

THE HUMAN VOICE ...a riveting production

Review by **Frank Spezzano**
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Part of the Harbourfront Centre world Stage Series is ***The Human Voice***, a play written by Jean Cocteau in 1932 with the French title *La Voix Humaine* and it's set in Paris. The story is about a middle-aged woman who calls her ex-lover for the last time, he having ended his relationship with her a few days ago. Though she tries, in vain, to keep him talking on the phone, he tells her that he's leaving for a younger woman.

That period of the 1930s was a time when men and women were being driven to indecisions, desperate acts of violence. They went to shrinks, were psychoanalytical, existential, and at the same time in depressing moods expressing annihilation. While the movie version of this play is immortalized by none other than Ingrid Bergman, a European star who made her own legend in Hollywood and made it a very personal affair on screen. This Harbourfront production arrives in Toronto from Amsterdam, where actress Halina Reijn has been working with Toneelgroep Theatre since 2003. Halina held the audience spellbound with her solo performance earning an uncommon silence...uncommon because the audience in the Enwave Theatre filled the air with gasps and pauses. Reijn gave us a performance which held us breathless with our eyes glued to the stage and maintained good character-focus and projection. She has previously appeared in *The Taming of the Shrew; Hedda Gabler; Oresteia* and is seen regularly in films and television in her native Holland. Although director Van Hove was firmly and visibly in control of the production, I thought he might have been more congenially effective by using a greater variety of tone and colour to lead us into the lower depths of soul searching, thus deepening the drama. The sound and lighting were cleverly designed and effectively helped the audience understand the play better, since it contemplated many emotional changes in the life of a woman. But adults are familiar with such departures of the heart. The intelligent audience in attendance identified an uneasiness filled with uninterrupted throbs that riveted them to their seats. Those are the precious dramatic moments of pulsating life. The outcome is the result of a desperate situation, an uneasy one at that, which can lead to annihilation, despair, absurdity, Down's syndrome, retardation; perhaps even a total mental derangement and collapse of human activity.