CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER PRESENTS

UM DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE
Daniel MacLean Wagner, Producing Director

DEPARTMENT
OF
THEATRE

Machinal
by Sophie Treadwell

Director Jerry Whidden
Associate Director Kristen Messer
Performance Coach Lindsey Snyder
Scenic Designer Marie-Noelle Daigneault
Lighting Designer Rebecca Wolf
Costume Designer Marie-Noelle Daigneault
Sound Designer Laurence Zoll
Movement Director Leslie Felbain
Dramaturg Kristen Messer

For tickets, call 301.405.ARTS or visit www.claricesmithcenter.umd.edu

NOVEMBER 2 - 12, 2006
ROBERT AND ARLENE KOGOD THEATRE
THEATRE NEWS

ALUMNI

Karen Bradley (BA 1999) appeared in the short film The Date by Dobler's Productions for the annual Baltimore 48 hour film project.

Christine Marie Brown (BA 1996) appeared as Masha in Chekov's Three Sisters at Center Stage in Baltimore in October 2006.

James Gardiner (BA 2006) appeared as the Boy in Round House Theatre's production of A Prayer for Owen Meany in September and October 2006. His work Ass Backwards, co-written with Nick Blaemire, was featured as part of an hour-long concert at The Kennedy Center showcasing new works being developed by Signature Theatre. In addition, a reading was presented at Joe's Pub in New York City.

Brad J. Ranno (BA 2000) is the Theatre Technician at the Community College of Baltimore County at Essex and does freelance work in lighting and sound design in the Baltimore-Washington area.

Betsy Rosen (BA 2006) appeared as the Girl in Round House Theatre's production of A Prayer for Owen Meany in September and October 2006.

Jamie Klassel (BA 2003) will appear in Round House Theatre's production of A Little Prince, adapted from the book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry from November 15 to December 10, 2006. Since graduation, she has been living in New York and appearing in various off Broadway and off off Broadway productions as well as working as actor/producer/director with Impetuous Theater Group.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Elizabeth Long (PhD candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies) is a third year PhD student in Theatre and Performance Studies and an International Globe Center Fellow. She is teaching Voice and Speech this fall at the Shakespeare Theatre Company as part of their Master Acting Classes program. She is currently serving as Voice, Speech, and Text Consultant on Everyman Theatre's production of The School For Scandal directed by Artistic Director Vincent Lancisi. In 2007, Ms. Long will return to the stage to play Queen Gertrude in Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead at the Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. Studio Theatre's production, directed by Kirk Jackson, as part of the 2007 Shakespeare Festival in D.C.

WHAT'S THE GOING RATE FOR FREEDOM?

"... To find ourselves in a life of sameness — equalization — mechanization — in a life without freedom and fulfillment in a dark evil without humanity. Is this to be our future?"

This question clamors in the air of George H. Jones and Company, hangs in the hospital and prison hallways, and reverberates throughout the court room of Machinal. It is within this landscape of "sameness" that Treadwell's ordinary Young Woman travels. Through the Young Woman's eyes we are privy to the stifling grind of the day-to-day; she, like us, is an audience to her world, able from her vantage point, to bear witness to the myriad personal sacrifices offered each day to assure the machine's efficient functioning.

Machinal opened in September of 1928 under the direction of Arthur Hopkins with designs by Robert Edmond Jones. The play was influenced by Treadwell's experiences covering criminal trials over the course of her extensive career as a journalist. While earlier cases shaped Treadwell's opinions about the injustice of the judicial system, it was the infamous 1927 Snyder-Gray Trial that inspired Treadwell to record these thoughts in Machinal. One of the crime events of the century, the Snyder-Gray trial received front page coverage in newspapers throughout the nation for several months. The story re-surfaced when the New York Daily News published the now famous photograph of Ruth Snyder's execution taken by a journalist with a contraband camera strapped to his ankle.

As Pierre de Rohan writes in a September 8, 1928 review in the New York American, Treadwell "... created a complete picture of life's bitterness and essential meanness, painted with the small, oft-repeated strokes of the realist, yet achieving in perspective the sweep and swing of expressionism." Although Machinal premiered at the end of expressionism's American vogue, it has often been termed more successful in integrating expressionist form and content than experiments by authors such as Rice and O'Neill. Perhaps the play's success lies in the specificity of the supporting characters, as well as in the inescapable tangibility of the voices that filter through the windows of the Young Woman's environment — voices that invade and alter the very processes of her thoughts — never leaving her alone and never letting her rest.

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PROGRAM NOTES

By building her play on the bedrock of a real media sensation Treadwell is able to comment with prescience on a social, political and economic structure that only affords release through violence. From her Lover’s escape from Mexican “bandits”, to the Young Woman’s escape from an unhappy marriage, to her final end, in the world of Machinal, stepping outside of one’s function begets only a temporary freedom that makes imprisonment taste more bitter — a transient, fleeting freedom, that’s final cost is life itself.

Treadwell, however, does not leave us at the end of these nine episodes simply with the picture of a failed insurrection. Instead, she leaves us with some small hope for rebirth. The Young Woman is not able to live free, but she is able to recognize that freedom itself lies in her ability to own and to understand the power of her actions. She cries out, “For one moment — down here on earth — I have been free.” How many of us can study the complex web of technology, commerce, politics and power that we live in each and every day and say the same of ourselves? The price of our freedom and our future — like the Young Woman’s — depends on that answer, for as Treadwell reflects, “And so I thought — ‘Still in this world of mass men — mass movements — the single person is effective.’ Something in me stirred — a sense of my own worth and power — And my duty to use it.”

—Kristen Messer, Ph.D. candidate, Theatre and Performance Studies

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

When I was handed this script nine months ago I had no idea what was in store for me. Since that initial encounter with Machinal I have come to know — though not as well as I would like — two profound and powerful women whose stories are illuminated by this play.

In the Young Woman, whose journey we follow throughout Machinal, I have found a unique and relentlessly compelling reminder that the individual does not always triumph; yet, the individual does — without fail — gravitate toward that which makes them free — no matter what the cost or the circumstances of that freedom. Machinal lives as a kind of tone poem, an ode to this woman’s plight showing both her internal struggle and her interactions with the external world. Even though the Young Woman is truly of her own age and time, her refusal to submit and her commitment to find peace in a world that denies her experiences make her Everywoman — so different, yet so like us. The world of eighty years ago, in which Machinal is grounded, is surprisingly similar to our own. The specter of de-personalization and the inhumanity that hang over the cyber age easily parallels the increasing mechanization of humanities’ mental and physical landscapes in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. It is this mechanically structural jungle that the Young Woman must travel through to find the peace she desires. And though the route she takes in pursuit of her peace is not morally sound or viable, it is — when viewed through the prism of the Young Woman’s struggle — understandable. In Machinal, Treadwell effectively challenges us with the friction that arises between the Young Woman’s insurrection against the forces that stifle her and the validity and viability of the actions she takes to get out. It is the compelling questions raised in the struggle between a restrictive world and explosive freedom that Treadwell offers us as a reward.

That’s why I love theatre.

This brings us to the other woman now so present in my life — Sophie Treadwell. Her story stems from the same impulse as the Young Woman’s — to be free in a world of nearly suffocating restriction. Treadwell was one of the first women to produce and direct on Broadway, one of the first American female war correspondents, the first journalist to interview Pancho Villa after the Mexican Revolution. Throughout her own life Treadwell also refused to submit. Her work spanned continents and careers and her commitment to exploring and improving women’s position and possibilities was consistent. She put a woman at the center of almost all of her work, whether it was a play based on a famous murder trial, or an eighteen part expose on the lack of help available for “fallen” women who desperately wanted to go straight. Though Treadwell empathizes with her own central creation in Machinal, her life story had a profoundly different result; she did indeed triumph through the way she lived her life, as well as through the forty plays and countless other works of hers, which we have to learn from, to admire, and to enjoy.

—Jerry Whiddon

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1 The quotations at the beginning and the end of this note were both written by Treadwell in her serial “Report from a Traveler”. Both quotations paraphrase part of a lecture given by the philosopher Karl Jaspers in Basel. Only the third “Report” was published the others can be found in Treadwell’s papers at the University of Arizona. The above are quoted in Jerry Dickey and Minam Lopez-Rodriguez’s collection of Treadwell’s writing, Broadway’s Bravest Woman: Selected Writings of Sophie Treadwell, 16-17.

2 Though she did not cover the Snyder-Gray Trial as a journalist Treadwell was present at the proceedings.

3 Treadwell, Machinal, 80.