Evelyn Brown (A Diary)

Conceived and originally directed by María Irene Fornés
Directed by Alice Reagan

The Downstairs
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003
May 19 - June 4, 2023
Evelyn Brown (A Diary)

Conceived and originally directed by
María Irene Fornés

Directed by Alice Reagan

Cast:
Evelyn:   Ellen Lauren*
Evelyn Brown:   Violeta Picayo*

Understudy: Talia Hankin

Dramaturgy by Gwendolyn Alker

Set Design: Donald Eastman
Costume Design: Gabriel Berry
Lighting Design: Christina Watanabe
Sound Design: Jordan Rose Bernstein
Stage Manager: Emani Brielle Simpson

Producer: Shannon Sindelar
Technical Supervisor: Mike Banta
Associate Producer: Kate Purdum
Assistant Director: Britt Berke
Assistant Stage Manager: Maya T. Weed
Assistant Dramaturg: Saniya Ahmed Jaffer
Assistant Technical Supervisor: Talia Hankin
Assistant Set and Props Design: Maya T. Weed
Assistant Costume Design: Laurel Carpenter
Assistant Lighting Design: Celia Krefter

Music by Mary Z. Cox used with permission

This show runs 70 minutes with no intermission

*Courtesy of Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) which founded in 1913, represents more than 50,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. www.actorsequity.org
A Note from the Dramaturg

_Evelyn Brown (A Diary)_ is the only play by María Irene Fornés with a text that came entirely from a found object: a handwritten diary—now lost—of a housekeeper who lived and wrote in rural Melvin, New Hampshire in 1909. The diary was a present to Fornés and became the inspiration for the work; she labeled the original production an “adaptation,” leaving herself as director, and the two actors as co-collaborators with the long-lost Evelyn Brown. Cast and crew members talk of Irene’s fascination with Brown, both as a woman from an early 20th century rural culture and as a writer.

_Evelyn Brown (A Diary)_ was produced one time only, in 1980, and has never had a second production, until now. The version you are seeing today attempts to stitch together the archival remnants of that piece, even as we have reckoned with the fact that theater remains always in the now. _Evelyn Brown_ remains a prescient meditation on this woman and the many before and after who do their domestic work daily with care and grace, without witness or other markers of social or economic respect. This piece continues to insist on the centrality and import of women’s work – what is only recently being called “essential work.”

The timing of this play is notable in the development of Irene Fornés as an artist. Debuted a few years after the iconic _Fefu and Her Friends_ (1977), _Evelyn Brown (A Diary)_ was the first in a string of prolific creations that lasted throughout the 1980’s. This outpouring included _The Danube_ (1983), _Mud_ (1983), and _The Conduct of Life_ (1985). During this decade, she also honed her skills as a director and as a teacher of playwriting. In this context, _Evelyn Brown_ becomes foundational in the playwright’s ongoing fascination with certain themes. The rehearsal process for _Evelyn Brown_ is particularly informative in this regard: Fornés traveled with her two actors to Melvin, New Hampshire to learn about Evelyn Brown, and further researched women workers at the turn of the 20th century in rural America. She then made the costumes herself, dyeing the cloth with spinach and onions as a replica of what women would have done in the era of the play. While these same preoccupations were never again highlighted as directly as they are in _Evelyn Brown_, the theme of women’s labor, and Fornés’s admiration for it, remains a central through line in her subsequent body of work.

Alice and I wish to thank Scott Cummings, who began this project back in 2018, as well as members of the original _Evelyn Brown (A Diary)_ production who generously shared their insights over the last five years: Donald Eastman, Peter Littlefield, Aileen Passloff, Rebecca High, Bonnie Marranca and Margaret Harrington. We also thank Kaelani Burja, Ally Wonski, Paul Muldoon, Marion Young, and the Lewis Center for the Arts, where this production of _Evelyn Brown (A Diary)_ was originally workshopped as part of the Princeton Atelier.

– Gwendolyn Alker
Gwendolyn Alker (Dramaturg) is an Associate Arts Professor and the immediate past Director of the Theatre Studies program in the Department of Drama, Tisch/NYU. She is the former Editor of *Theatre Topics* and the former Managing Editor of *Women & Performance*. As a scholar and dramaturg, she has taught and advocated for the work of María Irene Fornés over the last two decades. Dramaturgical credits include the New York Fornés Festival (2010), which she curated and organized, the award-winning documentary *The Rest I Make Up* by Michelle Memran (2018), and JoAnne Akalaitis' María Irene Fornés Marathon at The Public Theater (2018). She has also published widely on Fornés including articles and book chapters in *Theatre Topics*, the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (2020), and chapter entries in *Playwrights of the 1980s, Fifty Key Figures in Queer US Theatre* and the forthcoming *Fornés in Context*. She is also a core member of The Fornés Institute, an initiative of Howlround that advocates and amplifies the work of this important Latina playwright. She is currently working on a biography of Irene Fornés.

Mike Banta (Technical Supervisor) is the Director of Production for the Barnard College Department of Theatre. Previous credits include Hudson Scenic Studio, New York City Opera, Bard SummerScape Festival, Utah Shakespearean Festival, and various regional theatres, theme parks, and cruise ships. He was also an Adjunct Professor at NYC College of Technology (CUNY) from 2005 to 2010. Mike is a proud member of IATSE Local One and is an ESTA-certified Theatre and Arena Rigger; he holds an MFA in Technical Design and Production from Yale School of Drama and a BA in Drama from the University of Virginia.

Britt Berke (Assistant Director) is an NYC-based theatre director. Her 2023 World Premiere production of *Becomes a Woman* by Betty Smith received two Outer Critics Circle nominations, including Outstanding New Off-Broadway Play. Recent projects: *DOGS* (Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep); *watchme* (New York Theatre Workshop Residency); Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (Torn Out Theater AKA “The Naked Shakespeare Company”); *Liberian Girl in Brooklyn* (Mabou Mines) and *Round Room* (Origin Theater's 1st Irish Festival - Best Director nomination). She is a member of the Leon Levy Roundabout Directors Group and the Mercury Store Inaugural Directing Lab. BA, Barnard College. SDC Associate Member. brittberke.com.

Jordan Rose Bernstein (Sound Design) is a Filipino American sound designer based out of the NY/NJ area. She is passionate about telling stories through sound and showing the importance of sound in storytelling. With a close attention to dramaturgy and world building, she supports and uplifts narratives with her design, whether through subtle ambiences or sonic journeys. Jordan greatly values strong collaboration and recognizes the worth of good character in a room. She strives to help create a supportive and empathetic space wherever she goes. Recent credits include *Bandstand* (New Studio on Broadway; NYU), *Learning How to Read by Moonlight* (Leviathan Lab), *Where Are You?* (Suite/Space; Mabou Mines), and *Blue Fire Burns the Hottest* (The Exponential Festival; The Brick). BFA Drama: NYU.
Gabriel Berry (Costume Design) arrived in New York City early in 1979. Within a few months she met Ellen Stewart, made her New York debut designing costumes for Charles Ludlam’s *The Enchanted Pig*, and became the costume designer in residence at La MaMa E.T.C. Specializing in the creation of new work, she has designed premieres of the works of dozens of artists including John Adams, Samuel Beckett, Anne Bogart, Charles Ludlam, Caryl Churchill, Lucinda Childs, Christopher Durang, Ethyl Eichelberger, Richard Foreman, Branden Jacobs Jenkins and Taylor Mac. She was privileged to work with María Irene Fornés on numerous projects including *Sarita*, *Mud* and *The Danube*. Irene is much missed.

Laurel Carpenter (Assistant Costume Design) will have graduated from Barnard College with a degree in Physics by the time you’re reading this. Many thanks to Alice for this opportunity, Gabriel for taking me on, and Kara Feely for everything she's taught me at the Barnard costume shop.

Donald Eastman (Set Design) began his journey with Irene designing *Evelyn Brown (A Diary)* and moved through three decades with designs that include *Fefu and Her Friends*, *Sarita*, *Abingdon Square*, *A Matter of Faith*, *Springtime*, *Summer at Gossensass*, *Enter the Night*, her final production, *Letters from Cuba* as well as Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Donald made his La MaMa debut with *3 Solo Pieces* by Winston Tong and went on to design numerous productions for Tom Even, Mike Gorman, and especially Theodora Skipitares. A noted designer of opera/theatre; companies include BAM, NYC Opera, Lincoln Center Festival, San Francisco and Seattle Opera, Washington National Opera, Dutch National Opera and Lisbon Opera. Mr. Eastman studied at CalArts and Yale Drama. He received an OBIE Award for Sustained Excellence of Design and is a grantee of the NEA/National Opera Institute. This one's for you Irene, my dear sweet love.

María Irene Fornés (Playwright) (1930-2018) was one of the most influential female American dramatists of the twentieth century. Born in Cuba, she immigrated to the United States in 1945 with her mother and sister. A seminal figure in the Off-Off Broadway movement of the 1960s, she pioneered a downtown theater aesthetic which continues to thrive today. Over her long and prolific career, she wrote more than forty plays including *Tango Palace* (1963), *Molly’s Dream* (1968), *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977), *The Danube* (1982), *Mud* (1983), *Sarita* (1984), *The Conduct of Life* (1985), *Abingdon Square* (1987), *The Summer in Gossensass* (1997), and *Letters from Cuba* (2000). She won nine Obie Awards and her play, *What Of The Night?* (1989), was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. As director of the INTAR Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Laboratory in the 1980s, she nurtured a generation of Latinx playwrights, including Cherríe Moraga, Migdalia Cruz, Nilo Cruz, Caridad Svich, and Eduardo Machado. As playwright, designer and director she created a unique body of work known for its lyricism, rigorous and crystalline composition, wild flights of fancy, and passionate examination of the human spirit. Despite longstanding neglect by the mainstream, her fierce and unwavering commitment to an ethic and aesthetic of theater-making remain a testament to what this art form can be.
Talia Hankin (Understudy Evelyn/Evelyn Brown; Assistant Technical Supervisor) is an NYC-based actor and playwright. Selected credits: Victor/Victoria (Cotuit Center for the Arts), By the Way, Meet Vera Stark (Barnard College), You Can’t Touch My Sister I Ate in the Womb! (Columbia School of the Arts), Circle Mirror Transformation (Cotuit Center for the Arts), and developmental workshops of Reply All (Clubbed Thumb) and Grief Hotel (Clubbed Thumb). She has previously understudied for Shakespeare on the Sound and collaborated on new works projects with WP Theater, Object Collection, and The Barrow Group. Her original play, When I Consider Everything that Grew, premiered in March 2022 at Columbia University/Barnard College. Columbia University: BA Drama and Theatre Arts (Acting Concentration), Film and Media Studies. taliahankin.com

Celia Krefter (Assistant Lighting Design) is a director, choreographer, and designer. Recent directing/choreography credits include Victor/Victoria (Cotuit Center for the Arts) and The Sonic Life of a Giant Tortoise (Barnard College). Recent lighting design credits include Cuck, Cuck, Bull (Columbia School of the Arts), Spring Performance (Columbia Ballet Collaborative), Vile Isle (Columbia School of the Arts), and HOUSECONCERT (Object Collection/The Brick, ALD). You can catch her and Kate Purdum’s new dance-theatre aquarium piece, Everything Changes, Nothing is Lost, at Brick Aux this June 14-17. Celia extends her gratitude to the whole Evelyn Brown team!

Ellen Lauren (Evelyn) is a former co-artistic director for the SITI Company which she helped found in 1992, and an ongoing associate artist with the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT) under the direction of Tadashi Suzuki since 1996. She has been on the faculty of The Juilliard School of Drama since 1995. She has performed and taught extensively nationally and internationally with both SITI and SCOT. NYC credits: BAM (Fisher, Harvey, Opera House), NYLA, CSC, NY City Opera, Joyce, NYTW, WP Theater, Park Avenue Armory, The Public, Abington Stage, Miller, The Skirball Center, and the Guggenheim Museum. A founding member of the International Consortium on Suzuki Training for Actors, she produced the international symposium, Transformation through Training. Collaborations with Ann Hamilton, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance, Martha Graham Dance Co, Elizabeth Streb Extreme Action Dance. Past Resident company member: The Alley Theatre, StageWest and the Milwaukee Rep. Published in American Theatre, “In Search of Stillness.” Scott T. Cummings interview: “Ellen Lauren: The Art of Extreme Acting” in Narrative in Performance published by Red Globe Press/Macmillan International (2019). Director: Oresteia (Juilliard Group 53), Trojan Women (Group 47), Iphigenia and Other Daughters (Group 43), A Midsummer Night’s Dream (UCLA MFA Acting). First TCG Fox Fellow for Distinguished Achievement recipient.
Violeta Picayo (Evelyn Brown) is a bilingual Cuban-American actor, director, and choreographer. Selected credits - New York theatre: The Medium (SITI Company, BAM), Three Little Girls Down a Well (The Public), War of the Worlds-The Radio Play (SITI Co.), Sense and Sensibility (Bedlam), Julius Caesar (Pocket Universe), Helen. (SuperGeographics), The Strangers Came Today (Society). On-Camera: Shallow Water (Sheila Negheg), A Despicable Woman (Kostov España), Bedlam: The Series (Bedlam), Fernanda (AFI). Violeta has worked regionally at theaters including the American Repertory Theater, Portland Center Stage, The Fisher Center, and City Theatre. Internationally, she has worked in Argentina, England, Greece, India, and Scotland. Violeta is a proud graduate of the SITI Conservatory, the National Theater Institute, and Vassar College. She is an associate artist of SITI Company and a company member at One Year Lease, the SuperGeographics, and Bedlam. www.VioletaPicayo.com

Kate Purdum (Associate Producer) is a director, dramaturg, and maker thrilled to be communing with the legacy of Irene Fornés and the future of her work. Recently: The Appeal, Barnard College; HOUSECONCERT, The Brick (AD). Soon: Everything Changes, Nothing is Lost, Brick Aux (June 14-17). You can find her writing in HowlRound & Theatre and Performance Design Journal, and her zines scattered to the wind if you know where to look. BA in Theatre and History, Barnard College. Ask her about her family’s bread recipe...

Alice Reagan (Director) is a freelance director whose work includes new plays, adapted classics and plays by María Irene Fornés. She is Associate Professor of Professional Practice at Barnard College where she founded New Plays at Barnard and received the Teaching Excellence Award. Recent plays: Measure for Measure at Shakespeare & Company, Cherry Orchard with Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble (Portland Monthly Best Theatre of 2022), On Loop by Charly Evon Simpson with New Plays at Barnard. She received a Princess Grace Award and two PGA Special Project Grants. Her productions have earned NYC Fringe First Awards, Berkshire Theatre Awards, and Cleveland Critics Circle Awards. Alum: Mabou Mines/SUITE Resident Artist Program, Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, Women’s Project Directors Lab, and the Drama League. Upcoming: Twelfth Night at Barnard. MA, Performance Studies: Tisch/NYU. MFA, Directing: Columbia. www.alicereagan.com

Emani Brielle Simpson (Stage Manager) is an actor, producer, stage manager, director, and the founder of the talent agency, The Real Artists (TRA). The mission of TRA is to create an inspirational environment where artists can hone their crafts, thrive and network to build a career out of their passions. Emani is passionate about collaborating on new works that make the audience think. Recent projects include Assistant Stage Managing The Black That I Am, Stage Managing Dust of Egypt in the New York Theater Festival, directing for SERIALS with the Fled Collective, Associate Producing PEA Fest ‘22 with
Breaking and Entering and House Managing at the New Brunswick Performing Arts Center in New Jersey. She began her theater career by fully producing an original stage play called, *Love is Respect*, primarily themed around domestic violence awareness in 2013. These experiences have made her a passionate, well-rounded artist that works in a collaborative style to create a safe space and allows for effective problem solving when needed.

**Shannon Sindelar (Producer)** is the current producing director for the Obie Award-winning company The Builders Association and managing director for the composer-driven non-profit Experiments in Opera. She served as the producing artistic director of Brave New World Repertory Theatre, and has directed many productions with the cross-media performance group 31 Down. She served as managing and programming director of The Ontological-Hysteric Theater, where she produced theatre auteur Richard Foreman’s works. She is an adjunct lecturer at Barnard College, an affiliated artist with New Georges, and a board member of the performance ensemble Object Collection. MFA: Carnegie Mellon (John Wells Directing Fellow).


**Maya T. Weed (Assistant Set Design, Assistant Stage Manager, Props Designer)** is an actor, designer, writer, and illustrator based in New York City. Recent scenic design credits include *The Whitney Album* (SoHo Rep, assistant to Peiyi Wong), *This is Our Youth* (Pale Fire Theater), *Waiting for Godot* (Pale Fire), *Victor/Victoria* (Cotuit Center for the Arts), *Jackie* (Barnard College), *When I Consider Everything that Grew* (Columbia, NOMADS), and *Disco Pigs* (Barnard College). Other production roles have included collaborations with Clubbed Thumb (actor), SoHo Playhouse (actor), and New York Theatre Workshop (production assistant). BA: Columbia University, Drama and Theatre Arts alongside studies in English and Comparative Literature. For more information about Maya’s performance, production, and creative work, visit www.mayatweed.com. Thank you for supporting *Evelyn Brown (A Diary)!*
Special Thanks:
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In addition you can scan the QR code Poster located in the theatre lobby for access to the digital program.
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The Downstairs

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