How can a door slam without a door? Ingmar Bergman’s Nora, a 1981 version of Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House (1879) explores this possibility. The first production of Ibsen’s A Doll’s House back in 1879 in Norway shocked audiences and incited protests. The door slammed in the end has since been referred to as “the door slam heard around the world”. It symbolically marked the beginning of the feminist movement brewing at the time. A Doll’s House also served as an example of the emergence of realism in theatre. Bergman’s revision focuses on the psychological turmoil of A Doll’s House main character, Nora. His adaptation (translated and adapted by Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker) condenses Ibsen’s original script down to 90 minutes and the five main characters while updating the language. The University of Hawaii at Manoa’s Kennedy Theatre further modifies this adaptation to entice a modern day audience.

We are first introduced to Nora Helmer, (Christine Lamborn) a young housewife and mother who her husband, Torvald Helmer (Tyler Haugen) refers to as a childish spendthrift. There is excitement as Torvald has recently landed a significant job promotion and Nora’s childhood friend, Christine Linde (Emily Steward) re-emerges in hopes that his promotion will secure her a new position. Complications arise as Nils Krogstad (Donovan Oakleaf) reminds Nora of her obligations and her past choices that have come back to haunt her. Meanwhile, Nora’s loyalty and maturity is tested by her and Torvald’s close friend, Dr. Rank (Malia Wessel).

Call it a bad few days for Nora around the holidays filled with stressful ups and downs and difficult choices. The audience observes Nora and Torvald’s marriage through its daily facades, while being able to contrast that relationship with the close friendship between Nora and Dr. Rank along with another intimate past love relationship. Nora waits for a “miracle” that never arrives to save her, prompting her to make a change.

Kennedy Theatre’s production of Nora can truly be described as a powerhouse of performances. Christine Lamborn’s portrayal of Nora is captivatingly intense and transformatory, heightening the tension and driving the pacing of the piece. Tyler Haugen’s Torvald at times seems genuinely sweet and distraught, not the typical controlling Torvald portrayal throughout. While Dr. Rank makes a dramatic modern shift being portrayed as a woman, Malia Wessel’s delightful subtlety delivers this new element with ease. Rounding out the cast are strong performances from both Donovan Oakleaf’s Krogstad and Emily Steward’s Linde. Director Stacy Ray’s superb casting and coaching shines.
Bergman’s “new” adaptation in 1981 of this classic is now 37 years old. It is still relevant given the current #Metoo movement and the daily headlines forcing us to re-examine male/female relationships in and out of marriage. Adopting Bergman’s directorial approach of removing “realistic exits and entrances” (no doors to slam) and “having the cast remain on stage during the entire production” creates an examination of relationships as if under a microscope or within a fishbowl. This transformation allows a modern audience more accessibility to the material removing most of the classical language and surroundings. It also creates practical challenges that allow for inconsistencies which can be distracting. The time period of this piece also became unclear. This may have been the point, to create a timeless piece, but the music suggested 2018, while some of the furniture and costumes seemed more mid-century modern or retro. It appeared to be more of an examination from the 1950’s to present. The set designed by Rachel Filbeck was simple yet effective in a large space while beautifully enhanced by projections designed by Joseph Governale.

Opening night was a stormy night which added to the intensity of the piece. Projection of an outside tree blowing in the wind in the Helmer’s window was accompanied by gusts of wind outside the theatre. During some of the intense moments within the play, alarms were going off which many audience members believed was part of the show rather than cell phone flash flood warnings. Actors on stage didn’t even skip a beat which is a testament to this cast’s focus. Mother Nature seemed to enrich the production that night. I attended with my thirteen year old daughter and sat near a young college student, both of whom were unfamiliar with the play. They both enjoyed the production and described it as intense or “savage”. Though there are warnings that the play has adult situations and profanity, there was only one of each which I believe would be equivalent to PG-13. I found that it is clear that this version is very tangible to a new and young adult audience. When combining that tangibility with incredible performances, fans of the original A Doll’s House like me, will also find this piece thought-provoking and impressive.

Nora

April 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, 2018

Fri/Sat 7:30pm & Sun 2:00pm

Box Office 956-7655

www.manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/kennedy-theatre
Nora, Kennedy Theatre

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