

# NEW JERSEY Stage

## Hurricane Diane

*By Gary Wien*



In *Hurricane Diane*, playwright Madeleine George reimagines the classic story of *The Bacchae* by having the Greek god Dionysus come down to earth as Diane, a lesbian permaculture gardener from Vermont. The play takes place today and is set, in a fantastical way, in Red Bank, NJ - the town where Two River Theater presents the play's World Premiere in January.

“It was one of the craziest plays from ancient Greece,” said George. “The god Dionysus shows up to a place where he’s not worshipped and he announces that he is going to wreak revenge on everybody until they acknowledge that he’s a god.”

In George’s play, Dionysus (as Diane) is on a mission to get his cult started up again while the people are vulnerable due to climate change. Unfortunately, he encounters unexpected resistance from the community.

George, the Playwright In Residence at Two River Theater, was interested in how the communities along the coast had been resilient in the face of Hurricane Sandy. While her play isn’t based on that storm, it is inspired by the memory of what took place in the storm’s aftermath.

“In a way, it’s a love letter to communities who come together and take care of each other after catastrophes of all kinds,” explained George.

In the spirit of *The Bacchae*, this play is a wild comedy as well. Directed by Leigh Silverman, a two-time Obie winner, the cast includes Mia Barron, Becca Blackwell, Nikiya Mathis, Danielle Skraastad, and Kate Wetherhead.

George laughs when the idea of a play about climate change opening around the same time that a highly anti-climate change administration is about to take office.

“We open a week after the inauguration, so I suppose there could be no E.P.A. by the time we open!” said George. “Just a closed sign on the door of the E.P.A. - not that the E.P.A. was doing all that much to prevent climate change, this is just an acceleration in a way in that direction.”

The playwright, who lives in Brooklyn, said her love of gardening was her lead in towards writing this story. Even though she only has about ten feet of bad dirt to work in, she is very interested in gardening which led to the formation of Diane’s character. George says gardeners sort of play the role of the proverbial ‘canaries in a coal mine’ when it comes to climate change by noticing the way certain zones are shifting and growth cycles are changing.

“It’s a small or intimate/personal relationship to the big shift,” she explains. “That’s how I get into it.”

In the end, the play looks at how impossible and overwhelming it can seem for people to think about the giant problems we face in the world; how everything can appear as a one-time experience when you’re living through it; and how these giant shifts can be hard for us poor mortals to grasp.

***Hurricane Diane runs January 14 - February 12 at the Two River Theater in Red Bank, NJ.***