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A deeper look at Dorothy: One-woman play examines witty, intelligent, socially conscious writer

By [Jackie Jadrnak](#) / [Journal North Reporter](#)

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Margot Avery portrays Dorothy Parker in “The Portable Dorothy Parker,” which will be presented at The Lodge at Santa Fe this weekend. (Courtesy of Fredda Tone)

“That would be a good thing for them to cut on my tombstone: Wherever she went, including here, it was against her better judgment.” Dorothy Parker

Those of us who may have heard of Dorothy Parker know her as the mistress of the bon mot, the witty and pointed quips that skewer their target, unerringly aimed from the Round Table at the Algonquin in New York City during the 1920s.

But did you know that the Scotch-swilling saboteur of the social order also was the highest-paid writer in

Hollywood? Had books of her poetry published?

Was deeply involved in human rights, helping found the Screen Writers Guild and the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League? And left the rights for her works to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., moving on to the NAACP after his death?

If you go

WHAT: “The Portable Dorothy Parker”

WHO: Solo show with actress Margot Avery

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. today and Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: The Lodge at Santa Fe, Cabaret Room, 750 N. St. Francis Drive

HOW MUCH: \$20

FOR TICKETS: holdmyticket.com/event/224079

A trio of women have gotten together to reveal the full Dorothy Parker in a one-woman show that will be staged today through Sunday in the Cabaret Room at the Lodge at Santa Fe: playwright Annie Lux, actress Margot Avery and director Lee Costello.

They started work on the project 10 years ago as friends in New York City, but now only Avery remains there; Lux lives in Santa Fe and Costello lives in Los Angeles.

This weekend’s show is the Santa Fe (and New Mexico) premiere of “The Portable Dorothy Parker,” but it had a sold-out run in August at FringeNYC|the New York International Fringe Festival.

It also has been presented at the 2014 Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston, S.C.; the Hollywood Fringe Festival; the Blank Theatre in Los Angeles; and the Leslie Cheek Theater at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art in Richmond.

“There’s a hell of a distance between wise-cracking and wit. Wit has truth in it; wise-cracking is simply calisthenics with words.” DP

“She was the Elaine May of her day for the Hollywood of her time,” Costello said of Parker, adding that she discovered the writer once lived a half-block north of where Costello lives now in West Hollywood.

Avery has her own Hollywood connection with Parker – her actress mother actually met her.

The story her mother always told, Avery said, is that they encountered each other one weekend at a vacation spot in 1939 or 1940 in California. Sam Goldwyn, of the Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), was also there with his wife, Frances.

When Frances said she had to leave the gathering to go pack at the end of the weekend, Avery’s mother mused, “If I were Frances Goldwyn, I’d have a maid to pack for us.”



From left, Annie Lux is the playwright, Margot Avery (seated) is the performer, and Lee Costello is director for “The Portable Dorothy Parker.” (Courtesy of Fredda Tone)

Parker, apparently not finding Sam Goldwyn remotely attractive, reportedly responded, “If I were Frances Goldwyn, I’d have a maid to sleep with Sam.”

Despite her Hollywood years, Parker was a New Yorker through and through – although she actually was born in New Jersey, Costello said.

“She was always mad about that,” Costello added. “Apparently, her family was on vacation and she came a little early.”

Lux said she tried to find a New Mexico connection with Parker in her research and the only thing she came across was Parker’s marriage to actor Alan Campbell in 1934. The two had been living together without any raised eyebrows in New York City but, when they moved to Denver for a production Campbell became involved in there, their co-habitation caused quite a stir.

To quell the wagging tongues, Lux said, the two stole across the state border to Raton and quietly got officially married there, while telling the Denver folks they had been married all along.

“Of course I talk to myself. I like a good speaker, and I appreciate an intelligent audience.” DP

“The Portable Dorothy Parker” sort of fell into place through the women’s common interests. Lux, who wrote a book about New Mexico churches after moving here and currently is working on a play about Los Alamos spying during the Cold War, credits Costello with the original idea.

“I was familiar with Annie’s writing, and Margot and I have been friends forever,” Costello said. They wanted to come up with a one-woman show for Avery and they turned to Lux for a script. Dorothy Parker seemed a perfect fit.



Margot Avery portrays Dorothy Parker in “The Portable Dorothy Parker.” (Courtesy of Fredda Tone)

Lux said her approach to the show was inspired by the book, also called “The Portable Dorothy Parker,” a collection of works put together when Parker was 50 years old. The playwright decided to show Parker under siege by an editor for a publishing house, reflecting on her life and the people she knew even as she was being continually hassled to choose which works to include in the collection.

Parker was a procrastinator when it came to a deadline, Lux added. At times, a publishing company representative would even be locked in a hotel room with Parker and a bottle of Scotch until she finished a project, she said.

In playing her, Avery said she views Parker as “a very complex person – both extremely intelligent and quite emotional but, in the ’20s, there was a disdain for emotion or for showing too much. She was extremely tender-hearted and socially conscious.”

“She was very unhappy at the time of the play,” Lux added, explaining that Parker’s marriage was falling apart. But the Parker in the play also is interested in setting the record straight about her life, Costello said.

“In the play, she is speaking to a younger woman,” Avery interjected. “A lot of what she’s saying is: ‘Learn from my experience.’”

“It’s not the tragedies that kill us; it’s the messes.” DP