

## The Revolutionists

By: David Sargent

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**LEWISTON** — The Public Theatre's current production of "The Revolutionists" draws plenty of laughs from its view of feminist power during the bloody French Revolution of 1790.

In this new play by Lauren Gunderson, four bold and brassy ladies turn the Reign of Terror into a dark farce. It all revolves around a former queen, an assassin, a Haitian rebel and a playwright. A fifth, silent and ever-present character is the tall framework of the guillotine, with a blood-red spotlight focused on the raised blade. These women find humor and friendship in their plight during a momentous period of history. The final scene is appropriately somber and touching.

Janet Mitchko, co-artistic director of The Public Theatre, delivers a faultless portrayal of Olympe De Gouges, a playwright who was one of the first women to fight for women's rights. The play takes place in Olympe's mind as she works persistently to re-write history. In contrast to the familiar advice given playwrights to "write what you know," Olympe insists they should "write what you want." Gunderson's play finds many comedic contradictions amid the horrors of France's Reign of Terror. It's just before the execution of Mitchko's character that Olympe yells, "You can't kill me, I work for a nonprofit!"

Among numerous TPT shows in which Mitchko has played memorable roles are "The Ladies Foursome," "Good People" and "Time Stands Still." Robyne Parrish gives an artfully-nuanced performance in the role of Marie Antoinette. The former queen was the opposite of a revolutionist, and there are running jokes about that in Gunderson's witty script.

Marie Antoinette is seen as a fading royal, still wearing a high wig and elegant gown with pockets full of her precious ribbons ... her reminders of what once was. Olympe's regal visitor wants "a re-write" of her life. She wants to be the heroine of a romantic comedy and she would like to have "a little credit" for her part in the French Revolution. "I care," she says. "I care so much about my people and my country." There's a simple solution to her problems, the former queen tells Olympe, "I just need better press," she says. Parrish is appearing in her fifth TCP production. She was in "Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike," "The Book Club Play," "Miss Witherspoon" and "Rough Crossing."

Sherrill Turner is excellent as Charlotte Corday, who murders French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat. Her sanity is steadily unraveling as she paces the stage, swinging a steak knife and muttering "stab, stab." This is Turner's debut at TPT. Born in London, she has lived in Los Angeles and now makes New York her home. She has many theatrical credits.

Shamika Cotton brings conviction to her portrayal of Marianne Angelle, who fights French colonization in Haiti, then known as San Domingue. Her character is fictional, but it adds a global dimension to the story of revolution in France of the 1790s. Cotton is best known for her controversial television portrayal of a drug-addicted mother on HBO's "The Wire." She appeared in the off-Broadway production of "Bullet for Adolf." Cotton has numerous television and regional theater credits.

Under the direction of Christopher Schario, TPT's Executive/Artistic director, "The Revolutionists" follows four strong women who rely upon friendship and humor in a tumultuous time. There is a recurring melody throughout the show, and the song is prominently featured in the guillotine scaffold scene at the end. Lighting design by Jim Alexander is important to the mood of "The Revolutionists," adding important drama to this TPT production.

Costume design by Anne Collins ranges from a simple dress for Charlette Corday to a flamboyant gown for Marie Antoinette. Lisa Bragdon is stage manager for this show. Effective set design by John D. Ervin features a large guillotine, with simple contrast of a small desk on one side of the stage and a red velvet sofa on the other side.



In a scene from "The Revolutionists" from left, Shamika Cotton as Marianne Angelle, Janet Mitchko as playwright Olympe De Gouges, Sherrill Turner as the murderous Charlotte Corday and Robyne Parrish as Marie Antoinette.