



NOMINATE YOUR FAVORITE PEOPLE AND PLACES FOR THE PHOENIX'S ANNUAL BEST ISSUE.

See all in Theater

Theater

Gina Gionfriddo on the art of playwrighting

Review: The Gamm's masterful Doll's House

A matter of trust

By BILL RODRIGUEZ | January 26, 2011

Like 11

There have been other plays well worth seeing this season, but nothing like this masterpiece at the Gamm. And I don't mainly mean the classic by Henrik Ibsen itself, since *A Doll's House* in shaky hands can come across as shrill and lesson-laden.

No, it's this remarkable production, directed by Trinity's Fred Sullivan Jr. and infused by powerful, illuminating performances. It is the sort of experience that theater was designed to achieve but can rarely accomplish.

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is staging *A Doll's House* through February 20.

The setting for us is 1959 America, a time carefully chosen for being toward the end of the Eisenhower years of stalwart Republican propriety and before the Kennedy years of hope and alternate possibilities. The social and political context is crucial, because the culminating speech of Nora Helmer (Jeanine Kane), who has been playing house nicely with equally oblivious husband Torvald (Steve Kidd), is a clear-minded, definitive feminist declaration of independence that would have been appropriate in many periods, in many societies, before the successful feminist upsurge of 1960s America.

To move a play originally set in 1879 Norway to the America of 80 years later reveals more than that the more things change the more they stay the same. A hypervigilant social paranoia is overlaid on a milieu that was only potentially that extreme. Late 19th-century upper- and middle-class Europeans worried excessively about who they could trust, which meant being categorically mistrustful of those of a lower class. There was the cult of the gentleman, who was by definition honorable. How that translated into practice was that the *appearance* of being honorable — having an impeccable reputation — meant everything.

How that plays out in Ibsen's morality tale is that any social or legal indiscretion of these people had to be kept secret at all costs. Not only were the sins of the father visited upon the sons, but such sons, nevermind fathers, could never again be trusted, no matter how beatifically they behaved to redeem themselves.

Nora has committed such an indiscretion in the past, something strictly speaking illegal but done out of kindness, without harmful consequences to others. At first the only person who knows this is Nils Krogstad (Tony Estrella), a disgraced lawyer now working in a menial position at Torvald's bank. Some time ago, Nora had borrowed money from him to pay for a vacation to save the health of her husband, who had a nervous breakdown. Krogstad, about to be fired, reluctantly threatens to reveal Nora's dishonorable act to her husband unless she makes sure he keeps his job.

The other main characters involved are Dr. Rank (Tom Gleadow), a jovial family hanger-on who is in love with Nora; Kristine Linde (Rebecca Gibel), an impoverished old school



FASCINATING STATES OF MIND Kidd and Kane.

Friends' Activity

Popular

Most Viewed



Kate Ferdinandi shared The Gamm's masterful Doll's House - Theater - Providence Phoenix · 13 hours ago



Danielle Dube liked Review: Lieutenant of Inishmore is the cat's me-oww! - Theater - Providence Phoenix · about 2 weeks ago

THE PROVIDENCE PHOENIX DEALS HALF OFF EVERYTHING ALL THE TIME

- Seiren Salon 4 left Save \$50
- Wings Over Providence - 50 Offer 5 left Save \$25
- Salon Ojonne 4 left Save \$50

See more deals

TODAY'S EVENT PICKS



[COMEDY] Donald Glover at the Comedy Connection

Plus 2 more >>

ARTICLES BY BILL RODRIGUEZ



REVIEW: LOUIS FAMILY RESTAURANT | January 25, 2011

There are no Greek columns outside or marble steps, but make no mistake: Louis Family Restaurant is an institution in Providence.

FESTIVAL BALLETS EMOTIONAL, SENSUAL CARMEN | January 25, 2011

Although the gypsy girl Carmen is most familiar from the 1875 opera of that name by Georges Bizet, local audiences have also become acquainted with the Carmen performed by Festival Ballet, which was commissioned by them and first appreciated in the 2003-04 season.

REVIEW: THE GAMM'S MASTERFUL DOLL'S

Rick's Roadhouse Karaoke Competition banner with details: EVERY TUESDAY AT 9PM, \$1,000 IN CASH AND PRIZES

friend and new confidante of Nora, who is promised Krogstad's job. The longtime family maid Helen (Joan Batting) serves as a reminder of personal devotion. Kane real-life daughters, Brigid and Fiona, briefly come in as Nora's children.

Adapted by artistic director Estrella from six translations, this version flows well and sounds comfortably colloquial. The only non-contemporary aspect, besides the Helmers having a servant, is all the hysteria over reputations. (Today these characters would write profitable confessionals about their disgraces and work the morning talk shows.)

1 | 2 | next >

Related: , , , [More](#)

Topics: [Theater](#) , [Theater](#), [Theatre](#), [Henrik Ibsen](#), [More](#)

[Like](#) 11 people like this. Be the first of your friends. | [More](#)

Be the first to comment / Add Comment

Add Comment

HTML Prohibited

[Add Comment](#)

HOUSE | January 26, 2011

There have been other plays well worth seeing this season, but nothing like this masterpiece at the Gamm. And I don't mainly mean the classic by Henrik Ibsen itself, since A Doll's House in shaky hands can come across as shrill and lesson-laden.

■ **REVIEW: LOCAL 121** | January 18, 2011

Local 121 isn't a locabore about their commitment to "locally harvested food and drink." The restaurant just places a list of some of their "local resources" at the bottom of their menu: Matunuck Oyster Farm, Prima Pasta, Sakonnet Vineyards, and so on.

■ **GINA GIONFRIDDO ON THE ART OF PLAYWRITING** | January 18, 2011

Although playwright Gina Gionfriddo was raised in Washington, D.C., Rhode Island has also made its contributions, since she polished her writing skills at Brown University, where in the late 1990s she sought out eventual Pulitzer winner Paula Vogel and her MFA playwriting program, attracted by the kind of dark comedy Vogel was coming up with.

See all articles by: [BILL RODRIGUEZ](#)

HOT TOPICS

[Tennessee Williams](#) , [Larissa Ponomarenko](#) , [Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum](#) , [Mark Morris](#) , [Edward Hopper](#) , [Noel Coward](#) , [Montserrat College of Art](#) , [Cameron Jamie](#) , [Tufts University](#) , [Rick Lombardo](#)

[More Topics . . .](#)

LATEST SLIDESHOWS



[Sexiest video game studs of 2010](#)



[Slideshow: 'Networks 2009-2010' Exhibit at the Newport Art Museum](#)

[All Slideshows](#)

Advertisement: [Buy Adult Novelties Online](#)

Featured Articles in Theater:



[Present laughter](#)



[Behind closed doors](#)



[Adam Bock is a good listener](#)



[Nude vs. prude](#)



[Clan bake](#)

[Sign In](#) | [Register](#)

[SEARCH](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Listings](#)
- [Editor's Picks](#)
- [News](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Film + TV](#)

thePhoenix.com:

- [Food + Drink](#)
- [Life](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Rec Room](#)
- [Video](#)

Phoenix Media/Communications Group:

- [Boston Phoenix](#)
- [Portland Phoenix](#)
- [Providence Phoenix](#)
- [STUFF Boston](#)
- [WFNX Radio](#)
- [People2People](#)
- [MassWeb Printing](#)
- [G8Wave](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Advertise With Us](#)
- [Work For Us](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Mobile](#)

TODAY'S FEATURED ADVERTISERS

[Like](#) **11**