Theater Review: Antaeus Theater’s Hedda Gabler

Directed here by Steven Robman, Hedda Gabler tells the story of the titular newlywed housewife who marries a reliable yet unremarkable man, moves into her dream house, and realizes everything she thought she wanted has made her utterly miserable. Armed with newfound boredom and a frightening mean streak, Hedda begins to pass the time by concocting manipulative plots designed to ruin the lives of those around her and help her regain control of her boring existence. The original was written in 1891, but this iteration takes place in the 1920s. Hedda is widely considered one of the great female antithropes of drama, and the play’s shocking ending is just as effective today as it presumably was in the Victorian era.

One could probably spend weeks attempting to psychoanalyze Hedda, but in the end, her actions are completely unjustifiable to anyone not privy to the inner workings of her brain. This is not a character most will sympathize with, although her general situation is familiar. She quickly gets in over her head chasing her version of happily ever after, only to learn that life as a housewife and, possibly one day very soon, a mother is completely unstimulating, unfulfilling, and uninteresting to her. She could not be less suited to the life she has carefully constructed, and her first instinct is to turn to cruelty. Thea, who has known Hedda since their school days, drops in anecdotes from the past that hint Hedda has always been, frankly, a bit of a sociopath. While the story may on the surface tell of the dangers involved with oppressing women and restricting them to certain roles, Hedda is not your average woman. Much is made of her intelligence, her wit, and her cunning nature—the implication is that while her life may be plenty for some women, even someone like Thea, Hedda is simply too brilliant, too special, and too beautiful to be satisfied by such a mundane existence.

Hedda Gabler runs at Antaeus through July 17 with performances Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, as well as Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Tickets range from $30-34. For information on both casts and to purchase tickets, please visit www.Antaeus.org.