

Department of Dramatic Arts February Mainstage, 2009 Audition Posting

SMASH, by Jeffrey Hatcher (6m, 5f), adapted from "An Unsocial Socialist", the last novel of Bernard Shaw.

Why propose this script? It is:

- a comedy! for February!
- a script that challenges students' skills of language & theatricality;
- a balance of gender roles;
- a script that might have links to Improv/Commedia skills or Bernard Shaw so as to provide practicum for specialized performance classes offered 2008/9;
- a script that contrasts or complements the fall production (*Medea*) so as to give our audience wider or more intensive production experiences 2008/9;
- a script that has overt curricular links to the English or Visual Arts or Music department & that can stimulate the university community and schools attending matinees.

Characters:

Sidney Trefusis, a socialist

Henrietta Jansenius Trefusis, socialist's spouse (abandoned)

Mr. Jansenius, socialist's father-in-law

Miss Wilson, Headmistress

Lumpkin, gardener

Agatha Wylie, rebellious schoolgirl

Jane Carpenter, schoolgirl

Gertrude Lindsay, schoolgirl

Photographer

Sir Charles Brandon, upper class twit in love with Jane

Chichester Erskine, sonnet tutor, in love with Gertrude

“Hi-jinks at an all-girls boarding school as an unsocial socialist seeks to infiltrate this bastion of conservatism to recruit the future wives of presidents to his revolutionary cause”.

This play is very English (oh well) and very silly. And yet—Ivan Illyich in De-schooling Society certainly shares some of Shaw's awareness of the ways the education system props up the belief systems of society, providing the gatekeepers and the legacies that perpetuate the power balance. Its appeal to me lies in discovering a comic style that infuses Shaw with commedia and borders joyfully on the grotesque without losing lightness: a parody of Merchant Ivory that draws on "The Corpse Bride" as a precedent. There is an effervescent physicality to the show that we should enjoy.

The play is set in 1910. It has an Edwardian, pre-Vorticist, pre WW1 innocence. It is very far from the “South Park” cynicism of contemporary discourse. Its stridently vacuous politics are contradicted in many ways by its action and it embraces numerous blissfully ignorant assumptions. The apparent straightforwardness of the play is reinforced by

audience assumptions (especially in our parts) that Shaw is by definition of the visionary intelligentsia. Much humour is derived from the disingenuity (and lack of self knowledge) of the main character and there is a bawdy subtext under the Edwardian surfaces. I'm not particularly looking to generate a controversial Shaw exposé, but as in previous experiences with directing Shaw, I won't be treating him as holy.

Of course, one of the great advantages of working on this play is the title.
I look forward to your smashing auditions next week...

Best to all,
Gyllian