

## Antaeus Company's 'You Can't Take It With You' Makes Theatrical Magic



Photo Source: Karianne Flaathen

There aren't many actor-proof plays, but "You Can't Take It With You" is at the top of the list. Whether performed as a staple of high school and community theater or offered in a professional arena, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's 1936 Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy is the Energizer Bunny of American classics.

Serendipitously, the prolific and dedicated Antaeus Company proves the perfect partner to present this goofy tale about the world's most endearingly unconventional family as it hosts a dinner party for a daughter's straight-laced future in-laws.

All Antaeus productions are double cast, a practice initiated with the inception of the company in 1991. Originally put in place because most members are familiar faces with careers to consider, it has

become a way to keep the actors sharp and the performances evolving. Whether attending a performance by the "Sycamore" or the "Kirby" cast (the schedule for each is posted on the company website), it would be hard to imagine one ensemble better than the other, especially with director Gigi Bermingham around to keep them on their toes.

Joseph Ruskin leads the "Kirby" cast as family patriarch Martin Vanderhof. Never pandering to duplicate the gruff but lovable "Grandpa" made famous by Lionel Barrymore in the film version, the octogenarian Ruskin easily commands the stage. Despite a few forgivable blank spots and line fumbles, he possesses a well-honed comic timing that should be studied by fledgling acting students everywhere. Julia Fletcher holds it all together as Grandpa's ditsy daughter Penny, who began writing plays eight years ago, when a typewriter was delivered by mistake. Linda Park and Michael Hyland are hilarious as Essie and Ed Carmichael, her ballet moves to his xylophone accompaniment a testament to every dubiously talented wannabe who ever dreamed of success.

Bermingham's subtle wink-wink-nudge-nudge directorial embellishments are everywhere, especially in the delightfully over-the-top performances of Tony Abatemarco, as a sexually ambiguous Mr. De Pinna, and Shannon Holt, who as Mrs. Kirby could resurrect the put-upon deadpan diva in any Marx Brothers movie. When she re-enters as the wonderfully boisterous Grand Duchess Olga Katrina, come to dinner on her break waiting tables at Schraft's Time Square, Holt brings down the house.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about this production is how Bermingham has physically manipulated 17 game actors to dance, feed snakes, and pose in togas while explosions emanate from the basement and G-Men swoop in to arrest the lot. Creating this energetic theatrical magic on the deep, narrow stage of this

converted storefront is an accomplishment in itself. Set wizard Tom Buderwitz and prop designer Heather Ho have created a detailed home-sweet-home right out of an Andy Hardy movie that's crammed with more eclectic knickknacks than a neighborhood thrift store. It's amazing to watch the actors negotiate their playing space without bumping into one another. But if they did, of course, such relentlessly talented folks could quickly make any gaffe work to their advantage.

*Presented by and at the Antaeus Company, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. Oct. 18–Dec. 9.  
(818) 506-1983 or [www.antaeus.org](http://www.antaeus.org).*