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Antaeus Begins Its 15th Dream Season

By Julio Martinez

CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTORS John Apicella and Jeanie Hackett express excitement and surprise about Antaeus Theatre Company presenting the first complete staging of Noel Coward's landmark *Tonight at 8:30* since its LA premiere in 1940. "It was originally produced at the historic El Capitan Theatre and consisted of all nine published one act Coward plays," says Apicella.

The Theatre @ Boston Court and The Ivy Substation.

"Our performance spaces have changed a lot but our mandate to present and teach the great classical material, both ancient and modern, has never wavered," says Apicella.

Hackett adds, "We now have over 100 actor members plus a dedicated support group of directors, designers, costumers, musicians, etc. And it feels like everyone is somehow involved in this Coward production."

Tonight at 8:30 is being performed in two sections. Part One, subtitled *If Love Were All*, opened Oct. 27 and includes *Star Chamber*, *We Were Dancing*, *Astonished Heart* and *Hands Across the Sea*. Part Two (opening Nov. 10) is subtitled *Come the Wild* and features *Red Peppers*, *Fumed Oak*, *Family Album* and *Still Life*.

"Each evening is comprised of four one-acts," explains Hackett. "The two remaining plays will be presented separately during the run as special events."

To pull off this Herculean event, Antaeus is utilizing the skills of six directors: Brendon Fox, Robert Goldsby, William Ludel, Michael Murray, Stefan Novinski and Stephanie Shroyer. "When this work was first produced, Noel Coward and Gertrude Lawrence played the leads in each play," says Apicella. "In our staging, we are spreading the wealth around."

The attention of the co-artistic directors is so concentrated on getting the Coward project launched they pause a bit when asked about the rest of their season. "Of course we have a season, a great season," Hackett exclaims. "We are following Coward with the world premiere of a project created especially for Antaeus: *American Tales*, two one-act musicals presented as a single evening, with music by Jan Powell and book by Ken Stone. That will be followed by Mark Twain's comic tale of love via crossed telephone wires, *The Loves of Alonzo Fitzclarence and Rosannah Ethelton*; then Herman Melville's tragic fable, *Bartelby the Scrivener*. And next summer we will stage our annual ClassicFest."

Looking toward future seasons, Antaeus administrators have met with real estate developer Richard Loring of Habitat Group who has embraced the long-planned vision of a permanent facility, The Antaeus Center." Apicella says, "Negotiations are underway with the City and the Community Redevelopment Agency to secure a site in the NoHo Arts District to construct a mixed-use project that would include a 12,000 square-foot Antaeus performance, educational and administrative space. It would be leased to us for a dollar-a-year."

"The Antaeus mission has always been very simple," says Hackett, "to keep classical theatre alive in ourselves and in our community. To have a permanent home would be the culmination of all our dreams." ■



Co-Artistic Directors Jeanie Hackett and John Apicella

Speaking almost in tandem, Hackett says, "We are adding a 10th play, *Star Chamber*, not included in that production. In fact, it has only recently been published and has never been produced on the West Coast."

A good deal of the Apicella/Hackett excitement comes from the reality of staging this massive work in their new interim home, Deaf West Theatre, located in the NoHo Arts District. "The space is a bit tight for this production," admits Apicella. "We are double-casting each role so we are cramming 38 actors into every nook and cranny of the theatre."

"But we are so grateful and happy to have this space for an entire season," says Hackett. "We have been homeless for so long."

In its 15-year history, Antaeus has had a bit of wanderlust. Billed as "LA's Classical Theatre Ensemble," Antaeus began as an actor-initiated project supported by Center Theatre Group's Mark Taper Forum. Under the artistic direction of award-winning Dakin Matthews, the company initially performed in the Forum Lab space, located beneath the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre. The company has also utilized The Getty Villa, The Skirball Center,

TONIGHT AT 8:30

Both parts play Wed.-Sat., 8 pm;
Sun., 3 and 7:30 pm;
closes Dec. 23
Single Tickets: \$30;
both shows: \$50
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