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New York Theatre Wiresm
Advance News of What's Playing on New York's Stages

Theatre Dance Performance Art Music
Alternative and International Theatre

Litt Crit

by Larry Litt

The Doctors Are In, The Patients Are Way Out: Two Plays, One Ailment

[THE IMAGINARY INVALID](#)

By Moliere

Resonance Ensemble

October 27 - November 19

Theatre Row's Beckett Theatre (410 West 42nd St.)

Adapted and Directed by Rebecca Patterson

[SOME HISTORIC, SOME HYSTERIC](#)

New Stage Theatre Company

Conceived by Ildiko Nemeth and Jessica Sofia Mitrani

Directed by Ildiko Nemeth

Clemente Soto Velez, 107 Suffolk St., NY

Nov. 10 to Dec 10, 2006

www.smartix.com

The Imaginary Invalid

Moliere's classic over the top comedy reappears from the Resonance Ensemble with Argan played by exuberant Virginia Baeta in a wonderfully exaggerated king drag. She plays much more alive than any old man suffering from just about everything his doctors

can diagnose. Moliere didn't conceive Argan as a woman probably because women's roles were relegated to the romantic. However Baeta understood the hypochondriac personality so well I saw through her drag into the perpetually sick woman who uses doctors as her social life. Baeta's comic timing carries the play, with it's all female cast, on her shoulders throughout.

I think *The Imaginary Invalid* can be viewed as a metaphor for America's national health care crisis we're enduring today. We know insured individuals can demand attention from doctors and health care providers at will, while the uninsured patiently wait their turns in emergency rooms. Often when an uninsured patient is asked for their insurance carrier information a negative answer can result in inferior care or in some cases none at all. I ask, "Are the hypochondriacs among us using too many health services, too much insurance, occupying doctor's precious time while raising premiums? Is the only way to insure health care for a reasonable price to marry in or support a child through many years of schooling into the professions as Argan does? Or is it corporate pharmaceutical salesmen and health care administrators who are reaping the rewards of the body in pain and distress?"

Rebecca Patterson's adaptation of Moliere and direction of the all-female ethnically diverse company mixes archaic and modern language to create a period piece where proper amounts of respect and disrespect are evoked but still farce abounds. The only questionable moments come when the company provide musical interludes that drove me mad.

I have to mention Amy Driesler who valiantly played against type and convincingly made both characters Pulchinello and Thomas Diafoirus come alive. It ain't easy being a man.

Some Historic, Some Hysteric

A very severe, observant, reserved 19th century scientist was Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot, master of hysterical women at Salpetriere Asylum in Paris. His work with some 5000 committed women created neuropsychology and inspired Freud's psychology. He's also been the inspiration for numerous feminist theories, diatribes and artist explorations.

In this sweeping multi-media theater piece conceived by Jessica Sofia Mitrani and Ildiko Nemeth, also directed

by Nemeth, actor Markus Hirnigel plays Charcot as a mystical idolizer-examiner of basically sad, frightened women escaping their unhappy realities and environments. Along with Dr. Charcot, "Some Historic/Some Hysterical" permits us entry into some of their wildly imaginative, colorful, and often artistic minds.

The scientific questions such as why and how and how long any human mind checks out are explored intimately with clocks, measuring devices and endless notes on the bodily functions of the young women in the cast. All portray their hysteria in the most natural way, as if somewhere in all women lurks the hysteric's potential, waiting for that singular pyrotechnical, emotional event to set them aflame.



Markus Hirnigel as Dr. Charcot



Ensemble as patients of Salpêtrière Hospital

However, the asylum's bigger issue was how to help these patients, many of whom appear to revel in the asylum's safety. Dr. Charcot's acts of observation and experimentation with these fragile minds and bodies is the point of this movement and video extravaganza.

An exquisite Victorian interlocutor, played by Denice Kondik, explains and comments on Dr. Charcot's theatrical proceedings while he show off his patients at his Tuesday Lectures, demanding they perform their

hysteria with their bodies. Is she too a former inmate, or another exploiter of this pathetic Theater of Hysteria? Is hysteria itself a state of theater she asks, in which the body and mind act out and through life's challenges until they are reconciled and the pain is manageable?

Using the writings of French feminist artist Claude Cahun as a multi-media statement of women's desires along side Freud's statements on hysteria and sexual agitation, this play gives us a complex insight into contemporary attitudes towards women's performance art. Are experimental performers basically hysterics? Are there hysterical influences that can drive art practice and perhaps create real hysteria in artists and audience?

It's no comfort that the fragility of women's lives are always subjects for artists in every genre and discipline. If there's anything about hysteria that comes across to me from this play it's that women artists should be caring for women hysterics. [Litt]

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