

## How I Learned to Drive - Reviewplays.com

Veronique Ory is the kind of theatre person that takes chances, not for the sake of it, but to push herself and explore the concepts of what makes a good performance and how it affects the audience, the actors and the story itself.

This most recent effort has all the elements of walking on a tightrope, reaching the other end successfully after stepping with baited breath, and giving a cheer that lets you know she's probably thinking of doing it again.

How I Learned to Drive explores a strange relationship between a young girl and her uncle, bouncing back and forth across time from her pre-teen years to adulthood. Disguised as driving lessons from the uncle, his lust for her spins a benevolent web that captures the girl's affections and trust, and while she draws clear boundaries that he playfully pushes, there is a definite intimacy established between them over a seven year period.

Jon Emm is exceptional as the uncle torn between what he knows is definitely taboo and his agonizing desire for carnal pleasure from Lil' Bit, his precocious niece. The role of uncle/surrogate father requires that a fine line be defined between someone who has genuine love for a child, while harboring desires so strong that reason and common sense are flung to the winds. Veronique Ory is brilliant as she fills the role of the young woman who approaches the uncle's advances with wonderful childlike innocence, which slowly develops to picaresque teasing, ending in absolute abomination as she realizes how she's been used throughout the years. She makes you wonder just how much she encouraged the uncle, and he makes you angry that such a nice, gentle guy could harbor such perverted feelings.

Adding dimension to the story is a trio of excellent actors appearing like a chorus, returning off and on as her mother, her grandfather and her grandmother. If Norman Rockwell would have painted "The Dysfunctional American Family", it would have to be the characters played by Kurt David Anderson, Pamela Clay and Laura Beckner. They were so good in their parts, you instantly dislike them and you no longer wonder why Lil' Bit has to turn to Uncle Peck for affection and attention.

Author Paula Vogel draws some very sharply defined profiles, infusing her characters with plain everyday traits, skewed just a tiny bit in each person, but just enough that the congruity of a family circle becomes an unrecognizable scribble.

Scott Tyler uses this material insightfully, directing with stylish restraint, never letting the characters overlap their roles. This way, we, the audience, decide if we want to accept or reject the characters and if we believe that this story is about a beauty and a beast or about two people manipulating each other to fill their needs.

The show played at the Raven Playhouse for far too short a run, closing on October 16. Let's hope that producer Veronique Ory brings it back soon.

[www.reviewplays.com](http://www.reviewplays.com)

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## **How I Learned to Drive - NoHoLA**

by Don Grigware

Uncle Peck in **Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize winning *How I Learned to Drive*** calls to mind Professor Humbert Humbert in **Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita***. Both men are pedophiles yet victims themselves of a sick sense of love. Peck is sincerely in love with his niece L'il Bit and we almost look past his perverted frailty to start to feel for him, especially in **Athena Theatre's** quintessential production playing only two more times Friday Oct 15 and Saturday Oct 16 at **the Raven Playhouse** in NoHo.

How is it possible to feel sympathy for a pedophile? Perhaps it's Vogel's humorous perspective. L'il Bit, as narrator states quite emphatically at the beginning of the play, finally learned that pedophilia were not people who love to bicycle.

She was victimized, yet still manages to look back at what happened with some sense of humor. Maybe when you view L'il Bit's dysfunctional family as a whole, that makes Uncle Peck seem the more stabilizing influence. Through her eyes we are introduced to her crazed Southern alcoholic mother and

grandparents (the grandfather has enough testosterone for ten men and grandma can sex-talk you under the table), and then there's the gentle protective Uncle Peck whose love for L'il Bit goes back to her birth when he held her tiny body in the palm of his hand.

That picture is surely more tender than harmful. It's really quite a powerful image: a man holding a woman in the palm of his hand. Think of King Kong softly stroking Jessica Lange's hair as she sat a helpless victim in his gigantic palm. It's grotesque and beautiful at the same time. That duality may be in Uncle Peck's favor. Some may see him more a tortured soul than a criminal.

Under director **Scott Tiler's** careful eye, **Jon Emm** and the gloriously gifted **Veronique Ory** deliver potent performances that deserve to be seen by a much wider audience. The supporting cast of **Pamela Clay**, **Kurt Anderson** and **Laura Beckner** who form a Greek chorus around the principals and play all of the other significant roles are equally wonderful.

RECOMMENDED

[www.nohola.com/](http://www.nohola.com/)

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## **Waiting for Godot's Véronique Ory**

Actress Veronique Ory triumphed as Babe in the Athena Theatre Company's production of *Crimes of the Heart* in 2003. She is currently at work on their next production, Beckett's classic *Waiting for Godot* running June 11-19 at The Raven Playhouse in NoHo.

**DG:** Waiting for *Godot* is a difficult piece. Why did you choose this particular play at this point in time?

**VO:** I have wanted to do *Waiting for Godot* since college. Elizabeth Welsh (co-founder of Athena Theatre) and I became very excited about producing the play because it is such a great piece and because it presented an opportunity to stretch our creative muscles in a new direction. The challenge of working on a Samuel Beckett play is amazingly rewarding to an artist. Due to its difficult nature, we had to find a director (Claire Titelman) who is familiar and comfortable with theatre of the absurd. Beckett's language can be confusing, but with the right director, the story can be painted very clearly for the audience, and the characters become so real and relatable.

**DG:** I have never seen females portray these roles!

**VO:** We wanted Vladimir and Estragon, played by Ory, to be female to tell the story in our own way. When Beckett was alive it was impossible to do such an interpretation because he did not want any alterations to the script. I discovered that without making any alterations to the text, I could tell the story of two people waiting to be saved in a different way. It displays that everyone is waiting for something, but from a female perspective.

**DG:** Describe Athena's origins and your very first production.

**VO:** Athena Theatre Company was created by Elizabeth Welsh and me in November 2002. Athena Theatre's debut production was *Two Encounters*, *Birdbath*, and *Ferryboat* by Leonard Melfi. These selected one-act plays explore the theme of what it means and what it takes for people to ultimately connect in a large and often isolated world. Written in the 1960's, Melfi is adept at flashing a mirror at human interaction and connectedness that still rings true in today's modern world. The plays ran for six weeks at the Tamarind Theatre in Hollywood.

**DG:** What is your mission statement?

**VO:** The specific purpose of Athena Theatre is to provide a supportive and creative environment for artists (actors and the technical crew team), where we take risks, try new things and consider new approaches. To provide theatre we are proud of and passionate about, representing the strength, intelligence, beauty and unique perspective of women in society. Our charitable purpose is to educate through the arts; we are currently looking for interns.

**DG:** Did you do theatre elsewhere before LA? How would you compare LA to those other venues?

**VO:** I did theatre in New York before I moved to Los Angeles three years ago. I received my B.A. in Theatre at Russell Sage College where there is a regional theatre on campus, The New York State Theatre Institute. Working in theatre in New York, there was a sense that people were fully committed to it. In Los Angeles, theatre seems to be something that people mostly do on the side.

**DG:** What is Veronique Ory's goal?

**VO:** To tap into the community that truly is passionate about creating theatre and to produce wonderful plays. [athenatheatre.com](http://athenatheatre.com) for more information.

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### **Waiting for Godot - Reviewplays.com**

"Nothing to be done!" Samuel Beckett's masterpiece has the two main characters repeat the line, which can take on a different meaning from person to person and from time to time. Is it referring to boredom - is it talking about hopelessness - or maybe acceptance at the inevitability of life

The Athena Theatre Company takes a huge leap in presenting this classic example of Theatre of the Absurd, by courageously exchanging the gender of the two principal characters. If someone has never heard of "Godot", this piece will fall neatly into place as Vèronique Ory and Schantelle Cason play the title roles of the seemingly destitute Estragon and Vladimir with wonderful commitment and veracity, giving realistic portrayals of people in limbo. If you know the play, the gender exchange may grate at first, but soon becomes natural as the characters easily flow into the situation. Sitting on bench by a tree, they wait for Godot, who presumably will bring something better for them. Their disjointed chatter about removing a boot, wanting food and other trivialities exemplifies how people might pass the time to prevent boredom, although they often delve into the private and personal, but quickly back off.

Making the characters female permits some unscripted liberties and

inevitably their sexuality becomes part of the tension that drives the story. When Pozzo, the presumed land owner enters, it's as if a new world opens. Nathan G. Johnson is superb playing a rambling often irrational man, with complete mastery of Lucky, a slave - puppet who carries Pozzo's suitcase, food basket and stool. GJ Echternkamp gives a brilliant performance, speaking only when commanded by Pozzo, suffering humiliation and physical abuse. Some scenes suggest sexual intimacy between the two women and Pozzo, yet the dialog never wavers from the original even when their actions seems to correspond with their words. Pozzo and the two women remain at odds, and his appearance is another element in the passage of time. As in the original play, *Godot* never arrives, but sends a boy with word that he will be there the next day. Another day of waiting is in store for Estragon and Vladimir, where they will talk about boots, perhaps discuss committing suicide, perhaps nothing. They'll spend their day waiting for *Godot*.

Director Claire Titelman has chosen to have the main characters speak their lines with a high energy and volume, so that at first it seems overly done but as their anxiety and anticipation becomes more evident, it's easy to see how people could exhibit high tension. The starkly barren set with only a wooden crate and a dead tree in the corner is brightly lit, giving a feeling of stifling blandness, which echoes the characters' feelings.

The play has only a few performances, so it would be a good idea to call early for reservations. (818) 754-1423. [www.athenatheatre.com](http://www.athenatheatre.com)

[Full Review](#)

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## **Beirut - Review by Systems Reviews**

This Athena Theatre production of Alan Bowne's play, *Beirut*, powerfully depicts an apocalyptic era ruled by fear and paranoia. It details a time when those who contract an unnamed, sexually transmitted disease are forced into ghetto-like military-enforced confinement to live out their days. It is when the government advocates fear over love, and brutality over compassion. It is difficult to tell those who have hope from the hopeless. The play opens by introducing Torch (Damien Midkiff), a young man forced into a solitary

existence by his testing "positive" for this aids-like disease. Sneaking through security to visit him is former girlfriend, Blue (Veronique Ory). As the action unfolds each character expresses a different form of hope -- Torch's version is to hope for health and protection from disease for Blue. Blue's hope is that her love and attraction and the connection it would bring would provide meaning to a maddened world. Yet, as Torch persists in defeating the possible connection with Blue, he deepens her own hopelessness in living. And as Blue persists, her wish to make love takes the one power away from Torch he feels he has left. But their physical attraction is undeniable and raises the possibility that connection and love are ultimately deeper than the forces that seek to destroy us. Midkiff plays torch with the intensity of a caged animal who hasn't yet completely surrendered to death or fear. Ory brings out the necessary sexual tension and energy to pull Torch towards connection. Together the actors create an energy that makes it easy for the audience to be captivated and wondering just what will happen next. The pace of the production never lags, even in quieter moments, largely due to the performances which hold us transfixed to the very end. And ultimately, this production satisfies on several levels. Not only is this an entertaining production -- it also raises more questions than it answers and -- as in all worthwhile theatre, it makes us think.

by Systems Reviews  
(reviewer: Jude James)

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## **ACCESSIBLY LIVE - Beirut**

**ACCESSIBLY LIVE**  
**OFF-LINE**  
*Your Low-Tek NewsTM*

Week of February 9th, 2004 Vol. 9-No.6

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BEIRUT, Alan Bowne's play about love, sex, and near death in a parallel society, performs at The Elephant Lab Theatre in Hollywood.

It is sometime in the near future. Somewhere in a shabby apartment in New York City's lower east side, Torch (Damien Midkiff) a young man that has been quarantined by the 'powers that be' because he has been tested positive for some deadly and contagious disease that could only be spread through open wounds or sexual contact. He is doomed to live alone with no physical contact with anyone. However, his girlfriend Blue (Veronique Ory), who does not have this disease, comes to see him in spite of the odds of not only catching this disease, but to have the authorities take her away from him. The question remains: will this two find the love/sex that they desire, or will Torch become left alone only to die as just one less person to possess this disease?

This play is a depressing one, yet it is part of those 'what if?' tales that could (and may) actually happen. The disease in question may be AIDS, but then again, it may not! Ty Donaldson is on helm to direct this one-act play, packing in a powerful production in the 70 or so minutes it takes.

Also appearing is Paul Darrigo as a security guard, watching over to separate the 'positives' from the 'negatives'.

Again, this is a play, but a real one at that. The title BEIRUT suggests a battle zone. It is one!!

*BEIRUT is presented by the Athena Theatre Company and performs at the Elephant Lab Theatre, 6322 Santa Monica Blvd. (at Lillian Way), Hollywood, until February 29th. Showtimes are Friday and Saturday nights @ 8:00 PM, and Sunday evenings @ 7:00 PM. Reservations and information, call (818) 754-1423. Visit the web site at <http://www.athenatheatre.com>*

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### **Veronique Ory - L.A.'s top 10 female performers**

Reviewplays.com has just rated Veronique Ory as L.A.'s top 10 female performers.

We're very excited about this and VERY proud of her:

<http://allegrophoto.com/topten-2003.htm>

<http://www.reviewplays.com>

[Reviewplays.com review for Crimes of the Heart](#)

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## **Theatre NoHo LA Review - Crimes of the Heart by Don Grigware**

**August 2003**

As many times as I have seen Beth Henley's Pulitzer-Prize winning play *Crimes of the Heart*, if the production values are high, I never tire of it. On the contrary, I get caught up in the pain/joy of the Magrath sisters. Laughter through tears is a saving grace. It comforts the soul. When the obstacles to happiness keep getting worse, or when the sky rains lemons, these gals make lemonade-literally! The Athena Theatre Co. did the honors this time at the Actor's Workout Studio in NoHo, and a passionate commitment from director Elizabeth Welsh and her cast of six infused the space with cheerful aplomb.

Sisters Babe, Lenny, and Meg, like the steely Southern belles they are, will somehow find a way to survive. Veronique Ory is just right as the sweet Babe, who wouldn't hurt a fly, except this one time...she shot her husband. But he deserved it, the abusive son-of-a-bitch! Lenny, who is turning 30, has to deal with caring for her ailing granddad, has a shrunken ovary-which is enough to keep any man 100 miles away-and now must give her Babe all the support she needs! Lenny is a rock, the strong member of the family, and as played lovingly by Cameron Meyer, wins our hearts at the very start.

Then there's sister Meg, the black sheep, who left Hazlehurst, Mississippi for a singing career in Hollywood, only to end up in mental collapse before returning home. A burgeoning Blanche Dubois with a cracked sense of humor, Meg (the beautiful Tessa Munro) has a tainted reputation with men and is known as white Christmas trash by her obnoxious kin Chick (a witch played with appropriate venom by Emily Stiles) What a motley quartet!

Then there are the men in their lives, simple-living Doc Porter (Scott Tiler), who although married, cannot resist flirting with Lenny and spending one night with Meg and even simpler Barnette Lloyd (Matt Braaten), Babe's lawyer, who just happens to love her orange pound-cake. Yes, it's soapy, but gutsy, campy, crazy, and in the hands of this entire cast, pure joy.

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### **Review from ReviewPlays.com - Crimes of the Heart**

August 14, 2003

After winning a Pulitzer, where do you go from there? The Athena Theatre decided to host their Inaugural Event at The Actor's Workout Studio, which is not a bad place to follow up on Beth Henley's drama-comedy of a Mississippi family of women facing the cliché riddled fork in the road. Southern accents flail wildly in this presentation, where three sisters are brought together by the extreme illness of their grandfather and the possible incarceration of the youngest, who shot her husband in the stomach.

These Southern women have a strange way of expressing their feelings. Babe, the baby of the three keeps saying she shot her husband because she didn't like him anymore. She later divulges the trivial detail that the husband caught her doing the nasty with neighbor Willie Jay, a fifteen year old - who just happens to be Black. Her color blindness is admirable, even if her anger management could use a bit of a tweak.

In truth, all the women have issues, from the oldest who's sees herself a victim of life and self appointed guardian of the grandfather, to the middle one who is a failed singer returning from Hollywood, to the cousin who is a Prima Donna wannabe socialite.

As played by this wonderful cast, the four women have great interaction between them, and the brisk dialogue keeps the play alive and believable. When Babe explains why she shot the husband, you just know that this girl isn't paddling with all the oars and you see her boat sinking faster than a bailing bucket with a hole. Vèronique Ory is great in this part, with just the

right innocent look which keeps you guessing if she's really slow, or a black widow.

Bubbly Meg is the singer, and Tessa Munro nails the part with the true charm of a Southern Belle, sweet and perky, but not above having a little fun on the sly and getting her way when she wants it. Cousin Chick is married, and rubs it in with brilliant sarcasm as Emily Stiles becomes the snooty but beautiful outsider who thinks that she's just too - too good to hang around the riff raff her cousins have become.

The outwardly strong and responsible Lenny, who is becoming the head of the house could not have been better as played by Cameron Meyer in a conservative old lady dress, celebrating a birthday alone, with a candle and an oatmeal cookie. Meyer is excellent as the sister who tries to keep the family going, secretly harboring romantic desires, but suppressing them because of a medical condition that keeps her barren.

Director Elizabeth Welsh moves the action quickly, pacing the comic scenes with the more serious elements of the story. Never overplaying it, she wisely backs off the melodrama which could have easily taken over some of the more heart tugging moments.

Behind the issues of the sisters waiting for the grandfather to die, and struggling with their love lives, is the struggle of siblings who have to balance family love with family feuds and resolve years of antagonism and bitterness between them.

In the final analysis, when it seems that Babe is sure to go to jail, they all pull together in mutual support, realizing that regardless of the past, they still have each other to lean on.

Oh yes - there are two men in the play. Scott Tyler plays Doc, a former flame of Meg, who is now married with two children. Widely criticized for having married a Northern girl, Cousin Chick is appalled that his children are "half Yankee." No self respecting Southerner would even allow that to happen. However Doc isn't about to let a little detail like a wedding band get in the way of a one night fling with Meg, especially since she seems so willing. Tyler comes across more like Gomer Pyle than Casanova, so its hard to believe a looker like Meg would go for him . . . but this is the South , and

perhaps it's not easy to find men who aren't your blood kin - at least once removed.

Matt Braaten plays Babe's lawyer, and you know he's no kin to anyone, with his nervous twitches and stammering accent. For a brilliant lawyer, he sure doesn't have it together with women, but for some guys, walking and chewing gum just don't mix. Bratten makes lawyer Barnett Lloyd appear to have trouble doing both but lucky for him Babe seems to have a crush on him. She sure forgot about Willie Jay real fast.

We don't learn if Babe will be convicted of the shooting, or if Lenny will connect with a former date, or if any of the other setups that are presented will work or not. In that sense, this is a very direct play, that is a look at the present moment, a brief glimpse of the past, and a huge question mark about the future.

A little bit like daily life, only more fun.

#### CRIMES OF THE HEART

Directed by: Elizabeth Welsh

Lenny Magrath.....	Cameron Meyer
Chick Boyle.....	Emily Stiles
Doc Porter.....	Scott Tyler
Meg Magrath.....	Tessa Munro
Babe 'Magrath' Botrelle.....	Veronique Ory
Barnette Lloyd.....	Matt Braaten

Actor's Workout Studio

4732 Lankershim Blvd

North Hollywood, CA

[www.athenatheatre.com](http://www.athenatheatre.com)