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By William Wolf

**MARGARET CHO'S THE SENSUOUS WOMAN** [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

I thought I'd seen everything, but a striptease by a 3 foot 10 inch little person, as they say in politically correct jargon? There was Selene Luna doing her zestful, sexy strip in "Margaret Cho's The Sensuous Woman," and from the neck down her body is perfectly proportioned for her size. Cho, in addition to her hilarious standup routine, brings with her a revue of a wild assortment of characters, with burlesque-style emphasis.

Even Cho herself gets into the take-it-off act, including the feat of twirling tassels with her breasts, and when she gets down to the last bit minus the g-string, you are in for a ribald, riotous surprise.

This is an anything goes, foul-mouthed, down and dirty satirical production that at its peak moments offers much hilarity, but obviously it is not for the prissy. Cho's fans scream with delight, and if you are keyed to her brand of humor, there is much to enjoy. In her standup routines she takes on a variety of targets, political and otherwise. Her in-your-face vulgarity tweaks hypocrisy. She mocks Senator Craig's self-described wide stance sitting on a toilet at the airport, but she'll also express pity for people who can't come out of the closet.

I can't describe some of her funniest routines because they are so raunchily explicit. Those who have seen her on cable television will get the drift, only on stage she is even freer. Her avowed aim with this burlesque style show is to celebrate women's bodies, and as with Luna, they come in all shapes. Not all in the show are women.

Her contingent includes Princess Farhana, Kurt Hall, Ian Harvie, Ryan Heffington, Kelly, Diana Yanez and Miss Dirty Martini, with Randall Rapstine directing and Kitty McNamee handling the sprightly choreography. Some of the rap routines get boringly repetitive, but overall, for those who dig Cho's sense of comedy, the show offers plenty of rowdy fun. At the Zipper Factory, 336 West 37th Street, \$45-\$55. Phone: 212-352-3101.



MAURITIUS [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

Sharp acting and Doug Hughes' slam-dunk direction mask the thinness of Theresa Rebeck's new nasty comedy "Mauritius," being presented by the Manhattan Theatre Club and The Huntington Theatre Company. The title refers to the place of origin from which two stamps have emanated in a collection that is being disputed and is also the basis of an attempted scam.

The play, Rebeck's Broadway debut, is amusing, largely because of the quality of the acting by a cast delivering Rebeck's Mamet-like dialogue giving voice to oddball characters. When it is all over, we're not left with much that is credible or substantive, but the fireworks on stage has been attention-grabbing.

The action is rooted to the assumption that two stamps in a hand-me-down collection may be very valuable. Alison Pill, who was so affecting in "Blackbird," gives a vigorous performance here as Jackie, who claims ownership of the stamp collection left her by her mother. But Mary (Kate Finneran), a half-sister from hell, insists that she is the owner as the stamps were collected by her grandfather, with whom she had a close relationship. It is clear that there is plenty of baggage in the hostility between the women.

Jackie, a seeming innocent, walks into the lair of Philip (Dylan Baker), a nasty stamp dealer who at first doesn't even want to evaluate the stamps. A hanger-on at the emporium is Bobby Cannavale as Dennis, who tries to gain Jackie's confidence so he can get in on the action. His target is a rich dealer, played by F. Murray Abraham. The various manipulations and confrontations that evolve make for sometimes suspenseful fireworks until the matter is resolved, although not very convincingly.

Cannavale is particularly good as the energetic, resourceful manipulator, but Pill is also a scene stealer. However, the total contingent of five delivers strongly as a unit and makes up for the play's limitations. At the Biltmore Theatre, 261 West 47th Street, \$46.50-\$91.50. Phone: 212-239-6200



THE RISE OF DOROTHY HALE [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

Did Dorothy Hale commit suicide? Or was there hanky panky followed by a cover-up? There was a ruling of suicide in the

death of Hale, the widow of Gardner Hale, an American muralist, but there apparently have been questions, and playwright Myra Bairstow, fascinated by the subject, has done research and is presenting the possibility that duplicity was involved in her drama, "The Rise of Dorothy Hale," set in New York City in 1938.

What makes the subject intriguing is the involvement of notables. The play sets forth the premise that Hale was having an affair with Harry Hopkins, the famous close advisor to President Roosevelt, and that the connection may have been a thorn in Hopkins' alleged plan to run for president if he had a go-ahead from Roosevelt. The implication is that Hale may have been murdered instead of leaping to her death from the 16th floor of the Hampshire House on Central Park South.

The famous Clare Booth Luce, a friend of Dorothy, commissioned Mexican artist Frida Kahlo to paint a portrait of Hale, and it was that surviving portrait that stimulated the author's interest in pursuing the story.

The subject matter itself is more interesting than its execution. The author has opted for a somewhat clumsy mix of showing Hale both before and after her death. Having the deceased comment on her life after death is always iffy, but it is compounded when Hale at one point talks about what her funeral was like.

However, the cast does an effective job, with Laura Koffman as Hale, Mark La Mura as Hopkins and Sarah Wynter as Luce. Also key in the cast are Michael Badalucco and Patrick Boll. The direction is by Pamela Hall, who took over from a predecessor before the opening. At St. Luke's Theater, 308 West 46th Street. Phone: 212-239-6200.



THE GOLDMAN PROJECT [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

When actress Anita Keal as Holocaust survivor Naomi Goldman, seated in her Inwood, New York home, slowly tells the story of events she has kept secret all these years, she can break your heart. Her moving account comes as a wrenching high point in Staci Swedeen's drama "The Goldman Project," being staged by the Abingdon Theatre Company and the Penguin Repertory Company. The play is intelligently and sensitively written, and its three-member cast and director Joe Brancato do it justice.

The author is concerned with the Holocaust itself but also the residue it has left not only on those who suffered but on family members. Naomi is a widow, quite likable for her streak of independence, her proud bearing, sense of humor and her

determination not to let advancing age define her life. Her son Tony, played with energy and a restless edge by Sam Guncler, is not a happy man. He has always felt uneasy with his parents and he is cynical about the world.

The dramatic catalyst arrives in the person of Aviva (Bernadette Quigley.) She and Tony were lovers when they were in school, but the relationship ended, and to his surprise, she turns up wanting to film an interview with Naomi as part of a project to preserve Holocaust stories for posterity while there are still survivors. Tony is angry and rejecting. Protective of his mother as well as his own disengagement with his Jewish roots, he doesn't want the matter reopened. At first his visibly upset mother leaves the room when the issue is brought up. But she soon comes around and begins to cooperate.

Tony and Aviva are opposites, and yet a flame is rekindled as we watch an embrace on the sofa, followed by a fade-out. But the author has the good sense not to turn this into a Holocaust tale with romance. She keeps her focus on Naomi and her jolting story told to Aviva and her camera, followed by exploration of its aftermath without veering off track. What is revealed has a profound effect on Tony and presents Aviva with a dilemma.

One leaves the play with respect for it, as well as for the performances by Quigley, Guncler, and especially Keal.



SCARCITY [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

Lucy Thurber has written an earthy, turbulent play about a working class family torn asunder by the struggle to make ends meet, as well as by personal attitudes, anger and the danger of a bleak future for a son and daughter trapped in the household. The writing is perceptive, the acting sharp.

The small town setting is in western Massachusetts, with Walt Spangler's appropriate set visually reflecting the living conditions. Kristen Johnston in an outstanding performance portrays the very dissatisfied wife, Martha. Her husband, Herb, played provocatively by Michael T. Weiss, drowns his frustrations in alcohol and is habitually unemployed. Martha is fed up.

Her cousin Louie (Todd Weeks) is married to another frustrated wife, Gloria (Miriam Shor), and he has become part of Martha's life by buying groceries for her to help ease the financial burden and treating her kindly and affectionately, which makes Herb angry and jealous.

The son, Billy, nicely played on the night I saw the show by

Brandon Espinoza (Jesse Eisenberg is the usual Billy), finds an interest taken in him by his teacher, Ellen (Maggie Kiley), and she makes him her project to help him get into an upscale school that will give him greater opportunity for his future. She becomes obsessed with her mission, and the closeness creates sexual stirrings. Although, as we know, there are real-life situations of excess bonding between teacher and student, the way this over-the-top relationship unfolds isn't quite believable. Still, it adds drama and purpose to the plot and the acting helps.

Martha is torn between resentment and appreciation, while Herb is deeply resentful that the teacher is providing what he can't and pride arouses hostility. As for the marriage of Herb and Martha, they try to grasp moments of affection amidst other moments of loathing.

Meredith Brandt gives a key performance as Billy's emotionally needy younger sister Rachel, who has a sharp tongue and is obviously upset by the home tensions and flaring tempers. She is faced with the prospect of living there alone if Billy goes off to school elsewhere, and she'll be faced with wondering what the future will hold in store for her. An important lighting assist at a critical moment clues us into her feelings.

Thurber's writing provides characters worth watching, and the play's gritty aura and its emotional trauma, kept in the forefront by Jackson Gay's understanding direction, become increasingly involving as the sparks fly. At the Atlantic Theater Company's Linda Gross Theater, 336 West 20th Street, \$55. Phone: 212-279-4200.



FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: RUDE AWAKENING [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

It is amazing how fresh the "Forbidden Broadway" show can manage to be as it celebrates its 25th anniversary with its latest edition, subtitled "Rude Awakening." It is up to date, enormous fun, and blessed with terrific performers who are skilled at plunging into the variety of songs and sketches demanded of them. There is nothing tired about this show! Creator Gerard Alessandrini continues to write ever-so-smart lyrics and he and Phillip George co-direct with élan. You have to admire a revue that rhymes "Mamma Mia!" with gonorrhea.

Janet Dickinson is a great impersonator, but nothing beats her dead-on impression of Christine Ebersole doing her famous number from "Grey Gardens." The revue also has fun with "Spring Awakening," spoofing the sexual doings of the youngsters with inventive lyrics and such gambits as a teenager pulling a microphone out of his trousers.

Valerie Fagan is another jewel of a performer. Her Ethel Merman impression ranks high among those who have imitated The Merm over the years, but the fun also lies in using her to show how a real singer doesn't need the sort of amplification we have these days. Among other shows spoofed are "Hairspray," "Jersey Boys," ("Jersey Goys") "Mary Poppins," "Legally Blonde," "Wicked," "The Little Mermaid," "Spamalot" "The Drowsy Chaperone" ("The Lousy Chaperone") "Company," and of course, the ever-present "The Phantom of the Opera," and more.

Jared Bradshaw and James Donegan are brilliant handling the variety of male performing, and Steve Saari is indispensable as pianist.

I have always been impressed with the many wigs and costumes that enable the performers, with their rapid-fire changes, to fill out the imagery needed. Alvin Colt is to be applauded as costume designer for this go-around that continues to be tops in That department. At the 47th Street Theatre, 304 West 47th Street, \$60-\$65. Phone: 212-239- 6200.



DIVIDING THE ESTATE [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

At 91, Horton Foote remains one of our most prolific and skillful playwrights, further evidence of which can now be found in "Dividing the Estate," a new production being offered by Primary Stages in association with Jamie DeRoy. Set in 1987 in Harrison, Texas, the play depicts family members focused on how an estate will be divided after the matriarch in the household dies. The rivalries, resentments, financial pressures and manipulations are incisively and often humorously dramatized, and you won't find better writing or acting currently on any stage in New York.

Foote is on firm footing in his ability to write dialogue that accurately captures the way his characters would speak, and the cast members, under the direction of Michael Wilson, get the tone and the dynamics of their roles exactly right. Elizabeth Ashley portrays Stella, the widowed head of the family who is in her 80s, and Ashley gets the right mix of age and firm spirit that make her an impressive figure. It is a stretch this fine actress handles with style and grace.

But the play stealer is Hallie Foote (the playwright's daughter who frequently appears in his works), who plays Stella's daughter Mary Jo, jealous of just about everyone, and anxiety-ridden because of the debts pressing in on her and her husband. A mother of two selfish daughters, Mary Jo is disgustingly and ludicrously grasping at every turn. She wants

to divide up the family estate, consisting mainly of a farm in trouble, even before Stella dies.

Penny Fuller as her widowed sister Lucille is a kinder person, although none too informed and somewhat flighty, and Fuller gives her humanity in strong contrast to the personality of Mary Jo. Lucille's son, known as Son, played with earnestness and quiet control by Devon Abner, manages the estate and is quite content with his lot. He doesn't want more, and even announces that he will resign his duties in a fed-up response to the demands of those who want their share immediately. Another son, the emotional Lewis (Gerald McRaney), has been in trouble for having affair with a young girl, but the relationship is turning out to be a serious one. The family eventually is in for some surprises that further compound the various frustrations.

There is also 92-year-old Doug, the African-American servant who has been with the family for years and looks so tired that he would seem about to drop from exhaustion at any moment. He is kept on more out of loyalty than for any conceivable help he can be. Others in the cast add realistically to the ensemble effect. Jeff Cowie's set design of the Texas home provides further authenticity.

The beauty of Foote's writing is that while presenting characters locked in serious confrontations, Foote finds humor in their behavior and enables us to laugh even while taking seriously the squabbling going among the family members. The play may remind one of Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes," only with a more gentle approach characteristic of Foote's writing. At Primary Stages, 59 East 59th Street Theaters, 59 E. 59th Street, \$60. Phone: 212-840-9705.



SIVE [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

The Irish Repertory strikes again. Continuing its welcome streak of providing effective staging of intriguing works, The Irish rep is now offering "Sive," a play by John B. Keane, who was at first underrated, but gradually gained deserved recognition for such works as "The Field." With "Sive" he chillingly explores the immoral lengths to which people who live in poverty can go for the sake of money and the tragic consequences than can ensue.

The production works because it effectively delineates the assortment of characters well-written by the author and brought dramatically to life by a first-rate cast. Getting to know the people, we can become emotionally invested in the outcome. Charles Corcoran has provided a spare but realistic set design for kitchen in the County Kerry home where the action unfolds

in 1957. The creative use of the small stage is generally an important plus in Irish Rep productions, as is the case here.

A haunting tone is set before the play begins by singer-musicians James Barry and Donnie Carroll, who also appear in the play as soliciting wanderers whose songs are expressions of judgment. Sive, played with girlish innocence by Wrenn Schmidt, is the young daughter of a woman who died under mysterious circumstances. Her grandmother, Nanna, played by Terry Donnelly, loves Sive, but is shunted aside by her son Mike (Aidan Redmond), and his nasty wife, Mena (Fiana Toibin), who loathes Sive and is generally a mean-spirited bitch driven by the circumstances of poverty to crave any possible avenue for getting money.

Along comes Patrick Fitzgerald as Thomasheen, who grasps what money he can as a matchmaker, and offers a deal to Mena and Mike to marry Sive off to a well-to-do old geezer. Nanna is furious with them and wants to protect Sive, but she is powerless in the household. Mike has a bit of a conscience, but it quickly weakens, as he is under the thumb of his greedy wife. The village is talking about the impending travesty of a marriage being foisted on. Sive, who is in love with a young man, who in turn tries to persuade the family to cancel the wedding.

The plot is quite predictable, but nevertheless the events that unfold are jolting, largely because of the high caliber of acting. Fitzgerald makes a strong impression as the matchmaker, although he would do well to at times counterpoint the general shrillness in his dynamic performance. Toibin is also particularly effective and relentlessly true to her character.

Director Ciarán O'Reilly builds the tension to a high pitch but makes the tale more than the simple melodrama it might become. At the Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 West 22nd Street, \$55-\$60. Phone: 212-727-2737.



THREE MO' TENORS [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

This show gets off to a rousing start as the three African-American tenors James N. Berger, Jr., Duane A. Moody and Victor Robinson, although feigning a light edge with some amusing body movements, show off their excellent voices with a series of demanding opera selections. They quickly win over their audience with their obvious talent. That's the classical part.

In a while the Mo' kicks in, as they do some musical hell-raising with such numbers as "Let the Good Times Roll" and a variety of blues, gospel, rock, pop—you name it. There's a terrific

impersonation of Cab Calloway with “Minnie the Moocher,” and the tenors have the knack of getting audience involvement without making the ploy overly aggressive.

They are backed by excellent musicians, and most importantly, all three have in addition to their vocal skills and smooth applause-rousing moves a special personality quality—likeability.

The show has been conceived, directed and choreographed by Marion J. Caffey, and the performers have come into town with a reputation from their touring and their recording of the show. Three others, Kenneth D. Alston, Jr. Ramone Diggs, and Phumzile Sojola make up a cast that alternates with the one at the performance I saw. At the Little Shubert Theater, 422 West 42nd Street, \$75. Phone: 212-239-6200.



THE MISANTHROPE [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

Having butchered “Hedda Gabbler,” the self-styled deconstructionist Flemish director Ivo van Hove has recklessly applied his carving knife to Molière’s great play “The Misanthrope.” The result is a modernized insulting travesty of the 17th century playwright’s work. Van Hove’s accomplice in the slaughter is Tony Harrison, who has translated and adapted the play into a gross, absurdist rendering that caters to the director’s talent for assaulting classics rather than illuminating them.

For example, Bill Camp as Alceste, who is determined to be truthful and candid in battling what he sees as hypocrisy, enters a food-fight scene and deliberately pours ketchup and other sauces all over himself and his clothing to a disgusting degree, and tops it off by crushing half a watermelon over his head. At one point, after leaving the theater and going out into East Fourth street to place a key letter into a garbage bag—a journey captured on the video screens integral to this production—he returns with sacks of trash, empties them on stage, and lies down and wallows in the refuse. Although obnoxious, the scene at least symbolizes what van Hove has done to Molière.

Jan Versweyveld has created a sleek production design that includes a grey and black rectangular, partially glass-enclosed set in which the cast members cavort interminably. We not only are asked to watch them live but also simultaneously on a three-way split television screen. A video cameraman follows them around on the edges of the set and films them through the glass walls. It is painful enough to have to see the proceedings once without having to see double images.

Van Hove has said in a newspaper interview that Molière's plays are misunderstood as comedies but he discovered in the plays research about society. Golly gee. For centuries critics and students have found that within Molière's witty comedies there are observations about society. The beauty of the author's works is that although they were written in the 17th century, the perceptions contained can easily be applied to contemporary times. Van Hove's deconstruction only obscures the brilliance and meaning by cluttering the stage with superfluous nonsense.

As for the actors, it is impossible to judge them fairly, as the irritating posturing in which they indulge is apparently what has been demanded of them. Camp as Alceste is particularly grating, but the others are almost equally annoying, including Jeanine Serrales as Célimène, Jason C. Brown as Clitandre, Joan Macintosh as Acaste and Alfredo Narciso as Oronte. Eliante is played by Quincy Tyler Bernstine, Arsinoé by Amelia Campbell and Philinte by Thomas Jay Ryan.

Of course, there is justification for the experimental, but Van Hove lacerates Molière so brutally that the evening was one of the most excruciating I have spent in the theater in quite a while. One has to listen intently to catch the author's dialogue gems, but they are mostly overshadowed by this misbegotten, crass interpretation. At the New York Theatre Workshop, 79 East 4th Street, \$65. Phone: 212-239-6200.



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