

UPCOMING READINGS 2013-14 SEASON

| Date | Play | Playwright | Director |
|-----------|---|--------------------|--|
| Dec. 16 | <i>A Bold Stroke for a Wife</i> (1717) | Susanna Centlivre | Rebecca Patterson Artistic Director Queens Company |
| Jan TBA | <i>The Convent of Pleasure</i> (1668) | Margaret Cavendish | Elyse Singer Artistic Director The Hourglass Group |
| Feb TBA | <i>I'll Tell You What</i> (1785) | Elizabeth Inchbald | Kay Matschullat |
| March TBA | TBA | | Rachel Dickson Artistic Director Ripe Time |

ON HER SHOULDERS is supported largely through tax-deductible gifts from individual supporters and the generous volunteer and in-kind contributions of the producing team (individuals and institutions). **Cash donations are gratefully accepted at the box office to help defray the cost of artist stipends and refreshments.**

We are a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts services organization. **Donation checks** in support of this program should be made payable to Fractured Atlas, specifying OHS as the intended beneficiary, and mailed to:

New Perspectives Theatre Company
456 West 37 Street
New York, NY 10018

Credit Card donations may be made at onhershoulders.weebly.com via PayPal. All donations are tax-deductible to extent allowed by law.

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE DONATED TO MAKE THIS SERIES POSSIBLE

Anonymous, Judith Barlow, Suzanne Bennett, Julie Bleha, Rachel Brill, Jennifer Brown, Thomas Burka, Sanjay Cherubala, Michael Coleman, Jill Dolan, Lue Douthit, Keller Easterling, Gia Forakis, J. Ellen Gainor, Jayne Atkinson-Gill, Julie Gochman, Lorraine H., Ludovica Villar-Hauser, Darlene Rae Heller, Mari-Lyn Henry, Heide M. Jonassen, Leon Katz, Betty Kronsky, Justine Lambert, Kenneth Levis, Tim Licht, Katt Lissard, League of Professional Theatre Women, Isaac Loftus, Sarah Lyons, Gwynn MacDonald, Susana Meyer, Georgianna Page, John Parks, Laura Riveros, Rachel Routh, What's the Story?, James SoRele, Harriet Slaughter, Simon Trevino, Karen's Workshop, and the many audience members who have added something to the donation pot!

ON HER SHOULDERS

in association with
New Perspectives Theatre Company
and **New School for Drama**
presents

The Years Between

by Daphne du Maurier



Directed by **Mary McGinley**
Dramaturgy by **Susan Jonas**

Monday, November 18, 2013

The New School

Wollman Hall, 65 West 11th Street
New York, NY

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DRAMA



Women have been writing plays and contributing to the Western Theatrical Canon for 1,000 years.

How many of the plays or playwrights can you name?

Total plays by women produced in commercial and regional theatres in the U.S. have remained below 20% for most of the 20th Century and now into the 21st. Yet many of these plays have been the most successful of their time, earning greater awards and box office income than their male counterparts.

At the first reading of this series, Rachel Crothers' *A Man's World*, **ON HER SHOULDERS** surveyed the audience about their knowledge of the play and/or the playwright. Given that our audience is generally composed of theatre practitioners and those with an interest in women in theatre, the numbers were still shocking: only 40% had ever heard of Rachel Crothers; just 21% had read any of her plays, and only 7% had seen a production of one of them.

With a general audience, we can imagine that these numbers would be even worse!



The goal of ON HER SHOULDERS is to remedy this situation. By presenting staged readings of plays from across the spectrum of time and place, with contemporary dramaturges adapting them for modern audiences, we are making it impossible to deny or ignore the great tradition and value of women's contribution to the theatrical canon. Through our reading series we

intend to motivate producers and directors to champion and produce these brilliant plays in New York and regionally, and to incite audiences to demand to see them.

In making history visible, we also shine the light on today's women playwrights and see their work as part of a continuum a thousand years long. They stand on the shoulders of giants—and in restoring our foremothers to their rightful place, we elevate all women playwrights.

The Play in Context, the dramaturgical and scholarly presentation component for all of the readings, is sponsored in part by the League of Professional Theatre Women, a not-for-profit organization promoting visibility and increasing opportunities for women in theatre since 1982. www.theatrewomen.org

LEAGUE OF PROFESSIONAL
THEATRE
WOMEN



ON HER SHOULDERS is also aligned with the goals and projects of 50/50 in 2020: Parity for Women Theatre Artists. This grassroots initiative was launched in August 2009 to work toward 50% representation for women playwrights and directors by the 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in the U.S.

Consider the context. The role of women was defined by “science,” religion and women's magazines as romanticized subservience to men and a biological imperative to motherhood. Then suddenly, with the advent of war, women were needed to quickly replenish the workforce as the men went “Over There.” A massive government public relations effort aimed to convince women that they were both capable of and obligated to work, that it was essential to their men and their nation, but also to their very self-perception as women. Suddenly women flooded into all the workplaces from which they had been prohibited. They were being told they were contributing importantly, that they were patriots, even home-front heroes. No longer were their priorities dirty diapers, meal preparation, house-cleaning and making themselves attractive, in part by projecting helplessness. Then, with the end of the war, they were told to stand aside and allow the returning menfolk their rightful place as breadwinners. Women should again assume the pretty domestic poses that their menfolk saw as emblems of the nation they sought to preserve, not to mention validation of their manhood. (This expectation and sense of betrayal was no less powerful in this country after the Vietnam War.) But how could it have been expected that once women have tasted independence, productivity, and camaraderie, that they would cheerfully put on their aprons and make pies in their ticket-tacky houses?

Unquestionably *The Years Between* is of its time, and deliciously so for those of us who have a particular taste for the trembling lower lip and stiff upper lip of British theatre and film of the *Brief Encounter* ilk—a predilection I share with the director, Mary McGinley, who explains:

The British imports, like *I Know Where I'm Going* and *Brief Encounter* held a special place. These romances did not just tell a love story. They told stories of love against the odds. Though many might be classed as war-time propaganda, they were imbued with a sense of strength necessary to carry on and rise above the situation. They were imbued with a sense of honor, duty and nobility. This had a great impact on me as a young girl and I saw love as something deeper than mere romance.

It is the bulwark theme of Western drama, from Orestes to Hamlet to Biff, “How to be a good man?” What is perhaps most alluring about this play is that it is the moral choice of a woman protagonist that is of utmost consequence, and though those choices have changed over time, the decisions are no less wrenching between work and home, love and honor, happiness and responsibility.

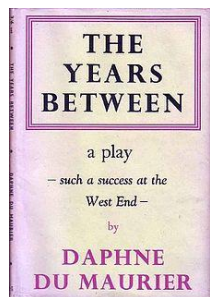
The Years Between is startlingly prescient about the conflicts that would, for coming decades, dominate discussion around gender roles, and though the seeds sown in post-war England bloomed into revolution twenty to thirty years later, can anyone think we are today close to resolving these enduring conflicts? And the painful estrangement of couples separated through war, who must renegotiate their roles—gender-related or not—is no less acute in 2013, nor is the profound sense of betrayal felt by those returning from fighting for a country that has moved on.

We may never know what Daphne du Maurier did in bed. It is much more significant to recognize what she did on paper; she used her own inner conflicts to explore and confront major social conflicts on a wide historical stage.

1. “Daphne’s Terrible Secret,” Michael Thornton *Mail Online* May 2007 ; 2. “Daphne’s Dilemma,” Lynn Barber, *The Independent*, March 14 1993; 3 It seems unlikely that the choice of name— Diana— was coincidental; how apt to choose the goddess of the hunt who was averse to a marriage.; 4. *The Years Between*, Daphne du Maurier

Daphne and Diana: Resisting Roles

by Susan Jonas D.F.A.



Daphne du Maurier's private life has been the object of great speculation and sensationalism, much focused on to what degree, if at all, she acted on her lesbian inclinations, if indeed she had them. Armchair psychology has been applied to her penchant for trousers, her grudging relinquishment of youthful tom-boyhood, and her periodic ambivalence about motherhood—all indicative of resistance to the limitations imposed by gender, not solely sexual preference. The most sensational allegation—that she had an affair with her father's ex-mistress, Gertrude Lawrence, was roundly challenged, both by the failure of the rumored evidential letters to appear, and by Lawrence's own daughter who insisted that while she would have no objection to her mother's alleged bisexuality, in fact the actress was voraciously "heterosexual to the point of nymphomania."¹ Many have asserted that du Maurier went to great lengths to hide her lesbianism, but given that both of du Maurier's sisters were "out" lesbians living openly with their partners, there would have been little shock value. And the product of a theatrical family given to off-stage theatrics, she was scarcely averse to being provocative; at dinner parties she would ask siblings if they had considered incest.

Whatever her sexual inclinations and activities were, we may never know, but we do know she was deeply ambivalent about her role as a wife, mother and writer. She was drawn to solitude and in her letters often remarked that she dreaded the return home to Cornwall of her husband, who was often away at war and later lived in London. Yet despite their largely separate lives, they remained married for 33 years until his death in 1965. She confessed that she found motherhood a strain and left much of the care to her nanny, preferring to eat alone and to spend her evenings working. Yet in a letter to her friend, she faulted herself, saying, "It's people like me who have careers who really have bitched up the old relationship between men and women. Women ought to be soft and gentle and dependent. Disembodied spirits like myself are all wrong."² Of course, despite her self-censuring, she never considered giving up her work.

To her creation, Diana Wentworth,³ she was much more forgiving, offering us a character who is far more attractive than unattractive. When she learns her husband's plane has crashed into the ocean, she is grief-stricken but also admits: "I suddenly realized my life doesn't belong to him anymore; it's mine; I can do what I like with it. And, oh, Richard, that sudden sense of freedom—almost as if the years had rolled away and I was young again..."⁴ Despite her insistence that she lacks all personal ambition, Diana becomes an effective and charismatic politician. And if Diana leaves the care of her home and child to the capable nanny and avuncular neighbor, she does not alienate her audience in so doing. She even finds love—with a man who offers her the kind of support she offered her husband.

Diana is torn between *oikos* and *polis*—domestic and public life, love and duty, nostalgia and a vision of the future, self-interest and responsibility—towards her husband, child, community, country. If du Maurier was struggling to reconcile her own desires and obligations, she was also investigating the role of women in her life and work at a moment when gender was of necessity being rapidly redefined, or perhaps more to the point, repackaged for convenience and economic use at a pivotal moment.

ON HER SHOULDERS

is produced by
Melody Brooks, Andrea Lepcio & Lillian Rodriguez
Season One has been curated by Susan Jonas

The Years Between

by Daphne du Maurier

Directed by **Mary McGinley**
Dramaturgy and Introduction by **Susan Jonas**

CAST
(in order of appearance)

Robin
Nanny
Richard Llewellyn
Diana Wentworth
Sir Ernest Foster
Miss Jamison
Michael Wentworth

William Goldberg
Charmaine Broad
Kristoffer Infante*
Susannah Melone*
Elliot Nesterman
Josephine Cashman*
Gene DeFrancis*

* Member AEA

There will be a brief, 10-minute intermission.
Please join us after the reading for a discussion with the director and dramaturg.

MARY MCGINLEY has been Artistic Director of the Carolinian Shakespeare Festival in NC for the past 15 years. She has worked as a director, dramaturg, performer and administrator at many regional theaters across the country and in the NY area. She is the director of Actors Alternative Studio where she teaches acting, Shakespeare and does private coaching. Mary is a member of the Lincoln Center Theatre Director's Lab and also teaches at Kean University in NJ. She received her M.F.A. in Directing from Mason Gross School of the Arts and her B.A. in Acting from Rutgers University. Besides classics she has worked extensively on new works with such playwrights as John Pielmeier and Bill Mastrosimone. She currently directs *The Garden*, A New Plays Project for New Millennium Theatre Works and leads *Weird Sisters Consortium*, an advocacy group for women working in Shakespeare.

SUSAN JONAS, DFE., held leadership positions as a dramaturg, curator and producer at Classical Theatre of Harlem, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Classic Stage Company and The Acting Company. A Theatre Arts Analyst at the New York State Council on the Arts for a decade, she has also taught at Princeton, Brooklyn College, S.U.N.Y.-Stonybrook, and New York University. Dr. Jonas co-authored the 2002 "Report of the Status of Women in Theater," and co-founded "50/50 in 2020," a grassroots organization committed to achieving parity for women in theatre.

Nothing Like a Dame! by Melody Brooks

Born in London on May 13, 1907, Daphne du Maurier came from a creative and highly successful family. She was the grand-daughter of the cartoonist and writer George du Maurier and daughter of Gerald, the most famous Actor Manager of his day. Gerald's sister was Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, whose five boys inspired JM Barrie's *Peter Pan*; among those who came to watch Daphne and her two sisters' nursery performances of his "terrible masterpiece" was "Uncle Jim" Barrie himself. Each girl got the minimum of formal schooling necessary to prepare them for the "good marriage" none of them in fact wanted.



*"Even among Edwardians, Gerald's sexual hypocrisy was notable. He longed for a son, never got one and made each daughter in turn his victim. And yet, after he died, Daphne— who refused to attend his funeral—quite literally wore his trousers for more than a decade. That seems emblematic. All his daughters were tomboys who invented heroic male alter egos...and only Daphne enjoyed successful long-term relationships with men...."*¹

Du Maurier began writing short stories in 1928; some were published in her great uncle William Comyns Beaumont's *Bystander* magazine. In 1931 her first novel, *The Loving Spirit* was published. It received rave reviews and further books followed. She married Major (later Lieutenant-General) Sir Frederick "Boy" Browning in 1932 and had two daughters and a son. Apparently, he demanded an introduction to Daphne on the strength of having read one of her novels. *"Here was a hero of the first world war, an ideal fantasy-figure. Daphne herself, after 10 weeks, proposed marriage.. he was deeply conventional and unimaginative; she self-willed and essentially a loner. They were strangely matched."*²

Rebecca, inspired by Daphne's discovery that her husband had had a previous lover who committed suicide, is generally regarded as her masterpiece. In the U.S. she won the National Book Award for favorite novel of 1938, voted by members of the American Booksellers Association. It was adapted for stage by du Maurier herself, as well as for the screen on multiple occasions. Several of her other novels also became films, including *Jamaica Inn*, *Frenchman's Creek*, *Hungry Hill*, and *My Cousin Rachel*. The Hitchcock film, *The Birds* (1963), is based on a treatment of one of her short stories, as is the film *Don't Look Now* (1973).



Though literary critics have rebuked du Maurier's writings for their lack of intellectual heft, admirers consider her a first-rate storyteller and mistress of suspense. She was often labeled a "romantic novelist" (a term she despised), though most of her books do not fit neatly into the stereotypical format of a romance novel. They rarely have a happy ending, and her brand of romanticism is often at odds with the sinister overtones and shadows of the paranormal she favored. In this, she has more in common with the "sensation novels" of Wilkie Collins, whom she admired. Sensation novels were precursors to modern detective fiction or suspense novels. Her biographer Margaret Forster wrote: *'She satisfied all the questionable criteria of popular*



fiction, and yet satisfied too the exacting requirements of "real literature".' Her stories read like classic tales of terror and suspense but written with a sure touch for character, imagery and suggestive meaning.

Thirteen forgotten short stories written in the 1920s were published in a new collection in May 2011. They reveal, perhaps better than anything, that du Maurier was way ahead of her time and far from an insipid romance novelist. One of them, *The Doll*, is described as "gothic, suspenseful and macabre". It tells the story of a frustrated romance in which a young man discovers the girl he loves—also called Rebecca—will never accept his advances because she owns a life-size mechanical male doll. Her son, Kit Browning, who still lives in his mother's house, claims he would have liked to have teased her about it. "It's a very dark and disturbing story for someone who was 21 when she wrote it, and from the sort of background that she came from."

Du Maurier wrote only three plays. Her first was a successful adaptation of *Rebecca*, which opened at the Queen's Theatre in London on 5 March 1940, ultimately running for 357 performances after a transfer to the Strand. Her second play, *The Years Between* opened in January 1945, five months before VE Day, and ran for 617 performances. A film version was made in 1946 starring Michael Redgrave. Better known is her third play, *September Tide*, about a middle-aged woman whose artist son-in-law falls for her. It opened at the Aldwych on December 15, 1948 with Gertrude Lawrence in the lead, running for 267 performances and closing in early August 1949. It led to a close but ambiguous relationship with Lawrence.



In correspondence released to Forster by her family after Daphne's death, du Maurier explained to a trusted few her own unique slant on her sexuality: her personality, she explained, comprised two distinct people—the loving wife and mother (the side she showed to the world) and the lover (a decidedly male energy) hidden to virtually everyone and the power behind her artistic creativity. According to the biography, du Maurier believed the male energy fuelled her creative life as a writer.

Du Maurier was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1969. She accepted by never used the title. Lady Browning; Dame Daphne du Maurier DBE, died at the age of 81 on April 19, 1989, at her home in Cornwall, in a region which had been the setting for many of her books. In accordance with her wishes, her body was cremated and her ashes were scattered on the cliffs near her home.



1. (Peter J. Conradi, reviewing *Daphne du Maurier and her Sisters: The Hidden Lives of Piffy, Bird and Bing*, by Jane Dunn, *Financial Times*, 3/1/13). 2. Ibid