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PORTLANDCENTERSTAGE

The Guide

A theatergoer's resource edited by the Education & Community Programs department at Portland Center Stage

Bo-Nita

By Elizabeth Heffron; Directed by Gretchen Corbett

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A PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL



The Play

Bo-Nita was workshopped at Portland Center Stage's annual new works festival, JAW, in the summer of 2012. For two weeks every summer, PCS bursts at the seams with new play energy. JAW (short for Just Add Water) fills the Armory with playwrights, actors, directors, dramaturgs, stage managers, production assistants, and sometimes even dogs and babies. The two-week blur of activity ends with staged readings that are free and open to the public. For *Bo-Nita*, Heffron and her team worked with actress Kate Eastwood Norris to flesh out the myriad characters in the play, exploring the 'personal beat' of the title character at the center of this at once hilarious and heartbreaking story.

Cast of characters

BO-NITA: 13, scrappy, matter-of-fact, but still a child. The role is meant for an adult actor who can play the emotional quality of a 13-year-old, not the exact age.

The actor playing Bo-Nita will also play:

MONA: mid-30s, Bo-Nita's mother

GRANDMA TINY: late 50s, Bo-Nita's grandmother; Mona's mother

GERARD: mid-30s to 40s, a nice enough guy, but has trouble with boundaries.

LEON (a.k.a. WHOZZITS-#47): 40s, Tile Salesman. Skinny, fastidious, married, knows his tile.

COLONEL T: 60s, Grandma Tiny's brother; Mona's uncle

JACQUE: 50s, Gerard's Cajun half-Uncle



Playwright Elizabeth Heffron

Biography

Elizabeth's full-length plays include *New Patagonia* (Seattle Repertory Theatre), *Her Mother Was Imagination* (Annex Theatre), and *Mitzi's Abortion*, which received ACT Theatre's (Seattle) New Play Award in 2005, and had its world premiere at ACT in 2006. Her short plays include *Irreducible Howard*, *Pipe Play*, and *T-Minus*, radio dramas performed before a live audience for podcast through Sandbox Radio Live! (and available for free download at iTunes), *Foxy Populi*, a Seattle Times Footlight Award winner, as well as *Moses Lake* and *Birds*, both Heideman Award Finalists at Actors Theatre of Louisville. She's written 3 site-specific musicals for One Reel Productions, including *Icicle Times*, which featured 250 performers, two chickens, and a horse, and spawned three more years of work writing the ICICLE TIMES RADIO HOUR. Elizabeth has served as dramaturg for Intiman/STG's *Black Nativity*, as well as ACT's Young Playwrights Festival, and the Cornish College of the Arts Winter New Works Festival.

She's received several grants from the Seattle Arts Commission, as well as a Playwriting Fellowship from Artist Trust and the Washington State Arts Commission; and currently teaches at Cornish College of the Arts, ACT's Young Playwrights Program, and at Freehold Theatre/Lab, where she spent 5 years working with the women of the Washington Correctional Center for Women on inmate-generated performance pieces. Elizabeth is the recipient of a 14/48 Glen Mazen Award, and is a member of the Seattle Rep's Writers Group, the Sandbox Artists Collective, and the Dramatists Guild.

<http://elizabethheffron.com/>

Why a local playwright wants us to consider a rigged economic system

By John Longenbaugh, *Seattle Weekly*

Elizabeth Heffron is one of the friendliest playwrights you'll ever meet. She laughs easily; and when she listens, it's usually with the attentive, sensitive smile of an experienced mom. Pretty, relaxed, and engaged, she doesn't seem in any way a troublemaker. But that's only true if you haven't seen her plays. "That's what I was told by a literary manager I met at Hedgebrook," she says, remembering a recent encounter at the Whidbey Island writers' colony. "After we read one of my plays, she just looked at me and said, 'But you seem like such a nice lady.'"

Her geniality is an effective cover for a writer whose work is rarely congenial. *New Patagonia*, presented at the Rep back in 2000, was about a man intent on staging his own funeral, or "death festival." Six years later, ACT produced her award-winning *Mitzi's Abortion*. "You might as well be open about it," she says of the play's title. She's no less direct in discussing her latest work, *Bo-Nita*, a one-woman show opening next month at the Rep. In it, Hannah Mootz plays a 13-year-old girl being raised by a struggling single mother in St. Louis.

Heffron's connection to the subject is partly autobiographical, she says. Growing up in St. Louis during the '60s, her family was educated, but her parents were divorced. "Money wasn't stable, and my home life was pretty turbulent," she recalls. "I can remember things like walking to school wearing my Keds and realizing that they were split up the middle, but since I couldn't talk to Dad about money without him getting angry, I just shored it up with some cardboard."

Decades later, relocated to Seattle, Heffron believes that confronting social issues isn't necessarily brave, just the basic response of an artist alive to our times. And that includes the touchiest of social issues: the growing divide between rich and poor and the shredding of the social safety net. (The few plays that do deal with such issues, like last season's *Good People* at the Rep, create an almost palpable level of subscriber shock—you can hear it in the lobby at intermission.) Heffron features working-class characters in her plays because she doesn't find much inspiration in the lives of stable middle-class Americans. "When I see another play about a bunch of New Yorkers having problems with their condo," she says, "that's not what interests me. The lives of working-class people are relatively underrepresented—and frankly contain a lot

more conflict and drama."

Still, the stage story of young Bo-Nita, as she is called in the play, is darker and much stranger than Heffron's own life, with a large amount of the show taken up with a comedic shaggy-dog story involving a heart attack, a belly-dancer costume, and the roof of a Barbie Dream House. "My inspiration, in a way, were the Homer Price stories that I grew up with," she says, referring to Robert McCloskey's much-loved children's books. "I call it Midwest magical realism." The surreal comedy that *Bo-Nita* shares with us pushes right up to the boundaries of the possible, then is willing to push further in search of a great joke.

While the play's absurdity is high-spirited, in other ways Bo-Nita's circumstances are all too real. Her story includes episodes of domestic violence and abuse, and her world is one where the lack of a safety net forces people to depend on family as best they can. References are made to school and employment programs that promise much but are discontinued when the budget tightens; middle-aged men are told that the reason they're still stocking grocery shelves is their own laziness, not a rigged economic system.

Heffron's work defies the current truism that social-issue plays about contemporary American life are inevitably good-hearted but naive, feel-good pabulum for well-heeled audiences to feed their social conscience. "I do believe that plays can achieve social change," says Heffron. "I don't believe that people see a play about vegetarianism and go home and throw out every piece of meat in their freezer. It doesn't happen like that. But what really opens the door to change is empathy for other people." Referring to her next writing project, about the '60s radical group The Weathermen, she says "The job is to make the people real, because the personal is political. You have to let the politics come second."

In this, the script for *Bo-Nita* succeeds. Its protagonist/narrator is an impressive creation—matter-of-fact about the darkness in her world, but with a hilarious appreciation for just how weird things can get. Bo-Nita is tough and smart without being precocious. As she tells her story, you find yourself yearning for a way out for her. Not that her creator needs any such help. As Heffron prepares to move *Bo-Nita* to Portland Center Stage next year, and plans a new play about Hanford whistle-blowers, she says, "I want to make sure I get it right." The more serious the topic, the more she's likely to smile and laugh. As an artist with a sharp social conscience, she's right in the thick of it. And that's exactly where she wants to be.

<http://www.seattleweekly.com/home/948857-129/heffron-says-nita-plays-social-doesn>

Q&A with Elizabeth Heffron

By Gemma Wilson

Playwright Elizabeth Heffron recently completed a two-year stint as a member of the Seattle Repertory Theatre's Writers Group. She applied using samples from her then work-in-progress play *Bo-Nita*. Now completed, the play draws on Heffron's early childhood in St. Louis, and will receive its world premiere at the Rep this October.

What first inspired you to start writing *Bo-Nita*?

I wanted to do a really straightforward piece in a girl's voice. *Bo-Nita* is 13, and I wanted her to be really honest in that sense that when somebody is 13 and strange things happen, they don't realize they're strange because that's just their world.

I was a public school kid. In the last five years, all this funding has been taken away from public education and the social safety net. For *Bo-Nita*, the safety net is the public schools and teachers and counselors, those people who look out for you. She's a kid who needs that, and I was a kid who needed that. That helped me make it through my childhood, so I wanted to write something from that perspective.

The play also has "Midwest magical realism." What does that mean?

I made it up! I don't know if you've ever heard of the Homer Price stories, but they were written in the '40s. Homer Price is a kid from a small Midwest town who gets into these bizarre situations. So there's a Homer Price-y thing to *Bo Nita*, but about the very adult, dangerous world that she lives in. There's funny stuff to it, but there's something else under there. Sometimes people will be laughing but going, "I don't know if I was supposed to laugh at that." That's the way humor is. There's usually a lot of sadness or pain underneath it.

Does your writing often combine those elements?

I do find that I've been doing that more and more. I had a piece at ACT in 2006 called *Mitzi's Abortion*, about a young woman whose fetus is diagnosed with anencephaly, which means it doesn't have a cortex. Her doctor says she has to induce labor, but her insurance company says she can't, because that would be a late-term abortion. It sounds hideous, but it's actually quite funny, and kind of sad all at the same time. When people go through these kinds of horrible things, there are funny things that happen out of the reality of the moment.

Is there a lot of your young self in *Bo-Nita*?

I would say that there is, in a way. I've also raised two daughters, and there's just that 13-year-old way of looking at the world. Oftentimes I'll have these things that I'm working on that I need to do a lot of research for; *Bo-Nita* was not one of those. I started working on finding her voice, and the voice of everyone around her, and it just came. It's *Bo-Nita*, her mother, who has had a pretty hard go of it, her grandmother, who comes from the Ozarks and also had it rough, and all these whacked-out guys in their lives.

Did you always intend it to be a solo show?

When I first started the play, I had them all as separate characters, and something just wasn't working. And I said, 'Wow, this is all coming from her, so she needs to tell the whole story.' My goal had never been to write a solo show, but when I realized this is how this story wants to be told, it really deepened the play.

Your background wasn't in theater at all—how did you end up making the switch to playwriting?

Growing up I always thought, "I need to do something practical." I have a Bachelors of Science in neurophysiology from UCLA, so I was going to be a scientist. And then in my last year I hated the lab classes, where you had to implant things into rat hypothalami. I thought, "I don't want to do this." But I didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to write somehow, and I was looking for a format. I wrote some monologues, I did some solo shows, I took an acting class at what would become Freehold. My training was mostly working in theater and meeting theater people. I'm definitely what you'd call a late bloomer.

<http://cityartsonline.com/articles/qa-elizabeth-heffron>



Actor Kate Eastwood Norris

Rather than offering a traditional artist biography, we thought we would show you what an actor's professional resumé looks like. Here is Kate Eastwood Norris' impressive list of credits as seen by casting directors and directors on the back of her headshot!

THEATRE (PARTIAL LIST)

Stupid Fucking Bird (wld prem)	Emma Arkadina	Woolly Mammoth Theatre	Howard Shalwitz
Gnit (wld prem)	Various roles	Humana Festival ATL	Les Waters
The Taming of the Shrew*	Kate	Folger Theatre	Aaron Posner
Eat Your Heart Out (wld prem)	Nance Sanders	Humana Festival ATL	Adam Greenfield
The North Plan (wld prem)	Tanya Shepke	Portland Center Stage	Rose Riordan
The Book Club Play	Ana Smith	Arena Stage	Molly Smith
My Wonderful Day ^	Paula Tate	Wilma Theatre	Richard Hamburger
Ghost-writer	Myra Babbage	Florida Stage	Lou Tyrell
Lucy ^	Vivian	Delaware Theatre Company	David Stradley
Concerning Strange Devices (wld prem)	Isabel Hewlett	Berkeley Repertory Theatre	Les Waters
Full Circle	Christa/Ursula	Woolly Mammoth Theatre	Michael Rohd
Fever Dream (wld prem.)	Stella Strong	Woolly Mammoth Theatre	Howard Shalwitz
How to Disappear (US prem.)	Sophie	Portland Center Stage	Rose Riordan
Rock & Roll ^^	Eleanor/Esme	Wilma Theatre	Blanka Zizka
School for Scandal	Lady Teazle	Folger Theatre	Richard Clifford
Macbeth	Lady Macbeth	Folger/Two River Theatre	A.Posner + Teller
Playboy of the Western World	Widow Quin	Shakespeare Santa Cruz	Robert Moss
Much Ado About Nothing	Beatrice	Shakespeare Santa Cruz	Kim Rubenstein
She Stoops To Comedy**	Kay / Jayne	Woolly Mammoth Theatre	Howard Shalwitz
The Pavilion	Kari	Two River Theatre Company	Aaron Posner
A Midsummer Night's Dream**	Puck / Philostrate	Folger Theatre	Joe Banno
As You Like It	Rosalind	Shakespeare Santa Cruz	Aaron Posner
King Lear		Goneril	Shakespeare Santa Cruz Skip Greer
A Body Of Water	Wren	Round House Theatre	Rebecca Taichman
Boston Marriage	Anna	Actor's Theatre of DC	Jeffrey Johnson
Much Ado About Nothing	Beatrice	Folger Theatre	Nick Hutchinson
The False Servant	Chevalier	Pittsburgh Irish+Classical Theatre	Stuart Cardin
Henry IV Parts 1&2	Lady Percy/Doll	Pittsburgh Irish+Classical Theatre	Andrew Paul
The Two Gentlemen of Verona	Launce / Thurio	Folger Theatre	Aaron Posner
Uncle Vanya	Yelena	Pittsburgh Irish+Classical Theatre	Andrew Paul
She Stoops To Conquer	Kate	Hardcastle	Folger Theatre Richard Clifford
Picasso at the Lapin Agile	Germaine	Arden Theatre	Aaron Posner
Bug	R.C.	Woolly Mammoth Theatre	Wilson Milam
Twelfth Night	Olivia	Folger Theatre	Aaron Posner
Big Love	Lydia	Woolly Mammoth Theatre	Howard Shalwitz
Intimate Exchanges*	Celia / Sylvie / Irene	Source Theatre Company	Joe Banno
Hamlet	Hamlet (1 of 4)	Folger Theatre	Joe Banno
Strange Interlude*	Nina Leeds	Washington Shakespeare Company	Kirk Jackson
Richard III	Richard III	American Shakespeare Centre	Ralph Cohen

AWARDS

**Helen Hayes Award *Helen Hayes Nomination ^^Barrymore Award ^ Barrymore Nomination

TRAINING / AFFILIATIONS

Whole Actor Research Project-Linklater, Packer, new method development with Cary Upton and Adele Cabot
The School for the Comic Actor – commedia, clown, acrobatics with Antonio Fava in Reggio Emilia, Italy
B.A. in Theatre Arts – Virginia Tech Company member of the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

SPECIAL SKILLS

Comic Timing, Piano, Drums, Stage Combat –broadsword, hand-to-hand, Physical Comedy, Mask, Improvisation,
Clown, Dance, Puppetry, variety of British and American dialects, Alto/Tenor



Director Gretchen Corbett

Gretchen spent much of her career in New York and Los Angeles performing on and off Broadway, in films and in dozens of television shows. For a number of years in Los Angeles she served as the Resident Director for the ASK theatre, where she directed numerous staged readings and workshops of new work. Upon moving to Portland, she created and ran the Haven Project for ten years, a non-profit organization that paired underserved children with professional theatre artists to create original theatre.

Theatre (partial list)

Third Rail: *The Gray Sisters*, *A Skull in Connemara*, *A Lesson From Aloes*

Broadway: *After the Rain*, *Forty Carats*

Off Broadway: *Arms and the Man*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *The Bench*, *The Justice Box*, *Henry VI - War of the Roses* (NY Shakespeare), *The Government Inspector*, *The Survival of Saint Joan*

Long Wharf Theatre: *Master Builder*, *Pasta Pageant*

Mark Taper Forum: *The Traveler*, *The End off Long Island*, *Woman in a Bathtub*

Seattle Rep: *Hunting Cockroaches*, *The Heidi Chronicles*

Portland Center Stage: *King Lear*, *Sylvia*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Other theatres include: Eugene O'Neill Festival, Philadelphia Playhouse, Berkshire Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Repertory Theatre New Orleans, New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Back Alley Theatre. Los Angeles Actor's Theatre, Sojourn Theatre

Film

Out of It, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, *King Cobra*, *Gathering Evidence*

TV (partial list)

Series: *Otherworld*, *The Rockford Files*, *Marcus Welby MD*, *Family*

24 movies for TV, numerous episodes

Awards

Lead Actress:

The Fox (LA Dramalogue)

Voice of the Prairie (LA Critics)

Molly Sweeney (Drammy)

It Had to be You (Drammy)

Happy Days (Drammy)

A Lesson From Aloes (Drammy)

Local Connections

Outside In

outsidein.org
503-535-3800

1132 SW Thirteenth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97205

Did you know \$35 can help feed 25 homeless youth for a month? Helping thousands of homeless youth each year, this organization is actively seeking volunteers to fill a diversity of staff positions.

Trillium Family Services—Healing with Horses Program

trilliumfamily.org
503-234-9591

3415 SE Powell Boulevard
Portland, Oregon 97202

Oregon's largest provider of mental and behavior healthcare for children and families. The Healing with Horses program links families with skilled horseback riding instructors who specialize working with children and families.

YWCA of Greater Portland—Social Change Division

ywcapdx.org
503-294-7400

1111 SW Tenth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97205

This branch provides community training for individuals with an interest to drive social change. Interactive workshops and events increase awareness of racism, sexism, and other forms for oppression.

Bernie's Southern Bistro

berniesbistro.com
503-282-9864

2904 NE Alberta Street
Portland, Oregon 97211

Craving some Cajun food? This dinner bistro features all the southern treats – from hushpuppies to crawfish cakes, blackened catfish to spinach and cheese dumplings! Reservations for dinner are recommended.

Hidden Oaks Llama Ranch

hiddenoakslamaranch.com
503-630-5173

30645 SE Currin Road
Estacada, OR 97023

Looking for that perfect llama? This ranch houses 100+ llamas, with a wide variety for sale! Sorry—no leasing llamas here...

Further Reading

compliments of Seattle Repertory Theater & The Seattle Public Library

Book

Cavedweller
by Dorothy Allison

In Zanesville
by Jo Ann Beard

Durable Goods
by Elizabeth Berg

Running with Scissors
by Augusten Burroughs

The Love Curse of the Rambaughs
by Jack Gantos

Girl in Translation
Jean Kwok

Let's Pretend This Never Happened
by Jenny Lawson

Eleanor & Park
by Rainbow Rowell

Strong at the Heart
collected stories

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 ¾
by Sue Townsend

eBook

The Year We Were Famous
Carole Estby Dagg

Television

Freaks and Geeks

My So-Called Life

Music

#1 Record
by Big Star

The Sunset Tree
by Mountain Goats