

Old Wife Tale: Talking Theater with Lucia Grillo

Natasha Lardera (April 06, 2012)



The 68 Cent Crew Theatre Company presents a collection of one act plays, 4 comedies and 2 dramas at the Arthur Seelen Theatre at The Drama Book Shop Theatre Space. Italian American actress and director Lucia Grillo directs the drama of a woman whose life is about to end and her concern for the future of her beloved husband.

4 comedies (Get Back, Guess Who's Coming to Breakfast, Family Picnic and Rounding Third) and 2 dramas (Benson, Old Wife Tale), are the plays presented in Home Brewed, the premiere production of [the 68 Cent Crew Theatre Company NYC](#). [2]

This is a collection of one act plays written, directed and produced solely by members of the 68 Cent Crew Theatre Company (company founded by General Hospital's star Ronnie Marmo) that can be seen thru April 27th, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights at the Arthur Seelen Theatre at [The Drama Book Shop Theatre Space](#) [3] (250 West 40th Street #1, New York, New York, 10018).



Members of the company were each asked to write a one act play. Later two Committees read all the one acts and commented on them. Within the Committees there was mentor chosen for each play and playwright. After having consulted them, each writer had the chance to concentrate on a rewrite and now, the final six chosen plays are being performed on stage.

Company member [Lucia Grillo](#) [4] is the director of Old Wife Tale, a snapshot of a dying wife who meets the new woman who has captured her husband's heart. We had a chance to chat about the play and the creative process behind it. "I wrote a drama, a one act version of my feature length screenplay A Tigered Calm. I was inspired by an article I had read in a local Calabrian newspaper about a murder in a small town. I took the opportunity to explore my own characters of the feature length screenplay and see if I could tell their story in one act. I like the outcome and I got really good feedback, but the theme of this selection that is being performed is 'home' and mine didn't correspond to it so it was not chosen," she explains.

This is the first time that Lucia, a celebrated Italian American actress, writer and director, directs for the theater. "I only directed film before," she admits. "I approached it kinda as I would have approached it as an actress, and most likely as a film director. I read the script several times, first to have an idea of the story, then to try to get at the bottom of what the writer intended to say with the play and then to see if I had anything new of my own to add to it. To see what my perspective was. Afterward, I read it from the point of view of each character, in order to see what each of them wants to achieve by the end of the play and identify their relationship to the other characters. Then I asked the actors what their perspective was on their character and their relationship with the others. I like the creative process to be a collaborative process."

Lucia made her own choices and the biggest, more apparent one is that "this play was written for people that are older than the people I have cast. The ones I cast are in the mid to late 20s. I thought that it would be more striking to see a young couple going through what these characters go through, that it would be more poignant to see it happening to someone who didn't have a chance to live her life to the fullest... a couple who did not have a chance to get everything they wanted as a couple."

Working in a tight group where the writer is readily available is a luxury that is not always available yet Lucia did not really rely on Suzanne Mernyk. "At first I really wanted to consult with her, mainly because I wanted to know about any research that she had done about this particular type of cancer and the character's physicality and how the cancer and any medication would affect her physically and mentally, and how she treats other people. I was especially inquisitive about the scientific aspect. I was dying to know what the story was because apparently the play is based on a true story but then I thought that because I am such a realist that once I heard her story it would lose something from a creative aspect because I would try to be true to every detail of the reality that corresponded to her fiction. And I just wanted to respect the fiction, the great piece of writing that she had created. So I didn't. I know very little about the true story. We did consult with her later on during the rehearsal process because at first I just wanted to get the characters relationships down and explore that with the actors. So we consulted her later, on the pain that the sick character feels and the effect of the medications."

Suzanne Mernyk saw the play and she is very pleased with the final result and admitted that Lucia and her actors found some nuances that she didn't have in the writing.

"This play spoke to me. I love all three characters and I love how large their minds are. We rarely see this in our society. These three people are so loving and so giving. We see Betty (played by Tygar Hicks) the one who is ill and who, despite her jealousy and her love for her husband, wants to know that he will be taken care of and that he has someone to love when she dies. We have Howard (played by James Sayess and Tyler Rackliffe) the husband who loves his wife very much, who is falling in love with this other woman and is trying to give them both love and respect. And Patricia (played by Hadas Nuriel), the new woman, who comes in to give something to a woman she doesn't know. She is giving her the gift of knowing that her husband will be taken care of. This is something we don't often find in our society today so this is what I loved the most about this play."

By entering Patricia's life, Howard is also gaining a daughter, Cathy. Is this one more reason for him



to get involved with Patricia in the first place? "Howard and Betty were never able to have kids as a matter of fact. It's revealed in the play that once she thought she was pregnant but it was actually a cancer mass. We decided, as a back story, and it is pretty clear in the play, that they wanted a child. His tenderness towards Cathy, Patricia's daughter, is obvious, yes. He might not even admit it to himself yet because his wife is still alive and he is in denial about that, he doesn't want to face this. I think he does like the fact that he will become a father," Lucia replies.

The other plays presented in Home Brewed are:

Benson - A man struggling with suicidal thoughts finds help very close to home, through the unspoken love of his son.

Get Back - Lost in limbo and longing for loved ones, Jack needs to act quickly or lose to a devilish woman. Between heaven, hell, repentance, and family, can Jack win back his soul?

Guess Who's Coming to Breakfast - A seemingly perfect nuclear family shows their true colors when a visit from an unexpected stranger spins their world around.

Family Picnic - With praises to Jesus, self-help books, and freshly baked pie, Anna learns life with her sister-in-laws is no picnic.

Rounding Third - A couple struggling with sexual dysfunction seek help at a sex therapy office and find remedy in the most unexpected place.

All performances are held at the Arthur Seelen Theatre at The Drama Book Shop Theatre Space, 250 West 40th Street #1, New York, New York, 10018 (on 40th street between Broadway and 8th). Tickets are \$15 online and over the phone, \$20 cash only at the door. Running time is 75 minutes with no intermission.

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