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review - The Women

CRITIC'S PICK

The Women

by Clare Boothe Luce
directed by Arden Teresa Lewis
Theatre West
through June 16



Clare Boothe Luce's satirical classic *The Women* was a big grossing box-office hit at the movies in 1939. It was based on the 1936 play of the same name. Due to its opulent settings and large cast of 18 females, however, it is rarely produced on stage. Theatre West is taking a brave step in mounting the piece, and director Arden Teresa Lewis has purposely stepped away from the film's glossy texture and directed from an artistically smart perspective, focusing more intensely on the colorful characters, their differences in class dynamic and their

singularity as individuals ... and on Luce's wicked wit, which was way ahead of its time. Set in the Great Depression, these women, some affluent, some poor...and all *friends* or loyal servants ... gossiped fiercely and kept their claws out, some coated vibrantly with jungle red nail polish, and infected the world with their razor-sharp opinions and criticisms. Criticisms which ranged in tone from purely constructive, sympathetic and supportive to viciously jealous and spiteful. Were these devilish ladies really close friends? Well, even today, there are loyal relationships and then there are the fair weather ones that dissolve quite rapidly. On the other hand, who doesn't play tit for tat and take advantage of a close friend from time to time? These transgressions all form a part of the crazy circle we call life.

How the upper crust married females of New York City society and those who served them behaved *then* surely has opened up new vistas to feminist thinkers *now*, and especially where morality is concerned. Infidelity was a whole different ballgame back then for the women as well as the men. There was a certain amount of guilt one felt, and so Steven Haines could very well have reconciled with his wife Mary (Maria Kress) after divorcing her and remarrying Crystal (Caitlin Gallogly). Would Mary have taken him back? Yes! And now? Probably not, as contemp couples get bored pretty fast. With incisive direction from Lewis and a glorious cast of pros, Theatre West's current production of *The Women* sparkles with truth and fun. It will hopefully be a surefire box-office hit, putting them back on the map as one of LA's premiere theatre companies.



The cast is uniformly marvelous. Kress makes Mary stand apart as the straight-laced and completely faithful wife and mother. Whereas her performance and that of her mother Mrs. Morehead, played by ever- resourceful Sandra Tucker, are the rocks, the pillars of the community, everyone around them are crazed and absurdly discombobulated, so the over.the.top. work we get suits the humor and pace of Luce's keen script. Take, for example, *Sylvia*, played deliciously by Leona Britton, or Peggy,

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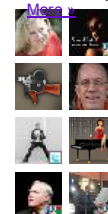
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extravagantly funny Ayn Olivia Vaughn, and the Countess, so full of life and herself, played with exuberant throwaway clatter about the foibles of *l'amour* by Jacque Lynn Colton.



Their deliveries are grossly flamboyant and we can't help but crack up at their terribly flawed personalities, each and every one. Opposing them is Dianne Travis wonderfully calm and drole as author Nancy. Gallogly is delightfully wicked and bitchy as Crystal,

and in smaller roles, terrific comedic work emanates from Mary Garripoli as Lucy, also from Barbara Mallory as the *office wife* Miss Watson. For me, the most expertly acted scene in the entire play is the kitchen scene in Act I between Mary's two servants, played to the hilt by Jeanine Anderson and Deborah Webb Thomas. Kudos to all the rest, including Anne Leyden, Heather Alyse Becker, Emily Mount, a totally believable Little Mary, Melanie Kwiatkowski, Sarah Purdum, Paula K. Long and Rebecca Lane.



Great set designed by David Offner, lovely costumes by Valerie Miller, especially in the Fashion Salon and dinner party scenes, and fantastic work from all of the crew who made set and prop changes fast and furious without the slightest delay, at least on opening night! Go to ***The Women*** and be prepared for a delicious evening of laughs. Remember, ***The Women*** was written long before and was a precursor to *Steel Magnolias*. The men are never seen in either piece (except the film of ... *Magnolias*, which is its only flaw) but through the eyes and words of the strong females, they become real. These divas under Lewis' fine pace are fun and most definitely entertaining. Luce's perspectives are intelligent; ***The Women*** is a marvel for its time, but don't stop to think about any of it...just enjoy!

5 out of 5 stars

<http://www.theatrewest.org/>



Posted by [Don Grigware](#) at 6:39 AM

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