

Talk

City Theatre's Newsletter for Subscribers, Members, Patrons, and Friends

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THE *Dating Game*

If you think you've got some funny stories of dates gone horribly awry, then you haven't met **HALEY WALKER** — the hapless heroine of Theresa Rebeck's comic one-woman play *Bad Dates*. Rebeck, a Pulitzer-nominated

playwright who has also written and produced for such television shows as *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *NYPD Blue*, and *L.A. Law*, decided to mix

two things she was quite familiar with: dating and crime-drama. The result is the hilarious story of a single mother and shoe aficionado bent on succeeding in New York's

highly competitive restaurant business while finding

Mr. Right. There are only two tiny snags in that

plan: all the men out there are gay, married, or crazy, and her restaurant... well, it's owned

by Romanian mobsters. To learn more

about the mind behind the madness,

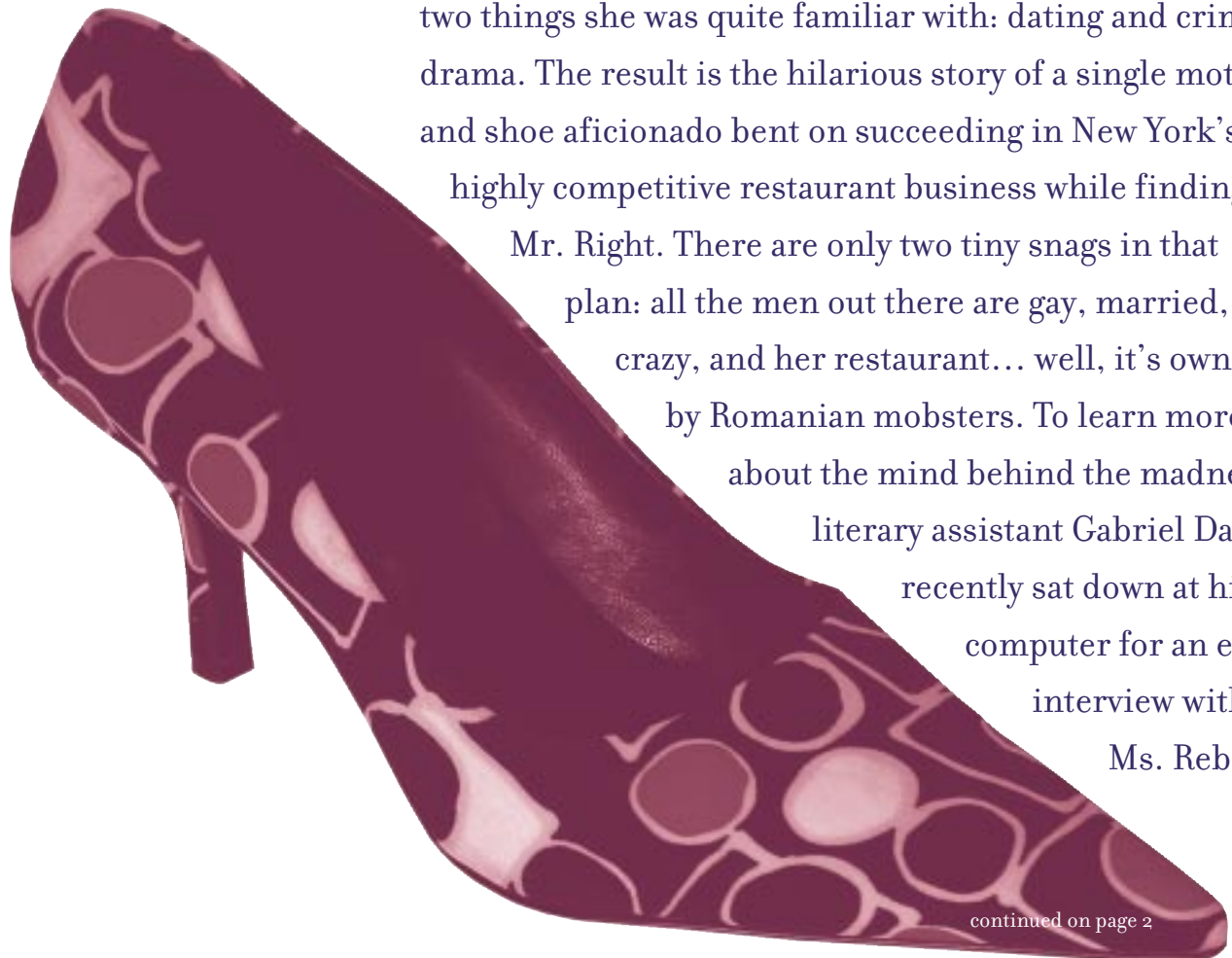
literary assistant Gabriel Davis

recently sat down at his

computer for an e-

interview with

Ms. Rebeck.



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BAD DATES continued from cover

GABRIEL DAVIS: With productions in New York, California, Boston, and even Brazil, *Bad Dates* is literally making the theatre-going world laugh this year. What projects are you working on? Are they also comedies?

THERESA REBECK: I've actually been working on these plays about murder. So working on *Bad Dates* — it felt good to be funny again, you know, to be with somebody whose impulse would be to tell a joke. Comedy always feels like a defiant response to the trouble of the universe. It seems a redemptive act.

GD: What do you feel makes for the richest comedy?

TR: In general, I'm not all that interested in the joke, or a kind of simple absurdism. That thins out, for me. I do find myself attracted to sardonic re-definitions which undercut or even explode emotional tension, or release anger and laughter at the same time — the sort of thing the really great stand-ups like Lenny Bruce or George Carlin or Chris Rock excel at. There is a political element to that kind of comedy which is quite satisfying to me and which does appear in much of my work in kind of subversive ways. On the other end of the spectrum, I like what Chekhov and Moliere and Shakespeare do — they let their characters wallow in their own flaws to such a degree that it becomes funny, somehow, to see how small and vain and lovable we all are.

GD: What sets *Bad Dates* apart from your other work?

TR: It's very different. It feels very intimate. This is the first one-character piece that I've written. Drafting it was different because I wasn't sure how to build the story dramatically with just one person. It feels a little bit like a cross between a play and a novel, or like a very lively version of a first-person

narrative novel, like the Salinger novels. I enjoyed that aspect of it, but it took me a while to learn how to imbue every movement with immediacy and a play structure. I wanted it to still be a play — I didn't want it to be just somebody telling stories.

GD: The character of Haley has the remarkable ability to find humor in the midst of even the most excruciating personal disaster. What was the inspiration for her?

TR: Haley is inspired by a friend of mine. We've worked together so much we've truly infected each other's psy-

away from the theatre. People have to make a choice, are they going to go to L.A. for a few years to see if they can land a show that will give them a nut so they can survive? Playwrights have to move to Los Angeles if they want to work in television, because that's where all the people giving out the jobs are. There's very little television work in New York. I think that's very, very hard on the system here... it's a simple problem of geography.

GD: What is it about writing for the stage in particular that you love?

TR: The experience is more urgent, more humane, more rewarding in every way, as storytelling. Also it's the one place where your voice can really be your own — Hollywood is famous for throwing several writers at everything, which I think diffuses and dilutes the storytelling. Because there are now these other venues for dramatic storytelling, there are some who have developed a prejudice against naturalism and realism in theatre, they like to say that the province of realism is film or television. I think under those rules if Chekhov were writing now, people would dismiss him. The narrowness and the unproductive nature of those sorts of observations — that

theatre has to "steer clear" of realism — is silly, and I'm always surprised when it still shows up. There's room for many different kinds of theatre. But I'm personally addicted to narrative.

GD: Finally, I have to ask: about Haley's obsession with shoes... is there any autobiographical link?

TR: Ha ha, actually no. I'm not a shoe person at all. I wear boots and I wear gym shoes and Birkenstocks and sometimes I wear clogs. Basically, I like shoes that slide on easily.



“COMEDY ALWAYS FEELS LIKE A DEFIANT RESPONSE TO THE TROUBLE OF THE UNIVERSE. IT SEEMS A REDEMPTIVE ACT.”
— THERESA REBECK

ches. So I built on the way we both yearn for a comedic lift out of our sorrow, on a lack of self-pity that we both strive for. That was a big inspiration for Haley, that ferocious need to be a survivor and to be a buoyant survivor.

GD: You might say that you have been a buoyant survivor yourself, having managed to thrive as a playwright while also working extensively in Hollywood writing for film and television.

TR: Part of the problem that the American theatre scene has is that so much of the money work is 3,000 miles