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 by Nancy Grossman October 4 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/boston/article/BWW-Reviews-Celeste-Oliva-Makes-it-Worth-RECONSIDERING-HANNAH-20141004?PageSpeed=noscript>



Reconsidering Hanna(h)

Written by Deirdre Girard; Director, Bridget Kathleen O'Leary; Stage Manager, Marsha Smith; Scenic Design, Anthony Phelps; Lighting Design, Karen Perlow; Costume Design, Rachel Padula Shufelt; Sound Design, [Mark Bruckner](#); Props Artisan, Megan F. Kinneen

CAST: Celeste Oliva, Barlow Adamson, Kippy Goldfarb, Caroline Lawton

Performances through October 19 at Boston Playwrights' Theatre at Boston University, 949 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA; Box Office 866-811-4111 or www.bostonplaywrights.org

IRNE Award-winning actress Celeste Oliva gives two riveting performances in Deirdre Girard's *Reconsidering Hanna(h)* to open the 2014-2015 season at Boston Playwrights' Theatre. Oliva takes on the dual roles of Hanna, an international journalist struggling to reclaim her life after her husband's violent death, and the subject of her investigative reporting assignment, the infamous Hannah Duston, a Puritan woman kidnapped by Native Americans in 1697. Oliva distinctively inhabits these two women, separated by two centuries, yet sharing an internal fortitude and dark trait that links them across time and circumstances.

With thoughtful direction by Bridget Kathleen O'Leary, who worked with Girard to develop the play over the past two years, *Reconsidering Hanna(h)* takes its time to unfold by telling pieces of each woman's story in an alternating fashion, requiring the audience to pay attention and look for the synergy. It is a detective story cum history lesson as fictional Hanna digs deep to find the truth about the real Hannah's motivation to return to scalp her captors after she had made her escape. As she immerses herself in the research and begins to sympathize with Hannah, more facets of her late husband's story surface to clarify the complex scenario on the home front and give us a window into Hanna's mindset.

The play opens in semi-darkness (effective lighting design by Karen Perlow) as we witness young Hannah and her nurse Mary Neff (Kippy Goldfarb) at her Haverhill farm just before the Abenaki

raiding party swoops down on them (appropriate war whoops courtesy of sound designer [Mark Bruckner](#)). In subsequent scenes, when they are tied together in captivity, both Oliva and Goldfarb fairly shiver with fear, while also grasping onto their faith. When Hannah later plots the details of their escape, Mary's horror is stamped all over Goldfarb's face, as is her resignation.

Modern day scenes take place in Hanna's apartment, cluttered with books, files, and takeout containers. It is her fortress against the harsh world that killed her journalist husband and changed her life when she was on assignment in Afghanistan. She lies around in sweatpants and dozes fitfully on the sofa, jumping every time the phone rings or there is a knock on the door. Her frequent visitor and champion is her editor Matt (Barlow Adamson), a pleasant guy who bumbles his way through trying to restore Hanna to normalcy by giving her what he thinks is a puff piece to write. He also invites a colleague and Hanna's former friend Joanna (Caroline Lawton) to visit without understanding the vitriol that exists between them. Oliva shoots daggers at Lawton who, we know from the moment she enters, is a *biatch* only acting as if she's sort of sorry. The subtext looms heavily in the scenes with these three characters and it is fun to watch Adamson as the odd man out, as it were, until he gets what's been going on and is sent reeling.

Girard's focus is on the stories of the two Hanna(h)s, eventually getting to a place where they intertwine organically. O'Leary and the design team (Anthony Phelps, Scenic; Rachel Padula Shufelt, Costume; Megan F. Kineen, Props) collaborate to enhance the storytelling, inserting musical themes by avant garde cellist Zoe Keating, and using light and shadow to reveal and hide details, to enlighten and (at times) perplex the audience, but always in service to the dramatic effect. The playwright succeeds in showing the universality of human nature, despite circumstances that are seemingly very different, and drawing us into exploring how we might behave if faced with their situations. *Reconsidering Hanna(h)* tells two good stories for the price of one, both of which will stay with you long after the curtain falls.

Photo credit: Kalman Zabarsky (Caroline Lawton, Barlow Adamson, Celeste Oliva)

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