

April 4, 2018

**The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater presents**

***Fefu and Her Friends***

**María Irene Fornés’ landmark play will be presented in a unique setting**

**on the Princeton campus**

**Production is part of a national symposium at Princeton on perhaps the most influential but perhaps lesser known American playwright**



Photo caption: Seniors Lydia Watt and Alex Vogelsang in rehearsal on-site at Maclean House for *Fefu and Her Friends* by María Irene Fornés

Photos credit: Madeleine Dietrich

What: *Fefu and Her Friends*, a funny, mysterious, and provocative play by María Irene Fornés, explores the relationships of a group of women who gather at Fefu’s country house to plan an event for their do-gooding educational work. Set in pre-feminist America, the eccentric Fefu, the haunted Julia, and these old college friends and former lovers struggle to figure out who they are and what it means to be a woman in a male dominated world. Presented in conjunction with the María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium held at Princeton by the Latinx Theatre Commons and the spring show for the Program in Theater.

Who: Presented by Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater featuring seniors Alex Vogelsang and Lydia Watt and directed by faculty member R.N. Sandberg.

When: April 12 and 13 at 8:00 p.m.; April 14 and 15 at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Where: Maclean House on the Princeton University campus

Free but advance reservations are encouraged due to limited seating in this site-specific venue. Reservations can be made at <fefuprinceton.eventbrite.com>. Seats will be available on a first-come, first-seated basis at each performance.

Event link: <http://arts.princeton.edu/events/fefu-friends-maria-irene-fornes/2018-04-12/>

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater at Princeton University will present María Irene Fornés landmark play *Fefu and Her Friends*, featuring seniors Alex Vogelsang and Lydia Watt and directed by faculty member R.N. Sandberg. The play is being presented in conjunction with the Latinx Theatre Commons’ María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, a national convening hosted at Princeton. Performances will be held at 8:00 p.m. on April 12 and 13 and at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. on April 14 and 15 in the Maclean House on the Princeton University campus. The show is free and open to the public but seating for this site-specific production is limited and advance reservations are encouraged.

*Fefu and Her Friends,* first produced in 1977, explores the relationships of a group of women who gather at Fefu’s country house to plan an event for their do-gooding educational work. Set in pre-feminist America, the eccentric Fefu, the haunted Julia, and these old college friends and former lovers struggle to figure out who they are and what it means to be a woman in a male dominated world.

In a format that was groundbreaking for its time, the play is divided into three parts. The first part takes place in the living room of the house with the full audience. The second part is set in four different areas of the house: the lawn, the study, the bedroom, and the kitchen. Fornés deconstructs the familiar stage, removing the fourth wall, and scenes are played in multiple locations simultaneously. The audience is divided into groups to watch each scene, then they rotate to the next set, as the scene is repeated until each group has seen all four scenes. The play concludes in the living room with the full audience.

Faithful to Fornés’ format, the production’s creative team is staging the play’s performances in the Maclean House on the Princeton’s campus. Maclean House, located on Nassau Street adjacent to Nassau Hall, is currently home to Princeton's Alumni Council. It was built in 1756, the same year at Nassau Hall, as the official residence of Princeton's president. The house's early history was recently highlighted by the Princeton & Slavery Project, which revealed that many Princeton presidents held slaves and six slaves were offered for sale on the grounds of the house in 1766 as part of President Samuel Finley's estate. Retaining its original architecture and structure, the building provides a fitting backdrop for the play and its challenges to tradition, convention and oppression.

Vogelsang is a computer science major pursuing certificates in theater and in statistics and machine learning. She has appeared in Lewis Center productions of *Cloud 9*, *Mad Forest*, *Elektra*, and *The Luckiest Girl*. She has also worked with a number of student theater companies as an actor, director and board member including Theater Intime and Princeton University Players. She performed last summer in two Princeton Summer Theater productions, including Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *Appropriate*. She plans to pursue a career in computer science after graduation.

Watt is an environmental engineering major who has appeared in a Lewis Center presentation of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. She has worked as a technical director, technician, designer, and actor for Theater Intime in productions of *Arcadia*, *Agamemnon*, and *Blue Heart*, and has performed with Princeton University Players and Princeton Shakespeare Company. She has also worked the past two years with Princeton Summer Theater as a performer and technician. She plans to pursue a career in environmental engineering after graduation.

Vogelsang and Watt both knew they wanted to collaborate on a senior thesis in theater since their sophomore year. Together, they wanted to explore a drama which deals with serious and thought-provoking issues.

Vogelsang notes that despite the many talented female actors on campus, she felt there was a dearth of plays with strong female characters presented, and she was particularly interested in a play with an all-female cast. Her work in the ensemble casts of two Caryl Churchill plays, *Cloud 9* and *Mad Forest*, further informed the kind of play she wanted to explore as an actor for her thesis. She notes that *Fefu and Her Friends* was a perfect match for the kind of challenging play with complex female characters that she and Watt were seeking.

Watt adds that she liked the community of interesting women Fornés creates in the play, women with whom she would want to be friends.

The two actors will alternate in the roles of Fefu and Julia during the run of the show. They view the characters as two sides of the same coin and welcomed the challenge of juggling two roles while also examining how different actors might portray the same character. Both Watt and Vogelsang noted that this double-casting also deepened their understanding of how the two roles interact within the play.

Lecturer in Theater R.N. Sandberg is directing the production. He has produced it once before and has seen numerous other productions, but finds it fascinating every time due to the well-drawn characters and a great script that challenges actors. He also notes the mysterious quality of the play and its portrayal of inexplicable things as deeply unsettling.

Sandberg teaches in both the Theater Program and English Department at Princeton and is a professional theater director and playwright. He directed a number of recent Lewis Center productions including *Cloud 9*, *Madman Robertson, Uncle Vanya, How I Learned to Drive*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire,* as well as Princeton Summer Theater productions of *Pygmalion* and *The Heidi Chronicles.* His plays have been seen in Australia, Canada, England, Japan, Panama, and South Korea, as well as at theaters throughout the U.S. He has been commissioned by, among others, George Street Playhouse, McCarter Theatre, Metro Theater Company, and Seattle Children’s Theatre.  Sandberg is a Princeton alumnus and in 2014 received the University’s President's Distinguished Teaching Award.

In addition to Vogelsang and Watt, the cast of Princeton undergraduates includes juniors Kirsten Hansen, Sally Lemkemeier and Anna Zabel, sophomores Carol Lee and Allison Spann, and first year student Morgan Carmen. Sophomore Madeleine Dietrich is serving as stage manager and sophomore Richard Peng as assistant stage manager. The faculty acting advisor for the production is Suzanne Agins.

Playwright Fornés, born in Havana, Cuba in 1930, is among the most influential American theater-makers of the 20th century, however one of the least widely known. A defining force within the off-off-Broadway movement of the 1960s and 1970s and nine-time Obie Award winner, Fornés — as playwright, director, designer and teacher — became a guiding presence for emerging theater artists of the 1980s and 1990s, especially those invested in staging feminist, queer and latinx aesthetics and experiences. Fornés’ experiments in theatrical form and her transformative teaching techniques continue to challenge and inspire new generations of theater-makers today. Even so, the living legacy of Fornés remains remarkably under-acknowledged among contemporary theater artists, students and scholars. Currently 87 years old, Fornés resides on the upper West Side of Manhattan. Due to late stage Alzheimer’s disease, she is no longer writing or teaching.

The Latinx Theatre Commons’ María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium is being hosted at Princeton by Assistant Professor of Theater Brian Herrera. The symposium is designed to activate broader awareness about Fornés’ multifaceted legacy. On Saturday, April 14 at Princeton, the symposium will convene an intergenerational “community gathering” of artists, academics, students, and others for a day of vigorous, Fornés-inspired creativity, conversation, and conviviality. On Sunday April 15, New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts will present a colloquium on Fornés, which will feature a panel of experts on the playwright, a roundtable of women directors discussing the influence of Fornés’ directorial work, and a concert reading of her musical *Promenade*. The Latinx Theater Commons María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium is presented by Princeton University’s Lewis Center for the Arts in partnership with the Latinx Theater Commons and is made possible with support from the Stephen Trask Lecture Series Fund, the Vice President for Campus Life, the Humanities Council and the Programs in American Studies, Latino Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Latin American Studies.

Admission to *Fefu and Her Friends* is free, however due to the unique nature of the setting and venue, seating for the six performances is limited and audiences are encouraged to make advance reservations at [arts.princeton.edu](http://arts.princeton.edu/events/fefu-friends-maria-irene-fornes/2018-04-12/). A small number of tickets will be held at the door and available shortly before the start of each performance. Seats will be available on a first-come, first-seated basis at each performance. Seating will begin 15 minutes before each performance, and there will be no late seating. Patrons in need of accommodations for wheelchair or other access issues are strongly encouraged to contact the Lewis Center at least two days in advance at 609.258.5262.

To learn more about this event, the Program in Theater, and the more than 100 other performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts, and lectures presented by the Lewis Center, most of them free, visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu/arts).

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