

“It’s compelling that, as she gets closer to her famous decision to leave her family, Nora becomes more mechanical -- as if her social role were fighting to keep her in place.”

Variety

“Heddy Lahmann plays up Nora’s childish qualities, bouncing around the stage like a rubber ball, sometimes nearly leaving the stage. Peter Mutino is convincingly desperate as Krogstad. Nathan Caron is a fine Dr. Rank.”

Broadway World

“Daniels casually attempts to tame Nora’s reckless impulses the way he might examine an unwieldy stock portfolio: with even-tempered curiosity, not with passion. When he calls her his “lark,”—he asserts that he owns her.”

New York Theatre.com

“Kvale abandons realism by having shadows loom large on the back wall of the stage, suggesting that Nora’s past is coming back to haunt her. The celebrated Christmas tree is a coat tree from which she hangs ribbons. It is a sham tree, much as her life has been a sham life.”

Theater Talk



A CurtainUp Review: A Doll's House

Paulanne Simmons

And what a translation! Who would have thought Ibsen, the "father of modern drama," who sometimes seems so antiquated today, could have his often stodgy dialogue turned into conversation that is poetic, passionate and contemporary, all at the same time?

Energized by this terrific translation, the cast, headed by the powerful Heddy Lahmann as Nora, creates an explosive reality that is only intensified by Mike Billings' abstract set. With its forced perspective and backstage scrim that lets the audience view the hovering male figures menacing Nora's sheltered life, the very stage seems to surround and stifle the submissive heroine.

Lahmann prances and pirouettes, wheedles and cajoles. She seems immensely satisfied with her life, despite the dark secret that will soon destroy her complacency and her happiness. She is especially strong in rendering Nora's transformation from a naïve young lady who has traded intellectual and emotional fulfillment for the good life into a mature woman willing to take the necessary risks to become independent.

Luke Daniels, in his fancy suit or elegant tux, is a particularly attractive Torvald, which makes it easy to understand why the flighty, seemingly superficial Nora would be so attractive to him in spite of his obnoxious, patronizing attitude. He's also an effective contrast to the pitiful Dr. Rank (the fine Nathan Caron) and the cunning Krogstad (made sympathetic by the talented Peter Mutino).

Hillary Parker holds her own as Nora's down-and-out friend Kristine, a vitally important, though underappreciated role. Her dignity and fortitude serve Nora as both an admonition and a frightening example of the future she faces without a husband.

The temptation to give Ibsen's realistic drama a magical, ambiguous or modern setting must be overwhelming to the modern director. Few efforts can come close to what Kvale has done. This production is not only startlingly innovative it is also magnificently effective.

A Doll's House was written at a time when a woman's job options were limited to sewing, embroidering and, occasionally, office work. Women like Kristine married men they despised because they had a mother and brothers who were destitute and dependant on them. Women like Nora could not borrow money without their husband's consent and were reduced to forging signatures in an emergency.

Times have changed so much for women in the West that A Doll's House seems about as archaic as a horse and buggy making its way down Fifth Avenue. But when a production as fresh and lively, and yet completely free of gimmickry, as Bated Breath's hits the stage, we can joyfully suspend our cynicism and step uncritically back into Ibsen's world. That doesn't happen often enough, but when it does it shouldn't be missed.

TheatreScene.net Review: A Doll's House

Loria Parker

It is indeed a noble effort for a budding young theatre company to take on an historically pivotal play as its premiere production. Yet, to its credit, that's exactly what Bated Breath Theatre Company has done with Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Bated Breath's founder, and the play's director, Helene Kvale, has fashioned a version of the classic that deserves admiration and acknowledgment. The play's translation verbally and stylistically works well, as the story takes place in what appears to be the 1950's instead of the late 1800's. In an era that in many ways infantilized women, the '50's attitudes and gender roles were just the spark it took to ignite the feminist movement, gaining benefits that so many of us now enjoy.

The ersatz "padded cell" set design by Mike Billings, perfectly creates the physical environment in which to tell the story, of Nora's (Heddy Lahmann) emotional journey through madness, and finally back to a grounded sanity about her life and marriage to Torvald (Luke Daniels) that allows her to leave it all behind her. Ms. Lahmann and Mr. Daniels work well together as Mr. and Mrs. Helmer, each playing the stereotypical roles set in their marriage agreement. The seemingly perfect applecart is upset when Nora is visited by Krogstad (Peter Mutino), from whom she secretly borrowed money by forging her father's signature. Their interchange is one of the high points of the play, as Mr. Mutino embodies the anger and frustration of a person whose life has spun out of control through bad judgment and flawed integrity. Krogstad wants to strike a deal with Nora that will forgive her debt and keep her illegal secret, in exchange for her convincing Torvald to give him back his job at the bank. This scene reveals another side of Nora's normally frivolous nature, as her fairytale existence is genuinely threatened.

When Nora's old friend Christine Linde (Hillary Parker) comes to visit, she too asks for the favor of employment from Torvald, in an intensely honest performance. Family friend, Dr. Rank (Nathan Caron), in a fine performance,

continued

brings the symbolic element of death to the play through his impending demise from a TB related illness. It is no coincidence that his death in the play is timed with Nora's own emotional death and rebirth, as Torvald finds out about the forged loan and angrily banishes her from their marriage and their children. When Krogstad forgives the loan note instead, Torvald takes back his harsh words, believing that all will be forgiven and things will get back to "normal", but Nora is unmoved as she tells him she's leaving him and the children. This final scene between Ms. Lahmann and Mr. Daniels is their best, as Nora stops dancing around the stage of her life, and speaks the truth of their marriage to Torvald, for the first and last time. For all the scurrying about during the rest of the play, it is this quiet moment that best shows Ms. Lahmann's innate dramatic ability.

Helene Kvale, an accomplished actor in her own right, has brought her actor's sensibility to the production and allowed her performers to find their own truths in their characters. Although the play might have benefitted from some editing, it holds up quite well and certainly held the audience in rapt attention. Costumes by Lucy Brown work beautifully for all the characters, and the other technical aspects of the production complement the play perfectly. Going forward, Bated Breath Theatre Company will most certainly grow beyond its current fledgling status, and that's something to look forward to.

Theater Talk's: New Theater Corps

Amy Freeman

These days, a woman can leave her husband whenever she wants and society barely blinks an eye. However, when Nora left her husband Torvald in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the scandal reverberated across the world. People often focus on that final scene as the entire play, with Nora's exit as Ibsen's one grand statement. But if that statement has lost its edge, what will speak to our world today?

Bated Breath Theatre Company presents a new version of *A Doll's House*, adapted and directed by Helene Kvale. The time and setting have been moved to 1950s America. Ibsen's "comfortable room, tastefully but not expensively furnished" has been changed to a spare chamber with padded walls, a doll house that serves as a fireplace and two boxes which fulfill the function of furniture. Nora is initially led onstage by a nurse, wearing only a white nightgown. She is dressed by the cast, suggesting that what is about to occur is a flashback and that Nora is now institutionalized.

I hoped and prayed this was not the case and my fears were dispelled by the production. Nora is not institutionalized: the dressing is just a visualization of her doll's life, a life of imprisonment that matches her belief that all her life she has been a doll. Other literally portrayed images reinforce the idea that Nora's life is a delusion. It is more the stage directions that vary from Ibsen's original work than the language. Kvale abandons realism by having shadows loom large on the back wall of the stage, suggesting that Nora's past is coming back to haunt her. The celebrated Christmas tree is a coat tree from which she hangs ribbons. It is a sham tree, much as her life has been a sham life.

The text of the play remains essentially the same as Ibsen's original. The 1950s version of Nora tells the same vast number of lies to Torvald as the turn of the century Nora. She lies about eating macaroons, about visitors coming and going, and most importantly, about a secret loan she took out, on which

she had to forge her father's signature. It is the lack of trust between the husband and wife and the way that it ultimately destroys their marriage that continues to resonate today. The performances of the actors playing Nora and Torvald (Heddy Lahmann and Lucas Daniels) heightens the language. Lahmann leaps onto boxes, dangles from the wall, bouncing between excitement for her plan and fear of being found out. Daniels comes off as the All-American husband, with squeaky clean looks and the tendency to infantilize and misunderstand his wife.

A Doll's House is not about the end, but about all that comes before, those years of lies and puppetry that Nora lived through. Ibsen wrote the original play 130 years ago and *Bated Breath*, by focusing on the relationship and ditching the realism, has succeeded in restaging it for today.

Richard Eyre

“Any version of A Doll’s House has to make you feel that it’s subject is urgent and its world contemporary – and it has to achieve that without any sense of anachronism. Helene Kvale’s version makes Ibsen’s 129 year-old play feel like a play for today.”

Richard Eyre is a world renowned theatre director and filmmaker. He won an Oliver award for his adaptation of Helda Gabler and is the former artistic director of the National Theatre of Great Britain.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

“Helene Kvale’s new adaptation and translation of A Doll’s House is a daring, innovative and brilliant piece of work. It reverberates with breathtaking psychological tensions for which Ibsen was justly famous, but Kvale also succeeds in bringing out the timeless qualities of the play, showing that Helmer and Nora have something to say to everybody, everywhere.”

Thomas Hylland Eriksen is a leading Scandinavian intellectual and social commentator. He is Professor at the University of Oslo and a regular contributor to Aftenposten, Norway’s quality newspaper.

“What I saw at the Gene Frankel Theatre just knocked my socks off. Bated Breath Theatre Company’s inaugural production not only has superb acting, excellent direction and an innovative set...it shouldn’t be missed.”

[Curtain Up](#)

“Lahmann and Daniels play the final confrontation excellently.”

[Backstage](#)

“Kvale and her designers provide an elegant look for the production.”

[Time Out](#)

“Bated Breath’s founder...has fashioned a version of the classic that deserves admiration. Bated Breath Theatre Company will most certainly grow...that’s something to look forward to.”

[Theatrescene.net](#)

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