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## A Summer Day

by Winnie McCroy

EDGE Editor

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Karen Allen stars in Jon Fosse's bleak play (Source:Sandra Coudert)

The Rattlestick Playwrights Theater group stages Norwegian author and dramatist Jon Fosse's "A Summer Day" at the charming Cherry Lane Theatre. Although the play is a bleak and questioning foray into self-regret and stark reality, actress Karen Allen brings it alive, so to speak, with her strong performance.

The meat of the play is very straightforward: a young couple leaves the city for a solitary house by the sea. She (Allen) loves the solitude; he (McCaleb Burnett) finds refuge by rowing far out into the bay in a tiny wooden rowboat. One day, her friend comes to visit. He puts on his sweater and boots and takes the boat out. Rain comes, night falls, she stares out the

window and runs back and forth to the dock with her friend, but the man never returns. Only the rowboat is found, empty and floating near the shore.

Allen remains on stage for the duration of the 90-minute play, either playing out her present-day self, still staring out the same window searching for her man on the horizon, or narrating as her younger self (Samantha Soule) considers whether to tell her man that she has a bad feeling about him going out on the bay that afternoon.

Although her acting chops are formidable here, this former "Raiders of the Lost Ark" star has been cast somewhat against type in this play. Her usual character (see Marion Ravenwood as Indiana Jones' love interest) is a feisty, hard-drinking, straight-shooting broad.

In Fosse's play, she is a woman who is adrift on the waves of life. In predictable Norwegian fashion, she is a bleak shell of a woman, compulsively drawn to staring out that same window for the past 25 years, but petrified by the idea of getting close to the shore. Like Miss Havisham, she even wears the same floral-print dress she wore on that fateful day.

"When I stand by the window, I can see him," she tells her friend, played as a young woman by Maren Bush, and as the older friend by Pamela Shaw. Whatever drew the two together as friends originally, one gets the idea that the only connection they now share is that the friend was there on the day that the man went missing.



The pain is apparent in her face as she watches her friend watching the sea, and even admits to her that when she pictures the woman in her mind, she is staring out that very same window.

But Fosse leaves room for myriad interpretations in his play. When the woman revisits the day her man disappeared, she recalls that there was a sense of unease about him, as though he was



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unhappy. She remembers that his clothes were folded and put away so neatly, as if no loose ends were to be tolerated.

Perhaps she wonders if he simply rowed to shore during that stormy night and walked away from their life together. Or maybe she wonders whether, if she followed her gut and told him not to leave, he would still be with her.

And just maybe she is fine with that. When she was with her man, the woman was constantly plagued by feelings of anxiety. But since he has gone, although she says she is "unspeakably sad," she also admits she is "emptied out, wasn't anxious, was pitch-black darkness shining. The darkness would be me forever."

The set by John McDermott is simple, meant to evoke a weathered old beach house, white paint beaten off its boards, thin windows and an old wooden bench that houses their raingear and assorted reading materials. The set is on a slight angle tilting toward the stage, and Allen moves back and forth off the platform as the action calls for.

Fosse's play takes a good look at human nature and the idea of isolation, and as the director notes, "creates webs that are open to countless interpretations, and this can be both liberating and terrifying."

"I'm empty like the wind. I knew nothing because now nothing exists anymore," the woman says, as she curls up deep into herself. At the end, she gathers her things into a pile on the living room floor, and her friend is hopeful that something must be changing. But no, the woman will stay in the old house alone, without a husband, with no real friends and with no foreseeable future other than standing, staring out the window for a man that will never appear.

*"A Summer Day" runs through Nov. 25 at the Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. For info or tickets, call 212-989-2020 or visit <http://www.cherrylanetheatre.org/>*

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

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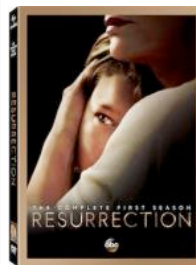


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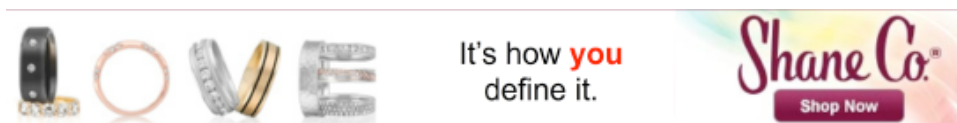
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