

OCTOBER 6, 2010

BERKELEY REP'S *THREE SISTERS* GETS TOP GRADES AT YALE

Hi, folks-

Like a proud Ivy League parent, Berkeley Rep is pausing for a moment to brag about its progeny. Our co-production of *Three Sisters* – which graduated from the Thrust Stage last spring – has gone off to Yale and is getting top marks.

Associate Artistic Director Les Waters reunited with playwright Sarah Ruhl for this fresh take on a classic. They brought a host of local artists from the Berkeley run along with them to New Haven: performers such as James Carpenter, Emily Kitchens, Alex Moggridge, Barbara Oliver, and Richard Farrell, as well as designers Annie Smart and Alexander V. Nichols. Our co-production with Yale Repertory Theatre ends its East Coast run this Saturday.

We're pleased to bring home this report card for our *Three Sisters*:

- **New York Times:** "Sarah Ruhl has a taste for and a way with the classics. Now she has tackled *Three Sisters*, Anton Chekhov's 110-year-old drama about young women in the provinces with big-city dreams... Yale Repertory Company, in a co-production with Berkeley Repertory Theater, brings Ms. Ruhl's version of the story to the New Haven stage with emphatic clarity... As theatergoers familiar with *Three Sisters* know, Natasha is going to gain a good bit of confidence after she and Andrei marry and have a child. Ms. Kitchens brings out the oblivious evil in the character [and] the impact of her final outburst, over finding a fork on a porch swing, is **a tribute to Les Waters's dynamic direction**, too. On the other end of the continuum, Mr. Waters gives Masha and Vershinin a sweet moment of silent gesturing when they try to have an intimate conversation on the night of the terrible fire at the beginning of Act II... And Ms. Wood delivers a powerful, intensely believable Act II scene in which depression and hopelessness build to waves of tears."
- **Boston Globe:** "*Three Sisters* sparkles in its melancholy... If done wrong, Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* can verge on self-parody or bear an uncomfortable resemblance to certain scenes from *Love and Death*, Woody Allen's spoof of the Russian literary masters. If done right, as in the **incisive and well-acted** production at Yale Repertory Theatre directed by Les Waters, *Three Sisters* reminds us that few writers have ever seen into the human soul with more acuity and understanding... Waters has taken pains to ensure that the performances remain grounded in the particulars of each character, so the sisters and their friends register as real people who are grappling with the difficulties and disappointments of existence. Scene by scene, the Yale Rep's *Three Sisters* adds up to a compelling group portrait of characters who, in ways large and small, try to escape the limitations life has imposed on them. That they are ultimately unable to do so is presented less as a cause for despair than as a simple and profound statement that this is the way things are."
- **New Haven Register:** "Heartbreaking... A memorable evening, thanks to Sarah Ruhl's touch and a great ensemble... The smartest thing Ruhl does with *Three Sisters*, running through Oct. 8 at Yale Rep's University Theatre, is keep out of Chekhov's way. While one may detect her DNA in its colloquialisms and idioms, Ruhl humbly faithfully serves The Master with her adaptation (derived from a literal translation by Elise Thoron with Natalya Paramonova and Kristin Johnsen-Neshati). The result is a **wonderfully human** script that, in the truest Chekhovian sense, depicts its characters in comedic and poignant terms. Patient theatergoers and Chekhov aficionados will find this *Three Sisters*, co-produced by Berkeley

(MORE)

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Repertory Theatre, where it ran last spring, as three hours well spent. Directed with subtle grace by Les Waters (who, among his previous Ruhl collaborations includes the achingly beautiful *Eurydice* at the Rep several seasons back), this production is marked by a solid ensemble performance that personifies naturalism at its best, complemented by a tasteful production design.”

- **Yale Herald:** “A rich and sonorous version of the classic play... *Three Sisters*, now playing at the University Theatre, is a surprisingly wry exploration of slowly building resentment. Chekhov’s script, adapted by Sarah Ruhl and brought to life by a talented team of actors and designers, **brilliantly creates an atmosphere of thwarted hopes** and dreams endlessly deferred. This production reunites playwright Sarah Ruhl with director Les Waters, who previously helmed a production of Ruhl’s *Eurydice* at the Rep and Tony-nominated Broadway production of her *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*. Ruhl seems a good fit to adapt Chekhov, as each writer’s works are playgrounds of bittersweet ambiguity.”
- **New Haven Review:** “A well-played and respectful classic ... The best thing about this production is Ruhl’s thoughtful translation which manages to bypass some of the more stilted aspects of translated Chekhov... The feel of the language seems right for the characters, so that even the philosophizing seems character-driven rather than abstract... What makes it entertaining is Chekhov’s view of life as not essentially tragic, so that touches of humor and tenderness, of awkwardness and passion, and other displays of the pathos of personality, involve us but let us keep ourselves a bit distant.”
- **New Haven Theater Jerk:** “Ruhl retains far more Chekhov than expected, and rearranges almost nothing. In this season of *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*, this level of respect is **positively exhilarating**. This is a thoughtful, careful, well-articulated production of a classic... The virtue of this production is not how ‘modern’ or ‘sensational’ it is. It’s how classically Chekhovian it is. And that turns out to be just the *Three Sisters* we need right now.”

Congratulations to everyone who worked on this show, in Berkeley and in New Haven. Later this season, Les directs John Logan’s Tony Award-winning *Red* for Berkeley Rep – so I hope to see you at the Theatre!

All the best,
TK

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