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**Readers' Theatre Kicks Off 2013-2014 Season with All-Woman Ensemble**

The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca is pleased to launch their fourth season with the Pulitzer Prize nominated play, *Collected Stories* by Donald Margulies. The two-person, two-act play is directed by The Readers' Theatre's Founder and Artistic Director, **Anne Marie Cummings** and stars local actresses **Barbara Adams** (as Ruth Steiner) and **Helen T. Clark** (as Lisa Morrison), with LIVE jazz singing by **Nikki Schwarz**.

*Collected Stories'* performance readings will be **Friday, September 27th (8pm)**; **Saturday, September 28th (8pm)**; and **Sunday, September 29th (6:30pm)**. All three performances will take place at **THE BLACK BOX THEATRE at Lehman Alternative Community School (111 Chestnut Street)**.

The play centers around the famous writer Ruth Steiner and her pupil, Lisa Morrison. Over the course of six years, Lisa journeys from insecure student to successful writer. After Lisa becomes successful from her publication of various stories based on private details of Ruth's life, the two women grapple with the question of whether it is ethical to utilize someone's own life and experiences for artistic gain.

The juicy roles of literary hero Ruth Steiner and the wide-eyed, innocent Lisa Morrison have been sought after and played by some of the world's greatest actresses because of their dramatic and human interest: Helen Mirren and Anne-Marie Duff; Linda Lavin and Sarah Paulson; and Uta Hagen and Lorca Simons. The roles originated with Kandis Chappell and Suzanne Cryer in 1996 at South Coast Repertory.

*The Los Angeles Times* said of this sharply written play, which premiered in 1996 at South Coast Repertory, where it was also developed "...Margulies creates an authentic insular world and he gives equal weight to the opposing viewpoints of two formidable characters." However, 17 years later, *Collected Stories* is still a relevant play not only about the mentor/mentee relationships that exist across the board, but it speaks volumes about the changes in the publishing industry today.

In James Sims' 2010 review of Manhattan Theater Club's Broadway production of *Collected Stories* at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, he wrote that one could imagine the dialogue between the two characters played out in the halls of news and publishing houses across the globe. "*When e-book retailers dictated prices to book publishers, it couldn't have been pretty in the morning meetings,*" wrote Sims.

Cummings was drawn to this play "because most of us look up to someone in our fields, and the Ithaca community in particular is filled with established writers who would appreciate and understand how the relationship between Margulies' two women evolves," she said, pinpointing that the choices she'll make as a director will revolve around the "dance" between the physical distance and closeness the characters have with one another.

Clark, playing the role of Lisa Morrison, stated that a large part of her quest as an actor is finding either all women or mostly women plays, as she believes they are "few and far between and are often under produced in the professional circuit."

Adams, who saw the play with Uta Hagen playing the role of Ruth, said, "The student/teacher relationship may go through many stages -- guiding and mentoring, letting go, sometimes eventually becoming friends and colleagues. Here, Ruth's sense of their relationship is different from Lisa's -- she assumes a level of trust and respect that blinds her to Lisa's neediness for recognition."

Said Clark: "I am greatly excited to be a part of a play that focuses on two successful women, yet unveils undercurrents of tension, as well as overt issues present for women in society today."

*New York Magazine* was quoted as writing, "The conflict between the established artist and the adulatory fan who becomes a protégé, disciple, colleague and friend – and finally threatening rival – is one of those great topics."

The Readers' Theatre has invited three local writers for the talk-backs following each performance: **Alexi Zentner**, author of **Touch** (speaker following the Friday, September 27th performance); **Jeanne Mackin**, author of *The Sweet By and By* (speaker following the Saturday, September 28th performance); and **Shawn Goodman**, author of *Something Like Hope* (speaker following the Sunday, September 29th performance).

The corporate sponsor for *Collected Stories* is: **Tompkins Trust Company**, and supporting sponsors are **Barnes & Noble**, **Buffalo Street Books**, and **Sustainable Tompkins**. Tickets for students are \$10 with a reservation (student ID required at the door) and \$12 at the door. Tickets for adults and seniors are \$12 with a reservation and \$15 at the door. Reservations are recommended, and can be made by calling 607.217.6272. Note, cash only at the door. For details visit The Readers' Theatre's new website at: [www.thereaderstheatre.com](http://www.thereaderstheatre.com).

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