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BWW Reviews: The Antaeus Company Jubilantly Presents Los Angeles Premiere of New Adaptation of Corneille's THE LIAR

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by Don Grigware

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The Liar/adapted by David Ives from the comedy by Pierre Corneille/directed by Casey Stangl/The Antaeus Company/review of the Tangerine Cast*/through December 1

17th century French farce with its overabundance of mistaken identities, risqué remarks about women and romantic trysts and expert timing is a lot to handle for contemporary actors. Plus Corneille's *The Liar* offers the further challenge of speaking dialogue in verse. No problema for The Antaeus Company, LA's premier Classical Theater Ensemble, who rise to every occasion and carry off a perfect coup. Pierre Corneille's *The Liar* was first performed in 1644 France, but is based on 1634's *La Vida Sospechosa* by Spanish-American playwright Juan Ruiz de Alarcon. Like all French farce, it's a satire on class, especially the upper class, with a fast and furious pace which director Casey Stangl handles magnificently and boasting an uber skilled cast (alternating Cherries and Tangerines)* that could not be more scrumptious.

David Ives' new adaptation keeps all the glorious plot twists in tact and provides for the anticipated delicious over-the-top acting style, but, as an added plus, it brings the play into the 21st century with contemporary lingo, making the dialogue fresh and ripe for young audiences who want to laugh, and on opening night, that they assuredly did. Heard exclaimed during

the two hour romp are "I'm constipated with the truth. Teach me to lie." Fondling a lover, "If you're going to lie, lie in bed." "Liar? He studied law." There are several silly *play.on.word* phrases like *dupe de jour* for soup de jour and a *neuf* for enough or equally inane rhymes like "The Louvre has *mouvred*" or "Isabelle ...*visibelle*". It's one big game, and the language is all for fun. There seem to be quite a few plot twists akin to Shakespeare; in fact, his name satirically pops up. And as in Shakespeare, there are ample asides from the actors about pretending, "Is this a stage? Are these just props?" The male characters not only talk to the audience but even engage one or two in some enjoyable tomfoolery.

The basic plot involves Dorante (Nicholas D'Agosto), a deceitful cad, who lies about returning from the war to impress a bevy of women. He falls for Clarice (Kate Maher), but mistakingly calls her Lucrece (Joanna Strapp), setting off a chain of confusing situations, which involve Dorante's meddling father Geronte (Peter Van Norden), a crazed buffoon Alcippe (Bo Foxworth) and a rather drab Philiste (Jonathon Lamer). Of course, what's the French upper class without servants? Cliton (Rob Nagle) serves Dorante and Isabelle/Sabine - twins - (Gigi Bermingham) serves Clarice/Lucrece. Do plot elements all get straightened out with a happy ending? Is there a moral to the story? As you may guess, the answer is yes, but one of the characters, I won't say who, brings the play to a spirited and exaggerated conclusion, putting a fresh spin on morality.

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The ensemble are all at the highest level of expertise. Standouts include: the ever hilarious Nagle as Cliton and delightfully engaging Bermingham as the twins; both Strapp and Maher make delectably enticing pawns. D'Agosto steals the play as the sly Dorante and Foxworth a close second as the outrageous Alcippe. Foxworth is such a resourceful actor and really uses his face and a trollish look he concocts here to superlative advantage. Simple but effective - steely on two levels - scenic design by Keith Mitchell, lighting by Francois-Pierre Couture - glaringly bright-colored almost neon lights - and great costuming by Angela Balogh Calin - sexy, skimpy attire for the ladies - all contribute to a sensual, fantasy-like look at the classic.

Even if you are not into the classics, you will enjoy *The Liar* as sheer entertainment. The *Cirque du Soleil* clowns, who entertain us in leaps and bounds, learned most of what they perform from this genre of farce. The fast pace, ripping energy and unabashed humor will hold you captive. The Antaeus Company prove once more that in putting on a classic in LA, farce or otherwise, they will not be beat.



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Grigware is an Ovation nominated actor and writer whose contributions to theatre through the years have included 6 years as theatre editor of NoHoLA, a contributor to LA Stage Magazine and currently on his own website:

www.grigwaretalkstheatre.com

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