

THE ZIP CODE PLAYS DELIVERS LOS ANGELES TO YOUR LAPTOP

Antaeus Playwright's Lab takes on the city one piece at a time

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

In an enchanting and original response to the pandemic era's lack of live, in-theater experiences, the Antaeus Theater has released 'The Zip Code Plays, a suite of six new radio pieces, each set in a different L.A. neighborhood. These short (10-25 minutes each) works were written with audio-only performances in mind by members of the outfit's Playwrights Lab, and while the stories do not all take place in the present day, each in its own way speaks directly to the current social and political moment.

Additionally, the online experience comes with both a downloadable program and a whole ancillary site hosting audio and visual tours of each neighborhood's historical landmarks and some present-day attractions. Not only does this ground the "true" part of the "based on a true story" notation in some of the plays in real history, but it offers an educational companion for both more meaningfully understanding and potentially physically exploring the works' settings.

For example, 90272: *Pacific Palisades -- Annexing the Palisades* (written by Alex Goldberg, directed by Ann Noble, and starring Nike Doukas, Harry Groener and Adrian LaTourelle) takes place at the Murphy Ranch in 1939. It imagines a scene in which a craftsman arrives at the home of a wealthy couple who turn out to be Nazi sympathizers (that

part is true) and things go rather badly. This nefarious part of the Murphy Ranch story was in fact a major scandal after the war, and the piece does a brilliant job of linking it to more recent political actions as well as Los Angeles mythology. It often contains this gem of dialogue: "Before Europe falls, we need a proper balustrade!"

Likewise, 90011: *South Central Los Angeles -- Speakeasy* (written by Khari Wyatt, directed by Bernadette Speakes, and starring Bernard K. Addison, Lloyd Roberson III, and Marlow Wyatt) is set in the past but speaks to tensions of our day. In 1956, an African American writer comes home from an expat stint in Paris, planning to wrap up their life in our violent, oppressive culture and head back to the humanist pursuits and relative peace of life in Europe. His wife, who has been making her own way just fine thank you and feels committed to her community, does not like this idea at all. The question of whether to escape evil or stay and fight it is salient and perennial.

Now, 90012: *DTLA -- Clara and Serra and The Talking Bear* (written by Angela J. Davis, directed by Steven Robman, and starring Tony Amendola, Luis Kelly-Duarte and Abby Marks) takes place both in the distant past and the near future and actually more like in a dream. A comet makes bronze statues come to life and a merry trio of historical figures grapple with their own roles in



the current state of society. It's both a bit ridiculous and unexpectedly moving, as its allegorical framework outlines convincing links between the best and worst impulses of California's historical legacies, set against the specific backdrop of questioning the authority of the past. As an aside, while all the plays open with a land acknowledgment, this one makes it clearest why the custom is necessary.

90024: *Westwood -- ALL INFORMATION HEREIN IS CLASSIFIED* (written by Deb Hiatt, directed by Carolyn Ratteray, and starring Dawn Didawick, Bo Foxworth and Catia Ojeda) shares a setting of political protest with DTLA, but this one has all the hallmarks of a detective show, complete with surveillance and lowkey double agent action. Its central character is a sweet old lady that did not

come to play, and its perspective on BLM protests is a unique one.

90403: *Santa Monica - Plucker* (written by Nayana Agrawal, directed by Jonathan Muñoz-Proulx, and starring Verilyn Jones, Kavi Ramachandran Ladnier and Marcelo Tubert) has something to say about political allegiances and justice in public spaces too, but its take on antifa is delivered in a basket of adorable.

91352: *Sun Valley -- Salvager* (written by Steve Serpas, directed by Julia Fletcher, and starring Gigi Bermingham and Jon Chaffin) is the most romantic, the most intimate of the pieces, with a surprising pivot from darkness to light that reminds each and every one of us that magic is always potentially close at hand and the vulnerability is the key to joy.

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