, vibrant and captivating. It comprehends the fingers while nurturing the thumbs.

The veteran Antaeus director ("Peace in Our Time," "The Curse of Oedipus" and "The Liar") spends as much time here contemplating the substance as the language, the purpose and meaning as the style.

The Minnesota Artist of the Year assembles an incredibly talented and traditional double or partner cast which takes no prisoners and understands the playwright's deeds and words gracefully and effortlessly.

On the first Saturday evening that this critic saw the play, the Blighters cast took the stage.

Stand outs include:

Chad Borden (Joshua/Gerry) simply shines in both roles. The boldness, backbone and bravery the Northwestern University graduate exemplifies in portraying both characters is not only breathtaking, but rare.

Liza De Weerd (Maud/Victoria) gives a convincing double turn rich in sensitivity, intensity and clarity. The veteran classical actress rises to the occasion with two pitch perfect characterizations.

Bill Brochtrup (Betty/Edward) nearly runs away with the show with a sincere and thoughtful double portrayal. The veteran Antaeus actor and "NYPD Blue" star contrasts his two characters beautifully. His work in Act One, especially, is unique, touching and not contrived in its power and tenderness. Brochtrup gives both characters an inner life that is authentic in glow, glamour and gold. This is an accomplishment not to be missed.

Bo Foxworth (Clive/Cathy/Soldier) steals the show, however, with an intelligent, insightful and indignant performance. The longtime Antaeus member and actor is nothing less than side-splitting and hilarious in both acts.

The seamless transition, however, exhibits a gift for the joyous and meticulous. The UCLA graduate also displays a motivation both parts muscle and memory. His love and preparation of and for the craft or art of acting are inspiring, illuminating and educational.

This is a triumphant return to glory for Foxworth, who has acted in six previous Antaeus productions. Miss it at your own peril.

This critic hopes to see the Yale School of Drama graduate on the stages of North Hollywood and Los Angeles again soon.

Furthering the message of the play are Stephanie Kerley Schwartz' scenic design, Leigh Allen's lighting design, Peter Bayne's composing, sound design and musical direction and A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's costume design.

All in all, "Cloud 9," then, succeeds because of its convoluted dramatic structure, not despite it.

The upside/down nature of the play, which lasts two-and-a-half hours with an

intermission, only contributes to its dazzling grasp of human experience and existence in a way that opens hearts and tickles funny bones.

The often unique relationships here only further galvanize the play and its playwright as creatures of their own wondrous and magical realms.

It is indeed not often when one laughs and cries in the same moment while watching a play. Here it is a given.

Antaeus proves once and for all that all is well on Lankershim Boulevard in this its second-to-last production in North Hollywood before moving to a new space in Glendale.

It is a special and giddy time for a company which understands classics such as this play in an innovative, distinct and authentic manner as well or better than many local, regional or national theatre companies.

Antaeus is a gem that will be sorely missed upon its exit from the No Ho Arts District.

But instead of bemoaning the loss, we, the fortunate audience members throughout the years, must applaud this company for its flawless record.

So, as is the case with every play this critic has reviewed here, this production will have you under its spell from A to Z and then some.

Perhaps it is time this company gets the credit and attention it deserves. Not so much for quality or quantity, but both.

Showtimes:

Thursdays at 8 p.m.

Fridays at 8 p.m.

Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Sundays at 2 p.m.

Ticket Prices:

Thursdays and Fridays: \$30

Saturdays and Sundays: \$34

Where:

Antaeus Theatre Company

5112 Lankershim Blvd.

North Hollywood, CA 91601

(One-and-a-half blocks off Magnolia)

Parking:

\$8 in the lot at 5125 Lankershim Blvd. (West side of the street), just South of Magnolia.

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Radomir Vojtech Luza

RADOMIR VOJTECH LUZA (radluza@sbcglobal.net)

Radomir Vojtech Luza was born in Vienna, Austria in 1963. He owes his love of art and politics to his Czech parents, Radomir Sr. and Libuse Podhraska Luza. The former was a resistance fighter against the Nazis in WWII, and the latter at 15 the youngest actress ever accepted into the Czech National Dramatic Conservatory where she loved studying and acting the works of William Shakespeare and the Greeks until Adolf Hitler closed the doors in 1943.

Luza is the Poet Laureate of North Hollywood, a Pushcart Prize Nominee and the author of 26 books, including his latest, the 404-page EROS OF ANGELS, a collection of poetry and prose. Eros of Angels The President of the North Hollywood West Neighborhood Council has had his poetry published in nearly 80 literary journals, magazines, anthologies and websites such as the front cover of Papyrus, KYSO Flash, Askew, Cultural Weekly, Spectrum II and III, LummoX I-IV., the Boston Globe, Spare Change and roguescholars.com. The SAG/AFTRA/AEA actor has featured his verse across the country over 100 times. The veteran stand-up comedian has also organized and hosted over a dozen readings in cities such as New York City, Ft. Walton Beach, Fla., Jersey City, NJ and Los Angeles. The Tulane University graduate currently co-organizes and co-hosts UNBUCKLED: No Ho POETRY with Mary Anneeta Mann on the first Saturday of each month at T.U. Studios in North Hollywood.