Call for Papers: A Symposium

The First Actresses: 1660-1930s

Friday, May 23 and Saturday, May 24, 2014

Finally, women. Reflect on the whole history of women: do they not have to be first of all and above all else actresses?

Friedrich Nietzsche. The Gay Science, 1881

Deadline for Abstracts:
March 15, 2014

Arriving centuries late to the theatre profession, women have met with hostility, censorship, bans, and working conditions often well below those available to their male counterparts, not least of which was economic security much lower than that of actors. This symposium focuses on the actress with a view to promoting, identifying and encouraging research and scholarly directions on the work and lives of actresses from the 17th through the early 20th centuries.

In addition to keynote speaker Sharon Marcus (The Orlando Harriman Professor at Columbia University), the symposium will present two performances and an exhibition.

Addressing the centuries long prohibition on women acting, *The First Actress* by Christopher St. John (Christabel Marshall) features one of the women purported to be the ‘first actress’ to take the role of Desdemona in *Othello* in 1661. This short play from 1911 Britain is a touchstone for the symposium as it addresses a range of issues: the prejudice against the women performing, their ‘natural’ inadequacies as artists in the public realm, and women’s agency in demanding access to both the public stage and the right to vote. The second performance, a premiere of a solo work, looks at the life of the celebrated Columbus, Ohio artist with an international reputation Elsie Janis (1889-1956). This piece is commissioned for this symposium and will be created by Victoria Matsos, from the Theatre Research Institute’s Elsie Janis Collection. Finally we will mount an exhibition on the actress drawn from multiple collections of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute.

The symposium with presentations, exhibition, and performances will provide a forum for scholarship to be shared, work by practitioner/researchers to be experienced, and for future directions on the study of the actress to emerge. We seek paper proposals from all disciplines working on issues related to the symposium theme and from graduate students, independent scholars, and faculty.

Email 300 word abstract, 100 word bio to both the symposium organizers: Nena Couch (Head, Thompson Library Special Collections, The Ohio State University Libraries) couch.1@osu.edu and Lesley Ferris (Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor of Theatre) ferris.36@osu.edu by March 15, 2014.