

## City Has Starring Role in 'Zip Code' Play

By Christian Leonard  
Burbank Leader

The city of Burbank takes center stage in a new fiction podcast episode, written by a resident, set in a small sound studio.

The episode, subtitled "True Sound," is part of Antaeus Theatre Company's third season of its "The Zip Code Plays: Los Angeles" series. Launched during the pandemic, the series invokes the radio plays of the past as well as more modern fiction podcasts. "Zip Code" episodes center around the culture of L.A.-area neighborhoods.

In "True Sound," written by longtime Burbank resident Steve Apostolina, a veteran sound artist working at one of the city's many post-production studios — specifically one in the 91505 ZIP code — teaches a younger apprentice how to create audio for a low-budget slasher film. As the artist explains the principles of audio work, details about his past and his character slowly arise.

Season three of "The Zip

Code Plays" will be available at Antaeus.org and other podcast platforms on Thursday.

Apostolina, an award-winning playwright, actor, director and voice artist, said he has been involved with the Glendale-based Antaeus Theatre Company since joining its writers lab around 2015. And as the coronavirus pandemic forced many venues to shut down live performances, he explained, Antaeus pivoted to offer free audio plays — providing an alternative from the Zoom productions many other theaters offered.

Though he hadn't written a script for radio before, Apostolina welcomed the challenge, deciding to set the story in his own city because of its close connection with production studios. He worked closely with Jeff Gardner — audio producer, sound designer and Foley artist for the Antaeus Theatre Company — to determine how to add an additional dimension to the characters' actions, unseen to the listeners, with sound effects.

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Photo courtesy Antaeus Theatre Company  
"True Sound" actor Peter Van Norden receives his kit of audio recording equipment, provided by Antaeus Theatre Company.

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"I thought, 'Well, here's an opportunity to really incorporate sound in a way that is almost a character unto itself,'" Apostolina said.

"When you realize that you have to convey everything without a picture or without a body on stage," he added, "you have to really pick and choose and edit your way through the piece to really be specific. ... Everything is in there for a reason."

It's no mistake that a play about audio engineers makes heavy use of Foley, or the reproduction of sounds for use in media. For example, as a character in "True Sound" mentions, Alfred Hitchcock believed that stabbing a casaba melon produced a noise close to that of a knife piercing human flesh. Foley artists used the melons for the stabbing scenes in



Photo courtesy Antaeus Theatre Company  
Actress Emily Goss poses with sound equipment for her role in "True Sound," a fiction podcast episode set in Burbank.

"Psycho."

Similarly, the characters in "True Sound" brutalize pieces of fruit to simulate sounds for a horror film. Gardner, who created most of the sound effects listeners will hear in the audio play, said he has had to buy a lot of produce.

"Foley is still very much a big part of how we make movies and how we make radio," he added, "and people take a foot-step or a punch for granted, [thinking] that the actors executed it or that's the actor's steps. A lot of times, it's not the actor's steps during [the scene] — it's us in the Foley pit walking through corn starch."

The sound effects were added to the episode after the actors recorded their lines. Gardner explained that each of the three actors received kits with basic recording equipment — such as a microphone and sound-dampening material — so they could set up home studios.

Apostolina said that he wanted the dialogue between the characters to reflect the sometimes-crass banter that is often part of the creative process for those in the entertainment industry. The nature of improvisational acting, he explained, allows participants to feel free to try anything, experimenting to see what works. But, Apostolina noted, the lack of a filter sometimes means that entertainment workers can go too far, crossing boundaries they shouldn't have and making others uncomfortable.

"Some people would argue it's been [like that] forever," he said, "but let's just say it's been a focal point as of late, and rightly so."

Both Apostolina and Gardner said they were excited for listeners to learn a bit about audio work through the episode. Because the Zip Code Plays are free and online, Gardner pointed out, the stories have drawn in people who don't have the money or time to watch a live performance.

"How wonderful it is to have a bigger audience because of this medium," Gardner said.

"True Sound," directed by Gregg Daniel, stars Cherish Monique Duke, Emily Goss and Peter Van Norden.