

Getting Out

THE SALONNIERES

By Sheila Barth

Definition of salonnières: Women who were agents and funding agencies for significant writers, philosophers and artists, who encouraged and supported the founding of the French Academy and writing of the Encyclopedia. Created in Catherine Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet's famous chambre bleue in 1618, salons were groups of people who came together to discuss a common topic led by a hostess, or salonnière.

At Greater Boston Stage Company, theatergoers seeing "The Salonnières" stage as they enter are dazzled by scenic designer Katy Monthei's splendid, huge gilded, bird cage-like structure, adorned

with crystal chandeliers and stunning white-and-gold furniture.

Award-winning designer Gail Astrid Buckley's resplendent period costumes punctuate the magnificent wealth of pre-French Revolution's aristocracy.

This new work by Liz Duffy Adams is part of the theater's Don Fulton New Play Project, named after the late philanthropist-benefactor who died in May. The theater is honoring Fulton's memory by continuing to produce worthy new works.

Directed by Producing Artistic Director Weylin Symes, the cast features three veteran Boston performers and two newcomers to the theater: award-winning Laura Latreille, portraying Henri-

ette, the Comtesse de Mare, who mixes up her words and phrases, but is cunning and self-serving. Garbed in black, Sarah Newhouse portrays Gabrielle, the Marquise D'Aulney, whose austere presence masks her pragmatic, caring personality. Award-winning actor Bill Mootos portrays Claude, the Duc de la Beauchene, who shows his true colors as these patron women of the arts, literature and education spin seemingly harmless fairy tales that are veiled political denunciations.

Portraying Madeleine de Sauveterre, newcomer Elainy Mata is charmingly youthful and innocent. Set in pre-French Revolutionary Paris - or as further suggested, pre-Feminist revolution, lovely maiden Madeleine, who

is motherless and lived in a convent, is promised to marry an older duke, to pay off her father's debts. Frightened, she flees to the literary salon of her late mother's aristocratic female friends, seeking refuge and advice.

Another newcomer Lisa Joyce, portrays uneducated maid, Françoise, who obediently, and at times, grudgingly, answers the aristocratic women's beck and calls. Françoise can't read, but she's clever, hiding her own agenda that's revealed at the end.

During the Duc's visit at the salon to meet his young

BOX OFFICE

World premiere of acclaimed playwright Liz Duffy Adams' one-act, 90-minute play, "The Salonnières," appearing through Nov. 11: Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2 p.m.; Thursday, 7:30 p.m.; Friday, Saturday, 8 p.m.; Sunday, 2 p.m. Greater Boston Stage Company, 395 Main St., Stoneham. \$45-\$55, seniors, \$40-\$50; students with valid ID, \$20. 781-279-2200, greaterbostonstage.org.

betrothed, Henriette spins a "Beauty and the Beast" type fairy tale that has a happily-ever-after ending, while Gabrielle has a darker, frightening version of the tale. Their storytelling is enhanced by Chris Fournier's lowered lighting and Christine Banna's projected, cartoon-like silhouetted figures looming in the background.

There are fun scenes, too,

especially when Françoise and Madeleine conjure up and carry out a plan to dupe the Duc and Henriette.

In a printed quote, Director Symes says, "The moment I read Liz's witty, anachronistic fantastical riff on the lead-up to the French Revolution, I was hooked. The play is smart, funny, and has something to say about our world today."