

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.**

FOR THE 2014-15 Series, we are again asking friends and colleagues to **send a check or visit PayPal to make a more substantial donation that will allow us to continue this vital work!** Checks should be made payable to New Perspectives Theatre Company noting OHS as the beneficiary, and mailed to: New Perspectives Theatre Company, 456 West 37th Street, New York, NY 10018.

Credit Card donations may be made at
<http://www.nptnyc.org/programs/ONHERSHOULDERS.htm>

THE 2014-15 SERIES

DATE	PLAY	AUTHOR	DIRECTOR	DRAMATURG
10/1/14	<i>The Office</i> (1966)	Maria Irene Fornes	Alice Reagan	Morgan Jenness
12/17/14	<i>Chicago</i> (1926)	Maurine Dallas Watkins	Melody Brooks	Mari Lyn Henry
2/18/15	The Suffrage Plays	various	Melissa Attebery	Barbara Cohen-Stratynner, Ph. D.
4/15/15	TBD	Zora Neale Hurston	Melissa Maxwell	TBD
6/17/15	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

About the New School for Drama

The creative home for the future of performing arts. **Agile. Engaged. Innovative. Multi-disciplinary.** The New School for Drama is home to a dynamic group of young directors, writers, actors, creative technologists, and award-winning faculty. With a core belief in rigorous creativity and collaborative learning, our programs embrace civic awareness across performance disciplines to create work imbued with professionalism, imagination and social context. For more information, please visit www.newschool.edu/drama

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
 New Perspectives Theatre Company
 and The New School for Drama
 present

CHICAGO

by Maurine Dallas Watkins



Directed by **Melody Brooks**
 Dramaturgy by **Mari Lyn Henry**
 Assistant Director, **Katie McHugh**

Wednesday, December 17, 2014
The New School
 Wollman Hall, 65 West 11th Street
 New York, New York



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 **ON HER SHOULDERS** in May 2013, we 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.



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.

NEW PERSPECTIVES THEATRE COMPANY (NPTC) is an award-winning, multi-racial company performing in the Theatre District and in communities throughout New York City. Our mission is to develop and produce new plays and playwrights, especially women and people of color, to present classic plays in a style that addresses contemporary issues, and to extend the benefits of theatre to young people and communities in need. **Our aim is not to exclude, but to cast a wider net.** **Now in its 23rd season**, notable NPTC productions have included *Richard III*, starring Austin Pendleton; *Exhibit #9* by Tracy Scott Wilson (1999 **Audelco Award**); *Jihad* by Ann Chamberlain (**OOBR Award for Best Production**); *The Taming of the Shrew* (**OOBR Award for Best Production**), *Admissions* by Tony Velella (**10 Best Plays Backstage**); the U.S. premiere of *Visit* by renowned Argentinean playwright Ricardo Monti; and the New York Premieres of Vaclav Havel's *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration*, OBIE-Winner Stephanie Berry's *The Shineequa Chronicles* (produced with Blackberry Productions), *Lemon Meringue Façade* by Ted Lange, and *MOTHER OF GOD!* by Michele Miller (Finalist, Princess Grace Foundation Award). www.nptnyc.org



Within a year, *Chicago* was produced as a silent film, supervised by Cecil B. DeMille. It was also the basis for a 1942 film adaptation *Roxie Hart*, starring Ginger Rogers. After it closed on Broadway, it toured for two years with a then unknown Clark Gable appearing in a Los Angeles production as Albert Annan (Amos Hart).

Following *Chicago's* success, Broadway producers pursued Watkins for new works but those plans didn't materialize. She adapted Samuel Hopkins Adams' book *Revelry*, about the Teapot Dome scandal that tainted the presidency of Warren G. Harding, into a stage play called *Revelry*. She lampooned the ethically-challenged administration of an incompetent, poker-playing and liquor-swilling president. The play touched a raw nerve; *Revelry's*

pre-Broadway, out-of-town run was forced to close down in Philadelphia on the charge of being "inimical to the interest of the United States Government" and its Broadway run ended after 48 performances in the 1927-28 season.

She continued to write short stories and other plays including *Gesture*, *Tinsel Girl*, *So Help Me God* (which did not premiere until 2009 at the Mint Theater in NYC) and *The Devil's Diary*. Watkins went west to write screenplays including the 1936 Oscar-nominated comedy *Libeled Lady* with William Powell, Myrna Loy, Jean Harlow and Spencer Tracy as well as the screenplay that would be Humphrey Bogart's film acting debut, Fox's *Up the River* (1930) directed by John Ford. She also won acclaim for her screwball comedy, RKO's *Professional Sweetheart* (1933) starring Ginger Rogers.



Up the River; October 12, 1930

Watkins faded into obscurity in the 1940s. She moved to Florida, became a born-again Christian and left her fortune of over \$2.3 million to found contests and endow Chairs in classical and biblical Greek at a number of universities. Before her death in 1969, she was approached by Bob Fosse who sought the rights to *Chicago* for a musical adaptation but she resisted his offers. There is some speculation that her refusal was influenced by her belief that she helped two murderesses get acquitted. After Watkins' death her estate sold him the rights, leading to the development of *Chicago: A Musical Vaudeville* with a score by Kander and Ebb, first produced in 1975 and still running today.



MAURINE DALLAS WATKINS: *Brave Little Woman*

by Mari Lyn Henry



Maurine Dallas Watkins (1896-1969) was born in Louisville, Kentucky and began writing as a young girl—producing plays, founding her high school newspaper, and writing short stories. The only child of a Protestant minister, she attended several colleges before landing at Radcliffe where she pursued but did not complete a doctoral degree in the classics. She applied and was accepted into English Professor George Pierce Baker's playwriting workshop at Harvard University. Baker encouraged students to seek experience in the larger world and may have recommended newspaper reporting.

Watkins moved to Chicago in early 1924 and landed a job with the *Chicago Tribune* as a crime reporter. She remained at the paper for seven months covering the murder trials of Belva Gaertner and Beulah Annan. Her articles focused on the farcical, cynical, and sensational aspects of the two cases, the press and public interest, and the legal proceedings—two attractive “jazz babies” claiming to be corrupted by men and liquor. She characterized Beulah as the “beauty of the cell block” and Belva as “most stylish of Murderess Row.” Although both women were found not guilty, Watkins was convinced they were. In her reporting, Watkins had cleverly twinned the two murders together. Under a picture of the pair of the accused murderesses captioned “Killers of Men,” she wrote that “as yet the two have not talked over their common interests. A man, a woman, liquor and a gun.”

She subsequently returned to school to study again under Baker who had moved to Yale. As a class assignment in his famous 47 Workshop course, she wrote a thinly fictionalized account of the two murders, calling it first *The Brave Little Woman*, then *Chicago, or Play Ball* and finally *Chicago*. Beulah became Roxie Hart; Belva Gaertner, Velma Kelly, Albert Annan, Amos Hart and the two lawyers William Scott Stewart and W. W. O'Brien, were combined in a composite character, Billy Flynn.

Professor Baker sent her play (which received an A in his class) to producer Sam Harris in New York, a former business partner of George M. Cohan. Harris, in turn, hired George Abbott to direct *Chicago* on Broadway where it ran for 172 performances during the 1926-27 season and was named as one of the Top Ten plays by leading critic Burns Mantle. On December 31, 1926, Brooks Atkinson, theatre critic for the *New York Times* commented: “*When Roxie Hart, the chief strumpet of this comedy, faces the police and the District Attorney after the murder, she naturally fears the worst. Miss Watkins has striven to show by the method of satire, why no beautiful woman need quail before justice.*” In his preface to the only published edition of the play, eminent critic George Jean Nathan believed that in spite of a few unavoidable defects “*her play is an eminently worth-while affair, its roots in verity, its surface polished with observation and humorous comprehension, its whole witty, wise and appropriately mordant. It is American to the core; there is not a trace of imitativeness in it; and it discloses, unless I am badly mistaken, a talent that will go a considerable distance in the drama of the land.*”



ON HER SHOULDERS

presents

CHICAGO

by Maurine Dallas Watkins

Directed by **Melody Brooks**

Dramaturgy by **Mari Lyn Henry**

Assistant Director **Katie McHugh**

CAST

(in order of speaking)

Sergeant/Flynn
Amos
Jake
Harrison/Photographer
Roxie Hart
Mrs. Morton/Judge
Babe/Velma
Liz
Mary Sunshine
Maggie/Kitty

Stephen Girasuolo*
Mackenzie Knapp†
Arisael Rivera†
Federico Trigo*†
Lauren Salvo†
Richarda Abrams*
Aurea Tomaski†
Joyce Sylvester*
Anne Fizzard*
Alexandra Gellner†

* Member AEA †New School Alum

Please join us after the reading for a Play in Context discussion and a glass of wine

MELODY BROOKS (*Director*) is the founder and Artistic Director of New Perspectives where she directs the Women's Work LAB, developing short and full-length plays by 6-10 members per year. She also serves as Executive Producer for NPTC's *Voices From the Edge Festival*, which has showcased more than 75 new works by African-American writers and performers since 1998. In 25 years, Melody has developed, directed and produced more than 150 original and classic plays in locations ranging from large professional venues to city parks and schools in all boroughs. She is a co-founder of 50/50 in 2020: Parity for Women Theatre Artists, a grassroots initiative named by nytheatre.com as a 2009 Person of the Year, and a member of the League of Professional Theatre Women, serving on the Heritage and International Committees.

MARI LYN HENRY (*Dramaturg*) is the founder of The Society For The Preservation of Theatrical History which brings together historical scholarship on the people, circumstances and societal forces that shaped the modern era. She holds a Master's Degree in Theatre History from Catholic University; her published thesis concerned the development and significance of the dramatic sketch and playlet in American vaudeville, 1893-1925. She is the co-author of five editions of *How To Be A Working Actor* which for over 25 years has been considered the ‘bible of the biz’ and she conducts workshops on audition technique, script analysis and impression management at a number of conservatory programs nationally and abroad. Mari Lyn is on the Board of the League of Professional Theatre Woman, and founder and chair of the Heritage Committee.

KATIE MCHUGH (*Asst. Director*) is a New York based director, teacher and producer of theatre and film with an MFA in directing from The New School for Drama. She is the Founding Director of the Southeastern Teen Shakespeare Company, Co-Founder of the Teen Shakespeare Conservatory NYC, Co-Artistic Director of Les Exportables, and Artistic Director of the Audition Prep Intensive, NYC. She is currently producing and directing a new play with her company for the Fringe Festival San Miguel de Allende, premiere February 2015. Other projects include: Co-producer of the Playwright's Gallery reading series 2014-2015 and Co-producer of *Stage Struck: From Kemble to Kate* performed at the New England Theatre Conference 2014. Katie is an associate member of the League of Professional Theatre Women.

A CULTURE OF CORRUPTION, INFLUENCE, PROHIBITION

by Mari Lyn Henry

The Roaring Twenties changed Chicago's nickname from 'windy' to 'wicked'. Bathtub gin flowed, bootlegging was a big business, speakeasies were plentiful, the crime bosses under Al Capone oversaw the acquisition of protection fees from small businesses and all liquor distribution. And in the Governor's mansion, Lennington Small, the 26th governor between 1921-1929, was indicted for embezzling \$600,000 and running a money laundering scheme when he was State Treasurer. Ironically, he was acquitted but eight jurors got state jobs!

William Hale Thompson, mayor of Chicago from 1915-1923 and then from 1927-1931, was defeated in 1924 by William Emmett Dever. When he ran again in 1927 during a city wide gang war, he held a debate between himself and two live rats he used to portray his opponents. The *Chicago Tribune*, after his final defeat in 1931, wrote that he had "*meant filth, corruption, obscenity and bankruptcy for Chicago. He had given the city an international reputation for moronic buffoonery, barbaric crime, triumphant hoodlumism, unchecked graft, and a dejected citizenship...he made Chicago a byword for the collapse of American civilization.*"

But it was also an era when women had won the right to vote and could drive an automobile, lose their corsets and assert their independence from Victorian morality. The flapper could bob her hair or get the marcel wave, a styling technique using hot curling tongs a la Josephine Baker. She could apply rouge and nail polish, powder from a compact, lipstick from a metal container. Bee stung lips and blush were in vogue. Dark eyes, rimmed in Kohl, were the style. And then there was the popular Black Narcissus perfume created by Caron founder Ernest Daltroff in 1911. Dubbed 'the Film Noir perfume', it expressed a beautiful and dangerous femme fatale, only in it for herself, even though she dresses to 'lure you in'.



The dresses were straight and loose in luxe or lightweight fabrics, leaving bare arms and dropping the waistline to the hips. Skirts rose to just below the knee and some ladies applied rouge to their knees. High heels of two to three inches came into vogue. Large breasts were considered unsophisticated, so women would bind their breasts to achieve the *look*. Silk or rayon stockings were held up by garters.

A short skirt and bobbed hair were considered symbols of emancipation which included premarital sex, birth control, drinking and smoking excessively. Silent screen stars like Louise Brooks and Clara Bow were the poster girls for the flapper. Ann Pennington, the darling with the dimpled knees, was an extremely popular vaudeville star in *The Ziegfeld Follies* and *George White's Scandals* in the 1910s and 1920s. She was renowned for her variation of dancing the Black Bottom and her interpretation of the Charleston.

In 1924, there were eight daily newspapers which covered the scene in Chicago. Over 100 reporters vied for assignments especially when a crime of passion was involved. Robert R. McCormick, the conservative publisher of the *Tribune*, dominated Chicago's morning field and



the midwest. Maurine Dallas Watkins was hired to report on major crimes from a woman's perspective. Women were not allowed on juries in the United States at that time. But if you were a pretty woman who wore the appropriate attire and looked remorseful, you were probably not going to hang. Watkins cut her teeth on the Leopold and Loeb Case of 1924 also known as the crime of the century, when the teenaged son of an affluent Jewish family was kidnapped, held for ransom, and murdered, his body found in a culvert near Wolf Lake.

Two murder cases that went viral occurred one month apart. Belva Gaertner, a three-time divorced cabaret singer who used Belle Brown as her professional name, shot and killed her lover Walter Law, a married man with one child on March 11, 1924. He was found sprawled in the front seat of her car with a bottle of gin and a gun lying beside him. She pled amnesia, confessed she was drunk and was driving with him...and that she carried a gun for fear of robbers. After her acquittal, she told Ms. Watkins: "*No woman can love a man enough to kill him. They aren't worth it, because there are always plenty more. Walter was just a kid. Why should I have worried whether he loved me or left me? Gin and guns—either one is bad enough but together they get you in a dickens of a mess, don't they?*"



Beulah Annan shot her lover Harry Kalstedt in the back on April 3, 1924. She sat in the bedroom she shared with her husband drinking and listening to the lyrics of *Hula Lou* on her Victrola—"*I'm a gal that can't be true. I do my dancin' in the evenin' breeze, 'neath the trees I got more sweeties than a dog has fleas*" for at least two hours before she called her husband to tell him about the crime.

There were other women in the Cook County Jail that year and Watkins refers to them in her play. Doug Perry's book *Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust, and the Beautiful Killers Who Inspired Chicago* (Viking, 2010), describes the rash of forgotten cases which became footnotes. Perry's book explains why Annan and Gaertner were acquitted. They played on the sympathy of the male jurors. Sabella Nitti, described by the *Tribune* as "a cruel animal" after her husband was beaten to death with a hammer, and Kitty Malm, nicknamed Wolf Woman and Tiger Girl after a robbery with her husband went wrong and a security guard was killed, were examples of *rare* convictions. Juries were biased against poor immigrants and verdicts were class based.

Another notorious case involved Wanda Stopa who allegedly tried to shoot the wife of a man she loved, but she ended up killing a handyman at the woman's home. Stopa escaped but before the police could catch her, she swallowed cyanide in a Detroit hotel room. When her family set up her coffin for viewing in their apartment, huge crowds came for a glimpse. Maurine was thunderstruck at how, in death, everybody seemed to love Stopa. It no longer mattered that she had shot and killed an innocent man; it mattered only that her beautiful face and mournful words appeared above the fold of every newspaper in the city. It definitely bothered her that Beulah Annan got off. Watkins wrote *Chicago* as a way of righting that wrong, but she wanted Beulah to be guilty.

Maurine Dallas Watkins