



Antaeus Company's 'The Crucible' Is a Blast of Theatre Glory



John Allee, Ranya Jaber, Ann Noble and Nicole Erb in The Antaeus Company's production of "The Crucible." Photo - FacetPhotography.com

Much has been made over the years about how Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* was paralleling the Salem witch trials to the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s, and while that is certainly true, it does the play a disservice to think that's all it is. It's also a clear example of how individuals will capitalize on public hysteria over an issue to settle grudges or gain power, a theme that unfortunately is always relevant. The new production by the Antaeus Company galvanizes the play with ferocious energy and a wealth of acting talent that instantly makes it one of the best shows of the year.

In 1692 Salem, Massachusetts, a group of girls is discovered dancing naked by moonlight by the local reverend, Parris (John Allee). Worried by how this will be perceived by the community, under the sway of the group's leader, Abigail (Nicole Erb), the girls pretend hidden witches within the town are to blame. A more experienced reverend, Hale (Ann Noble), questions the girls, and she's concerned enough that Deputy Governor Danforth (James Sutorius) comes to town to begin trials. Stuck in the middle of this mess is John Proctor (Bo Foxworth), whose wife Elizabeth (Kimiko Gelman) has been accused of being a witch. He'd had a moment of infidelity with Abigail in the past, and he knows the girl wants his wife dead. He has to confess his sin to the community, or he knows his wife will hang.

As usual, Antaeus double-casts its shows; this is only a review of "The Putnams" cast. Foxworth, in the best performance I've seen him deliver, does a marvelous slow-burn as Proctor, an inner conflict of self-doubt and simmering anger which reaches an anguished and stunning crescendo. Noble, essaying a role usually played by a man, excels as Hale, a decent person who slowly realizes she's been party to madness. Noble is superb throughout, but the scene in which she portrays Hale's fervor to get the truth from servant Tituba is an intense highlight.

Sutorius is terrific and slyly amusing as Danforth, a brilliant man who is nonetheless completely wrong, an object lesson in the misuse of authority. Erb does good work as the sociopathic Abigail, as does Alexandra Goodman as the terrified and manipulable Mary. Gelman seems a bit too low-key as Elizabeth, but Allee is properly discomfiting as the self-interested Parris. Steve Hofvendahl is bluntly humorous as the litigious Giles, and Rhonda Aldrich stands out as bereaved mother Ann Putnam, who vengefully seeks someone to blame for the deaths of her seven infants.

Directors Armin Shimerman and Geoffrey Wade have done an excellent job with this show, and perhaps their smartest decision was the style of staging. In the beginning of the play, the fact that the actors constantly face and speak to the audience instead of to each other seems distracting. As the story proceeds, however, the audience realizes it's a de facto jury and the staging choice works. The characters plead their cases with growing passion until, in one amazing scene where the girls on trial begin to scream that they're being attacked by witchcraft and the courtroom erupts into complete pandemonium, the whole stage is aflame with the holy fury of theatre firing on all cylinders. This production is a righteous blast, my friends. Don't miss it.

"The Crucible" plays at The Antaeus Company through July 7. Tickets are available [online](#).

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