

*"If you had had the choice between being a writer and being happy,
what would you have chosen?"*

"To be happy, of course. To be happy."

THE CANADIAN PREMIERE OF
AFTER MRS. ROCHESTER

by POLLY TEALE

Directed by Laura Roald

Jean Rhys (1890 – 1979) was a troubled, Caribbean-born chorus girl turned writer who strongly identified with a fictional counterpart - Mr. Rochester's mad first wife in **Charlotte Brontë's** classic 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. In 1966, after decades of silence, Jean Rhys produced her masterpiece, a *Jane Eyre* prequel titled *Wide Sargasso Sea* told from the perspective of Rochester's unhappy West Indian bride. British playwright Polly Teale's labyrinthine drama interweaves the demons haunting Jean with her fictional obsession to explore their toll on the writer's stormy life. Alumnae Theatre Company is very proud to present the Canadian premiere of *After Mrs. Rochester*.

Polly Teale, the co-Artistic Director of Shared Experience Theatre in Oxford, England read Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* while researching for a stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (which premiered in 1997). The more she read of Rhys' other novels, the more she was "struck by the parallels between her own story and that of Mr. Rochester's mad wife – the woman who would become the heroine of Jean's late masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea* ... Jean felt a desire to rewrite Mrs. Rochester's story, to tell it from the beginning. To tell it from the inside."

Laura Roald, who directed *Closer* for Alumnae Theatre in 2008, looks at the play *After Mrs. Rochester* as the story of Jean Rhys "ripping the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* from her very skin". Roald notes that "working with an all-female cast allows the production to explore the hauntings from a personal perspective - Jean Rhys wrote with a deeply personal voice, and each emotional echo is an aspect of her own experiences. Cross-gendering the roles allow us to maintain that voice while still examining the raw pain of her life journey."

The set design, conceived by the director, suggests outlines of mountains and doors, pulling together the disparate worlds of the lush landscape of Dominica and the stuffy cloister of Jean's little writing room. A single space transforms to dozens of locations, and still remains a closed attic room. **Paul Hardy's** lighting incorporates the rich and sensual as well as the humid and shadowy. **Megan Benjafield's** atmospheric soundscape weaves throughout the fluid time shifts.

Alumnae Theatre Company's production of *After Mrs. Rochester* features **Susan Q Wilson** as Jean Rhys, **Jessica Rose** as Ella (her younger self), with **Julie Burris**, **Keriece Harris**, **Laura Jabalee**, **Tabitha Keast**, **Tina McCulloch** and **Laine Newman** as various characters (real and fictional) who haunted Jean's life and memories – including *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester, and Bertha Rochester.

The Details - *After Mrs. Rochester*

Running Time: approx. 2 hours including intermission

Opening Night: Friday September 23, 2011

Performances: Friday September 23, 2011 - Saturday October 8, 2011

Schedule: Wednesday - Saturday 8:00pm; Sunday matinée at 2:00pm
There will be a **Talkback** with cast & director after the matinée on October 2

Tickets: Wednesday 2-for-1; Thursday, Friday & Saturday \$20; Sunday PWYC

Location: Alumnae Theatre, 70 Berkeley Street, Toronto

Box Office: 416-364-4170 (box 1) or email reservations@alumnaetheatre.com
Box Office opens one hour prior to each performance
Please note: Box Office does not accept credit or debit cards

Production photos for *After Mrs. Rochester* will be available for download on the **Media** page at www.alumnaetheatre.com by September 15.

Read cast & creative team bios on the **After Mrs. Rochester** page.

Find us on **Facebook!**

Read the blog: alumnaetheatre.wordpress.com

For more information or to set up an interview please contact:
PJ Hammond at 416-832-0422 or goalumnae@gmail.com

ALUMNAE THEATRE COMPANY *has been producing
thought-provoking, challenging and rarely-performed plays since 1919.*

Check our website at www.alumnaetheatre.com for press releases, production photographs, and a retrospective on how Alumnae Theatre shaped Toronto's theatre scene.