

Milwaukee Repertory Theater Presents

November 23 — December 19, 2010

Quadracci Powerhouse Stage

BOMBSHELLS



*This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at Milwaukee Repertory Theater and is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains information that will deepen your understanding of, and appreciation for, the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of **BOMBSHELLS**.*

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If you would like to schedule a classroom workshop, or if we can help in any other way, please contact

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Weekday Matinees

December 8

December 15

All matinees are at 1:30 pm

NOTE:

BOMBSHELLS contains
adult content.

Study Guide
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THE SHOW

BOMBSHELLS tells the story of six different women: a frazzled mother, a nervous bride-to-be, a lonely widow, a timid Cactophile, a teenage talent show contestant and an aging diva. In this one woman show, each character reveals a little bit about their life. Completed in 2004, the show was specifically written for Caroline O'Connor.



The Monologues

Meryl Louise Davenport

Meryl is a thirty-something woman with a family. This internal monologue shows us a typical day for Meryl. She begins her day at 6:07 am with the baby crying and trying to get her son to eat a healthy breakfast. Her day consists of grocery shopping, doing laundry, cleaning, getting the kids home from school, dinner and contemplating the things she thinks she is doing wrong. As we listen to her internal monologue we get an insider's

look at what it's like to be a busy mother. Her monologue ends as Meryl begins another long, hard day.



Tiggy Entwistle

Tiggy is a representative of CASL, a group that is for cacti-lover, and she is at a meeting for all cacti lovers. Her slide-show of pictures and heart-felt address to the group show and tell us why cacti are important. However, Tiggy is also immersed in her own world tormented by the loss of her lover and she intersperses her speech about cacti with her own thoughts about Harry.

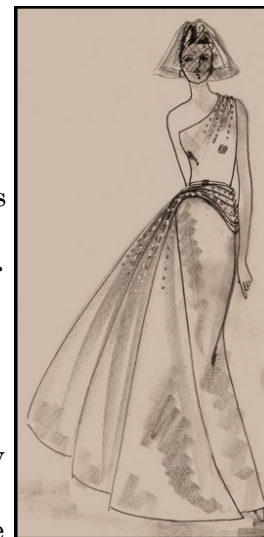
Mary O'Donnell

Mary is a teenager at St. Brigid's School. Her love of performing shines in her monologue as she prepares to go on stage and perform 'O'Shaunnesy, the Mystery Cat' from the musical, CATS, at the school's talent show. However, as Mary is getting ready, she hears over the loud speaker that her nemesis, Angela McTerry, will be performing the same number, before Mary! Mary is bewildered at the thought of what she should do now. As she browses her CD collection, Mary decides to do a 'Shaft' number, in her cat costume. We see her perform the number, receive much applause and then hear the announcer begin to state the winner of the talent show.



Theresa McTerry

Theresa is a young, happy, beautiful bride. She is so happy she could scream. Theresa leads us through her thoughts about being a wife and how much she loves her future husband, Ted. We see her put on her wedding dress and begin to walk down the aisle to where she actually sees Ted. And then realizes that her wedding day may not be all she hoped for. Theresa begins commenting on the negative things about Ted, including the color of his cummerbund. We bounce between Theresa saying her vows, which she regrets writing, and her internal monologue where she comments on how sexy the vicar looks, her wedding dress and how horrible the bridesmaids' dresses are. Her monologue ends as we hear Theresa beginning a speech about how happy she is.





Winsome Webster

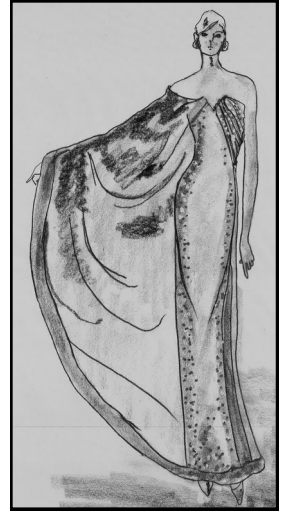
Winsome is an older widow. She begins by explaining her week and the activities she does with other widows. Winsome explains what the group is and what it's like to be a widow. She then tells us that she received a phone call to work with a new client, Patrick, from the Blind Society. Winsome explains what he looks like and how often she visited him and the experience of those visits.

However, one day, Patrick asks Winsome to read a new book and as she begins to read it, realizes that it is a lewd novel. As she continues reading, hesitantly, Patrick grabs Winsome and begins to seduce her. She tells us that she thinks about telling him to stop, but finds herself taking off her

own clothing instead. Patrick does the same and moments later, Winsome and Patrick are making love on a table in his living room.

Zoe Struthers

Zoe is an aging American singer doing a show in London. As she gets the crowd riled up, she shifts between singing and speaking, mainly about the losses she's had in her life: her husband to her stylist, her house to a fire, her daughter she gave up at birth and her substance abuse problem. But, she announces to the audience that she is, indeed, sober and begins singing about what she's learned in her life.



WHO IS CAROLINE O'CONNOR?

Caroline Ann O'Connor was born in Oldham, Lancashire England to Irish parents, and eventually moved to Sydney, Australia. A performer from a young age, Caroline started singing almost before she could speak. At age 10 she was crowned Australian Irish Dance Champion. Wanting a more formal training, Caroline packed her bags once again and returned to England to train at the Royal Ballet School in London. After receiving her training, she moved back to Australia to work with the Australian Opera Ballet where she was told to pursue musicals.

Caroline has enjoyed great acclaim for stepping into the shoes of the likes of Edith Piaf, Judy Garland and Ethel Merman, as well as headline roles in many of the world's best-loved musicals. Out of her many Australian productions, one of the most famous is BOMBSHELLS. After the success of the show, Caroline filmed BOMBSHELLS for ABC Television and toured the play to sell out performances at the Edinburgh

Festival (where she won the coveted Fringe First Award), London's West End at the Arts Theatre (for which she received her second Laurence Olivier Award nomination) and at the World Stage Festival in Toronto, Canada.

Her own show, *From Stage to Screen*, has been presented at the Sydney Opera House and was filmed for Australian television. Caroline's film work includes the featured role of Nini Legs in the Air in Baz Luhrmann's film *Moulin Rouge*, and as Ethel Merman in the Cole Porter biopic *De-Lovely*. Caroline has also recorded four solo CDs and is featured on numerous cast recordings and compilations.

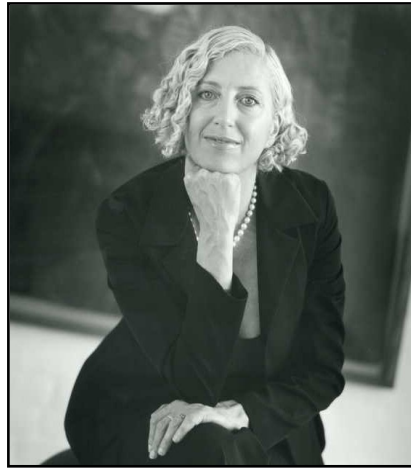


Caroline O'Connor as Nini Legs in the Air in the film *Moulin Rouge*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Researched and written by Robin Esch Gower, PR/Marketing Intern

Born April 17, 1962 in Mount Eliza, Victoria, Joanna Murray-Smith is a Melbourne-based playwright, screenwriter, librettist, novelist and newspaper columnist. She attended Toorak College and received her BA from the University of Melbourne. In 1995 Murray-Smith was awarded a Rotary International Scholarship, which she used to attend New York's Columbia University writing program.



Many of Murray-Smith's plays, including *ATALANTA* (1990), *REDEMPTION* (1997) and *RAPTURE* (2002), have been translated and performed throughout the world. Her 1994 work, *HONOR*, has been performed in over 36 countries, including Broadway productions, as well as performances at London's Royal National Theatre and in the

West End. Murray-Smith penned *BOMBSHELLS* (2004), her one-woman show, specifically for actress Caroline O'Connor. Following its Sydney premiere to sell out

crowds, *BOMBSHELLS* headed overseas to the Edinburgh Festival and was awarded the Edinburgh Festival Fringe First Award. It was then performed in London's West End where it received the 2005 London Theatergoers Choice Award. *BOMBSHELLS* has since been performed around the globe and was filmed for Australian television.

Murray-Smith is currently married to Raymond Gill and has two sons and one daughter. She states that although she considers "the life of the playwright . . . an emotional and financial minefield," Murray-Smith also acknowledges, "My working life comes from what I'm dreaming up inside my head. How lucky can you get?"

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION: Why do you think Smith decided to write a show specifically for an actor? What factors might play into creating a show around various characters played by one person? What difficulties might you run into trying to do this? Discuss your answers with your classmates.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: While there are no specifics for a set, it must be flexible and accommodating for the actors and the script. Knowing that there are six different monologues, design the set for *BOMBSHELLS*. Use clues from the script to help you create something that is appropriate for the show as well as effective in conveying meaning. Share what you have designed with a small group.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: After seeing the show, compare the actual set to what you previously designed. How do they compare and contrast? Do you think the set was effective in conveying meaning as well as accommodating of the six monologues? Discuss your thoughts with a small group.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: The show is made up of six monologues about the lives of six different women. Pick an event in your life that has had a big impact on you. Write a short monologue about this event and perform it for your classmates.

MONODRAMAS

The monologue has become a very important piece of writing in the theater world. Solo performance is a basic idea that finds its roots in storytelling. A monodrama, a play acted by one person, is well on its way to becoming very established style in theater. We will see this in BOMBSHELLS. In the past fifty years, the monodrama has become increasingly popular and continues to grow in popularity every day. It gives the audience an exciting opportunity as they watch a character morph into another in front of their eyes.



Ruth Draper portrays two different characters for one of her shows.



portray all the characters in their works, sometimes numbering over 20 different people. The first actor and playwright to

make this performance style popular was Ruth Draper. She often created several characters through monologues and portrayed them in a single show. Draper's work was the first of its kind and become accepted very quickly. The audience was astounded by her ability and talent to portray an old woman and then a young girl or a rich heiress and then an immigrant worker. She performed this style of theater until her death in 1956.

What makes this style of theater challenging is that the playwright must create multiple stories within the one performance. Each monologue needs to have certain characteristics in order for it to fit in with the others. Each individual story must have a beginning, middle and end. The playwright must consider who the speaker is, where the entire story takes place and what's going on in this particular moment. It requires multi-tasking and much attention to detail.

Monodramas have become much more modernized and we are able to see it performed not only on stage, but also in stand-up comedy, television and film. Actors such as Eddie Murphy, Tracy Ullman and Whoopie Goldberg have all found success with the multi-character solo performance.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION: The monodrama is very popular in today's world. Think about where we see the act of solo performing. Where do you see this happening? With your class, list various examples from theater, stand-up, television or film. What do you think is the most difficult part of solo-performing? How do you think someone would train in order to become better at this? Name some techniques an actor might find useful in making each character stand out from the others.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: Get into small groups with your classmates. Recall a story that is familiar with all the students in the group. This story should have multiple people in it. After deciding a story, make sure that everyone knows the specifics of the story. Each person should pick one character and write a monologue from that person's perspective. The group will then have created, in essence, a monodrama. Perform the monologues for the rest of the class.

AN INTERVIEW WITH...

Both Rukhmani Desai and Stephanie Lambourn are Acting Interns at The Rep. They will be working with Caroline O' Connor in BOMBSHELLS as ensemble members. Not only will they support her in the show; but they will also be gaining valuable information about the world of professional theater.

Rukhmani Desai, Acting Intern at The Rep

What has your time as an acting intern at The Rep been like so far? What do you do as an intern?

My time as an acting intern has been an extraordinary learning experience so far. As interns, we understudy actors in main stage productions here at The Rep. We have understudy rehearsals along with being cast in the ensemble of these productions as well. We also audition for various professional companies throughout the season and participate in staged readings with the Ten Chimneys Foundation. Right now, I'm understudying roles in MY NAME IS ASHER LEV and am a part of the ensemble in BOMBSHELLS. Before that, I was in the Ensemble of CABARET.

What is it like working on a one-woman show (even though there are three of you)? What have you learned so far?

It's pretty amazing working on a one-woman show starring Caroline O'Connor. I've learned so much about the importance of "play" in this work. Caroline has such a solid technique and presence, but she also isn't afraid to keep pushing her choices further as

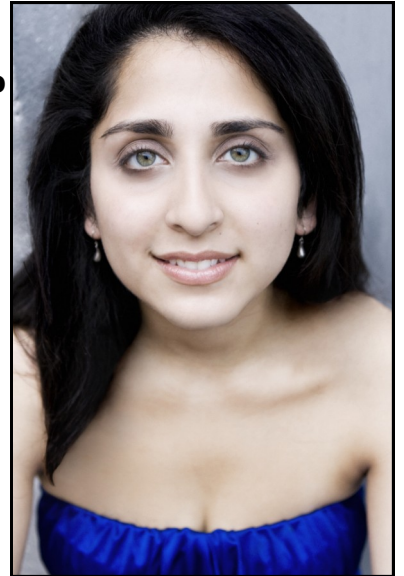
she rehearses each character. She is so incredibly specific with the different rhythms of each of the characters, (not to mention also with the various accents she has to take on).

Give me three words that describe your experience working with Caroline O' Connor thus far.

Thrilling. Playful. Inspiring.

BOMBSHELLS is an American Premiere, but has gotten lots of positive feedback overseas. How do you think our audiences will react to it?

I think audiences will absolutely embrace it. Although there is only one American character in the show (Zoe), I think the issues and complexities each character faces are pretty universal. If anything, the incredible truth and humanity within each of these women as portrayed by the amazingly gifted Caroline O'Connor will draw them in!



To see some videos of Caroline O' Connor performing check out You Tube and type in OfficiallyCaroline (no space). You can also visit her website at <http://www.carolineoconnor.com>.



Stephanie Lambourn, Acting Intern at The Rep

What has your time as an acting intern at The Rep been like so far? What do you do as an intern?

So far my time as an intern at The Rep has been a very busy one but I have enjoyed all

the busy moments. As an intern, we primarily work as understudies, although sometimes, we are involved as ensemble members in productions as well. For example CABARET, all of the acting interns performed in the show as well as understudied major characters in CABARET and also ASHER LEV. In addition to all of that, we as an intern group with Ten Chimneys have performed two play readings and have participated in some professional development workshops.

What is it like working on a one-woman show (even though there are three of you)? What have you learned so far?

BOMBSHELLS is a dream for me to work on and understudy. It's a lot of work, but I have learnt that a one woman show isn't just about the one actor performing the role, but

it really is the accumulation of a lot of people's hard work. It's the first one person show I have been involved in, and really it isn't all that different to working on any production. Our roles in the show are really supportive, in the first monologue we are assisting with the handling of props and then we assist with transitions for the rest of the show. It's done so creatively though that it is still very interesting for us.

Give me three words that describe your experience working with Caroline O'Connor thus far.

Fun. Creative. Inspiring.

BOMBSHELLS is an American Premiere, but has gotten lots of positive feedback overseas. How do you think our audiences will react to it?

Interestingly we have spent a fair amount of time in rehearsal discussing this. The show was written by an Australian for Australian audiences so some of the colloquialisms had to be changed. In my opinion, I think the audiences will react to it in a similar way to the audiences from Australia, Edinburgh and London (some of the other places Caroline has performed this show). It's clever writing, wonderfully acted.

WORKS CITED AND FURTHER READING

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A Woman's World. 10 March 2009. The Age Education Resource Centre. 26 October 2010. <<http://education.theage.com.au/cmspage.php?intid=136&intversion=214>>.

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our Ticket Office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. If you walk into the center of this area, you'll see a staircase on your left. You will take this staircase to the Quadracci Powerhouse lobby.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains, and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) at the coat check and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full "running time" of the play.

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**"You need three things in the theatre – the play, the actors and the audience –
and each must give something." – Kenneth Haigh**

Theater is described as a collaborative art form. The success of a production relies upon every member of the process: playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, actors and the audience. Plays require audiences to give a new life to performances through their careful attention and enthusiastic reactions. The audience has an active role to play and the actors rely on you to be respectful and attentive. Through your observation of sets, costumes, lighting and the work of the actors, you'll be better able to follow the story and enjoy its live presentation. You are important in the final performance and your participation is what makes this process worthwhile.

Milwaukee Repertory Theater Education Department

<http://www.milwaukeerep.com/education/outreach.htm>

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