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1995

LMDA Review, volume 7, issue 1

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Recommended Citation

Sanders, Erin and Whitehead, Robert, "LMDA Review, volume 7, issue 1" (1995). *LMDA Review*. 13.
<http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/lmdareview/13>

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LMDA Review

Volume #7
Issue #1

Changes at LMDA

EMILY DEPARTS

After many faithful, brilliant years of service, Emily Morse has moved on to greener pastures. We will miss her daily service, but are glad to welcome her as a member in earnest. We are fortunate to have Lisa Timmel as a replacement. Lisa has worked on the literary staffs at both Actors Theatre of Louisville and Playwrights Horizons and has worked most recently as Education Associate at National Actors Theatre.

OUR FINANCIAL PICTURE

As anticipated, our NYSCA and NEA grants have been cut, but the news is worse than expected. These cuts, along with our diminishing savings account, have forced us to reassess some of our programs. The new LMDA Review format is among these changes. Also expect a change in our conference brochure. And for the near future, we will have to cut back on our administrator's hours. Please be patient if you need to communicate with us.

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OFFICERS

Our call for nominations for a president-elect has resulted in a consensus: Jayme Koszyn from the Huntington Theater in Boston. Jayme has been active in LMDA almost since its inception and all of us who know her marvel at her intelligence, energy, and bonhomie. We think she'll make a great president.

We are also nominating Allen Kennedy, teacher, free-lance dramaturg, critic, and a backbone of our U-Caucus, to complete the current term as treasurer. We know Jayme intends to nominate Allen in her term as well, so this will give us some much needed continuity in our financial planning. We are extremely lucky that Allen's wife, Patty Taylor, has volunteered to help us professionalize our budgetary process.

We will also nominate Candace Burley, Director of Script Development at Canadian Stage, as our VP-Communications for the Toronto Conference. Candace was the first choice for the position from our Canadian members and our Canadian board member so we are grateful and excited that she is willing to serve in this capacity.

We will mail all members a ballot with these nominations in 30 days.

BY-LAWS REVIEW

On September 18, 1995, Erin Sanders, Tim Sanford, Jayme Koszyn, and Board Chair, Peggy Marks met to review the by-laws and make recommendations for amendments. Our goal is to simplify the by-laws to make them more flexible and more in line with current practices and to clarify certain definitions, procedures, and responsibilities that are left unclear in the current by-laws. We are looking at the following areas most closely:

1. Membership definitions: the committee recommended opening up the definition of Active members to include university dramaturgs, dramaturgs in the commercial theater, and dramaturgs or literary managers who achieve promotions to Artistic Associate or Artistic Director positions.

2. Board Responsibilities: We propose to invest the Board of Directors with ultimate responsibility for the stability and health of the organization. This will make our Board more like most non-profit institution boards. It will promote a more active board and organizational continuity.

3. Elections: We need to clarify the election process to insure maximum membership participation, especially regarding the formation of a Nomination Committee.

4. Annual Meetings: We need to redefine quorum for our organization to insure that we can vote on issues at Annual Meetings (excepting officer elections and by-laws amendments).

We feel there are large sections of the by-laws that go into unnecessary detail about obligations, expulsion procedures, and committees.

Peggy has volunteered to begin writing up a new version of the by-laws according to the committee's recommendations. Peggy is a lawyer so she will be thorough and careful about language. We will submit them for a vote one month before the conference.

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SCRIPT EXCHANGE

We have expanded the scope of our script exchange. Every year, we will publish an expanded Script Exchange annual, called Full Spectrum, comprised of all the year's previous submissions, as well as other submissions that could not fit into the five issues edited throughout the year by Lynn Thomson. We developed this idea in the spring of '95 and compiled our first volume of Full Spectrum. This volume is available to all members for printing costs and handling.

We hope to increase the appeal of the organization to regions through this expansion. VP's are encouraged to solicit ideas of regional writers from members. If enough ideas are submitted we can devote an entire issue to a region. We intend to include an index by region in Full Spectrum. Lynn will continue to target the conference site region for the last Script Exchange of the fiscal year. Lynn also intends to introduce a new feature to either the Script Exchange or Full Spectrum: playwright profiles, which will target not just individual plays but individual writers for recommendation. Ideas can be submitted directly to Lynn Thomson at her home address, 484 West 43rd St., 16F New York, NY 10036, or the LMDA office. Please notify us if you want Lynn to call you for ideas. Regional VP's can also help organize submissions.

We hope this new format will also make our script exchange more appealing to our Institutional members.

Minutes from LMDA meeting June 26, 1995

The meeting was called to order with the observation that a quorum of the members was not present and that no proxies had been registered so no issues could be voted on at the meeting officially, according to our by-laws. Tim Sanford then cited this as one example of several articles in our by-laws that bear review. He announced that he and Peggy Marks, who was recently elected acting chair of our Board of Directors, had already met to initiate the first stages of such a review. He announced that an official by-laws review committee would be formed after the conference to draw up suggested amendments. This committee will then offer their suggestions to the general membership for a vote. Erin Sanders and Tim then proceeded to identify several critical challenges facing LMDA for general discussion:

1. Officer Elections

Because LMDA's office is based in New York, we have always had a New York-based president. New York, however, has a limited pool of working dramaturgs, not all of whom are active in the organization.

Our by-laws call for nominations for officers from our membership, but this rarely happens. Tim and Erin revealed they had made some inquiries about possible nominees but felt the membership should discuss options on how the presidency might work in the future. We can't practically afford to move our central office to another city. We have grown too dependent on the continuity of our administrator and board. Erin suggested that with the current structure of a Co-Presidency, we might be able to have an outside president coupled with a New York Co-President.

Tim noted, however, that a co-presidency in a way "used up" two potential officers in two years. He expressed concern over the willingness of our senior members to serve, leaving aside the problem of the limited number of New York candidates. He suggested that our objective should be to foster continuity in our leadership. Tim stated that LMDA flourished during the last four years, partly because Vickie Abrash was so well-prepared for the presidency after serving as VP in Anne Cattaneo's term. Tim and Erin felt that while the current set-up calls for a year of preparation for the President-Elect before assuming office, neither felt as prepared as they would have liked before taking office. Someone then suggested that perhaps the VP should always be looked at as a President-Elect. Tim countered that he felt all of the officers should be able to serve, especially since we have begun to clarify and broaden the definitions of the other officers.

This raised the issue of the office of Treasurer. Michael Dixon resigned as Treasurer midway through the year after it became clear how difficult it was to take over accounts that were partially overseen in Chicago by Richard Pettingill and partly in New York by our administrator. Richard then voiced his strong recommendation that our treasurer be based in New York. Allen Kennedy has agreed to complete the term.

Tim suggested we broaden our search for a president-elect to regions that are readily accessible to New York. Much of the president's work can be accomplished by phone, fax, and correspondence. But the president does need to come to the New York office once or twice a month. And the organization cannot afford to foot much of a travel bill.

2. Finances

LMDA has operated comfortably in the black for several years but we have been dipping steadily into our cash reserves. We have become dependent on our administrator, but the cash flow of income from dues, NEA and NYSCA grants barely pays for both our administrator and our programs. After years of steady growth, membership rates have leveled off, even declining slightly. How do we rekindle growth?

3. Regional Activity

We have recently expanded the role of the LMDA Secretary as liaison to the Regional Vice-Presidents. Jayme Koszyn has begun a review of the status of our Regional VP's. In many cases VP's have moved or left the business and not been replaced. Jayme has worked to find replacement VP's for these regions. And we have begun to set up some guidelines on how regional VP's should be selected and replaced. (See the accompanying article.) Our immediate goal is to activate the regions more. Regional VP's should make sure that some LMDA sponsored events occur periodically in their region. VP's should lobby for new members.

Suggestions from the membership to increase regional activity:

- Publicize who the Regional VP's are more often and include their contact info.
- Include notes from regions in newsletter, or even circulate regional newsletters.
- Use E-Mail. Geoff Proehl reminded us that we have a list of e-mail addresses now and urged members to use it. [LMDA now has email! Our address is: ltimmel@email.gc.cuny.edu]
- Share script exchange ideas regionally more often.
- Expand our exchange of thoughts to plays we've produced as well as unproduced plays we recommend to Script Exchange

We ended the meeting by introducing members to Candace Burley, Director of Script Development at Canadian Stage Company, who Tim and Erin have nominated as VP-Communications and Conference Coordinator for the '96 Conference in Toronto.

We reiterated the call for nominations for either a President-Elect or two Co-Presidents Elect, putting a deadline of July 31st for nominations. We also announced that we would form a by-laws review committee that would begin convening in the Fall.

1995 Conference Rehash

by Erin Sanders

Well, we survived another annual conference. Could we have picked a busier weekend in Los Angeles for our tenth? We joined forces with the Taper's Blacksmys and welcomed the hospitality of the Audrey Skirball-Kenis Theater's reception for us and ALAP, the Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights (okay, I know we promised no more playwright-literary manager schmoozefests, but at least the food was good...). We made ourselves known a bit more to the film and TV industry, fostering new relationships with the very generous Turner Network Television, HBO, Disney TV, Vanguard Films, Act III, Goat Cay Productions and even the Creative Artists Agency. We even got a taste of the father/daughter act of Gordon and Rachel Davidson representing the finest in LA theater and television. Throw in a healthy dose of freeway driving and even an earthquake (which I somehow missed, it being the night of the banquet...) and it can be argued that this was one of our most complete conference experiences yet.

Jayne Koszyn did a miraculous job rearranging the Pre-Conference schedule for the Blacksmys and many of us were happy to be introduced to Gina Dent (when she had a chance to speak...). The screening of *The Heidi Chronicles* not only brought us a decent film adaptation and a supportive discussion with ample networking, but also gave some of us a new appreciation for parking validation.

On Saturday, we had the double whammy of an intro from Gordon Davidson, Mr. LA Theater, and a keynote from the indefatigable Robert Whitehead. Norman Frisch made sense of our conference topic in moderating the Cross-Pollination panel and Giles Croft came all the way from England to dramaturg the Universal Studios tour. From there it was on to UCLA (turn right where?) and the lush Melnitz auditorium. Saturday was capped with the reception and individual theatergoing--okay, who got the last *Master Class* tickets?

Sunday began early with Cornerstone Theater's revealing workshop in defining community. Did we all learn something about archiving our work? Panels in the afternoon were followed by a very vocal annual meeting in which we all agreed on at least one thing: the need to budget more time for annual meetings. At the outdoor banquet at the President's Club we toasted making it through another year and celebrated Emily's birthday.



Pictured: Rachel Davidson, Wes Moore, Jim Simpson, Risa Bramon, Steve Kaplan.

We saved some of our most dynamic panels for Monday. Our panel on multicultural theater offered a heated and impassioned exchange of ideas. The afternoon brought together the heavy hitters of Southern California's regional theaters, Gordon Davidson, David Emmes, Michael Greif, and Sheldon Epps, covering for Jack O'Brien, along with most of the major players in the Equity Waver Theaters. All in all, a stunning cross-section of the theatrical life of Los Angeles.

If one thing became evident at the conference, it was the need to broaden our ranks. The theme of Cross-Pollination addressed this issue and signaled to portions of the film and television industry our necessary role in the theater and in play development. This may have been one of the most ambitious conferences in a while and we owe many thanks to all the LA folks who helped organize. Unfortunately, it was also one of the poorest attended. In hindsight, we can see how essential it is to stimulate regional activity before a conference moves into a particular region. Our national (and international) attendance figures were on a par with past conferences, but the number of regional participants was down. This may have been caused by the number of theater-related panels and festivals in the area but we clearly need to be in closer contact with each region's constituency.

The 1995 Conference was kicked-off by Robert Whitehead who candidly recognized the commercial theater and film industry's respect for and confusion about dramaturgy. Mr. Whitehead is one of the most

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Rehash--cont'd

distinguished men of the theater, with a career spanning nearly fifty years. Gordon Davidson, in his introductory remarks, said of Mr. Whitehead, "Some of you may not know that Bob was the first director of Lincoln Center Repertory Theater...It was a very exciting time in New York and held great promise for all of us who were working in the theater...finally a resident repertory company had arrived in New York on a scale and magnitude and vision that we all wanted to sign on to. It made a mark. Lincoln Center Repertory, along with the Guthrie and the Arena, helped make possible the growth of the resident American theater and therefore all of your jobs in terms of an idea of theater that went beyond Broadway and beyond the commercial, and yet has somehow been effectively married to it.

"Bob represents a person who has straddled the non-profit and commercial theater through his career. He is a director, he's been a producer on Broadway, and he's been an extraordinarily successful producer dealing with new plays. He was, in one way or another, his own Literary Manager/Dramaturg and still to this day works very closely with playwrights in a very effective and supportive manner."

Excerpts from Mr. Whitehead's speech are on page 5 of the *LMDA Review*.



Pictured: Erin Sanders and Tim Sanford

Toronto Conference News

Candy Burley has already done a substantial amount of work on the conference. We have investigated dates and chosen the first weekend of June 1-3, with Friday May 31st as the Pre-Conference day. This weekend coincides with the annual Playwrights Union of Canada (PUC) conference, so there will be lots of interesting people in town. Candy has also begun to investigate possible conference host sites, form a conference organizing committee, and solicit conference sponsors. Our Pre-Conference this year will be organized by Judith Rudakoff of York University, and Harriet Power of Villanova University.

New Regional Divisions Proposed

As LMDA Secretary, Jayme Koszyn has taken on the responsibility of taking stock of the various LMDA regions, touching base with the regional VP's, trying to ascertain who is still active. One thing became clear in the process: some of the regions seemed rather arbitrarily designed. Jayme and Tim Sanford then sat down with a map of the U.S. (not yet Canada) and redrew the regions. Some of the proposed regions don't even have many active members. But, if we are to ensure LMDA's future, we need to encourage as much regional activity as possible.

We had question marks about certain areas of course and made some choices. But, we certainly can change things. We were particularly curious to get input from people in **Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Hawaii, Alaska, Tennessee, West Virginia, upstate New York, and Western Pennsylvania** about these regions.

Jayme has been trying to reach all the regional VP's. If she has not reached you and it is your assumption that you are a regional VP, please call Jayme at (617) 266-7900 ext.2528 or the LMDA Office. Below is a list of the regional divisions as they stand as of 9/22/95. Tell us what you think.

LMDA REGIONS

Southern California and Hawaii

Northern California

Northwest: Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Alaska

Southwest: Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming

Homestead States: Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma

Greater Chicago

Plains States: Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota

Ohio River: Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Southern Illinois, Northwestern New York, Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia

North Midwest: Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan

Southeast: Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee

Florida

Bayou States: Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama

Northeast: New England States and Northwestern New York

Mid-Atlantic: Washington D.C., Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, Southeastern New York

Metropolitan New York

Canada - Regions to be determined

Excerpts from Robert Whitehead's keynote address

I feel honored to be here and flattered to speak with you this morning. This is the tenth annual meeting of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. The theme is "Cross-Pollination: Art, Enterprise and Dramaturgy." All the terminology scares me a little bit, I've got to admit. I'd never heard the word "Dramaturge" until sometime in the '50s. Actually I heard it first up in Stratford, Canada. They had an explosive success starting that theater and it had a big influence on all of us. I went up there each year and that's where I first heard that word dropped. It seemed to me a little bit pretentious but I thought, "Wow, it must come from Europe."

It's very important that we remember that the commercial theatre in America was really the only theater we had until recently. And for about a hundred years it worked that way. I don't know if it worked anywhere else. The European theater was certainly not a commercial theater. Most of the important theaters there were municipally subsidized. But, in our country in a strange way, it worked. The social conditions, the economic conditions, our way of life, so to speak, lent itself to a functioning commercial theater.

My life was totally in the commercial theater. I came in on the tail end of what was a vigorous part of theater life in America. In the '20s you had some 200 plays opening on Broadway. It had adventure! It was experimental. It was anything you wanted it to be. And it was financially viable in the sense that though most plays lost money the chances of making it were fairly good. And if they did make it, they made it big. So, the combination of things made it a reasonable pursuit. I came into the theater first as a stage manager and an actor. I began to produce to create work for myself. I was desperate. The war was over and I thought I couldn't just hang around. I was terribly impatient about life and getting things going. But I did do it when it was a possible thing to do.

I'm going to drop my credits because I want to express what the commercial theater in America was at a certain time and why, as a result, we didn't have theater such as all of you are working in. In the course of about 15 years from the late '40s to the early '60s, I produced the following writers commercially: Dostoevski, Carson McCullers, T.S. Eliot, Thornton Wilder, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, William Inge, Clifford Odets, Gertrude Stein, George Bernard Shaw, William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Terrence Rattigan, Maxwell Anderson, Arthur Miller, Jean Anouilh, Duerrenmatt, S.N. Behrman, Robert Bolt, Harold Pinter, and others. All of those writers came into the scene in purely commercial productions. That couldn't happen today. It began to cease happening in the late fifties and sixties.

I could smell the demise of that kind of possibility and wanted desperately to put together a company, a prospect which was very exciting. It was also painful. I had terrible disagreements with Lincoln Center at that time. But, I managed to do it. Broadway was changing. Gradually, we were doing more musical shows and nightclub shows until we moved toward what has become a kind of Las Vegas extravaganza. The theater that really had something to say about our lives--whether satire, comedy or tragedy--that theater seemed to be disappearing. It has now almost totally disappeared; but it is through the work so many of you have been doing that it continues to have some real life.

The regional theatre movement began happening across the country. Theater centers were being built out of a general sense of necessity. When the darkness gathers, some light on the distant horizon always appears. It did in America. It has. It has a hell of a long way to go and we are besieged at this point. But that light has prevailed because fate moved in and theatre began to grow up around the country.

This movement relates to our theme, Cross-Pollination, because that light that I see on the distant horizon prevails in the idea of this gathering. Theater is never an industry. It's a crazy thing to try to put on a play. The motion picture industry has certainly used the theater continually and cross-pollination might be a very important thing. It might come out of just the kind of meeting you're having here. But up to now, I feel it's been a one-way street, the theater has done the pollinating. Still, the theater will continue to survive. It must survive. It has a deep relationship with our lives. It very seldom truly works the way we want it to work but when it does, when that moment does come, it's a living emotion that exists between two people. There's the actor and the audience and there's something that happens. When it does take place--which I say is practically never--when it does take place it changes the course of our lives a little bit. It also changes the course of social conditions in which we live. It finds its way into every aspect of life when it happens. It can never be reproduced in any form. It has nothing to do with the media. It has something to do only with a very private thing that is totally its own. But the fact that it is now at a terribly difficult time in its history and particularly in this country make the theme of this meeting quite important to me. I do feel that what the movie industry can bring to the theater can help not only enrich themselves but also enrich the theater itself.

Dramaturgy is a function performed by writers, directors, actors, producers, critics, teachers, designers, in which case we're all dramaturges. When I had that theater in Washington Square, one of the Associate Directors was Harold Clurman and I used to say to him, "You're the dramaturge!" I hardly knew the word then but I used to say it a lot. I'd say, "You're the dramaturge. Come up with some exciting plans. Come up with some exciting adventures we can embark on. We're banking on you because you're the dramaturge!"

CHECK IT OUT

LMDA member and LA conference attendee **Janice Paran** has a very witty and interesting article in the October 1995 issue of *American Theatre* about the conference. Kudos to Janice, and everyone else be sure to pick up a copy!

LMDA co-president **Tim Sanford** was recently named the new Artistic Director of Playwrights Horizons. Congratulations, Tim!

We are investigating New York City as the location of the **1997 Annual Conference**. It looks like we may be able to get affordable housing at Columbia University. More as plans develop.

U Caucus member **Geoff Proehl** is still in charge of the LMDA e-mail project. You may contact him at gproehl@ups.edu. If you have trouble reaching him you can call him at (206) 756-3101. LMDA can now be reached by e-mail. Our address is: ltimmel@email.gc.cuny.edu. (We had to use the administrator's name because CUNY will not issue an account to a "generic" name.)

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