

A Feast of Sound

Antaeus fills the air with magical music for ‘The Tempest’

By Bridgette M. Redman
Pasadena Weekly Contributing Writer

When scribing what was likely his final solo play, William Shakespeare created an isle “full of noises, sounds and sweet airs.”

As Nike Doukas directs “The Tempest” for Antaeus Theatre Company, she is tapping into the play’s inherent musicality to create what she hopes will, as Shakespeare promised, “give delight, and hurt not.” The show opens at the Glendale Theater on Friday, June 30. It is a production filled with original music, live musicians and live Foley effects onstage.

“The Tempest” is considered Shakespeare’s most mature work, and many think it was his farewell to the theater. In

it, the exiled duke and magician Prospero lives with his daughter and the spirits he commands. When those who wronged him sail close to the island, he conjures up a storm and will either enact revenge or grant forgiveness.

When Antaeus asked Doukas to direct a Shakespeare this season, she said “The Tempest” was the first play she thought of, in part because she felt the themes made it a perfect metaphor for where the world is now.

“It’s very much a play about redemption and forgiveness and about greedy people who just can’t get along,” Doukas said.

Doukas, an MFA graduate from the American Conservatory Theatre and a Shakespeare instructor at the Art of Act-

ing Theatre, brings extensive experience and artistic vision to this production. With a previous directorial stint for the play under her belt, Doukas has further refined her vision, honing in on the abundant musical elements and the island’s auditory landscape. The production centers on her exploration of these aspects, seeking out an immersive experience that captures the essence of the play’s sonic tapestry.

“We’re going to have live Foley onstage that all the actors are participating in,” Doukas said. “It’s really quite beautiful and evocative.”

She connected with John Ballinger, an LA composer, who wrote 10 songs for the production. Actors and musicians perform onstage, including a pianist, guitarist and drummer. She cast singers in all the play’s roles; she also filled the stage with noise-makers, with Jeff Gardner designing sound and Foley effects. Gardner taught actors how to create Foley sounds.

“I imagined what I wanted, and it’s been really collaborative,” Doukas said. “The actors and I and Jeff have constructed a soundscape that the audience is able to watch being created live.”

Doukas described the upcoming production as a beautiful experience in the intimate theater where audiences are up close and personal with the actors seeing them create sounds and a parallel story.

Leading the ensemble as Prospero is Peter Van Norden, with Ana Racić as his daughter, Miranda. Peter Mendoza plays Ferdinand, Elinor Gunn is Ariel, and JD Cullum is Caliban.

“It has been such a heavenly experience,” Doukas said of directing this play. “First of all, I’m a little prejudiced because I’ve been with Antaeus for a long time, but you can’t find better actors anywhere. It’s really world-class actors who know how to handle this language and make you remember and forget at the same time that it’s poetry.”

Her cast, she said, has delved into the relationships between the characters, whether they are the real people or the people and the spirits. While she describes

everyone as phenomenal, she said it has been exciting to watch the interaction between Van Norden and Gunn as Prospero and Ariel, the invisible sprite.

“Elinor and Peter are like a pair of sparring partners,” Doukas said. “Another big question in this play is what is their relationship? What does the spirit really want? I think she wants to be seen by him. Prospero has become consumed by his own ego, and he’s a little bit of a control freak. I think she wants him to see her as a partner instead of as his slave. She’s so feisty and so strong, and I think you sort of see him finally starting to see that she’s separate from him. That she is her own spriteness. There’s a real struggle between them.”

With Ferdinand and Miranda, Doukas said everyone gets to relive what it feels like to fall in love for the first time when it is moving and sweet.

As they’ve neared opening night and they refine the show, Doukas said a very clear story has emerged.

“I hope when people leave they will feel that if they know the Tempest, they understand it even more deeply, and if they don’t know it, they can’t imagine it being told any other way,” Doukas said. “My biggest priority is that people hear and see the play. I’m not trying to retell the story. I’m not trying to correct the story. I’m not trying to redefine the story. I really believe in getting to the essence of it. I think Shakespeare was pretty smart.”

She points out that theater tells stories in different ways than film — it is more theatrical, less literal and responsive to audiences. While taking a nontraditional approach, Doukas said what the play looks like is a secret, something that is part of her desire to surprise audiences with what theater can do.

“Sometimes the visuals overwhelm the story,” Doukas said. “I’ve seen productions where people try so hard to interpret the location that you get distracted by that. I want to make sure it’s a very compelling story about forgiveness and how an old man learns he can forgive really horrible,



Peter Van Norden as Prospero orates his magic in “The Tempest.”

Frank Ishman/Contributor

legitimate wrongs.”

Miranda and Ferdinand provide Prospero with a path to forgiveness, Doukas said. The couple presents the purest, most idealistic people in the play.

“Everybody else is sort of jaded,” Doukas said. “Those two represent hope for the future. They think this is the last play (Shakespeare) wrote on his own. He might have collaborated on a couple of other plays. He could have made it an ‘old people know best and good luck to the future,’ but you get the sense that he has faith in what’s to come and what he doesn’t know yet. I find that very hopeful

and inspiring.”

The Kiki and David Gindler Performing Arts Center in Glendale is what Doukas describes as new and comfortable, a “beautiful gem of a theater.” It’s a rare opportunity, she points out, to see Shakespeare in an intimate setting rather than a more sprawling space.

“You hear the language, and this is a personal play,” Doukas said. “I believe Shakespeare was really writing about his own demise, the end of his career. To be this up close and upfront with the sensitivities of this play is a real gift. That’s what I would say is wonderful.” ■

Glendale Antaeus’ “The Tempest” by William Shakespeare

WHEN: Opening June 30, 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Mondays, 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays

WHERE: Glendale Antaeus Theater, 110 E. Broadway, Glendale

COST: \$40

INFO: antaeus.org