

Marilyn I. Walker  
School of Fine &  
Performing Arts

Department of  
Dramatic Arts  
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**Brock University**  
Faculty of Humanities

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Jan 12, 2018

A Special Invitation to bring your students for innovative and energizing theatre experiences presented by the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock University!

## *Top Girls*

By Caryl Churchill  
Directed by Danielle Wilson  
Friday March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 11:30am

Group tickets start at \$12 each, discounts available.

Twice a year our faculty and students present Mainstage productions in The Marilyn I. Walker Theatre. Directed and designed by faculty and guest artists, performed and produced by students in our Honours BA program, these productions offer you an affordable opportunity to engage your students with original performances that examine provocative thematic ideas. Stimulating course-related content will animate and enrich your teaching curriculum. Our faculty and students bring you the very best of their work in professional-level productions distinguished by their verve and energy. This is a great opportunity to enhance your teaching and to bring excitement to your classroom with a visit to our theatre. Join us at the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts located in downtown St. Catharines at 15 Artists' Common.

## *Top Girls*

By Caryl Churchill  
Directed by Danielle Wilson  
Set Design by Nigel Scott  
Costume Design by Kelly Wolf  
Lighting Design by Jennifer Jimenez  
Assistant Direction by Michelle Mohammed  
Dialect Coaching by Jane Gooderham

Friday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 at 7:30  
Saturday March 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30  
Sunday March 4<sup>th</sup> at 2:00  
Friday March 9<sup>th</sup> at 11:30am - STUDENT MATINEE  
Friday March 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm  
Saturday March 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm



## Plot Summary

Meet Marlene, who in 1980's London has just been promoted to managing director of the Top Girls Employment Agency. With a magic realist twist we see Marlene celebrate her success at a dinner party with five women from history, literature, and art, and as the drink begins to flow, so do their stories of family, adventure, and loss which overlap in witty and humorous dialogue.

Throughout the play we also meet the real-life women in Marlene's life at the office. They struggle to rise to the top of the corporate ladder but are held back by lack of opportunity and the harsh competitiveness of the business world. We are also introduced to Joyce, who is Marlene's sister, and Joyce's daughter Angie who longs to escape the confines of her home life, and become a successful career-woman like her aunt Marlene.

The final scene of the play takes place a year earlier when Marlene visits Angie and Joyce in her small hometown in the English countryside. We learn that Angie has planned the visit without Joyce's knowledge. Joyce sees Marlene as someone who abandoned her family and thinks that they are better off without her. The final scene becomes a confrontation between the two sisters while they battle over their conflicting ideologies and secrets of their family's past are drawn out in a chilling conclusion.



Pope Joan, a guest at Marlene's dinner table, posed as a man in order to gain the papacy anywhere from the 9th to the 12th century, before giving birth and subsequently being executed for her deception. Illumination from c. 1500 French translation of Boccaccio De Mulieribus Claris (BNF ms. fr. 599).

## About the playwright

Caryl Churchill is one of Britain's greatest living playwrights. Her witty, powerfully intelligent dialogue and her imaginative sense of dramatic structure saw her at the forefront of British playwriting in the 1980's and 1990's. *Top Girls* is perhaps her best-known work and was first performed in 1982 during Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government's reign in the UK.

Churchill's distinctive writing style is characterized by overlapping dialogue, and interruptions and is a feature of the play. Other notable works are *Serious Money*, *Mad Forest*, *The Skriker* and *Cloud Nine*. Churchill's plays have been performed on international stages, on the BBC radio and adapted for BBC television. They frequently deal with issues regarding women, abuses of power and sexual politics.

Her latest play, *Love and Information*, is being performed at The Canadian Stage Company in Toronto in April 2018.



*Top Girls* Playwright Caryl Churchill

## Artistic Direction, with notes from the Director, Danielle Wilson

### *Why Top Girls? Why now?*

I have known this play for many years and first read the play while I was in high school. The University of British Columbia, where I attended, also did a production of it in the 1990's. Back then, going to the theatre to see stories about women was not the norm, it was the exception.

I remember being transfixed as a young woman, whose identity was still being formed, watching the stories of these bold, flawed and multi-layered characters unfold. Would I become a 'Top Girl'? What would that look like? Thirty-five years after *Top Girls* first premiered, what it means to be a 'top girl' still remains complex and not without obstacles.

For me, the question at the core of *Top Girls* is "what would you sacrifice to get to the top?" This question remains relevant because something is always sacrificed in the pursuit of success. This question has become even more relevant as news stories in recent months have broken about the abuse of power that top male executives have wielded over many women in their pursuit of success, and the decision for many women and men to keep silent over the years for fear of ruining their careers. Here in Canada, the trial of former CBC host Jian Gimeshi also raised many questions about power and success. Marie Henein, Gimeshi's defence lawyer and a 'top girl' in her own right, was criticized for turning her back on the women's cause by defending him and ultimately winning his case.

*Top Girls* asks tough questions and looks at power and success in a critical light. When we think of leadership, we may tend to think of aggressive negotiations, firm discipline, and a dominant physical presence. The question of women in power is a loaded one. The women in Marlene's world are not without their flaws and often turn to what may be considered more 'masculine' tactics by using their power in unsupportive ways over other women, thus inflating the role of the individual over the celebration of collective group gain. Angie, Marlene's teenage niece, is afraid to be left behind, a fear that today's young generation live with in this economy. Throughout the play, we also learn of the personal loneliness that Marlene endures in her pursuit of career success, and of her secret sacrifice that has underpinned her rise to the top.

As we continue in an era of what has been labeled Third-Wave of Feminism, women's stories have become front and centre as years of silenced stories have come bubbling to the surface, just like the historical women Marlene has dinner with in the first scene of the play. Churchill's *Top Girls* does not strive to provide solutions, or take sides in the debate, but only to shine a light on the tough complexities of what it means to 'rise to the top'.



Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of England from 1979 until 1990 and leader of the Conservative Party. Though not a character in the play, her presence is important as Marlene represents Thatcher's ideologies.



Marie Henein, notable defense lawyer for Jian Gimeshi and a 'Top Woman'. Source: hhlip.ca

## Curriculum Ties

This production of *Top Girls* is suitable for high school-age audiences and provides an opportunity to enjoy what is becoming a modern classic play from one of Britain's top living playwrights, if not the world. Caryl Churchill's plays remain relevant today as she tackles thought provoking issues and compelling debate within her multi-layered characters.

Curriculum connection include Literature, World Studies, History, Gender Studies and Drama Studies.

## School Outreach

We are pleased to offer a talkback and Q & A with the actors and creative team after the matinee on March 9th. Should you be interested, contact us for more information.

## Student Matinée Booking

The performance of *Top Girls* appropriate for high school and Jr. High audiences. Please note that it contains language that while appropriate in context may be offensive to some.

The student matinee for *Top Girls* is Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 11:30 am, presented in the Marilyn I. Walker Theatre at the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts. Tickets for the student matinee start at \$12 for each student and teacher.

### Prices:

Single Student rate: \$15

Group rates are available:

10-20=\$12.00 ea;  
20-30=\$11.00 ea;  
30-40=\$10.00 ea;  
40-50=\$9.00 ea;  
over 50=\$8.00 ea.

To book your school, please telephone the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre Box Office, 905.688.0722, by email at [boxoffice@firstontariopac.ca](mailto:boxoffice@firstontariopac.ca) or in person:

FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre  
250 St. Paul Street  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 3M2  
Open Monday to Friday, 10 am to 6 pm;  
Saturday,  
10 am to 2 pm.

The Marilyn I. Walker Theatre is situated at the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, located at 15 Artists' Common in downtown St. Catharines, L2R 0B5. We are adjacent to the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre and the Meridian Centre.

See our website for maps and contact information: [brocku.ca/miwsfpa/dramatic-arts/contact/](http://brocku.ca/miwsfpa/dramatic-arts/contact/)



Costume maquettes by costume designer Kelly Wolf