Not-Ready-for-Prime-Time Chekhov

By Paul Birchall

"It turns out to be boring, and there's nothing more boring than a boring play," lamented Anton Chekhov after the first production of his four-act 1889 "romantic comedy," The Wood Demon. Allowing the play to be staged only once during his lifetime, Chekhov clearly detested it, although he subsequently pillaged the piece for other purposes. Many of The Wood Demon's best elements subsequently appeared, in a far subtler and more mature form, in his Uncle Vanya.

The Antaeus Theater Company has resurrected the drama (presumably causing Chekhov to whirl in his grave like the

Latest Reviews

Canned Goods

While the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department makes an earnest effort to depict Korean-African-American relations, Canned Goods offers no new insight. Nevertheless, the performances are powerful enough to compensate for this and other flaws.

The story focuses on Angel King (Soon-Teck Oh), a blues-loving, soul-food-eating Korean-American grocer who plans to retire and turn the store over to his racist son, Frank (Philip Moon). Tension between the two escalates, as they argue about how best to deal with the myriad drunk, penniless, and disorderly customers who stream in.

The production would have benefited from fewer characters and tighter direction. Too much of the play is merely a series of aimless encounters between the Kings and their customers. Fortunately, things take a gripping turn for the better with the appearance of two hoodlum teenagers (chilling portrayals by Denise and Sedric Hirns). After a particularly brutal scene in which the boy is left writhing on the floor with two broken arms, the tone becomes one of perverse comic relief as two "spiritual hitmen" enter. Troy Anthony Cephas gives the standout performance as a boot-scootin', gun-totin' phantom bounty hunter, who entertains with song and dance before pulling the trigger. You may be left wondering what it all meant, but entertained just the same. (Shawna Saperstein)


The End of the Day

Jon Robin Baitz, whose The Substance