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Photo by Daniel G. Lam



### ***Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black And White***

**Reviewed by Terry Morgan**  
***Antaeus Company***  
**Through Dec. 7**

The Antaeus Company is well known for its facility with classical plays, such as *King Lear* and *The Crucible*. What may not be so well known is that the group often tries to spotlight excellent plays that are a bit less famous, such as *Mrs. Warren's Profession* or *The Liar*. Following that tradition, Antaeus' new presentation is Alice Childress's play, *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black And White*. The production is accomplished and enjoyable, with terrific performances, but a couple of under-motivated turns in the plot kept me from completely believing in the play.

In 1918 South Carolina, Julia (Karole Foreman) has rented a room from Fanny (Karen Bankhead), and the locals are curious about what a single woman is doing there. Nosy Fanny tries to find out to no avail: Of those who might assist her, Mattie (Cheryl Francis Harrington) is too busy trying to make ends meet while her husband is off fighting in the war. However, Lula (Saundra McClain), concerned about her own son Nelson (Jason Turner) going back into the military, discovers that Julia is waiting for her lover, Herman (Leo Marks). They haven't married because she is black and Herman is white,

and not only is such a union illegal at that time, but both the black and white communities are generally opposed to the couple being a couple at all.

Antaeus "partner casts" its shows; this is a review of the "Sweet Potatoes" cast. Foreman delivers a strong lead performance as Julia, making her need to connect with people and her anger at her situation fully credible. Marks is charming as Herman in the first act, but his acting in the concluding half seemed a bit mannered. Bankhead is acidly amusing as the self-centered Fanny, using a church service to praise herself, and Harrington is superb as Mattie, terrified of going broke but sweetly in love with her absent spouse. McClain is a standout as the sympathetic but no-nonsense Lula, and Turner smolders nicely as the frustrated Nelson. Karianne Flaathen quickly etches an icy reserve melting into genuine concern as Herman's sister Annabelle, and Anne Gee Byrd brings fire to his racist mother, who'd rather he die than shame the family.

Gregg T. Daniel's direction gets nuanced work from his ensemble, and he's helped enormously by François-Pierre Couture's skeletal shack set, which creates a palpable rusticity. Childress's play is very good in setting up the small African-American community with compelling characters, and the story is a relatively rare one with a worthy subject. My two problems with the play are in the writing, however. A late conflict in the play, where a character says unforgivable things, I found unconvincingly motivated, and unfortunately that's the pivot for everything else that happens. Secondly, the addition of one character getting sick with Spanish influenza seems like an unnecessary distraction that blurs the focus of the play.

This an enjoyable show with much to appreciate, but the play is a slightly dented vehicle.

***Antaeus Theater, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. Thur.-Sat. 8 p.m, Sat.-Sun. 2 p.m. through December 7. <http://www.Antaeus.org>***



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