

KING LEAR

[Review by Madeline Shaner – Park La Brea News/Beverly Press \(opens in pdf\)](#)

Shakespeare's "King Lear" is one of the plays everyone thinks they know, many say they have read or seen, but far more, in greater numbers, have made a greater effort to avoid at all costs. Making the effort to sit down and read the play is not something one would attempt to do on a sunny day at the beach, but a sunny Sunday afternoon spent at Antaeus' Theatre, or a rip-roaring Saturday night at Deaf West Theatre in North Hollywood, is more than time well spent – it's an adventure in excitement, a mystery tour of a place or time in a musty historical past that comes as alive, if not as amusing as "Daddy's Dyin'...Who's Got the Will?" And once more, just as our expeditions into the past and into older cultures proves that 'le plus ça change, le plus c'est la même chose', or translated, 'the more things change, the more things remain the same', down through the centuries, people have made the wrong choices, parents and children make the same mistakes, wars are fought for all the wrong reasons, and people have lived and died in the wrong wars. Death isn't fair in its choices – neither is life. King Lear, aging, unwell and less wisely than prudently, has granted his daughters an inheritance that will accord to the degree to which they express their love for him. Regan (Francia DeMase) goes overboard in declaration of her love for her father and accordingly will inherit one third of Lear's vast kingdom which, united with her husbands' belongings, will give her the power she desires, as does Goneril (Kirsten Potter), Regan's also married sister. Cordelia, the youngest daughter, refuses to set a price on her love, vowing that it is already all her father's, since she has no husband, nor does she want one to share it with. Thus, almost immediately is set up a rivalry that promises trouble in Britain. The Antaeus company, long one of L.A.'s greatest treasures, is presenting two completely separate casts of the play on alternate days, headed by the inimitable Dakin Matthews who is cast as Lear, with Kirsten Potter

as Goneril, John DeMita as the Duke of Albany, Francia DiMase as Reagan, and Rebecca Mozo as Cordelia. Morlan Higgins is the Earl of Kent, Norman Snow is the Earl of Gloucester, Stephen Caffrey is Fool, Seamus Dever is Edmund and Ramon de Ocampo is Edgar. Both casts are directed by Bart DeLorenzo, with simple, but ample set design by Tom Buderwitz, costumes by A. Jeffrey Schoenberg, lighting by Lap Chi Chu, magnificent sound design by John Zalewski, and produced by YoungJi. I have, so far, seen only the one production, but will, nay must endeavor to see the other, with Harry Groener as Lear, Gregory Itzin, JD Cullum, Tessa Thompson, Daniel Bess and Robert Pine. Dakin Matthews is a force of nature in a play that is itself a force of nature. One loves and fears the great king's strength, as powerful as his anger and the depth of his despair when he weeps for the loss of his daughter whose broken body he must carry to its grave. There's not a moment in the production when the audience is not involved as a participant rather than as an onlooker. Bart DeLorenzo's art, combined with actors of this caliber – we can't mention them all – stirs the soul, breaks the hearts, leaves the audience shattered and deeply bereaved. Forget the history, true or imaginary; let go good reason and dramatic through-lines; set aside pre-conceived notions of what a play should be, what it should do...and give full reign to emotions you may never have known you had.