

Fall Preview

Top Girl

Elizabeth Marvel on rats in the theater (human and otherwise).

By [Boris Kachka](#) Published Aug 24, 2008[Add a Comment](#)

(Photo: Walter McBride/Retna)

Is Elizabeth Marvel going mainstream? The 38-year-old actress is known for plays like a blood-drenched *Hedda Gabler* and the Manhattan Theater Club's revival last spring of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*—a show that some audiences cheered and others walked out on. But recently, Marvel has taken on movie roles—including the Coens' *Burn After Reading*, as George Clooney's wife—and she stars this fall opposite Norbert Leo Butz in *Fifty Words*, Michael Weller's simple two-person play about a yuppie Brooklyn couple on the rocks.

This play seems pretty tame by your usual standards. How did you end up doing it?

We did a reading of it three years ago with Phil Hoffman—then he won an Oscar and became quite unavailable. When I first read it I thought, *Oh, okay, sure, I can do this situational drama*. But then I realized that with the right actors, this has the potential of being like a very condensed *Scenes From a Marriage*.

But people probably won't walk out. Did the polarized reaction to *Top Girls* bother you?

It was a very bizarre fit for an MTC audience. They're used to things like *Rabbit Hole*, and Caryl Churchill is not *Rabbit Hole*. But it does not make me uncomfortable at all. I like it if you love it, I respect it if you hate it.

Are you worried that movie stars are taking away your opportunities for Broadway roles?

Oh, absolutely. And it's incredibly frustrating, the amount of British actors that perform on Broadway. This isn't my personal pet peeve, but I've always wanted to do *Mary Stuart*, and they're bringing it over from London, and I feel like, well, how am I going to get any better if I don't get a shot? I'm an American actor! I gotta act!

Would you go back to Shakespeare in the Park?

Not so much. I'm so glad I did it, but I'm in my late thirties now. Sweating it out, teching in 98-degree heat on a stage with rats running around—I'm too old for that now.

Rats?

There are lots of rats. It's a dirty little secret at the Delacorte Theatre.

But you would like to be on Broadway more, win a few Tonys, and all that?

Sure. If someone can make money from you, you can do more things, and eventually, you can do things you come up with. I've always got a pocketful of ideas.

For what? Revivals? Can you give me an example?

A couple of times I've pulled them out, and I've been really fucked by it. I have to keep them to myself, no offense to you. The past season I got really screwed over.

For what show?

I really shouldn't talk about it—I'd like to be invited to the party.

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Fifty Words

By Michael Weller.

MCC Theater; in previews September 10 for a September 28 opening.

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