

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Rigor As Fun & Feistiness

Sylvie · Wednesday, October 2nd, 2019

When you do the right thing as you see it, the dominant feeling is that you can't go wrong. So how do two Supreme Court Justices, who also happen to be the first women honored with this lifetime appointment and who also happen to hold different perceptions of the job, also manage to be friends and rivals?

Just ask playwright Jonathan Shapiro.

Oh. Not a household name to you, even if it sounds like that of every doctor in Beverly Hills? Maybe, but this one belongs to a first-time playwright, the author of *Sisters In Law* now on the Lovelace stage at the Wallis in Beverly Hills.

Oh. You haven't seen it? Well, see that you do, because Shapiro's bio in the program explains everything—especially the fact that this Rhodes scholar is by no means a new writer, just a new playwright, which also explains why *Sisters In Law* is such a witty and wise surprise, and why, if you enjoy intelligent theatre, this is your chance to get some.



Stephanie Faracy as Sandra Day O'Connor in *Sisters In Law* at the Wallis Theatre in Beverly Hills.

Don't be misled. It's nothing big, just a modest two-hander that smartly relies on talent and simplicity throughout. That's the beauty of it. When you have two such seasoned performers as Stephanie Faracy (Sandra Day O'Connor) and Tovah Feldshuh (Ruth Bader Ginsburg) engaged in friendly battles of wits and principles, you don't want to gum it up with more than the words traded by two such important lives spent in the service of freedom and justice. Remember, Ginsburg is good at this. After all, she and the late Justice Antonin Scalia were great friends, even when their views on the law were almost diametrically opposed.

(A cautionary note: of course the words in the play don't necessarily come from actual conversations; this is a piece based on the book of the same title by Linda Hirshman, and theatre will take its share of liberties as long as they reflect the characters and situations. All the more credit to the playwright for the crispness of the dialogue.)



Tovah Feldshuh as Ruth Bader Ginsburg in *Sisters In Law* at the Wallis Theatre in Beverly Hills.

Thanks to make-up, hair design and wigs (Judi Lewin) and costumes (Melissa Trn), Feldshuh is the image of RBG, tiny, all Brooklyn tenacity, humor and restraint, while Faracy, insistently blonde, is

all WASP self-confidence and espoused moderation, sharp as a tack and proud of her role in improving the status quo, rather than trying to move the institutional goal posts. Shapiro, no doubt with some generosity of spirit, allows these two bright stars, bit by bit, to value their similarities and frank disagreements about the law, so that the respect they feel for each other only grows... And lucky us, we get to witness it.

The balance of the production wisely emulates the playwright's affection for simplicity, as the other creative artists took their cue from his approach. Patricia McGregor's spot-on direction, Rachel Myers' minimal settings and Yee Eun Nam's projections that smoothly bridge scene changes with images of the parade of passing political eras, all contribute to the unencumbered presentation.



l-r, Stephanie Faracy & Tovah Feldshuh in *Sisters In Law* at the Wallis Theatre in Beverly Hills.

A notably famous quote from the First Testament, spoken by Ginsburg to her friend and fellow justice says it all: "In the Bible, Ruth says to Naomi, 'whither thou goest, I will go. For your people are my people. And where you die I will die and there I will be buried. *May the Lord punish me if I allow anything but death to separate us.*' "

Only the italics are mine.

Top image: l-r, Stephanie Faracy as Sandra Day O'Connor & Tovah Feldshuh as Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Sisters In Law at the Wallis Theatre in Beverly Hills.

Photos by Kevin Parry

WHAT: *Sisters In Law*

WHERE: Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, Lovelace Studio Theater, 9390 No. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90210.

WHEN: Tuesdays-Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2:30 & 8pm; Sundays, 2:30 & 7:30pm No performance on Oct. 8. Ends Oct. 13.

HOW: Tickets, \$60 (subject to change), available at 310.746.4000 or online at TheWallis.org/Sisters

Or in person at the box office, The Wallis, 9390 No. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90210.

RUNNING TIME: 90 minutes with no intermission.

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