

HOW TO SURVIVE CHAUVINISTIC INHUMANITY WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

by [Jesse David Corti](#) on March 23, 2013



We live in a nation where people celebrate socialite Kim Kardashian, who bore a child with a man who's not her husband. Sexual indiscretion can be summed up as "Hey, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." And whether it's a running joke or understood truth, the San Fernando Valley – home to Antaeus Theatre Company, which opened Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* this week – serves as "The Porn Capital of the World." Sociologically speaking, western culture has transformed greatly from the 19th century to the 21st – from prudish sexual tolerance to sexual independence and acceptance.

Another transformation in our culture involves the role of women in society. Today, women are more encouraged and empowered to pursue their individual happiness than ever before. Oprah Winfrey, J.K. Rowling, Sheryl Sandberg, and [others](#) are examples of successful women today. Granted, the

richest men in the world outnumber the [richest women](#) 10 to 1, but the success and wealth of women now are more prevalent and continue to increase steadily; a stark contrast of what women were capable of accomplishing two centuries ago.

In 1893, failed novelist, revered critic of the arts, developing playwright, and social progressive, George Bernard Shaw penned his fifth play, the provocative *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays E.F. Smyth Piggott declared it was "immoral and otherwise improper for the stage"; and thus, he prohibited the play from public performance in the UK until 1925. What

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Mrs. Warren's knowledge of receiving

corners of Europe, and because she was not brought up by her mother, but instead by paid guardians. As the bright and biting Vivie slowly learns how her mother established her means, she must grapple with the ramifications of such knowledge and circumstance in light of her own

was all the fuss about? Mrs. wealthy woman who has means and place in high-prostitution. She began as a evening and eventually clawed her way into a lucrative that allowed her to be "queen" trade in London.

daughter, Vivie, has no this, due in part to her education from different

situation as a well-to-do blossoming young woman who may marry and dare to start her own enterprise.

This establishes the context for Shaw's dastardly and delicious dialectical dramedy about the abuse and mistreatment of women in society, and how they might rise above the inherent inhumanity and chauvinism of Victorian society to be like their opposite sex: independent and successful.



Antaeus traditionally double-casts their productions (I saw the "Bernards" cast). The exception to this standard is Anne Gee Byrd, who is the sole Mrs. Warren in both casts; Byrd gives a strong performance that alternates between being playful, witty, forceful, and protective as the titular character with the unbecoming enterprise. Nontraditional casting

aside, South Korean Linda Park hits all the necessary notes as the spoiled, sarcastic, holier- and smarter-than-thou Vivie; the two tête-à-tête scenes between her and her mother provide gripping dramatic moments.

Arye Gross is quite amusing as the affable, befuddled, and bedraggled romantic thinker and architect Mr. Praed, a friend of Mrs. Warren. Robert Machray is similarly humorous as the pompous and pious, yet fragile Reverend Samuel Gardner. Daniel Bess plays the singularly



focused Frank Gardner, object of Vivie's affection, with cavalier command and impetuous sexuality. Fiona Lakeland executes some lovely pantomime during a few scene transitions, but the best performer of the lot is Tony Amendola as the wealthy sleazebag Sir George Crofts. In a relationship with Mrs. Warren, both business and personal, he finds himself taking more than a fancy towards her daughter. All are appropriately aghast at such prospects, but his captivating characterization of the articulate, straightforward shark is refreshing

for always maintaining intensity and intelligence while shifting through different modes of both emotional and intellectual manipulation to get what he ultimately wants; his scenes with Vivian are certainly memorable, and the most arresting.

The design elements are economical and efficient. Jeremy Pivnick's lighting design is full of



bright ambers and yellows for the outdoor scenes, and toned down for the darker moods that fill the scenes set indoors. Francois-Pierre Couture's bronze-colored, slatted, propped-up backdrop with a painted tree upon it allows for

flexibility in the small space; in particular, there is a dinner scene where the characters eating are placed behind the backdrop (obscured by the slats, but not out of sight), while the characters talking are in front; a shrewd handling of space by director Robin Larsen. My only grievance with A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's wonderfully elegant costumes is that Mrs. Warren is outfitted in one costume, yet she prides herself on being able to purchase new dresses every day and still have money enough to live luxuriously.

Minor objections aside, Larsen's clever staging and talented ensemble balance the juicy humor and acidic drama of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* by focusing Shaw's minor, controversial classic on the intimacy of inhumanity and nonchalance of evil; a provocative and promising start to Antaeus Company's 2013 season.



photos by Karianne Flaathen

Mrs. Warren's Profession

Antaeus Theatre Company in North Hollywood

scheduled to end on April 21, 2013

for tickets, call 818-506-1983 or go to <http://www.antaeus.org>