



Press Release

For Photos, interviews, videos, press tickets, etc. contact:

Kimberly Wadycki, Managing Director

650.493.2006 x 5, or kim@dragonproductions.net (preferred)

The Regional Premiere of *Airswimming* Takes Flight in Downtown Redwood City This August

This poignant drama by Charlotte Jones (*Humble Boy*, Dragon 2007) takes place in England in the 1920s. It is the somewhat true story of two women who were locked up in a hospital for the “criminally insane” because they had children out of wedlock. Forgotten by their families, they stayed imprisoned for more than forty years. To pass the time, Dora and Persephone create alter-egos, Dorph and Porph, and act out fantastical stories under the watchful eye of St. Dymphna, patron saint of the mentally ill. A tribute to both Doris Day and the forgotten women of this generation in Ireland and England, *Airswimming* is ultimately a tribute to the resilience of the female spirit.

Airswimming is a part of Dragon Productions Theatre Company’s 2017 Main Stage Series. For the first time ever, Dragon’s season has two thematic series. Part of the series entitled “Women Take Center Stage,” *Airswimming* came on to Executive Artistic Director Meredith Hagedorn’s radar in 2007. Ms. Hagedorn says that “[Playwright Charlotte Jones] was best known for her play *Humble Boy* which she wrote in 2002 and was on Dragon’s list to produce as soon as we would be able to move into our own home in Palo Alto and could really do it justice. Dragon produced *Humble Boy* in 2007 and it was so special that I had to read everything I could about Charlotte. I was completely in love with the story of *Airswimming*. Charlotte calls it a “comedy about despair... inspired by the various true stories of women who were placed in mental institutions in the 1920s because they had given birth to illegitimate children, or for other spurious reasons such as they were deaf, lesbian or merely ‘atypical’.” I saw Annamarie McLeod and Katie Anderson perform in *And Baby Makes Seven* by Paula Vogel where they got to utilize their extensive imaginations in creating a magical friendship and family together. The chemistry of these two actresses together, I thought, would be perfect for *Airswimming*. I asked them to read the script and they were both as taken with the story as I was. Unfortunately, Charlotte restricted productions of this play in the U.S. for many years. I kept trying and was finally granted permission. I was so lucky when both actresses we’re excited to at long last come together to tell this painful and heart-warming story about loss and the strength of friendship.”

Airswimming was the first play script that Charlotte Jones wrote and its inaugural production was at the Battersea Arts Center in London in 1997. In the 2004 author notes at the beginning of the script with Ms. Jones says, “I always start with an image. With *Airswimming* I saw a woman trying to trepan herself with a hand whisk. I happened to read a book about the injustices committed against the mentally ill: “A Miss Kitson and a Miss Baker were placed in a Hospital for the Criminally Insane in the 1920s for bearing illegitimate children and not released

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until the 1970s.” That was the line that started me writing. There was something terribly moving to me in hearing their names – genteel English names, the names of posh girls who should be coming out into society, not being incarcerated for being out of wedlock. Those names with the dismissive and distancing ‘a’ before them – ‘a Miss Kitson and a Miss Baker’ reading those names was the trigger to wanting to write their story. A story about bad girls trying to be good – a world where it seemed inevitable to me that Doris Day should become the patron saint of all that is wholesome and perfect and feminine.” Ms. Jones goes on to say that when writing she starts with the title and then writes the story. About the title of *Airswimming* she says “[i]t expressed perfectly to me the emancipation that the two women find in each other in a world where they are denied the simple act of coming up for air – and yet still they swim!”

The story is true in that women were routinely incarcerated in what were called Magdalene laundries (or Magdalene asylums) in the 1700, 1800s, and 1900s. Name for the Biblical character Mary Magdalene, the laundries were institutions for “fallen women” – women who were prostitutes, or more often than not, unwed mothers who bore children out of wedlock. The laundries were run as penitentiary work-houses where the women did laundry and other hard manual labor jobs, and the conditions were generally appalling. The first known Magdalene laundry was founded in Whitechapel, England, in 1758. Laundries/asylums were also operated in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Scotland, and the United State.

In 1993 a mass grave was discovered on the grounds of a former Dublin convent, which led to a number of media investigations and resulted in a public call to the United Nations’ Committee on the Rights of the Child to conduct a full scale investigation and government inquiry. The state of Ireland issued a formal apology in 2013 and more than 60 million euros were set aside to compensate the living survivors of the Irish laundries. It’s still a contentious issue as the religious institutions that ran the Irish asylum have yet to pay into the compensation pool despite pressure from the Irish government and the UN Committee Against Torture. The last Magdalene laundry was closed in 1996.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: Charlotte Jones is a British playwright who was born June 2, 1968. Her first play [*Airswimming*](#) debuted in 1997 at the Battersea Arts Centre in London. She won the Critics’ Circle Most Promising Playwright award in 1999 for *In Flame and Martha, Josie and the Chinese Elvis*. Her fourth stage play *Humble Boy* premiered at the National Theatre in 2001, and was awarded the Critics’ Circle Best New Play Award, the People’s Choice Best New Play Award and was nominated for an Olivier award. It transferred to the West End and ran for nine months before opening at the Manhattan Theatre club in New York and being nominated for a Drama desk award. *Humble Boy* also garnered Ms. Jones the 2001 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize established in 1978, is for English-language women playwrights. In 2004 her play *The Dark* premiered at the Donmar Warehouse in London. Ms. Jones also wrote the book to the 2004-2006 West End musical, *The Woman in White*, in collaboration with David Zippel and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Ms. Jones also writes extensively for TV, radio and film.

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Featuring the talents of: Katie Anderson (Persephone/Porph) and Annamarie MacLeod (Dora/Dorph)

Designers & Production Team: Katherine Forrest (Stage Manager), R. Dutch Fritz (Scenic Design), Meredith Hagedorn (Director), Lance Huntley (Sound Design), Brooke Jennings (Costume Design), Patrick Mahoney (Lighting Design), Charles McKeithan (Technical Director), Richard Newton (Dialect Coach), Erika Overstreet (Properties Design), Erika Zinsmeister (Dramaturg), Maggie Ziomek (Graphic Design).

WHEN: August 4 – August 27, 2017

Thursdays – Saturdays, 8pm, Sundays, 2pm. Doors open 30 minutes before the show.
Pay what you will preview on Thurs., August 3rd at 8p
Opening night performance with post-show reception on Fri., August 4th at 8p
Post-show discussion with the cast and director Sun., August 13th

The show has a run time of approximately 95 minutes and will be performed **without an intermission.**

WHERE: The Dragon Theatre in downtown Redwood City
2120 Broadway Street at the intersection of Broadway and Theatre Way

HOW MUCH:

\$35 for general admission seats; \$27 for student/senior tickets.
\$15 rush tickets on Thursdays and Fridays starting 2nd week. Limited availability and cash only at the door.
Pay what you will preview on Thursday June 22nd – no reservation necessary, just walk up and pay cash at the door. Doors open at 7:30p; show starts at 8p.
\$175 for the VIP box (seats 4 people and includes champagne and chocolates.)

CONTACTING THE BOX OFFICE: Leave a voicemail at 650-493-2006 x 2 and your call will be returned within 2 business days. If you'd rather email, contact Josiah at tickets@dragonproductions.net. The Dragon Box Office is not staffed 7 days a week so there might be a delay in response. Buying tickets online at <http://www.dragonproductions.net> is the very best way to reserve a ticket in advance, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

TIX & MORE INFO: <http://dragonproductions.net/>

PRESS PHOTOS: Available online at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jkasyan/albums/72157683767567893>

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