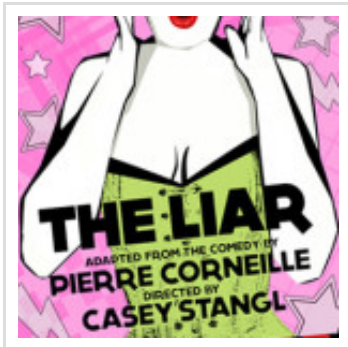




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*The Liar* at Antaeus Theater until December 1st, 2013



If you think of **Corneille** as the father of French tragedy, then *The Liar* (*Le menteur*) will reveal a lesser known aspect of the great playwright: his talent as a comedy writer. Funny, clever, and light. Under the direction of **Casey Stangl**, the engaging English-language adaptation of the play by **David Ives** astutely takes the stage at Antaeus Theatre, in NoHo, for a few delightful hours of fun and smarts.

The **Antaeus Theatre** has a tradition of “partner casting,” meaning that each role is shared by two actors. The acting teams work together during the rehearsal process but, as hinted by the fact that one team is Tangerines and the other Cherries, we can expect that each one has its own flavor. With my ‘Cherries’ picking, I got to see the representation with **Graham Hamilton** in the lead role, as Dorante, the liar. The entire cast (eight actors for nine roles) delivered an energetic and passionate performance, punctuated by graceful changes of scenes. Warm professionalism was evident as soon as I met the people working at the reception in the small but cozy lobby, and to whom I am grateful for pointing us in the direction of *The Republic of Pies* around the corner.



Certainly this version of *The Liar* at Antaeus Theater is presented in a resolutely updated fashion. Speaking of style, the color palette (co-created by **Angela Balogh Calin, François-Pierre Couture, Keith Mitchell**) is almost monochromatic, with layers of black, anthracite grey, and deep blues. A solid background to display the intriguing bright fuchsia moleskine notebook, the only bright color of the entire production, as to highlight its potent content: the permanence of the written word, the diary containing Lucrece's true feelings.



— *The Liar*, Antaeus Theatre, Kate Maher as Clarice, Joanna Strapp as Lucrece.  
Photo Geoffrey Wade

If David Ives has taken some minor liberties from Corneille's version (1643), most remains of the seventeenth century play and undoubtedly, this twenty-first century production is an homage to its forerunners. By the plural I mean Corneille and before him Lope de Vega or, I should say, don Juan d' Alarcón. Let me explain: in his preamble to *Le menteur (The liar)*, Corneille salutes the author of the play *La Verdad sospechosa* (1634), of which he says *The liar* is partly translated, partly inspired ("*en partie traduite, en partie imitée de l'espagnol*"). Originally Corneille credited Lope de Vega for the Spanish play, until it was brought to his attention that Juan d'Alarcón (born in modern Mexico around 1581), was complaining about the printers who he said, had wrongly printed his work under the name of Lope de Vega. Born in Madrid, Felix Lope de Vega, a key figure of the Spanish Golden Century Baroque, and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón were known rivals and apparently it was not the first time Alarcón 's work got attributed to someone else. Eventually, *La verdad sospechosa* was accepted as his. Corneille also indicates in his presentation is that the Spanish author (also a law graduate) stressed the moral lesson of the play, so that in the end the liar is punished, forced into a marriage he does not want, while in Corneille's version the ending is an happier one.

Although Corneille uses the quintessentially French alexandrine (12 syllables) – ask French kids about *Le Cid*, Corneille (1637), and they'll reply « *Ô rage ! Ô désespoir ! Ô viellesse ennemie ! N'ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie ?* » — Ives's characters "*speak pentameter*," that is the iambic pentameter, most commonly used in English poetry. But this is getting technical. Nevertheless, because we are dealing with rhymes, translation should be less about word transposition than in taking a distance from the original rhymes and create new ones in the target language. Interestingly, from a theatric perspective, Ives also creates a distanciation with

The Liar at Antaeus Theater | Bonjour LA! Los Angeles with a French touch  
the character of Cliton, who alternates between inside and outside the scene, often addressing the audience directly. This technique, because of the tension it creates between fiction and reality, seems particularly à propos for a play titled *The Liar*. The delivery of these *apartés*, or side notes, therefore appropriately rests on Cliton, the one who cannot tell a lie.



- Rob Nagle as Cliton, the one who cannot tell a lie, and Graham Hamilton as Dorante, the liar.

Photo by Geoffrey Wade

The original plot remains: in today's words we would say that Dorante is a pathological liar. Aware of his character flaw, one may not find his demeanor appealing either: his freshly earned law degree boosts his high self assurance, and one may find him overly confident, egotistical, and somewhat arrogant with his fashionable wardrobe, his good looks, good fortune, and family pedigree. How could he appeal to us? Yet, that's precisely what Graham Hamilton manages to do. About a third of the way in the play, Hamilton's performance shifts our perspective, and one is faced with this truth: lying is hard work. As Corneille said, "A good memory is needed after one has lied," and Dorante's mental agility allows him to juggle the multiple layers of reality that he has created. Hamilton submerges his audience in a bottomless reservoir of richly detailed stories. Reality and fiction are particularly entangled in Hamilton's swirling performance of the imaginary duel. He takes us on a tourbillon, spinning, dizzying, because Hamilton not only does not stop talking, creating, in the process he does not stop moving, and leaves us drained, ready to capitulate.



— The Liar, Antaeus Theater, Robert Pine as Geronte, Rob Nagle as Cliton.  
Photo Geoffrey Wade

For a moment, it seems that Dorante becomes a victim of his inflated self-confidence, catching up with him since he never bothered to question his assumption over Lucrece's identity, in spite of Cliton's and others' suggestions. But that would be misunderstanding him: his mistake now staring at him, Dorante, incapable of contemplating defeat, his mind unencumbered by the thought of failure, in a split second shifts in fourth gear, to swiftly transition to this new situation, already seizing its possible positive outcome. Are serial liars inveterate optimists? Are they simply unwilling to ever consider setbacks, always able to perceive the positive in the direst situations? In the script he wrote of his own life, Dorante comes out winning. Dorante's father, Géronte, played by **Robert Pine**, wears red tinted spectacles but his progeny goes through life in rose colored glasses.

—*Amélia M. for BonjourLA*

The Liar, [Anteus Theatre](#), in North Hollywood, playing until December 1st, 2013