

• ARTS & CULTURE •



Vivienne Sievers records the role of Angelica in "The Changeling."

Playwright converts fantasy thriller to an audio-based format

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One of the joys of being a storyteller is exploring different mediums by which the same story can be told.

Jennifer Rowland, a playwright and member of the Antaeus LAB where writers develop new works, is getting a chance to present her play, "The Lost Child" in a different medium. Originally performed at Skylight Theatre, Rowland always felt the work would be compelling as an audio play. When the pandemic hit and audio plays started to become more popular, she rewrote the play to create "The Changeling."

A follow-up to Antaeus Theatre Company's "The Zip Code Plays: Los Angeles" podcast series, "The Changeling" will be offered to audiences free of charge starting Oct. 12 at antaeus.org.

A fan of Irish folklore and mythology, Rowland set this 65-minute story in an enchanted forest where an estranged couple, Ann and Daniel, are returning to the deserted cabin on the anniversary of their daughter's mysterious disappearance, the event that destroyed their marriage. They've returned to pack it up so they can sell it when a storm moves in, the electricity goes out and a mysterious child appears.

The child looks exactly like Angelica at the age of 11, but their Angelica would now be 18.

"I've always been a fan of audio plays," Rowland said. "Pinter wrote a lot of audio plays. A lot of playwrights have written audio plays and I've listened to a lot."

There were many elements in the play that already worked for the audio medium. Rowland said she didn't so much as change the play as she reconceived it. As a fantasy thriller, it already had a lot of mysterious, supernatural elements that could be presented in a powerful manner by taking away the visual element.

Since the pandemic, she's observed that podcasts and audio storytelling have become more popular and sound designers have discovered new ways to create them. Whereas before people would gather in a studio together, now they rehearsed and recorded over an online platform similar to Zoom.

"Jeff Gardner is an extremely talented sound designer," Rowland said. "He did a fantastic job, and it was really fun to tell the story this way."

He sent each actor a recording kit and everyone was in their own space while performing.

It's a story that Rowland said captivated audiences. People who saw the stage play

said that the story stayed with them for days. One person described being in such deep thought after seeing the play that she left the theater and walked several blocks before remembering that she had gone to see a friend and turned around to meet up with her.

"It seems to be something that grabs people and really, really stays with them," Rowland said.

She followed that by saying the cast for the audio play is wonderful and this time around they were able to hire a young teenager to play the part of Angelica rather than an adult. The cast includes Jocelyn Towne as Ann, Jeffrey Nordling as Daniel and Vivienne Sievers as Angelica. It is directed by Cameron Watson. Gardner is the audio producer, sound designer and Foley artist.

Rowland said she had been hoping for the opportunity to work with Watson and is grateful that the pandemic offered the chance where he wasn't off directing something else.

"Cameron is a dream to work with," Rowland said. "He and I had done another smaller project, very small things, but fun. He really liked this play, and he is so great with actors. They just feel so comfortable with him and so taken care of. He can pinpoint what is important and is able to bring that out in both the material and the actors. It's a real gift beyond just being super talented and a nice person."

"This was really a dream project. Everyone involved was so talented and such a pleasure to work with."

Rowland has now previewed the finished production and hopes that it will be an October treat that reminds people what it was like to gather together and listen to an old radio play.

"If you have an hour and you want to get immersed into another world, you'll enjoy this," Rowland said.

**"The Changeling" by Jennifer Rowland, an audio play with
Antaeus Theatre Company
WHEN: Starting Oct. 12
INFO: antaeus.org**