

“A Naughty, Entertaining Evening!”

What can we look forward to in our upcoming production of Faithful Cheaters? Trinity Rep's Ziyi Yang sat down with playwright Deborah Salem Smith to get the scoop!

Ziyi Yang: Your hilarious and insightful play, *Faithful Cheaters*, will be on Trinity Rep's Dowling stage in April. Can you tell us what it is about?

Deborah Salem Smith: It's about marriage today and what it means to be happily married. Poppy and Theo are professionals. Every day they expect their lives to become balanced, but of course instead their careers make them busier

and endlessly befall the characters. And my play also has similarities to Alan Ayckbourn's comedies — remember Stephen Thorne performing that fantastically silly Morris dance in *House & Garden*? Or Annie Scurria as the snobbish, delightful drunk in *Absurd Person Singular*? Ayckbourn writes real characters who simply find themselves in comic situations. Similarly, *Faithful Cheaters* has at its center very real characters that we come to love and root for. They end up in an incredible mess, and to get out of the mess they go on an uproarious chase, but ultimately Poppy and Theo discover one another again.

Ziyi: What do you look forward to about this production?

Deborah: Our audiences will have a rare opportunity to see two incredibly talented guest

is a property with several derelict cottages on it. Sixty years ago it was a nice place for families; now the cottages are falling down. But when you turn your back to the cottages and stand in the sand and look out to the lake — the crystal clear water, the calming waves, the clouds drifting by — it's stunning. Places like that have magic. They can restore a person in a profound way. So I had the idea of a family gathering in this magical place — but will they notice the magic? Or will they be too distracted by their conflicts with one another? As one of Poppy's moms proclaims: “We are a family. That means we are in your business at the worst possible times.”

Ziyi: You are Trinity Rep's playwright-in-residence. How does *Faithful Cheaters* compare to your other plays that audiences have seen here?



and busier. Years are passing by and they keep asking the question that I think many people ask: Am I happy yet? Poppy wants to get control of her life — she wants real time with her husband. She decides that they should buy a lake cottage to rekindle their marriage. But in the way that life often doesn't work out as you expect it to, she falls in love with a totally dilapidated property.

Ziyi: So her good plan goes wrong?

Deborah: Absolutely! For an audience, it's hilarious to watch things go wrong for someone else! But it's equally thrilling for an audience to then watch the characters find their way back to each other, to find love again. The play mirrors and examines contemporary marriage — life today keeps couples at a frantic pace and pulls couples apart. Yet people struggle valiantly to find each other again and again. We pursue happiness, even when it often feels a little out of reach.

Ziyi: *Faithful Cheaters* feels very much in the tradition of other popular hit comedies. In writing it, did you look to other favorites as models?

Deborah: A classic farce like *Noises Off* was a great inspiration for the shenanigans that

L TO R: Acclaimed Boston actor Karen MacDonald joined company members Anne Scurria & Stephen Thorne, director Melia Bensussen, playwright Deborah Salem Smith, & company members Mauro Hantman & Rebecca Gibel for a reading of *Faithful Cheaters*.

artists. Director Melia Bensussen is the recipient of an OBIE award for Outstanding Direction and often directs at the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston. Also, we are so fortunate to have Karen McDonald in our cast. Karen was an original company member at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge and has received many awards, including the prestigious Elliot Norton Prize for Sustained Excellence. And of course it has been a gift to work on this play with our own talented company members — Stephen Thorne, Annie Scurria, Charlie Thurston, Becky Gibel, and Mauro Hantman. I almost feel guilty about how much fun we've had working on this production!

Ziyi: What inspired you to write this play?

Deborah: There is a lake house that I go to every summer with my family. Down the beach

Deborah: In those earlier plays I told stories that made visible how an issue of our time becomes more challenging and more morally ambiguous as it is untangled. When I gave Trinity Rep *Faithful Cheaters*, they expected it to be similar to my previous plays. However, instead of taking on a hot-button cultural issue, the play investigates a timeless (and mysterious!) social issue — the union between two people. Instead of being a serious drama, this one is a serious comedy.

Ziyi: How do you hope the audience will respond to the play?

Deborah: As adults, we see children experience joy so effortlessly, and we are hungry to experience joy for ourselves. So this play should be a hilarious romp, yet the final minutes of the play shift in tone. Even in a comedy, there can be real consequences. I believe the best comedies, like dramas, must surprise and end in a nontrivial moment of awakening. So this play will be a naughty, entertaining evening and ultimately I hope it will be a story that lingers in the minds of our audience members when they leave the theater and go home.