

## THE AUTUMN GARDEN

DEAF WEST THEATRE | 5112 Lankershim Blvd.  
NoHo | Through Dec. 19 | Tickets \$30-34 | [antaeus.org](http://antaeus.org)

The Antaeus Company continues its longtime tradition of double-casting its shows from its stellar stable of veteran theater actors with this finely rendered revival of Lillian Hellman's uncharacteristically gentle 1951 drama of middle-aged regret, directed with grace and nuance by Larry Biederman.

Hellman put aside the sharp pen that gave us such caustic dramas as *The Little Foxes* and *The Children's Hour* when she crafted this languid look at a collection of mostly 40-something characters converging on a Gulf Coast guest house for a fateful weekend in late summer 1949.

The unmarried Constance Tuckerman opens her family home to summer guests to make ends meet. She is particularly excited by the imminent return of artist Nick Denery, her long-ago love, and his fancy-pants New York wife, Nina, who have lived an exotic life in Europe. Constance's contemporary, Rose Griggs, is a giggly gal who refuses to believe that she isn't 25

anymore or that her military-man husband is determined to leave her. Also on hand is matriarch Mary Ellis, who recognizes the conflicted sexuality in her grandson Frederick that the boy's mother, Carrie, is blind to.

Antaeus' two casts—labeled "Dreamers" and "Idealists"—each wring subtly different qualities from the play. Except for Shannon Holt's wonderful, coltish Constance, the Dreamers have a greater air of resignation from the start; we know these people aren't going to rebound. The Idealists, on the other hand—with Faye Grant's spunky Rose and Stephen Caffrey's gasbag Nick—seem to be fighting harder to find the joy in their fading lives.

Hellman's Chekhovian structure allows the well-stocked Antaeus bench to sink their teeth into a dozen delicious characters. Aside from those already mentioned, some of the standouts include Kurtwood Smith in an artfully underplayed turn as Gen. Griggs, Jeffrey Nordling as a restless and still debonair Nick, and Jane Kaczmarek, whose Nina



PHOTO: ED KRIEGER

moves us when she attacks Nick as a "gifted amateur." Anne Gee Byrd is beautifully brittle as Mary, while Dawn Didawick brings more matronly wisdom to the part.

Enough cannot be said about Tom Buderwitz's gorgeous set, which establishes the necessary playing spaces with depth and levels, defying the re-

strictions of the intimate Deaf West space. All of the production elements are top-notch, in fact, with the exception of the jarring music in between scenes, which seems disconnected from the wistful goings-on that are so sensitively brought to life by Biederman and his capable casts.

—Christopher Cappiello

## PETER PAN

ORANGE COUNTRY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER | 600 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa | Through Jan. 2 | Tickets \$30-12 | [ocpac.org](http://ocpac.org)

The magic of JM Barrie's *Peter Pan* is brought to vivid life in Threesixty Theatre's travelling production of the classic fairy tale. With a cast and crew of a hundred and a 360-degree movie screen the size of three IMAX screens, *Peter Pan* is a visual treat made all the more enchanting by a perfect cast and ingenious sets and costumes.

The tale hasn't changed: A boy who won't grow up climbs through the bedroom window of three English children, and before long they have all taken flight to the island of Neverland. There they meet Peter's crew of orphans called the Lost Boys, a tribe of Indians, peculiar mermaids and a band of pirates led by the amusingly brash Captain Hook.

Adapted by Tanya Ronder from JM Barrie's original play, *Peter Pan* is a theatrical experience from start to finish. Performed in a tent constructed specifically for the show, the "theater" holds 1,500 audience members who circle almost the entire stage. The characters leave and enter the scene in ingenious ways and a massive movie screen encircles the tent serving as the ever-changing backdrop to the show. Whether we are standing on the deck of a pirate ship, or deep under the surface of Neverland's

waters, the images effectively plop us right down in the middle of the action. Adding to these visuals is Benjamin Wallfisch's beautiful score, which punctuates the wonder of it all with dazzling clarity.

Veteran stage and film actor, Jonathan Hyde (*Titanic*, *Jumanji*) plays the dual role of Mr. Darling and Captain Hook. As Mr. Darling he is a puffed-up stick-in-the-mud whose only care is of work and how best to organize his and the children's lives. As Captain Hook, he is a maniacal buffoon who wants to destroy not just the Lost Boys, but Peter Pan himself. Long standing as the best analogy of a man who has forgotten how to be a child, the part is a tour de force of acting and Hyde doesn't disappoint.

As Peter, newcomer Nate Follows brings an impish liveliness to the title character and Abby Ford is cutely defiant as the self-assured Wendy. Itxaso Moreno as the irritated fairy Tinkerbell is hilariously weird, emitting raspy grunts and growls at anyone who gets in the way of her friendship with Peter. Puppeteer Christopher Keller skillfully plays the animal characters (sheepdog Nana and the cleverly constructed crocodile



among them), seamlessly adding them to the action of the show.

But it is the flying that will have audiences oohing and ahing. When the Darling children join Peter Pan on their first flight, the four zoom over Lon-

don, skimming rooftops and zipping through the arches of the city. It's a delicious bit of staging that truly makes us believe in the magic of fairy tales—and theater.

—Kevin P. Taft