

UNITED STAGES



The House of Yes

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Medicine Show Theater
549 West 52nd Street 3rd Floor

Seeing Stars:

United Stages columnist Wendy Taylor tracked down stage director Lauren Reinhard at rehearsals for TheatreRats' recent production of Wendy Macleod's *The House of Yes*.



Stage director Lauren Reinhard

New York City is a theater town and even if Broadway didn't exist there'd still be dozens of great shows to see on any given night.

Flipping through Playbill one finds listings for forty-six shows, any one of which costs more to present for one evening's performance than the average small-venue play costs for its entire run. How does a small theater company make its mark and produce memorable shows in light of such startling inequity? They start by hiring a hot young director like Lauren Reinhard.

Growing up in Allentown, PA, Reinhard made regular trips to the city with her mother. 'I loved the big shows as a kid? she tells me over coffee 'but as I got older I couldn't see myself making my mark there. I just didn't identify with the grandeur [of Broadway].' What she does identify with is the close audience connection and intimacy of small-venue theater. In directing *The House of Yes* a few blocks west of The Great White Way for the scrappy and ambitious young group called TheatreRats,

Reinhard has been doing a lot of thinking about the current cultural dissonance playing out between family values and celebrity emulation. 'Our culture is just so celebrity driven. It baffles me. And the internet has just made it explode.' What fascinates the director about *The House of Yes* is the rich demonstration of celebrity emulation carried to perverse extremes. The object of envy in Wendy MacLeod's play is American royalty, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis - an iconic figure that at one time every mother across the country encouraged their daughters to aspire to become. Reinhard is aware that in a world where a young woman might seriously ask herself 'What would Paris Hilton do?' Ms. MacLeod's vision is only a slight exaggeration of the copycat craze that celebrity culture continues to propagate. 'What would Jackie be if she had the internet and the gossip shows we have today?'



The cast of *The House of Yes*

In explaining her appreciation of directing for small-venue companies Reinhard said 'We are lucky in theater because we actually get to be heard. Everyone has something to say, but we get to put it out there, and whichever fifty or a hundred people are in the house that night, get to hear it. It's a big responsibility' she says. Reinhard received a B.F.A. in theater from the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University. She chose the program because it was the only one in the country based in Suzuki and Viewpoints work - disciplines that make her particularly adept at creating out-of-the-box staging for New York inside-the-box theater spaces.

Invited to attend an early rehearsal of *The House of Yes*, I found a group of actors walking on an imagined grid exchanging a series of physical greetings. Somehow without a line uttered or a plot enacted, a story emerged and the effect was spellbinding. Reinhard takes easy charge of the rehearsal room and works with her cast to find character specificity in gesture and movement. 'This is a safe space,' she says, challenging everyone to take risks. 'Fall on your ass,' she dares them, and they do - and so does she. For two straight hours she is up and down out of the chair and onto the stage, gauging and calibrating the play's pacing from the boards.

A few weeks later at a dress rehearsal Reinhard confesses 'I love actors. I love coming to rehearsal and being prepared and having them be prepared and we play until we find it. Ultimately the show is in their hands; I want them to be comfortable up there.' When the play changes hands from director to actors, Reinhard wants the actors to be ready to take responsibility for it. After the dress rehearsal she runs through some notes with her omnipresent stage manager, Marta Tejada. 'They'll be ready,' she says and continues down her list of things to address, but from the wobble in her voice one wonders how ready Reinhard will be to let her beloved actors go.

Written for United Stages by Wendy Taylor, contributing columnist.