

THE SANDRA FEINSTEIN-GAMM THEATRE



*Hedda Gabler*

BY **HENRIK IBSEN**

DIRECTED BY **TONY ESTRELLA**

Marianna Bassham  
Photo by Peter Goldberg

**STUDY GUIDE**

**GAMM**  
EDUCATION 

sandra feinstein-  
**GAMM**  
theatre

**30<sup>TH</sup>**  
2014  
2015  
SEASON

401.723.4266  
GAMMTHEATRE.ORG  
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PAWTUCKET, RI

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2.....**ACT I: WELCOME**
- Theater Etiquette / pg 3
  - Guide to Common Core Standards / pg 3
- 4.....**ACT II: HENRIK IBSEN AND *HEDDA GABLER***
- 5.....**ACT III: OUR PRODUCTION**
- Who made it happen? / pg 5
  - Director’s Notes by Tony Estrella / pg 6
  - Dramaturgical Notes by Jennifer Madden / pgs 7 - 8
- 8.....**ACT IV: DISCUSSION & WRITING**
- Discussion Questions, Themes & Topics / pgs 8 - 10
  - Activity for the Classroom: Adapting a Story / pg 10
- 11.....**ACT V: SUPPORTING MATERIALS**
- Links to Online Articles / pg 11
- 12.....**EPILOGUE: THANK YOU!**
- Student Matinee Information / pg 12
  - A Look at The Gamm’s 30th Season / pg 13

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*This study guide was prepared by  
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*Design by Courtney A. Martin*



Marianna Bassham  
Photo by Peter Goldberg



**ACT  
I**

# WELCOME

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Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen. In this guide you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside look at our production, as well as activities for your classroom and questions for discussion. We recommend using this study guide before your visit to The Gamm, as well as after to debrief with your students.

We would like to offer a workshop free of charge with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. These workshops will get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the themes, motifs and the language of the play. Kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning. Much of this work was discovered, developed and inspired by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. Their strategies and models for learning continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming, including our PLAY (Pawtucket Literacy and Arts for Youth) in-school residencies.

Attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication, as well as many of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. We have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide (see page 3).

We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!


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## THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE



What is so exciting about attending the theater - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theater is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience. **The actors can see and hear any distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc.** This can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. *Thank you!*

Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theater is different from film, television and sporting events.

## COMMON CORE GUIDE

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*Here is a list of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that align to the information and activities in our guide:*

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4] *See our Activity for the Classroom*
- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7] *See examples throughout our study guide.*
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9] *See our Resident Scholar's essay.*
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3] *See our Activity for the Classroom*
- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2] *See examples throughout our study guide.*

# ACT II

## PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT

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### ABOUT HENRIK IBSEN

Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright and poet, is often referred to as the “father of modern drama.” Born into a fairly wealthy family in 1828, Ibsen’s childhood was not as picturesque as one might think. As his family’s wealth began to deteriorate, his religious mother sought comfort in her faith, while his father fell into a depression. His childhood is often mirrored in his plays, with common issues such as financial difficulties and secrecy. He would also mold parental figures in his plays after his own parents. His work was often considered scandalous and challenged the norms of 19th century society. *Hedda Gabler* is one of his most performed plays with its title role regarded as one of the most challenging and rewarding roles for an actress, even in present day. Other well-known plays by Ibsen include: *A Doll’s house* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), and *An Enemy of the People* (1882).



Henrik Ibsen

### ABOUT HEDDA GABLER

*Hedda Gabler* was published in Norway in 1890 and premiered in Germany at the Königliches Residenz-Theater on January 31st 1891. The first British performance was at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on April 20th 1891, and the first US production, opened on March 30th 1898, at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City. *Hedda Gabler* has been adapted and translated into 78 languages. Despite its wide appeal, Ibsen’s Norwegian roots were always important to him, especially in his writing.

“He who wishes to understand me, must know Norway. The magnificent, but severe, natural environment surrounding people up there in the north, the lonely, secluded life - the farms are miles apart - forces them to be unconcerned with others, to keep to their own. That is why they become introspective and serious, they brood and doubt - and they often lose faith. At home every other person is a philosopher! There, the long, dark, winters come with their thick fogs enveloping the houses - oh, how they long for the sun!”

-HENRIK IBSEN

At the start of the show, Hedda Gabler has returned from an extended honeymoon with her kind but tediously academic husband. Beautiful, self-possessed and also haunted, she is already bored of marriage. Suffocated by bourgeois society and disdainful of intellectual pursuits, she tries to fulfill her aimless desires by manipulating the fates of those around her...with tragic results. Offering no easy answers, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is a fascinating, paradoxical portrait of a woman slipping into despair as her options narrow in a world expanding for both sexes.

# ACT III

# OUR PRODUCTION

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## WHO MADE IT HAPPEN:

### ON STAGE:

<i>Hedda Tesman</i>	Marianna Bassham
<i>George Tesman</i>	Joe Short
<i>Juliana Tesman</i>	Marya Lowry
<i>Judge Brack</i>	Jim O'Brien
<i>Eilert Lovborg</i>	Alexander Platt
<i>Thea Elvsted</i>	Karen Carpenter
<i>Berta</i>	Katie Travers



Marianna Bassham as Hedda Gabler

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## BEHIND THE SCENES:

<b>Director</b>	Tony Estrella
<b>Assistant Director</b>	Susie Schutt
<b>Production Associate</b>	Rachel Walshe
<b>Set Design</b>	Michael McGarty
<b>Costume Design</b>	David T. Howard
<b>Lighting Design</b>	Megan Estes
<b>Stage Management</b>	Meg Tracy Leddy
<b>Assistant Stage Manager</b>	JonPaul Rainville
<b>Production/Wardrobe Assistant</b>	Annalee Cavallaro
<b>Scenic Artist</b>	Carrie Capizzano
<b>Sound Technician</b>	Stef Work
<b>Master Electrician</b>	Justin Carroll
<b>Electrician</b>	Marc Tiberiis
<b>Lead Carpenter</b>	Joe Short
<b>Construction Crew</b>	Max Ramirez

## DIRECTORS' NOTES:

by Tony Estrella, Director of *Hedda Gabler*

"She's snobbish, mean-spirited, small minded, conservative, cold, bored, vicious; sexually eager yet terrified of sex, ambitious to be bohemian but frightened of scandal, a desperate romantic fantasist but unable to sustain any loving relationship with anyone, including herself. And yet, in spite of all this, she mesmerizes us and compels our pity." – Director Richard Eyre on *Hedda Gabler*

Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is one of the theater's great enigmas. Its original production is infamous in the annals of theater history. It's been incredibly popular for more than a century with audiences and critics alike, and is routinely described as one of the masterpieces of the modern theater. The role of Hedda itself has been described as the "female Hamlet." And yet, having seen it staged many times, productions have very rarely, to my mind, lived up to the advanced billing. Was it my own limitations or the productions' shortcomings? Could it have been Ibsen's fault? What is it that makes this particular play such a challenge?

There's a famous anecdote about an out-of-town tryout of the original production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Thornton Wilder was in attendance and remarked afterwards to Tennessee Williams that he thought Blanche DuBois was too complex a character for the theater. Tennessee is said to have replied, "People are complex, Thorn."

As the epigraph above suggests, Hedda is complex. And human complexity is very difficult to portray in the two-hour traffic of our stage. The greatest characters in drama, the Hamlets, the Blanches and the Heddas, share an unknowability that thrills and frustrates, baffles and enrages. These characters are consistent only in their myriad contradictions. We in the audience, of course, want to know immediately. We need to put things in order and simplicity makes it easy. Two-dimensionality squares the circle, wraps things up in a tight bow and makes for supremely satisfying, instantly gratifying melodrama. However, it is complexity, contradiction, what William Blake called the "mingled contrairities of existence", that makes for characters which endure. In the end we can't completely know Hedda, or Blanche, or Hamlet for that matter, any more than we can entirely know ourselves.

The great British director Richard Eyre wrote in an introduction to his own version of *Hedda Gabler*, "The best way of understanding a play is to write it – even if that means merely typing a script yourself or copying it out longhand. It obliges you to question the meaning of every word, speech, gesture and stage direction." I've always felt that *Hedda Gabler* was brilliant even if I couldn't quite explain why. Finally, in writing this version, it's become unmistakably clear. The answer is in every "word, speech, gesture and stage direction." The title character is deliberately unsettling. Hedda is walking dynamite, trailing a fuse that she might light or douse on a whim. She's as unpredictable and poisonous as mercury, the smartest and saddest person in the room, seeming to carry on a conversation that only she can hear. It's as if her bones and skin are in constant, raging debate and rarely, if ever, agree. After pulling Ibsen's masterpiece apart and piecing it back together again, I hear Hedda's, desperate, warring inner voice at a much higher volume and if I can't ever know her completely, I think now that I understand what she's attempting to say. I hope you will, too.

-Tony Estrella

## DRAMATURGICAL NOTES: I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE HER FRIEND

By Jennifer Madden, Gamm Theatre Resident Scholar

I had a scorpion in an empty beer glass on my desk. Now and again, when the creature was wilting, I would drop into the glass a piece of fruit, which it would seize upon in a frenzy and inject it with its poison. It would then revive. Are not we poets rather like that?

HENRIK IBSEN

Who has not, when standing with someone by an abyss or high up on a tower, had a sudden impulse to push the other over?

HENRIK IBSEN

Last year author Claire Messud was asked in a Publishers Weekly interview about the embittered female protagonist of her novel, *The Woman Upstairs*: "I wouldn't want to be friends with Nora, would you? Her outlook is almost unbearably grim." Messud's response was delicious:

For heaven's sake, what kind of question is that? Would you want to be friends with Humbert Humbert? Would you want to be friends with... Hamlet? Krapp? Oedipus? Oscar Wao? Antigone? Raskolnikov? Any of the characters in "The Corrections"? Any of the characters in "Infinite Jest"? Any of the characters in anything Pynchon has ever written? Or Martin Amis? Or Orhan Pamuk? Or Alice Munro, for that matter? If you're reading to find friends, you're in deep trouble. We read to find life, in all its possibilities. The relevant question isn't "is this a potential friend for me?" but "is this character alive?"

The question highlights existing gender biases. Reviewer Ron Charles noted: "Decades after the protests over the Equal Rights Amendment, 'angry feminist' is still a slur, as though anger were a ridiculous reaction to persistent social inequality. Worse, the words 'bitter' and 'shrill' sit in their silos, ready to be launched at any woman who drops her pleasant smile while debating day-care availability, reproductive rights or sexual harassment."

That was written in 2013. Henrik Ibsen wrote *Hedda Gabler* in 1890 and it was revolutionary. Ibsen placed women front and center, full of the ugly complexities seen primarily in male characters. Hedda's biggest sin might not be that she's a nihilist bent on destruction but that she isn't nice. After all, mean girls who refuse to play fair, won't aim to please nor smile on command aren't very likable, are they?

Of course, Hedda is not a feminist poster girl, nor was she ever meant to be. Spectacularly solipsistic, Hedda is blithely unconcerned with struggles and pains not her own. Others are bit players in her melodrama, minor stars in her inexorable orbit. Hedda is also surprisingly contemporary and American. Her misdirected exceptionalism and sense of entitlement would not seem out of place on Facebook or Twitter. Henrik Ibsen all but dares us to empathize with his fantastically complicated, cruel anti-heroine.

It's treading familiar ground to state that for a woman life in the 19th century was a type of hell. In most countries women couldn't vote, apply for credit, have much access to education, inherit property or own a home. For every George Eliot and Marie Curie there were millions of women utterly infantilized by society. The



bourgeoning Suffrage movement embraced Ibsen’s heroines as icons of the struggle for equality. Yet Ibsen insisted that his plays argued for human rather than specifically women’s rights.

This is an important point. Scholars suggest that Hedda is Ibsen’s truest representation of his own repressed desires and complicated relationship with social convention. Susan Faludi observes, “What is less recognized is his towering achievement that, in such a century as his, he could look into the constricted life of a hausfrau—and see his own.” Thus Ibsen radically presented his female protagonists as universal, identifiable to both women and men.

Hedda Gabler has been called “sinister, degenerate, repellent, lunatic, a monster in the shape of a woman, with a soul too small even for human sin.” She is also alive; witty, charismatic, and wildly unhappy. Seeing no other options she submits to marriage and motherhood even as she knows she is clearly unsuited for either. To reject these sacred roles was to be labeled deviant, even freakish. Hedda (like Ibsen) holds such reactionary views in contempt. She resists the suffocating limitations of the whole of bourgeois society and yet, very much like her creator, dreads its condemnation.

Hedda, of course, is not merely a victim. She made her bed though she herself is desperate not to lie in it. Her moods careen violently from manic cruel hilarity to apathetic ennui underscored by a steady thrum of low panic. Warped by the denial of her (what we now view as) basic human rights, she poisonously lashes out like the scorpion, bullying and manipulating those around her, turning an afternoon social call into deadly blood sport. Likable? Who cares. Hedda Gabler is magnetic in her rage; and her frenzied, ultimately futile struggle for self-hood is a thrill to behold.

# ACT IV

## DISCUSSION & WRITING

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1. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? What would you change and why?
2. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, and sound?
3. What does the Gamm poster (also the cover of this study guide) tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
4. Why do you think the play is titled “Hedda Gabler”?

### TOPIC: **Adapting a Play**

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term *adapt* as: “to change so it can be presented in another form”. *Hedda Gabler* was originally written by Ibsen in Norwegian in 1890 and was translated into English shortly after. There are many adaptations of this play, which gives artists more room for interpretation. The Gamm’s Artistic Director, Tony Estrella, chose to adapt one of the English translations of *Hedda Gabler*. This means that though the plot points and story can be credited to Ibsen, the word choices and some character

nuances are a creation of Estrella.

**Questions for Free Write or Discussion:**

- If you could adapt a story, which story would you choose and why?
- Why do you think a writer would want to adapt a play?

**THEME: Gender Roles**

At the time when *Hedda Gabler* was written, women in the 1890's were restricted in many aspects of their lives. From the tight corsets to the lack of rights, the Victorian Era treated women as property rather than citizens. Like many other women of her time, headstrong Hedda does not have much control over her life. Though she appears to adhere to the gender roles laid out for her, she still insists on challenging those roles. For example, she gets married and moves into "the home of her dreams", but continues to flirt with other men and resists the idea of having a baby.

Ibsen wrote in his notes about *Hedda Gabler*:

"The mutual hatred of women. Women have no influence on external matter of government. Therefore they want to have an influence on souls. And then so many of them have no aim in life (the lack thereof is inherited)."

**Questions for Free Write or Discussion:**

- In what ways does Hedda have control over her life? In what ways doesn't she?
- What feminine qualities does Hedda have? What masculine qualities does Hedda have?
- In what ways is Hedda a strong woman? In what ways is she weak? Why?
- Does Hedda try to have an influence on the souls of those around her? If so, how?
- In his notes, Ibsen asks the question: "If a man can have several male friends, why can't he have several lady friends?" Do you think this is true? If so, why? If not, explain.

**TOPIC: Greek Mythology Index**

Hedda and Eilert reference Greek mythology throughout the play. A breakdown of some of the terms is provided below.

In the following excerpt, Hedda compares Eilert Lovborg to the Greek God Dionysus:

"You were a god. My Dionysus. I was a girl, inexperienced, with certain curiosities, passions, clawing at her from inside—"

**Dionysus:** The Greek God of wine and the patron of the stage. Dionysus is the son of Zeus and a mortal named Semele. He is often seen as a symbol of rebirth because he was killed by the Titans and then brought back to life. Dionysus is considered to have two distinct sides to his personality. One side is full of joy and ecstasy, the other is consumed by rage, brutality, and destruction (much like the two side effects of wine). Dionysus' darker outlook was commonly the result of others denying that he was a god.

On multiple occasions, Hedda talks about vine leaves being in Lovborg's hair:

"The bell will strike ten. And Dionysus will return. Vine leaves in his hair."

**Vine Leaves:** More specifically, grape vine leaves, in reference to Dionysus, the Greek God of wine. The festival of Dionysus happens in the spring, which is when the leaves on the vines begin to bloom.

When describing his relationship with Thea, Lovborg talks about the Moirai:

“I called her my muse. I was wrong. She was much more. The Moirai...From the Greeks. The three sisters of Fate...Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos. All in one. She reclaimed me and gave me life. Nurtured it for three years. And now... destroyed me with a look.”

**Moirai:** The Ancient Greek name for the Three Fates.

**The Three Sisters of Fate:** Said to be older than the Gods themselves, the Three Fates have the power to decide a person’s destiny. Their names are Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. In *The Republic* by Plato, The Three Fates sing along with the music of the Sirens.

**Clotho:** The spinner, who spins the thread of life and determines the time of birth. She sings the things that are.

**Lachesis:** The allotter, who measures the thread and determines the length of life. She sings the things that were.

**Atropos:** The unturnable, who cuts the thread of life and determines the time of death. She sings the things that are to be.

**Questions for Free Write or Discussion:**

- In what ways is Lovborg like Dionysus?
- How does Lovborg’s reference to the Greek representation of Fate, reflect what is happening in the play?
- Do you believe in fate or choice? Why?

## ACTIVITY FOR THE CLASSROOM

### ADAPTING A STORY

**DESCRIPTION:**

In Ibsen’s notes about *Hedda Gabler*, he writes a brief description of another story line he was toying with. He writes:

“The two lady friends agree to die together. One of them carries out their end of the bargain. But the other one who realized what lies in store for her loses her courage. This is the reversal-“

As was explained previously, you can take an already written story and adapt it to what you envision. Ask your students to read this basic plot idea from Ibsen’s notes and adapt it to a story they want to tell. They can expand upon the story and make it more detailed, with aspects such as character traits, names, background information, etc. Tell them that they can write a short story or a scene. Once they are finished with the creative writing exercise, encourage them to share their work. Have a reading of their short stories or even have them direct their own scenes.

# SUPPORTING MATERIALS

## ONLINE ARTICLES

FATAL ATTRACTION -  
WHY HEDDA STILL FASCINATES  
<http://nyti.ms/1rcY8y2>

WAS IBSEN THE FIRST MALE FEMINIST?  
<http://bit.ly/1sSjBlg>

THE MANY FACES OF HEDDA GABLER  
<http://bit.ly/1zaMGgk>

## HEDDA GABLER'S FAMOUS PORTRAYALS

## GAMM INSIDER MAGAZINE: SPOTLIGHT ON "HEDDA GABLER"

New this season! An email-based collection of reviews and articles gathered from across the web. Email [susie@gammtheatre.org](mailto:susie@gammtheatre.org) to request it be sent to your email address.

The play was written and first performed in Munich at the Königliches Residenz-Theater on 31 January 1891, with **CLARA HEESE** as Hedda.

**1891**  
Portrait of Clara Heese by Kaulbach-Friedrich

**1903**  
**MINNIE MADERN FISKE**  
BROADWAY

**1963**  
**INGRID BERGMAN**  
BBC ADAPTATION

**1980**  
**DIANA RIGG**  
YORKSHIRE TELEVISION PRODUCTION

**1991**  
**FIONA SHAW**  
NATIONAL THEATRE

**2005**  
**EVE BEST**  
ALMEIDA THEATRE, LONDON

**2006**  
**GATE BLANCHETTE**  
BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC



**MORE  
TO  
COME**

# EPILOGUE

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**THANK YOU** for joining us for *Hedda Gabler* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *Hedda Gabler*.

Our Education Department provides classes for students of various grade levels, as well as a month-long Gamm Summer Intensive for summer time theater fun. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

**GAMM  
EDUCATION**

## UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES:

### **MORALITY PLAY**

based on the novel by Barry Unsworth  
adapted by Tony Estrella

- Friday, January 16, 2015
- Friday, January 30, 2015

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### **THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES**

by John Guare

- Friday, March 6, 2015

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### **MARIE ANTOINETTE**

By David Adjmi

- Friday, May 1, 2015

## **TO BOOK A MATINEE**

contact Tracy at [tracy@gammtheatre.org](mailto:tracy@gammtheatre.org) or 401-723-4266  
ext. 12.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GAMM EDUCATION  
find us on the web at [www.gammtheatre.org](http://www.gammtheatre.org) or reach  
Susie Schutt at 401 723 4266 ext. 17.

# A LOOK AT THE GAMM'S 30TH SEASON

A combination of classic and contemporary works, set over hundreds of years of world history, the 2014-2015 Season is an entertaining and evocative line-up that speaks as a whole to American society today.



"We're excited to celebrate our 30th anniversary season by traveling in time from the mid-14th century to the early 21st. This includes a world premiere medieval murder mystery and a one-woman tour-de-force about drone warfare. Along the way, we peek into the palaces of revolutionary France, visit the home of a bored house wife in Victorian Norway, and witness the wild goings on in a Vietnam-era New York tenement."

—TONY ESTRELLA, Artistic Director of The Gamm

## COMING IN 2015: The new year opens with a thrilling world premiere, 10 years in the making!

*Morality Play*, adapted for the stage by Tony Estrella from the best-selling novel by Booker-Prize winner Barry Unsworth, is historical fiction in the form of a Plague-time whodunit, with fascinating insights on the evolution of storytelling. John Guare's comedy classic, *The House of Blue Leaves*, follows--a masterful commentary on American exceptionalism and the fine line between optimism and self-delusion. The season closes with *Marie Antoinette*, David Adjmi's alternately hilarious and shocking take on the 1% vs. the 99%.

► LEARN MORE AT [GAMMTHEATRE.ORG](http://GAMMTHEATRE.ORG)