

# A Doll's House at the Lovinger Theater

SHIRLENE WILLIAMS

Bronx Journal Staff Reporter

**T**he production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, performed at the Lovinger Theatre at Lehman College this past December 7, was a tremendous success.

The cast consisted of six people all of whom were fairly new to the acting scene, but did a superb job nonetheless. Dawn Clarke, who portrays the character of Nora Helmer, has a few plays under her belt, with *A Doll's House* being her sixth work. Felix Otero, who portrays Torvald Helmer, was last seen in plays such as *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Noel Mendez, who plays the character of Nils Krogstad, is making his twelfth appearance on the Lehman stage with this production. His credits include *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*. Elaina Washington, who portrays Anne-Marie the maid, Diane Reilly who plays the character of Kristine Linde, and Darryl Downes as Dr. Rank are all making their stage debut with this production. *A Doll's House* was directed by Betsy Shevey, and presented by the Theatre Program at Lehman College.

In 1871, eight years before he wrote *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen met a

Norwegian girl named Laura Petersen. He liked her and called her his "skylark". In 1872, she married a Danish schoolmaster, Victor Kieler, who soon after contracted tuberculosis. His doctors prescribed a warmer climate, but they were poor, and Victor became hysterical at the mention of money. Laura arranged a loan without her husband's knowledge, for which a friend stood security. They made the trip to Italy and Victor made a full recovery. Two years later, repayment of the loan was demanded. Laura did not have the money herself and she dared not tell her husband.

Worse still, the friend who had stood security had fallen on hard times. Laura attempted to pay off the loan by forging a check. The forgery was discovered, the bank refused payment and Laura was forced to tell the whole story to her husband.

Despite the fact that she had done it purely to save his life, Victor Kieler treated Laura like a criminal. He claimed that she was an unfit wife and mother, and when she suffered a nervous breakdown, he had her committed to a public asylum, and demanded a separation so that the children could be removed from her care. She was discharged after a month, and persuaded Victor to take her back for the children's sake, which he did grudgingly.

In September 1878, only a couple of months after hearing about Laura's committal to the asylum, Ibsen began work on *A Doll's House*, which is the story of Laura Petersen, but with a different ending. In his notes he wrote the following: "A woman cannot be herself in modern society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess female conduct from

a male point of view."

"I've read Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in class, but this is the first time I'm seeing it performed on stage. It was great," said Michael Otero, a junior at Lehman College. "It shows some of the struggles women went through to achieve independence."

The role of a woman in marriage throughout history has been the role of the submissive, attentive wife. Her role was basically to live for her husband and children. In this play, Ibsen examines the consequences of the stereotypical roles of women and men in marriage. He walks his readers through the path of a woman regaining her strength and self-respect. Some critics still write about *A Doll's House* as if it were only a play about the problem of women's rights. But its theme is the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person. Ibsen knew that true liberation could only come from within. "Everyone has a personality, and until we find out who or what we are, we can't really commit to any type of relationship," said Ivan Degen, a member of the production staff of *A Doll's House*.

In this play, Nora Helmer finally sees the truth of her husband Torvald's character and breaks free from his grasp. Unlike the true story, Nora leaves her husband, because she thought her husband would try to protect her, for after all, she saved his life. But instead, Torvald says to her, "no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves".

However, Nora comes to a much larger understanding of women's plights, for she answers "thousands of women have". In this little statement, she realizes that she is quite accomplished and worthy of a larger

award than what she has been given. Torvald finally notices that she has strength of character that far exceeds his own, and now the tables have turned. Instead of her relying on him, he is dependent on her. He can't imagine his life without her; Nora, on the other hand, has set herself free from her prison.

In the beginning of the play, Nora is first weak and childlike, which is the way her husband wants her to be. After her husband's true character is revealed, she gains the strength to stand up to him, and she ultimately breaks free from her cage and flies away..



FILE

## POSITIONS IN MULTILINGUAL JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

### Assistant/Associate Professor (Tenure-track) Multilingual Journalism and Mass Communication Department of Languages & Literatures

**Duties:** The Multilingual Journalism/Mass Communication Program is seeking a specialist to join the faculty in teaching all levels of Multilingual Journalism and Mass Communication. Emphasis on audio and TV production. Develop radio programs (production, cablecast and audio webcast) television, and film programs. Teach courses in communication as well as multilingual and multicultural media. As part of service to the college, the candidate must be willing to engage in recruitment and retention efforts, expand internships with the media, and write grant proposals.

**Qualifications:** MFA (Ph.D. preferred) in Broadcast Journalism or Mass Communication or equivalent. Five years experience in teaching and/or production of public affairs, community and civic broadcast journalism projects. Proficiency in a second language preferred. Rank will be determined by record of publications, scholarly activities and experience in writing successful research grant proposals.

Starting date: September 1, 2002

Salary:

Assistant Professor \$ 32,703 - 57,049

Associate Professor \$42,616 - 68,174

#### Submit resume to:

Professor Patricio Lorzundi, Program Director  
Multilingual Journalism and Mass Communication  
Lehman College, CUNY  
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West  
Bronx, New York 10468

Or fax resume to: Professor Patricio Lorzundi (718) 960-8218

Subject to financial ability

Lehman College/CUNY is an equal opportunity/affirmative action/Americans with Disability Act Employer

### Lecturer Multilingual Journalism and Mass Communication Department of Languages & Literatures

**Duties:** The Multilingual Journalism/Mass Communication Program is seeking a specialist to join the faculty in teaching all levels of Mass Communication. Emphasis on audio and TV production. Develop radio programs (production, cablecast and audio webcast) and television programs in coordination with senior faculty. As part of service to the college, the candidate must be willing to engage in recruitment and retention efforts.

**Qualifications:** B.A./B.S. in Mass Communication or equivalent. Five years experience in teaching and/or production of public affairs, community and civic broadcast journalism projects.

Starting date: September 1, 2002

Salary range: \$ 29,997 - 49,714

#### Submit resume to:

Professor Patricio Lorzundi, Program Director  
Multilingual Journalism and Mass Communication  
Lehman College, CUNY  
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West  
Bronx, New York 10468

Or fax resume to: Professor Patricio Lorzundi (718) 960-8218

Subject to financial ability

Lehman College/CUNY is an equal opportunity/affirmative action/Americans with Disability Act Employer