



THE AUTUMN GARDEN by Lillian Hellman

by Ingrid Wilmot

The Antaeus Company is a class act, L.A.'s Masterpiece Theatre, if you will and this production reinforces its status among genuine theatre lovers. The handsome set, designed by Tom Buderwitz, is the Tuckerman family home converted into a guest house. There are old photographs, a vintage radio, chaise longues, an old fashioned telephone, authentic in every detail. It is the annual gathering place for long time friends, situated on the Gulf of Mexico near New Orleans, in 1949. A not so innocent time - no drugs but plenty of booze.

As each character appears and the heavy friction among these Southern folks develops, we get to know each of them intimately, their foibles and attributes skillfully fleshed out by the legendary playwright (The Little Foxes, Watch on the Rhine, Toys in the Attic etc.) The fragile Constance Tuckerman (Lily Knight), a spinster fearful of facing a lonely, old age, is nervously awaiting the arrival of her old beau Nick, a portrait painter who turns out to have become a boorish drunk, unafraid to impose his non-existent charm on every female within reach. A fabulous performance by mustachioed Stephen Caffrey. He is accompanied by his patient wife Nina (the excellent Jane Kaczmarek), whose face is like a mirror, alternating between bemusement and annoyance by his antics. Constance's cousin Sophie (the pale, gamin Zoe Perry), who was given asylum from war torn France in her early teens, seems more like an unpaid maid in her apron, with mop and broom at the ready, another impressive portrayal. She is engaged to wimpy Frederick (Joe Delafield) and their tepid romantic relationship is subtly clarified in the course of the story. His dominating, interfering mother Carrie (Eve Gordon), holds the purse strings which are actually controlled by sarcastic grandma Mary Ellis (Ann GeeByrd), very amusing as an acid tongued, old lady who doesn't mince words. Also assembled are Edward (Ned) Crossman (Stoney Westmoreland), an old friend of Constance's, a sympathetic character who drowns his meaningless life in alcohol, as does the General, Ben Griggs (James Sutorius). The only thing dry about him is his sense of humor. But, who can blame him, stuck in a miserable marriage to Rose, a fading but still pretty Southern belle (the flirty, flirty Faye Grant). Reba Waters as the "colored maid", only has a few lines but she delivers them perfectly.

This ensemble, under the admirable direction of Larry Biederman, is pitch perfect. There's not a wasted gesture or expression. And so believable are they, one cannot imagine anyone else in their roles, which is ironic because the show is double-cast and the one you're going to see will surely be equally accomplished. Just prepare yourself for a long sit, the show lasts three hours (one intermission). A cup of strong coffee might be advisable, too.

The Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Boulevard, one block south of Magnolia, North Hollywood. Thursday - Saturday 8 p.m. (dark 11/25). Sunday 2:30 and 7:30. \$30 - \$34. Free parking in Citibank lot on Otsega Street. (818) 506-1983 or [www .anaeus .org](http://www.anaeus.org) ends 12/19

Pre-Performance Dining Suggestion: Conveniently located between Universal Studios and the theatre, is **FIRENZE OSTERIA** (the former Brasserie Barzac, same owner), a lovely multi room and bar setting. Everything is bathed in Florentine gold (a few of those coins wouldn't hurt since you may blow the entire dining out budget for the week). The lighting makes us all look good, emanating from the glowing chandeliers to the candles in each table, bedecked with pale gold cloths and sparkling glassware, a rich, warm look. The food is expensive but the quality warrants it. We only ordered two entrees. They charge \$30.95 for veal Milanese style, very fine, with a light, crisp breading that would give a Wiener schnitzel a run for its money. It has a topping of salad, arugula and sauteed cherry tomatoes. No starch either with their flank steak, from the "light menu", tender, marinated slices topped by a salad, a more elaborate version in balsamic vinaigrette, with arugula, goat cheese, olives, cherry tomatoes and cubes of avocado. First class, \$24.95. To begin, they provide a complimentary caponata dip, of which we made short shrift. It was graciously replaced. Service is wonderful, mostly by men in black, except for our darling waitress who packed the veal bone in a doggie box and threw in extra bread and more of that delicious caponata. A nice surprise. There are fine wines, from \$7 per glass for a Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. In about seven minutes you will be at your destination.

Firenze Osteria, 4312 Lankershim Boulevard, Toluca Lake. Full bar. Valet parking. (818)760-7081



Absolutely must see



A wonderful evening of theater



An excellent evening of theater



A good show, but not great



Mediocre, but better than no theater at all

No Stars - Do something else or stay home