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BWW Reviews: Antaeus' TOP GIRLS Is Illuminating Theatre

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by Don Grigware

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Top Girls by Caryl Churchill/directed by Cameron Watson/Antaeus Theatre Company/through May 4

*The Ballbreakers Cast



Kimiko Gelman and Karianne Flaathen

Photo by Geoffrey Wade

Normally not my teacup, a play about women's liberation through the ages would not pique my interest, but Caryl Churchill's surprising setups, intense character examinations, fiercely dramatic confrontations and unexpected reactions make 1982's Top Girls a must see in my book. Antaeus' top-notch production has magnificent casting and superb direction from Cameron Watson, through May 4.

The opening scene set in some futuristic time and place features six women, all successes through the ages, who meet for lunch to celebrate Marlene's, played by Rebecca Mozo, promotion in a big corporate employment agency circa the early 1980s. There's also Karianne Flaathen as

Isabella, a Scot, Kimiko Gelman as Lady Nijo, Abigail Marks as Dull Gret, Elizabeth Swain as Pope Joan, Shannon Lee Clair as patient Griselda and Julia Davis as their waitress. Marlene is now; the others come from the 19th all the way back to the 13th centuries. They all interrupt each other incessantly, talking about their achievements and their suppression by men. Most of them have taken extreme measures to subdue, defeat, conquer, these men and find absolute glee in their abusive power. We learn much later in Act II how very much Marlene has learned from history, as she seems to be practicing the same technique in her handling of both men and women beneath her on the corporate ladder. She bore a child, let her sister Joyce, also played by Karianne Flaathen, bring up Angie, also played by Abigail Marks. Marlene takes pride in putting Angie down as fat and lazy and lordin' er power over everyone around her including Joyce. Most of the other scenes play out in the 20th century offices and in Joyce and Angie's home when Marlene comes to visit. Set in England around the time of "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher's rise to power as the conservative Prime Minister, it is obvious that the play is a satire on her privileged abuses toward the working class.

The ensemble is nothing short of sensational, not one false move. No one stands out above anyone else, except I must admit sparks fly in the scenes between Mozo and Flaathen, and whenever Marks is on stage. She is a young actress to keep your eyes on. Quite remarkable as Gret and particularly Angie! Mozo is the only one playing one character; all the others play two or three. Cameron Watson's direction is just great, as he magically gets perfect timing from all of his actresses. The first scene around the dining table is a ballbuster with all the overlapping, and it soars like clockwork. Terri A. Lewis has designed some beautiful costumes and Stephen Gifford's simplistic set design works to perfection in designating the various locations.

Bravo to Antaeus for another sterling production!



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