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Wednesday, 16 March 2016 02:44

'Cloud 9:' Theatre Review

Written by [Barbra Dillon](#), Fanboy Comics Managing Editor

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[Antaeus Theatre Company](#) recently launched its 2016 season with Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, unequivocally demonstrating to audiences that its cooperative theatre ensemble intends to break free of boundaries and examine deeply ingrained social inequities with admirable intentionality. Antaeus and director Casey Stangl rightfully recognize *Cloud 9* as a truly great contemporary play, allowing this latest interpretation to not only reflect on the social influences of the time when it was written, but also to speak volumes as to how those same influences still resonate today and what that means for our future. Through a zestful, yet affecting, performance, Antaeus' cast of supremely talented players envelops the audience in two very different worlds, casting light on the disparities and parallels of social change, then and now.

Under Stangl's direction, Antaeus' *Cloud 9* upholds the non-traditional dramatic structure that has always made the play so unique in its execution. The first act of the show finds the cast in 19th century colonial Africa, with male characters played by women, female characters played by men, and a white man playing an African butler. Intended to demonstrate that who we are on the outside is often not who we are within, the audience watches as a family is torn apart by their struggle to adhere to a strict social code, where men are fearless leaders, women are dutiful and timid, and children honor and love their parents without question. The second act moves the characters to 1970s London, when sexual liberation and feminism are in full swing. While gender roles are reversed and statuses have shifted, the parallels between the characters in the first act and their counterparts in the second are remarkably illustrated by their continuing confinement by unyielding societal chains. Those same parallels may be the most stark reminder to theatregoers that when it comes to equality and acceptance (both by society and one's self), even after 100 years of humanity's evolution, we have not changed that drastically.

As always, the cast assembled by Antaeus is simply stellar, effortlessly weaving between satiric humor and heart-rending vulnerability. Similar to many of the company's performances, *Cloud 9* is a partner-cast production, meaning that there are two wholly separate casts that alternate with one another. I had the fortune to see "The Blighters" cast which performed as a well-oiled machine; it was abundantly clear that the ensemble felt the freedom to experiment and test their limits, providing the opportunity to further collaborate with their colleagues and hone their performances.

It goes without saying that *Cloud 9* can be an immensely affecting play, one that will impact every individual differently and that will allow connections to be made with the most unanticipated characters. That, for me, is the beauty of Caryl Churchill's work. As earlier stated, who we are on the outside does not often match who we are on the inside, but the ability to one day recognize those differences - to acknowledge them, accept them, and celebrate them - will perhaps allow us to watch a production of *Cloud 9* many years from now and marvel at a time when inequity and intolerance were so quizzically rampant.

Cloud 9 will play at the Antaeus Theatre in North Hollywood through April 24 with performances on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Tickets are \$30 on Thursdays and Fridays and \$34 on Saturdays and Sundays.

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