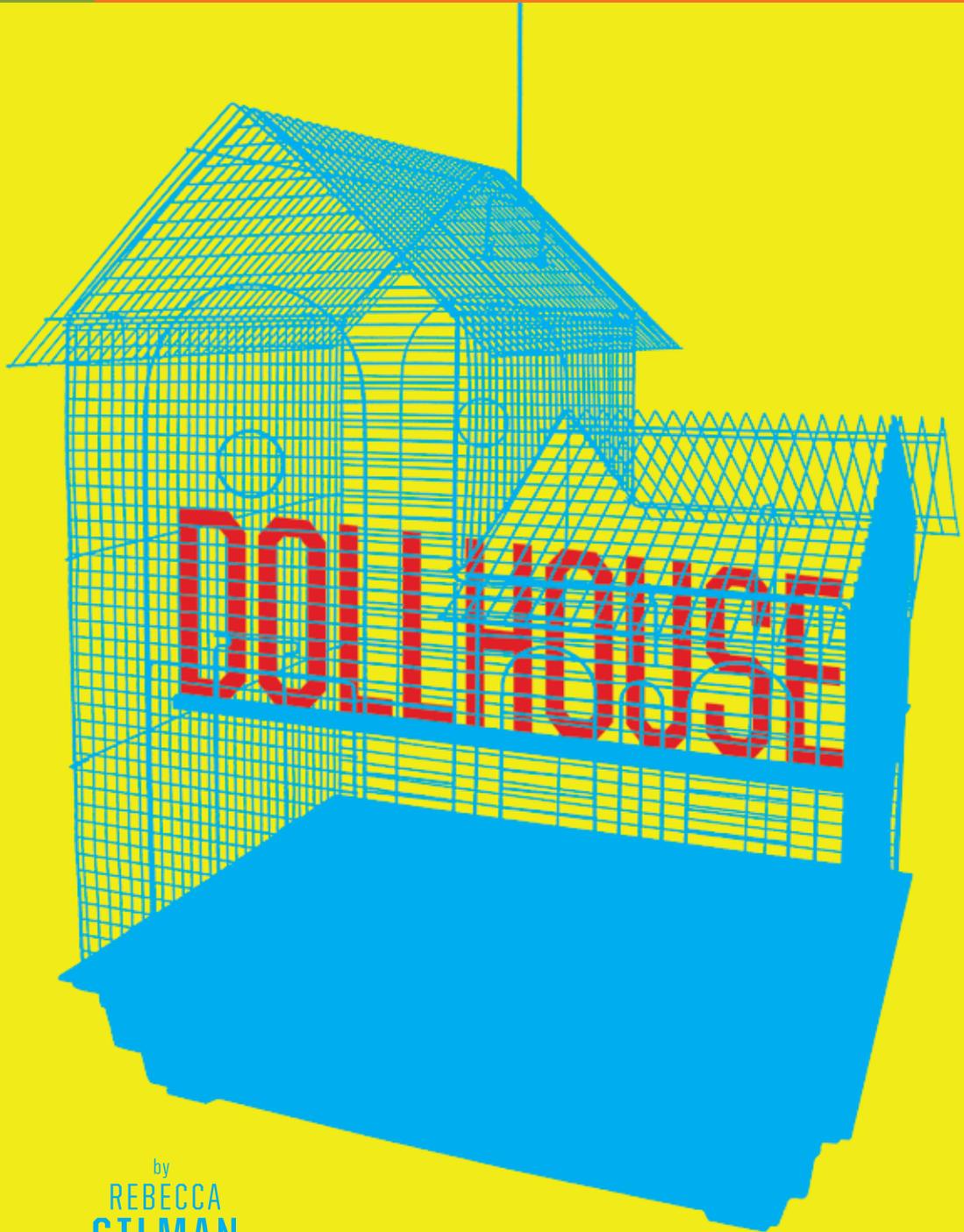




GUTHRIE
THEATER

PLAY GUIDE



by
**REBECCA
GILMAN**
directed by
WENDY C.
GOLDBERG

based on *A Doll's House* by
**HENRIK
IBSEN**

May 22 - July 11, 2010 • McGuire Proscenium Stage

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**GUTHRIE
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PLOT SYNOPSIS AND CHARACTERS

SYNOPSIS

Chicagoans Nora and Terry have a happy, middle-class life, and it's about to get better: Terry's been promoted to division head manager at the bank and it's nearly Christmas! They're going to celebrate with friends – Dr. Pete, who's always had a soft spot for Nora, and Kristine, who just moved back to town – and there are plenty of gifts to go around. There's a little problem, though: Nora is, unbeknownst to anyone, in debt. She took out a secret loan from Raj Patel in order to pay for Terry's earlier (also pretty secret) Vicodin rehab, and now Raj is calling in a favor. He needs a loan for a business venture, and Terry has the power to decide whether to extend the loan. But Raj has a bad reputation and Terry doesn't want to associate himself with this; the answer is “no.”

Christmas comes and goes as Nora becomes steadily more distressed. She must find the money for Raj before he tells Terry about her secret loan. She enlists the help of her friend Kristine, but her luck fails, and Raj sends Terry an e-mail explaining everything. Desperate, Nora uses a *Flashdance*-style routine turned lap dance (and almost striptease) in order to distract her husband, and she buys a little more time by promising Terry whatever sexual treatment he desires.

She can't avoid her fate forever. Although Raj softens at Kristine's behest – the two were once romantically involved and decide to make another go of it – Kristine decides that Nora needs to confront the crazy secrets and games of her life. Returning reluctantly from a costume party, Nora is left to handle Terry's rage as he discovers the e-mail and the story that he thinks will ruin him. Terry calms as soon as Raj calls to assure him that the loan has been dropped, but it's too late. Faced with Terry's brutal abuse and lack of concern for her good intentions, Nora at last realizes how poorly she has been treated and how like a simple doll she has been. She announces that she is leaving and heads from the room.

ABOUT THE PLAY

When Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was first produced in Copenhagen in 1879, it met with showers of acclaim that spread across continental Europe and beyond; the play met its share of criticism, too. Nora's behavior was called unforgivable, even unnatural: it seemed bad enough that she should dare to meddle in untoward affairs and go so far as to leave her husband, more monstrous still that she could so easily abandon her children (in Ibsen's play, Nora leaves her family for good at the end of the play with “the door slam heard around the world.”)

CHARACTERS

Nora Helmer, *a housewife*

Terry Helmer, *Nora's husband, a banker*

Pete, *Terry's old roommate, an endocrinologist*

Kristine Linde, *Nora's friend from college*

Raj Patel, *a biotech businessman*

Marta, *nanny who watches the Helmer children*

Iris, *Nora and Terry's cleaning woman*

Skyler Helmer, *their 6-year-old daughter*

Macey Helmer, *their 3-year-old daughter*

Max Helmer, *their 4-year-old son*

Yet as time passed, Nora emerged as a laudable woman who struggled against the strict, male-structured rules of society. Whether or not Ibsen championed women's rights, he was certainly a proponent of humanity. He sought to present characters (female and male alike) that faced and were often forced to shatter societal constructs in order to pursue their own lives. Thus, in order to find freedom, Nora shuts the door on everything about her old life: naiveté, husband and children all.

Rebecca Gilman's adaptation ends on a rather different note. When Nora declares she's leaving, she promises to take the children. What is more, she returns shortly after slamming the door. Her return and much of the conversation between her and Terry is ambiguous, but the effect allows Gilman to raise questions of her own. What does it mean to stand up to daily life and demand change? How might a woman in a repressive situation suddenly wield her own power? Though Gilman offers no easy answers, her shifting of Ibsen's twists do perhaps suggest a hope of change from within. The nature of that change is subjective, however.

Gilman's play also sparks controversy of its own. Terry's abuse is abrasively direct. Dr. Pete is more than a little lascivious. And the play pushes boundaries of stage sexuality when Nora performs a frantically erotic dance and, later, when Terry becomes insistent on after-party intimacy. *Dollhouse* finds its own edge, reflecting Ibsen's text but not afraid to diverge when necessary, driven by a vivid energy and forthrightness that characterizes Gilman's work.

Dollhouse was commissioned by Chicago's Goodman Theatre, where it premiered in 2005.

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PLAYS

ABOUT A DOLL'S HOUSE BY HENRIK IBSEN

The wife in the play ends by having no idea of what is right or wrong; natural feeling on the one hand and belief in authority on the other have altogether bewildered her.

A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society, with laws drafted by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. ...

Spiritual conflicts. Oppressed and bewildered by the belief in authority, she loses faith in her moral right and ability to bring up her children. Bitterness. A mother in modern society, like certain insects who go away and die when she has done her duty in the propagation of the race. Love of life, of home, of husband and children and family. Now and then, she shakes off her thoughts. Sudden return of dread and terror. She must bear it all alone. The catastrophe approaches, inexorably, inevitably. Despair, resistance, and destruction.

Henrik Ibsen, "Notes for the Tragedy of Modern Times," preliminary notes for *A Doll's House*, October 19, 1878

It is long since any new play was awaited with such excitement, and even longer since a new play brought so much that is original to the stage, but it is beyond memory since a play so simple in its action and so everyday in its dress made such an impression of artistic mastery. ... Every needless line is cut, every exchange carries the action of a step forward, there is not a superfluous effect in the whole play. ... [T]he mere fact that the author succeeded with the help only of these five characters to keep our interest sustained throughout a whole evening is sufficient proof of Ibsen's technical mastery.

Erik Bøgh, in *Folkets Avis*, December 24, 1979, reprinted in *Ibsen: a biography* by Michael Meyer, New York: Doubleday, 1971

[T]hrough *A Doll's House* marriage was revealed as being far from a divine institution, people stopped regarding it as an automatic provider of absolute bliss, and divorce between incompatible parties came at last to be accepted as conceivably justifiable.

August Strindberg, preface to *Marriage*, 1885

A *Doll's House* exploded like a bomb into contemporary life. *The Pillars of Society* ... though it attacked reigning social conventions, still retained the traditional theatrical happy ending, so that it bit less sharply. But *A Doll's House* knew no mercy; ending not in reconciliation, but in inexorable calamity, it pronounced a death sentence on accepted social ethics. ... Those who were against social and moral upheaval, against female emancipation, came to see in Ibsen their greatest and most dangerous enemy.

Halvdan Koht, *Henrik Ibsen: eit diktarliv*, 1954 (reprinted in *Ibsen: A Biography* by Michael Meyer, New York: Doubleday, 1971)

I believe that Nora's most beautiful declaration and act of love is leaving her husband. She says goodbye to everything that is familiar and secure. She does not walk through the door to find somebody else to live with and for; she is leaving the house more insecure than she ever realized she could be. But she hopes to find out who she is and why she is. ... It is a little girl who slams the door behind her. A little girl in the process of growing up.

Liv Ullmann, *Changing*, New York: Knopf, 1977

Nora at the end of the play is not essentially different from Nora at the beginning. She is only different from what she seemed to be. Earlier, she managed the household finances and was skillful enough to manipulate money in order to meet her payments when they came due. Why imagine that she will be less skillful in future? At the end of the play Nora acts not only independently but unconventionally as well. Here too, she is no different from what she was previously, when she managed to go it alone to borrow a large sum of money and to commit forgery in order to secure the loan.

Bernard F. Dukore, *Money and Politics in Ibsen, Shaw, and Brecht*, Columbia: Missouri University Press, 1980

The real Helmer is in his mental make-up much less liberated than Nora herself; he reveals himself as being a pitiable and egotistic slave of the male society of which he is so conspicuous a defender. It is not the human being in him which speaks to Nora at their final confrontation; it is society, its institutions and authorities, which speak through him. Ibsen's exposure of him is total; and Helmer's *oratio morata* when the danger is past - "I am saved!" - is on the verge of caricature.

Bjorn Hemmer, "Ibsen and the Realistic Problem Drama," 1994

ABOUT *DOLLHOUSE* BY REBECCA GILMAN

Ibsen's play created an uproar after it opened because Nora Helmer decides to walk out on her husband and children, abandoning an outwardly agreeable middle-class existence because she finds her marriage is built on lies. Times have changed in the century and a quarter since "A Doll's House" exploded in Western theater. The feminist issues the Ibsen play raised about women's rights wouldn't cause a ripple of controversy today. But "A Dollhouse's House" wasn't just about a wife oppressed by her husband's patronizing attitude. It's also about individuality, freedom and responsibility, and those issues didn't go out of fashion in 1879.

Gilman cleverly retains the major plot mechanisms from the Ibsen drama but runs them through a 21st century prism. The time is now December 2004 and the setting is a plush apartment in the upscale Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. Nora is the slightly ditsy wife of Terry, a banker due for a big promotion and bonus, which will provide urgently needed additional money for a family living beyond its means in today's consumerism society. ...

Gilman nicely shifts the emphasis in "Dollhouse" from possibly dated feminist issues to a portrait of life in the rat race in contemporary upper mobile society. For Terry and Nora in "Dollhouse," what matters are the neighborhood of one's condo, the stores where one shops, and the school one's children attend. All that may seem superficial to the audience but it is crucial to Nora and Terry. It's their lifestyle that's at risk if scandal breaks over their household, and they are frantic.

Dan Zeff, "Review of 'Dollhouse' at the Goodman Theatre," Copy News Service, June 29, 2005

Although Gilman doesn't exude doom and gloom, she is keenly aware of what works on stage.

"In murder and mayhem there is a high drama, so if you're a playwright, you look for the highest stakes situation possible."

That might mean a violent crime, a personal demon or a life crisis – as in "Dollhouse," Gilman's modern adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play. ...

Gilman adheres to the broad outlines of the original drama, a commentary on gender roles and middle-class consumerism. But she skillfully updates the 19th-century trappings. As in Ibsen's time, audiences are expected to identify with the characters and see their contemporary lives reflected on stage.

Reimagined by Gilman, Nora, the main character in both versions, is a stay-at-home Lincoln Park mother of three. She has a maid, a nanny, a shopping addiction, a new condo full of stainless-steel appliances and a domineering banker husband – none of which she can comfortably afford, financially or emotionally.

Alison Neumer, "Stage Acts of Anger," *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 2005

"**D**ollhouse" is Rebecca Gilman's profound and altogether brilliant reimagining of "A Doll's House," Henrik Ibsen's landmark late 19th century drama. It may also turn out to be the quintessential American play of the early 21st century.

A cry from the heart in the wake of the Enron, Arthur Andersen and WorldCom scandals, the dot-com meltdown, the potential real estate bubble and the attempted dismantling of Social Security (whether those words appear in upper- or lower-case letters), it says more about where we are as a society at this moment than some might want to contemplate. And yet, like Ibsen's play – and like Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" – it strikes such a deep chord of truth (and consequence) it cannot be avoided. ...

Had Gilman simply shifted the setting and references in Ibsen's play from one country and century to another, and given us a rather out-of-date tale of feminist awakening, the whole exercise would have been unnecessary. But this is no cosmetic retrofitting of a classic. Instead, the playwright has made a great leap – spinning off from the original to create something bold and new, revelatory and disturbing, while at the same time inspiring you to think about its source in a wholly fresh way.

Gilman unflinchingly shows us the terrible corruption of the heart – and enslavement of the soul – that results from an unbridled quest for financial success, social status and the desire for more that is fueled by seductive advertising and that feeds off some deep flaw in our own sense of self-worth.

Hedy Weiss, "Dollhouse," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 29, 2005

Torvald is in midmarket lending at Bank One. Krogstad is running from the Securities and Exchange Commission. Mrs. Lind is a needy refugee from Arthur Andersen. Dr. Rank is an iconoclastic college pall with liver cancer. And Nora? She's a Whole Foods-loving art history ditz with a penchant for gourmet chocolates and maxed-out plastic. ... [J]ust as her "Spinning Into Butter" skewered liberal racism, so Rebecca Gilman's savvy, commercial, droll and deliciously caustic updating of Ibsen's marital classic "A Doll's House" barbecues modern-day, debt-ridden [Chicago] yuppies – complete with their nannies, flatscreen TVs, overpriced condos, lousy ethics and marriages built on sexual frippery.

Chris Jones, "Dollhouse," *Variety*, July 1, 2005

QUOTES FROM THE PLAYS

FROM A DOLL'S HOUSE BY HENRIK IBSEN

Rolf Fjelde, translator

HELMER: Has the little spendthrift been out throwing money around again?

NORA: Oh, but Torvald, this year we really should let ourselves go a bit. It's the first Christmas we haven't had to economize.

HELMER: But you know we can't go squandering.

NORA: Oh yes, Torvald, we can squander a little now. Can't we? Just a tiny, wee bit. Now that you've got a big salary and are going to make piles and piles of money.

HELMER: Yes – starting New Year's. But then it's a full three months till the raise comes through.

NORA: Pooh! We can borrow that long.

HELMER: Nora! Are you scatterbrains off again? What if today I borrowed a thousand crowns, and you squandered them over Christmas week, and then on New year's Even a roof tile fell on my head, and I lay there –

NORA: Oh! Don't say such things!

- Act I

KROGSTAD: I don't want any money from your husband.

NORA: What do you want, then?

KROGSTAD: I'll tell you what. I want to recoup, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get on in the world – an there's where your husband can help me. For a year and a half I've kept myself clean of anything disreputable – all that time struggling with the worst conditions; but I was satisfied, working my way up step by step. Now I've been written right off, and I'm just not in the mood to come crawling back. I tell you, I want to move on. I want to get back in the bank – in a better position. You husband can set up a job for me –

NORA: He'll never do that!

KROGSTAD: He'll do it. I know him. He won't dare breathe a word of protest.

- Act II

NORA: [Papa] used to call me his doll-child, and he played with me the way I played with my dolls. Then I came into your house –

HELMER: How can you speak of our marriage like that?

NORA: I mean, then I went from Papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything to your own taste, and so I got the same taste as you – or I pretended to; I can't remember. I guess a little of both, first one, then the other. Now when I look back, it seems as if I'd lived here like a beggar – just from hand to mouth. I've lived by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that's the way you wanted it. It's a great sin what you and Papa did to me. You're to blame that nothing's become of me.

HELMER: Nora, how unfair and ungrateful you are! Haven't you been happy here?

NORA: No, never. I thought so – but I never have.

HELMER: Not – not happy!

NORA: No, only lighthearted. And you've always been so kind to me. But our home's been nothing but a playpen. I've been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child.

- Act III

FROM DOLLHOUSE BY REBECCA GILMAN

TERRY: Which card did you use?

NORA: Fleet.

TERRY: So are we maxed out on that one now?

NORA: No.

TERRY: I really want to pay off our credit cards.

NORA: We will. When you get your bonus.

TERRY: That's not a sure thing.

NORA: It's part of your promotion.

TERRY: I have to meet plan –

NORA: Why wouldn't you meet plan?

TERRY: I don't know. I could get hit by a truck tomorrow. Somebody could blow up the building –

NORA: Don't talk like that. I can't think things like that.

- Act I

RAJ: Do the words “kick back” mean anything to you? How about “scandal”? “Felony”? “Prison”?

NORA: You're crazy.

RAJ: Ask Terry! He'll tell you. There's a line. And when you cross that line, you're a thief. I should know. I still can't catch a break because everybody thinks I stole that money from the College Republicans –

NORA: You did.

RAJ: Ten years ago! I can redeem myself. But I can't do it if you won't help me. And if you won't help me... Then I'm going to have to tell Terry what you did.

- Act I

NORA: I'm a child. That's what I am. This is my... this is my playhouse, my dollhouse. And I'm your little doll – I'm your doll and you can pick me up and play with me – pull my legs apart and slap me on the ass – and then when you're through with me throw me in the corner. I'm like a dog, who comes to you saying “pet me, pet me” –

TERRY: Are you a doll or a dog?

NORA: I'm a fucking personal assistant. Is what I am. A gopher! I pick up dry cleaning, I make sure the refrigerator's stocked – I wait around for the cable guy and the alarm guy and have heart to heart discussions with the Perma-Seal guy and then, I get in the car and drive all over town to make sure these *toddlers* keep their *appointments* –!

TERRY: Oh yeah, life's hard, isn't it No-No? Everyday you have to get up and – oh! go to spin class, and oh! – get a Starbucks. How do you even have the energy for your pedicure?

NORA: You have no idea what I do with my days.

TERRY: And you have no idea what I do with mine! You're my doll!

Well I'm your pack mule. You feel kept? I feel used! The shit I eat, every day, so you can go shopping –

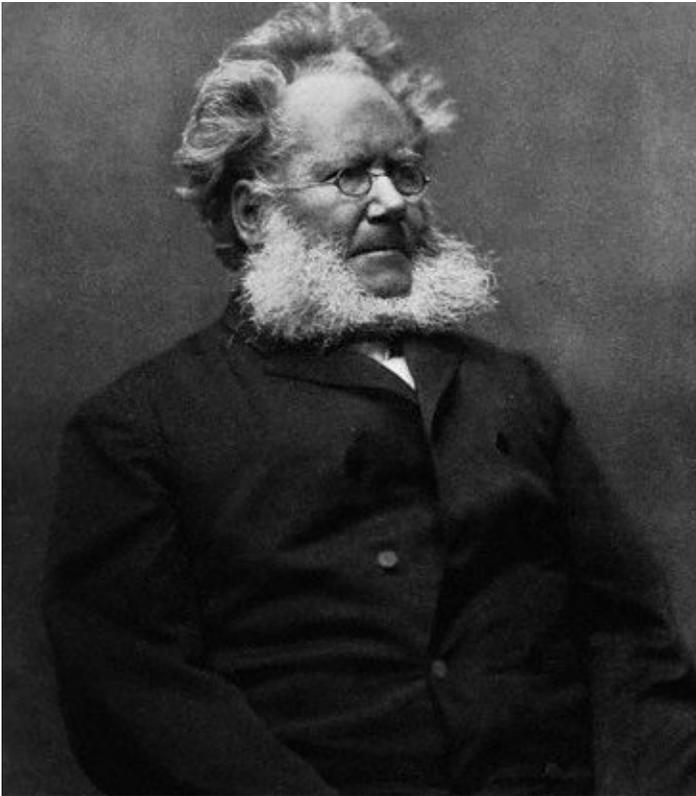
NORA: The energy I use to stay cheerful. And to lie! Lie lie lie – it's all I ever do.

TERRY: Finally! She tells the truth!

NORA: Not that lie. Lies you make me tell. That you're stronger than me and smarter than me. That I need you more than you need me.

- Act III

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PLAYWRIGHTS



One of the world's most renowned playwrights, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen broke the bounds of theatrical tradition to create plays long-enduring in their pursuit of human experience. Known internationally during his lifetime, Ibsen's works have remained subjects of extensive production and intense examination. With a body of work that includes *Peer Gynt*, *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* among many others, Ibsen's plays cover a wide range of thought and form. Indeed, his views cannot be pigeonholed according to any single play, residing rather in a comprehensive understanding of his works as a body of work. Various as these works were, Ibsen focused always on the condition of human beings, spotlighting the impossibilities of life in society and prompting self-examination. He was born in the small coastal town of Skien, Norway, in 1828. His relationship with his native country was often tumultuous, and he spent many years living and writing outside Norway, in Italy and Germany. He returned to Norway in 1891 and died in Oslo (then called Christiania) in 1906.



Rebecca Gilman has established herself as a foremost American dramatist through grittily vibrant, hard-hitting plays that expose societal flaws. In 1996, Gilman found her first theatrical success with *The Glory of Living*. Her subsequent work has been marked with an unrelenting penetration of complex issues, for Gilman is not afraid to face controversy head-on and confront audiences with their own shortcomings. Complicating notions of good and bad, Gilman presents innumerable questions for uncomfortable but necessary examination. Her other plays include *A True History of the Johnstown Flood*, *The Crowd You're In With*, *Dollhouse*, *Spinning Into Butter*, *Boy Gets Girl*, *Blue Surge*, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Sweetest Swing in Baseball*. Her plays have received numerous productions at regional theaters and abroad, including at the Goodman Theatre, the Royal Court Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater, the Public Theater and Manhattan Theatre Club. She is the recipient of, among other honors, a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright, and *The Glory of Living* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She received her M.F.A. from the University of Iowa and is currently an assistant professor of playwriting and screenwriting in the M.F.A. in Writing for the Screen and Stage program at Northwestern University.

TOUCHING THE HUMAN SOUL'S HIDDEN SPRING: COMMENTS ON HENRIK IBSEN

It is ... as if he touches a hidden spring in the human soul, a spring most human beings are not ever aware of. A little room, strangely dark and secretive, appears – the innermost. There may be only a narrow line between that room and what we see expressed as people's everyday thoughts and actions. Perhaps life's own tragic conflicts have brought most of us, at least once, quite close to this small, dark room in the soul. But the spring remained untouched, we stopped in time, or there was something outside that stopped us – and nothing extraordinary happened.

Ibsen touches that spring – the innermost room is seen – the chain of consequences runs its course – the last bit of will is driven forth in a moment of spiritual tension – and the act is completed.

That is why Ibsen's humans *do* what people *usually* don't do: Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* shoots herself, Rebekka and Rosmer throw themselves in the river, Nora slams the door behind her, the lady from the sea risks everything in her "either – or" and Hedda Gabler burns Eilert Lovborg's manuscript, then places her old toy, General Gabler's pistol, against her temple and pulls the trigger.

Hanna Andresen Butenschon, 1891

Ibsen is a born polemist, and his poetic utterance was his first declaration of war. ... No one who, like Ibsen, believes in the rights and powers of the emancipated individual, no one who has felt himself, as early as he did, at war with the world around him, has a favorable opinion of the multitude. ... In Ibsen's eyes, the average man is small, egotistical, and pitiful. He looks upon him, not from the purely scientific, but from the moral point of view.

Georg Brandes, "Second Impressions," 1899

The glory of Ibsen is that he refused to make certain fatal separations. He refused to separate the individual from the collective, the personal from the social.

Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theatre*, 1953

The problem of *Being*, the nature of the self, with the question of what an individual means when he uses the pronoun *I*. How can the self be defined? Can one even speak of a consistent entity corresponding to an individual's self? This, it seems to me, is the fundamental and underlying subject matter of Ibsen's *oeuvre* which was masked, for his contemporaries by its surface preoccupation with social and political questions.

Martin Esslin, *Ibsen and Modern Drama*, 1980

To me he was a reincarnation of the Greek dramatic spirit, especially its obsessive fascination with past transgressions as the seeds of current catastrophe. In this slow unfolding was wonder, even god. Past and present were drawn into a single continuity, and thus a secret moral order was being limned. ... Present dilemma was simply the face that the past had left visible.

Arthur Miller, "Ibsen and the Drama of Today," *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, 1994

BALANCING THE COMIC AND THE HORRIFYING: COMMENTS ON REBECCA GILMAN

[R]ebecca Gilman], a woman of placid demeanor who is quietly forthright in conversation, defies the expectation of a provocateur. She is a native of Trussville, Ala., a small town outside Birmingham known for producing fire extinguishers. She still speaks with a bit of a drawl that is particularly noticeable here in Chicago, where she has been living since 1994, after finishing a graduate degree in theater at the University of Iowa. The central event of “Spinning Into Butter,” the anonymous persecution of Simon Brick, derives from a similar episode at Middlebury College in Vermont in the early 1980’s, when Ms. Gilman was briefly a student there.

Her career is gathering momentum. After, by her estimate, some 150 rejections of her plays by nonprofit theaters all over the country, Circle Theater, a tiny company outside Chicago, took a chance on her grim look at two youthful serial killers, “The Glory of Living.” The sterling reviews drew the attention of, among others, the Royal Court Theater in London, whose production opened in January to critical praise.

That also resulted in a commission from the Goodman for its smaller stage, the 135-seat Studio Theater, which turned into “Spinning Into Butter.” The Goodman subsequently commissioned a second play, and she wrote “Boy Meets Girl,” about a young woman who is stalked by a man with whom she has one date; it is scheduled for the Goodman’s main stage next season.

“I think of ‘Spinning’ and ‘Boy’ as two sides of the same coin,” Ms. Gilman said. “One is about what it is to objectify people, and the other is about what it is to be objectified. I guess the theme of objectification runs throughout my work.”

Bruce Weber, “Drama Confronts an Awfully Familiar Bias,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 1999

In other words, Gilman writes accessible plays with such intriguing plots that the audience finds itself hungry for what is going to happen next – and once she has the viewer under that narrative spell, she does not shirk from exposing complex themes with a strongly feminist sensibility, dispensed with just the right quirky touch of nouveau Southern gothic.

As you read the burgeoning Gilman oeuvre, other common themes emerge. She’s fascinated by crime but is determined that her perpetrators’ actions are never seen as isolated from societal forces. She fights objectification but seems to understand its hold on modern consciousness. She’s never crudely polemical; there’s always a sense of life’s ironies and ambiguities.

But perhaps the most striking (and currently unfashionable) aspect of Gilman’s stance is a warm and sympathetic attitude towards the victims in her plays, especially when their humanity is negated by tensions between society’s liberal and conservative factions.

Chris Jones, “A Beginner’s Guide to Rebecca Gilman,” *Theatre Communications Group*, 2000

[Rebecca Gilman] seems to have a remarkable capacity to put her finger on the pulse of the zeitgeist. ... She understands how to write plays that are premised in something that seems immediate and recognizable to her audience, but she finds a way to dig very deeply into the characters and the milieu. And she has a remarkable capacity to hook you into a story.

Michael Maggio, DePaul theater dean, quoted in Chris Jones’ “A Beginner’s Guide to Rebecca Gilman,” *Theatre Communications Group*, April 2000

I find Rebecca’s work infused with an unusual intelligence, and she’s one of the few writers I know who can balance the comic and the horrifying. ... She has a tremendous gift for that. ... There’s a ballsy-ness and a toughness that’s sort of unusual for a female playwright, that’s not particularly feminine.

Robert Falls, quoted in Alison Neumer’s “Stage Acts of Anger,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 2005

Gilman’s social-political concerns have long been apparent in her work, if rarely front and center in it. In plays like *Spinning Into Butter* and *Boy Gets Girl*, she turned deceptively small-scale character dramas into larger explorations of society’s discomfort with issues like race and sexual stereotyping. Her brilliant adaptation of Carson McCullers’ *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (staged a few months ago at the off-Broadway New York Theater Workshop) managed to restore all the political context and Depression-era social realism that had been scrubbed out of the sentimental, Oscar-nominated 1968 Hollywood film.

Richard Zoglin, *The Johnstown Flood: Disaster, Art and the Critics*, *Time*, April 8, 2010

IN HIS OWN WORDS: HENRIK IBSEN

A SAMPLING OF IBSEN'S WRITING

He who possesses freedom otherwise than as something to be striven for possesses something dead and meaningless, for by its very definition freedom perpetually expands as one seeks to embrace it, so that if, during the quest, anyone stops and says: "Now I have it," he shows thereby that he has lost it.

Henrik Ibsen, letter to Georg Brandes, February 14, 1871

To ask is my vocation, not to answer.

"A Letter in Rhyme," 1875

Everything I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through inwardly – even if I have not experienced it outwardly. In every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification – for no man can escape the responsibilities and the guilt of the society to which he belongs.

Henrik Ibsen, letter to the newspaper *Ludwig Passarge*, June 16, 1880

Ibelieve that a time will soon come when our political and social conflicts will no longer exist in their present forms, and that the two will grow together into a single whole which will embody for the present the conditions making for the happiness of humankind. ... I have been charged on various occasions with being a pessimist. And that is what I am, insofar as I do not believe in the absoluteness of human ideals. But I am at the same time an optimist insofar as I believe fully and steadfastly in the ability of ideas to propagate and develop.

Henrik Ibsen, speech, December 24, 1887

I have been more of the poet and less the social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. ... My task has been the *description of humanity*. To be sure, whenever such description is felt to be reasonably true, the reader will insert his own feelings and sentiments into the work of the poet. These are attributed to the poet, but incorrectly so. Every reader remolds it so beautifully and nicely, each according to his own personality. Not only those who write, but also those who read are poets; they are collaborators; they are often more poetical than the poet himself.

Henrik Ibsen, speech at the Festival of the Norwegian Women's Rights League, May 26, 1898

Anyone who wishes to understand me fully must know Norway. The spectacular but severe landscape which people have around them in the north, and the lonely shut-off life – the houses often lie miles from each other – force them not to bother about other people, but only their own concerns, so that they become reflective and serious, they brood and doubt and often despair. In Norway, every second man is a philosopher. And those dark winters, with the thick mists outside – ah, they long for the sun!

Henrik Ibsen, speaking with Felix Philippi, October 27, 1902

IN HER OWN WORDS: REBECCA GILMAN

A SAMPLING OF REBECCA GILMAN'S WORDS AND WORK

I always write for a reason. I don't see the point of doing a play unless I take a chance and express an opinion about what it is I'm writing about. I try not to be didactic. I know I'm trying to get a point across, but I'm trying to do it in an artful and entertaining way.

Rebecca Gilman, quoted in Dan Bacalzo's "Gilman's Spin," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2000

Howard: How can you not check people out? It's what you instinctively do.

Mercer: But do you look at a woman and think, There's an attractive woman. Or do you think, Nice ass.

Howard: What's the difference?

Mercer: I think the difference is the intent. Maybe "There's an attractive woman" would lead you to try and get to know the person. "Nice ass" would be it. You'd stop there, you wouldn't care about the woman, you'd only care about her ass.

Boy Gets Girl, 2000, Act 2, Scene 2

Theresa: Maybe being a woman, to me, meant tolerating a lot of shit. And maybe I never learned otherwise. I still tolerate shit, but I do it as a reporter, so it just seems like part of the job. But maybe it's really still me thinking that's what I'm supposed to do, as a woman. Sit and listen to some asshole go on and on about himself, and then reward him for it.

Boy Gets Girl, 2000, Act 2, Scene 3

Ross: Look, we pride ourselves on our inclusiveness. We claim to embrace cultural diversity. And yet some racist is running loose on campus, and I would wager that this idiot is very much like all our other students in appearance and manner and class, and that's what we need to reveal. That racism isn't somebody else's problem. It's our problem. If we handle this right, it could be a real learning experience for the students.

Kenny: All right, then. Good. This seems like the sort of response we should have, doesn't it? If it leaks out to any of the parents and some irate mother calls me, I can say, "We've already organized a campus meeting in order to reduce any stress or obviate any adverse reactions..." Something like that.

Strauss: Obviate? Will that translate?

Kenny: Whatever. I'll write it out so it sounds right.

Spinning Into Butter, 2000, Act 1, Scene 2

Sarah: You idealized him and that means that you didn't respect him.

Ross: What?

Sarah: To idealize is to fundamentally mark as different; it is not to respect. It is to fundamentally mark as different and, therefore, not equal.

Spinning Into Butter, 2000, Act 2, Scene 1

People are screwed by circumstances, and they screw themselves. ... I think society absolutely has a responsibility to take care of the circumstances part if things are unequal and unfair.

Rebecca Gilman, quoted in Alison Neumer's "Stage Acts of Anger," *Chicago Tribune*. July 13, 2005

WHAT'S WHAT IN DOLLHOUSE: A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CHICAGO

Lincoln Park

A popular, well-known section of Chicago that has recently experienced a lot of development on its south side. A family-friendly neighborhood, Lincoln Park features its namesake Lincoln Park (the largest public park in Chicago), Lincoln Park Zoo, Oz Park, the Lincoln Park Branch of the Chicago Public Library and DePaul University. Second City and Steppenwolf theaters also are located in this neighborhood. Real estate prices range from near-Gold-Coast level to surprisingly affordable, depending on the type of property and specific area of the community. The Helmers live in west Lincoln Park, a slightly less desirable (to them) part of a desirable neighborhood.

Gold Coast

Chicago's "it" neighborhood, located just outside the Loop, inhabited by the powerful and affluent. The area has expansive beaches and beautiful lakefront views, bike trails, jogging paths and green spaces. And it offers the best shopping in the city, including the Magnificent Mile, which begins in the Gold Coast and runs down Michigan Avenue. Home runs from 19th-century mansions, luxury high-rise condos and renovated grey and brownstones. Most detached residential homes (of the sort Nora wants) start above \$1 million but can easily reach the multimillions.

Albany Park

As Nora says, Albany Park is at the end of the Brown Line of Chicago Transit Authority's "L" trains. It's a diverse neighborhood, with large Korean, Muslim, Jewish and Polish populations among others; in fact, it's the third most diverse zip code in the U.S. It's about eight miles northwest of the Loop, and has several parks and green spaces. The real estate varies from multi-flat and courtyard buildings near the L to two- and three-flats further away and to bungalows in the western areas of the neighborhood.

Red Balloon

A Chicago store with two locations (Bucktown and Andersonville in the north end) operating since 1998. Gifts, clothes, toys, etc. for children up to age 10.

Chicago Art Institute/Miniature Rooms

The Chicago Art Institute, one of the preeminent art museums in the country, includes in its collection the 68 Thorne Miniature Rooms. They were conceived and their construction was overseen by Mrs. James Ward Thorne during the 1930s. The rooms show European and American interiors from the late 13th century to the 1930s on a scale of one inch to one foot.

Taste of Chicago

A 10-day lakefront festival in Grant Park featuring food from restaurateurs all over Chicago. Established in 1980, it now attracts more than 6 million people annually.

Dixon, Ill.

A small city of about 15,000 in northwest Illinois located 100 miles west of Chicago.

THE HELMERS' LIFESTYLE

Real Simple

a monthly women's/household magazine with information about childrearing, cooking, housekeeping. Its original subtitle was "life/home/body/soul" now changed to "life made easier." It's published by Time, Inc.

Cohibas

A brand of luxurious Cuban cigars, thought to be Fidel Castro's favorite. They have been produced in large quantity since 1982.

Ghurka

Founded in 1975, Ghurka is an American maker of fine leather goods, described on its website as "exceedingly supple leather that looks and feels like no other." Many Ghurka products are a signature chestnut color.

Saugatuck

A town in Michigan, northeast of Chicago, along the east coast of Lake Michigan. It's 142-mile drive from Chicago and among the popular the getaway places for Chicagoans, along with Lake Geneva and Door County, Wisconsin, and Galena, Illinois.

truffles

The play doesn't specifically name the brand, but Nora's favorite truffles are most likely Vosges Chocolates, which are created with exotic flavors and based in Chicago. It's signature nine-piece collection features such flavors as Hungarian paprika, wasabi, anise and sweet Indian curry powder, sells for \$26 and includes a booklet that describes the flavor and tells "unique truffles stories."

basil paste

chopped basil in oil (sunflowers, olive, etc.)

Chi-O's

Chi Omega [ΧΩ] or Chi O, a sorority that has more than 170 active chapters. It was founded 1895 at the University of Arkansas.

ART

The Artist's Way

A kind of self-help book by Julia Cameron that is designed to help people discover their creative side or to reengage artistic juices.

Peggy Guggenheim

(1898-1979), an important patron of the Abstract Expressionist school of artists in New York through her gallery Art of This Century. She sponsored painters including Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell. Post-World War II, she moved to Venice where

she remained until her death. She donated her collection to the Guggenheim Museum (founded by her uncle Solomon.)

Jackson Pollack

(1912-1956) a leading exponent of Abstract Expressionism, a moment characterized by free-associative gestures, aka “action painting.” He used a pour or drip technique to create his major works.

Isamu Noguchi

(1904-1988), an American sculptor and designer and one of the strongest advocates of the expressive power of organic abstract shapes in 20th-century American sculpture. Besides his sculptural pieces, he designed fountains, playgrounds, sculptural gardens and stage sets.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Bank One

Bank One Corporation, based in Chicago, was formed in 1998 through the merger of Banc One in Columbus, Ohio, and First Chicago. In July 2004, Bank One merged with JPMorgan Chase.

Enron

A Texas-based company that started as a natural gas provider but eventually moved into trading natural gas and electricity commodities. Enron introduced a number of innovations in energy trading, but is now best known for its remarkable collapse at the end of 2001. It came to light that the company had misled investors, reporting inaccurate trading revenues and shuffling off debt to offshore companies, so it appeared Enron’s bottom line was strong and healthy. The SEC (see below) opened investigations into Enron’s activities in October 2001 and by December it had filed for bankruptcy.

Arthur Andersen

A Chicago-based accounting firm that became inextricably connected with Enron’s collapse because its Houston office was Enron’s accountant. Arthur Andersen employees shredded documents related to Enron’s finances before federal officials could begin its investigation. The firm was found guilty of criminal charges related to Enron’s deceptive activities and relinquished its accounting license. As Kristine notes, Arthur Andersen had many national offices, most of which had nothing to do with Enron, but the company could not recover from that scandal.

kick back

The return of part of a sum received, often because of confidential agreement or coercion

promissory note

A written promise to pay at a fixed date in the future a certain amount of money to a specific person or to the bearer of the promissory note. An official I.O.U.

SEC

The Securities and Exchange Commission, the regulatory body established by Congress in 1934 after a Senate committee investigated the New York Stock Exchange following the stock market collapse in 1929. The SEC’s purpose is to maintain investor confidence by investigating and ending misleading sales practices and stock manipulations.

MEDICAL TERMS

IVF (in vitro fertilization)

A medical procedure in which eggs are removed from a woman, fertilized with sperm outside the body then inserted into the uterus.

Fragile X

A chromosomal disorder with a fragile site on the end of the X chromosome. The disorder results in a wide spectrum of diminished mental capacity. Men with fragile-X will be affected by the syndrome. Women will be affected in one-third of cases; the other two-thirds of women with fragile-X have a 50-50 chance of passing the defective chromosome to each offspring.

Tay-Sachs

A hereditary metabolic disorder that causes progressive mental and neurologic deterioration and results in death in early childhood. It’s most likely to affect Ashkenazic Jews.

Thalassemia

a group of blood disorders characterized by a deficiency of hemoglobin, the blood protein that transports oxygen to the tissues. Some forms cause mild anemia, others can cause premature birth or stillbirth. It’s most likely to affect people with ancestors from the Mediterranean.

endocrinologist

A doctor whose medical specialty is studying the role of hormones and other biochemical mediators in regulating bodily functions and the treatment of imbalances in these hormones.

THE '80S AND OTHER MEMORIES

Jean Naté

A popular line of products in the 1970s, including the “exhilarating” after bath splash. “Don’t give her perfume... give her Jean Naté.”

Flashdance

A 1983 movie in which Jennifer Beals played Alex Owens, a Pittsburgh welder and exotic dancer who wants to get into dance school.

XTC

A new wave/alt pop group from Swindon, England.

Gang of Four

A post-punk band from Leeds, Yorkshire, England.

Pink Floyd/Roger Waters

1960s psychedelic band from Britain. Roger Waters was the songwriter/bass player and dominant musical influence from the early 1970s, evident from “Dark Side of the Moon” on. The band split in the early '80s, but three members reunited, sans Waters.

Pee-wee Herman

A comic – and child-like – fictional character created by Paul Reubens. He starred in the film *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* in 1985 and in the children’s television series “Pee-wee’s Playhouse” on CBS from 1986-1991. Reubens was arrested in 1991 for indecent exposure, which essentially brought an end to the Pee-wee phenomenon.

NOTES FROM MEMBERS OF THE CREATIVE TEAM



PHOTO: MIKE HABERMANN

NOTES FROM DIRECTOR WENDY C. GOLDBERG

The pairing of Henrik Ibsen and Rebecca Gilman, I think, is an inspired match. Ibsen, who is considered to be the father of modern drama, is a playwright who elevated the dramatic form of his time from mere entertainment to a forum that exposed sociopolitical issues and problems. In addition, his narrative interests revolved around

realistic depictions of human beings, their complicated interpersonal relationships and their equally complex relationship to their own political landscape.

Rebecca Gilman's plays and interests as a playwright are strikingly similar. Whether you look at her play *Spinning Into Butter* or her most recent piece which just closed at the Goodman in Chicago called *A True History of the Johnstown Flood*, she is a sociopolitical writer with an incredible gift – one of the best I've ever seen – for writing naturalistic dialogue whose objectives center around realistic, challenging, interpersonal dynamics with her characters. She often takes an examined look at a particular moment in history, in which her characters either accept or struggle against the sociopolitical norms of that moment. She has this gift, as one observer has noted, of turning “deceptively small-scale character dramas into larger explorations of society's discomfort with various issues like race or sexual stereotyping.” And she does all of this with an incredible sense of humor and brilliant craftsmanship, in the way that Ibsen himself was a master craftsman. She's never didactic, and she always seems to have a relevance and an immediacy to the particular moment. Like Ibsen, she's extremely controversial. At the beginning of this month, *Time* magazine went to Chicago to review *Johnstown Flood*. And the critic from *Time* said that “any play that prompts that kind of critical outrage must be doing something right: defying expectations or flouting theatrical convention in some important way that demands a look.”

Dollhouse, our play, is truly no exception. When Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*, opened in Copenhagen in 1879, the audience reaction was one of shock. The challenges to the archetypal marriage ideas presented within the play truly affronted many of the playgoers. The idea that a woman could reject the role society had designated for her was completely alien to many. Gilman has masterfully constructed a modern adaptation of Ibsen's play. Interestingly, the problems that plagued Ibsen's Nora are still faced by Gilman's Nora, only in slightly altered form. Once again, audiences are presented with questions about relationships, materialism and of a life built on lies. The play is firmly set at the end of 2004 in

Chicago. At that moment in our country's history, we were a year-and-a-half into the Iraq War and George Bush was recently reelected. It's not a coincidence that this play, with its focus on materialism and lies, takes place in the year that Kenneth Lay was indicted (following the discovery of Enron's scandals and the billions in debt that it hid) and that accounting firm Arthur Andersen had effectively gone out of business. It's a haunting period in our nation's continued economic struggles, particularly because it signaled the beginning of wide scale corruption, deception and the start of this grave economic recession.

Ibsen's play was so controversial that he was actually forced to write a second ending to the play, which he called a “barbaric outrage to be used only when necessary.” The controversy, of course, centered around Nora's decision to abandon her children. Although Ibsen was later to be embraced by feminists, Ibsen was truly no champion of women's rights. What he wanted to do was to present a realistic depiction of a woman and examine her choice. But his intention was not to solve this issue – it was just to illuminate it, to bring it to light.

And it is Gilman's intention with her ending to capture that same kind of controversial spirit of Ibsen's ending. She thought about what would create that same sort of heightened debate and controversy and cause tension with the audience. Money and power are at the center of this play, after all, and so all of the decisions that are made in the play are driven by these forces. One Chicago critic, I think, put it best about *Dollhouse*: “A warning: *Dollhouse* is the kind of play that can cause a difference of opinion with your significant other. This is not a feel-good date play. This is a play to think about and discuss.”



PHOTO: MIKE HABERMANN

NOTES FROM SET DESIGNER ALEXANDER DODGE

When Wendy and I first talked about this play, it was exciting because there's so much history and obviously we study Ibsen in school, but being able to take the play into such a new place was very exciting. And having been to Chicago but not knowing it very much, I thought this was a great opportunity to look into its different neighborhoods.

The Helmers are on the outskirts of Lincoln Park, and while, yes, that's very specific to Chicago, I'm sure there are places like that here in Minneapolis as there are in every major city. The idea of sort of clawing your way or trying to be something that you're not quite at and overextending was something scenically that was delicious to bite into. Especially because this is a contemporary environment, we all have a better sense of “that's a Viking stove – that costs around \$8,000,” as

opposed to when you're doing something set years ago. You don't really know – was that the high-end stove at the time, was that the really expensive Biedermeier chair? It's exciting for this play because those details are very specific and very important. It's also very important that this play is taking place in 2004, which is tricky for us because we have to really pay attention. You really have to think back because things we take for granted today were not around then – the iPod I think just came back at that point, for instance.

The Helmers' condo is new construction, with a little bit of a fake loft, fake townhouse feel. But it's basically an apartment building that probably has several units. We've decided that this unit is on the ground floor but it has two floors and there's at least one other unit above this one, where they go to the party in act three. [Adds Wendy Goldberg: It's a traditional Chicago three-flat, where they have the first two floors of the flat.] The condo itself wasn't that expensive, but they have added all the bells and whistles. In the kitchen, for example, which is something that we see on stage, there'll be granite countertops and high-end appliances. All of that is important because they really had no business actually spending that kind of money on all of that. But they're status symbols, like automobiles. If they had a car, we know it would be a Lexus or something outside that they're barely able to make payments on.

The other idea that was interesting to us was the world beyond this environment. We've abstracted it, so the house is really more like a cube. We've added a waffle edge around the proscenium, which gives us a sense of an abstract cityscape. It suggests that this is maybe one of many – hundreds, thousands – of very ordinary situations. As crazy as the Helmers' is, it's not one of a kind.

Edited from comments made to staff and actors on the first day of rehearsal.



PHOTO: MIKE HABERMANN

NOTES FROM COSTUME DESIGNER ANNE KENNEDY

Wendy and I have worked together frequently, largely on modern-dress shows. Over time we've really hit a groove; it's become a kind of a dance for us. The way we have grown to do a show together is to meet and talk about the world of the play and about the characters and the kind of people they are, where they

might shop. Rather practical matters. I like to provide a lot of research that serves as an outline for when I go out in the world and look for these clothes. The next step is a thinning process through fittings. A lot of designing actually happens in the fittings in the way that I do it. Wendy and I have discovered there's a kind of alchemy that happens with the real choices, the research and then interacting with the actors.

Rebecca Gilman has given us such specific information about the character of Nora. Nora can be the peacock of the play. As Sarah Agnew [who plays Nora] and I talked about it in her fitting today, Nora is the kind of person who goes to Nordstrom and does her research and then shops at Nordstrom Rack.

The other thing that I'm paying attention to visually, because the set is so neutral, is that color will be really important in terms of the clothing that I choose.

Edited from comments made to staff and actors on the first day of rehearsal.



PHOTO: MIKE HABERMANN

NOTES FROM SOUND DESIGNER REID REJSA

Wendy and I have been talking about some ideas including a modern soundtrack of popular music, probably Chicago-based artists, and no Christmas music. The other part of my work will be supporting the environment of the play – such as city sounds as needed.

Edited from comments made to staff and actors on the first day of rehearsal.

BUILDING THE PRODUCTION

Backstage information about *Dollhouse*.

Opening May 28, 2010

Compiled by Jacque Frazzini,
Artistic Relations

Production photos by Michal Daniel



SET

Alexander Dodge, Set Designer
Ed Saindon, Assistant Technical Director

Set Designer Alexander Dodge described his design concept for *Dollhouse* as presenting a “story unfolding within one of many boxes.” The set reflects both a sense of Chicago, a sense of the outside world and the emotional dynamic of the family living within the largest “box.” Assistant Technical Director Ed Saindon and the Scenic Department have brought the Helmer’s Lincoln Park townhouse to life on stage by building what Saindon describes as “as box within a box within a box.” The frame for the show portal is constructed of 1” x 4” pine covered with Lauan (a type of plywood skin). Using a sizing fluid which is a mixture of 50/50 water and white glue, the Lauan is wrapped with muslin; the edges are wrapped and painted by Lead Scenic Artist Michael Hoover and his crew. The series of boxes are built of 90% conventional foam used in building construction; they fit together in a tongue in groove configuration called lap joint where one half laps over another. These boxes are backed by a rear projection screen similar to those used in local movie theaters; a white muslin drop is hung next and finally a black velour drop is hung to prevent light from the boxes to “bleed” into the set. Molding around doorways and crown molding is poplar. Stained Lauan strips have been laid over stock

plywood to form the stage deck; black velour strips are used for the downstage edge facing the audience.

Master Carpenter Tom J. Truax built all of the kitchen and center island cabinets; Hoover and his staff painted them. Every drawer in the kitchen is completely functional, and the counter-tops are laminate over a base of 1” MDF (medium density fiberboard). Set doors of solid poplar with frosted Plexiglas were built by Staff Carpenter Patrick Landers. The sink in the center island is functional through the use of a soda keg which is pressurized (similar to those used with soft drink beverages) enabling water to pour into the sink and drain into a bucket placed strategically underneath. The island sink was purchased at Home Depot as well as all cabinet and door knob hardware. Built as a single unit and then dropped into place, the upstage stairway including hand rails, balusters and newel posts are all constructed of oak; the stairs are plywood covered with Lauan strips. The back wall which is 24’ wide and 12’ tall was constructed in three pieces, wrapped with muslin over Lauan and painted in the same method as the portal. In the townhouse ceiling, the Scenic Department drilled holes and fitted the trim caps for 30 recessed lights. On stage right, an exterior brick wall can be viewed through the kitchen door. To create this effect, the wall has been built of Vacuform brick; the “concrete” floor is painted Duron (a type of hardwood).

PROPS

Patricia Olive, Props Manager
Sarah Gullickson, Associate Props Manager

Due to the contemporary nature of this production (2004), Props Manager Patricia Olive and Associate Props Manager Sarah Gullickson explain that most of the props have been purchased; very few were built. Purchases are made from a variety of sources – some local and some online. Research was done through a Crate and Barrel catalogue from 2004 to find appropriate props as there is a reference to this store in the script. The major pieces of furniture in the living room are purchases from Slumberland (the couch and matching chair), but modified with plywood under the cushions for stability. The ottoman, built by Master Props Craftsperson Mel X. Springer and upholstered by Shopper/Buyer Craftsperson Stacey Schwebach, has been fortified with plywood under the leather cover because Nora Helmer (Sarah Agnew) dances on the top. Other examples of modifications are the side chairs purchased from Target but then reupholstered by Schwebach. The coffee table and side tables were purchased from Becker Furniture Outlet. Stools for the center island were obtained through an online purchase; Guthrie Lighting department electricians added wiring to the two pendant lighting fixtures from Lowe’s. The children’s toy box and the ladder shelf unit seen on stage left

were built by Springer. Rugs that decorate the set were from two sources – the upstage and downstage rugs were purchased from Lowe’s; the middle rug comes from Hayneedle.com.

The Props Department often uses Craigslist as a source for purchases, and this production is no exception. The Christmas tree, the stereo components and the stove were such purchases. Springer made two additional stove burners to coordinate with the existing ones. Staff Props Craftsperson John Vlatkovich built the vent hood by bending Plexiglas to the desired curved look. Further items in the kitchen area are the dishwasher, on loan from A1 Recycling Center & Appliance Sales in Anoka, and the Kenmore refrigerator, a purchase from the Sears Outlet Store. Due to a specific reference in the script, Golfis designed a Viking brand sticker for the refrigerator door. Decorations for the Christmas tree were found at Lakeland Floral and Litin Paper Company. To expedite the movement of the gifts during the scene changes, the wrapped presents are attached to a bendable piece of plywood which can be moved as a unit. For Act II, a set of unwrapped gifts built by Springer and Staff Props Craftsperson Kellie Larson is moved on as a unit. To create the large portrait seen near the stairway upstage, Staff Props Craftsperson Nick Golfis, photographed Nora and Terry Helmer (Peter Christian Hansen), had the print enlarged at Fed Ex Office and then built the frame and did the matting. Golfis photographed the actors outside of the Guthrie for the smaller wedding photos; additional

photos are of friends and families of Props Department members. Some of the decorative items on the set have been pulled from stock; small picture frames are from IKEA, and then spray painted. Other IKEA items include the glass container holding rocks and decorative items on the occasional tables.

Set dressing includes dishes and fake food pulled from stock plus “recycle bin donations” from the Props Department. The floor lamp is a Pier One purchase; table lamps are from Lamps Plus online, and the Mineral Rock lamp is a donation from Schwebach. When the script calls for specifically named props, the Props Department designs and builds such props. For example, Golfis made labels for the 312 Beer and the Cohiba cigars and box which was built by Vlatkovich. For scenes in which actors smoke, E-cigars are used which are operated by an electronic process that does not involve the use of tobacco, making them harmless to actors and audience members. Props for the children include a sock monkey made by Larson, 2 backpacks pulled from stock, a backpack purchased at Target for one of the little girls and a borrowed sled. Soaps which Nora uses as gifts are pieces of wood covered with leather and wrapping paper. Candles on the table are wood and muslin built by Vlatkovich; the hat tree was pulled from stock with hooks modified by Springer. All Target bags and Crate and Barrel boxes were donated; the Red Balloon bags were sent from Chicago. Larson created the snowball which is thrown against the window in Act II



IRIS (NORA MONTANEZ) AND NORA (SARAH AGNEW) WITH SHOPPING BAGS.

by wrapping a small weight with muslin and batting then shaved ice is applied to the outside prior to each performance.

LIGHTING

Josh Epstein, Lighting Designer
Ryan Connealy, Lighting Design Assistant

Lighting Designer Josh Epstein describes his approach to lighting a production as “moving from big ideas and broad strokes to fine tuning; trying to find the intimacy of the play and yet remaining unobtrusive.” Ryan Connealy, Lighting Design Assistant, explains the specifics of translating Epstein’s design to the stage. A rented HMI (Hydragryum medium arc iodide) unit provides lighting on the back wall showing the passage of time during the transitions. This is a special light which provides a type of illumination used for stage lighting, in the film industry and for large image projection.

Nine color scrollers are used, lighting devices having several different colored gels that can be indexed via the lighting control board, shine on the portal while colors are changing behind it.

To light the areas behind the sides of the stage portal, 13 mini-strips with three different colors are used to provide a large “wash” lighting effect. There are 30 MR-16 lights in each mini-strip. MR-16 lights (mini-reflectors) 75W are a type of halogen light using halogen gas which allows the lamp to burn brighter and are more efficient than incandescent light bulbs. MR-16 lights are also used in the down lights which are an architectural feature of the set ceiling with a theatrical birdie (lantern) behind each 3 ½” fixture opening. There are a



MARTA (GEORGE A. KELLER) AND NORA (SARAH AGNEW) AT CENTER ISLAND.



FULL SHOT OF THE SET WITH ILLUMINATED BLUE BOXES IN PORTAL.

total of 420 MR-16 lights in the production. Five moving (or intelligent) lights, which have several modes for changing color are remotely controlled from the light console, and are different from normal lights that can only be controlled in terms of intensity.

There are seven practicals – table and floor lamps, the stereo, and the under-counter lighting is controlled through the lighting console; the refrigerator is operated independently. Lighting cues for this production number 150.

SOUND

Reid Rejsa, Sound Designer

In discussing the sound design for the production, Sound Designer Reid Rejsa explains that the concept was to create an intentionally repetitive soundscape chosen for scene transitions and to indicate the passage of time. To accomplish this mechanical, clock-like feeling, musical choices were made which have precise, rhythmic qualities featuring drums and bass. Specific sound effects include ambient sounds indicating the outside world such as the party upstairs – bringing in the reality of the world without making it super-realistic. At various times during the production, doors open, phones ring, doorbells chime, there are computer keyboard sounds and the tinkling of a children’s piano keyboard. The script has a specific reference to the sound track from the film “Flashdance”, and the song “Maniac” is from a compilation disc, “Early 80’s Disco Classics.” Performed by the group Count D’s Disco Explosion, it is played through the sound system at the appropriate time. There are a total of 60 sound cues in *Dollhouse*.

COSTUMES AND WIGS

Annie Kennedy, Costume Designer
 Amelia Cheever, Costume Design Assistant
 Ivy Loughborough, Wigmaster

In remarks on the first day of rehearsal, Costume Designer Annie Kennedy stated that “she loves designing present-day shows.” For Kennedy, all people are making choices about the way they want to look everyday – in the case of Nora, the look is trendy and materialistic. As Terry states in the script, “People judge you on appearance,” and appearance plays an important part in the lives of these characters. Kennedy attributes the costume design for the show to research through fashion magazines and photos of ordinary people. Costume Design Assistant Amelia Cheever goes on to explain that the look of the show is “real people, not caricatures.” Due to the contemporary nature of the production, all of the costumes were purchased either locally or online.

Cheever cites the only item built is Macey’s (Piper Gallivan, Emily Marceau) jacket hood which is mentioned in Act I and later clasped



KRISTINE (NORAH LONG), PETE (MATT GUIDRY) AND NORA (SARAH AGNEW).



NORA SITTING ON STAGE LEFT HOLDING THE HOOD.

like a stuffed animal by Nora. The colors chosen are mostly blues and greens to contrast with the neutral color tones in the set. All of the men’s clothing has been purchased. To replicate the actress Jennifer Beals’ look in “Flashdance” for Nora’s costume party choice, specific clothing was indicated – black leggings, a sweat shirt, black leg warmers with a star design and tall pumps. Wigmaster Ivy Loughborough designed the wig for the “Flashdance” sequence; there are no other wigs in the production.



NORA (SARAH AGNEW) WEARING HER “FLASHDANCE” WIG TALKING WITH KRISTINE (NORAH LONG).

FOR FURTHER READING

BOOKS

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Shafer, Yvonne, ed. *Approaches to Teaching Ibsen's A Doll's House*. The Modern Language Association of America, 1985

WEBSITES

www.ibsen.net

The world's largest Web site devoted to Henrik Ibsen, with pages in Norwegian, English and German. It was founded by the National Ibsen Committee of Norway and is now run by the National Library of Norway.

www.norway.org/ibsen/

Norway's official English language Web site devoted to Ibsen.