

# GREATER NEW YORK



## Cleared for Take-Off

Obie-Winning 'Jet Lag' Is Revived in Montclair

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT A30

WSJ.com/NY

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Wednesday, September 29, 2010 **A23**

## A New Century for a Timeless Story of Space and Travel

By VIBHUTI PATEL

Long before the architectural firm of Diller Scofidio + Renfro redesigned Alice Tully Hall and created the High Line, Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio liked to integrate architecture with the performing arts. Back in 1998, they visualized the design, story and video concept for "Jet Lag," a play about the impact of travel, speed and the confusions of time and space. For this, they collaborated with Marianne Weems, the artistic director of the Builders Association, a New York theater company that produces works based on original stories drawn from contemporary life and showcasing modern technology.

"Jet Lag" ran for three weeks at the Kitchen on West 19th Street, won an Obie Award in 2000, then played 13 interna-

tional cities in three years. Now, a decade later, the production has been revived by Peak Performances @ Montclair, and is running through Oct. 3 at the Alexander Kasser Theater in Montclair, N.J. (For showtimes and directions, visit [www.peakperfs.org/performances](http://www.peakperfs.org/performances).)

Ms. Weems has updated the play's bare-bones script with a new cast, as well as digital animation re-created by the award-winning interdisciplinary advertising agency *dbox* and lighting design by MacArthur fellow Jennifer Tipton.

When she conceived "Jet Lag," which was her company's first production to use a contemporary story and cutting-edge technology, Ms. Weems said, "I juxtaposed two true stories about people severed from the conventions of time and space: an



Moe Angelos and Jess Barbagallo star in the Builders Association's revival of 'Jet Lag,' at the Alexander Kasser Theater in Montclair, N.J.

American grandmother who flew across the Atlantic 167 consecutive times with her grandson to elude his father and who finally died of exhaustion from doing so; and the ill-fated British yachtsman who disappeared in

the course of a faked solo-circumnavigation of the world, leaving a haunting film and audiotape diary charting his mental deterioration."

From a technical standpoint, "Jet Lag" still amazes because

technology becomes a protagonist in the play. It is used to create the set, including a jet's vast interior with "real" seats, in-flight movies, an invisible airport escalator that seems to ascend, and a man in a boat that rocks on virtual waves as we see him faking his travel reports.

Since 1994, Ms. Weems has been creating plays that combine live performance with video, radio, computer screens, internet technology and architecture: "Al-ladeen" (2003), spanning three continents, dealt with call centers; "SuperVision" (2005) was about government surveillance, online transactions and identity theft; "Continuous City" (2008) contrasted a traveling salesman's unsatisfying virtual relationship with his daughter and a perennially wired IT professional's familial I-chats. The plays explore con-

nectedness and its effects on our sense of isolation and intimacy.

"I try to combine entertainment with critical thinking by creating complex stage images that invite the audience to consider the expanding role of technology in our lives," Ms. Weems said.

But although technology underpins her plays, the drama is always anchored firmly by human conflicts and emotions.

"The impetus for me is not the technology but the human story and, in this century, stories are inevitably bound up with some kind of network," she said. "Technology comes as part of the story-telling package because people's lives are complicated by it, and because those are the tools we use. It's a way of holding a mirror up to our society to express something that's part of the contemporary moment."