

A Review

GAC's The Eaton Woman: An Allegory for the Times?

by Carol Griffith

Ever wonder if our nation has ever experienced anything like this year's election situation? Well, the answer is yes: the events following the election of President Andrew Jackson were even more acrimonious, as dramatized in the current play at the Greenbelt Arts Center (GAC).

The Eaton Woman, Anthony Gallo's latest creation, tackles big issues with intelligence, a bit of religion and much talent.

Around the time of his inauguration, Jackson's beloved wife Rachel died. Although he had a niece to assist him with social functions in the White House and as boisterous as those events could be, Jackson relied on the new wife of his friend and now his Secretary of War, Peggy Eaton. Polite Washington society was aghast as Mrs. Eaton was accused of having extramarital affairs, an illegitimate child or two, and being the cause of her first husband's suicide, among other things. While those accusations would hardly cause a yawn today, the fallout for Jackson was immense and is the plot of the play.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the play is the character of Peggy Eaton as Gallo has interpreted her. As the scandal about her position with Jackson rages, she says and does some – even by today's standards – outrageous things, yet toward the end of her life moralizes about the very things of which she was accused. Was she trying to atone for her sins with her pious platitudes or warning others not to do as she had done?

Gallo is especially talented at weaving historical facts and background into a play that moves quickly and crisply. Ably directed by GAC's own Beatrix Whitehall and impeccably acted and costumed, The Eaton Woman is a real treat.

On every level, The Eaton Woman shows us that our nation has survived other political crises and that there is hope for our future.

Gallo is director of the Seventh Street Playhouse. Among his recent productions at GAC include Eugenio, about Rome's chief rabbi during WWII, Vandergrift!, which dealt with union organizing during the Gilded Age, and two plays about Abraham Lincoln: Lincoln and God and The Springfield Boys.

The Eaton Woman will play at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday evenings, July 15 and 16, and on Sunday, July 17 at 2 p.m. Reservations may be made through the box office at 301-441-8770 or online. The GAC is located at 123 Centerway, beneath the Coop supermarket.

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