



WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM

July 7, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

The Women's & Gender Studies Program and the School of Music at the University of South Carolina had the pleasure of hosting a production of the Core Ensemble's new work, *Mona Lisa Speaks*, at School of Music Recital Hall in March 2011. It was the opening performance for the Women's & Gender Studies annual conference titled, *Recovering Voices/Constructing Identities*. The performance set the tone and the themes for the rest of a very successful conference.

The musicians, Tahirah Whittington, cello, Hugh Hinton, piano and Michael Parola, percussion were excellent and the actress, Dara Seitzman, who played the part of Mona Lisa, as well as other persons and paintings in the life of the Mona Lisa, was simply stunning! The audience was mesmerized. I would highly recommend this production to anyone and particularly to other Women's & Gender Studies programs.

The concept of "voice" is central to feminist scholarship and praxis. *Mona Lisa Speaks* gives voice to one of the most iconic representations of women. Rather than muse over what her smile means, *Mona Lisa Speaks* allows the audience to understand and enter into the milieu in which she was originally painted as well as the cultural environs of Paris in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through the compelling artistry of Dara Seitzman, the outstanding text by Jenny Lyn Bader, and the world-class musicianship of the Core Ensemble, we, the audience, are given an entre into some of the ways women and men during these different historical periods constructed their sense of self, sexuality, and bodily integrity.

*Mona Lisa Speaks* is one of the most sophisticated and compelling works that the Core Ensemble has done. In addition to Women's & Gender Studies programs, I would recommend it to Art History and Modern European history programs. It embodies the idea of art as a way of understanding what it is to be human and the roles of gender, sexuality, and class in that understanding.

I cannot think of a performance I have enjoyed more!

Sincerely Yours,

Drucilla K. Barker, Ph.D.  
Professor and Director Women's & Gender Studies  
University of South Carolina