

# LA STAGE TIMES

## FEATURES

### Ann Noble's on the *Laramie-Liar* Shuttle — But Writing Comes First

by Pauline Adamek | October 24, 2013



Ann Noble. Photo by Tim Sullens.

You think you know LA theater? Who's currently acting in two very different productions — yet considers herself primarily a writer, more than an actor?

Chicago-raised, LA-based [Ann Noble](#).

She can be spotted in *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's Davidson/Valenti Theatre, and also in the changing casts of *The Liar* at Antaeus Company's space in North Hollywood.

*Laramie* is a docudrama that examines the aftermath of the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming, a decade later; Noble adopts several roles throughout the play. At the opposite end of the spectrum is her lively role in *The Liar*, a farce by 17th-century French playwright Pierre Corneille, translated and adapted in 21st-century language by David Ives. Here Noble engages in witty wordplay while playing a high society Parisienne whose best friend is wooed by a fabulist.

Blessed with naturally red corkscrew curls and piercing blue eyes, Noble is also a playwright. Prior to joining Antaeus three years ago, Noble not only performed in numerous plays at the [Road Theatre Company](#) but also was its playwright-in-residence.



Ann Noble in The Antaeus Company productions of "MacBeth" with Bo Foxworth (2011), photo by Daniel Blinkoff, and "The Crucible" with Ranya Jaber (2012), photo by Facet Photography.

One of her most popular plays, *And Neither Have I Wings To Fly*, was produced at the Road in 2007 but was first staged in Chicago in 1995. It's a period family drama about a budding romance, set in rural Ireland during the 1950s. Noble was one of the cast members, and the actors were nominated for the Ovation for best ensemble.

*The Pagans*, produced at the Road in 2004, was Noble's second Irish play, a kitchen-sink drama also set in rural Ireland. Another LA company, Interact, produced her *The Boarding House* in 2007 (at what was then the WriteAct space

in Hollywood). Her most recent Road production, in 2010, was the [premiere of \*Sidhe\*](#). In it, Noble combined the spooky mythology of Irish folklore with a seedy setting in contemporary Chicago.

Noble recently wrote a [new adaptation](#) of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* that was staged at the Citadel Theatre late last year, in her home town of Lake Forest, Illinois.

In the web series world, she was an executive producer, a writer and a regular on [We Have To Stop Now](#) and she co-created [Nurses Who Kill....](#)

#### **A storyteller from an early age.**

Charting her upbringing, Noble describes her formative early years. Her mother — a dancer, singer and actress — was from northern California, and her father — a physicist and musician — was originally from Danville, Illinois. "He was at Berkeley, and she was at Mills College [in Oakland], and that's where they met. All my siblings grew up in California, and then they moved to Connecticut, which is where I was born and lived until I was three. Then we moved to Lake Forest" (in the suburbs north of Chicago). "It's the town where *Ordinary People* was filmed. I'm a total Midwestern baby."

Earlier, while in northern California, her parents were among those who helped start a theater, [Woodminster Amphitheater](#), in Oakland. "They did big musicals over the summer. My mom would perform, my dad was the conductor." Because her parents had always been involved in the arts, they were supportive of their children's artistic pursuits.

The youngest of four, Noble was creating comedy bits as early as the age of nine. "I wanted to act, and so I did all the plays in school. In third grade, we were doing *The Tortoise and the Hare*, and I didn't get cast. I was very upset, so I said, 'Well, can I do the commercials?' and my teacher was like, 'What?!' I said, 'Can I do the commercials in between scene breaks, because it's like television, right? So there are commercials.' She said 'I guess so,' so my friend Janie and I wrote and performed the silly commercials in between the scenes. I would be advertising, say, a washing machine and then she pushed me into it."



Ann Noble in the 2007 Road Theatre Company production of "And Neither Have I Wings to Fly." Photo courtesy of the Road Theatre.

It seems that Noble thrived on wherever her imagination took her. "All through high school I did all the plays, all the musicals and I would direct as well on summer programs. I was always crafting my own stuff. If school wasn't doing what I wanted to do, I would go on my own. 'Well then, I'm directing this!'" She smiles as she describes herself as a "very self-possessed little girl. I just loved the theater and all the storytelling."

She received a bachelor of science in theater at Northwestern University. "It's not just an arts

degree; you have to take a lot of English classes and 'crew' classes — all the technical stuff like lighting and set design."



A Pioneer Press clipping of Ann Noble in a 1987 talent show at Lake Forest High School in Illinois.

At Northwestern she had access to many resources in acting and directing. Fortunately, the university brought back the playwriting program in time for her sophomore year. Noble's face lights up as she recalls that pivotal year of study. "That's when I really kicked into high gear on my playwriting. I'd always been a storyteller...I had notebooks full of stories when I was in high school and junior high but I never really realized that I wanted to write — it's weird. When the playwriting class was offered, I was like, 'Yes I want that!'" Throughout that school year the students each wrote a play. "Then, out of the class, my play *Two by Four* was selected to be produced at the university, but they said, 'Well, we'll let you have a space but we don't have money for it.' So I said, 'Well, I'll produce it myself.' So that's how that all started."

After graduating in 1993, "I'm in Chicago auditioning to be an actor, and not doing very well as you can imagine. There were a million girls that look like me." Noble didn't want to hit the standup comedy circuit, nor did she want to embark on a career in musical theater, so she found her options in Chicago were limited. "Then I fell on some ice that Christmas and tore a ligament in my knee. I was laid up at my parents' house and so I wrote a play."

It turned out to be her first professional play, entitled *And Neither Have I Wings to Fly*. "My boyfriend at that time, a lovely guy named Michael Grant, told me, 'This is really good, we should do a reading.' We kept doing reading and rewrites and they went really, really well, and finally my dad was like, 'Well you should just produce it. What do you need?' I thought I needed about \$30,000, and my brother said, 'Okay, well I'll get that from friends,' and so my whole family pulled around. Michael and I started a theater company in Chicago called the [Seanachai Theatre Company](#) in 1995. It's Gaelic for storyteller." Adds Noble, "The company is still running and actually Michael Grant is an artistic director again after 20 years. He's back in, poor guy!" she laughs.

*And Neither Have I Wings to Fly* proved "a huge hit" and ran for eight months. Because *Wings* was so successful, Michael Leavitt and Fox Theatricals optioned it for New York for five years. (One of her two brothers, [John York Noble](#), has won two Tony Awards as one of the co-producers of Broadway productions of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, in collaboration with Leavitt and Fox Theatricals.) "They were going to produce it on Broadway, but it never happened; it was never the right time. They produced it in Chicago several years later, in 2000 and it went really, really well. But the momentum for Broadway just never happened, and I was off doing other things."



Ann Noble and Martin McClendon in the 1999 Northlight Theatre production of "The Cripple of Inishman." Courtesy of the Northlight Theatre..

It was her work with Seanachai that condensed her focus as a writer. "They were a very specific group of actors so I started writing for them. All my plays, even *Sidhe*, were all written with those actors in mind," she admits. "I love my plays. I love my language and the way I write and I enjoy it, and it's how I wish I could speak. I don't know whether they are excellent plays or just okay plays, but I don't really care because I enjoy them...[A playwright is] the little god of your kingdom because nobody can take it away from you. You own it forever and that is a beautiful thing."

In 2002, Victory Gardens Theatre produced Noble's *Ariadne's Thread* — a "big deal," she remarks, with "actual royalties and a commission and all of that," compared to her arrangements with previous productions at smaller theaters. With that, "I'd really hit the ceiling of how far you can go in Chicago as a playwright." So, in 2003, she [decided to pursue](#) possibly more lucrative writing gigs in LA. "I came out with all these scripts and an agent...I basically

then worked pitching to television and film for a couple of years and it was moderately successful." But she also discovered LA theater.

### Antaeus.

Noble wittily puts me straight on the correct pronunciation of her theater company, Antaeus, "It's 'An-tee-us.' The way we look at it is... An-tay-us, they don't pay us. An-tee-us, come see us!"

In 2011 Noble landed a small, virtually wordless role in *The Malcontent* as a pining duchess, who has eschewed society for solitude until her husband's reign is restored. "It was very small — just two scenes — but I loved doing it. The cast was amazing and I just fell in love with the company. Once I did that, I wanted to do more. They asked me to be in the ensemble of the next play, which was Noel Coward's *Peace In Our Time*, and I've just been there ever since" — including roles in *Macbeth* (2012) and *The Crucible* (2013).

Through Antaeus, Noble also teaches Shakespeare and creative writing to kids in juvenile detention in Chatsworth, at William Tell Aggeler School. "The boys are aged from 14 to 17 and they are all offenders of some kind, usually drug-related." Fellow Antaeus member John Prosky introduced her to the program "a year or so ago. He's been doing the program for about five years, but he brought me in because they really needed a dramatist, someone to craft a play for the kids."



JoBeth Williams and Ann Noble in Odyssey Theatre Company's 2012 production of "The Fall to Earth." Photo by David Colclasure.

Noble begins with workshopping scenes from Shakespeare's plays, then invites the boys to write their own personal stories in response. "Then I craft a play merging the two and they perform it at the end of 10 weeks. That's my Tuesdays and Thursdays. We are on our third session. We are self-supporting through donations to Antaeus, so when we walk into a school, they don't have to pay anything," she says, grinning.

Noble has acted on other LA stages besides Antaeus and the Road —

in Joel Drake Johnson's *The Fall to Earth* last year at the Odyssey and in Brett Neveu's *American Dead*, which was Rogue Machine's second production in 2008. In 2006 she was nominated for an Ovation for leading actress in a play for her performance in Craig Wright's *Orange Flower Water* at Victory Theatre.

#### More plays in the works.

Noble confides that she has "a couple of screenplays" and two plays that she wants to work on that are presently in a nebulous state. "I have one called *By Moonlight* which I've done many, many readings of, but it needs to be fixed. It's about a family of musicians and the pressure of being an artist — what that means — and craft versus art. It also deals with two sisters, a mom, and the father has died, so it's sort of the flip of *Wings*." The other is a development of a personal monologue she wrote for Rogue Machine's Rant and Rave evenings. "I tend to write about family, love and death," she smiles, "But I don't get a lot of time to write, it's sort of ridiculous."

Certainly not when you are appearing in two plays at once. "The only reason I can do that is because *The Liar* at Antaeus is double cast. Basically from Thursday to Sunday I am in a theater doing the two shows — and sometimes two on Saturdays and Sundays."

Noble admits *The Liar* is physically demanding. "Not only are we running around, but I'm wearing high heels and corsets. But it's so much fun and the people are so wonderful and talented and it's just a great dynamic and group and I love [director] Casey [Stang]. This is my third time now with her as director and she's amazing."

As for the *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later*, Noble gushes about the experience. "I love the purpose — the singularity and focus — of *Laramie* and just the material itself. [Director] Ken Sawyer was amazing to work with. I've known him for about 10 years but never actually got to work with him as a director until now. The cast is not only very talented, they are like love balls —



Ann Noble and Patrick Rieger in the Road Theatre Company's 2010 production of "Sidhe." Photo by Chris Goss.

they are just so loving and wonderful!"

The roles she plays within this unusual play have proved a new challenge for her. "It's like 'no acting'," she explains. "It's very specific and you just have to approach it differently." She says she adopts a stance of "I'm not duping you, you know it's me standing there, I'm not playing a different character — I'm playing me as this character. In a lot of ways, I had to forget my training. It became all about communicating

what you are saying. It's very, very simple and it's a wonderful exercise. But to then to go to something like *The Liar*, which is high style, high technique, but at the same time also has to be very true... It's been fascinating to do the two pieces."

So does she think of herself as an actress or a writer? Responds Noble, "If you ask me, the default

So does she think of herself as an actress or a writer? **RESPONSE:** Noble, if you ask me, the default will come out 'writer.' That's what the default will always be, because even when I'm acting I still feel like I'm storytelling. I rarely say I'm an actress. It's always, 'I'm a writer! Oh, and an actor...'



Ann Noble in "The Liar" and "The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later." Photos by Geoffrey Wade and WIN WIN IMAGING.

Above all, she says she feels nourished by the work she is doing with the incarcerated teens at the William Tell Aggeler School. "First of all, just gratitude that I didn't grow up and start smoking crack when I was 8 years old, like some of these kids, that I did have opportunities. It also strengthens my resolve regarding the importance of my writing — that I owe it to the community and owe it to the world to keep writing and telling my stories if they can heal someone else. And it's fun... watching these kids that we've

taught and seeing them grow at the school. Suddenly they are like, 'Hey!' and they have these amazing personalities, whereas before they couldn't even talk to you."

***The Liar*, Antaeus Theatre Company, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood 91601. Thu-Fri 8 pm, Sat 2 pm and 8 pm, Sun 2 pm. Through December 1. Tickets \$30-34. [www.antaeus.org](http://www.antaeus.org). 818-506-1983.**

***The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, Davidson/Valentini Theatre, the Village at Ed Gould Plaza, 1125 N. McCadden Place, Hollywood 90038. Fri-Sat 8 pm, Sun 7 pm. Through November 24. [www.lagaycenter.org](http://www.lagaycenter.org). 323-860-7300.**