Notes from the Dramaturg

The Lady from the Sea was written in 1888 and drew heavily from legends and mythology as well as Ibsen’s personal life, including a possible affair with a precocious girl from a seaside town who was to become the model for Hilde, the only character to appear in two of his plays (she returns in The Master Builder). Ellida is certainly a reflection of Ibsen’s grandmother, who had in her youth run away with her lover, and who bathed in the sea every day, even as an old woman. By the early 1890s, Ellida was already a favorite role of such grand dames of the theatre as Janet Achurch and Helenora Duse (she herself narrowly escaped being cast as the Stranger in the first English production in 1891).

The Lady from the Sea, like several of Ibsen’s later plays, features a female protagonist struggling against an oppressive social code. These plays have given Ibsen the reputation as a crusader for women’s rights, but ironically, a performance tradition has emerged for this play which focuses on the men, and Ellida has become an allegory for “all mankind.” Such an interpretation, however, runs the risk of rendering invisible the deep-seated contradictions and conflicts that are the true engines of the drama. Allegorizing Ellida in this way de-genders her, in a sense, and the production could easily ignore that if she were not a woman, she would hardly be as terrible at the extremes. Far from becoming a “feminist” poem, however, this interpretation enables us to see the struggles of all the characters, male or female, virtuous or wicked, with greater clarity and a renewed appreciation for Ibsen’s versatility and power as a playwright.

SUGGESTED READING:
The Death of Character by Elinor Fuchs
(Indiana University Press, 1996.)
“Lady from the Sea” by Susan Sontag
(Theatre, Vol 29 No 1 Winter 1999.)

School of Drama
Executive Director
Sarah Nash Gates

Faculty
Professors: Robert Dahlstrom, Steve Pearson, Barry Witham
Associate Professors: Robyn Hunt, William Forrester
Assistant Professors: Sarah Bryant-Bertail, Valerie Curtis-Newton,
Mary Louise Geiger, Odai Johnson, Shanga Parker
Senior Lecturer: Mark Jenkins, Mark Harrison
Lecturers: Tom Burke, Judith Shahn, Deborah Trout

Part-time Faculty
Geoff Alm, Scott Hafso, Catherine Madden,
Karen Omahen, Stephanie Skura, Scott Weldon

Retired, Emeritus Faculty and Former Program Heads
John Ashby Conway*, Jack Clay, Betty Comtois, James Crider,
Alanson B. Davis, Gregory Falls*, Vannick Galstaun, Robert Gray,
Agnes Haago, Donal (Dart) Harrington*, Robert Hobbs,
Paul Hosteler, Glenn Hughes*, Robert Loper, Warren Lomounsby*,
Michael Quina*, Duncan Ross*, Geraldine Sikes, Jack Sydow,
Aurora Valentinetti, Jack Wolcott

Staff
Kris Bain, marketing and PR manager
Bob Boehler, stage technician
Nacho Bravo, master electrician
Malcolm Brown, stage technician
Sue Bruns, office assistant
Alex Danilchik, stage technician
Josie Gardner, costume shop manager
Arlene Hamilton, administrator
Dorothy Kerst, graduate programs
Laurie L. Kunitz, costume
Cecile Kummerer, computer technician
Scott Perkins, fiscal technician
Anne Stewart, general manager
Joanne Tall, secretary
Rebecca Traber, office assistant
Alan Weldin, scene shop manager
Nancy Vaeth, costumer

The Lady from the Sea
By Henrik Ibsen
Translation by Gerry Bamman & Irene B. Berman
Directed by Tlacoc Rivas

University of Washington School of Drama
33rd Season
195th Production
May 5 - 15, 1999

Food for the Opening Night Reception was generously provided by Raindancer Restaurant
THE LADY FROM THE SEA

BY HENRIK IBSEN

TRANSLATION BY GERRY BAMMAN & IRENE B. BERMAN

DIRECTED BY TLALOC RIVAS*

SET DESIGN
J. Clay Satterfield

LIGHTING DESIGN
Miki Takahashi

HAIR DESIGN
Gary Osborne*

COMPOSER
Linda Antas

DRAMATURG
Michael Chemers

STAGE MANAGER
Austin C. Elston

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
Malcolm Brown

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Henrik Ibsen wanted to be a doctor. Born in 1828 in the Norwegian coastal town of Skien, Ibsen was the eldest surviving child of a large, impoverished family. At the age of fifteen Ibsen started six unhappy years as an apprentice to an apothecary, during which time he fathered an illegitimate child. He wrote poems and plays, one of which, Catiline, had the good fortune to be published. He spent years in and out of bankruptcy and living in self-imposed exile from his native land, and it wasn’t until 1865, when he was 37, that his fortunes began to skyrocket. His most famous, most successful, and most controversial play, A Doll’s House, would be written in 1880. By 1885, Ibsen translated plays would be sweeping Europe, England, and America, championed by such famous theatre personalities as William Archer and George Bernard Shaw. By the turn of the century, Ibsen was immortalized as one of the pioneers of a revolutionary form of drama which became known as "modern realism," and his impact on twentieth-century theatre has been immense.

Translation of The Lady from the Sea is courtesy of Writers & Artists Agency.

*In partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Directing.
*In partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Costume Design.