



Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

Theater: Playwright Lucas Hnath On The Year's Surprise Hit Comedy

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The good news keeps coming for the goofily titled *A Doll's House, Part 2*, a witty and unexpected sequel to Henrik Ibsen's sobering classic. First, the Broadway debut of playwright Lucas Hnath enjoyed some of the best reviews of the year. That's no small feat since other shows opening include the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Sweat, Indecent* by Paula Vogel (a Pulitzer Prize-winner herself) and Lincoln Center's justly acclaimed transfer of *Oslo*. Second, *A Doll's House, Part 2* garnered eight Tony nominations, more than any other play this year. Third, it made history by getting a Best Play nod — this is the first time all the nominees are American playwrights making their Broadway debut. (Indeed, it seems to be the *only* time all nominees for Best Play were making their Broadway debut, whatever country they hail from.)

Most importantly, *A Doll's House, Part 2* is becoming an honest-to-goodness word-of-mouth hit. Sure, it's got the star power of Emmy winner Laurie Metcalf, film star Chris Cooper, recent Tony winner Jayne Houdyshell and the rising talent Condola Rashad. And sure, people have *heard* of *A Doll's House*, the landmark Norwegian drama that showed Nora turning her back on the institution of marriage by slamming the door on hearth and home at its infamous finale. But just because they've heard of it doesn't mean they've actually seen it. And would they want to see a sequel about what happens when Nora returns 15 years later?



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Laurie Metcalf, Jayne Houdyshell, Condola Rashad, and Chris Cooper star in Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House, Part 2*.

Not to worry — you don't need to know a thing about the original to savor the biting and bitingly funny recriminations and justifications and rationalizations that arise in the wake of a marriage disintegrating. And audiences are getting the word. The musical *Come from Away* came out of nowhere to build and build every week until it joined the million dollar club of hit musicals. Now Hnath's 90 minute boxing match of a comedy is doing the same: audiences and grosses are rising almost performance by performance since it began previews in April. They didn't even miss a beat at the box office when staging a raucous midnight show to benefit the Actor's Fund.

That was a masterstroke of goodwill by producer Scott Rudin (who at least approved of it, if he didn't originate the idea himself). And his gamble in bringing this unlikely show straight to Broadway is paying off: *Oslo* and *A Doll's House, Part 2* are in a dead heat for Best Play. But no matter what happens on Tony night (and Metcalf at the very least deserves Best Actress for her ferocious and funny command of the stage), it marks Hnath as a talent who has fully arrived.

Lucas Hnath has been on the radar of anyone paying attention for years now. He burst onto the scene at the Humana Festival in 2012, where then New York Times critic Charles Isherwood championed him. Since then Hnath (pronounced NAY-th) has enjoyed a seemingly classic career path from festivals to regional productions to Off Off Broadway and up. He created a stir in New York when his terrific play *Isaac's Eye* opened at the tiny Ensemble Studio Theatre in 2013. That same year, New York saw *A Public Reading Of An*

Unproduced Screenplay About The Death Of Walt Disney with some bigger talent attached.

Then in 2015, his drama *The Christians* opened Off Broadway. That was followed in 2016 by the even more ambitious staging of *Red Speedo*, the story of an Olympic swimmer accused of taking performance enhancing drugs, a play that included a swimming pool in its set design. Every step of the way, Hnath's work has been praised, analyzed and compared to the likes of Michael Frayn and Tom Stoppard, two other playwrights who can turn unlikely subject matter into popular entertainment. And now he's on Broadway, becoming a (hard to pronounce) household name.

In this exclusive interview, Hnath talks about his childhood in Florida and how living in a geodesic dome influenced his writing. He discusses the ten years he spent writing plays when no one cared, working in isolation late into the night after a day job working for a legal aid non-profit. Hnath labored over show after show, even though he couldn't get anyone to read them, much less perform them. Then when that first break came and producers asked, "What else have you got?" the answer was a stack of plays, much like Martin McDonagh burst onto the theatrical scene in the 1990s with a seemingly endless supply of good to great dramas. Now, instead of the pressure of having to believe you're a playwright when no one mounts your plays, Hnath faces the happy pressures of media attention and the bigger stage of Broadway. What else has he got? We're about to find out.

You can see the 28 min. interview at the bottom of this story. If you're already a fan, you might prefer the longer, 46 min version. And if you're already a genuine Hnathian fanatic, check out the complete, unedited 83 min interview including hems and haws and awkward pauses (mostly on my part). First I've included some highlights.

LUCAS HNATH ON WHY "A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2" IS HIS "BREAK-UP" PLAY

LUCAS HNATH ON GROWING UP IN A GEODESIC DOME...AND HOW THAT INFLUENCES HIS PLAYS

LUCAS HNATH ON THE BOOK THAT INFLUENCED HIM THE MOST

LUCAS HNATH ON BEING BAD AT TAKING STANDARDIZED TESTS

LUCAS HNATH ON VIDEO GAMES AND VIRTUAL REALITY

LUCAN HNATH ON WHAT IS A DRAMATURG

LUCAS HNATH: THE INTERVIEW

Here's about 30 minutes of my interview with playwright Lucas Hnath.

Theater Of 2017

The Fever (The Public's UTR Festival) **

Lula del Ray (The Public's UTR Festival) **

La Mélancolie des Dragons (The Public's UTR Festival at the Kitchen) **

Top Secret International (State 1) (The Public's UTR Festival at Brooklyn Museum) **

The Present **

The Liar *** 1/2

Jitney *** 1/2

The Tempest (Harriet Walter at St. Ann's) *** 1/2

Significant Other * 1/2

The Skin Of Our Teeth ***

Natasha, Pierre And The Great Comet Of 1812 (w Groban) ** (third visit, but *** if you haven't seen it)

Everybody (at Signature) ** 1/2

Idomeneo (at Met w Levine conducting) *** 1/2

Sunday In The Park With George (w Jake Gyllenhaal) ****

The Light Years * 1/12

The Glass Menagerie (w Sally Field, Joe Mantello) *** 1/2

946: The Amazing Story Of Adolphus Tips **

The Price (w Mark Ruffalo) *

Come From Away *

Miss Saigon **

Picnic/Come Back Little Sheba * 1/2

Broadway By The Year: The 1940s **

Vanity Fair (at Pearl) ***

Latin History For Morons * 1/2

On The Grounds Of Belonging (workshop production w Bobby Steggert)

Wakey Wakey ***

Present Laughter (w Kevin Kline) ***

CasablancaBox ** 1/2

Amélie * 1/2

The Play That Goes Wrong **

War Paint **

In and Of Itself ***

Indecent ** 1/2

The Hairy Animal (covered briefly in “Mourning Becomes Electra” review) ***

The Antipodes **

Anastasia **

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory **

Oslo *** 1/2

The Little Foxes **

Groundhog Day ** 1/2

Babes In Toyland (Kelli O'Hara at Carnegie Hall) ** 1/2

Mourning Becomes Electra **

A Doll's House, Part 2 *** 1/2

Bandstand ** 1/2

Pacific Overtures (at CSC) ***

Six Degrees Of Separation (w Allison Janney) **

Twelfth Night (Public Theater Mobile Unit) ** 1/2

Rooms **

Arlington ***

All The President's Men (Public Theater one-night event at Town Hall) ** 1/2

Happy Days (w Dianne Wiest) *** 1/2

Derren Brown: Secret *** 1/2

The Whirligig * 1/2

Sojourners and Her Portmanteau **

Broadway By The Year 1997-2006 ***

The Boy Who Danced On Air ** 1/2

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.