

Cultural Daily

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The Heidi Chronicles with Elisabeth Moss Feels Diminished

David Sheward · Wednesday, April 8th, 2015

When *The Heidi Chronicles* opened Off-Broadway in 1988 and then transferred to Broadway a year later, it perfectly captured its historical moment. Wendy Wasserstein's bittersweet survey of one woman's journey through social upheavals, female empowerment, sexual revolutions, and the morning after evaluated the impact of the feminist movement with equal measures of humanity, humor and sorrow. Heidi Holland, the heroine not unlike Wasserstein, is in the generation between housewives and "have-it-all" superwomen. Born at the end of the Baby Boom, she comes of age just as doors are being broken down and women are forced to choose between family and careers rather than opting for both. An art historian specializing in neglected female painters, Heidi pursues her work passions, but the men in her life are either emotionally unavailable or gay. Her women friends go on different tracks, some forsaking ideals for money, others giving up their dreams for husbands and kids. Heidi feels abandoned, but ultimately relies on herself for fulfillment, adopting a baby and looking to the future with hope. Wasserstein, who died at 55 in 2006, detailed Heidi's trek with wit and compassion.



Elisabeth Moss in *The Heidi Chronicles*

Credit: Joan Marcus

The issues still resonate, but the first Broadway revival of this Pulitzer Prize-winner feels somehow diminished. Perhaps it's the direction by Pam MacKinnon, which tends towards the sitcom in some of the more satiric scenes such as a 1970s consciousness-raising vignette and is strangely muted in the big moments between Heidi and her on-again, off-again romantic partner Scoop Rosenbaum, an obnoxious but attractive magazine editor. Perhaps it's the low-key lead performance by Elisabeth Moss of *Mad Men* fame. Moss overdoes Heidi's fragile vulnerability and doesn't endow her with much of a backbone. She displays welcome rough edges during Heidi's quirky art lectures and totally nails her long monologue summarizing the character's sense of loss as she details the differences between an idealized perfect woman and Heidi's real, lonely life. But other than these solo moments, the actor seems to vanish into the background, allowing flashier supporting characters to dominate.

These include Bryce Pinkham's vibrant Peter Patrone, Heidi's pediatrician gay best friend, Ali Ahn's mercurial Susan, who morphs from committed women's legal advocate to shallow TV exec, and Tracee Chimo's quartet of cultural stereotypes, including a vapid talk-show hostess and a foul-mouthed radical lesbian. Jason Biggs' Scoop lacks the necessary charisma to explain why Heidi would keep coming back to this creep who treats her pretty shabbily. He looks too much like the kid from *American Pie* in an ill-fitting suit trying to appear grown up.

John Lee Beatty's versatile sets and Jessica Pabst's costumes accurately place us in the right decades and locations, but these *Chronicles* just miss completely conveying the feel and impact of their times.

Opened March 19 for an open run. Music Box Theatre, 239 W. 45th St., NYC. Tue.—Thu., 7:30 p.m.; Fri., Sat., 8 p.m.; Wed., Sat., 2 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m. Running time: two hours and 40 mins. including intermission; \$59-\$139. (212) 239-6200 or www.telecharge.com.

This review has previously appeared on ArtsinNY.com and Theaterlife.com.

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