

October 31 - November 16, 2008

An American Daughter

Reviewed October 26 by [Brad Hathaway](#)

Running time 2:35 - one intermission
Margaret Bush shines in Wasserstein's political comedy

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Any competent production of any of the late and lamented Wendy Wasserstein's plays is worth an evening of a theater lover's time, and unless the price is exorbitant, it's worth the price of admission as well. The Port City Playhouse provides a case in point. Here is a clean and uncomplicated presentation of Wasserstein's sharp language and keen plotting on a topic of continuing interest. The company throws in one additional incentive: a superb performance by an actress who has done some marvelous work in community theater in the past, but who seems to have been honing her skills. She turns in a delightful piece of work as the daughter of the title, a woman who has risen to the peak of her profession but who is derailed by a previously overlooked personal transgression blown up into "a federal case" by the press examining her as a nominee for a post in the administration of an unnamed President. That actress is Margaret Bush, and she shines all evening long in a play that seems relevant and timely.



Storyline: The nominee for Surgeon General of the United States is a successful doctor who lives in Georgetown, the daughter of a United States Senator, a fifth generation descendent of a President, a hospital administrator and, oh yes, a wife and mother. Popular approval of her candidacy begins to erode as the fact that she once failed to respond to a summons for jury duty provides a rallying cry for those who resent her success but can't come right out and say "a woman's place is in the home."

Wasserstein's script is a blend of intelligent wit and serious purpose. Decked out in the guise of a light comedy - with all the flippant retorts, glib rejoinders and penchant observations on the state of the body politic - it is peopled with prototypes of the professionals who think they influence important events. It is a serious examination of the state of modern feminism and the fate of the modern female: No matter how many barriers are removed and no matter how many opportunities open up, following one dream always involves sacrificing at least part of another one. The role of spouse and parent still places uneven demands based on gender. Balancing it all is a modern challenge highlighted by Wasserstein's combining the political and the social issues in one well constructed plot.

Bright, perky and sexy and with a sharp intellect visible in every scene, Bush is a believable nominee for high office with a naive streak that may be her political downfall, but isn't a fatal flaw for her success as a human being. Mark Lee Adams does his usual, thoroughly competent job as the nominee's husband, even managing to handle the worst single line in the play (the lame excuse for a wayward act "it just happened - it didn't mean anything") without drawing attention to its triteness. For the rest of his role, he seems to enjoy the lack of stereotype in Wasserstein's crafting of the part. Kimberly A. Gowland lends a needed touch of unpretentiousness as the nominee's new step mother with a polished performance not matched in naturalness by Ron Field as the nominee's father, a United States Senator. Theresee McNichol is appropriately obnoxious as a young journalist and Richard Isaacs is pleasant as the neighbor whose "big mouth" blows the whistle on the ignored summons.

Director Barra Kahn teamed with producer Don Neal to design a set that occupies the too-large playing space of the Nannie J. Lee auditorium without either seeming bare or swallowing up the cast. It is a handsome assembly and works nicely as does Alan Wray's sound design which meets the requirements of the script for everything from Mozart to Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys.

Written by Wendy Wasserstein. Directed by Barra Kahn. Design: Barra Kahn and Donald Neal (set) Farrell Ann M. Hartigan (costumes) Bette Williams (hair and makeup) Barra Kahn, Margaret Bush and Donald Neal (set decoration) Edward Breitner (properties) Nancy Owens (lights) Alan Wray (sound) Douglas Olmsted (photography) Amanda Helms (stage manager). Cast: Mark Lee Adams, Edward Breitner, Margaret Bush, Ron Field, Kimberley A. Gowland, Steven Haber, Richard Isaacs, Anita Jones, Anna Lathrop, Theresee McNichol, Cal Whitehurst.