



# LA STAGE TIMES

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# LA STAGE TIMES

## FEATURES

*Antony and Two Cleopatras at A Noise Within*

by Steve Julian | February 29, 2012

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# LA STAGE

EMPOWERING ARTISTS AND ENGAGING AUDIENCES SINCE 1975

## NEWS

*A letter from the CEO of LA STAGE*

by LA Stage Alliance | January 31, 2014



Susan Angelo and Geoff Elliott in "Antony and Cleopatra"

The plan went awry.

Jeanie Hackett had left her leadership position at Antaeus Company half a year ago, so she was hungry to sink her teeth into an epic role — something she had put aside while leading the small-stage classical ensemble in North Hollywood. The co-artistic directors at Pasadena's larger classical company *A Noise Within* (ANW), [Geoff Elliott](#) and [Julia Rodriguez-Elliott](#), who also are co-directing the upcoming *Antony and Cleopatra*, had called [Hackett](#) last fall to read for the female lead, opposite Elliott's Antony — a casting decision the couple had already made.

[Susan Angelo](#) auditioned, too. She's well-known in LA theater as a veteran actor, director and educator at Theatricum Botanicum — and she had appeared with *A Noise Within* in *The Rehearsal* and *Richard III* in 2009.

The role of Cleopatra came down to Angelo and Hackett. "Sometimes when it gets down to two actors that are equally strong," says Rodriguez-Elliott, "you often base a decision on tone and what you may think you'll build on with one actor over the other."

Elliott adds, "In Jeanie's case, too, there was the reality that



FIRST PERSON

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by Deborah Behrens | January 31, 2014



COLUMNS

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by Julio Martinez | January 30, 2014

# LA STAGE WATCH

DON SHIRLEY



Julia Rodriguez-Elliott; Photo by Daniel Reichert

she had recently come off of *Antaeus* and had that kind of experience that I found to be very attractive for the role. Cleopatra is a woman who is used to leading people.”

While the ANW leaders had worked with Angelo, but not Hackett, they gave the role to Hackett. “In one way,” says Rodriguez-Elliott, “it’s a way for us as a company to challenge ourselves.”

Hackett (*Broadway: A Streetcar Named Desire* and author of *The Actor’s Chekhov*) had come close to playing Cleopatra in 2004 at the Old Globe in San Diego — but when it came down to her and another actress, she demurred. “I was just beginning to run *Antaeus* and I thought that I just couldn’t divide myself this way.” The role went to Sara Surrey.

It may be a while before she gets another opportunity. Hackett, who described her departure as *Antaeus* artistic director as “rough,” backed out four weeks into rehearsals at A Noise Within to spend time with an ailing family member out of state.



Geoff Elliott and Susan Angelo

Angelo’s phone rang. ANW was in a bind ““ was she willing to step in?

Yes. “Thank God,” says Elliott.

LA STAGE Times met with Elliott, Rodriguez-Elliott and Hackett just days before Hackett left the production, and then spoke with Angelo by telephone this week. She acknowledged that the show had remained on her mind since she auditioned around Thanksgiving.

“Through the holidays I had books about the play on my bed stand. I just had a feeling that I should learn this part.” But once she learned that Hackett was cast, Angelo put the books away. “My instinct was to keep working on it, but I didn’t trust my instinct. I wish I had.”

### Choosing one over the other

“Casting is a very strange thing,” Elliott says in a follow-up conversation this week, after Angelo joined the production. “I suppose it’s an art form, very difficult to articulate. There’s a feeling you have about where you think this production will go with one person or another, even when they’re equally talented.”

### COLUMNS

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by Don Shirley | January 27, 2014



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by LA Stage Alliance | January 27, 2014



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by Connie Danese | January 24, 2014



Geoff Elliott; Photo by Daniel Reichert

Elliott talks of his respect for Hackett's work as an actress, but the clincher for him was her experience as a fellow artistic director. "Who knew how it was going to manifest itself, but it was just a reality. Little things like that can sway you one way or another."

Yet to include this in the decision-making loop, Elliott ostensibly must have been in touch with his own artistic leadership style and counted it as a qualifying factor in his decision to play Antony, another strong leader. "I think that's true. If Jeanie and I didn't have the experience we have [as artistic directors] I wouldn't have put it in the mix. At the same time it comes down to, as Susan has come

into the role, realizing the role is bigger than any one person. Antony too."

"And when you start going in one direction," adds Rodriguez-Elliott, "you can't imagine it done in any other way — and yet someone else may come in. That's the beauty of these great plays "" they can suffer changes in location and actors and still manage to work."

And those are the cards they were dealt — one strong actress out and another one in. Where does that leave the director's vision and the ensemble's expectations?



Jeanie Hackett

Rodriguez-Elliott says, "I think perhaps Jeanie's Cleopatra may have brought a volatility that Susan's doesn't. Susan has more singleness of purpose. I don't mean that one over the other [is better]."

"They're both very strong," notes Elliott. "They both have a great deal of presence as actors; both are very dynamic. The choices that they each make are going to be interesting."

"Jeanie's power in Cleopatra," adds Rodriguez-Elliott, "is in a power that reaches out and grabs and takes, whereas Susan's power is one that reaches out and grabs but gets the individual to come to her."

The way each actress has approached Cleopatra profoundly affects Elliott as Antony. "Jeanie does a lot of thinking and her choices have a "" and I don't mean this in a negative way "" her choices are complicated. She's a complicated person and thinks a lot. There's a lot going on with her as she goes through and maneuvers through a scene. Again, this was the first time I'd worked with Jeanie, and this is just

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JULIO MARTINEZ

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by dani oliver

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by Don Shirley | January 20, 2014

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JULIO MARTINEZ

an impression. Susan is more direct and has a more grounded sense to her as she moves forward. Less complicated and more a sense of a straight line. Those are tonal differences.”



Susan Angelo; Photo courtesy of the artist

Angelo writes these observations off as a practical matter. “I’ve only had time to cram the lines in, make a choice, and go. I don’t have the luxury of second guessing myself, which normally I love to do, by the way! It’s just full steam ahead.”

At rehearsal, Elliott moves from his role as Antony to his other role as co-director when Antony is off stage. Dealing with a “complex” actor presents additional challenges. “Don’t get me wrong. We all need to be challenged. We have to open ourselves up to challenge, which is how we grow as artists.”

But when the actor opposite you approaches the rehearsal process in a manner different from your own ““ one you may find more complicated than your own ““ it becomes an exercise in perseverance and acceptance. Says Elliott, “It takes a good deal more”! (drawing in a deep breath) “loxygen and breathing and being patient and understanding. We have to have open discussions

about where we’re going and what we’re doing. As opposed to someone who’s more direct and “let’s keep it simple’.”



Susan Angelo and Geoff Elliott

“You can’t underestimate long-term working relationships,” adds Rodriguez-Elliott. “I think about working with Geoff or [longtime company member and director] Deborah Strang, someone I’ve worked with a lot, and if I need to explain something I can walk up and say, ““It’s kind of like eeeeeoooowww’ and they know what I’m talking about. There’s something about that that’s wonderful. We have this kind of vocabulary ““ a shorthand that takes us to some place. When you work with someone new, it takes longer to understand how you work and think.”

Despite her departure deep into rehearsals, the couple does not consider casting Hackett a mistake. “You make a choice and go, and either it works out or it doesn’t and you pick it all up, dust it off and move on,” says Elliott.

### Consistency counts

Rodriguez-Elliott looks at the situation more broadly. “There should be a consistency in output, and I think that A Noise Within has built that consistency, but there’s no formula.”

### COLUMNS

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by Julio Martinez | January 16, 2014



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by Don Shirley | January 13, 2014

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Yet there is.



Diana Gonzalez-Morret, Susan Angelo, Geoff Elliott, and Jill Hill

As co-founders and co-artistic directors, Elliott and Rodriguez-Elliott are prominent in many, if not most, ANW productions. "It began [when the pair founded the company] 20 years ago. We were going to do *Our Town*," Elliott remembers. "We lost our director at the tenth hour and we said, well, why not?"

The two embarked on a co-directing career they now call "organic." Rodriguez-Elliott claims, "If we took separate notes and compared them at the end of the night, they'd be the same notes."

While Rodriguez-Elliott often directs or co-directs with her husband, she stopped acting in A Noise Within productions years ago. But Elliott often is found onstage. In the past two seasons he has appeared in *Twelfth Night*, *Noises Off*, *The Chairs*, *Great Expectations* and *Measure for Measure*.

Is there a temptation to blur the line between one's artistic responsibility and one's avocational desire? Elliott explains, "Antony is a very good part for me. I know myself well enough as an actor, and Julia and I have done this long enough to know what's in my strike zone. Some people may argue that I don't know what's in my strike zone," he jokes, "but that's all right."

With her husband across the table and the San Gabriel Mountains looming behind her, Rodriguez-Elliott says, "I can be objective and tell Geoff as we embark on a project that I'll be involved only if he plays a certain role. But it can be challenging, especially for the track we've been on the last five years in terms of this capital project. We're now getting back to where we feel like we have the time to think about what we're doing. We've been creating our art under extreme pressure."



Max Rosenak and Susan Angelo

Their \$13 million capital campaign that built the new facility in Pasadena is nearly fully funded. In the initial conversation with LA STAGE Times, Hackett applauded and reinforced the couple's presence on stage and off. "The success of A Noise Within justifies the personal avocation these two feel about their art and the projects they want to accomplish. That is the proven success of A Noise Within." She adds, "Geoff and Julia's artistry and the way Geoff and Julia use themselves in a play, whether as actor or directors".

Rodriguez-Elliott finishes the thought. "Your audience becomes devoted to the vision that's being put forth. They want to see Geoff in all these different roles. That's the whole sense of community

FEATURES

### Fleming Rides Rudnick's Tale of a *Day Trader* and His Daughter

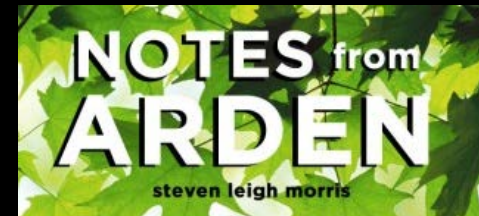
by Ed Rampell | January 10, 2014



COLUMNS

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by Julio Martinez | January 9, 2014



COLUMNS

### Classical Gas: Reviews of our Most Important Plays by College Students

by Steven Leigh Morris | January 8, 2014



COLUMNS

### THE ARTS FIX: Graffiti, Punk, Health Insurance

by Dani Oliver | January 7, 2014

theater in the best sense of the word, that people really invest in a group of artists. We have guest artists coming in, so it's never static. The audience that comes here is not anonymous. You look out and it's a sea of faces that have grown up with this theater. They know you and you know them, and it would be very hard to go away and have an experience as creatively fulfilling."

With eyes mostly diverted now from the capital campaign, the co-founders still seem to collect their breath at every turn and look toward producing six shows in 2013. And getting *Antony and Cleopatra* on its feet this week. They abandoned at least one preview to give Angelo more time to integrate.



Susan Angelo and Geoff Elliott

"Every Shakespeare character that he writes in blank verse," notes Angelo, "has its own thought process that you discover *in* the blank verse. I'm blown away that [Cleopatra's] thoughts go like lightning. One thought to another, 360 degree turns. Boom, boom, boom. That's challenging. My head's spinning!"

As a teacher of scansion, however, Angelo's confident. "Do I wish I had six months? Sure. At some point the actor has to serve up the text and get out of its way. I don't have time to get *in* its way."

***Antony and Cleopatra*, presented by A Noise Within. Opens March 3. Presented in repertory with *The Bungler* and *The Illusionist*. Plays Sun. March 4, 2 pm; Thurs., March 22, 8 pm; Fri., March 23, 8 pm; Fri., April 13, 8 pm; Sat., April 21, 2 pm; Saturday, April 21, 8 pm; Sun., April 29, 2 pm; Sun., April 29,**

**7 pm; Fri., May 4, 8 pm; Sat., May 12, 8 pm; Sunday, May 13, 2 pm. A Noise Within, 3352 E. Foothill Blvd., Pasadena. Free self-parking is located in the Sierra Madre Villa Metro parking structure, with entrances on northbound Sierra Madre Villa Avenue or North Halstead Street. 626-356-3100 ext. 1. [www.ANoiseWithin.org](http://www.ANoiseWithin.org).**

\*\*\*All *Antony and Cleopatra* production photos by Craig Schwartz



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COLUMNS

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by Don Shirley | January 6, 2014



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## Searching for Human Identity Within a Solo Show

by Christopher Vened | January 6, 2014

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