

# Constitutional Drama

A PLAY ABOUT POLITICS BY A FORMER EUGENEAN  
KICKS OFF THE SEASON AT **OREGON CONTEMPORARY THEATRE**

By Dorothy Velasco

**W**ho knew that we could laugh so much about our nation's Constitution — and take it so seriously at the same time? The opening show of Oregon Contemporary Theatre's 2023-24 season, Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me*, is an invaluable choice considering America's current political climate of extreme polarization.

Schreck, an award-winning actor and playwright originally from Wenatchee, Washington, studied theater at the University of Oregon. While living in Eugene, she also starred in a couple of plays at Lord Leebrick Theatre, the precursor to OCT. The first play she wrote, *Creature*, was performed in 2013 at UO after several successful previous productions. It's about time that her most acclaimed play, nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, should be performed at OCT.

And what a production. The play, directed by Craig Willis, who also designed the set — a realistic veterans' hall — is essentially a one-woman show brought to stunning life by Inga Wilson. In the first regional and New York productions, Schreck played herself, the character named Heidi. Now the show is open to other actors, and Wilson is just as charming, funny, emotional and forceful as Schreck.

Don't be misled by the dry sounding title. It harks back to high school essays and debating competitions, but Heidi is never dry. As played by Wilson, we see her at her current age, around 50, and as a 15-year-old whose mother has convinced her to hone her speaking and debating skills in order to compete around the country at events sponsored by the American Legion.

These competitions offer generous prize money for college, exactly what young Heidi needs. She's so good that she manages to pay her way entirely through college with her earnings.

The play runs about 100 minutes without intermission and eventually becomes somewhat repetitious. Having seen a number of plays without intermission, I'm beginning

to believe there must be something in our DNA that tells us 90 minutes is just right and 100 minutes is slightly too long.

During the show we see approximate examples of Heidi's defense of the Constitution, as much as the adult Heidi can remember. Oh, the sincerity and passion of a 15-year-old! The older Heidi tells us she fell in love with the Constitution at a young age, and that she loves it to this day, but now she understands much more than she did as a teen. Back then when she read about the rights provided to "the people," she didn't realize that people had to be white, property-owning men. No women, no Blacks (who were mostly enslaved at the time the Constitution was written) and no Native Americans had those rights. Only the white male property owners could vote.

She also learned more about domestic violence and sexual abuse, topics she could never discuss in her teen years, but by asking questions and piecing together bits of information, she learned about several generations of mistreatment within her family. As an adult, she can tell us, the audience, about her family history, and reveals that now she realizes the Constitution, the Supreme Court and the elected government may have failed to provide equal protection to all and might benefit from a makeover.

Serious topics, but the explosive humor is a strong counterweight. My favorite example: Heidi tells the audience she's prone to crying, not just daintily-dab-your-eyes crying, but what she calls Greek tragedy crying. Wilson's demonstration would make Carol Burnett proud. She starts with full-out howling and shrieking, she twists her face into a tragic mask and she contorts her body in tortured writhing. Funniest crying I've ever seen.

Wilson is backed up by two other actors in small but important roles. Alexander Holmes plays two characters: an upright Legionnaire timekeeper at the competitions, as well as Mike, an actor who traveled with Heidi to play the Legionnaire. Noah Oristano, an actual teen, plays a spirited debater.

*What the Constitution Means to Me is playing at Oregon Contemporary Theatre through Oct. 1; times and tickets through OCTheatre.org or 541-465-1506.*

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### Jonesin' Crossword

BY MATT JONES

©2023 JONESIN' CROSSWORDS (EDITOR@JONESINCROSSWORDS.COM) if you were on the London Underground.

#### Across

1. The work of groan adults?
5. "Futurama" co-creator Groening
9. Actor B.D. of "Law & Order: SVU"
13. "Need \_\_\_?" (possible truck service tagline)
14. Push rudely
16. Food Network initialism
17. Bumble and Hinge, e.g.
19. "\_\_\_ la vie!"
20. "Princess of Power" of Saturday mornings
21. Stereotypical event for fraternities in movies
23. Substack offering, maybe
25. Northwest Mexican state
26. Abbr. in a military address
28. Castle protectors

#### Down

32. "Dang it!"
33. Fruit suitable for making pies (rather than, say, a Red Delicious)
36. Type of bar with mai tais
37. Finland-based communications company
38. French silk city
42. Ripping to shreds
45. On the ocean
47. Braying equines
48. "Go, team!"
49. Putin predecessor Medvedev
51. Slide on something slippery
53. Apparel for striking poses?
57. Come after
60. \_\_\_-Lenape (Delaware tribe)
61. Small spaces between areas, or what's represented in

#### the long entries

63. The Weeknd, a.k.a. \_\_\_ Tesfaye
64. California berry farm founder
65. Yale students
66. Washington, D.C., baseball team, familiarly
67. Art sch. study
68. "Divorce Capital of the World," once

#### Down

1. Launching platforms
2. "Spiral Jetty" state
3. Small laptop
4. Soft serve machine option
5. Food additive initials
6. At the drop of \_\_\_
7. \_\_\_ Chico ("Agua Mineral" brand)

### "Do You Mind?"

if you were on the London Underground.

8. "Young Sheldon" rating
9. Ad tagline for the frustrated and confused
10. Put one \_\_\_ (fool)
11. \_\_\_ account (term for a bank's holding at a different bank)
12. "Now I understand"
15. Those things, in Spanish
18. Actress Watts
22. Table game
24. "Haters \_\_\_ hate"
26. Several scenes, sometimes
27. Luau dish
29. Ancient Greek gathering spot
30. Chips brand with a "Blue Heat" flavor
31. "Press Your Luck" turns
34. Attachments for a seaside hobby, perhaps
35. Volume count
39. Rummage event
40. Singer Rita
41. Furthest degree
43. Wild West Wyatt
44. Lopsided
45. One-celled protozoan
46. Official seal
49. "Blowin' in the Wind" singer
50. American, in England
52. Actress Stevens of '60s TV
54. Mom's mom, in some places
55. Sci-fi movie with a "Legacy" sequel
56. Mlle., in Monterey
58. \_\_\_ arms
59. Old U.S. gas brand
62. Mel of baseball

