

We just launched a new Q&A feature on Patch! [Check it out or learn more!](#)

ARTS, OPINION

Theater Review: 'The Autumn Garden'

Multidimensional performances by the Antaeus Company's ensemble cast bring Lillian Hellman's Southern drama vividly to life at Deaf West Theatre.

By **Tiffany Kelly** November 23, 2010

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

What implications arise when you marry the wrong person? That is the question hanging in the air in Lillian Hellman's *The Autumn Garden* (<http://northhollywood.patch.com/articles/the-autumn-garden-premieres-thursday>), a nuanced 1951 drama revitalized by the Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theatre.

The play follows middle-aged Southerners over the course of a weekend at a summer house near New Orleans. A refreshingly unsentimental, wry commentary on the disillusionments and restrictions of marriage, Hellman's play is as relevant today as it was when she wrote it.

The Antaeus Company always works with two casts for its productions, which alternate performances. On the night *Patch* was present, the ensemble wove a multidimensional portrait of couples at various stages of happiness and heartbreak.

Autumn opens with Rose Griggs (played that night by Rhonda Aldrich) begging for attention from her uninterested, sarcastic husband General Benjamin Griggs ([Kurkwood Smith](http://northhollywood.patch.com/articles/70s-show-dad-calls-me-a-dumbass) (<http://northhollywood.patch.com/articles/70s-show-dad-calls-me-a-dumbass>)). Meanwhile, fellow house guests Mrs. Mary Ellis (Anne Gee Byrd) and her daughter Carrie Ellis (Eve Gordon) chastise Carrie's young son, Frederick Ellis (Josh Zuckerman), for his companion choices. The tone is light and playful, helped by a commanding performance from Smith, who gained experience playing a cranky husband on the hit TV comedy *That '70s Show*.

The men sip brandy outdoors while the elegantly dressed women talk about parties and fashion. It's 1951, but the gender roles and attitudes don't feel that different from today's: Women can't figure out the opposite sex, and they still wonder whether a marriage will stand the test of time.

Constance Tuckerman (Shannon Holt), the owner of the summer house, waits for a reunion with former flame Nick Denery (Jeffrey Nordling), a flirtatious playboy who settled down with snarky intellectual Nina (Kitty Swink). Constance has kept her companion Edward (Josh Clark) close by and dangling, without moving toward marriage.

Sophie, Constance's young French cousin and Frederick's fiancé, serves as the voice of reason in a sea of uncertainty. Played with a convincing accent and subtle naiveté by Jeanne Syquia, Sophie bluntly recognizes the other couples' obvious communication problems. A quiet presence in the first act, she steals the show by the end of the play.

Sophie's character is a reminder of reality in a majestic set designed by Tom Buderwitz with an eye for fine detail. From a lamp adorned with tiny birds to a vintage fainting chaise, every piece glows with the grandeur of a sophisticated time. Perhaps we need a beautiful aesthetic to digest the vague resolutions carefully constructed by Hellman. There is never a definite answer to the intricacies of the heart.

"*The Autumn Garden*" ends Dec. 19. Contact: 818-506-1983 or www.Antaeus.org (<http://www.Antaeus.org/>) for tickets. Running time: 3 hours.



PHOTOS (2)



SEE NEXT IN ARTS

Is Studio City Farmers Market Taking Toluca Lake Market's Business?