

## LEGIT REVIEW



Apollo Dukakis, left, Melinda Peterson, Jeanie Hackett, Daniel Bess and Bill Brochtrup star in Sinan Unel's complex Turkish tale "Pera Palas."

## Pera Palas

(Theater@Boston Court, 99 seats; \$20 top)

A Theater@Boston Court and Antaeus Company presentation of a play in three acts by Sinan Unel. Directed by Michael Michetti. Sets, Tom Buderwitz; lighting, Adam H. Greene; costumes, Ivy Y. Chou; sound, Lotti Rothemann; production stage manager, Young Ji. Opened, reviewed July 23, 2005. Runs through Aug. 28. Running time: 2 HOURS, 40 MIN. Evelyn Crawley, Sema — Jeanie Hackett  
Melek, Kiazir — Rebecca Mozo  
Ali Reza, Sir Robert — Joe Brown, Ipek — Mikael Salazar  
Brian, Cavid — Bill Brochtrup  
Neyzine, Anne Miller —  
Orhan — Deborah Puette  
Bedra, Kathy Miller — Angela Goethals  
Ayse, Cavid Older —  
Kathy Older — Melinda Peterson  
Adnan, Bedra Older —  
Orhan Older — Apollo Dukakis  
Orhan, Porter — Ramon De Ocampo  
Murat — Daniel Bess

By JOEL HIRSCHORN

A complex, multicharacter, multiplot canvas like "Pera Palas" requires confident, cohesive direction, and the Theater@Boston Court version of Sinan Unel's 1999 Off Broadway drama comes sweepingly to life under Michael Michetti's dynamic directorial hand. In this first co-production between Boston Court and the Antaeus Company, Michetti guides 10 actors playing 27 roles, weaves stories from different time periods (1918-24, 1952-53 and 1994), often simultaneously, and maintains complete clarity and focus.

English journalist Evelyn Crawley (Jeanie Hackett) appears as a spokeswoman for women's rights, befriend Melek (Rebecca Mozo), a beautiful 15-year-old Turkish girl who rejects worldly ideas and cheerfully embraces the prospect of an arranged marriage.

When Evelyn accepts Melek's invitation to live in her home and experience life in a harem, the contrast between her modern British views and Melek's bubbly radiant naivete is intriguing, especially after it becomes clear that Evelyn's well-meaning interference may promote more problems than it solves.

A key conflict set in the '90s involves gay men Murat (Daniel Bess), who fled Turkey years earlier after his father denounced him for homosexuality, and Brian (Bill Brochtrup), a more lighthearted personality. He tries to instigate Murat's reconciliation with his aging parents while suffering "Turkish tummy" from unfamiliar food such as intestines and "ram's eggs."

Kathy (Angela Goethals) completes the main plot scheme as a 1950s American woman infatuated with charming, seemingly progressive Orhan (Ramon De Ocampo). Although her plans to marry him are opposed by her skeptical sister, Anne (Deborah Puette), she plunges ahead, later discovering her Prince Charming is a violent alcoholic.

Certain characters and situations inevitably make a stronger impression than others, and there's occasional frustration when compelling scenes are clipped short to accommodate other, less gripping confrontations. This is particularly true toward the end, when the production seeks to resolve its issues and dashes through moments that deserve more attention.

Fortunately, superlative portrayals keep interest from flagging. Melinda Peterson is magnificent as the older, 1990s Kathy, still married to angry, abusive Orhan and, surprisingly, revealed as Murat's mother. Peterson shows all the pain

# VARIETY

of a wife who has learned to live with her compromises, struggling to keep the peace when Murat brings Brian to dinner and prods his father into admitting he still harbors hostility about his son's choices. This scene has an explosive, Arthur Miller drive, and Apollo Dukakis tears the stage apart as a man fighting to heal old wounds yet still inextricably tangled in his bitterness.

Hackett's range is strikingly displayed in her two contrasting roles: as the soberly concerned Evelyn and Murat's edgy sister Sema. A measure of Hackett's achievement is her ability to be cerebral in her British part yet cuttingly harsh as a woman who identifies with her brother's need for his own sexual lifestyle because she, too, has a secret long withheld from her mother and father.

Brochtrup brings magnetism and welcome, effervescent humor to a part that could use more definition, and he's touchingly tortured as Cavid, a young man shattered by his mother's heartbreak when her husband casts her aside for another wife.

Bess, the only actor handling one role, is a powerful Murat, intensely believable in his desire for the paternal approval he can never truly gain.

Some of the best portrayals are in smaller parts. Mikael Salazar is remarkable as Joe, a Turk-hating Midwestern hick who loves baseball and hot dogs, and impressively dignified as Ali Reza, a potentate with many wives who is destroyed by cultural change. Salazar also excels as a condescending embassy rep.

Tom Buderwitz's superb set enhances the epic feeling of the piece, filling the stage with hotel room, lush palace and small apartment. Buderwitz's detail — Turkish tile lining walls and steps, silhouetted skyline of the minarets and domes of Turkey on the upper balcony, huge pictures of Turkish royalty and the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk — is masterful. Adam H. Greene's lighting and Ivy Y. Chou's costumes add authenticity to a show that projects dimension and grandeur while preserving a sense of subtle emotional intimacy throughout.