

Project Shaw Revives Master's Work—All of It

Project Shaw

Monthly readings of Bernard Shaw Plays

Monday evenings at 7pm

Directed by David Staller

The Players Club 16 Gramercy Park South

www.projectsshaw.com

In brief, Project Shaw is currently the most important theatrical event in New York. Beginning last season, continuing this year and ending next season, Project Shaw is presenting all of the master's plays in readings at the Players Club, each produced and directed by David Staller and starring the theater's most formidable actors and actresses.

In introducing three Shaw one-acts that are currently performing, Staller said that he decided to tackle this long and difficult project—it's a 63 play cycle, after all—after George W. Bush's re-election because Staller and his collaborators felt that Shaw's wit and wisdom would serve as a needed antidote to the current political climate. After the evening's host theater critic Howard Kissel placed this trio of one acts in the context of Shaw's life and times, four eminent actors—Barrett Foa, George S. Irving, Marian Seldes and Paxton Whitehead—enchanted the packed house with comedic readings of several lesser lights in the Shaw canon.

The opening “The Interlude at the Playhouse,” written exactly a century ago, is a frothy curtain-raiser about the opening night of a new London theater, and the closing playlet, “The Music-Cure,” from 1913, is best described by its author's subtitle: “A Piece of Utter Nonsense.” Both showcase famous Shavian wit, but the middle piece “The King, the Constitution and the Lady,” originally published in the “Evening Standard” newspaper in 1936, is something else entirely.

This masterly one-act tackles a then-important topic in 1930s Great Britain: that then-King Edward VIII wanted to marry Wallis Simpson, thought far beneath a royal's station, not only because she was American but also because she was twice-divorced. Shaw's ingenious one-act imagines a meeting between the King, the Prime Minister and the Archbishop, in which the latter pair attempt to talk the King out of wanting to marry this unworthy woman. (In reality, Edward VIII abdicated the throne, which Shaw himself suggested in his work.)

In each of these one acts, the actors deliver Shaw's still-stinging dialogue with the proper finesse and vocal inflections it deserves but often doesn't receive. Rounding out the evening, Kissel and the actors took turns reading brief but hilarious and thoughtful excerpts from Shaw's letters, prefaces to plays and other writings.

Such a splendid evening of civilized comedy is a real treat, and at \$15 a seat, “Project Shaw” easily becomes one of the biggest theater bargains in New York. Don't miss it.

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