Creditors
The Odyssey Theatre & The New American Theatre at Odyssey Theatre

Reviewed by Julio Martinez

Gustav (Jack Stehlin) had his happy life ripped from him, years earlier, when his youthful wife Tekla (Heather Anne Prete) cast him off for successful young artist Adolph (Burt Grinstead). Now, Gustav has invaded the Swedish seaside hotel where he and Tekla once honeymooned and where his former wife and her current husband are now vacationing. Gustav methodically sets

The Liar
Antaeus Theatre

Reviewed by Bob Verini

This production is a buoyant treat from first to last. Full disclosure, this is coming from someone with a lifelong antipathy to mistaken-identity plots—you know, the ones in which one opportune word from a character would set everything right immediately, but that word is arbitrarily withheld until the 11th hour. That's
out to extract payback for what was taken from him and he is demanding interest: the destruction of two lives for his one. A co-production of Odyssey Theatre and New American Theatre, the LA premiere of David Greig’s new translation of August Strindberg’s 1888 psycho-drama Creditors, helmed by David Trainer, offers a surgically precise yet emotion-rending study in psychological assassination with a touch of dark humor thrown in. On the minus side, this is not a fair fight. Then again, Strindberg did not instill enough humanity in these people to care who wins or loses. It’s the action that counts.

Set in 1888, the opening scene finds Adolph quite ill, confiding in Gustav in the lounge of the hotel, unaware that he is speaking to his wife’s former husband. He only knows he has found a willing, sympathetic ear on which to unload his marital concerns and doubts about Tekla’s dominating nature with him and her openly flirtatious manner with other men, especially younger men. Grinstead’s Gustav believably gushes at what he believes to be sage advice from this worldly gentleman who has been kind enough to give of his time and attention.

Unfortunately, Strindberg provides Gustav—portrayed with cold-blooded, cobra-like precision by Stehlin—with an overabundance of weapons to inflict on woefully susceptible Adolph. While sympathetically musing, “Life offers a thousand means by which we can hurt each other,” Gustav is declaring what his intentions are toward Adolph and Tekla. By the scene’s end, Gustav has reduced the younger man to a state of palsied hysteria, inhaling Gustav’s every malevolent thought and suggestion, even promising to give up sexual relations with his own wife.

What Gustav does not predict is Tekla’s commanding hold on Gustav. Sweeping into the lounge with beaming exactly how David Ives’s rhymed couplet version of a 1644 Corneille play operates, and yet such is the magic of this production that it never feels labored.

Our dashing hero Dorante (Graham Hamilton in the “Cherries” cast in this double-cast production) has not one but two Achilles heels in his quest to hit upon fortune and romance in beau monde Paris: reckless impulsiveness, and a congenital disinclination to truth-telling. The former has him assume that given two first names, the woman of his dreams must be called Lucrece rather than Clarice—cf. tedious identity confusions, above—while the latter trait causes him to muck everything else up despite the best endeavors of cynical servant Cliton (Brian Staten).

Clearly this is commedia dell’arte stuff, a fact that Ives emphasizes through self-conscious asides on “this is only a play,” and that director Casey Stangl exploits with controlled tomfoolery and audience participation. Tech elements are solidly professional and eye-pleasing, creating a blithe air wholly appropriate to the textual goings-on.

On press night, some of the “Cherries” comedy suffered from muddy execution—that will surely work itself out in time, irrespective of what goes on with the “Tangerines” cast on alternate nights—but happily, three key performances avoided a bunch of deadly traps. The play requires a Dorante totally committed to mendacity yet capable of an act of sincere 11th hour repentance, as inspired by father Geronte, who could be easily tossed away as a bumbling Pantalone. Hamilton’s classical training and apparently innate sense of whimsy put both halves of our hero in splendid hands, while Robert Pine earns Geronte’s laughs yet maintains the moral authority to bring the audience to a hush when he gives his son his deserved late-inning what-for.

Moreover, a show like The Liar needs at least one reliable, dazzling farceur or farceuse on the premises, and the “Cherries”’ cherry atop the sundae is Karen Malina White as our heroines’ twin maids. The lady careens between impish Isabelle and severe Sabine with total concentration, nary an eyebrow raised, and she kills every time in two of the funniest
certainty, Prete’s Tekla imperiously projects the quickly shifting agendas and priorities of a socially liberated woman who innately knows she is emotionally superior to the men who believe they can control her destiny. Her only weakness is her deep-rooted sense of guilt at having abandoned Gustav, which allows her former husband to wedge himself back into her affections and possibly her bed.

Trainer underscores the authenticity of this godless ménage à trois, bereft of free will and any true feelings for their fellow human inhabitants on earth. As Gustav points out, real feelings evolve into emotional indebtedness, and indebtedness breeds creditors. While Gustav is in mid seduction, Tekla cries out, “I feel you’re trying to steal my soul.” Gustav coldly replies, “There is no soul.” Tekla answers, “I know, I know, I know.” Indeed!

October 15, 2013

Oct. 11–Dec. 15. 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd. Parking $3 or on neighboring streets. There is wheelchair access. See theater website for schedule (but, in general, selected Wed-Thu, plus Fri-Sat 8pm, Sun 2pm). Running time 95 minutes. $15-30. Pay what you can, minimum $10, Oct. 18, Oct. 30, Nov. 15. (310) 477-2055.

www.odysseytheatre.com

g.co/maps/b9j59

Lake Anne
The Road on Magnolia

Reviewed by Julio Martinez

Oct. 16, 2013

Oct. 10-Dec. 1. 5112 Lankershim Blvd. Parking available for $7 in the lot at 5125 Lankershim Blvd. (west side of the street), just south of Magnolia. Thu-Fri 8pm, Sat 2pm & 8pm, Sun 2pm. $30-34. (818) 506-1983.

www.Antaeus.org
goo.gl/maps/B6Gn

War Horse

An unrelenting aura of sadness permeates playwright Marthe Rachel Gold’s sojourn within the challenged life of Anne (Laurie O’Brien), a widowed former prima ballerina dealing with the often chaotic behavior of her handicapped adult son Will (Alex Smith) and the potential loss of her beloved lakeside home in upstate New York. Even the positive machinations—a