

## [Cherry and Spoon: The Basset Table](#)

### "The Basset Table" by Persistent Theatre Productions at Dreamland Arts



Welcome to the Renaissance! The day after seeing the hilarious fictional farce about (all male) playwrights in Shakespeare's day, I saw an actual play written by a female playwright of the era. Who knew that there was a successful female playwright who lived and wrote shortly after Shakespeare's time? I didn't. Susanna Centlivre was one of the first women in history to make a living as a

playwright, and was also an actor in the era just after women were allowed on stage in England. With the current necessary focus on putting more women's stories on stage, it's a great idea to revisit female playwrights of the past who have been largely forgotten. Thanks to Persistent Theatre Productions, a new #TCTheater company with a "feminist voice," for bringing us one of Centlivre's works.

*The Basset Table* was written in 1701 and features several independent women, one of whom runs a card game where serious money is won or lost. Lady Reveller (Julie Ann Grief) lives with her uncle Sir Richard (Don Larsson), who is not too pleased with his niece's gambling habit and wishes her to be more like her cousins, the demure Lucy (Alison Anderson) and the scientist Valeria (Lana Bean). He wishes to marry off his daughters and urges Lady Reveller to do the same. Of course that's exactly what happens in the end. But while the play still ends with everyone coupled up (like Shakespeare's comedies usually do), at least the getting there is perhaps a little less cliched and the women don't have to give up their interests, or hopefully their

Before the show starts, in the sweet little space that is Dreamland Arts in on Hamline Ave. in St. Paul, the actors mill around in character, chatting with the audience. This playful spirit continues into the play itself, in which familiar troupes like silly/wise servants (including an amusingly over the top Allison True) and disguises make for some ridiculous comedy. The cast really commits to the campy tone under director Meggie Grievell, with some more poignant moments as well. The British accents are fun to listen to, if a bit inconsistent.



the ladies Lucy (Alison Anderson), Reveller (Julie Ann Grief), and Mrs. Sago (Jody Bee, photo by Scott Pakudaitis)

A cast of 12 is large for this intimate space, that only seats about 40 or so. But they're rarely all on stage together, and the stage is separated into several distinct areas on different levels (living space, basset table, science lab), so that it never feels crowded. The period costumes are bright and colorful, complete with headpieces. (Set and property design by Beth Anne Roe, costume design by Rebecca Karstad.)

*The Basset Table* is a similar feel to Shakespeare's comedies, but it's fun to get it from a women's perspective (and not as long - just over two hours including intermission). Continuing through April 22.



Labels: [Alison Anderson](#), [Allison True](#), [Beth Anne Roe](#), [Don Larsson](#), [Dreamland Arts](#), [Jody Bee](#), [Julie Ann Greif](#), [Lana Bean](#), [Meggie Grievell](#), [Persistent Theatre](#), [Rebecca Karstad](#)

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## 18th Century Feminist Classic – Susanna Centlivre’s Delightfully Mischievous “The Bassett Table” Shines at Dreamland Arts

By John Townsend April 17, 2018

Categories: Featured - Home Page



A major woman playwright from early 18th century England is in revival by Persistent Theatre Productions at St. Paul's Dreamland Arts. *The Bassett Table* by Susanna Centlivre is a delightfully mischievous story of a gambling salon where women are on equal footing with men, sharing the possibility of beating the odds. That said, they're ultimately just as liable for the consequences of that freedom.

Meggie Greivell has directed this farcical gem with a scrupulous eye toward period and style, enhanced Rebecca Karstad's sumptuous costumes. Every actor masters the language, carriage and movement with crisp clarity, expert timing throughout, and a verve that is simply infectious.



One of this production's notable accomplishments is that the period and style are heightened to almost a point of being larger than life. Yet the Dreamland Arts space is one of the most intimate theater venues in the Twin Cities. In other words, you get a theatrical experience on a scale of a grand theater space while sitting in the diametrically opposite.

The superb cast is led by a dazzling performance by Julie Ann Greif as the salon supervisor, Lady Reveller. She is supported winningly by an earthy Allison True as maid and assistant, Alpiev. (You might think of them in modern American terms as rough equivalents to Bette Davis and Thelma Ritter.)



Centlivre reflects the theatrical class types that those familiar with Shakespeare and Restoration drama will immediately recognize. And if you don't know of those, no matter, it's great fun anyway. Greivell's female-to-male crossgender performances authentically reflect the class levels and gender by actresses Maureen Bourgeois, Tara Lucchino, and Amanda Kay Thomm. They are vibrantly matched by those traditionally cast: Lana Bean, Bruce Abas, Alison Anderson, Don Larsson, and Franklin Wagner. Trans artist Kjer Whiting also contributes commendably. There is a particularly wonderful performance by Jody Bee as the self-deceived Mrs. Sago, whose gambling habit comes hilariously home to roost.

***The Bassett Table***

Through Apr. 22

Dreamland Arts, Hamline Ave., St. Paul

651-645-5506

[www.dreamlandsarts.org](http://www.dreamlandsarts.org)

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## Reviews of *The Bernice Project*

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## Her story


A new play tells a compelling personal history and inspires reflection on how far we've come.




REVIEW BY HAILEY COLWELL | JANUARY 8, 2017

We have not yet reached a day when young single motherhood is free of stigma, or when male privilege doesn't cause problems in sexual situations.

This past week, a [newborn baby](#) was discovered in the stairwell at the Cathedral of St. Paul. Prayers and wishes were expressed for the mother who made the painful decision to leave him there. But I read of no one talking about the baby's father and his own decisions. This past month, some University of Minnesota football players were [suspended](#) following allegations of sexual assault, and we watched the conflict get all the more messy because of these men's high-profile position.

In *The Bernice Project* at Phoenix Theater, an ensemble of actors tells of the tensions between these realities though the true story of a Midwestern woman in the mid-20th century, showing us both how far we've come and how far we have to go.

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The Bernice Project



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We meet Bernice (Tiffany Cornwell, who carries the show earnestly) as a young woman in 1946. She is swept off her feet when her boyfriend returns home after fighting in World War II. After a few months, she realizes she is pregnant and scrambles to stay in rural Wisconsin's good books. She makes the arrangements for her sweetheart to marry her, which, despite his professed love, is not an easy task because his family is Lutheran while hers is Catholic.

The couple manages to set a marriage date, but not before their families start an uproar. Their traditions, we learn, are about to get tested on a whole new level: Bernice's boyfriend stands her up on their wedding day (he tells her he wants to be a "free man" and not tied down by their baby), leaving Bernice to face single motherhood, which her family and church consider a sin.

### Not the man's responsibility

In these days, fathers were rarely required to pay child support, forcing single mothers to put their children up for adoption (in Bernice's case, through the church) after giving birth. The common belief was that if an unmarried couple had a child, it was not the man's responsibility. He could deny parentage if he wanted to while the woman was left with the blame of being "promiscuous" and causing a scandal.

With no financial support from her family, who has cut ties with her, Bernice faces an impossible situation. Still, she decides to do whatever she can to keep and raise her child. By teaming up with her county district attorney and a supportive nurse, Bernice sets off on an unprecedented quest for child support. By doing so, she takes a stand against the sexist constraints of her world.

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### Retelling a family tale

Meggie and Debbie Greivell crafted the play from retellings of Bernice's story by her younger sister, Esther — one of their ancestors. The mother-daughter team skillfully used Bernice's situation to illustrate the hurdles single mothers faced then, some of which, in more vestigial ways, still exist today. By showing us what happens when single parenthood is placed against the opponents of church, family, the law and the times, they opened an interesting discussion about women's rights and male privilege.

Perhaps most interestingly, the creators painted a nuanced portrait of Bernice's boyfriend, Roman (John Stark, who also played a supporting character to hilarious effect). Roman has just returned from fighting in France and Germany. When they are together, he seems to genuinely love Bernice. But he tells her, now that he's back, he is not ready to settle down and have a family because he wants to make something of himself. He's selfish and unaccountable, but he's also a war hero. In Bernice and Roman's day, having hero status was a get-out-of-jail-free card. He opted not to take on the consequences of pregnancy because society told him he didn't have to.

### Modern resonance

It made me think of our own local heroes. It seems clear that the accused players' Division I athlete status had an effect on the dynamics of the recent university scandal. When their teammates [boycotted](#) team activities to demand lifting the suspensions, they suggested that no matter how grave the situation (which, at that point, was unclear to them), the players deserved special treatment. They leveraged their hero status in the local sports world in an attempt to extricate other men from the consequences of their actions. All of





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## Retelling a family tale, the cons

A big challenge of telling someone's life story is, well, it's someone's life. Thanks to Bernice's little sister and detailed research by the mother-daughter team, there was a lot of material to work with. But being related to the person whose story is being told offers an additional challenge: sacrificing parts of the story that took love-labored ages to dig up can seem even more sacrilegious than normal.

What I mean is, the play was long; more than two hours. I think some extra time spent trimming the script and working on pacing would have serviced Bernice's story even more. Plus, while the vintage furniture and prop-laden tables did a great job to establish the world of the play, the actors spent so much time dragging them on and off between the short scenes that it grew distracting. Simplicity and deciding when to "kill your darlings" (in order to enrich your darling aunt's story), could help the play shine.

What stood out despite all else was the inherent conflict in Bernice's narrative, and her unrelenting push to build a life with her daughter. It was an elegy to other single mothers out there, in St. Paul or afar, who have to make difficult decisions every day. For these women, for Bernice's creative descendants, and for audiences hungry for a powerful true story, I am glad hers was told.

# Reviews of, *When We Were Young and Unafraid*

## [Cherry and Spoon: \*When We Were Young and Unafraid\*](#)

Sunday, March 17, 2019

### "When We Were Young and Unafraid" by Persistent Theatre Productions at Fallout Urban Arts Center



"Nevertheless, she persisted" has become a manifesto for female empowerment, and it has also become a #TCTheater company. Founded in 2017, Persistent Theatre Productions is all about "lifting women through untold stories." They do that through their choice of plays (original, classics, or new plays by women) and by hiring women behind the scenes. Their newest production is *When We Were Young and Unafraid*, which premiered Off-Broadway five years ago. It explores the lives of women and the idea of feminism in the early '70s, a time very different from our own in some ways, but in other ways not so different. The untold story it tells is that of domestic violence, always an important story to tell and to hear. Persistent tells it with a strong cast in an intimate setting that leaves nowhere to hide from the sometimes difficult emotions.

Agnes (a no-nonsense Julie Ann Greif) runs a bed and breakfast off the coast of Washington, with a side business of sheltering abused women at a time when women's shelters didn't exist and domestic abuse wasn't talked about. The backstory of how Agnes got into this business comes late in the show (which also explains her heretofore out of place Southern accent), but suffice it to say she has a personal history with abuse. Despite the drama and trauma they encounter, this seems like a normal life for Agnes' smart teenage daughter Penny (an appealing Audrey Parry, believable as a teenager), until Mary Anne (a raw and vulnerable Aidan Jhane Gallivan) arrives to shake things up. She gives Penny advice on how to get the boy she likes to ask her to

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The play brings up some interesting ideas about what feminism, or women's liberation as it was called at the time, means to different women. Spoiler alert: not all women think alike and want the same thing. But the fundamental core of any equal rights movement is equality of choices and opportunity (to bring it back to *Mad Men*, in my favorite quote of the series Peggy says to her boss/lover as he tells her he's decided their relationship is over, "well aren't you lucky, to have decisions"). The play shows us that when a woman doesn't feel safe in her own home, whether that's with her parents, or siblings, or the man who's supposed to love and protect her above all else, her choices and opportunities for a happy and fulfilling life are severely limited.



Penny and Agnes attend to Mary Anne  
(Audrey Parry, Aidan Jhane Gallivan, and Julie Ann Greif)

Jay Beal has designed a detailed and realistic set of the '70s B&B kitchen, which the actors actually use to make coffee and muffins, and drink lots of whiskey. The space at Fallout Urban Arts Center (a different location a block away from **their other space where I've seen theater before**) is small and intimate, almost uncomfortably close to the action. The scene transitions are at times slow and clunky, dragging down the momentum of the piece. I would have liked more use of music during transitions, because the songs that they do use a few times during transitions and at intermission are great female songs from the time period (Dolly Parton, Karen Carpenter, and more). But on the whole it's a gripping and engaging piece, especially towards the end as the stakes get higher.

*When We Were Young and Unafraid* continues through March 31 at Fallout Urban Arts Center in South Minneapolis. near Nicollet and 26th. Get there early to find street



#### Contact Me

Have you seen a great show recently that you think I should see? I'd love to hear about it, email me at [cherryandspoon@gmail.com](mailto:cherryandspoon@gmail.com).

#### Upcoming Shows

- Into the Darkness (Collective Unconscious at Shakespearean Youth Company, St. Paul)
- Pride and Prejudice (Park Square, downtown St. Paul)
- what if (Moving Company at the Lab, Mpls)
- A 1940s Radio Christmas Carol (Lyric, Anoka)
- Miss Bennet (Jungle, Uptown Mpls)
- All is Calm (Theater Latte Da at the Ritz, Northeast Mpls)
- The Viking and the Gazelle (Waterfront Productions at Mixed Blood, Mpls)

Jay Beal has designed a detailed and realistic set of the 70s B&B kitchen, which the actors actually use to make coffee and muffins, and drink lots of whiskey. The space at Fallout Urban Arts Center (a different location a block away from [their other space where I've seen theater before](#)) is small and intimate, almost uncomfortably close to the action. The scene transitions are at times slow and clunky, dragging down the momentum of the piece. I would have liked more use of music during transitions, because the songs that they do use a few times during transitions and at intermission are great female songs from the time period (Dolly Parton, Karen Carpenter, and more). But on the whole it's a gripping and engaging piece, especially towards the end as the stakes get higher.

*When We Were Young and Unafraid* continues through March 31 at Fallout Urban Arts Center in South Minneapolis, near Nicollet and 26th. Get there early to find street parking limited by winter restrictions, and possibly check out one of the many nearby eating and drinking establishments like [Bad Waitress Diner](#) or Glam Doll Donuts.



Labels: [Aidan Jhane Gallivan](#), [Audrey Parry](#), [Fallout Arts](#), [Jared Mogen](#), [Jay Beal](#), [Julie Ann Greif](#), [Lynda Dahl](#), [Meggie Grievell](#), [Persistent Theatre](#)

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[Lavender Magazine: PTP's Astonishing When We Were Young and Unafraid](#)

Arts & Culture

## PTP's Astonishing "When We Were Young and Unafraid" – A Women's History Month Must-See!

By John Townsend March 26, 2019

Categories: Arts & Culture, Featured - Home Page, Our Scene



Photo by Scott Pakudaitis.

Sarah Treem writes roles with a diverse understanding of a wide range of women. Diverse, not in the intersectionalist, identitarian way of current common usage, but organically diverse within a personality and individual viewpoint. This insight serves her brilliantly in *When We Were Young and Unafraid*, now in an production that simply astonishes at Fallout Urban Art Center by Persistent Theatre Productions.

In a wonderfully muscular performance, Julie Ann Greif brings grit, steel, and kindness to Agnes, a woman in her early middle years who runs a secret safe house for battered women near Canada on a Washington state island. When Mary Anne (an electrifying Aidan Jhane Gallivan), a severely traumatized young woman fleeing a violent husband goes there for protection, she interfaces with Penny (a lovably vulnerable Audrey Parry), Agnes's high school senior daughter. Out of their age difference, traits, and belief systems, springs forth one of contemporary drama's most ingenious entanglements of two disparate personalities whose influence upon one another leads to some utterly astounding outcomes. These two actresses are thrilling to witness as they unfold these outcomes.

As one can imagine, a safe house is a setting brimming with dramatic potential and Treem has explored that intricately. Moreover, director Meggie Greivell has mined that with unflinching honesty and masterful grasp of the play's complexities. Her artists conjure a spirit of the time that you feel as you watch.



The textures of the era and the warring ideologies, not just Left v. Right, but within the Left, are rendered vividly. Lesbian separatism and a spirit of revolution, though not operative in Agnes's sensibility, are inevitable given her situation. Her feminism comes from a grounding in Good Samaritan values, not out of indoctrination.

Treem's counterpoint to this is lived into by a plucky and mercurial turn by a dynamic Lynda Dahl as Hannah, a lesbian with a cause, driven by zeal and earthy passion. She might be thought of as a philosophical mix of the Radical Faeries and the Lesbian Avengers. As we get to know Hannah, we see her rethink some of her views, which only adds dimension to this remarkably rich play. Treem miraculously avoids polemics and preachiness. She honestly and forthrightly wrestles with painful feelings and messy history rather than making definite declarative conclusions that playwrights such as Tony Kushner and Suzan Lori-Parks compel us to. In other words, she defies the standard of today. Treem respects the audience's intelligence.

Dahl's performance is not only captivating but an instructive one that offers today's audience a window into sorting out how much of Hannah's separatist ideology has now become mainstream. Again, respect for audience intelligence. Though radical politics infuse the air, you the watcher are left to mull it over in your own way and conclude what you will or not. This may well be a sign of greatness in playwriting. This is why that even though *When We Were Young and Unafraid* is clearly a feminist play, it doesn't preach to the converted. It humanizes real conflict rather than turn it into a cartoon. It seizes truths about the human condition. It will appeal to conservative women and all kinds of men in a way that could win their hearts and minds. Something in this is again, miraculous, and dare I use that overused word, 'inclusive', but in the purest sense.

Jared Mogen as songwriter Paul, *When We Were Young's* only male character, elicits a winningly wholesome quality from which important details of the era and conflicted views of manhood radiate. The imperfect Paul is coming out of a marriage in which the dreams fostered by his sheltered upbringing were trampled on by an addict wife who had given her life and soul over to the porous world of drugs, hedonism, and easy sensuality. This has left the emotionally abandoned Paul invalidated, without bearings. Hence, the turmoil in the house triggers him, setting up intensely charged interplay with Mary Anne. Mogen is luminous in a performance that casts shades of vibrant light and sinister dark. A gifted folk-style vocalist as well, Mogen also sings a touching solo reminiscent of a film and play of the late 1960s only a few years before Treem's play is set. The same energies were still lingering in the air a few years later.

That play and film's title was Leonard Gershe's *Butterflies Are Free*, a flower child era anti-establishment classic; and its title song is sung sweetly by Edward Albert. I refer to it because both Gershe and Treem are akin in sensibility, though different in intent. The connecting thread is that each captures that era's zeitgeist viscerally. Such an atmosphere emanates throughout Greivell's production in which every single artist magically transports us to the early '70s a time in which I suspect most if not all of the artists were born afterward.

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Simple yet profound touches add immeasurably to this: Shanna Frasier's period sound design, Terry Krider Kleinbaum's subtly well-observed costumes, and a set designed by Jay Beal and scenic painting by Martin Ware that could beguile with nostalgia, those of us who actually lived during that time.

Note: When you attend, go early to take in some thought-provoking visual art by women in the Urban Art Center's gallery area which connects to the theater space.

### ***When We Were Young and Unafraid***

Through Mar. 31

Fallout Urban Arts Center, 2609 Stevens Ave. S., Minneapolis

1-800-838-3006

[www.persistenttheatreproductions.com](http://www.persistenttheatreproductions.com)

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## [The Stage: Prick Review](#)


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### Prick review

★★★★★  
"Respectful but extremely funny"

REVIEWS AUG 16, 2023 BY PAUL VALE THE SPACE ON THE MILE, EDINBURGH






**Paul Vale**

Paul has been writing for The Stage since 1998 as a critic and feature writer. He is also part of The Stage's Edinburgh Fringe review team.

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Fascinating historical treatment that finds empathy and humour in the darkest of places

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In the 16th century the Scottish witch trials led to the torture and execution of more than 4,000 women and men, sanctioned and to an extent precipitated by King James VI of Scotland's book *Daemonologie*, which became a guide to finding witches.

Theatre company Light the Match tells ancient stories for contemporary audiences. *Prick*, written by Laurie Flanigan Hegge and marking the company's Edinburgh Fringe debut, does this exceptionally well.

Three women are led to the stake accused of witchcraft. Their individual journeys all began in very different ways, but their endings are horrifically similar. Neighbours turn on neighbours, grief begets suspicion and blame falls at the feet of even the most God-fearing person. Some of the women fight back, exposing the hypocrisy of the trials and the inadequate men who operate them. Others are simply executed, resigned to their fate and broken by torture. The show's title is a reference to one form of torture, in which iron pins are poked into the skin of victims.

Director Meggie Greivell's approach to these horrors is respectful but sometimes



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Director Meggie Greivell's approach to these horrors is respectful but sometimes extremely funny, formatting historical records as modern reportage, or depicting an interview with James VI as a daytime chat show. Most importantly, this play strives to give these women an identity where the authorities had tried to erase them from history. The young company get the balance just right, with particularly moving performances from Carys Turner, Lisa McIntyre and Abigail McDonald.

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## [West End Best Friend: Prick Review](#)

Review  
Aug 14, 2023 - Written By Rachel Louise Martin

# Fringe review: PRICK, Light the Match/New Celts Productions - Edinburgh Festival Fringe



Sanctioned by the state, fuelled by the church, fed by hysteria and buried in history; these are the excuses behind the Scottish witch hunts. Inspired by the Witches of Scotland campaign to remember those who were victims of this terrible miscarriage of justice, *Prick*

Sanctioned by the state, fuelled by the church, fed by hysteria and buried in history; these are the excuses behind the Scottish witch hunts. Inspired by the Witches of Scotland campaign to remember those who were victims of this terrible miscarriage of justice, *Prick* takes us through fact and fiction, past and present, magic and memory, from those that felt threatened by the devil to those that bore the brunt of that terror.

Written by Laurie Flanigan Hegge and directed by Meggie Greivell, the play tells just a few of the many stories of nearly 4000 accused people of the Scottish Witch trials, most of whom were women.

The choice to use puppets in some of the scenes represents just how much these women were tortured and assaulted during these times, to get them to confess to something they had not been a part of.

Abigail McDonald (Marioun Twedy), Lisa McIntyre (Isobel Gowdie) and Carys Turner (Jonet) are our three main 'witches', each bringing their own aptitude to the roles. They engage the audience in their storytelling and we feel a kinship with them immediately.

We'd love to say that witch hunts are a thing of the past, but what this production teaches us is that they are not. They still happen today in parts of the world, so the question is: what exactly have we learnt from the past?

Insightful, sorrowful and gripping.

\*\*\*\* Four stars

Reviewed by: Rachel Louise Martin

*Prick* plays in Space 3 at theSpace on the Mile at 11.15am until 25 August.

Edinburgh Fringe

# The Edinburgh Reporter: Prick Review

Culture | Fringe 2023

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2023 – Prick ★★★★★

By Rosemary Kaye · August 6, 2023 9:19 pm · 758 · 0

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In 1563 the Witchcraft Act became law in Scotland. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries between 4,000 and 6,000 people were tried on charges of witchcraft. Over three-quarters of these were women.

Of the 1,500 found 'guilty', the majority were garrotted; their bodies were then burned and the ashes thrown out to sea. The last trial took place as late as 1727 and the Witchcraft Act was not repealed until nine years later.

*Prick* is a new play by Laurie Flanigan Hegge (Light the Match Productions and New Celts Productions), aiming to give a voice to thousands of wrongly accused people. It shows us in horrific detail what went on in those terrible times, times in which a casual remark could raise fatal suspicions, and families were too scared to come to the aid of their own mothers and daughters.

On a simple stage, three women face the audience. One sings a song listing the numerous places in which trials took place. It's a very long list, and a sobering one. (And reminded me of the Proclaimers' *Letter From America*, another song about widespread injustice.) The women then repeat many of the accusations levelled against them; even bearing in mind the widespread belief in magic at that time, some of these are bizarre to say the least.

In the guise of a sensationalist modern day television show, a journalist (Lev Siegel, outstanding in each of his many roles) announces to camera that:

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“ *North Berwick is in the grip of a deadly invasion of witches.* ”

He interviews a local farmer (David Clarkson) who claims a witch has cursed his cow so that 'the butter won't churn' and has cursed him too by 'stealing his manhood.' But when the farmer's wife (Abigail McDonald) says she's seen the woman dancing with Old Nick in the kirkyard, things don't turn out quite as the farmer intended; his wife is also arrested and tried as a witch. You didn't have to say much in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lowlands to get yourself in trouble.

It is thought that a number of factors contributed to the country's obsession with witches. Economic times were hard, the kirk of the day may have seen women as a moral threat, and King James had his own reasons for diverting attention onto bothersome females. *Prick* seems to favour the view that women who stepped out of place, who were different in any way, were instant targets:

“ *They get too curious, they want to know things, it goes back to Eve in the Garden of Eden.* ”

Although most of the action in *Prick* takes place in the 17<sup>th</sup> century present, we are also transported to the Liminal Space, the gap between life and death, a threshold, the so-called Purgatory for those who have been denied a Christian burial. Here two women stand; one is the famous Isobel Gowdie (Lisa McIntyre, magnificently strong – 'I can smell the terror of every man in this room'), who confessed to witchcraft at Auldearn in 1662 and admitted to so many bizarre things, including not only sleeping with the Devil but also turning into a jackdaw and flying through the air on a magical horse, that the fact that she was believed shows us just how irrational and hysterical these witch hunts

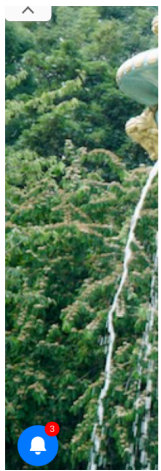
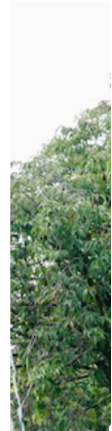


While Isobel is loud and brazen, the second woman, Marioun Twedy (Abigail McDonald), who was accused in 1649, is quieter. All she did, she says, is offer her neighbours 'cures' for their cows' ailments, but:

“ *Men say the Devil gives a woman the power to cure.* ”

The two of them have conjured up the Unknown Woman (Carys Turner) to protect her, but all she wants is to find her baby, and to tell her story. She is a simple girl, one who did her best to appease the fairies, but now she doesn't even know her own name; she has no headstone because her ashes have been cast into the sea (no chance then of her being resurrected). Her name is not even in the record of her trial. She has been erased from history.

The girl's story, heartbreakingly told by the excellent Turner, is one of torture, desperation and despair, and it's echoed again and again throughout the play. Director Meggie Greivell didn't want to show a real woman being physically tortured on stage, so with the help of puppet artist Madeline Helling she devised an ingenious way to convey it. As each woman describes her ordeal, men shout out accusations and a puppet on a plinth is manipulated by another member of the case. These puppets are extraordinarily eloquent; even in their prone state they somehow make us feel the women's agony and exhaustion. When one of them is seen in a head brace, despite knowing that this is a puppet we are truly shocked.



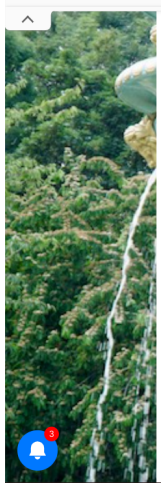
Pricking was a form of torture peculiar to Scotland. The (male) Pricker would break the woman's skin all over with a needle or bodkin, trying to find an area that did not bleed. This was 'the devil's mark'. David Clarkson's Pricker is both sinister and terrifying, as he stands waving a large iron pin. Twedy describes the men of the village looking on as the Pricker touches her all over, finally pricking her genitals:

“ *'I feel the burn of their eyes on my body. His breath smells of eels and ale.'* ”

And McDonald is on fire in this role; we are burned by her passion and stung by her resignation:

“ *'I will not confess. I am simply a woman who has nothing left to lose.'* ”

Of course one of the biggest supporters of the witch trials was none other than King James himself (Ewan Jardine) who provides a very entertaining interlude when he is invited onto a chat show to discuss his book *Daemonologie* (much of which is believed to have been used by Shakespeare in the writing of *Macbeth*, and this is touched on later), which he probably wrote at least in part to keep women away from political power. In his 'interview' James channels 21<sup>st</sup> century politicians; witches aren't just a threat to *him*, they 'threaten the whole of Scotland.' In other words, we're all in this together. Except the accused women of course. They're not. Ring any bells?



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When one of the two women stands up to the King, she is arrested – and her colleague instantly disowns her. It happened then, it happens now. As the old saying goes, you soon find out who your friends are, and sometimes what you find out is that you have none.



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These 'televised' mini-scenes, of which there are several, are a clever device; they make us laugh, they relieve the almost unbearable tension, but they also bring the main action into sharp focus. Before we know it we are back in the Tolbooths, and nothing is funny any

