

UPCOMING READINGS 2013-14 SEASON

Date	Play	Playwright	Director
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	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



Directed by **Pat Golden**
Dramaturgy by **Andrea Lepcio**
Guest Speaker: **Michael Dinwiddie**
Associate Producer: **Sandra A. Daley-Sharif**

Monday, October 21, 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.



Les Blancs was the first major work by a black American playwright to criticize colonialism and address the African liberation struggle, while openly questioning whether or not freedom could be won without violence. To do so, Hansberry created complex, diverse characters representing multiple aspects of White and Black experience. She opens in a scene at the crude Mission hospital introducing us to doctors doing their best under the leadership of an absent Reverend. The Reverend, his wife and doctors have committed their lives to helping the people of the imaginary country of Zatembe (believed to be a stand in for Kenya), but have purposefully chosen to keep the means of that help rudimentary, relative to the more sophisticated care available in nearby hospitals for Whites. The character of the Reverend, who never appears, was modeled, according to Steven Carter (University of Puerto Rico), on Albert Schweitzer. The colonizers are represented by Major Rice, a man who was raised in Africa and now fights to defend the colonizers' rights. Hansberry also introduces the character of the outside observer in the form of an American reporter who has come to write about the Mission.

Hansberry then takes us to a nearby hut where we meet three brothers, all African, but each touched by European influence. Tshembe is a world traveler now living in London with his European wife and son. Abioseh has never left his country, but has become a Catholic Priest. Eric was born from the rape of his mother by a White man whose identity is concealed until near the climax of the play.

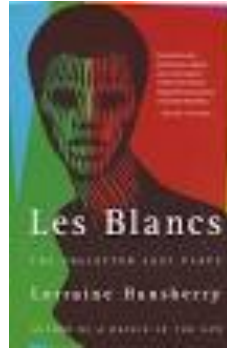
As mentioned above, Hansberry blends European tradition and African folklore to heighten the contrast between European and African culture and to highlight commonalities. When the radical Peter tells Tshembe a folklore about a laughing hyena, Tshembe replies, "*The Europeans have a similar tale which concerns a Danish prince.*" A careful observer would have already noted connections between Tshembe and Hamlet. According to Carter, "both Hamlet and Hansberry's Tshembe Matoseh return from abroad for their father's funerals and both are confronted by spirits who demand that they act quickly to rid their countries of grave injustices." Like Shakespeare, Hansberry blends realism with nonrealism creating a non-speaking female warrior character to visit Tshembe and remind him of his father's values. Both Tshembe and Hamlet take time to determine what they should do. In both plays, the guilty and the innocent die.

Hansberry allows the Black and White characters to make discoveries as tensions mount and violence fractures their world. Each must take a stand. Each is changed forever. *Les Blancs* is a deep, insightful work that merits our attention today. It is the work of a brilliant, gifted dramatist at the height of her powers.

The Quest for Freedom in Hansberry's *Les Blancs*

by Andrea Lepcio

Les Blancs is an astonishing act of the imagination. Lorraine Hansberry never visited Africa, yet she marries all she studied and dreamed about Africa's landscape, culture, folklore and fight for freedom with her knowledge of European culture, stories and history of colonization to create a provocative drama. It is difficult to write a short essay on this profound play which can and has generated numerous studies and essays.



Hansberry began the play in 1960 just after *Raisin in the Sun* was produced. She had been thinking about and making notes on what would become the script, but reportedly was really spurred to write it after seeing the 1961 U.S. production of Jean Genet's *Les Negres* with James Earl Jones who would go on to play Tshembe, the main character in *Les Blancs*. According to Joy Abell (Lewis-Clark State College), Hansberry felt *Les Negres* was a conversation between White men about themselves. She was critical of Genet's assessment that Blacks would be as corrupt as Whites if they attained power. Abell reports she expressed to Robert Nemiroff (her ex-husband and producing partner) a desire to write a play "in which people of all ethnicities were equal participants in a much needed dialogue." *Les Blancs* is most certainly that play.

Unfortunately, Hansberry fell ill while writing the play. She managed, remarkably, to rehearse and open *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* on Broadway and work on *Les Blancs* while undergoing treatment, literally carrying a typewriter and her notes in and out of hospitals. She wrote "If anything should happen-before 'tis done-may I trust that all commas and periods will be placed and someone will complete my thoughts...This last should be the least difficult since there are so many who think as I do."



After she passed away in 1965, Nemiroff, her literary executor, worked to keep her writing alive and to complete *Les Blancs* as he described it "along the lines we had explored together." He credits numerous people with helping him bring it to production in 1970, directed by John Berry with James Earl Jones and Earl Hyman among the actors. It was subsequently presented off-Broadway in 1980, at Arena Stage in 1988 and Huntington in 1989. The script **On Her Shoulders** is presenting was revised for a production at Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 1998. A 2003 production was done at the University of Wisconsin, with Lorraine Hansberry Visiting Professor Tim Bond directing. But it remains largely unproduced in the modern theatre.

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 Michael Dinwiddie

Les Blancs

by Lorraine Hansberry

Directed by Pat Golden
Dramaturgy by Andrea Lepcio

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Sandra Maren Schneider
Chrystal Stone*
Bernard Tarver*
Harold Surratt*
Chris Wight
Tomike Ogugua
Oliver Conant
Joris Stuyck*
Asta Hansen*
Ashton Williams
Tim Cain*
Brian Coats*

Drummer
Dr. Marta Gotterling
Villager/Child/Soldier Stage Directions
Villager/Child/Soldier Stage Directions
Peter
Charlie Porter
Ngago
Dr. Willy DeKoven
Maj. George Rice
Mme. Neilson
Eric
Tshembe Matoseh
Abioseh Matoseh

There will be a brief, 10-minute intermission.

Please join us after the reading for a discussion with the director and dramaturg.

PAT GOLDEN: Off-Broadway/Regional credits include *EST*, *INTAR*, *Subjective*, *Amherst College*, *NYU*, *NPTC*, *St. Peter's*, *Perry Street*, *NYSF/Public*, *New Dramatists*, *Tank*, *South Oakland Arts Council*; *Cherry Lane*; Asst. Director on Emily Mann's Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*; SDC Director Observer under Mann at McCarter on *The Convert* by Danaï Gurira; Asst. to director Volker Schlöndorff, for Opéra-Comique's *From the House of the Dead* by Leoš Janáček in Paris. As a member of *NewShoe Theatre Group*, dedicated to fostering collaboration between women playwrights and directors, Golden is currently writing a contemporary adaptation of English playwright Elizabeth Inchbald's 1798 play *Lover's Vows*, set in present day Cape Cod. She is a member of Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence (*HPLR*) at INTAR Theatre; Harlem Arts Alliance/Columbia University Writing Fellow; NYU/INTAR Collaboration under Eduardo Machado; EST; Lincoln Center Directors Lab; SDC

ANDREA LEPCIO'S *Looking for the Pony* was presented in a "Rolling World Premiere" Off-Broadway at Vital Theatre Company in New York and Synchronicity Performance Group in Atlanta and subsequent productions. Plays and musicals under development include *Tunnel Vision*, *Me You Us Them*, *Dinner at Home between Deaths*, *Strait of Gibraltar*, *Central Avenue Breakdown*, *Room 16*, *Lf&Tms* and *Ballad of Rom and Julz*. Andrea is the Dramatists Guild Fellows Program Director. M.F.A. in Dramatic Writing, Carnegie Mellon University. B.A. Human Ecology, College of the Atlantic. Andrea lives in Harlem, New York and Seal Cove, Maine.

TITLE
by Andrea Lepcio



"I was born black and female", said Lorraine Hansberry the youngest American playwright, the fifth woman, and the only black writer to ever win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for "Best Play of the Year". Speaking to the winners of a United Negro College Fund writing contest she continued, "I say all of this to say that one cannot live with sighted eyes and feeling heart and not know and react to the miseries which afflict this world." She would spend her all too brief life writing--plays, essays, articles, poetry--in reaction to what she saw and how she felt about it.

Lorraine Hansberry was born and raised in Chicago where her father fought all the way to the Supreme Court to defend his purchase of a home in a white neighborhood--which would inspire her first and most well-known play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. She attended the University of Wisconsin for two years, growing in political activism before moving to New York in 1950 to become a reporter for Paul Robeson's newspaper, *Freedom* and then Associate Editor. In that capacity she attended the Intercontinental Peace Congress in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1952, when Robeson was denied a passport to attend. She also took classes on Africa with W. E.B. Dubois.



She met Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish publisher, songwriter and political activist on a picket line, and they were married in 1953, spending the night before their wedding protesting the execution of the Rosenbergs. Moving with her husband to Croton-on-Hudson, Lorraine Hansberry continued not only her writing but also her involvement with civil rights and other political protest.

As she began to write plays, Hansberry recalled that she had seen a rehearsal of Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* in college, about which she would later write, "One of the sound ideas of dramatic writing is that in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific." Her plays certainly reflect this point of view. She did not believe in art for art's sake and believed that all plays make a social statement.

A Raisin in the Sun was completed in 1957 and debuted in 1959, the first play by an African-American woman on Broadway. She was only 29 years old. After the success of the play (and subsequent film version) Hansberry was commissioned to write a television drama on slavery, which she completed as *The Drinking Gourd*, but it was



not produced. NBC executives apparently didn't support the idea of a black screenwriter writing about slavery.

Her marriage lasted only six years but the working relationship continued; Hansberry subsequently dated both men and women and joined the lesbian-feminist organization Daughters of Bilitis. She wrote letters to the editor using only her initials explaining "... homosexual persecution and condemnation has at its roots not only social ignorance, but a philosophically active anti-feminist dogma."

During her lifetime many of her essays and articles were published. In 1964, *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality* was published for SNCC (Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) with text by Hansberry. Her only other play to receive a Broadway production while she was alive was *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, which played for 101 performances and closed the night she died. She had become ill with pancreatic cancer and as she was writing *Les Blancs* and was writing *Les Blancs*, James Baldwin, referring to her clear-eyed view of the world and its troubles wrote, "it is not at all farfetched to suspect that what she saw contributed to the strain which killed her, for the effort to which Lorraine was dedicated is more than enough to kill a man."



Her ex-husband, Robert Nemiroff, became the executor for several unfinished manuscripts. He added minor changes to complete the play *Les Blancs*, which Julius Lester (New School/U Mass at Amherst/WBAI) termed her best work, and he adapted many of her writings into the play *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, which was the longest-running Off Broadway play of the 1968-1969 season. It appeared in book form the following year under the title, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words*. At Lorraine's funeral, a message from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. predicted "...her creative ability and her profound grasp of the deep social issues confronting the world today will remain an inspiration to generations yet unborn." That promise is still being fulfilled today.