

November 20, 2009

BROADWAY IS BUZZING ABOUT BERKELEY REP'S *VIBRATOR*

Good morning-

I'm thrilled to let you know that, once again, the national media is buzzing about a play born at Berkeley Rep. Last night our associate artistic director, Les Waters, made his Broadway debut with the opening of *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* at the Lyceum Theater. Berkeley Rep commissioned this script from MacArthur genius Sarah Ruhl and staged its world premiere earlier this year. Now Lincoln Center Theater has given it new life in New York.

This is the fourth show that Berkeley Rep has helped send to Broadway in the last four years. (One of them – Carrie Fisher's *Wishful Drinking* – is still running only a few blocks away!) The reviews for *In the Next Room* are out – and I'm proud to share the good vibrations...

In addition, tomorrow you can hear an interview with Sarah on [NPR's Weekend Edition](#). And don't miss this great feature in the [Wall Street Journal](#) that wonders if Broadway audiences can handle all those paroxysms.

- [New York Times](#): **"INSPIRED...** *In the Next Room* is a true novelty: a sex comedy designed not for sniggering teenage boys – or grown men who wish they were still sniggering teenage boys – but for adults with open hearts and minds.... The ideas underpinning the play, about the fundamental lack of sympathy between men and women of the period, and the dubious scientific theories that sometimes reinforced women's subjugation, are serious. *In the Next Room* illuminates with a light touch – a soft, flickering light rather than a moralizing glare – how much control men had over women's lives, bodies and thoughts, even their most intimate sensations. [It] is directed by Les Waters with a fine sensitivity to its varied textures. Insightful, fresh and funny, the play is as rich in thought as it is in feeling."
- [Associated Press](#): **"SENSUAL** and dare we say it, surprisingly romantic... The dawn of electricity and the quest for sexual fulfillment. Who knew the two could be linked so satisfactorily on stage? But then Thomas Edison gets profusely thanked in Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*, a perceptive comedy about female liberation of a very specific kind. This provocative, often quite funny play, which Lincoln Center Theater opened Thursday at Broadway's Lyceum Theatre, is Ruhl's most entertaining work to date. Not only because of its sexual subject matter but because she has created a parade of appealing, fully drawn characters."
- [New York Post](#): **"POETIC...** *In the Next Room or the vibrator play* goes where no Broadway show has gone before. And we're not talking about nudity (though there's some of that) or graphic sexuality. Ruhl presents something a lot more intimate and a lot more daring: women's discovery of their own bodies and their own pleasure. It may be the first time we've seen characters repeatedly reach orgasm on a mainstream stage – in a Lincoln Center Theater production, no less – and it happens in a play that's smart, delicate and very, very funny... As well written as the play is, it could easily have gone astray in the wrong hands. But director Les Waters and his cast proceed with great sensitivity. Cerveris' earnest, slightly stiff physicality is put to good use here, while Benanti and Dizzia brim with a contagious glee in their shared scenes."

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- [New York Magazine](#): **"PURE PLEASURE...** Sarah Ruhl should write more porn. Her works of brainy, feathered whimsy generally hover a few safe inches over dolorous themes – death, depression, unbridgeable distances between the sexes and between people in general. But her latest, the giggly, teasing, shamelessly entertaining *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*, displays something new: a pornographer's instinct for instant gratification. Positioned somewhere between a dirty joke and an educated guess, the play draws on historical fact – Victorian doctors really did administer machine-assisted genital massage to 'hysterical' women – to tell the tale of a staid physician (Michael Cerveris), his ebullient wife (Laura Benanti), and the miraculous device that comes between them. The play begins as an extravagantly elongated gag, morphs into an upended *A Doll's House*, and ultimately verges on romantic comedy... Ruhl's a great intellect, a true entertainer, an authoritative American voice that Broadway desperately needs. Let her milk it a little."
- [USA Today](#): **"PROVOCATIVE...** ambitious and surprisingly moving... *In the Next Room* will elicit paroxysms of mirth... By turns deftly farcical and deeply poignant, *In the Next Room* raises questions that transcend gender and, for that matter, time... The laughs that result (and there are many) are offset by the difficulties endured by Ruhl's female characters... The actresses all do justice to this vivid, bittersweet humanity that Ruhl affords them, as do their male castmates. By showing how women and men struggle with both pleasure and pain, *In the Next Room* offers something a lot more satisfying than cheap thrills or cheesy self-empowerment."
- [Variety](#): **"BEGUILING...** a period-appropriate comedy of manners about an inappropriate subject... There are so many lingering moments of emotional truth, and even more of daring comedy, that the play amuses and charms... Les Waters, who first directed the play at Berkeley Rep, has an agreeably light touch that allows the comedy to milk every ounce of naughtiness without tipping over into puerility. The treatment scenes in particular benefit from staging that underlines the clinical nature of the approach while slyly tickling the audience's more contemporary attitudes toward sexuality and manual stimulation. And the scene in which Mrs. Givings and Mrs. Daldry turn into complicitous, giggling schoolgirls when they get their illicit hands on the doc's equipment is a riot."
- [Hollywood Reporter](#): **"STIMULATING.** Although it would seem to hold the promise of being an extended dirty joke, Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room or the vibrator play* actually is a surprisingly funny and sensitive portrait of the eternal disconnect between men and women... The playwright, responsible for such works as *The Clean House* and *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, mines her subject for suitably bawdy humor without resorting to vulgarity. But what really gives the work its distinction is its sensitive exploration of the physical and emotional repression suffered by the women of the era, which has yet to disappear entirely. Nor does Ruhl neglect the male side of things, as evidenced by the beautifully staged final scene in which Mrs. Givings provides her husband with a lesson about the beauty of his own body. The play, seen at the Berkeley Rep, has been given a pitch-perfect Broadway staging that beautifully balances its humor and pathos. Under the sensitive direction of Les Waters, the ensemble delivers sterling performances, with Benanti a particular delight as the woman for whom electricity turns out to be a marriage saver."
- [Back Stage](#): **"ENDEARING...** a painful and riotous symphony of sexual searching... Ruhl's grasp of her characters is strong, and their troubles are affectingly depicted... Director Les Waters' production mines the comic potential of this setup, with the audience howling at the

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sexual misconceptions espoused and the powerful effects of Dr. Givings' marvelous instrument. Waters also stresses the tragedies caused by the characters' being out of touch with their bodies... As the vibrant Mrs. Givings, Laura Benanti is a ball of fire barely contained by costume designer David Zinn's elegant but restrictive corsets and gowns. Best known for her roles in musicals, including a Tony-winning turn in *Gypsy*, Benanti is emerging as one of our best young actors. Her Mrs. Givings is wildly funny as she blurts out inappropriate observations and achingly moving as she tearfully seeks to fill voids in her soul and libido. Fellow Tony winner Michael Cerveris is equally complex as Dr. Givings, who believes he's a forward-thinking scientist but is as convention-bound as the most domineering husband. In a shattering final scene, beautifully staged by Waters with the aid of Annie Smart's moving (both literally and figuratively) set and Russell H. Champa's warm lighting, Cerveris bravely sheds both the doctor's insecurities and his clothes."

- **TheaterMania:** "DELIGHTFUL... If Henrik Ibsen and Oscar Wilde had decided to collaborate on a post-modern drawing-room comedy, the hotsy-totsy twosome surely would have turned out something very much like Sarah Ruhl's genuinely hysterical new work *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*... Handed material that theatergoers stuck in a bygone age might find unsavory, director Les Waters has honed it to a fare-thee-well. (He also helmed the piece for its Berkeley Repertory Theatre debut.) And his actors are certainly a game lot... Ruhl is so accomplished in her aim as she progresses toward a dazzling Edenic conclusion that Sigmund Freud himself might have applauded her bold grappling with civilization and its discontents. He might even have conceded that Ruhl supplies the correct answer to the question that baffled him, 'What do women want?'"
- **Bloomberg:** "SUPERB... Ruhl's flighty *Vibrator Play* lives up to the buzz. [She] has written a smart, charming, iridescently funny-serious jewel... As Ruhl traces it with wit and insight, and without the slightest prurience, the birth of this new era gives rise to colorful events, astute psychological revelations and endearingly apt dialogue... Les Waters has directed compellingly on Annie Smart's scrupulous set, abetted by David Zinn's elaborately sober costumes and Russell H. Champa's electricity-enamored lighting. Laura Benanti is the most incandescent Mrs. Givings imaginable. She knows how to make flightiness winsome and gush graceful. Michael Cerveris's Doctor is flawless in the exacting traversal from cool scientist through jealous spouse to liberated wife-lover. And as the bumpily recovering Mrs. Daldry, Maria Dizzia is enchantingly exuberant."
- **The Faster Times:** "FANCIFUL... Commissioned by Berkeley Rep, which is becoming something of a feeder theater for Broadway – *Wishful Drinking* this year, *Passing Strange* last year, and probably Green Day's *American Idiot* next year – *In The Next Room* could not hope for a better production. Annie Smart's set is a credible facsimile down to the wallpaper, costume designer David Zinn's bustles, corsets, vested suits and gloves seem exactly right. The acting is uniformly spot-on, precise and believable – no broad winking – from a cast of seven, made up of both well-known Broadway names Laura Benanti (Tony-winner for *Gypsy*; *Into the Woods*; *The Sound of Music*) as Mrs. Givings and Michael Cerveris (*Sweeney Todd*; *Assassins*; *Titanic*) as Dr. Givings and such Off-Broadway mainstays as Quincy Tyler Bernstine (Obie-winner for *Ruined*), who plays a wet nurse for Mrs. Givings' infant and Maria Dizzia, a particular stand-out as Mrs. Daldry, the doctor's unhappy patient. Ruhl herself, with the help of director Les Waters, establishes right from the start through dialogue and gesture the period's patronizing attitude towards women that amounts to oppression, the quaint fascination with electricity, the misplaced obsession with propriety, the ignorance about sexual pleasure, the wrong-headedness of the doctor's approach."

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- **Daily News**: “**FRISKY...** *In the Next Room* clicks, or hums, when it's at its silliest and most titillating. As characters shed corsets and knickers for some good vibrations, the play surges with laughter... What must a woman do not to be invisible? That million-dollar mystery drives the story... Benanti is a charmer in a tricky part, and Dizzia is slyly delicious.”

In the last four years, four shows have moved from Berkeley Rep to Broadway: Sarah Jones' *Bridge & Tunnel* (2006), Stew's *Passing Strange* (2008), Carrie Fisher's *Wishful Drinking* (2009), and now *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* (2009). In fact, the Theatre has helped send **13 shows to New York in the last 13 years.** This list of hits also includes Danny Hoch's *Taking Over* (2008), Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2007), Tony Kushner and Maurice Sendak's *Brundibar* (2006), Naomi Iizuka's *36 Views* (2002), Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* (2001), Hoch's *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop* (1998), Anne Galjour's *Alligator Tales* (1997), and Philip Kan Gotanda's *Ballad of Yachiyo* (1997).

Known for its core values of innovation and excellence, as well as its educated and adventurous audience, Berkeley Rep provides a safe haven for emerging and established artists to explore new ideas. In 1968, during its inaugural season, the Theatre staged its first premiere – and it has presented **52 world premieres, 39 West Coast premieres, and four American premieres** in its history. Berkeley Rep has upped the ante by promising to commission dozens of new plays by 2013. In the last five years alone, the Theatre has invested more than \$1 million in new play development. **Writers currently under commission** include David Adjmi, Glen Berger, Marcus Gardley, Rinne Groff, Jordan Harrison, Naomi Iizuka, Dan LeFranc, Tarell McCraney, Dominic Orlando, and Stew and Heidi Rodewald. Through important new voices such as these – and daring initiatives such as this one – Berkeley Rep will continue to introduce inventive, intelligent, and relevant new material into the repertoire of American theatre.

Thank you for being a part of our success by supporting Berkeley Rep's commitment to new work.

All the best,
TK

- **For a press release on *In the Next Room*:**
http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/pr/0910/Berkeley_Rep_Broadway_shows.pdf
- **For photos of the production at Berkeley Rep:**
<http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/photos-09vp.asp>

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