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“Love, Genius and A Walk” at the Midtown International Theatre Festival at the June Havoc Theatre
Written by Gay Walley
Directed by Gregory Abels
Reviewed by David Roberts, Theatre Reviews Limited

“I often think: they have only just gone out,/and now they will be coming back home./The day is fine, don't be dismayed,/They have just gone for a long walk.” Gustav Mahler, “Songs on the Death of Children”

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Long walks are important not only for those on foot but also for those left behind waiting for the return of (most often) the beloved. Has the one loved left them? Has the beloved perhaps come to some harm? Are they ever coming back? When they do return, will things ever be the same?

The ‘walk’ in Gay Walley’s “Love, Genius and A Walk” is an extended metaphor for the vicissitudes of human relationships as well as the metamorphoses in the individual human being. The ‘genius’ is more sophisticated than reference to the gift of high intellect of Gustav Mahler or Sigmund Freud: ‘genius’ in Wally’s well-constructed play is more about having the right stuff – in this case, the right stuff to explore human love in all its complexity and mystery.



Director Gregory Abels handily directs his cast of eleven throughout their on-stage extended group therapy session narrated by actor Silas Moores and populated by none other than the master therapist himself Sigmund Freud (Shelley Valfer) and master musician Gustav Mahler (Paul Binotto). Ms. Wally’s complex script allows time and space to collapse into irrelevance and leaves room for a party attended by guests from different centuries and many other parallel conflicts. Steve (Alexander Pepperman) and his wife – known only as “Female Writer “ (Kathleen Wallace) – struggle with the same challenges to living with a mate as do Mahler and his wife Alma (Lara Hillier). Ms. Wallace’s character is the only character without a name and one wonders why her “generic artist” needs to counterpoint Mahler’s “artist with a name.”

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Particularly engaging is the Freudian dynamic extent in Steve's relationship with his wife and Mahler's relationship with Alma. Both couples have chosen mates based on complex layers of transference and counter-transference and a "healthy" dose of projection. Alma Mahler (cannot get much close to "alma mater!") and her doppelganger "Female Writer" seek solace in the images of their fathers and Gustav and his doppelganger Steve long for their nurturing mothers in their spouses. As clearly as Freud makes this to Gustav, he and Steve experience the anguish of love and all four learn the importance of sublimation.



These themes intersect the lives of the other characters whose stories tumble with those of the main characters and create a story whose theme of "watching the state of our hearts" resonates with every audience member and every person who has ever been lover or beloved (thank you, Frankie Addams) – or experienced the destruction and suffering that often accompanies love.

The ensemble cast brims with confidence and craft and navigates the play's twenty-six scenes with engaging performances and professionalism. "Love, Genius and A Walk" is not perfect (what in love and love ever is?) but this is a remarkable play with transcendent hues and delicious harmonic tones. Austrian accents wobble off course and Mr. Binotto often wears Mahler's malaise too close to the sleeve. A quiet, sonorous tone sometimes carries more weight than a frenetic high-pitched rant which sometimes appears more nerves than nettle. In the end, "talk therapy" assists those gathered to achieve living a life they each want and begin to sort through matrices of repressed feelings and the stores of "excess energy" resulting from their collective genius. Perhaps Mahler was right: "I often think: they have only just gone out,/and now they will be coming back home./The day is fine, don't be dismayed,/They have just gone for a long walk." It would be good to see Ms. Wally's play in some future reincarnation.

LOVE, GENIUS AND A WALK

"Love, Genius and A Walk" is presented by Vicki Abrams and the Midtown International Theatre Festival. Director: Gregory Abels. An AEA-Approved Showcase, the cast of "Love, Genius and A Walk" features Breanna Arneson, Paul Binotto*, Jimmy Dailey, Alexandra Dickson, Lara Hillier*, Kelly Leissler, Silas Moores, Alexander Pepperman, Shelley Valfer, Kathleen Wallace* and Joshua Warr. The creative team includes Vicki Abrams (Producer), Felicia Bass (General Manager) and Jamibeth Margolis (Casting). Publicist: Judd Hollander/Bunch of People Press and Publicity. Production photos by Russ Rowland.

The Midtown International Theatre Festival (MITF)'s fourteenth season will include a slate of full-length plays and musicals, as well as Short Subjects. The Festival will run from July 15 to August 4, 2013, at the June Havoc Theatre, 312 W. 36th Street, NYC, 1st floor; the Dorothy Strelsin Theatre, 312 W. 36th Street, NYC, 1st floor; the Main Stage Theater, 312 W. 36th Street, NYC, 4th floor; and the Jewel Box Theater, 312 W. 36th Street, NYC, 4th floor. Tickets are \$15 for short plays and \$18 for longer plays. Tickets are available at www.midtownfestival.org or by phone at (866) 811-4111. More information about the show is available at www.lovegeniusandawalk.com.

"Love, Genius and A Walk" ended its run at the June Havoc Theatre (see above) on Sunday August 4th at 1:00 p.m. Tickets are \$18.00 (see above). The running time is 90 minutes with no intermission.



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