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from TRAVIS MICHAEL HOLDER

Love and Information



Photo by Jenny Graham

Antaeus Theatre Company

It's a given that our courageous Antaeus Theatre Company doesn't brake for a challenge, something especially true as they tackle Caryl Churchill's seldom produced 2012 play *Love and Information*, a dense and complex reflection on, among other prevalent Churchillian themes, the fragility of the human memory and how that fallibility has been influenced—and exacerbated—by the advent of the digital age.

Author of such daring and universally acclaimed experimental works as *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine*, both of which not so coincidentally have been previously produced by Antaeus, Churchill is considered one of our time's most important leading-edge playwrights. At age 84, she still brings a sharply tuned poetic spin on contemporary sexual politics and unrelentingly explores the thorny issue of the social forces which, try as we may to avoid such an outcome, cannot help but affect our daily lives.

Consisting of a 90-minute collection of 50-some short basically two-character scenes performed by eight game actors uncannily able to tap into a kind of professional schizophrenia, *Love and Information* is perhaps Churchill's most opaque play, written without stage directions, devoid of any character breakdowns, and not offering any guidance to help decide how it might be staged. This leaves the outcome and even the message of the play totally subjective, dependent on how the director designated to take the lead orchestrates the goings-on.

Antaeus has confidently bestowed that task to Emily Chase, who helms this fascinating take on the play with tremendous success on Frederica Nascimento's austere and nearly nonexistent set, keeping each short scenario constantly fluid and yet simultaneously grounded, something which is without a shadow of a doubt a monumental achievement in itself.

Still, although I understand the desire to make the piece accessible to American audiences, I do think something is lost in translation here performing the piece without its archetypal English accents since Churchill's script is devoid of grammatical contractions and spouts words such as "proper" in a way only the British utilize.

Luckily, Chase has been gifted with a brilliant company of performers who are all seamlessly capable of switching from one of the play's diverse 100-plus characters to the next with lightning speed, leaving us dazzled and even somewhat dizzy in their collective ability to sort out the meaning of Churchill's often fragmented situations and pinpoint the discernible humanity in each that we surely all recognize and experience in our personal lives.

This includes a poignant, thought-provoking, somehow unsettling scene where the ensemble joins together to sit and watch old home movies together, prompting one of the participants to observe that her memory of the events are limited only to the things that happen on the video. It brought to mind how little I remember of the mother I lost when I was only 18 until I dig out the old photo albums that help invaluablely to evoke her image and presence once again.

Two of Antaeus' most impressively prolific artists, Anne Gee Byrd and John Apicella, lead the knockout ensemble on to flesh out the meaning of each vignette, inspiring the other actors to be as brave and fearless as they are in the creation their own individual interpretations. The veteran duo is especially memorable in one scene as a wife deals with a longtime mate no longer able to recognize her, something I'm sure will hit home with many audience members besides yours truly.

It's rather ironic that Churchill wrote *Love and Information* almost a dozen years ago and yet was somehow able to see clearly into the future and understand how technology would further both compliment and complicate our lives, how it would energize our existence and bring us together in our infinite electronic cyberland, and how often it would leave us more lonely and swamped by the scattered complexities of contemporary life than ever.

**THROUGH APR. 3: Antaeus Theatre Company, 110 E. Broadway, Glendale.
818.506.1983 or Antaeus.org**