



New York Theatre WireSM

Theatre Dance Performance Art Music
Alternative and International Theatre

Glenda Frank

Love in the Rain

“Indecent,” a play with music by Paula Vogel. Directed by Rebecca Taichman. Cort Theatre, 138 W. 48 St, NYC. April 4, 2017 -- open run. Tuesday & Thursday @ 7 PM; Wednesday, Friday & Saturday @ 8 PM; Wednesday & Saturday @ 2 PM; Sunday @ 3 PM. \$39-129. For tickets and information, call 212-239-6200 or 800-447-7400, visit the box office or www.telecharge.com by Glenda Frank

“Hot ‘N’ Throbbing” (about a single mom who scripts porn). “The Oldest Profession” (about prostitutes over 65). “How I Learned to Drive” (about pedophilia). “Desdemona” (a play about a handkerchief). And half a dozen other plays which won Paula Vogel Pulitzer Prize, Obie, and Lily awards. And her latest, “Indecent” (about a brothel, the Holocaust, and first love).

Paula Vogel with her signature take on sex is on Broadway with a magnificent new play in a brilliant production directed and co-created by Rebecca Taichman (“How to Transcend a Happy Marriage.”) This is Vogel’s most nuanced play. It has an emotional and historical range, characters who are easy to love and understand, and romances – gay, straight, and other. Plus music and dance interludes.

Inspired by Sholem Asch’s “God of Vengeance” (1907), a Yiddish play that horrified and delighted audiences for its attack on hypocrisy, Vogel has achieved a rare artistic mastery that empowered her to examine the role of history on human lives. The music was composed by Lisa Gutkin who performs on violin and mandolin, and Aaron Halva, on accordion and other instruments, while Matt Darriau joins them on clarinet and others). Choreography by David Dorfman keeps the stage always alive, from the Hasidim who lose their payot (religious male side curls) in America to the many celebrations of community. The ensemble with their shifting roles is itself an integral part of the story-telling. The music is klezmer and folk-tune flavored. (One song, “Wiegala,” was written by Ilse Klein as a lullaby for the children of Theresienstadt Concentration Camp.) The dances are both a reflection of fluid stagecraft and reminiscent of “Fiddler on the Roof.” But “Indecent” is not about tradition or the good father.



(l to r) : Katrina Lenk as "Menke", Adina Verson as "Rinkele". Photo by Carroll Rosegg.

Asch wrote his first and only play at 26. It was an angry young man’s play, with lots of forbidden fruit: attacking the roots of piety, the image of Jews, and patriarchal domination of women. Yekel, the protagonist, is an observant Jew who makes money from a stable of prostitutes. His wife (Mimi Lieber) once worked for him. He plans to wed his daughter to a rabbinical student and has commissioned a Torah (a handwritten scroll) as a token of his contrition. But daughter Rifkele has fallen in love with Manke, one of the prostitutes, and refuses to marry a man her father selects. In rage, Yekel lifts the Torah about his head to smash it on the ground, which probably offended and titillated the audience at least as much as the love scenes between the two girls (Katrina Lenk and Adina Verson). Some of their dialogue, according to Vogel’s script, came from Ashe’s private moments with Madje (Adina Verson), his bride.

Asch reads his new play at the home of I.L. Peretz, an influential Yiddish author, and soon the room bursts into argument, but Lemml, a country tailor who is visiting a relative, falls in love with the work. Lemml (a magnificent Richard Topol) is our guide through the various transmutations of the drama. He follows Ashe to America, becomes a stage manager, and later, after the 1923 Broadway debacle – the play is lost in translation to English and closed for obscenity – he assembles a Yiddish cast and tours it in Europe until the Nazis arrest the troupe in the Lodz ghetto in 1943.

The play touches so many chords. It tells about the discovery of love by two teenagers girls. The scene in the summer rain is tender and joyful, both a modest wet t-shirt moment and a cleansing for the lovers. It is the first lesbian kiss on stage. The actors who play these roles in America are also lovers, arguing, breaking up, forgiving each other. Asch (Max Gordon Moore as the young playwright, and Tom Nelis as the aging novelist) and his wife have grown old together, but theirs is a marriage that deepens over time. Lemml’s passion is “The God of Vengeance,” the play that changed his life.

“Indecent” is also a lament for those lost to the Holocaust. The forces of repression are everywhere, from Peretz’s reaction to the play and the Broadway censors’ condemnation to the horror of the Final Solution. We meet the cast in their somber costumes (Emily Rebholz) aligned against the back wall. Dust falls from their hair and sleeves as they dance. As this effect is reprised, it becomes increasingly poignant and powerful. The word “indecent” takes on multiple meanings as the play progresses. What began as a comment on the love scenes in “The God of Vengeance” becomes comments on intolerance and genocide. Projections in English and Hebrew by Tal Yarden; lighting by Christopher Akerlind; set by Riccardo Hernandez, for whom the many suitcases carried by the cast can become a bed, a chair, a dance accessory, and contain the props needed for the production.

The play has had an impressive trajectory, from a 2015 production at Yale Repertory Theatre, to the off-Broadway Vineyard Theatre in 2016, and now Paula Vogel's Broadway debut. In her many productive years since her first play, Vogel has been attracting a loyal audience. We celebrate her voice, the gifted Rebecca Taichman, and this auspicious production of "Indecent."



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