



‘Revolutionists’ brings razor-sharp performances to Unicorn

The Unicorn



Unique play at Unicorn points to historical significance of women’s rights and status dating back to French Revolution times with a new play, “The Revolutionists,” by Lauren Gunderson and directed by Missy Koonce.

Who knew that women flexed their muscle and found their voices as early as the 1790s in France? Well, “The Revolutionists” documents a French playwright, a soon to be beheaded queen, a notorious murderess, and a free slave/spy tell their stories in a comic way for audiences to enjoy while the light treatment leads to the gallows and serious consequences for

several brave women who dared to stand against oppression during the Reign of Terror leading to the French Revolution and overthrow of the monarchy.



Cynthia Levin/The Unicorn Theatre

Probably the most surprising aspect of the play is that Marie-Antoinette delivers some humorous dialogue that displays her with many facets that range from frivolous, to comedic, to tragic, to clueless, to concerned. She knows not how history will reveal her to future generations, but she knows much of rumors and gossip will follow her.

Brilliantly played by Amy Attaway, the audience finds the sympathy of the character and not so much of the evil generally associated with her. The script pokes fun at Marie-Antoinette's desire for pastry, yet shows the maternal instinct of a woman wrongly accused of incest. The play allows Attaway to create a character of Marie-Antoinette that shows a funny side, yet also the desperation and strength she needs to face the gallows. Whoever expected to laugh at the last queen of France?

Cynthia Levin/The Unicorn Theatre



Always prepared to create a new character, Vanessa Severo steps into the role of Olympe de Gouges, a playwright of the era. She's looking for fresh work and words to make her plays reflect art and honesty. The play teases the audience with current situations contrasted with French Revolutionary era politics. Severo's apt delivery and inuendo makes the character rich and full. As a playwright, she contemplates what words are honest, resounding, sympathetic, lasting, and meaningful. The character shows the highs and lows as she struggles to find and maintain her voice. How far should she go? How far will she go? What is important to stand up and defend? What consequences to her words lead to? These struggles edify the character Severo aptly presents.



Cynthia Levin/The Unicorn Theatre

Chioma Anyanwu plays the voice of reason and the fulcrum of "The Revolutionists." Her character questions the motives and the realities of the other three women. As a spy from another country, she seeks the truth and wants to spread her political influence to end the "Reign of Terror" that leads to the overthrow of the French aristocracy and monarchy. She brings the question of the sugar market and slavery to the forefront. Her character helps the other characters tell their stories. As always, Anyanwu brings a full character to the stage with beautiful character development and line delivery. Her duet scenes with the other actresses always stand out and deepen the understanding of the material.



Cynthia Levin/The Unicorn Theatre

In a major departure from her local musical-comedy forte, Elise Poehling portrays a young revolutionary, Charlotte Corday, hell-bent on killing a French antagonist. As Corday, she opposes the power and magnitude of her target, yet knows his murder may lead to her demise at the hands of the French guillotine. Young, but not so innocent, Corday presents a difficult undertaking for Poehling, allowing her to stretch her body of work in a new direction. Surrounded by three other strong actresses, Poehling delivers a decisive character that provides a strong focal point for the play.



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Theatre

Even though a serious topic, the play flows with many funny lines and laughs provided by the delivery of the cast. Director Missy Koonce saw something new in each of her four actresses and allowed them to create that in “The Revolutionists.” The end result is a beautiful piece, like all the pieces selected by producing director Cynthia Levin.

Along with a strong script, strong direction, and strong acting, credit for the production as a whole falls to the hands of the production team that created sets, lighting, sound, costumes, props, and the staging of the play. Every detail is polished and adds to the enjoyment of “The Revolutionists.” One of the most outstanding pieces lies in the costumes and wigs for the play. They are great and add a fine texture and contrast. The guillotene stands at the rear of the stage and keeps the audience focused on the atrocities of the French Revolution and the numerous lives lost.

Cynthia Levin/The Unicorn Theatre



The cast is: Vanessa Severo as Olympe de Gouges, Elise Marie Poehling as Charlotte Corday, Amy Elizabeth Attaway as Marie-Antoinette, Chioma Anyanwu as Marianne Angelle. The production staff is Missy Koonce, director; Tanya Brown, stage manager; Emily Swenson, scenic designer; Shane Rowse, lighting designer; Arwen White, costume designer; David Kiehl, sound designer; Eric Palmquist, properties design; Hannah Taylor, Dramaturg; Torrey Meyer, scenic change artist & assistant scenic designer; Nicole Jaja, master electrician; Chloe Robbins, production assistant; Hannah Zimmerman, sound board operator; Taylor Smith, Overlap production assistant.

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