

## ‘Everybody’ comes alive as Everybody approaches death

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, in his [“Everybody” at Antaeus](#), didn’t have to worry about how to reveal plot twists. His original source material is based on the medieval morality play “Everyman.” And, as in the original, its central point is something that everybody already knows, even if we try to avoid it — that we will eventually die.



Anne Gee Byrd’s Death, center, in “Everybody,” with Gerard Joseph, Nicole Erb, Lisa S

That might be a tough hurdle for marketing purposes, but those who venture to Antaeus will find that the playwright has centered this fact in a witty, contemporary framework that creates more laughs than chills.

Five actors who play the roles of “Somebodies” are sitting among us as the show opens. On the instructions of God (Cherish Monique Duke), Death (Anne Gee Byrd) summons the Somebodies to join her on stage.

A quick lottery is held at each performance to determine which of the five will become Everybody, who will now face the journey toward death. Antaeus swears that this is a real lottery, reflecting the randomness with which death can occur. Indeed, it's an extreme example of the Antaeus tradition of casting important roles with more than one actor.

At each performance, the lottery's winner/loser assumes the role of Everybody, whose primary task now is to convince the other Somebodies to accompany him or her toward the final destination. We're told that all five of the "Somebody" actors know all of Everybody's lines as well as all of the Somebodies' lines. So any of them can play Everybody, or any of them can fill in for the other Somebody who has been selected as Everybody.

Got that? Well, at the performance I saw, the device worked flawlessly, with no one stumbling over lines. But I won't even identify the actor I saw as Everybody, because the chances are high that you'll see someone else in the role. However, here are the names of those playing the Somebodies, in alphabetical order: Lisa Sanaye Dring, Nicole Erb, Harry Groener, Antonio Jaramillo and Gerard Joseph.

Jennifer Chang directed the ensemble and a canny design team, striking exactly the right tonal balance between the evanescent and the everlasting. Preparation for this particular production must have been somewhat jolted by the July 8 death of longtime Antaeus member [Gregory Itzin](#).