

Neapolitan

ARTS | CLASSIFIED

■ **Sing, sing, sing** There will be lots of vocal music in our future. **7D**

Thursday, January 23, 2014

PEACE PLANS



The Imagine Peace Tower is an outdoor work of art conceived by Yoko Ono in memory of John Lennon. It is on Viðey Island in Reykjavík, Iceland.

■ **Yoko Ono**
interactive art evokes Rauschenberg legacy with its peace projects

By **Harriet Howard Heithaus**
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There's a show of Yoko Ono's art — the avante garde interactive works that first made her famous in the 1970s — opening Friday at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery in Fort Myers. It's full of interactive opportunities and evocative pieces, and that's exciting enough.

But then, the gallery has new curator Jade Dellinger, who can barely contain himself over the potential for this space on the campus of Edison State College, and that's exciting, too.

In fact, it's hard to know which to get more excited about. But Dellinger, who organized the Yoko Ono exhibition as his first in his new position, is glad to create excitement for both.

Sitting in his office, where a dreamy Brian Eno CD induces a misleading aura of tranquillity, Dellinger hauls out flashlights, rubber stamps and a "catalog" for the show that actually is a box of its symbolic treasures. Visitors will be able to stamp "Imagine peace" on any spot on a series of maps that picture both global and local spots and flash "I love you" to one and all in the gallery.

"I felt Yoko's message of peace was in a way extending Rauschenberg's legacy. It was really connected with the kind of

See **PEACE**, 4D

IF YOU GO
YOKO ONO'S 'IMAGINE PEACE'

When: Friday-March 29, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Mondays-Fridays; 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays; closed Sundays and holidays

Where: Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, Edison State College, 8099 College Parkway SW, Fort Myers

Information: 239-489-9313; www.rauschenberggallery.com

Something else: Lecture by co-curator Kevin Concannon at 6 p.m. Friday, Rush Auditorium, J-Building at Edison State; reception, 7-9 p.m. Friday, Bob Rauschenberg Gallery

GET OUT

AND PLAN YOUR DAY

TODAY: Learn how to make French tagines from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Chez Boët, 755 12th Ave. S., Naples. The cost is \$55 and includes lunch, a glass of wine or a soft drink and a take-home recipe packet and spice sample. Call 239-595-7002 to make your reservation.



FRIDAY: Hear the Music Makers Show Band at 7 p.m. at Cambier Park, 755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples.

'Porgy & Bess' offers powerful musicianship, but cold staging

"Porgy & Bess" pulled into town this week. Catfish Row's heartbreaking love story and the immortal music of George and Ira Gershwin have docked at Artis—Naples.

Find pure, raw emotion, brilliant performances, gorgeous design and a 23-piece orchestra guaranteed to knock your socks off.

Slightly re-imagined from its 1935 roots, this "The Gershwins' Porgy & Bess" comes fresh off "Broadway," by way of South Carolina's Low Country.

Director Diane Paulus, who won a Tony Award for revival of "Pippin," combines Gullah-inspired dance and movement with soaring vocals. Alicia Hall Moran makes for the most



Alicia Hall Moran as Bess and Nathaniel Stampley as Porgy in the "The Gershwins' Porgy & Bess."

fragile, feral, determined Bess imaginable. Never back her into a corner. Her broken baby bird will melt your heart on stage — es-

pecially the moment Bess succumbs to her weakness.

Watch so many dreams smashed with such final-

ity, all without a single word. Listen as Nathaniel Stampley's powerful Porgy purrs the night's best song, "Bess, You Is



CHRIS SILK

REVIEW

IF YOU GO
'THE GERSHWINS' PORGY & BESS'

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; 7 p.m. Sunday

Where: Artis—Naples, 5833 Pelican Bay Boulevard, North Naples

Cost: \$75-\$110
Information: 800-597-1900 or artisnaples.org

On the Web: More theater news at The Stage Door blog

My Woman Now." Look too for Kingsley Leggs as swaggering

See **'PORGY'**, 4D

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Gulfshore Playhouse plays politics vs. religion in 'God Game'

How does an agnostic Republican even get elected? He doesn't. At least not in America. It's all one great big political fake-out in "The God Game," Gulfshore Playhouse's first world premiere. A brilliant senator is offered the vice-presidency, with one condition. "You need to sound more Christian."

How does it all end? Will it work? Can an agnostic really run for office on a national ticket? Who knows? Can't we all just get along? The audience is left wondering what would happen if Paul Ryan's fictional counterpart asked a crowd "How would you all like to be Episcopalians?"

Come for the questions — which playwright Suzanne Bradbeer never answers — then stay for her frustrating, fascinating lecture. Your essay test: If the United States was founded on (among others) Christian principles, but our founders explicitly excluded religion from government, then where, when, why and how does our nation teeter between the two?

"The God Game" launches its campaign with a professional cast and director Kristen Coury's interpretation of the show as pure political combat. It reads as an entertaining, sizzling, super-sized episode of a certain popular television show. You know, that one about a perfectly perfect Demo-



CHRIS SILK
REVIEW

cratic administration starring Martin Sheen? Coury also will direct a second production at Albany's Capital Repertory Theatre in April. The right — almost all of it, take your pick — gets dismembered in a searing 90-minute screed on the encroaching influence of a too-literal interpretation of religion in governance. Lefties get their smacks too; don't worry. The polls? An opening-night audience in a solidly conservative area leapt to their feet, wild with applause.

Three characters land amid one of politics' last inscrutable mysteries: the VP selection process. The setup, minus a slight opening scene, seems promising. Junior senator (Tom) and his wife (Lisa) retreat to Richmond for an anniversary.

Suddenly, a knock at the door. An old friend (Matt) offers an opportunity to renew partnership, party and politics.

Aaron Sorkin would be so proud. Bradbeer's best moments hold the audience rapt as she thrashes out difficult choices and the shades-of-gray options politicians face, complete with signature rat-a-tat dialogue. Note the subtle scales of justice in the set's

background, a reminder of balance and our three interlocking but functionally independent branches of government.

Jeffrey Binder dazzles as political operative Matt. His story navigates the dangerous currents between morals, party loyalty and personal principle. As Binder's sad Matt finally confronts his own humanity, he sees the ultimate emptiness of (a future in) politics and exits the stage. The powerful scene echoes with emotion and delicate meaning. Binder vibrates with intensity and falls into an easy camaraderie with Laurence Lau's lithe Tom and Yvonne Perry's Lisa.

Lau becomes the perfect candidate, channeling diffidence and a distant blond ambition almost entirely removed from the debate, like any professional politician. He's a man about whom we know almost nothing. Again, the play hints at the cool Obama and a condemnation of the modern political blood sport, where every previous position, word and deed, no matter how long ago, is torn apart. Bradbeer offers Lau a deliciously literate series of soaring (campaign) speeches. He quotes Jefferson and takes sidelong shots at too-literal interpretations of the Bible.

She also zeros in on the intriguing question of compromising personal beliefs for power. Like un-sticking the gears of government, it comes down to reframing debate in terms

IF YOU GO 'THE GOD GAME'

What: Agnostic Republican senator offered vice-presidential slot if he "sounds more Christian"

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday through Feb. 9. 3 p.m. matinees on Jan. 25, 26; Feb. 1, 2, 8 and 9

Where: Norris Community Center, 755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples

Cost: (\$33 & \$39, matinee) (\$45 & \$49, evening) \$15 for students

Information: 866-811-4111 or gulfshoreplayhouse.org

Post-show talkbacks:

Talk to playwright Suzanne Bradbeer about God, gays and the GOP after the 8 p.m. Thursday and 3 p.m. Sunday performances

acceptable to both "sides." "The God Game," in its best, most honest example of modern backroom deal-making and say-anything speak, floats a proposal to ask evangelicals to view climate change and energy dependence as being "stewards of earth."

Coury stages a magnificent roiling tempest fought between husband, wife and friend. This dramatic triangle collapses, reforms and refolds as characters argue, battle, retreat and charge forward again and again and again. Ask yourself, is Ken Goldstein's deliberately obvious set a metaphor for the feuding Clinton White House, Rome's battered, blood-soaked Coliseum or Reagan's "shining city on a hill?"

Coury mines hope, aspiration and patriotism from

Bradbeer's still-in-progress script. Tom is a thinly shaded cipher for Barack Obama, and in a lesser sense, 2004 Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry. Both saw issues unrelated to their ability to govern (birth certificates, Swift Boats) threaten (or destroy, in Kerry's case) their presidential campaigns. The play's most delicate, subtle such message is telegraphed via the tiniest of costume elements — a single, almost unnoticeable American flag.

In true political fashion, "The God Game" squirms right down to the end, with Tom offering a particularly slippery statement on his faith. Coury stages this as a greasy cop-out worthy of every lying politician; think Nixon's "I am not a crook" moment.

The ending feels cheap; that may be the point, as audiences wonder whether or not Tom sold out, sacrificing his marriage for power.

"The God Game" founders only on the bully pulpit of the devout Lisa character, someone who flips whichever way the argument requires and spouts whatever outrageous talking point the script asks. Perry (near miraculously) finds some grace and humanity in a role bluntly described (and costumed) as "black-and-white."

Consider the contradictions: A hardcore evangelical. Passionate about her job at an inner-city women's shelter. Best friends with a gay man

(her husband's brother) for decades. Married to an ambitious, moderate Republican politician. He's offered the second-most powerful job in the world. Suddenly, if he says one word about her faith, she leaves and takes the kid with her? Nothing adds up.

Both playwright and director either deliberately sidestep or miss the real debate, that of faith versus religion — and whether either deserve a place in politics. If so, how do you begin that discussion?

The play treats Lisa's laundry list of beliefs (which run the gamut from tolerant mainstream to born-again) as nothing more than a plot device. Sample dialogue: "Do not ever, ever refer to the Lord's resurrection as hoc-pocus."

I wish the play could find a way to integrate an honest discussion of religion and politics. Faith (of whatever stripe) is very real for millions upon millions of Americans; it is a source of light in the darkness and a normal, everyday part of their lives.

Faith is not, however, equal to religion; that point too often is lost — in the play, politics and life itself.

"The God Game" succeeds brilliantly in sheer "politics as entertainment" but never offers a solution to the gridlock, only another "Crossfire"-style shouting match.

"To everything there is a season." Email me, csilk@naplesnews.com.

'PORGY' from ID

gambler Sporting Life and Alvin Crawford's fierce, vicious Crown. Danielle Lee Greaves rules the neighborhood with wisdom and subtlety as matriarch Mariah. Look for the touches she brings, like the clenched, "bloodied" hands after a murder and cover-up.

Director Diane Paulus moves "Porgy" away from its roots — just not far enough. Her cast creates a fully formed story of a crippled beggar and a woman of loose morals living on Catfish Row out of little more than a bare, raked stage and evocative lighting.

The staging, especially with subtle, unshowy costumes from Season 7 "Project Runway" finalist Emilio Sosa, highlights themes of community and belonging.

Pulsing rhythm and energy from the Low Country re-imagining feel at odds with the precise, operatic vocal style in some scenes. Others, like "Leaving For the Promised Land" and "It Ain't Necessarily So" capture the tone perfectly.

The show distills its central love story in beautiful fashion. Yet "Porgy," for all its renewed energy, plays out like an opera staged in a cavernous church sung by a gospel choir. The staging is cold and distant, even though the story is about finding warmth in the most unexpected places.

When it works (the funeral, Kittawah Island), it is amazing. When it doesn't, you're at a Russian opera — with "Summertime" floating by almost unrecognized.

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PEACE from ID

philosophical interests Rauschenberg espoused," Dellinger explained.

Rauschenberg, he pointed out, traveled to countries around the world creating art projects with children as a goodwill ambassador for the U.S. The "Imagine Peace" exhibition speaks to that shared hope.

Any exhibition that comes, he added, must pass the litmus test of whether it can return somehow to the legendary artist whose name is on its walls. That connection may be by mentorship from Rauschenberg, whose last home was on Sanibel Island; by association with his collage printing techniques or his philosophical direction. Ono, whose formative years trail Rauschenberg's slightly, shares any number of connections.

But the peace link both intrigued Dellinger, and offered a quick opportunity. He was walking into a gallery that had no future shows planned. His successor, Ron Bishop, "had consciously left the schedule wide open for me so the next person after him wouldn't be obligated to his vision for a year."

With a mandate to raise the gallery's visibility and his own rudder of WWBRD — What would Bob Rauschenberg do? — Dellinger called on Ron Noga and Kevin Colcannon, curators of the "Imagine Peace" exhibition, who were just bringing it home from an international tour.

To his delight, not only did the curators agree to bring it here, Ono herself re-configured several of the pieces to

work specifically in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. She evened donated a billboard work, currently alongside U.S. 41 in south Fort Myers, exhorting people to "imagine" peace.

"The billboard doesn't say 'Rauschenberg gallery'; it doesn't say anything about the show. It's new, and it was created for us for Fort Myers for the show. It's a message for the new year," Dellinger said.

Ono also donated a sizable number of small flashlights, to be distributed in the catalog and to all visitors as long as they're available at the opening Friday. The commemorative pieces will enable visitors to blink out "I love you" in code, a sentiment Ono hopes will be shared among strangers as well as friends.

There are a wealth of other interactive elements to this exhibition:

- A solid white chess board.
- "It's a large one, the size of one of those lawn chess games," Dellinger noted. "Once you've moved two times you forget what square you were on... Eventually players come to the realization in the end — does it really matter what side you're on?"

- The ink pad, stamps and set of maps. The latter are ready to be imprinted with "Imagine Peace," by every visitor in the spot he or she wants it. One can only imagine how thing the impressions will be on Sochi, Russia, by February.

The maps include, significantly, one depicting every neighborhood in Fort Myers.

- A set of globes created in a white synthetic material, to be broken at the opening. Visitors will be invited to

mend them.

This segment in particular is said to recreate a piece that was first made for the gallery at which Ono met Beatle John Lennon, her future husband.

- A "wish tree," similar to those in Japanese temples, to which people can affix their own written wishes. At the end of the exhibition, a delegation of students from Edison will take the assembled wishes to be added to the Imagine Peace Tower in Iceland.

For those not familiar with it, the tower is a white monument, occasionally lighted from its "wishing well" center to send a strong beam about 13,120 feet into the sky. It bears the words "Imagine Peace" in 24 languages. Buried in the base of the tower will be the wishes gathered from these trees — as they have been from trees at each of the other locations the exhibition has toured.

Ono isn't expected to attend the opening, but Dellinger says some members of the Rauschenberg Foundation have expressed interest in being there.

That will be a treat for Dellinger, who has embedded plans to keep Rauschenberg's legacy in the gallery. (Even the walls are painted in tones the late artist used, a gray and a white blend so specific it has the name Bob White.)

Still, the major treat may be having Yoko Ono art.

"For me, Yoko is just one of those people who are seminal figures, in terms of popular art. She was creating art long before she met John Lennon.

"Falling in love with John probably did as much, or more, damage to her career as it did to his," he observed.

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