

## L.A. Women's Shakespeare Company

### REVIEWS – LISA WOLPE

**Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Honors  
LAWSC with the 2008 Margaret Harford  
Award for Sustained Excellence, 2008!**

*The Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, led by director/actress/producer Lisa Wolpe, has presented fourteen extraordinary all-female multicultural Shakespeare productions since 1993. Television coverage of LAWSC's work includes TNN's "Entertainment Hollywood", NBC News' "Unsung Hero", PBS' "In the Life", London's Arts Channel, CNN's "Showbiz Today" and other special programs.*

**OTHELLO** (2008) A match made in heaven ... stellar production values ... outstanding set, lights, sound and costuming. ... this partnership is an elixir of the purest theatricality! The focal point of this richly appointed presentation is the steadfast, magnificently shaded performance of Fran Bennett... the supporting cast is exceptional! - BACKSTAGE WEST

Villainous Iago Steals the Show...Lisa Wolpe is a standout bad guy in an all-female 'Othello' at the Theatre @ Boston Court. - LA TIMES

Some writers, in deference to gender neutrality, use the word "actor" to refer to performers of either gender. One almost needs to use that particular convention when reviewing the work of the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, as describing Lisa Wolpe as a brilliant Shakespearean "actress" is unduly limiting. Wolpe is a fine interpreter of the Bard, and the fact that she has created a company that enables her to address many of Shakespeare's greatest roles, regardless of gender, is our gain.



*Lisa Wolpe as "Iago"*

In Othello, playing at Boston Court, Wolpe takes a turn as Iago. It's difficult to pay attention to Iago's initial dialogue, as your brain is taking a moment to process how perfectly Wolpe creates a male character. It's the same feeling you get when you first hear a British performer flawlessly pull off an American accent - you just marvel at the fact they're actually doing it, before you can take it for granted and watch the story... It isn't about a swagger or a lowering of voice. Just watching the way Iago sits and holds his cigarette tells you not only that he's a man, but a man of a certain class (not that high), a man of a certain attitude (that the world should give him what he believes is his due), and a man of thoughtfulness. Wolpe approaches Iago with a level of understanding - if not actual sympathy - for the villain, creating a character who is conniving, but also delightfully human. Her Iago knows he's never going to be a dominating physical presence, so he smoothly talks other people into thinking that what he wants is in their best interest. And when Othello promotes Cassio over Iago, Iago feels unjustly betrayed, and thinks that revenge is his right. Wolpe's Iago is complex, but her interpretation is never confused. It's a splendid performance, well-served by Wolpe's own direction. - TALKIN' BROADWAY

Artfully conceived and psychologically astute - this is an "Othello" to savor. -VARIETY

*TOPS EVERY OTHELLO WE HAVE EVER SEEN!* Topping the LAWSC production is the performance of Lisa Wolpe as Iago. Wolpe has played them all, from Romeo to Lear, from Shylock to Richard III, and in all she has been outstanding, but here she outplays even herself! - NITELIFE

**MACBETH3** (2008) (Los Angeles, London, and Edinburgh Tour) DARKLY TERRIFYING!!! Wolpe confirms that she is simply one of the best interpreters of the Bard out there! - TALKIN' BROADWAY

PLENTY OF EPIC SWEEP!!! Lisa Wolpe's boldly truncated adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy runs just about one hour -- a sort of graphic novel-esque synthesis that gallops along at a breathless pace. In a thoughtful performance, Kate Roxburgh lends stature and masculine gravity to Macbeth, and Gavin McClure invests Lady Macbeth with feminine grace and guile. - LA TIMES



*Lisa Wolpe as "Shylock"*

**AS YOU LIKE IT** (2007) Since 1993 the L.A. Women's Shakespeare Company has turned the tables on tradition, reversing the original concept of male actors playing the Bard's female roles by casting only women in its productions. LAWSC attracts hugely talented performers eager to pencil in sideburns, adopt a wide-legged swagger, add a well-placed sock, and find a new kind of artistic empowerment. This time it's even more interesting, not only because of the already gender-bent nature of the material but because the Forest of Arden has astral-projected into the American West of the 1880s. Lisa Wolpe directs with an assured hand, cleverly adding period music and dance ... Among many unswervingly committed performances, Wolpe is riveting in her simplicity as the melancholy Jaques, - LA WEEKLY

...Whether you're a scholar or a mere groundling, you're likely to have a rollicking good time in this revisionist production. The decision to set the action in the Wild West is surprisingly apt... director Lisa Wolpe masks the deficits and maximizes the fun in this high-spirited entertainment...As the deceptively "melancholy" Jacques, Wolpe is the evening's standout, particularly in her authoritative rendering of the "Ages of Man" speech — the most lucid interpretation of that particular passage in memory. - LA TIMES

**THE MERCHANT OF VENICE** (2005) (2005 OVATION Award Nomination, Lisa Wolpe "BEST ACTRESS") Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, after eleven years of stand-out productions, has nothing left to prove. The gender question has no bearing on the quality of the work in this terrific production... Lisa Wolpe, who founded the company, and is producer, director, and a superb actor, has played a diversity of Shakespeare's male roles, all with a dedication to excellence and a palpable celebration of language. Her Richard III was memorable, as was her Hamlet, and her current Shylock may be the most outstanding of any viewed in a multitude of productions, here and in England. - BACKSTAGE WEST

**THE TEMPEST** (2003) "We are such stuff as dreams are made on"... the quote could well be the motto for the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare company's all-female production of the same: the show is a rich and lavish fantasy adroitly brought to the stage by director Lisa Wolpe...Natsuko Ohama conveys Prospero's inner revelations with grace and subtlety - Ohama could have played the part completely with her eyes, uttering nary a word and still achieving the required emotional hues... The irrelevancy of gender is testament to this fine production's mounting of the material, which makes it clear for the onset that it is not a novelty act or some cabaret drag show. This is Shakespeare, expertly performed! - DOWNTOWN NEWS

Fine performances and the steady hand of director and company founder Lisa Wolpe contribute to the success in staging one of Shakespeare's most difficult works...Contemplating the universal hierarchy of humanity and the gods, of the mysteries of the divine, of the powerful legacy of paganism and the endless pageant of human struggle is in itself rewarding. Director Wolpe and her fine ensemble deserve much credit for offering us this opportunity for contemplation. - BACKSTAGE WEST

**THE WINTER'S TALE** (2001) As vengeful King Leontes, Lisa Wolpe has a startling grasp on Shakespeare's text and the function of each line she speaks. Summoning such crystalline emotion as to leave us breathless, she gives an awe-inspiring depiction of love turned to tyranny. - BACKSTAGE WEST

Lisa Wolpe sets immediate high standards with a masterful performance of Leontes, the Sicilian monarch driven by sudden jealous rage to destroy his loving wife (Kimberleigh Aarn). Unlike Othello, Leontes is not the victim of an evildoer's manipulation, but rather overtaken by some inner, all-consuming darkness. As in many other portrayals, the reasons remain opaque, but Wolpe makes utterly credible both the king's cruelty and his subsequent remorse once the veil of madness has lifted. - LA TIMES

**TWELFTH NIGHT** (2000) LAWSC With the huge John Anson Ford Amphitheater to play in, the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company has great fun with one of the Bard's most fanciful comedies. The entire cast makes much of the fact they are all women, a conceit that broadens the comedy and sharpens the jokes. - LA WEEKLY

From Hamlet to Romeo, Wolpe has played many leading Shakespearean roles for the company since its inception. Wolpe is an ideal Viola, at times demurely feminine, at times convincingly boyish. As Shakespeare must have intended, her portrayal expands into a larger social commentary on the expectations of gender, the vagaries of personal identity - and the thin line that separates the two. - LA TIMES

**MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING** (1999) Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company makes the most of Shakespeare's silly romantic comedy under Natsuko Ohama and Lisa Wolpe's direction. Their take on the language is particularly lucid, so that not only do the actors understand and relish their lines, the audience does too...Will Beatrice and Benedick ever get together? The fun is in the journey, provided by a consistently vibrant and polished cast...That all the roles are played by women is merely momentarily disconcerting, and the ethnic variety only adds to the interest. What does it matter, after all, when they are all so good? - LA WEEKLY

LAWSC does a noble job of bringing Shakespeare into the mainstream. Much Ado About Nothing is no exception. A bevy of superb actors, some familiar, some not so, have once again tackled a play that isn't widely known...These marvelous women have turned out a sharp, funny, farce comedy with the creative dexterity that has become their trademark. This is elegant fare...performances are on a par with the best Shakespearean productions anywhere...You go, girls! - NITELIFE

Sure, Gwynneth Paltrow may have won an Oscar this year for her gender-swapping role in "Shakespeare in Love", but she's got nothing on the ladies of the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company who've been wearing the corsets - and the trousers - since 1993. LAWSC's latest production showcases the inimitable talents of an all-female ensemble cast, and an ethnic diversity rarely seen in any other mainstream theater company and certainly unseen in traditional Shakespearean productions, where in the Bard's day white men assumed even the female roles. - PACIFIC CITIZEN

**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM** (1998) LAWSC offers a superlative production of the Bard's classic... Wolpe's comedic staging is impeccable... - LA WEEKLY

LAWSC's Artistic Director Lisa Wolpe has outdone herself again, as creative visionary, as director, and as the young hero Lysander; There is a palpable spirit and joy that radiates in waves from everyone in this not-to-be missed presentation, one of the true theatrical highlights of the year in Los Angeles... a phenomenal mounting of Shakespeare's most beloved play. -PICK OF THE WEEK, ENTERTAINMENT TODAY

An enchanting production of the Bard's frothiest comedy...as director, Wolpe demonstrates an adroit and highly polished sense of humor; her production crackles with hilariously depicted physical comedy. CRITIC'S PICK - BACKSTAGE WEST

**MEASURE FOR MEASURE** (1997) Lisa Wolpe's performance as Angelo can be measured only by the highest rule - it is intense, focused, inspired and magnificent. -NITELIFE TODAY

By now it comes as no surprise that when this dauntless company sets itself a task, accepts a challenge, it will be equal to the effort. With blithe disregard of barriers - of sex, color, whatever - the Women's Shakespeare Company just gets on with it. Required only are talent, training, energy and conviction. Staging is creative, ingenious and impeccable...Measure for Measure is a triumphant re-affirmation of the critical success won by this company in the five years since it's founding, and a gratifying, heart-warming, rewarding experience of theatre. CRITIC'S CHOICE - DRAMALOGUE  
Among this engaging cast, two performers stand out. As Isabella's lecherous tormentor Angelo, Lisa Wolpe affords a chilling glimpse of moral decay cloaked in sanctimony - the universal garb of corrupt politicians, past and present. - LA TIMES



*Lisa Wolpe as "The Player King" in Hamlet*

**RICHARD III** (1996)\_\_\_The best Richard III this critic has seen in years...an evening of Shakespeare at his finest. - DRAMALOGUE

What would the Bard say if he saw this all-female production of Richard III? Certainly he would rave about Lisa Wolpe's outstanding performance of the title role... She is so good, in fact, that the other actors onstage with her often get lost in the background. - BACKSTAGE WEST

The best reason to see this Richard III is it's taut, superb acting. Lisa Wolpe delivers an overwhelming, hypnotic portrayal of the dominating central figure. Her inspiration and energy never flag as she imparts shape and depth to Richard's Machiavellian nature, whether he be carrying out his villainous sexual stratagems ... Even hardened skeptics will be convinced by this brilliant, revelatory staging by the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company...- LOS ANGELES VIEW

Wolpe is a mesmerizing and miraculous Richard, giving him such a slithery, most gleeful joy in his deathly web of twisted and world-class scheming that it makes one want to - appropriately - go home and take a shower. Thanks to the determination of Lisa Wolpe and her Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, even theatrical perfection recognized for several centuries can obviously be improved upon. - ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

A gem...Lisa Wolpe, in the title role, is at once beguiling and obscene, conveying all the necessary slime, sex and charm to bring the beast off the page.  
Judith Lewis, L.A. Weekly

**HAMLET** (1995)\_ A glorious rendition...with superb production values and a gifted cast... Kudos go to co-directors Wolpe and Ohama, not only for their brilliant casting, but also for their remarkable staging...a production that matches anything found on the boards at the Royal Shakespeare Company. -CRITIC'S PICK - BACKSTAGE WEST

Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company has once again tackled one of the Bard's masterpieces and conquered it with bravura. This time out it's Hamlet, featuring a title role that is universally regarded as one of the most psychologically complex character studies of all time...Wolpe fully embodies Hamlet and brings a veritable rainbow of emotions to the role. This is a Hamlet to be studied and savored, a revelation for newcomers to the text and a fresh awakening for veterans. - DRAMALOGUE

Hamlet proves anew how viscerally effective women can be in the great Shakespearean roles. A case in point is Lisa Wolpe. Intense and boyish, Wolpe mitigates the Dane's melancholy with a highly developed sense of irony that persists until the last gasp. It's a convincingly sexy performance, whatever your gender. - LA TIMES

**OTHELLO** (1994) Director Lisa Wolpe has led her large cast with a sure hand...Not only does this distinctive version of Othello prove that "a man should be what he seems," but it also illustrates that a woman can be whatever she wants to be - DRAMALOGUE

This production by the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company proves definitely that women can stage classic, gripping Shakespeare with the best of them.. . Othello shows that authentic human drama can easily cross the gender gap. -CRITIC'S PICK - BACKSTAGE WEST

This is simply good, solid Shakespeare, thoughtfully staged and performed...Shakespeare lovers should hie themselves posthaste to the Odyssey for an evening of the real thing. - LA TIMES

The company under Lisa Wolpe's direction delivers a compassionate, emotional and well-orchestrated production...This intelligent and well-paced production flourishes under Lisa Wolpe's direction. - LA VILLAGE VIEW

**ROMEO AND JULIET** (1993) LAWSC Directed by Lisa WolpeA watershed effort...staged with imagination, taste and passion by Lisa Wolpe, who also plays Romeo. A stirring production, rife with rich performances... a gilt-edged ensemble. The gender gap is erased by actors who enact their roles with style and individual characterization. - DRAMALOGUE