

## ARTS

# Romping through a warzone

## THEATRE

## Love Goes to Press

Mint Theater, New York

★★★★☆

Eric Uhlfelder

The theme of women in journalism or of looking at war through an allied profession isn't new to drama. But it was cutting-edge stuff when Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles, with tongue in cheek, chronicled their lives in an imaginary Italian warzone press camp in 1944.

It's just the sort of material that New York's Mint Theatre Company, under the guidance of Jonathan Bank, has been trawling for since it first set out in 1992 to rediscover lost plays. Many of its 39 resurrections have proven to be small jewels.

The initial attraction of *Love Goes to Press* is its playwrights. Gellhorn and Cowles, both Americans, were among the first female war correspondents. While in their 20s, they cut their teeth reporting the Spanish civil war and then covered military campaigns across the globe during the second world war. Cowles was a correspondent for the UK's Sunday Times and Daily Telegraph; Gellhorn, a novelist and writer-in-residence in the Roosevelt White House, reported for Collier's.

The Mint's staging is spot-on: an impeccably run-down Italian villa, complete with military maps, Remington field typewriters and sprinklings of plaster dust after nearby shell bursts. Here reporters



Great escapism: Heidi Armbruster (top) and Angela Pierce in 'Love Goes to Press'  
Richard Termine

Annabelle (Heidi Armbruster) and Jane (Angela Pierce) navigate the male-dominated scene as if they are two of the guys, romantically skirmishing with Joe (Rob Breckenridge), a Hemingwayesque hack with whom Annabelle shares a troubled history (indeed, Gellhorn was married to Hemingway) and Philip (Bradford Cover), the beleaguered Brit in charge of the press camp.

Reference is made to the women's daring exploits. Both plan to hitch rides into action: one a flight into Poland, the other an ambulance to an encircled allied encampment. But both schemes fail to materialise, which keeps the story's focus away from the women's profession and true to the play's title, with Gellhorn and Cowles taking Shavian aim at relationships. When Jane admits her

fear about her engagement, Annabelle quips, "It's always depressing when you're about to be married. That's only natural."

The play is a romp through a dark time, a piece of escapism driven by the same impulse as Hollywood's screwball response to the Depression. Gellhorn acknowledged this right off: "This play bears no resemblance whatever, of any kind at all, to war and war correspondents," she wrote. "It is a joke. It was intended to make people laugh." And that's what it did when it opened in London in 1946.

Odd to find such frothy preoccupations so near the front. But if one is able to check one's sense of reality in at the door, it's easy to get swept up with the play's charm.

[minttheater.org](http://minttheater.org)