



LONG ISLAND —THEATRE SCENE—

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AUGUST 25, 2022 / by JAIME ZAHL

Review: “In the Next Room or the vibrator play” at EastLine Theatre



Nicole Savin as Mrs. Givings

Photo: Rebecca Grace Photography

Over the last decade, EastLine Theatre has garnered the reputation of producing thought-provoking pieces of theatre. This inspired group of creatives consistently adapts to whatever space they choose for a production. “In the Next Room or the vibrator play” – written by Sarah Ruhl and directed by Danny Higgins – is possibly the best example of EastLine’s production team’s expertise in fully immersing audiences into the world of the play.

In this case, audiences travel back to the 1880s to witness a promising medical innovation of the time – the vibrator. Historically, the “electromechanical vibrator” was invented to relieve muscle

aches, but eventually became a method to treat hysteria – essentially an umbrella term. From a modern lens, the “condition” can be summed up as “everything that men found mysterious or unmanageable in women.” However, in its time, this treatment for the debunked condition provided many women with relief – an orgasm.

Audiences members who have attended shows at BACCA on Wellwood Avenue in Lindenhurst will hardly recognize the space. There are two rows of elevated seating on either side of the room with the stage spanning across the floor. Remi Watts and Matt Rosenberg, as Technical Director and Technical Operator, respectively, are visionaries. The lighting design is incredibly effective in evoking the atmosphere of a Gregorian sitting room with a sepia hue. The other end of the stage – “the next room” – is a doctor’s home “operating theater” exhibiting a more clinical atmosphere. Various effects tap into Ruhl’s theme of electricity and mechanics in the play. The sound design also contributes to the production’s immersive power. We hear the pulsation of the vibrator, which sounds like an otherworldly bass tone and well balanced. We even experience a flurry of snow on stage! The production design – including Lynn Ciorciari’s gorgeous period costuming – ultimately elevates the material to new heights.



From Left: Nicole Savin and Bryanna Bradley

Photo: Rebecca Grace Photography

Such high production quality could go to waste with mediocre performances. However, the cast assembled by Mr. Higgins is absolutely superb. Each performance builds off of another and it is clear that the actors have a deep understanding for the material. Nicole Savin, wife of the prominent Dr. Givings – is endearing throughout as the sheltered Mrs. Givings. We feel both the pain of the emotional and physical neglect she exhibits as a wife of a “man of science.” However, we also feel her joy in new

discoveries and overall enlightening. Martin Balaguer's Dr. Givings is equally compelling and paints a picture of an emotionally detached doctor of his time.

Julie Fergus truly shines in the role of Mrs. Daldry – a patient who benefits from her treatment that triggers an awakening of body and spirit. Her performance is both entrancing and authentic. This is especially clear through interactions with other characters who she interacts with and meets over the course of her treatment. John Dorcic does a fine job in his performance as Mr. Daldry – written as a typical man of the era. His banter with Dr. Givings exemplifies the comedy of the play that relishes in the ignorance of men who saw themselves as masters of the universe. We also see tremendous chemistry between Mrs. Fergus and Margaret Brigid, playing the role of Dr. Givings' assistant, Annie. Although the role is small on paper, Ms. Brigid leaves an impact the the scenes where Annie is given a voice.



Julie Fergus as Mrs. Daldry

Photo: Rebecca Grace Photography

Rounding out the cast, Paul DeFilippo portrays Leo Irving – a man living a bohemian lifestyle as an artist. Although a rarity, according to Dr. Givings, he also shows symptoms of hysteria. The female characters in the play are enchanted by Irving and his stories of Europe and other adventures. Mr. DeFilippo's natural charisma lends itself to the role as he displays the ability to flip from a display comedic wit to dramatic longing.

Finally, we are gifted with a performance by the phenomenal Bryanna Bradley as Elizabeth. Her character is introduced as a wet nurse employed by the Givings, but emerges as one of the most complex characters in the play. Ms. Bradley exhibits the character's strength as she copes with the loss of her

own infant while nursing a stranger's. However, we also get to see her brilliant comedic timing on display as she realizes Ms. Givings and Ms. Daldry are completely ignorant of true intimacy between a husband and wife.



Bryanna Bradley as Elizabeth
Photo: Rebecca Grace Photography

There is much more to say about this brilliant production, but in this case I would suggest letting your mind freshly experience all the nuances and powerful metaphor in Ruhl's play. On par with an Off-Broadway show, I would implore Long Island audiences to make it a priority to see this rare gem of a production that raises the bar of creativity for all theaters.

"In the Next Room (Or The Vibrator Play)" plays its final weekend August 26 - August 28 at BACCA Arts Center

Address: 149 N Wellwood Ave, Lindenhurst, NY 11757

Tickets available at vibratorplay.eventbrite.com