

Redwood Curtain's 'The Revolutionists' delivers fascinating, feminist dramedy

BY BETI WEBB TRAUTH
For the Times-Standard

Lauren Gunderson, creator of Redwood Curtain's devilishly clever dramedy, "The Revolutionists," was acknowledged in 2017-18 to be America's most-produced, living playwright, and it was during its 2017 season that the company first staged one of her intriguing works — one of that year's most outstanding local productions, "La Margeuse du Chatelet Defends Her Life Tonight."

The script was based on real-life French-woman and brilliant 18th century physicist (and long-time lover of Voltaire), and proved to be a prime example of what Gunderson does best, and that's seek out (and embellish) fascinating, little-known, backstories of relatively obscure, historic women whose determination to take their place in a man's world was way "ahead of its time."

Now full circle, the powerful, leading lady in the title role of that production, Alexandra Blouin, returns to inhabit yet another early heroine of the feminist movement in Gunderson's even more-outrageous take on four very different women (each influential

in unique ways) who collectively "upended France" in Paris during 1793's deadly Reign of Terror.

Using a shamelessly contemporary viewpoint, sprinkled quite liberally with four letter words, there is no attempt to hide the fact that Gunderson is giving the "historic content" a very modern, take-no-prisoners, feminist approach that often becomes downright hilarious in the most unexpected ways.

Blouin is once more sly and remarkable, this time as Olympe de Gouges, a French playwright, political activist and abolitionist (with a satirical writer's block) whose controversial views and writings eventually led her to lose her head thanks to the terrible, omnipresent guillotine — and that fate (for various other unpopular deeds and reasons) is what ties de Gouges together with the other three, featured women in this strong, all-female ensemble

There's Laskia Solomon as the feisty Marianne Angelle, a composite character created by Gunderson to represent the subversive women who could have started the first anti-France, slave revolution in Haiti. Then we



REDWOOD CURTAIN — CONTRIBUTED

Pictured (clockwise from top) are Kaitlyn Samuel Rosin, Laskia Solomon, Holly Portman, Alexandra Blouin in Redwood Curtain's "The Revolutionists."

meet Holly Portman, unsettling and stunning, as the infamous Charlotte Corday who stabbed radical journalist Jean-Paul Marat to death in his tub. (Believe it or not, she makes her murderous intentions funny, thanks to Gunderson's wry, witty dialogue.)

These two have showed up at de Gouges Paris study for two distinct reasons: Angelle wants her to write some fiery, revolutionary pamphlets to support the slave uprising, and Corday wants her to write some appropriate "last words" to state her case for killing Marat while she waits her turn at the guillotine — where Angelle would likely soon follow.

Rounding out the revolutionist quartet is Kaitlyn Samuel Rosin as the deliciously ditzzy Marie Antoinette, deposed Queen of France. She's also been drawn to de Gouges study

in order to get a "more flattering rewrite" of her disdainful "let them eat cake" comments before she too will follow her late husband's path up the steps to the falling blade. Rosin is a wacky wonder as she makes this vain woman (with all of her quirky behavior) strangely lovable, in spite of basically being a selfish diva.

But, what you have bubbling inside this madcap mashup of truth and fiction is always a subtle underscore that takes on some very serious issues concerning women's rights that are still being either ignored or under attack in today's world.

And using her characters to personify some of the earlier fighters for women's voices who bravely struggled to be heard above the din of society's cultural challenges, Gunderson continues to push the

issues that could help bring about real, lasting change (for a change) — with cutting-edge humor, profound profanity and surprising heart.

Director Ruthi Engelke (who acted in the company's first Gunderson production) has cast "The Revolutionists" perfectly, and they have rewarded her (and the audience) with a superb, ensemble performance because every character shines individually and together.

Technically, the show is impressive as well, with a simple, inventive, scenic design by Laura Rhinehart that has everything from a crystal chandelier to (of course) an omnipresent, lurking guillotine, all marvelously,

moodily lit by Todd Brecht's lighting design.

Kai Lassen's sound also adds a key element as the sights and sounds shift back and forth to various locations when the action shifts from a Paris safe place, a study, a prison cell, the tribunal and then the scaffold. The sounds you hear "in the dark" as the blade falls in farewell to each woman is chilling.

The important light and sound running crew are Felicia Kratt and Carin Billings (who also chose the complex, multiple properties). Stage management is by Yvette Faust and Engelke's assistant director is Amanda "M" Nash.

However, what makes this show such a

fantastic, visual triumph overall, are the glorious, character-specific, costumes designed by Jenneveve Evermore Hood and the gorgeous hair, makeup and wigs designs of Finn Ferguson. The detail is fabulous and brings each character to life with her own special style. (Marie Antoinette's look alone is worth the price of admission.) Absolutely unforgettable in every way. That's also an appropriate description of "The Revolutionists." It's a must-see show that continues its edgy Redwood Curtain run through Sept. 28 with performances on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. There are also Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. on Sept. 15 and 22.

Tickets are \$18 except for the Cheap Date

Night Thursday shows on Sept. 12, 19 and 26 with two tickets for \$20. Friday Focus on Sept. 13 features post-performance discussions with the cast.

Reserve or purchase tickets securely online by going to www.redwoodcurtain.com They can also be reserved by emailing boxoffice@redwoodcurtain.com or calling 707-443-7688. With just 80 seats available, doing so is highly recommended.

The theater is located at 220 First St. in Old Town Eureka, with its main entrance behind the building through Snug Alley. And, remember there is no late seating once a performance has begun ... so be on time.