

UPCOMING READINGS 2013-14 SEASON

Date	Play	Playwright	Director
Oct 21	<i>Les Blancs</i> (1970)	Lorraine Hansberry	Pat Golden
Nov. 18	<i>The Years Between</i> (1944)	Daphne DuMaurier	Abigail Zealey Ensemble Studio Theatre
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			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 via PayPal at OHS website. All donations are tax-deductible to extent allowed by law.

onhershoulders.weebly.com

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

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ON HER SHOULDERS
in association with
New Perspectives Theatre Company
and
the New School for Drama
presents



Directed by **Ludovica Villar-Hauser**
Dramaturgy by **Elizabeth Whitney**
Assistant to the Director: **Teresa Lotz**
Monday, September 16, 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.

The parallel structure of the language is what makes them seem to operate like a well oiled machine. However, immediately following this exchange, a dynamic of alienation enters:

HELEN: When you start earning you can start moaning.

JO: Can't be soon enough for me... I'm cold and my shoes let water...What a place...And we're supposed to be living off of her immoral earnings.

Jo's reference to Helen in the third person is an important aside to her audience that establishes her independence, as at the end of the play when Helen breaks the fourth wall and directly addresses the audience, asking, "What would you do?" This self-awareness was a radical position for female characters, and part of what shocked so many theatre audiences. To see women onstage with agency that was not only self-reflective, but comically biting, was quite unlike other contemporary playwrights from the "angry young man" genre whose work, while in some ways addressing domestic issues, was always from a masculinist perspective.

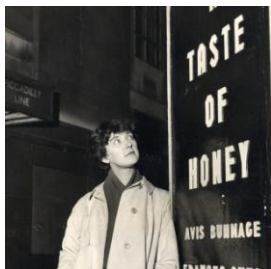
Helen and Jo's relationship is only one aspect of the unique and progressive work that *A Taste of Honey* was for its time. Jo's romantic involvement with a black sailor on leave, while intended to progressively address interracial relationships, is not without its complications. His character, for example, has no name until near the end of the play. He is simply, "The Boy," which both erases him as an individual and emasculates his status as an adult man. He is also exoticized as 'a prince from darkest Africa,' which may be Jo's idea of humor, though still speaks to limited understandings of the African diaspora in Great Britain. Finally, "The Boy" seems to have internalized himself as part of the white imagination, saying to Jo, "Let me be Othello and you my Desdemona," which is hardly a generous reading of his character. It's a tough argument to make that this is a move toward political commentary, and remains to be understood as Delaney's well-intentioned but problematic attempt to progressively represent race onstage.

Geof, on the other hand, is more of a success for Delaney in terms of resisting cultural clichés--and likely this was more easily accomplished as whiteness was already part of her world view. An openly gay man--although that appears to be due more to others' assumptions than his admissions--he and Jo settle into their own domestic play, keeping house together and preparing for the birth of her child. Geof's very presence as a likeable character who attempts to care for Jo and expresses parental desire speaks against stereotypes, despite being referred to as 'nursemaid' and 'organ grinder's monkey' by Helen, and 'Mary' and 'cuddles' by Peter.

Peter, Helen's alcoholic husband, is no more than an annoying necessity. He is required for financial assistance, and to a certain extent, catered to, although mostly he is an absence in this script, only noticed when he intrudes into the domestic space. Perhaps most importantly, Peter--in a way that is unique to his subject position as a heterosexual, white, middle-class male--functions in this piece as "other."

A Taste of Honey was a groundbreaking upstart that continues to surprise theatrical audiences. Delaney puts social class, racial identity, and sexuality in conversation with one another on stage with daring and forthright intention, and for that, we owe her a debt of gratitude.

A Taste of Honey: Kitchen Sink Patter That Dared
by Elizabeth Whitney



Shelagh Delaney was inspired to write *A Taste of Honey* at age 18 after a trip to Manchester to see Terrence Rattigan's *Variation on a Theme*. Delaney was bored and somewhat put-off by Rattigan's covert representation of homosexuality in the piece, and determined that she could do better. And she did--writing *A Taste of Honey* in just two weeks. It was first produced at the Theatre Royal Stratford East (1958), in an iconic production directed by Joan Littlewood that featured live jazz musicians, and later went on to Wyndam's Theatre in the West End (1959), and the Lyceum and Booth Theatres on Broadway in (1960).

A young, working-class woman with no formal training as a playwright, she turned to her rich surroundings in her home of Salford, Lancashire, England and the inherent musicality of the language she knew best to create a seminal piece of theatre. Delaney's work is located at the intersection of Kitchen Sink Drama and Music Hall Style. Kitchen Sink Dramas were part of a new wave of British theatre that addressed issues of social class using mundane settings and domestic issues, and Delaney's contemporaries included "angry young men" John Osborne, known best for *Look Back in Anger* (1956), and Arnold Wesker, who wrote *The Kitchen* (1950). Like *A Taste of Honey*, both of the aforementioned pieces were also made into films and entered into British popular culture as representative resistance to prior tokenizing, upper class depictions of working class culture.

Music Hall Style drew from a kind of vaudevillian low brow comedy and was marked by quick patter, evoking the spirit of a cabaret with multiple acts including jugglers, comedians, singers, and acrobats--for example, Delaney's staging includes characters dancing between scenes. We need look no further than the relationship between Helen and Jo to understand Music Hall Style. Helen is a woman who relies on her "fancy men" for financial subsistence, and eschews traditional motherhood, much as her daughter, Jo does later on in the play. Jo's disdain for her mother is palpable, surfacing in their tense interactions, but also manifesting in more complex ways, such as when she refers to pregnancy as cannibalistic, and later says, "I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman." Jo struggles against the limited conditions of her life--wanting something different yet without the means to attain it. Delaney skillfully uses the tensions between Jo and Helen to create an almost comedic relationship, as they alternate playing the "straight man." The stage directions indicate that the play opens with jazz music. As the characters enter, the patter begins immediately, and the mother and daughter team operate as a comedy duo, throwing dialogue at each other in quick response:

HELEN: Well! This is the place.

JO: And I don't like it.

HELEN: When I find some place for us to live I have to consider something far more important than your feelings...the rent. It's all I can afford.

JO: You can afford something better than this old ruin.

ON HER SHOULDERS

is produced by

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

The Play In Context

Introduction by
Elizabeth Whitney

A Taste of Honey

by Shelagh Delaney

Directed by **Ludovica Villar-Hauser**
Dramaturgy by **Elizabeth Whitney**
Assistant to the Director: **Teresa Lotz**
Jazz Pianist, **Anna Dagmar**

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Anna Dagmar -
Jenny D. Green
Aimee Whelan
Stuart Williams
Alan Tyson
Jason Linforth

Stage Directions
Helen
Josephine
Peter
The Boy
Geoffrey

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

LUDOVICA VILLAR-HAUSER (*Director*): Highlights include: Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* in London's West End; 3 productions at The Edinburgh Fringe Festival; the premiere of Gregory Murphy's *The Countess*, which ran Off-Broadway for 634 performances and in the West End; Rona Munro's *Bold Girls* at the 29th St. Rep.; the premiere of *Duet* by Otho Eskin, a new play about Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse; the North American premiere of *Leaves of Glass* by Philip Ridley and as part of Origin's First Irish Festival, Derek Murphy's *A Short Wake*; *As It Is In Heaven* by Arlene Hutton, produced by 3 Graces Theater Co at The Cherry Lane Theatre. For The American Academy of Dramatic Arts, *Enchanted April* by Matthew Barber, from the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim (2010 Company) and *The Heidi Chronicles* by Wendy Wasserstein (2012 Company).

ELIZABETH WHITNEY (*Dramaturg*) is an interdisciplinary artist/scholar who has toured extensively with solo and collaborative performance work. She holds a Ph.D. in Performance Studies and Communication, and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech, Communications, & Theatre Arts at Borough of Manhattan Community College in the City University of New York. She is currently developing a performative lecture on queer madness and failure in the life of abolitionist, lyceum speaker, and playwright Anna Elizabeth Dickinson. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild.
www.elizabethjwhitney.com.

Shelagh Delaney: A Lighthouse for Women Playwrights

by Elizabeth Whitney



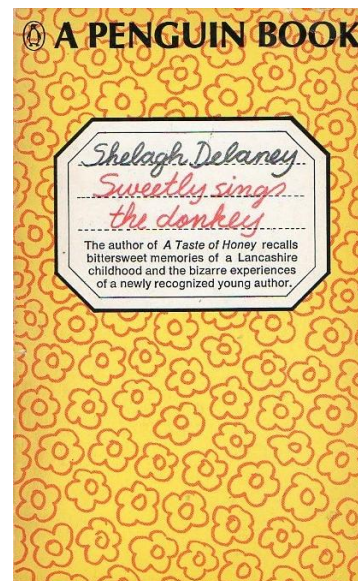
Shelagh Delaney (1938-2011) was born in Salford, Lancashire, England, a working-class, industrial setting that inspired her to write her first and most notable play, *A Taste of Honey*. Delaney's father was a bus inspector and her mother was--like many women in their world--a mother. While Delaney lived much of her later life

in London, she remained emotionally attached to her roots in Salford. In his 1966 essay, "A Taste of Honey and the Popular Play," Arthur K. Oberg notes that "One of the first things an audience notices about *A Taste of Honey* is the quickness and naturalness of the pace." Ostensibly, Oberg is referring to the colloquial, linguistic style of the piece, so famously derived from Shelagh Delaney's life experience growing up in Salford. However, this is a particularly intriguing comment in light of the fact that Delaney was only eighteen years old when she wrote *A Taste of Honey*, and we might surmise that she, like the environs which inspired her, was "a natural."

While her youthful promise received support from many--especially Joan Littlewood, who is credited with being a strong mentor in her early career during production of *A Taste of Honey*--she was also disdained or held in suspicion by many, including some from her hometown of Salford, who felt that her representation of them was less than favorable. It could be that her self-possessed and direct personality was surprising--in --in early television interviews, she does seem mature beyond her years.



Jeanette Wintersen writes that Delaney was, "like a lighthouse, pointing the way and warning about the rocks underneath." Wintersen's essay, titled, "My hero, Shelagh Delaney," argues that Delaney's early success unfairly eclipsed her later accomplishments. Given that her prolific career also included a series of television, film, and radio productions, a collection of short stories, and numerous awards, it hardly seems fair to write her off as a "one hit wonder." As Wintersen suggests, Delaney did pave the way for so many other working-class female playwrights, contributing a strong and much needed voice during the British Kitchen Sink Drama and New Wave eras.



dramatized for a BBC radio series.

Delaney's positive representations of gays and working-class culture have influenced many artists, most notably The Smiths. Lead singer Morrissey has stated, "I've never made any secret of the fact that at least 50 per cent of my reason for writing can be blamed on Shelagh Delaney." Her photo was featured on the cover of their 1987 album, *Louder than Bombs*, and direct quotes from her plays are found in many of their songs.



Curiously, little has been written about her life, and her public appearances and interviews were scarce in her later years, possibly of her own volition. We know that she was survived by a daughter and three grandchildren. She never married. She died from breast cancer at 72, in 2011.