

LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, SORORITÉ

French history is chilling familiar in OCT's *The Revolutionists*

Paris, September 1793: The Bastille has fallen, feudalism's dead and the *Rights of Man* have been declared. (That all sounds pretty good, right?)

But wait, there's more:

Enter brilliant playwright Lauren Gunderson, who illuminates a murky, muddling moment in history with her bold new play, directed with strength and humor for Oregon Contemporary Theatre by Elizabeth Helman.

The Revolutionists focuses on three figures from that tumultuous time: Playwright and abolitionist Olympe de Gouges, martyred assassin Charlotte Corday and infamous Queen-of-All-Excess Marie Antoinette.

In 1793, all three women were taken into custody under the pernicious Law of Suspects, which authorized tribunals to try those suspected of treason against the Republic and to punish those convicted (and most were convicted) with death.

The thing is, the play is damn funny.

Gunderson's confident rhythm, eclectic references and sitcom-like gaffes allow history to leap off the page with language that's pleasingly anachronistic and cheeky.

Here, the three historical figures, along with one character from Gunderson's imagination, laugh, tell stories, gossip and envision their country's future. Rather than toiling out their final days locked in prison, they take flight, finding solace and solid ground in Gunderson's inventive sorority.



INGA R. WILSON AS
MARIE ANTONETTE IN OCT'S
THE REVOLUTIONISTS

Erica Towe infuses a frantic quality into the rabble-raising writer de Gouges, as she at once declares the inalienable rights of women while neurotically seeking constant artistic approval.

Hailey Henderson's Charlotte Corday is a firebrand — vicious and exuberant, full of devil-may-care ingénue zeal.

Janelle Rae Davis, as Gunderson's fictitious Caribbean revolutionary Marianne Angelle, provides sobering counterpoint, as she raises questions of sovereignty and slavery.

And it's worth the price of admission to see Inga R. Wilson's Marie Antoinette. Speaking with a cadence that's part Lina Lamont and part Valley Girl, Wilson glides about the stage with such vapidly and carefree grace that even when doom descends and girliness gives way to gravitas,

la reine seems able to call upon her happy place, as though she's still just tending her perfumed sheep at the palace farm.

The production benefits from a unified artistic vision. Geno Franco's evocative set reminds one of Hubert Robert's capriccio paintings, depicting gilt and ruin simultaneously. Lighting by Kat Matthews takes leaps in focus and mood. Bradley Branam's sound design exposes the characters' emotions, down to the studs.

And Jeanette deJong's rich, detailed costumes — from Marie Antoinette's frothy wig to the tricolor cockade and the liberty cap worn by Charlotte Corday — offer tactile shape and form to a distant time. A time that's chillingly relevant to our own.

The Revolutionists continues through Oct. 8 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre; \$15-\$35, tickets at octheatre.org or 541-684-6988.

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