



Tuesday, March 24, 2015

The Direct(or's) Approach: "Of Good Stock"'s GT Upchurch



Of Good Stock—the new play by Melissa Ross—focuses on the three Stockton sisters who gather, with the men in their lives, for a weekend birthday celebration at the family home on Cape Cod. As Women's History Month concludes, it's fitting to note that the play is written by a woman, features a strong trio of women actors and is directed by a woman.

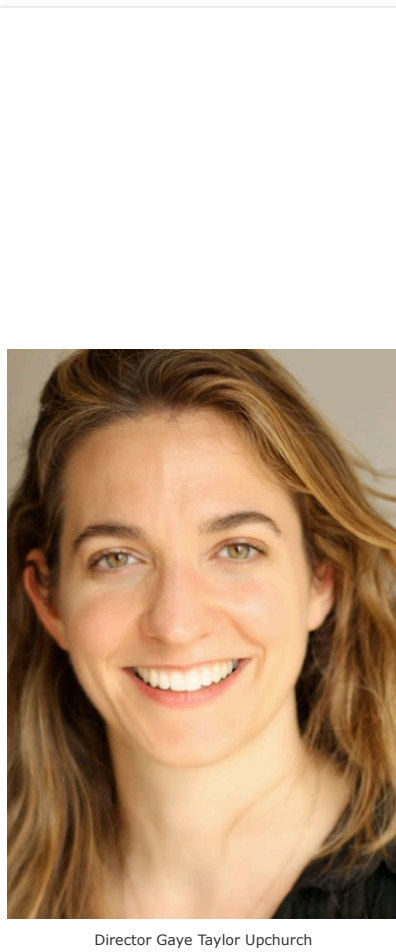
In the director's seat is Gaye Taylor Upchurch, who makes her South Coast Repertory debut with this production. Among the many productions she's directed are Laura Marks' *Bethany* (Women's Project, Lucille Lortel nomination for Best New Play and Best Actress and at The Old Globe), Lucy Thurber's *Stay* (Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Obie Award for Hilltown Play Cycle) and Simon Stephens' *Harper Regan* (Atlantic Theater, *The New York Times* Top Ten Productions, 2012). Her work on new plays was a factor that led *The New York Times* to profile her in a story about the number of successful women directors off-Broadway. So what shaped her career? We caught up with her recently, just as *Of Good Stock* moved out of the rehearsal hall and onto the stage.

What's the very first play you remember seeing?

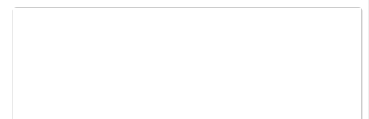
I was visiting New York City for a weekend when I saw Christopher Shinn's *Four* at the Worth Street Theater Company, and it was the first time I was fully aware of the power of theatre. The intimacy of those performances was shattering for me. I had to walk around the block a few times after it was over to gather myself.

What drew you to directing?

Directing brings together many elements of my life from before I ever got into theatre. I have a background in dance, and I tend to view staging as a type of choreography that best reveals the tension in a scene—not unlike a dance piece. I also spent a fair amount of time studying art history and painting, which often figures into the initial impulses I have when beginning conversations with designers—always one of my favorite parts of the process. I also love working with actors and being surprised and excited by them, so that's a big draw to wanting to direct.



Director Gaye Taylor Upchurch



Who would you cite as your mentor?

I wouldn't be a director if it weren't for Gerald Freedman, the former dean of drama at North Carolina School of the Arts, and the first person to encourage me to pursue directing. I still think about his classes every time I work. Also, a big part of his directing curriculum was sending students to experience art in other disciplines and having us write about it—we wrote about how something affected us and how we thought the artist(s) accomplished that. It shaped my own taste for what I love in art, and that shaped my thinking about how to create.

What's most attractive to you about *Of Good Stock*?

I love this play! Melissa Ross's writing is hilarious and tough, and is equally vulnerable. She's also accomplished the rhythms and dynamics of a family so beautifully, which has made it a joy to work on for me and the actors.

What did you know about South Coast Repertory before you came out to direct?

I know many people who have worked here and loved it. And, SCR has a fantastic reputation for being committed to new writing and producing world premieres.

If you could have lunch with any woman from theatre history, living or past, who would that be?

Martha Graham!

