

BWW Reviews: **THE CRUCIBLE** Examines What Can Happen When Fear Clouds Fact and Reason is Replaced by Blame

by [Shari Barrett](#)

The Antaeus Company, L.A.'s multiple award-winning classical theater company, is presenting an untraditional staging of Arthur Miller's **THE CRUCIBLE** with Armin Shimerman and Geoffrey Wade co-directing the fully partner-cast production May 16 through July 7. The crisp direction keeps the story moving and the words rang truer than in any other production of the show I have ever seen. It also got me thinking about my own life more than any show I have seen in years.

The Antaeus production highlights the play's universal and timeless themes by staging the play as presentation theater with the actors speaking directly to the audience, rarely to the person onstage to whom they are speaking. It is performed in conservative modern dress on a minimalistic set composed of tables, chairs, and stools moved about to suggest rooms during the show, with lights often casting a large cross on the center of the stage. And we know there is still great debate going on today about the separation of church and state in many places in the world.

Set in 1692 and written in reaction to the McCarthyism that gripped America in the 1950s, **THE CRUCIBLE** is a parable of mass hysteria, offering a frightening depiction of what can happen when fear clouds fact and reason is replaced by blame. The play has been constantly produced since 1953, and Miller's characters are appealing to us because their nuances and quirks make them so human to us. And in our society today with our immediate ability to communicate worldwide, once a rumor takes hold and there appears to be some evidence supporting it, how can you possibly set the record straight? And how do you know who really speaks the truth?

Unique among 99-seat theater companies in L.A., Antaeus is known for "partner casting." In all Antaeus productions, two equally talented actors collaborate on every role, working together throughout the rehearsal process and enriching the creative experience. The performance I attended featured The Proctors ensemble featuring Christopher Guilmet as John Proctor; Devon Sorvari as Elizabeth Proctor; John Prosky as Reverend Hale; Joe Delafield as Reverend Parris; Eva Beebe as Betty Parris; Marcia Battise as Tituba and Judge Hathorne; Lily Knight as Ann

Putnam; Stephen Mendel as Thomas Putnam; Fran Bennett as Rebecca Nurse; Joseph Ruskin as Francis Nurse; Philip Proctor as Giles Corey; Reba Waters Thomas as Deputy Governor Danforth; Kate Maher as Abigail Williams; Shannon Lee Clair as Mary Warren; Rachel Berney Needleman as Mercy Lewis; R. Scott Thompson as Ezekiel Cheever; and Aaron Lyons as Marshall Herrick.

Each actor created such intense and thoroughly believable characters that it is difficult for me to not want to write paragraphs about each and every one of them. With the actors speaking directly to the audience, I could not help but be drawn into the lives of people caught up in things beyond their control. I must say that during the courtroom scene, I could feel the entire audience yearning for Goody Proctor to tell the truth and set John free rather than trying to keep his good name in the town by not confirming his already admitted guilt. I felt the same way I always do during the death scene in *Romeo and Juliet* when I keep hoping she will wake up five minutes sooner and spare their lives. Why do good people suffer such unfair treatment? How often do we think that today?

I commend the entire Antaeus Company for their marvelous production. I encourage you to put aside everything you think you know about **THE CRUCIBLE** and see this production. You will enjoy the story... and I hope you remember the warnings.