

# DC Theatre Reviews

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## Top Performances For The Girls

By: Walter Ruff



Margaret Thatcher's England of the 80s has a lot in common with George Bush's America of 2005. It is those similarities that make *Caryl Churchill's* *Top Girls* a play that is relevant today and quite possibly into the foreseeable future because, while times have changed, the basic human desire to be successful at all costs has not. Whether the price tag of that success is a true bargain is the question being asked in this play by one of the twentieth century's most talented playwrights. You will be pondering that question long after you have left the confines of *Theatre On The Run*. That is what is wonderful about this play — it makes you think and laugh and then think some more. Of course in the end the costs are worth it; although women have evolved so much in society, it is as a result of numerous sacrifices by many strong women throughout history.

To celebrate her promotion, Marlene—an aggressive, fast track executive at *Top Girls* employment agency—invites five legendary women of great achievement throughout history to an imaginary fine dinner party at an upscale restaurant. What she experiences and learns about the women's accomplishments and exploits is that they were not without considerable relinquishment of those life experiences many of us take for granted. Marlene evaluates both her own life choices and life style and realizes they have cost her more than she had previously thought. This is not to say she regrets the choices but she begins to understand that success requires substantial forfeiture as well. Through her realizations the play compares the gains women have made in society with the costs of those dividends. The performances in this production are strong and satisfying; Marlene, played by *Lynn Audrey Neal*, is wonderfully immersed in the part and completely nails the last scene with her sister Joyce, played by *Charlotte Akin*. *Regina Aquino's* Lady Nijo is the most interesting portrayal of the play — her lines funny, and at times sad, but always delivered as if she knew exactly what Churchill had in mind when she wrote the play.

If there is a weakness in casting it is with the portrayal of Angie, Marlene's frail, slow daughter. Angie is not destined to be a success story like her mother and the role demanded a more fragile, unbalanced representation of this focal character than *Ms. Aquino* could deliver. Rosemary Regan is hilarious as Isabella Bird, the traveling aristocrat, and steals the show during the first act where she delivers one witty line after another. And lest I forget Callie Kimball as Pope Joan and Win whose "life story" in the

second act had me in stitches. The rest of the cast only has to be believable and they come through splendidly. The set design by *George Lucas* is very functional all the way from the restaurant dinner party to Joyce's kitchen.

Costumes by *Lynnie Raybuck* were clever and well-suited for each character — my favorite was Pope Joan's peaked miter (hat). I have saved for last the marvelous direction by *Dorothy Neumann* who has put together a production that satisfies and charms but more importantly asks extremely pertinent questions we the audience are left to answer. *Fountainhead Theatre's* production of *Top Girls* is outstanding, skilled theatre that both entertains and enhances our understanding of life's lessons.

*Top Girls* by *Caryl Churchill* Fountainhead Theatre Thursday, Friday, Saturday Evenings @ 8pm Saturday Matinees @ 2pm Sept 6 Thru Oct 1. Performances at Theatre on the Run 3700 South Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington, VA, 22206 Box Office 703-920-5923

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