

Lear some two decades prior. I witnessed Yoakam impressively tackle *Lear* in a Saturday matinee. In addition to appearing fresh and vibrant in the role, he clearly benefited from the warmth of a close-knit theatre community rooting for a fellow Minnesotan.

Perhaps the most successful of Haj's efforts to make *King Lear* engaging within our politically divisive 2017 context centered on the flurry of design and staging choices that accentuated the chasm existing among the economic classes. Costume designer Jennifer Moeller's stately tuxedos and silky mid-twentieth-century evening gowns replaced the expected leather and burlap of a twelfth-century monarchy—the more refined and impractical the dress, the more sinister the behavior. Perhaps the strongest example of this occurred in act 3, during the iconic scene in which Gloucester, played with tenderness by James Williams, is tortured and ultimately blinded. After the quaffed yet ruthless Cornwall gruesomely extracted the first of the old man's eyes, Haj slightly altered the text by directing Regan, not Cornwall, to gamely step forward to impale Gloucester's remaining eye. She did so by removing one of her ostentatiously long stilettos heels. Like a ruthless and despotic debutante, she rammed the narrow heel deep into Gloucester's eyeball.

Such torturous weaponizing of a symbolically pretentious article of clothing added validation to the violent retort that followed. Unable to passively witness the brutality, the otherwise nameless "First Servant" stepped forward from his position at the edge of the room to avenge the maiming of the old man. With a total of eight lines of dialogue, the servant valiantly plunged a knife into Cornwall's chest, infusing his master's white tuxedo shirt with a plume of scarlet, before himself being stabbed in the back by Regan. Echoing the perceptions of class warfare resonating throughout contemporary American life, this minor character portended a larger revolt in which decent people from lower economic stations will no longer passively tolerate acts of injustice in the name of entitlement and privilege.

While obviously still a challenging tragedy to realize, Haj successfully navigated many of *King Lear*'s inherent difficulties. Elegant staging and inventive and effective casting enabled an audience to more freely enter Shakespeare's bleak world of grief and regret. Moreover, the driving decision to equate privilege and wealth with avarice and murder forced comparisons between *Lear*'s conniving family and the ruthless and nepotistic oligarchs from our contemporary, political, real-life drama.

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TURQUOISE. By Deb Margolin. Directed by Dianne K. Webb. Next Iteration Theatre Company, Match Theatre, Houston. March 18, 2017.

"Imagine being new again every 7 seconds! It could be terrible, but it could also contain the beauty of the world!" This declaration on the front cover of the show's program was the introduction to Deb Margolin's new work, *Turquoise*, a dramatic exploration of dimensional and experiential reality. Utilizing the Higgs boson as a metaphor for the piece, *Turquoise* digs into the various disturbances in human existence in order to pull forth the meanings we create and absorb each day that usually go unnoticed. The Higgs boson is a particle that theoretically proves the existence of an invisible energy field that is present everywhere. By using this particle allegorically, Margolin challenged her audiences to engage differently with a theory of theatre—that of the suspension of disbelief.

Produced at the Match in downtown Houston by Next Iteration Theatre Company, Margolin took advantage of an intimate proscenium space to stage *Turquoise*. Upon entering the theatre and being given a program, audience members were invited to help themselves to select a small piece of turquoise from a pile on a table. This variation to the initial ticket-taking convention had a palpable effect, causing some spectators to debate the meanings and uses of their new function as "turquoise holders." The actors were present in the space and within their worlds as the house opened, situating the audience as critical spectators from the start and challenging the temporal aspect of theatre.

The action of the play started with a visual of the stage separated into three spaces, each holding its own story. There was an older couple, Esther and Morris, sitting in bed together doing a crossword; two teenage boys, Ran and Lenny, playing cards; and a nurse, Leanne, attending to a man, Lorne, in his bedroom. These stories were interwoven at times to create a fourth plane of existence wherein the character Ran is bombarded by a recurrent nightmare that the other actors inhabit. However, what immediately drew the eye at the top of the show was a man, named in the program as "Guy with Nothing," dressed in coveralls and a backwards baseball cap, sitting on the head of Esther and Morris's bed. He jauntily jumped from this place and meandered the space, unseen by the characters in the stories. He was the first to address us and, as he did throughout the piece, expounded on the meaning of life, matter, space, science, and memory—all of which were connected to the stories, both directly and tangentially.



Rhett Martinez, Jennifer Doctorovich, Seán Patrick Judge, Jason Duga, Liz Rachelle, and Wesley Whitson in *Turquoise*. (Photo: Pin Lim.)

The omnipresence of the man, with his frequent acknowledgment of the audience and invitations to partake of a deeper understanding, allowed us a guide for interpretation, but not a deterministic one. The Guy with Nothing initially gave the illusion of certainty, or at least answers; he introduced the people in the stories and, as his janitorial costume suggested to the mind's eye, continued to be an ever-present though unacknowledged person and font of knowledge within the piece. Eventually, he became just another component of the illusion, calling upon us as an audience to fill in the blanks.

Margolin uses three stories of people separated generationally and in time and space to show how the stories of all humanity are inherently connected, and to reveal to us our own intrinsic desire to connect things. The multiple stories we entered included an elderly couple unknowingly spending their last moments together, two teenage boys sharing a friendship that may be developing into something more, and a nurse helping a man with memory loss who re-experiences everything new every seven seconds. The stories are similar in their representations of being on the cusp of a new existence. For Esther and Morris, their frustration in solving a puzzle with a word that sounds like “turkey horse” mir-

rors their discomfort at their feeling of impending loss. Lenny and Ran, each going through their own separate struggle that pushes them to the brink of insanity (Lenny with his sexuality and Ran with his nightmares), come together to find that the solution to both of their problems could lie in each other. And Lorne quite literally is embarking on new life every few moments, relearning who he was simply by knowing that he knows what he cannot seem to remember, while Leanne joins him vicariously.

As cofounder of Split Britches Theatre Company, Margolin's dynamic and challenging writing was out in full force in this production. Few plays recognize and focus on the immense importance of “just-about-but-not-quite-there.” By doing so, Margolin gave spectators a new lens through which to view our own journeys and our own art—as perpetually on the verge. Her flexible use of space and time underscored the dubiousness of reality itself, highlighting what each of us needs to make meaning for ourselves. Notably, what tied the piece together was the metaphor of the Higgs boson. The method for proving the existence of this particle is to disturb the field of energy around it. *Turquoise* is called a “disruption-of-memory play” for this reason. To prove that there is meaning in the theatre event,



Jonathan Palmer and Jason Duga in *Turquoise*.
(Photo: Pin Lim.)

Margolin disrupted how we remember and make connections in order to uncover the ways that there is always something underneath what we think we perceive. In our current, media-saturated age it is imperative that the challenge to meaning-making is kept alive in this way. To paraphrase a line from the show in which Guy with Nothing explains the reason for speech, theatre is also just what we do to not disappear.

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INDECENT. By Paula Vogel. Directed by Rebecca Taichman. Created by Paula Vogel and Rebecca Taichman. Cort Theatre, New York City. May 18, 2017.

Celebrated playwright Paula Vogel, the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Obie Award for Lifetime Achievement among many other accolades, made her long-overdue Broadway debut with *Indecent*. That only two of ten new plays during the 2016–17 Broadway season were written by women (*Indecent* and Lynn Nottage’s *Sweat*) is in keeping with the depressing statistics about the number of female-authored plays produced annually in the United States, which usually hovers at around 22 percent. The Tony nominations for Best Play that both garnered, and the win that director Rebecca Taichman earned for directing *Indecent* were a minor victory for women in theatre. For these reasons, let us hope that the production of *Indecent* on Broadway is a harbinger of a shift in the male-dominated fields in American theatre.

Indecent succeeded as a celebration of the particular power of theatre on Broadway, reminding us that

art can simultaneously create and preserve culture, honoring what has come before, bearing witness to our own times, and cautioning us for the future. *Indecent* began its journey to Broadway at the Sundance Institute’s Theatre Lab in 2013, developing further through productions at Yale Repertory Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, and the Vineyard Theatre during which time Vogel, Taichman, choreographer David Dorfman, composers Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva, and an ensemble of actors collectively developed the piece. This rarefied model of collaborative development, once the soul of theatre, represented the epitome of theatre art at its finest.

Indecent was inspired by real events surrounding the Yiddish play *The God of Vengeance* by Sholem Asch, which premiered at Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theatre in Berlin in 1907 and enjoyed a successful tour throughout Europe and in downtown venues in New York City for years. Translated into English in 1918 by Isaac Goldberg, it made its Broadway debut in 1922. However, it was promptly shut down after opening, with the producer and lead actors being arrested on obscenity charges. With elegant dramaturgy that allows both past and present to exist simultaneously onstage, Vogel used the journey of Asch’s play from Europe to the United States as a framework to tell the story of a company of Jewish artists and the odyssey of its people.

When the audience entered the Cort Theatre, the actors were already seated onstage, framed in a gilded arch that blurred the line between spectator and performer and highlighted both the meta-theatricality of the production and the audience’s complicity in the events. Above the actors’ heads on the bare stage wall were words projected in both English and Yiddish: “a true story about a little Jewish play.” When the house lights dimmed and the actors came to life, musicians began playing the unmistakable vibrant chords of klezmer music onstage. After the troupe began a traditional dance—stately at first—ashes started pouring from their sleeves and the projection above shifted to read, “from ashes they rise”—a chilling foreshadowing for the future of these characters. The dance gained momentum, with the dust on the floorboards highlighting the performers’ steps, which were reminiscent of a “soft shoe” dance transporting us back to the popular traditions of vaudeville and Yiddish theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. With a nod to the iconic American play *Our Town*, Lemml, the Stage Manager of the troupe (the only named character in the program), then stepped out to address the audience and explain that he would tell us the story of the play that changed his life.

Seven actors played over forty roles to depict the people whose lives the play touched between