

In 1891, the premiere of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* caused an uproar—from curses and boos, to attempts to boycott and shut down the show.

In the 126 years since its first production, this play has been performed thousands of times in dozens of countries. In recent years it has been one of the most frequently produced plays at universities—but never eliciting the same raucous responses as those first stagings. Why do artists keep returning to this piece? What is it about Hedda that still captivates and fascinates us?

Many critics and producers call Hedda an “enigma,” citing her complex choices and conflicting emotions as the hook that draws them into exploring her story over and over. She is branded a man-eater, a vixen, a liar, and a mystery: a kind of monster. Our artistic team takes a different approach, asking if it is instead her humanity and relatability that urge us to dig deeper. Hedda appears to us not as an enigma. She is a real woman, familiar to us today because of the structures of patriarchy in which she is enmeshed.

While Ibsen may not have intended this as a feminist work, his text asks us to contend with feminist issues: gender equality, reproductive justice, sexual freedoms, capitalism, shaming, gaslighting, and even man-spreading. These are not new questions, and this is not a new story. In its time, this play served as a shocking mirror showing audiences what they were not ready to see. As her plight echoes across the century since the play's publication, Hedda has transformed from a dangerous spark into a recognizable figure.

In our production, Hedda's detachment is reimagined as a collective experience of womanhood, creating an opportunity for solidarity and community in a role that is traditionally isolating and tragic. As an ensemble, the women take turns embodying Hedda, forcing us to acknowledge the ways her experiences are each of ours. They ask us to consider how much things have—or have not—changed.

We offer to you then these new questions. What are the implications of continuing to produce a canonical text? If we keep repeating the same oppressions, how can we break the cycle? Are these structures as solid as we imagine, or can they burn?

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