

# A Smart, Sharp Take On George Bernard Shaw's Controversial 'Mrs. Warren's Profession'



*Ramon de Ocampo and Rebecca Mozo in the Antaeus Company production of "Mrs. Warren's Profession." Photo - Geoffrey Wade*

The thing about George Bernard Shaw's plays, what makes them still compelling a century on, is that they weren't intended to make his audiences comfortable. Either he'd find a way to offend or confuse you right away, or even better, he'd allow you to feel superior to all those people who were so easily offended. Then, right when you were smugly enjoying yourself, he'd turn back around and agree with the other side.

His plays are fierce in their intelligence and demand a flexibility of mind as Shaw passionately scrutinizes all sides of an issue. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is an excellent example of this, a play so controversial it wasn't produced for a decade, and was described as "unfit for women's ears" and likely to lead men to "insanity and suicide." Isn't that a play you want to see? The current production by The Antaeus Company is bracing and superb, and the issues it raises still sting.

In 1893 England, Vivie Warren (Rebecca Mozo) has been raised mainly in high-end boarding schools, rarely receiving visits from her mother Kitty (Anne Gee Byrd). She's been brought up to be a proper lady, and does have affection for her lover Frank (Ramón de Ocampo), but what she really wants is to work and make lots of money. When Kitty arrives for her latest visit, the aesthete Mr. Praed (Bill Brochtrup) and brutish businessman Crofts (Tony Amendola) in tow, the two women discover that although their points-of-view are quite different, their inner personalities are very similar.

Mozo excels as the self-possessed Vivie, a young woman who knows what she wants but now has to deal with all the others who think they know better. She's excellent at revealing Vivie's inner turmoil beneath a supposedly impervious shell, particularly in the final heartbreaking scene. Byrd nails both the sympathetic and self-serving aspects of Kitty. She demonstrates again what a terrific actress she is in her confrontations with Vivie, where what could be didactic Shaw becomes powerful and alive.

De Ocampo offers a canny and humorous portrayal as Frank, a character who initially seems straightforward in his goals but is ultimately complex and surprising. Brochtrup offers fine and subtle work as Praed, a sensitive amongst the casually blunt, who is finally as tough and smart as any of them. What's notable about his performance is how much he conveys by not speaking, in having Praed considering how to react and how much to divulge, a delicacy of attack that's quietly impressive. Amendola shines in his scene where he justifies his lifestyle and worldview, and John-David Keller is splendidly comic as the hapless Reverend Gardner. (Antaeus, as always, double-casts its shows--this review only refers to the "Georges" cast.)

Robin Larsen's direction focuses on clarity, both of emotion and especially of Shaw's words, and manages to take his thorny thicket of verbiage and makes it seem like naturalistic drama for smart people. Shaw's ideas are still essentially controversial, from Kitty implying that marriage is long-term prostitution as a legal business arrangement to the empathy for characters many would consider contemptible, but this keeps the play intriguing. A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's costumes are a standout, from Kitty's gaudy dark scarlet dress to the detailed accessorizing of cravats, scarves and pins that brings the era to life.

*"Mrs. Warren's Profession" runs through April 21 at The Antaeus Company. Tickets are available [online](#).*

By [Terry Morgan](#) in [Arts & Entertainment](#) on March 22, 2013 4:00 PM