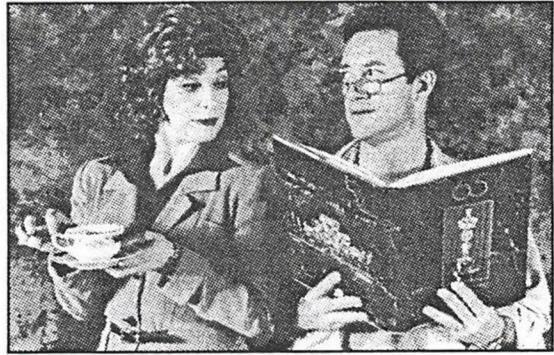


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By Carl Sturmer

Greer to the rescue

The ghost of Greer Garson (Patricia Randell) literally haunts the lives of playwright Aaron (Patrick Welsh) and his boyfriend Jimmy (Jay Alvarez) in the play *Random Harvest*, now playing at the Homegrown Theatre, 2628 Broadway, on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays until July 28. In her titian-haired beneficence, Garson's spirit arrives to help Aaron deal with the terror of imminent success and, incidentally, solve the mystery of whatever became of her Oscar-nominated co-star, Susan Peters (Kate Downing), in the sentimental MGM classic *Random Harvest*.

Richard Willett's funny, touching play is a total joy: skillfully written, insightfully directed (by Eliza Beckwith), beautifully acted and wonderfully informed with a deep-grained love of movies and theatre.

In the '40s, Garson was the biggest female star, an ultra-refined, British epitome of maternal womanliness, and Willett iconographically uses her as a radiant *deus ex machina*. As impeccably portrayed by the gifted Randell, she presides over the play like a fairy godmother. Randell is a highfalutin' comic joy when mention is made of Garson's legendary, endless Oscar acceptance speech: "It was late, everyone was tired, people exaggerate!"

Welsh is terrifically impassioned as insecure Aaron, who shudders at the prospect of schmoozing the right people for his career. Alvarez proves a divertingly campy foil, yet he rises wonderfully to the challenge of a revelatory final dramatic speech. Ann Talman has a deep humanity, skillfully underplaying the part of a distraught mother, in a highly pertinent subplot. Jonathan Kandel has a sleek matinee idol charm as real-life actor/director, Richard Quine, and as his erstwhile wife, Peters, Downing is a real discovery. On the tiny Homegrown Theatre stage, she maneuvers both her performance and an unwieldy wheelchair with unimaginable grace and stirs the audience with the line, "Luck is the most frightening thing in the world." Tickets are \$15, call (212) 229-7500.

—DAVID NOH