

Mari Andrejco's *The Belle of Amherst* (a new version after William Luce's play) at Triple Shadow in East Otis, Massachusetts, Friday-Sunday through August 28th



Mari Andrejco as Emily Dickinson in Triple Shadow's, *The Belle of Amherst*.
Photo © 2011 Edward Herbst.

So who was Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) really? She was the “Nobody” from Amherst, MA, the alleged half-cracked daughter of town father Edward Dickinson, who wrote nearly 1800 poems (7 published in her lifetime, but none by her initiative) and the continuing inspiration for poets, composers, writers, readers all over the world. Next to Rumi and Shakespeare, she may not only be the “Queen of Cavalry,” but assuredly the unequivocal Queen of the Pantheon.

You have a rare opportunity to know her and plunge into her worlds, both external and internal, in Triple Shadow's production in East Otis, South Berkshire County, MA because of Mari Andrejco, who becomes, before our eyes, Emily, from late childhood to a short time before her death. From the parlor of the Homestead, “her father's house,” she talks, addresses us one-on-one—the same way her poems call to us. (The barn/stage is at times too much space in the first act to anchor her intensity.) As time goes on, and you have met, through one-way conversations, family, friends, possible love interests, a reluctant editor, you don't want to let her go. She is your intimate, often witty friend, hardly crazy, a gardener (many plants from her conservatory are on the stage), a renderer of truth, love, and pain—what life brings and what her soul selected. Incisively so.

A member of Triple Shadow's company and skillfully directed by Beth Skinner, Ms. Andrejco performs her own adaptation, after years of studying Emily, of William Luce's 1976 play, “*The Belle of Amherst*,” (Emily's assessment of her popularity as a school-girl), which she has offered in many venues in New York, New England and beyond.

In spite of ongoing reams of research and now several excellent biographies (Heidegger) and scholarship (Vendler, Howe) on the texts of key poems plus projections of disease—the current favorites are epilepsy and agoraphobia (she only left her father's house a couple of times after she was 28)—Emily is best described by herself, by her own words—poems and letters and their take on the complexity of the natural world and the life and death dramas of town, family and God.

Mari Andrejco's *The Belle of Amherst* (a new version after William Luce's play) at Triple Shadow in East Otis, Massachusetts, Friday-Sunday through August 28th

Andrejco weaves in at least 30 poems and several excerpts from the key letters, not in chronological order, but where they fit the events and calamities of her life. The line between the poet and poem becomes barely discernible, an important factor in knowing who she was. The poems and letters are spoken as asides, invocations, as acute, in-the-moment observation. Never once did I say I don't get it. What is she talking about? Where are we going? You understand her business truly was circumference.

What you see and hear in the second act (the last half hour is breathtaking acting) is that Emily Dickinson was a complete human being, an extraordinary poet who was present to all of the agonizing and ecstatic moments of living, whose unwavering focus, inward and outward, is ripe for this summer and the ages.

FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS AT 7 PM
SUNDAYS AT 5 PM

THROUGH AUGUST 28

TRIPLE SHADOW, 621 Algeria Road, East Otis, MA
(www.tripleshadow.org)
Call for reservations and directions: 413-269-4201
Admission: \$20 suggested donation

Guests are welcome to bring picnics an hour before the performances.
Triple Shadow will offer desserts and beverages.