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## THE TIMES OF TRENTON

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### Theater: 'Menopause: The Musical' at Bucks County Playhouse



Ingrid Cole in "Menopause: The Musical."

By Ted Otten

Over nine hundred years ago, Persian scholar, philosopher and poet Omar Khayyam wrote, "Be happy for this moment; this moment is your life," and that's one of the serious messages underlying the hilarious musical called "Menopause: The Musical" now onstage at New Hope's Bucks County Playhouse through January 22 as the first of a winter and spring series the Playhouse has designated as its Visiting Artist Series, a panorama of musical and theatrical attractions running through April 9.

This lively musical by Jeanie Linders originated in a tiny theatre in Florida in 2001 and tells of the developing and very supportive friendship of four very different women without names in their 40's and 50s who have gone through or are going through menopause, one of the few things they all have in common. There's the power woman, the Iowa housewife, the aging soap opera star and the Earth Mother who meet while shopping for lingerie at Bloomingdales and create, after a wild argument at the clearance rack, a support group based on their common experiences, a chance meeting that continues to develop through manicure dates and luncheons.

This show, according to its website, has been seen by millions of people on an international journey which has necessitated some minor detail changes because audiences in Australia, South Korea, Spain, South Africa or Israel may never have heard of Iowa or Bloomingdale's (which became Marks & Spenser for the London production and Smith & Caughey's in New Zealand), and the show's creators are anxious to have audiences empathize and bond immediately with the show's characters and their shared problems and possible solutions. One of the important messages is that "you are not alone," and the show works hard to live up to its subtitle: "The Hilarious Celebration of Women and The Change."

One of the paths to humor is the parody of songs that will be familiar to anyone who was around in the second half of the previous century. Remember "Puff, the Magic Dragon"? Here, it becomes "Puff, My God, I'm Draggin," and "My Guy" morphs into "My Thighs." The song menu abounds with familiar, comforting melodies, and the changed lyrics reflect the women's shared problems, experiences and survival techniques. The second line of "I Heard It Through the Grape Vine" laments no longer being 39, and "A Sign of the Times" is that an hour glass figure now looks like a glass of wine. "Stayin' Alive" has become a complaint called "Stayin' Awake."

Atlanta based actress Ingrid Cole, making her BCP debut as Earth Mother, had to go shopping for a heavy coat for her offstage moments in the North East, but she was happy to return to a role so familiar to her. She's played that role all over the country since she first performed it over a decade ago.

"What I like most is the wonderful sound of communal laughter. It's like having a warm, gentle wave envelope me, and I have often had people come backstage to thank me for helping them laugh at something they never thought could be funny in any way. It's a lonely, scary thing to think that you're the only one who has ever felt a certain way or gone through something unprepared and frightened. And I love hearing from those who come back to see the show again and again. Somebody sees the show and recommends it to a friend. The friend goes to see it, and then the two of them come to see it again so that they can share, as the women in the show do, the comfort of laughter and friendship," said Cole whose career has included operas like Menotti's "The Medium," musicals like "Gypsy," "Nonsense," and "The Catered Affair," and her own one woman show, "Cole on Cole," a ninety minute cabaret from Cole Porter's classic catalog.

Among the songs Cole sings is "Drippin' and Droppin'" which audiences will recognize as Bacharach and David's "Wishin' and Hopin'" when it was a hit in 1964 for Dusty Springfield. While singing it, Cole does a parody fitness routine.

"I was really too young for this role when I first did it, but now I'm closer to her age and can appreciate her life better, things like joining a gym which, like this show, can be a comforting and supportive experience. She and I are both nurturing by nature, moms, caregivers, peacemakers and naturally funny," said Cole who believes that this is the best of the four roles for her although she does envy some of the other women their solos and thinks that the ensemble finale is her favorite moment.

Casting for the New Hope production was done from a pool of about two dozen experienced performers depending on their availability. It was then up to director Seth Greenleaf to coordinate the new cast, all of whom were experienced in their roles from previous productions. Greenleaf has directed this show throughout the country and was involved, either as producer or director, with

such Broadway productions as "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," "Book of Mormon," "Matilda," Al Pacino in "China Doll," and "9 to 5: The Musical." He's also working on two shows for Broadway later this year.

"Directing a touring production is like going from one hotel room to another; things are slightly different but always in same. You just make yourself as at home as you can.

"Everybody either goes through menopause or at least knows someone else who is," said Greenleaf, "and these women's stories give audiences a chance to appreciate that menopause, however difficult or inconvenient it is, isn't necessarily the end of everything. It's also the beginning of a new phase of life, a different part of life that women can be proud of. Some women feel alone or that menopause is only happening to them. This show demonstrates that those old ideas aren't necessarily true or true in the same way for everybody and that there's joy in appreciating the now of life, the now of whatever age you are."

## **IF YOU GO**

### **"Menopause: The Musical"**

**Where:** Bucks County Playhouse, 70 South Main Street, New Hope, Pa.

**When:** Through January 22; Wednesday & Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. with matinees at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

**How much:** Tickets are \$35 to \$55.

**Contact:** 215-862-2121.