



Culture Monster

All the Arts, All the Time

Theater review: 'The Autumn Garden' at Deaf West Theatre

November 3, 2010

You don't have to chop down a cherry orchard to feel the sting of lost time. Just sit and share a brandy with the people of "The Autumn Garden," Lillian Hellman's 1951 ensemble drama now receiving an elegant staging by the Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theatre.



Considerably more lyrical in tone than Hellman's "The Little Foxes," "Autumn" takes an elegiac look at

fortysomething Southerners sharing a summer house on the Gulf Coast in 1949. In the course of a few days, hearts are broken, marriages lost and found, and fates intertwined.

Like all Antaeus productions, this show is double cast; I saw "the Idealists" in action: Landlady Constance (Lily Knight) anxiously awaits the arrival of old flame Nick (Stephen Caffrey), a dilettante painter now married to a prickly New Yorker (Jane Kaczmarek). General Griggs (James Sutorius) is entirely through with love, exhausted by his needy wife (Faye Grant), still trying to skate by on her looks. Tart matriarch Mary Ellis (Anne Gee Byrd) watches her daughter (Jeanie Hackett) misunderstand her wide-eyed son, Frederick (Joe Delafield), engaged to Constance's French cousin, Sophie (Zoe Perry).

Hellman's tapestry of yearning and regret finds a splendid home in Tom Buderwitz's breathtaking set, a genteel living room and trellised porch sheltered by arching white beams. The layers of space allow director Larry Biederman to create depth of field — visual and emotional — in keeping with the play's sharp edges and shadows. Tina Haatainen-Jones' costumes and John Zalewski's percussive music add to the casting of this Chekhovian spell, though the ever-watchful Hellman never lets her privileged white folk get away with too much self-deception.

It's a treat to see so many accomplished Los Angeles actors in this intimate setting, and the production marks the close of an ambitious first year for this classical theater company. I found myself curious to see the other cast, whose members include Kurtwood Smith and Shannon Holt. "Autumn" may not be revolutionary, but it is finely wrought.

--Charlotte Stoudt

"The Autumn Garden" Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Boulevard, North Hollywood. 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 2:30 and 7:30 Sundays. No performance on Thanksgiving. Ends Dec. 19. \$30-\$34. Contact: 818-506-1983 or www.Antaeus.org

Running time: 3 hours.

Photo: Jane Kaczmarek and Stephen Caffrey in "The Autumn Garden." Credit: Ed Krieger.