

Fall 2003

# Review: The Newsletter of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, volume 14, issue 1

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# review

Volume 14, Issue 1  
Fall 2003

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## Far From Inundated

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari note that: "All history does is to translate a coexistence of becomings into a succession" (430). And for Deleuze and Guattari, so much can get lost in that translation. Their critique of the methods of history might also be applied to many production histories. By ordering information into a succession, a hierarchy and an implied progression of time and action emerges. The description of a rehearsal process often quite efficiently condenses the life out of the process itself, irons the com-

plexity out of it, and hides its collaborative quality. As dramaturgs in rehearsal, we often make it our task to defy simplifying successions and to create an atmosphere where the coexistence of becomings is more evident. To us, opening up a multiplicity of possible paths and gradually choosing among them is the definition of rehearsal. The dramaturg can be an agent against an overly hierarchical rehearsal that squelches complex, multi-vocal, and processural elements.

The most memorable moment from the conference in Chicago

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was when President Michele Volansky reminded the membership of LMDA that this organization continually attempts to subvert a hierarchical, sequential structure. Michele did this by asking members to stand and personally pledge to do something for LMDA. What followed was something more akin to a revival meeting than a professional one. The amount of dedication and interest and sentiment expressed by members for LMDA in this session was inspiring and contagious. If you were not able to attend, the foregoing scant description of this moment will not begin to do it justice. The moment was a tangible example of a coexistence of becomings—it was as though the future of the organization was taking shape as each member pledged to add something to the field of dramaturgy. When I (Shelley) stood up during this session, I noted that *Review* was far from inundated with ideas, articles, stories, photos, etc. Several months later, we are still far from inundated. So, to repeat, we welcome your submissions to *Review*. What *Review* becomes is up to you.

In this issue, you will find several examples of a spirit of becoming: for example, Liz Engelman raises the idea of a horizontal structure (rather than a vertical, hierarchical one); in his keynote address, Chuck Smith traced his own personal history through the complex theatre history of Chicago; the five Telephone Monologues (written for the conference) were created independently and yet in response to one another; and the multiple possibilities for theatre are forcefully expressed in the manifestoes from the Manifesto Competition. Enjoy this issue of *Review* and then take a minute to send us an e-mail in which you stand up (virtually) and tell us what you will contribute to *Review*—and what you want it to become.

## *a word from the president...*

**Michele Volansky**

As Gray Davis has shown, leadership is a tough thing. It's sometimes frustrating, it's often humbling, and it is always exhilarating.

One of the most important things that I have learned in the past year as president is that this is a remarkable organization, filled with smart, provocative and yes, fun, people. With all of the ups and downs of making computers work, reservations secure, and questions answered, we have continued to not only survive, but thrive. This is due in large part to the efforts of an amazing Executive Committee (Liz Engelman, Des Gallant, Gretchen Haley, Maxine Kern, Winston Neutel, and Lynn Thomson), an ever-growing in both size and stature Board (led by the fearless Mark Bly and featuring Past-Presidents Geoff Proehl, DD Kugler and Jayme Koszyn, Joan Channick, Kip Gould, Greg Gunter, Morgan Jenness, Jim Leverett, and our most recent newcomers Liz Diamond and David Henry Hwang) and most importantly, you, the membership. This is an organization that celebrates and embraces the notion of collaboration—without all of these forces working together, there would be no LMDA.

I would be remiss were I not to mention the heroic efforts of exiting Board members Arnold Aronson, Allan Kennedy, Tazewell Thompson, Jeremy Gerard, Lloyd Richards, and Tim Sanford. From all of us, to all of you—our deepest gratitude for your many years of significant contribution to the life of LMDA. Finally, a hearty welcome to new Board member Tim Blake Nelson and to new VP for Internal Communication Megan Monaghan, who will be stepping in to replace Liz Engelman as she begins her term as "President-elect."

Now, put June 24-27, 2004, on your calendars as the date for the Annual Conference in Philadelphia (planned by yours truly and Nakissa Eternad)—in honor of the location and the 04 US Presidential election, we'll be exploring "the dramaturg as citizen." If you haven't done so already, renew your membership. We're waiting for you.

## *review*

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*Review* is published twice yearly by the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. Submissions should ideally conform to MLA format (but we're not too picky). Spelling differences between Canadian and US English will be preserved. As per the name of our organization, "dramaturg" will be the default spelling, but we will preserve the spelling of any submitter who prefers "dramaturge." The same will hold for "theatre" and "theater."

Inquiries from prospective contributors are encouraged. PROJECTS-IN-PROCESS queries should be directed to Jacob Zimmer: "Small Wooden Shoe" <smallwoodenshoe@hotmail.com>. Queries regarding *Review*'s IN PRINT section should be directed to Madeleine Oldham: "Madeleine Oldham" <madalien@earthlink.net>. General inquiries and inquiries regarding feature articles may be directed to Shelley Orr: "Shelley Orr" <morr@artsci.wustl.edu>. Calendar and Events submissions should be directed to the appropriate LMDA regional representative. Questions regarding the Calendar and Events section should be directed to Liz Engelman: "Liz Engelman" <lengelman@mccarter.org>. *Review* reserves the right to edit (for length) any Calendar submission without notification. Regional updates should be 400–600 words in length; keep everybody informed about special events, readings, workshops, lectures, limited performances — the sort of thing that didn't make the subscription brochure.

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# LMDA CONFERENCE 2003

## “BHAGS” • Words of Welcome from Liz Engelman

As you all know, two weekends ago, TCG held its conference in Milwaukee. Its title was *Courage, Creativity, and Change*. Thanks to the TCG staff and the over 500 attendees, the conference was stimulating, energizing, and enlightening. It forced us all to look outside the frame of our particular jobs, even field, and encouraged us to look at the national, international, global landscape to explore and examine the larger ideas, issues, and trends at play in our lives that theatre then—hopefully—engages in and reflects.

Our LMDA conference—TURGS IN THE HOOD—couldn't come at a better time, on the heels of this larger conference. I hope that the focus of our conference, the crossing of the borders in all their literal and symbolic guises, can continue the conversations begun at TCG just 10 days ago. I think we are all well-poised to do so.

I know most of you were not in Milwaukee, so how can you enter a conversation you were not there for? Bear with me a moment while I attempt to recap some of the issues raised, and in my own dramaturgical way, try to connect some of the ideas at large to our role in particular.

At TCG, BHAGS abound. Big hairy, audacious goals. It's time we as an organization—and a field—had some. NEA chair Dana Gioia spoke about the need to “change the conversation” with the public surrounding the NEA, and the case it can make for the importance of art. It is my hope that we as dramaturgs can, starting at this conference, change the nature of our own as well by being the ones with the BHAGS.

Ted Halstead, of the New America Foundation, emphasized the need for BIG IDEAS for the political process. He called for an Activated citizenry: changes don't have to happen from the top down. His call for big new ideas was coupled with the need for Leadership with conviction: His refrain “BOLDNESS PAYS” called for the courage to put forth new ideas at whatever cost.

In the theater field, I think that can be our job. Dana Gioia, in one of his poems, states: “Give me a land of obstacles.” The artistic director of the Serbian Dah Theatre claimed that it is the impossible tasks that help you grow. She urged us to transform lazy thoughts into ones more rigorous. Israeli poet Motti Lerner pegged the theater as opposition to consensus, and described the theatre as a laboratory for reality, a hidden reality.

What leadership role can we take in relation to these experiments?

My favorite speaker, the former Mayor of Austin, Kirk Watson (who spoke in the bumper sticker phrases) encouraged us all to “find a place at the table.” He pinpointed IDEAS and IMAGINATION and PEOPLE as the best tools for building the new economy, the incubators of creativity, and called upon the T's of Technology and Tolerance as the ways of celebrating the diversity of opinions and ideas. We as dramaturgs are in one of the best positions to be the navigators between ideas, imagination, and people. On a smaller scale, this is what we do every day. Why not enlarge it?

There is no one better fit than a dramaturg to help guide the creation of a culture of creativity, to be the souls of the community. How can we as dramaturgs play a role in the big projects, how can we help create new constituencies and conversations? For us to be the active

citizens that Ted Halstead is calling for, how can we as dramaturgs aid in the removal of the barriers to creativity and become advocates in the system? (As Kirk Watson so eloquently put it, “Drama freaks are people too!”) How do we CROSS THE BORDERS between artists, the public, politics, to continue to make art the conversation, and make conversation out art?

Liz Lerman spoke perceptively about one's greatest weakness, and how it is these same strengths that are often the obstacles that stand in the way of change. The strengths of the dramaturg are many; they are often seen as: observing, questioning, listening, posing possibilities, reacting, reflecting, dreaming, imagining. While these are indeed commendable traits, thinking over them, they sound rather passive. How can we continue to draw on these as strengths and not allow for them to slip into weakness?

We bring up quite often the idea of “thinking outside the box.” Liz Lerman suggests the boxes can be actually be creative, but that maybe the boxes need walls with permeable membranes, so that lined up next to one another, connections can be made between them. Too often, she notes, the boxes are stacked vertical in a hierarchical relationship (with those in the boxes at the top claiming all the knowledge without having to explain themselves, and those in the bottom boxes being forced to always explain themselves). What is important—imperative even—is to make the boxes horizontal.

We are best poised to tip the scale sideways and see how we can travel across those permeable borders, for they are as permeable as our passion and persistence allow them to be. Let this conference allow for us to draw on those strengths of ours and observe, question, listen, challenge, pose possibilities, react, reflect, dream, imagine how we can boldly move the conversation horizontally forward across the many borders. Let's envision how we can—as Ben Cameron challenged 10 days ago—be the masters of change, not the victims of it.

This last note, and then I'll close. An executive director who attended the LMDA breakout session which I posed at the TCG conference (the subject was “what is/can be the role of dramaturgy in theater leadership and innovation”) said he came into our room because this is where his SOULMATES were. A playwright who attended said that he came to be with us because we were the people who most understood him, and with whom he spends most of his time. Looking around our small group, I was proud. We are the holders of the soul, of ideas. We create relationships. We deepen the conversation, we insist on surprise. We are open. We re-invent. We understand time. Let's bring this all to the table.

Let's make what we do so vital that, to paraphrase bumper sticker king Kirk Watson, cars will boast on their bumpers “if you don't own a dramaturg, git one.”

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# LMDA CONFERENCE 2003

## Remarks from Conference Co-Chair Ed Sobel

The bad news is I'm not Celise Kalke. The good news is I'm not Terry McCabe.

I thought we should start by taking a moment to congratulate ourselves on the borders we've already crossed. For me personally there have been a few. I've gone from never having been to an LMDA conference, to being part of a session, to moderating a session, to co-chairing the entire conference; all in the space of a month and a half. Given that I don't heavily self-identify as a dramaturg, the number of borders I've crisscrossed puts me up there with Carmen Sandiego.

Some of us have had to literally cross borders to get here. Our neighbors to the north, deserve congratulations for beating back the border patrol's paranoia about mad-cow, SARS, and terrorists bearing exploding hockey pucks. There may be a few, only a few I hope, of our colleagues from the East who, like the *New York Times*, every two years or so rediscover that they are shocked, shocked, shocked to find out there is a vibrant cultural life west of the Alleghenys. So I congratulate you for getting your passports ready in time. In fairness, and I say this only because I still self-identify somewhat as a New Yorker, one of the few things about the conference for which I can take some credit is that the t-shirts are black, so that our friends from New York can wear them.

All of us, in these difficult economic times, have surmounted the high fencing of expense to be here to participate in these couple of days. It might be worth reminding ourselves, that not everyone made it over the barbed wire.

The subject of our gathering is crossing borders, diversity. I'll confess I'm a bit flummoxed. As Chuck Smith made reference to last night, the theater for which I work historically hasn't exactly been the benchmark on this issue. So I spend a lot of time thinking about diversity, and what it means. I believe deeply in giving voice to the previously disenfranchised. I believe in correcting historic under representation.

But what vexes me greatly personally, and what I hope this conference that I now find myself helping to run may address, is the way in which discussions of crossing borders and diversifying often begin and end with a citation of differences. Even the phrase "crossing borders" implies the imprimatur of an appropriate territoriality.

The fact Terry McCabe was not invited to speak here, nor has he decided to attend on his own, speaks to two underlying questions about diversity. First, that sometimes the border we need to cross is our own front door. And second that when we speak of diversity, whether we mean race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, geography, professional label or definition, we always start with an idea: an idea of differences between us. And I'm reminded that the words "diversity" and "division" share the same Latin root.

If my experience in and love for theater has taught me anything, it is that human beings are human beings.

The theatre I love reminds us of the common humanity we share. So my hope for the conference is that in our conversations we will find ways of placing that sentiment downstage center.

Between the bus tour and Chuck Smith last night, you may have

heard all you really want to hear about Chicago theatre. But there was something in the spirit of Chuck's remarks that struck me as particularly resonant. Chicago is, even now in difficult times, a remarkably healthy and vital theatrical community. There are 1500 active members of AEA, and you could probably triple that number if you started counting SAG and AFTRA members, not to mention those with no union affiliation. The League of Chicago Theatres boasts a membership of some 140 theatres. There are some 100 shows up at any given time. We have not experienced major layoffs or closings. Subscriptions and ticket sales are not dangerously low. New and risky works are being pursued with vigor. Certainly this vibrancy is due to a number of factors. But embedded in Chuck's story last night is an amazing fabric of relationships, of work and experiences shared. Chuck's talk was a valentine not to his own work in Chicago, but to his embrace of and by this community. I'd suggest that at least in part the health of Chicago theater is due in no small measure to the common love for the work as work itself, and a common sense of mutual responsibility. It's a feeling almost universally shared here. Chuck had his Ted Ward. I wouldn't have whatever career I've had, were it not for Susan Booth. I think about that every time a new playwright or dramaturg or director asks to meet with me. When you think that way, you look at the person sitting opposite you less as male/female, old/young, of color/white, director or dramaturg, and more simply as another human being who wants to do this great thing I do. How can I help them?

But I know I'm preaching to the choir. So let's get to the business at hand.

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LMDA Conference 2003 began with a bus tour to four Chicago area theatres. The tour afforded LMDA members a chance to see a range of Chicago theatres, but also to see each theatre within its neighborhood and community.

# Keynote Speech given by **Chuck Smith**

introduced by Michele Volansky

**Michele Volansky:** We live in extraordinary times, with events that are at once devastating and staggering. We practice an art form that is at once up-lifting and heartbreaking.

We've gathered here in this Windy City of Big Shoulders, to explore this collision of the devastating, the staggering, the up-lifting and the heartbreaking on the personal, the local, the national, and the international stages.

Chicago is one of the greatest theater cities—the home to celebrated artists working at nearly every level, from the kids at Piven Theatre Workshop learning how to move in space to the writers under commission at one of the city's 3 Tony-Award-winning theaters.

Chicago is also home to the skyscraper and all that it has done to impact the world architecturally; to the almost-mythical University of Chicago where scientists have toiled away, touching our lives in ways we cannot ever fathom and to the political dynasty of the Daley family, which has altered our political landscape since 1968.

We're here to examine "borders" and all the implications, exasperations and exhilarations that that word entails.

Chuck Smith is one of those remarkable border-crossers that makes our art form so spectacular. When I first moved to Chicago in 1995, he reached out to me as the new kid on the block, and helped introduce me to the literally thousands of artists here. He's gentle and diligent, insightful and profound. It is a great honor to introduce him to you.

**Chuck Smith:** Good evening, my name is Chuck Smith, and I am a resident director of the Goodman Theatre here in Chicago.

Most of us remember the first theatrical dollar we earned. I earned mine at the Goodman Theatre during the 1970/1971 season. I was hired to understudy a role in a production of *THE NIGHT THOREAU SPENT IN JAIL* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, the same gentlemen who wrote *INHERIT THE WIND*.

The role was a runaway slave named Williams who encounters Thoreau at Walden Pond. Ira Rodgers was cast as the runaway and Christopher Walken played the role of Thoreau. Ira was the number one black guy in Chicago voice-over work in those days. He also had his own one-man cabaret show, which is where *THOREAU* director Patrick Henry saw him. Henry was famous then as head of the popular Free Street Theater. I had admired Chris Walken's work, particularly in the play *STATUS QUO VADIS* at Chicago's Ivanhoe Theatre, which was under the direction of another Chicago icon, George Keathley.

There I was working at the Goodman Theater with the likes of Ira Rodgers, Christopher Walken and Patrick Henry in a play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Not bad, I should have had my camera. No camera, but I did leave with a lasting impression of great experi-

ences and lessons learned. One particular experience is how well I was treated and supported by the Goodman staff. At the traditional Goodman closing night party, some key staff members were there to say goodbye to the actors and to me this was a class act. I really wanted to stay, and made up my mind then that someday I'd be on staff at the Goodman Theatre and would be around to say goodbye to the actors on closing nights.

During the rehearsal period I got one of my first lessons on script development craft. In the play, the runaway slave I understudied makes it to the free north, encounters Thoreau and is so impressed by him that offers to give up his freedom and become his slave. Ira confronted the writers, questioning the logic of an ill treated bondsman giving up his newfound freedom under any circumstances. The writers heard the case, agreed and changed the text. That was December of 1970, and little did I know that I was experiencing my first lesson in dramaturgy.

This year, 2003, I experienced yet another great Goodman Theatre moment when I was asked to serve as production dramaturge on the world premiere of August Wilson's latest drama *GEM OF THE OCEAN*. One of my favorite lines from the play was when the character Aunt Ester says, "You are on an adventure Mr. Citizen. I bet you didn't know that. You're on an adventure and you didn't even know it."

My life, especially my life in the theatre, has also been and continues to be an adventure and while writing this speech, I struggled with where to begin and end the story of my theatrical adventures. After some thought I decided the most appropriate place would be the Goodman Theatre, America's number one (ranked by Time Magazine) regional theatre. I want to tell you the story of how I became a staff member and along the way, introduce you to Black Theatre in Chicago, which is, in my opinion, America's number one Black Theater community. I have been a member of this community for 39 years and a member of the Goodman artistic staff for 11 years.

For the record, I was born here in Chicago on March 7, 1938, at Cook County hospital (the one made famous by the NBC television drama *E.R.*, which was originally a play that started here at Chicago's Organic Theater). I was raised on Chicago's South Side where after two failed marriages I live today with my daughter Michelle, a professional cosmetologist. My one and only ambition as a youth was to



Chicago theatre veteran Chuck Smith photo © Joan Marcus

join the United States Marine Corps where, after serving six and a half years, I was honorably discharged in 1963 a few days after Dr. King delivered his famous speech. A year later I was ready to return to the Corps when I was persuaded to join a community theatre group and my life changed.

Chicago, known as the windy city and the city of big shoulders also carries a large, rich history in theater. It is the home of three regional, Tony Award-winning theater companies Steppenwolf, a company run by actors; Goodman, run by directors; and Victory Gardens, run by playwrights. Most of the city's 140 League of Chicago's theaters are located on the city's North Side.

Chicago also has five Black Theater companies. Eta Theatre and The Chicago Theater Company are located on the South Side. On the North Side are the Black Ensemble Theatre, MPAACT (Maat Production Association of Afrikan Centered Theatre), and CONGO SQUARE. MPAACT and Congo Square do not have a theater facility. All five companies are members of the African American Alliance of Chicago and each produce a full theater season. All of this activity plus the black productions featured regularly at the Goodman, Victory Gardens, Next, and sporadic ventures from the rest of the Chicago's professional theater community including Steppenwolf and North Light makes Chicago a national leader in the production of Black Theater.

Black Theatre has been in this city for a long time. The first play I remember seeing was in the early 1950's at the old Parkway Community House on 51st and South Parkway, now known as King Drive. My Grandmother took me there to see my Aunt Willa perform in a play called "The Monkey's Paw." The performance took place up in the center's loft and the group was called The Skyloft Players, founded by Langston Hughes.

However, Black theater in Chicago began long before that. In 1905, The Pekin, located at 2700 S. State Street, first opened as a saloon and gambling den. The owner Robert Motts was encouraged by residents and city officials to make the place more respectable, so Motts transformed it to a cabaret-style setting. The Pekin Theater Temple Of Music thus became Chicago's first local all Negro show in the city's history. The legacy continues through the years with Black Theatre companies in this city too numerous to mention in this speech but surely know that if we stand tall in Black Theatre today it is because we stand on the big shoulders of our ancestors.

Early in the Spring of 1971 after completing the run at the Goodman I was invited to come and work with June Pasacik of the Kingston Mines Theater Company on north Lincoln Avenue located just a block north-west of the current Victory Gardens Theater complex. The VG complex was then occupied by a theatre company called The Body Politic headed by a Rev. Jim Shiflet and an actor named James O'Riley. They asked a group of actors operating in Madison, Wisconsin, to come and use the downstairs area of the building. The invited group was the Organic Theater Company, run by Stuart Gordon. Organic was looking for a new home because they were being kicked out of Madison for slipping a nude scene in a recent production of their PETER PAN.

The Organic took Chicago by storm. Some of their early productions included its adaptation of the classic CANDIDE, their original production of WARP, a comic book style action adventure play and POE, a production in which featured current Broadway actor Andre DeShields, as the raven. One scene frightened me to the point that I

had to check and make sure I could quickly get to the exit! Andre went on to be in the Chicago company of HAIR and later originated the role of THE WIZ on Broadway. I first noticed Designing Women's Meshach Taylor in Organic's THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT around the time the company moved to the Beacon Street theater (current home of Jackie Taylor's Black Ensemble theater). Organic's popular play about Cubs fans at Wrigley Field called BLEACHER BUMS went on tour on the West Coast. Both featured Dennis Franz of the popular NYPD Blue television series. WARP Part 2 and Part 3 were created and the trilogy went on to Broadway, but it didn't last. Of the few Organic shows that I missed, BLOODY BESS, the pirate adventure stands out. Many still rank it number one in Chicago theater favorites.

The Organic later purchased a building on Clark Street just north of Belmont but could never seem to make it work. The only stand out was their production of E.R., which went on to the left coast and originated current successful television drama. Years later the Organic organization teamed up with Ina Marlowe of Touchtone Theater Company and is now producing out of Loyola University.

The original GREASE was the hit running at Kingston Mines when I started working with them and there were always long lines waiting to see shows at the Mines and the Organic Theatres. That's when I came to realize that something was going on with this Chicago theater thing.

Kingston Mines was hoping for another popular show to follow the lively GREASE, but unfortunately, TERMINAL by Susan Yankowitz, wasn't lively at all. In fact it was all about death and not well received. We struggled through the run with the help of a wildly popular weekend midnight show called THE WHORES OF BABYLON. We were in the beginning stages of rehearsals for the next production based on King Tut when everything at the Kingston Mines Theater folded.

I took an improvisation class at Second City Theatre on north Wells and returned to the South Side troop that I started with, The Dramatic Art Guild (or D.A.G. as we called it). It was an integrated community theater company operating out of Michael Reese Hospital, doing plays for the patients. In late 1971 a few black D.A.G. actors joined a new group at the Parkway Community House called the Experimental Black Actors Guild, commonly known as X-BAG. They were working on a production of Ron Milner's WHO'S GOT HIS OWN and featured a marvelous young actor named Douglas Alan Mann. I began working with X-BAG in 1972 and this was my first real experience with what we now commonly refer to as Black Theater.

Years later Doug Mann and I would return to the Parkway Playhouse with two other actors, the late Michael Perkins and Charles Finister, to found the Chicago Theater Company. It was Chicago's first black company created under an agreement with The Actors Equity Association.

My first show with X-BAG was DAY OF ABSENCE by Douglas Turner Ward and I played the Announcer in white face. The company was run by a public school art teacher named Clarence Taylor who, like so many black theatre artists before me, had tried to work in the Chicago's "legitimate" theater but was rejected because of his race. That rejection turned Clarence Taylor into a Black Theater revolutionary and "Black Theater for Black People" became his X-BAG motto. Clarence Taylor spent hours preaching to Doug and myself about the importance of practicing our craft in the Black community.



My most memorable X-BAG adventure happened not on stage but when the Regal Theater (Chicago's Apollo Theater) on 47th Street, was being demolished. Clarence, Doug, and I went to the site and with permission, tearfully removed many of the seats and installed them in our theater at Parkway. The following season, Doug became an X-BAG artist in residence and I was assigned resident stage manager as the company's popularity increased. We received countless requests to bring shows to various locations throughout the city, so I put together two small productions that could travel easily. One was a collection of staged African-American poetry that we called "Poetry In Motion," and the other was a more risky one-act play called MIDNIGHT ANGEL by local playwright, Oscar Griffin. Depending on the venue, we took these shows to churches, community centers, and schools all over the city.

In the mid '70s we were doing MIDNIGHT ANGEL at a north Wells cabaret in Old Town called Club Misty where I first met Jackie Taylor of the Chicago Black Ensemble (or Black Ensemble Theatre). She had written this wonderful musical called THE OTHER CINDERELLA that was she was performing at Club Misty on a regular basis. A few months later, she moved into a 150-seat theatre on North Wells. It was rumored that a gangster who literally disappeared soon after she moved in owned the venue and she was able to stay there several years rent-free. Jackie and I had a lot in common and became friends fast. We first worked together at Victory Gardens and then later when she was operating in the studio of the new Organic space on North Clark. I directed two productions for Jackie there, her one-woman show PLAYSONG and FISH TALE by Charles Michael Moore.

Jackie later hooked up with drummer Jimmy Tillman (Jimmy has his PhD in music, and I sometimes refer to him as Dr. Cool) who became her music director. They started producing out of the now famous Jane Adams Hull House Theatre located at 3212 Broadway, the declared home of Chicago's off-Loop theater movement. Together Jackie and Jimmy developed the documentary, cabaret-style musical that the Black Ensemble is known for today. Jackie writes and directs most of the Black Ensemble productions, and recently has started to commission playwrights for scripts. When directing she hates tech with a passion and knows that I love it. It's not unusual for me to get a call from her asking if I can stop by and hang out during any of her tech weeks.

The Chicago Black Ensemble moved into the Beacon Street Theater in the mid-to-late eighties where they are currently located and have begun raising funds to build a new theater. Jackie is currently touring nationally the ensemble's smash hit, MY HEART IS CRYING, The Jackie Wilson Story, which played in the 2001 National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, NC and the Apollo Theatre in New York.

Late in 1973 X-BAG'S Clarence Taylor introduced me to playwright Theodore (Ted) Ward. Clarence decided to do one of Ted's plays, THE DAUBERS, and wanted me to direct it. At the time I was recently divorced from my first [wife] marriage and living in a swinging high-rise bachelor apartment in South Commons on south Michigan. As it turned out Ted Ward had a special friend living in the same building, and he and I spent many long nights talking theater. Ted was a published playwright and his play OUR LAND had been produced on Broadway. He liked what I did in directing THE DAUBERS and encouraged me to forget about acting and focus on directing. He pointed out to me that there was only one black direc-

tor active in Chicago's equity theatre arena at the time, a respected actor/director named Bob Curry. Ted was also impressed with the fact that I was then seeking a degree and had worked at the Goodman and Kingston Mines. Knowing how much I loved working with X-BAG and told me that I should always keep strong ties with the black theater community, but should never be afraid to venture outside of it. He told me all the things I needed to hear and charted the steps I needed to take in launching a professional directing career. I was very proud to have him in the audience in the fall of 1978 when I directed my very first equity production, EDEN by Steve Carter, at the Victory Gardens Theatre.

I had come across EDEN in 1976. I was emotionally suffering from the failure of a second attempt at marriage and decided to take my then 8-year-old daughter Michelle to meet our relatives in New York. My uncle, Abraham Booker (my mother's brother) served in World War II and when it was over decided not to return to Chicago but make a go of it in New York City. Later in the 1950's he married Lois DeChabert and they successfully raised her two children Glenn and Hermoine, Herm graduating from Hunter College in New York and the late Glenn DeChabert from Yale Law School and the University of Pennsylvania. I have traditionally visited them for Thanksgiving most of my adult life.

In 1976 Michelle and I visited Uncle Abe and his family for the Easter weekend. Uncle Abe and Aunt Lois suggested that I see EDEN at the Negro Ensemble Company. It was a good suggestion for after seeing the production I knew this was the play for me to direct in Chicago to get things going. It took me almost a year to get the rights. At the time, I was a guest director at Loop City College where I had studied under Sydney Daniels for several years. I first directed EDEN there in the Loop College Theatre in 1977 with a student cast. It went very well and even got a few positive press notices.

In August 1977, I got my degree from Governors State University and was asked to guest direct a production of a play called MY SWEET CHARLIE. The show went up in the early part of 1978 and again got some favorable press.

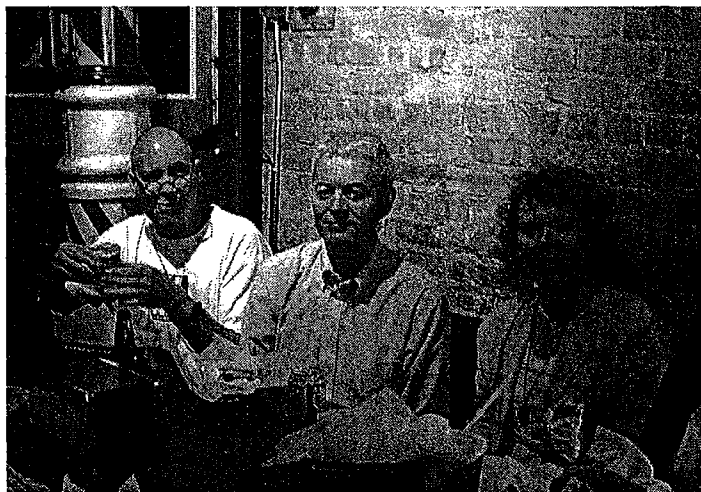
Now armed with two productions to shop around, I went straight to Dennis Zacek, the artistic director at the Victory Gardens Theater. I chose Victory Gardens because they had just mounted a production of Lonnie Elder's CEREMONIES OF DARK OLD MEN under Zacek's direction. While I was at the production, I noticed in their mission statement that they were committed to produce a black show each season. I hounded Dennis for an interview and he finally granted me one. Remembering all of my Ted Ward instructions, I had my "stuff" together and beautifully laid out. Dennis was impressed and promised he would read both plays and get back to me. Jackie Taylor was one of Zacek's former students at Loyola University and was then on the Victory Gardens teaching staff and she helped to convince him that bringing me on board would be a good idea. After what seemed like forever Dennis called me back and hired me to direct EDEN.

In the 1970's, the Victory Gardens Theatre was located down the street from Wrigley Field at 3730 N. Clark. Victory Gardens was in its fifth season and rehearsed during the day, six days a week, so I had to make schedule arrangements with my nine-to-five. I had been a computer programmer for the Illinois Department of Public Aid for over ten years and it worked out well because, per Ted Ward's advise, I had a back load of vacation days saved up for such an occasion.

The 1978 production of EDEN was a huge success, gathering four Joseph Jefferson Nominations. Thus began professional directing career and my relationship with Steve Carter and the Victory Gardens Theatre that still exists today. My third season at Victory Gardens featured another Steve Carter play called DAME LORRIANE and starred the late Ester Rolle, who was a close friend of Steve's from their early days at the NEC. My most recent Victory Gardens production was KNOCK ME A KISS by Charles Smith that opened in Jan. 2000. It was so popular that even Oprah came to see it. I am currently working on getting KNOCK ME A KISS and two other shows mounted at Woodie King's New Federal Theater in New York.

1978 was an important year at the Goodman also. They mounted their very first production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL that year. Earlier that spring, associate artistic director Greg Mosher mounted a Stage-Two production of SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD. In the fall, the very first show he mounted after becoming artistic director was a main-stage production of Richard Wright's NATIVE SON. A few years later he really turned some heads when he staged a production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL with a black Tiny Tim. I liked Greg Mosher, I heard him speak on a panel and remember him saying he couldn't understand why Chicago's professional theaters, which were suffering at the box office, weren't taking advantage of the fact that Chicago has a population of over 2 million African-Americans and a wealth of black theater talent. The following season after NATIVE SON, he brought in African writer and director Wole Soyinka to mount a production of his DEATH AND THE KINGS HORSEMAN in a co-production with the Arena Stage in D.C. After the HORSEMAN run in D.C., many of the Chicago cast members, now with equity cards in hand, went on to New York City instead of coming back to Chicago.

Luckily, some did come back including current radio personality Bonnie DeShong, Jackie Taylor, and actor Ernest Perry, who currently has done more shows at the Goodman than any actor in the history of the theater. Returning from HORSEMAN Ernest got busy putting together a theater company called Amistad Productions and asked Bonnie and I to join. I was a bit reluctant only because they were meeting on Wednesday nights to read plays and set policy, and Wednesday was one of my nights to watch my daughter. But even in my absence, those Wednesdays evenings became legendary. Every Chicago black actor who was around in those days has a story to tell about Wednesday nights at The Perry's. Helped by the fact that Ernest's wife Alice is one of the best cooks on the planet, those Wednesday readings led to equity showcase productions from 1979 to 1982 that included THE BLACK PICTURE SHOW at Hull House, IMPROMPTU and A CONVERSATION AT NIGHT WITH A DISPISED CHARACTER at Parkway and a critically acclaimed production of SUSPENDERS at Loop College. Fortunately I was involved in each as stage manager, actor, or director. All of these productions, plus the action from other members of the Black Theater Alliance of Chicago, including Kuumba Workshop (then Chicago's leading black theater company); LaMont Zeno Community Theater (under the artistic direction of Pemon Rami, then the black theater community's most popular director); Black Heritage Theatrical Players; Kusema; New Concept Theater; Chicago Black Ensemble; and in March of 1979, Ebony Talent School of Ujima (now ETA) purchased a screen factory on South Chicago Avenue, becoming the first black theatre company in Chicago to own its own space since the Pekin Theatre in



LMDA members DD Kugler, Mark Bly, and Morgan Jenness enjoy a break from the conference.

1905; this gave all of us Chicago black theatre artists reason to look to the 1980s with promise. Unfortunately, the early eighties saw the folding of my beloved X-BAG, and a new group called Black Visions began using the Parkway Playhouse part time.

Around this time, a force of nature called Steppenwolf came upon the Chicago Theater scene. They were young, extremely talented, and very, very smart. Plus they knew exactly what they wanted to do and exactly how they wanted to do it.

I saw the Steppenwolf group in the late seventies when they started off in the Chicago suburb of Highland Park with shows like INDIAN WANTS THE BRONX and THE GLASS MENAGERIE. I was completely blown away by their tight ensemble work. They moved to Chicago to the Hull House space on 3212 N. Broadway. I remember their prophetic ads read, "Steppenwolf moves to Broadway." Those were the true glory days of the company to old-timers like me. Those days birthed Steppenwolf greats like MICE AND MEN, TRUE WEST, and my all time favorite BALM IN GILEAD. Plus they did some funky, great late-night weekend shows there at Hull House. It was at one of those late night shows that I first saw John Mahoney, famous now for his TV role of Frazier's dad. They brought in popular New York actor/director Austin Pendleton to direct them in SAY GOODNIGHT GRACIE and he has been working with them ever since.

Sheldon Patinkin, head of the theater department at Chicago's Columbia College, mentored and hired many of the Steppenwolf players to guest teach, act, and direct at the college, so they wouldn't have to work non-theater day jobs. I remember one Saturday afternoon at a League of Chicago Theaters panel discussion held at Columbia College, Steppenwolf actor Rondi Reed, who one of the panelists, was very late. When she arrived she calmly apologized and explained that she was at a very important meeting where the Steppenwolf actors had just fired their entire board of directors. Again, they knew exactly what they wanted to do and exactly how they wanted to do it, and they still do.

Personally since seeing them in Highland Park I have always been a Steppenwolf groupie and I am happy to say that they have finally done an African-American play on their main stage. This season they mounted a fine production of Alice Childress's WEDDING BAND featuring members of the Congo Square Theater Company and is scheduled to open their next season with Suzan-Lori Parks's TOP-

DOG/UNDERDOG. In 1982 Sheldon Patinkin hired me to direct a student production of Lonnie Elder's CEREMONIES IN DARK OLD MEN at Columbia College. When the run was over he asked me to join the faculty. I told him that I wasn't a teacher and he replied "None of us are," and I have been there ever since.

I was able to bring in Ernest Perry as a guest artist to play the lead in CEREMONIES. Ernest and I had just completed the equity showcase production of SUSPENDERS by Umar Bin Hassan at Loop College featuring the then popular award winning actor Vince Viverito, who I had worked with on DAME LORRIANE at Victory Gardens. We did it at the Loop College theater to bring attention to the fact that the city was building a new Loop College, but wasn't going to include a theater in the new facility. It was a great production, but our political efforts were in vain. The new Loop College, named after the first black mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington, does not have a theater.

Soon after SUSPENDERS ran, City Lit Theater Company asked the three of us to work with them to do a staged reading adaptation of a short story about Pullman car porters called SOLO SONG FOR DOC. To my surprise City Lit's artistic director Arnie April didn't want me to direct the work but to play the title role of Doc. The show sold out at the Illinois Institute for Technology. We then moved it to Hyde Park's Black Box Theater at Mandel Hall on the University of Chicago campus. We took a proposal to Greg Mosher to try and get it in the Goodman Studio but it was booked solid. A few years later in 1985, Greg Mosher suddenly left the Goodman to take over the two theaters at the Lincoln Center in New York.

In 1983 I was introduced to Rufus Hill, Keithen Carter, and Phillip Brown who had written a lively upbeat musical called PO' (as in poor) but with no experience and no hard cash they had no idea how to produce it. With all the equity showcases I had done with Amistad, I knew just how to put it up. We rented a loft at 806 N. Peoria (the current location of Design Lab) and mounted the show under the showcase code. We played to packed houses but no producers would bite, including Roche Schulfer, executive director of the Goodman.

Never the less Roche Schulfer is a pretty amazing guy. Fresh out of Notre Dame, he started off in the Goodman box office and worked his way up to the very top. I first met him in 1978 when I took a summer class on how to produce theater at the old St. Nicolas Theatre. Roche was the instructor. When he first walked into the room I wondered why such a young kid would want to know about producing theatre and was floored when I realized he was the teacher. Young and smart, Roche taught me a lot in that class including the age-old lesson, never judge a book by its cover. At a recent Goodman Board meeting, Roche was awarded a special presentation for 30 years of exceptional service.

Closing night of PO' was the beginning of The Chicago Theatre Company. Doug Mann was at the closing night party and quietly said to me "Why don't we go home to Parkway?" That sounded like a pretty good idea to me.

The director who ran the Parkway Community Center was a wonderful brother named Karim Childs. We worked together on a few projects while I was at X-BAG, and when X-BAG folded I sent him a letter to discuss the possibility of using his space. I worked there for years with X-BAG and had done a show there in the summer of 1980 with Ernest Perry's Amistad Productions, which turned out to be Parkway's first equity performance. In late December 1983 Doug and I set up the meeting with Karim and he agreed to let us use

the space beginning in August 1984.

In January 1984, Doug and I brought in two other guys, Mike Perkins and Charles Finister, to help put it all together. Mike and I worked together with Amistad Productions, he was an all-around theater talent. He could do anything, and do it well—act, direct, stage manage, and design. Actually, he and Bonnie DeShong studied theater with many of the Steppenwolf members at Illinois State University in Bloomington. Mike's day job was with Illinois Department of Public Aid, the same as mine.

Charles Finister was a producer, organizer type who studied theater at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He started a company called The Chicago Theater Company and had done some pretty good shows. It folded, however, and thinking we could fool the funding community into believing that we were the same group with an established track record, the four of us decided to incorporate under the same name, also with agreement from the Actors Equity Association, to offer theater from a black perspective. It didn't work—we couldn't get a dime from anyone. Harold Scablow, a friend of mine at the nine-to-five, loaned us \$5,000 to get us started. By January of 1984, we were meeting weekly and had assigned titles and responsibilities, Charles would manage the company and I would be the artistic director. Mike was the resident stage manager and he also wanted acting and directing options. Doug, whose voice-over career had really begun to take off, was associate director.

We came up with our first season. We would start off with shows I had done before—shows that I knew worked and had gotten some press. PO' would be first, then SUSPENDERS. The other two slots were to be determined. I made it clear, however, that after the first season, we should look for a larger space. I didn't want to live at the small, 100-seat Parkway anymore.

In late January, I got a call from playwright Charles Michael Moore who had written THE HOOCH, a play about Marines in Vietnam. They wanted a Marine director. I saw a performance when it played at the LaMont Zeno on Chicago's West Side and liked it. It was going to go up in New York at Woodie King's New Federal Theatre and they wanted me as the director. I would be gone for four weeks in April but would be back in plenty of time to set up our first show. My only problem was taking off from the Public Aid office, since I was running low on vacation days. I somehow worked it out and was New York-bound again.

New York is always an easy trip for me—it is sort of like going to Grandma's house. My Uncle and Aunt live in a huge Harlem apartment where they raised two kids who are now grown and on their own. My aunt Lois, whom I love dearly, lives there alone now, which is why I currently spend as much time in New York as I possibly can.

I arrived there in March of 1984 to direct my first New York show and they were totally thrilled. My aunt and uncle were avid theatergoers at that time. One of their proudest collections is an original program from an early (preview or workshop) performance of A CHORUS LINE. I think they saw the very first public performance. It has always been very difficult for me to explain to them that there actually is professional theater done outside of New York City. To them and to most New Yorkers, this somehow does not compute.

THE HOOCH featured Kevin Hooks, son of Robert Hooks co-founder of the Negro Ensemble Company, in the lead role, and the show went off without a hitch. Steppenwolf's production of TRUE WEST had taken New York by storm, and naturally I secretly antici-

pated the same THE HOOCH. But, alas, luke-warm reviews put an end to all that. My family and friends filled the house the night after it opened and my cousin Hermoine and her young son Jonathan hosted a fabulous cast party; the following day I came home.

PO' opened the Friday after Labor Day in 1984 to great reviews. Word-of-mouth from the showcase the year before picked up right away and we had ourselves a hit. Too bad because starting on such a high meant everything was bound to go downhill from there. Mike and I were busy running the show and Doug was off into his voice-over career and not around very much. We were pulling in close to \$1,500 - 2,000 per week profit, but somewhere near the sixth week all the money disappeared. Charles Finister resigned from the company and signed a statement of liability for the loss, which estimated between ten and fifteen thousand dollars.

We had already decided to extend the show, so we did so until the end of December. We closed and although everyone got paid, we couldn't pay back our loan and had no money for the next show. After wrapping everything up, Mike and I were standing on the corner of 67th and King Drive waiting on his No. 3 bus. We discussed our options, which really were to take the risk and go on or quit while we were even, with the exception of the loan which we would pay out of pocket.

I wanted to quit but Mike Perkins wanted to go on, so we went on. For the next year, every dime we made from Public Aid, Columbia College, and any other outside show we worked fed right into the company. During that time I directed YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK at Pegasus and MASTER HAROLD AND THE BOYS at Victory Gardens. We survived, Doug came back, and we won a Jefferson Award for PO' and received a nomination for SUSPENDERS.

Now, nineteen years later, Doug Mann is the only one of the original four who is still there at Parkway. Charles Finister and Mike Perkins are with the ancestors, and the ancestors will judge them both, not I. As for me, I have completely recovered from my financial loss, and I am where I want to be. So is Doug. I don't think he'll ever leave Parkway. He can't leave Parkway because he is a disciple of Clarence Taylor, just like I am a disciple of Ted Ward.

After I staying with CTC for six years, I came to realize that the company intended to stay at Parkway forever, and I began working on plans to leave. One of my most popular shows there was in 1989, a ninety-minute, three-character drama called THE MEETING by Jeff Stetson. It got extended several times and caught the eye of Robert Falls, the recently selected artistic director at the Goodman.

Years before, Bob Falls came to Chicago as artistic director of the Wisdom Bridge Theatre after graduating from the University of Illinois, and he never looked back. I feel his work at the Goodman is nothing short of ingenious, and his Tony Award-winning productions seem to back me up on this. During his days at Wisdom Bridge his award-winning production of HAMLET is the one most spoken of, however, I especially remember a play he directed in 1979 called WINGS that hit me so hard I got lost driving home. Two others I can't forget are the powerful IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST with popular Chicago actor William Peterson (now TV's CSI lead) and a haunting piece he did with the St. Nicholas Theater Company called A SORROW BEYOND DREAMS, with a young Steppenwolf actor named John Malkovich. Anyway, in 1989, Bob Falls selected my production of THE MEETING as part of Goodman's 1989/90 Studio season.

After THE MEETING closed at CTC the lead actors Harry Lennix

(recently seen in Julie Taymore's "Titus" and currently in "Matrix II") and Greg Alan Williams ("Baywatch" and one of the generals on "West Wing") started a company called Legacy. They invested in a set, props, costumes and began touring the show. When they got a booking in Atlanta, they sent for me to help them get the show up. Right in the middle of a successful run, Greg was cast in "Baywatch" and we replaced him with Percy Littleton, who also did the Goodman Studio run. THE MEETING ran at Goodman Studio in the Fall of 1989 definitely rekindled my determination to work there as a staff member. However, in the Spring of 1990, while still trying to come up with a quiet exit strategy from Chicago Theater Company, my Uncle Abe died in New York.

By some strange, but truly fortunate, twist of fate I was accepted for an Arts Midwest fellowship that I had applied for months before and they assigned me to work in New York City with the Cornerstone Theater Company for five months. That blessing allowed me to be with my New York family when they really needed me there to help them stabilize. The fellowship was called The Minority Arts Administration Program and was designed to help professional artists develop specific skills of their choice, that would help forward their careers. I wanted to learn how to take shows on tour and program activities for a large theater space, like the Goodman.

The Cornerstone Theatre Company is now based in Santa Monica, CA, but in the Fall of 1990 they were New York-based and had toured all over the country. Comprised of a young group of Harvard graduates, the company planted themselves in small towns and staged local adaptations of the classics, integrating company and members of the community in major roles. Right before I joined them they were on the cover of the American Theatre magazine for staging ROMEO & JULIET with a black Romeo and a white Juliet in Port Gipson, Mississippi. James Bundy, now based at Yale, was then the company manager and taught me how to budget and manage a tour, and the rest of the wonderful company members filled in the rest of the knowledge gaps. While working with Cornerstone in New York I quietly mailed in my resignation from The Chicago Theatre Company effective January 1, 1991.

To accept the fellowship, Chicago Columbia College gave me a year's leave of absence. Fortunately, a few years before I had already resigned from my nine-to-five: in 1988 my daughter declared that she no longer needed my financial support as long as she could continue to use our basement as a beauty parlor. That sounded like a no-brainer to me. The very next day, after 21 years of service with the Illinois Department of Public Aid, and at the ripe young age of 50, I quit my job and became a full-time artist. I still had Columbia College as an anchor and two gigs lined up back to back. One was an acting job at Court Theatre in a production of PLAYBOY OF THE WEST INDIES that got nominated for a Jefferson Award; the other was a television-directing job that won me an Emmy.

After Cornerstone, my next fellowship assignment was with the History Theater in St. Paul, Minnesota. I arrived there in February 1991, in the thick of a snowstorm. Despite the bone-chilling weather, I fell in love with St. Paul with its laid-back atmosphere and lively arts community, which includes my favorite black theatre company, The Penumbra Theater, where August Wilson developed his craft.

Lynn Lohr was the managing director at the History Theater and she taught me all I needed to know about running a six-hundred-seat space, and even more important, groomed me on how to correctly

handle myself with members of the funding community. I returned to Chicago in the fall of 1991, a free agent and feeling like a mercenary, armed and ready. The very first thing I did was to begin working on a proposal to the Goodman.

I directed a production of *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* at Black Ensemble that got a lot of press with its all-black cast, including Jackie Taylor. While setting up a tour of *THE MEETING* to African-American colleges in the South, and a project with the Chicago Historical Society, I got word that the Goodman and several other major theatre companies had received healthy audience development grants from the Lila Wallace foundation, designed to get minorities in their empty seats. Guess what my proposal was about?

The black theater community was furious, as it should have been. At least SOME of that grant money should have gone to them. If you want to know how to get black butts in theatre seats, you should deal with the people who work at it full time. I was furious too, but furious or not, I knew Goodman had the grant and thanks to my fellowship training, and Ted Ward, I knew how to deal with it. I polished and dropped off my proposal the next day.

In the spring of 1992, I was called in for an interview and met with the late Michael Maggio, then Goodman's associate artistic director, and Steve Scott, associate producer. Artistic director Bob Falls was on a sabbatical and couldn't be there. Steve had seen and complemented on my production of *GLASS MENAGERIE* and Michael and Steve both complemented me on the proposal. After discussing a few audience development issues, and a show I wanted to develop, the interview turned into a gossip catch-up session.

What seemed like only a few years before, we were all sipping cool ones up in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, at a League of Chicago Theatres annual retreat. A time when Bob Falls was artistic director of Wisdom Bridge, Michael Maggio was artistic director of North Light, and I was artistic director of the Chicago Theatre Company. Steve Scott, who has been with the Goodman Theatre before time, used to hold legendary late night drinking sessions in the retreat hot tub. Michael was very frail during those wild Lake Geneva days as he had been all of his life up to that point, but thanks to a recent lung transplant he was now a new man doing all the things his old life had denied him. Michael's exciting new life and the early plans for a new Goodman Theatre facility are what I mostly remember about that interview.

Not long after in the summer of 1992, I joined the Goodman staff along with Mary Zimmerman as an affiliate artist. It had taken 21 years but I was finally there. *RIVERVIEW* was playing on the main

stage, and I saw it several times. I enjoyed sitting in the audience randomly thumbing through the program, and coming across my name as an artistic staff member. My first assignment was as assistant director to Steve Scott in the 1992 production of *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*. The following spring I assisted Frank Galati in *CRY THE BELOVED COUNTRY*, and they gave me the 1993 *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* for my very own. I directed *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* for three straight seasons, and with the help of music director Larry Schanker and resident sound designer Rob Milburn, I changed it from a play with some music to a play with a lot of music.

During this time Michael Maggio was training me on everything related to the Goodman Theatre operation, including Trustee Board meetings, artistic staff meetings, opening nights, Women's Board meetings, tech staff meetings, Discovery Board meetings, intern lunch meetings, closing nights, plus each and every social functional. Few individuals realize that there is so much more to the Goodman Theatre than what is seen on stage, proving that my 1971 instincts were correct; this is where I want to be.

In 1996 it was pointed out to me that Goodman had done all of August Wilson's plays at that time except one, *MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM*. I had seen several productions of *MA RAINEY*, including the acclaimed one here in Chicago at Pegasus Players with my friend Harry Lennix who had also become a member of the Goodman artistic staff. I was scheduled to direct and open *MA RAINEY* in June 1997. It was a perfect show for me to do for three reasons: Chicago, Harry Lennix, and Rob Milburn.

All of August Wilson's works take place in Pittsburgh except for *MA RAINEY*, a play with music, which takes place in Chicago, and I make no apologies for a certain spiritual connection to all things black Chicago. Harry Lennix and I were in perfect actor/director sync in those days. We had worked together on countless productions of *THE MEETING* and he taught music in the Chicago Public School system. Every production of *MA RAINEY* that I'd seen had one major flaw. The actors in the roles of the musicians couldn't play the instruments and the audience always seemed to know it. I was sure that with Rob Milburn I could fix that.

All of the band members that we cast were actors who I had worked with before, and we gave them each private music lessons. Harry was on trumpet, Percy Littleton on bass, Ernest Perry on Trombone, and Tim Rhoze on piano. In our production all of the music required in the play's rehearsal room was live and the audience knew it. When action shifted into the recording studio things changed. Thanks to Rob Milburn's wonderful sound design, Kimo Williams' music design, and the hot singing of Felisa Fields as Ma Rainey, no one cared if the band was live or Memorex. Harry had learned to play the trumpet so well that after the press opening I gave him the option to play live in the studio scenes if he so desired, which he did most of the time. A Wall Street Journal reviewer reported "...these actors are either playing their instruments or successfully fooling me..." Artistic mission accomplished!

The Goodman production of *MA RAINEY* was seen by Mayor Daley, then Vice President Gore, and Michael Jordan. August Wilson wrote me a note saying, "...Thank you for the beautiful production of *MA RAINEY*. It is really fine, fine work. I haven't seen any better..." August also latched on my sound designer Rob Milburn, and has used him in each of his premiere productions since. The show also set a Goodman Theatre box office record. Proposal mission accomplished!



At the conference awards banquet, Morgan Jenness presents her recent OBIE award to LMDA, and Michele Volansky cheers.

After the Vice President Gore performance, Bob Falls and Michael Maggio both embraced me, and to this day that was my finest Goodman Theatre moment.

That was the last show of mine that Michael saw. He died in August of 2000, right before we moved into the New Goodman Theatre. In a publicity photo of all of us taken that Spring there is Bob Falls, Mary Zimmerman, Mike, Cheryl Lynn Bruce, Harry Lennix, David Petrarca, Regina Taylor, Henry Godinez, and myself. It hangs on the wall in my Goodman office as a constant reminder that Michael will always be with us.

A RAÏSIN IN THE SUN, THE AMEN CORNER, and THE GIFT HORSE are my other Goodman favorites. Like the plays before them and those that will follow, they each have their own stories.

Theater in Chicago has developed considerably since I listened to Ira Rodgers passionately explain to Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee that no black man would escape slavery, find his freedom, and then offer to give it up, as if it were an item of clothing. It has certainly evolved since Ted Ward mandated that I always keep close ties

to the black theater community.

Ted Ward died in 1983 and in 1985 Chicago Columbia College established the Theodore Ward Prize for African-American Playwrights. In 1988, the third year of the prize, the founders Lya Rosenblum, then Dean; Sheldon Patinkin, Department Chair; and Paul Carter Harrison, Playwright in Residence, asked me to facilitate the contest, and I naturally accepted. Next season in 2004, the first volume of an anthology series of Theodore Ward Prize winning plays will be published. I think he would like that.

Last month I was on an assignment to review a show in Seattle. It was my first time there, and I thoroughly enjoyed my stay. I had the option to remain an extra day, but it was the final performance date of GEM OF THE OCEAN, and I had to get back. I still make sure I'm there on closing night to say goodbye to the cast.

"...You are on an adventure and you didn't even know it..." Those words ring in my head. I'll tell you one thing, I know it now.

Thank you.

# LMDA CONFERENCE 2003

## The Telephone Monologues

five monologues written for  
the 2003 lmda conference  
introduced by Janet Allard

Telephone  
Telephone  
Telephone  
Telephone

My part in the monologue project started when Liz Engelman called me up out of the blue (strangely enough, the first call on my new cell phone) and in an act of Guerilla Theater, made the following proposition. Write a monologue in a week for a hundred dollars. But...wait...there's more...

Liz laid out the rules for me. I would be the first writer in a string of five commissioned writers. Five monologues. Five phone calls. Five connections made across a border. This is a telephone project. It all happens through phone lines.

Here are the rules of the game (as I heard them):

*Note: This may not be what Liz said at all. Just what I heard. After all, this project follows the rules of the grade school game of "telephone". You pass on what you hear and see what it becomes through translation. So the word eggplant becomes elephant. And the rules of the project become:*

What I heard:

- You have one week to write a monologue.
- Then call up a person of your choice and pass your monologue and the rules of the game on to them via telephone (or e-mail).
- That person is in charge of passing their monologue (and the previous monologues, along with the rules of the game) on to the next writer.

• Your monologue will be the first in a string of 5 commissioned monologues. So the project stops with the fifth writer.

• The theme of the project is "crossing borders"—so, cross a border. It could be a literal geographical border or a figurative border (like calling up someone you would never usually call). The theme of "Borders" can be incorporated into the monologue too.

My control of the project (and my part in it) began with Liz Engelman's phone call and ended a week later when I passed my monologue and the mission on to Sunil Kurvilla, a colleague of mine from Canada who's writing I think addresses "borders". For a playwright, who is used to creating a whole, I found it liberating to create a part of the whole with no idea where the project would end up. With one phone call it was out of my hands. Open to chaos. Chance. Surprise.

Sunil Kurvilla called Michelle Nicole Lee (in Seattle) who passed the project on to Dan Taulapapa McMullin in Samoa. From Samoa, Dan called Victor Rodger, a New Zealand playwright, who wrote the final monologue, bringing the project full circle. Five phone calls. Five connections made across International borders. Five monologues.

The monologues were performed in June at the LMDA conference. And they've made it yet another distance to you. Enjoy:



# TELEPHONE by Janet Allard

<janallard@hotmail.com>

*Tess, a woman in her late twenties.*

**Tess:** Don't nobody fuckin' move. I know it's only you. What do you think I am, Helen Keller or some blind mother fucker. I can see it's only you. What, You live alone here in this big fantasy island mansion type place? Alone. I live with a family of twelve and we share two bedrooms and a living room full of fleas and shit. So what now? So what now is, I hear you forgot to pay my sister. Who we all know is a perfect, phone-answering, good-looking, paper-filing genius. And you didn't pay her a damn cent. And you said you would have to let go of her services. So I might have to let go of my better judgement and let go of this bullet here and watch it fly through your head. What you so surprised for? You read the new york times article about how girls are violent in different ways, like in underhanded manipulations of, aw shit never mind. We're supposed to be passive aggressive and shit. Well I'm just aggressive. They didn't get the mold right when they made me. This ain't right you're saying. Women doing against women. You're saying. We're on the same side. Women supposed to kill their kids and that's all. Well let me tell you something. Anyone can betray you. Anyone. Don't trust a damn white girl. And shit I went to some good schools too. I see myself as a contemporary outlaw whose job it is to keep chaos in order.

To keep chaos alive. It is, after all, one of the laws of the universe. A governing law. That and gravity. And gravity, we can defy. But chaos. We can't. So...

What do I want! What do I want? Nothing. What do YOU want? I want you to really examine what you want. So let's say, hypothetically speaking that I'm going to release this bullet into your skull, let's say hypothetically lady, that you're about to die, let's say that hypothetically speaking, you got 30 seconds to live. What do you want to say, and to who? You're going to spend your 30 seconds trying to convince me not to shoot you, to persuade me, connive me, try to figure out what I want, because you're only thinking about yourself. I want you to look me in the eyes now, what color on my eyes? How do you think I spend my days? Where do I live, what's my place look like? Would you ever stoop to live there, when was the last time you thought about someone other than yourself, Joan!

Whatcha got there? A plaque. For being good at something, what's this? Not in English? What's this? Latin? Who the fuck talks Latin? What's this supposed to be so only smart ass people who got validated and shit by people who know how to speak this Latin shit can read this shit about how you're good at some shit? What's it say. Spell it out, seniorita. Read my lips. What. Does. It. Say. What? Go ahead? What's that? Silence. It's mumbo jumble word muddle shit to you too. How much did you pay for this? You shoulda called me. I can get you one on the internet for twenty bucks. I went to Harvard. Shit. Joan huh? Pretty name.

*[She pulls the trigger. The gun goes off. She turns to the audience.]*

Whoa! It's okay. It's alright, there's no Joan.

Look, do you see a Joan?

There's no Joan here.

I'm shooting air.

*[She faces the audience directly.]*

I can't fake it. You don't see her. I don't see her.

I'm talking to no one here and we both know it.

Might as well say it.

Life is too short.

Instead of talking to imaginary Joan's, I'd rather talk to you.

Life is too short not to veer from the script.

My dramatic arc is up for grabs. My dramaturgy is uncertain. The outcome of this moment is unknown. I am officially "At large". Anything can happen. You think that's exciting? That's terrifying. Characters do this all the time, But I'm not a character. I am a woman. I've got a craving for a big Mac. I don't have any new sweaters. I watch a lot of television.

I want someone to talk to.

Yesterday I felt like dying, and then I met someone.

I think I'm ready to die. But.

I meet someone.

It's like finding a paper bag on the street and you open it up and inside's a million dollars. That was yesterday. What now? If you think that isn't terrifying. Think again.

You know who I admire? Astronauts. Because they float and don't fall. Orbit and don't spin off into oblivion, this is how to fall in love. To float. Not fall. To orbit, not spin off, not to lose yourself, not lose touch with the world around you. Unfortunately it's never that graceful? Astronauts should give lessons on how to fall in love.

*[The phone rings. It's hidden. A cell phone. Can't see it.]*

Don't worry, it's me. Not you. I'm ringing.

The way I see it. Falling for someone's is a pain in the ass. If love is a walk in the park, give me a swim in a frozen lake, if love is a sexy lace dress; dress me in a bathing cap and bathrobe. If love is supposed to surprise you. Let me know what's coming. If Love overwhelms you and takes you by storm, I want a weather report and a full body rain suit. *[The phone stops ringing.]*

Sometimes you just have to miss opportunities.

There is a border between life and death.

Between sleeping and waking up.

In between a decision and doing.

There is a border where the sea meets the sand.

I've never seen the ocean. I hate the ocean. It's enormous. Unpredictable.

But if I'm going to be honest with you. I can because you're in the dark and I'm in the light. If I'm going to be honest with you.

I'm afraid my heart's exploding like a volcano in my chest.

I have high blood pressure. *[The phone rings.]*

I'm not going to answer that. *[The phone rings.]*

I know who that is.

If you think you can live without taking chances.

If you think you can survive without risk *[The phone rings.]*

If you think you can walk through the streets of New York in the summer and refuse to inhale because of the trash and the green sludge in puddles and the piss in the stairwells.

If you think you have any choice about falling in love or who you do it with.

If you think you have any choice in the matter. *[The phone rings.]*

You can't refuse to fall. Once you're falling you can't stop without a splat.

What the hell.

You can refuse to eat, you can refuse to swallow but it'll kill you.

What the hell.

You don't refuse to breathe do you? *[She answers the phone.]*

Yes? *[Blackout.]*

# Billy

by Sunil Kuruvilla <sunileon@hotmail.com>

*Scene: Ohio. 1965. Billy, a six-year old boy, walks slowly in his basement, speaking into his hand.*

**Billy:** Houston, this is Gemini 4, over.... Houston, this is Gemini 4, over. I know you're confused. You think Ed White has lost his mind, first American to walk in space shouldn't be doing this but I know what I'm doing.

*Cups a hand to his ear as if listening.*

Mission control—you can stop your swearing. I know you want me to stop floating and just go back to the spacecraft but I can't. Not yet. There's a boy on earth. Billy. He sent me a letter before Gemini took off, gave me a mission. I should've cleared it with you but I know NASA—you would've said no. I'm going to do something for me then I'll come back.

*Steps over boxes.*

Space is so full. There are meteors. Moving slow. I can see the border of California. And the ocean. I'm trying to find my house. I'm trying to look close—I think that's Ohio. Makes my eyes hurt. So many planets. I can see the sun. And the moon. The moon looks like a basketball only it's white and it's round. There's a yellow part of sky off in the distance. And a big door. That must be it. I'm going in. My legs are getting tired and my power pack's running low but Mission Control, I can use the stars. There's so many of them. Like pages and pages of connect-the-dots and they feel like. I dunno. Shiny fish skin. I'm gonna use them like monkey bars. Don't worry. I know what I'm doing.

*Grips the beams in the ceiling and makes his way, swinging from one to the next.*

*Suddenly he drops to the ground.*

Houston. You're not gonna believe this. There are other people here. All around me. We're not the only ones in the universe! They've got wings and they keep smiling. They're playing red harmonicas, like the one Billy had that fell behind the piano. I think they're angels. Yes. They are. They're nodding their heads. They're juggling baseballs. All the ones Billy lost in the field behind his house. They're helping me. Moving me toward the yellow part of sky. Tell Billy it's all systems go.

*Billy reaches into his knapsack, pulling out pop and candy.*

The angels are giving me chewing gum and grape soda. For energy.

*Billy starts belching. Over and over.*

I'm burping purple burps.

*Billy continues his burping.*

This is how the angels talk.

*Reaches the padlocked fruit cellar door.*

*Burps then listens.*

There seems to be a problem. The angels say I can't go in. You have to be dead.

*Burps angrily then listens.*

They say rules are rules.

Angrily pulls the padlock then leans his head against the door:

I can't go in but I can hear what's going on. Wow. Tell Billy I can hear his Dad. He's laughing. Same way he did when he took him to watch the Buckeyes play football that one Saturday.... I think he's lis-

tening to records. It's The Supremes. Houston, you tell Billy his Dad is fine now—where you are really can change the way you feel.

*Runs his hand against the door then the walls around the doorframe.*

Heaven is wet. Like summer. At the cottage.

*Billy lifts his shirt and leans his back against the damp wall.*

The same way Dad taught me how to swim face up at the lake. Looking up at the sun and when I closed my eyes I saw black stars. Dad's hand under me. Cold. Strange. Like if you stuck lunchmeat flat on my back.

*Billy turns and pushes his face close to the door. He opens it as far as the padlock allows then speaks into the crack:*

Billy's Dad? Can you hear me? This is astronaut Ed White. I'm on Gemini 4. It's June 7, 1965. Back on earth, 194 million people are watching me on TV. They don't know what I'm doing but Billy wanted me to tell you to come back. You should be a ghost. You could haunt the house. Not for Billy. More for his mom. She laughs and smiles but she doesn't talk. Not like she used to. When she walks now, she moves real fast and every time she holds something, she holds so tight—I hate the way she touches now. Way she scrubs with the washcloth or does up my sneakers. Sundays for church, she tightens my tie so tight I make a burp.

*Billy jumps to flick at the brassieres and panties that hang on a line above him, drying.*

I shouldn't be here. I'm not allowed to come into the basement. We were over at the neighbors' watching the splash down on TV and I snuck away. She won't be back for a long time. Ever since the rocket took off? All she's done the last few days is watch on TV.

*Silence.*

I want to ask her what it was like. Finding you the way she did. I can't picture you doing what you did.

Looks up at a heavy pipe in the corner of the ceiling. Then at a footstool. Billy moves the footstool so that he stands on it, directly under the pipe. He stares at the pipe then stretches, trying to touch it. But he can't reach.

*Billy steps off the stool. And slowly moves back in the direction from which he came:*

Okay Houston. You'll be happy now. I'm coming back to the spacecraft. I can't float in space forever but I wish I could.

*Billy opens up the door to the dryer.*

—Time to come home.

*Billy squeezes into the dryer.*

Mom needs someone to smile at. Someone to squeeze.

*Billy grips the door of the dryer then yanks, pulling his hand away. The door slams shut. Locking.*

*Long Silence.*

*Sound of Billy trying to open the door.*

*Pause.*

*Sound of Billy, inside the dryer, pushing, straining against the locked door.*

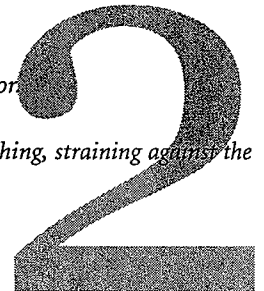
*Silence.*

*Billy knocks on the door.*

*Pause.*

*Billy knocks again.*

*Lights out.*





## The Visitors

by Michelle Nicole Lee <mnlee@cdforum.org>

*A woman in a rocking chair holds a young boy who is either asleep or dead.*

WOMAN: The sky closed and they were upon me like fog and I was not afraid.

They told me that skin is a dream that we inhabit. That our bodies, upon awakening, remember things that never happened, things we always knew.

That we enter into the Lost Kingdom and find upon the threshold of the mute castle, a golden parakeet. That we take it home.

That the parakeet will speak the Mother Tongue unspoken. That it will bring to bear the forbidden voices of the Long Ago Ones. That we will be fluent in this tongue that we have yet to speak.

## A DRAG QUEEN

by Dan Taulapapa McMullin <Malpropre@aol.com>

*(a black veil, a mourner)* My name is Il\_mutu. Il\_ is to be marked. Or stained. Mutu is to be cut off. Truncated. Your guess as good as mine. My mother tried to kill me. But she died first. I played dead half my life. Have you ever tried to play dead? Half your life? But she died first. She died first. That's the tragedy of it all. I should have died first. Shouldn't I? After all she gave me life. Didn't she? Il\_ is to be marked. Or stained. Mutu is to be cut off. Truncated. Your guess as good as mine. The Pieta. Looks like tefe. Tefe is circumcision. Circumcision looks like castration. Holy mother of god. Hold the knife. Tenderly over your son. Il\_. Mutu. Fly away. *(a black sarong, a whore)* Shoulder to shoulder. Me and my sisters. Holding our lighters high. Filing past the gray gardens. Past the hollow beds. Don't fall in. We're just here to steal wreaths. To stock our flower shops. Don't mind us. Don't fall in. We won't help you out. Your guess as good as mine. Single file through the gray gardens. Meeting your sons after the bars close. After the good girls go home. After the police have turned in for the night. Or come to join us in the gray gardens. In the bone bar. Looking for our dogs. Your sons. Your guess as good as mine. Looking for our babies. Your sons. In the bone bar. *(a black wrap, a bird)* Mother may I? Mom. Mum. Mommy. Mummy. Sister. Friend. Twin. Spirit. White bird. Cloud. Raindrop. Rainbow. Waterfall. Spring. Spring of water jetting from the sand, in the reef, a cool bowl of fresh

That we will still cry out, "water, water", though the streams have long since flown past. That we will cry out, "water, water", but refuse to drink. That when we stand upon the stone of pure marble, we will gaze upon the fog and see the descending firmament and be not afraid.

A ladder. Quick! A ladder.

He was not ready. I was not ready.

The dying take the world with them, like thieves. The dying take the world into the mute place, like a remembered melody carried for solace.

Once the silence is mastered, the song is forgotten. Once we ascend, we kick the ladder. We don't look down.

One does what one was. One does what one was.

They will come again. They will come again and they will tell us.

And we will find the bird and build it a cage of memory.

There is no endurance. There is no endurance like space.

water, in the salt sea, in the reef, in the hot ocean, a cool bowl of fresh water. A fresh water spring in the salt sea. A blue bowl in the green sea. Did I kill you? Global warming killed you not me. Did I kill you? Sweet mother. Fanua. Fanua is land. Nafanua. Is hidden in the land. Our goddess. Nafanua. Hidden in the land. Vasa is the great open seas that separate us. The seas are rising. Maybe maybe not. Your guess as good as mine. The earth is dying. Probably. The earth is dead. Your guess. You. Join me in the bone bar. I am a bird. Only I can change into a bird. Lucky me. Lucky me. Lucky me. Lucky me. Lucky me. Lucky me.

EXIT

Notes on pronunciation of Samoan words: The vowels are always Italianate in pronunciation (ah, eh, ee, oh, oo). The accent is on the penultimate or next to last syllable. The "T" is pronounced softly almost like a "D". Syllabic pronunciation should be soft and flowing, not clipped.

Il\_mutu: ee-laah-MOO-too

Il\_: EE-laah

Mutu: MOO-too

Tefe: TEH-feh

Fanua: fah-NOO-ah

Nafanua: nah-fah-NOO-ah

Vasa: VAH-sah

# CHOICE

by Victor Rodger <vrodger@quicksilver.net.nz>

*A man. Holding a gun in one hand. A telephone in the other.  
Looks from the phone, to the gun; back again.  
Laughs.*

MAN: Choices.

What it comes to, right?

Go left/go right.

Buy it/leave it.

Fuck it/Fuck, yes, I'll do it/...Fuck it

*Itches his head with the gun.*

Sometimes it just...overwhelms me, you know? All the stories in this fucking city, in this fucking world. Sometimes I think I could go deaf, imagining all the stories...all the people I pass in a day: people on the street, people on the bus, people I can't see, going about their shit in their houses, their flats, their offices...all their stories.

That beautiful girl, sitting by the fountain, throwing her head back with laughter. What's her story? What's underneath? She been raped? Does she know someone who was murdered? Is her mother dying of cancer?

That old man, limping slowly in the heat. Ba-doom, Ba-doom, big sweat patches on his shirt under his armpits, below his neck. What's his story? What's his goddamn story?

Choices. All comes down to choices.

To the only choice.

To keep going.

Or not.

Jesus.

I made a choice yesterday.

But I think I made the wrong one.

Actually, I made the choice a long time ago.

The choice I made yesterday was to stick to it.

The choice I made a long time ago was to never tell me father that I forgave him.

Watching your mother cry on and off for twenty years, you can understand, right?

So I get the call from his wife and her and the other kids are there, in his room in the hospital and I haven't seen him for like, eight years and anyway, he hasn't got long and all he wants to hear is that I forgive him for never being around.

I'd played that scene in my head, so many times.

"I don't forgive you, you cocksucker. Fuck you."

Revenge. For leaving mum. Leaving me.

Man, she was only fifteen when I popped out and he split and...

You know the crazy thing? I wanted to say it. Even though I wanted to tell him he was a cocksucking motherfucker as well, I wanted to tell him that I forgave him.

But I didn't. In the end I chose not to. Chose to stick to my resolve.

And so he died. Looking at me. Such disappointment on his face. And now I don't even know why I was angry at him for so long.

You know what I did say to him? I'm not the one you should be talking to. You know that.

And he knew it. But even then, with the end approaching, he still couldn't go there.

And so he died. Disappointed. Surrounded by his loving wife and children ...and me.

I didn't stick around. I left the hospital in a daze. Somehow found myself at a booth in a diner.

And then this woman: "Sorry, man, you mind? No other seats."

And she doesn't know my story, what's underneath. I don't know hers either but it's like we can sense stuff in each other and we get to talking and...

Some kindness. She's giving me some kindness. If she hadn't....

Anyway I got her number. She's reluctant.

"I just like talking to you, that's all. Honest."

And she chooses, she chooses to give me her number.

*He produces a scrap of paper.*

Choices.

If she doesn't answer the phone I'm going put this gun to my head and kill myself.

And if she does....

I'm just going to talk to her.

Simple as that, right?

*He dials the number.*

It's ringing.

*Beat.*

I don't think she's there.

*Beat.*

She's not there.

*He raises the gun to his head. Closes his eyes. Pulls back the trigger.*

Hello?

You're there.

It's me.

Marvin. From the...yeah. The diner. How are you?

How am I?

I'm...

*He lowers the gun. Smiles, tries not to cry.*

I'm okay. I'm okay.

*Blackout.*

# "Don't Know Much About Holly-turgy"

Greg Gunter

Notes from Greg's Presentation  
Victory Gardens Theatre, Chicago  
June 28, 2003

\*\*Greg's Journey Towards Hollywood\*\*

—Sporadic playwright in Chicago, but wanted to get into publishing in Boston (conflicted b/c Chicago had a hot/incredible theatre scene)

—American Repertory Theatre in Boston, internship

-wanted to see friends' plays done

-actor in crazy cabaret show: *Queen Blood*

>performance won over students: Jesse Helms

—Tina Landau wanted dramaturgy for Chuck Mee's *Orestes*: got Greg (Anne Bogart involved)

-worked for Charpinski (*The Idiot, Crime & Punishment, The Devils*)

—Tina Landau to Greg: "come up with ideas"

-went to Harvard Library: What would Orestes be?

-photo-copied a lot of images (35 ft. image of Orestes)

>involved innovative subjects such as lesbian rock punkers and Romanian street performers

—started cleaning/teaching dramaturgy at Harvard: no \$\$\$

\*\*Moved to Manhattan\*\*

—acted as dramaturg/ASM/Asst. Sound Tech/small role in play/understudy for all male roles of productions

—NY Theatre Workshop (Jonathon Larson—*RENT*)

\*\*Goes to LaJolla Playhouse\*\* met great people, did dramaturgy

—wanted to get a job in LA

\*\*Disney Feature Animation— looking for story people\*\*

DRAMATURGS ARE STORY PEOPLE

for the next half of this lecture:

"DO NOT TELL THEM I TOLD YOU THIS"

—more openings for executives who can do stories in business than theatre

-went to dinner with feature animation rep.

-brought up provocative questions

>"how come there are no black/Latino princesses?"

-a little put off by GG

—went on another interview with snippy rep.

-told GG: "we think you're crazy", GG: "I am" (in a good way)

-went on 9 interviews over 5 months

—Tom Schumacher (who came from theatre) grilled GG about Disney

-(GG did research from Hollywood Reporter, movies, etc.)

—Must-have qualities that GG expressed: knowledge of story structure, character development, enthusiastic, hard-working

-(research into job: investigative dramaturgy)

—guy interviewing wanted job he was applying for (stabbing in the back happens—must read how to deal with difficult people)

—GG knew he was good stuff; strong self-esteem: didn't say in mantra how much \$\$\$ he wanted; valued a job where he could work with beautiful, intelligent people

—asked for salary range \$65,000 – 100,000, ended up getting \$35,000

-split up salary

-originally a low offer, had to negotiate: each year it progressively gets better

HAVE TO BE OWN ADVOCATE

-do your dramaturgical work on how to get benefits and stock options: YOU ARE WORTH IT

-always think above your own standards

—journey as a creative exec can lead to a producer/VP of creative affairs

—lean all sources to base of knowledge (TV, film)

—don't use the term "dramaturgy" in Hollywood, no one knows what it is

-though Tom Schumacher (who came from theatre) started it as vernacular in Hollywood meetings: everyone very intrigued with the word

-call yourself a dramaturg (exotic, etc.)

\*\*Path of a dramaturg making it in Hollywood\*\*

1.) Story Editor

-(lit. manager)

-for ex, come up with 40 ideas for *The Little Mermaid* that will >become sequel

>or be Disney's *Harry Potter*

2.) Creative Associate

-(little story editing, comes up with ideas)

-brainstorms 1,000 ideas (story boards)

-you're responsible for creating a volume of material

3.) Creative Executive

-(entré into business)

-idea person

>comes up with ALL ideas

>writes A LOT of "approaches"—1-2 page treatments that will sell stories

—for ex. I want a story about African goddesses

-pull in all resources from library; archives

-pay archives and resources (this way you're getting dramaturgs work!)

—"What playwrights do you know?"

-found playwrights who made transition into screenwriters

GOTTA KNOW SCREENWRITERS'/AGENTS' NAMES

-get an internship

-find someone to live with

-work it

-read *Variety/Hollywood Reporter*

-learn terminology of studio

-use improvisational skills

DON'T SAY YOU KNOW THE BIG NAMES

-everybody knows everybody, skew the truth a little though

—You're an actor, politico, negotiator if you're a dramaturg

YOU PAY GOD (ART) YOU PAY CAESAR (BILLS)

4.) Director

-very rare that outside person will come in as director

-calls agents

-finds screenplays

-shepherds those projects (gives notes on writing, screening, directing)

THROW EGO OUT THE DOOR

-throw people off balance

-learn to deal with maniacal, powerful personalities

-improv around people's egos

HAVE PATIENCE

-journey towards production is slow in film world (8-10 years)

-have knowledge base (at least 1 or 2 connections)

MUST HAVE ABILITY TO COME UP W/ 1,000 IDEAS AND OWN NONE OF THEM

-don't emotionally attach yourself to things

-have a strong sense of self and know when to nail them

-don't let racist, sexist, homophobic attacks go—report them to HR dept. (but don't let it bother you, you are protected)

-don't let it fester, don't be bullied

-“support” people in powerful positions, and then strategize to get your part of the story in to other VPs

-if you have a good reputation, more people will wanna work with you

BE DIPLOMATIC

NEED TO FIGHT BATTLES

\*\*Film-turgy\*\*

—start looking at basic story structure in books and films

-AFI list: watch these movies, get to know them

-find out intuitively about what makes a good film

-research background of films, shorts

—very simple, A-B-C presentations

-convince them that it looks good

-animation library, archives of Disney

-not sycophantic

-basic dramaturgy impresses executives

HOLLYWOOD: REVERES AND LOATHES DRAMATURGY

-know the realm w/ which you're working in

-find 2-page scenes that add up to 100 pages (of stories you read)

>rhythmically

>character arc

Robert McKee *The Story*

—screenwriting is very prescriptive

—associate with other screenplays

THINK EXPANSIVELY!!!!

# LMDA CONFERENCE 2003

## Reflections on the Conference from Co-Chair Rachel Shteir

As Joan Didion once wrote, we tell ourselves stories in order to live. The complicated thing about those stories is that they keep changing.

Co-chairing the LMDA conference last year in Chicago helped me to think more clearly about those of my stories that have to do with dramaturgy. I think particularly in terms of the way I articulate what dramaturgy is, and how that evolved from the moment I began planning the conference to the moment I waved good-bye to the last conference-goer. It's not that new ideas emerged exactly over those nine months, but that the old ones became clearer and more tangible. There was at least one revelation. So, I'd like to talk a little bit about that process.

As someone who has worked hard to build a BFA Program in Dramaturgy since arriving in Chicago in 2000, I found that co-chairing LMDA provided a forum for me to try and put my ideas out there. Some things went over better than others. Some things I pushed for harder than others. Some things I wished I had pushed harder for.

I despise talking about identity, but I'll now identify myself as someone who is first a writer and second a dramaturg. During the conference, there were several moments when I became aware of how my own history had been instrumental in forming that identity in ways I had not thought of. I also thought about where I could redraw those lines to include dramaturgy in a different way than I had prior.

It was probably as an educator that the conference was most meaningful to me. I found that co-chairing the conference clarified some of the dualities I find most important in dramaturgy: dramaturg as both “nurturer” and “gadfly;” dramaturgy as both an art and a craft; dramaturgy as both a vocation and a role. Finally, having the luxury of planning the conference over the course of the year reminded me of my commitment to get young dramaturgs to be able to envision the ideal theatres, as we all should, but also work in real ones, as we all do.

I'm grateful to the many people who supported me, as well as to those who challenged and nudged along the way. It was gratifying to see conference-goers in Chicago enjoying themselves and enjoying Chicago and even more gratifying to see my students enjoying meeting people in the profession. And to see their work. At every session I attended, people seemed engaged and lively.

Of course, there are always things that one wishes that one could do differently. First of all, having been handed the theme “crossing borders,” in Vancouver, I can say that it was like being handed any assignment—you don't know where to start and you aren't particularly engaged with it. Moreover, as a relative newcomer to LMDA, I wasn't that convinced of the history and urgency of committing resources to that theme.

In the fall, I quickly became swept into the practical aspects of planning. As a result, I thought less about the intellectual and cultural aspects of “crossing borders” and how they were going to be parlayed into both a provocative and satisfying couple of days and more about hotels and bus tours. Since there were no models to paint by, we in Chicago were mostly on our own.

Finally, a critique: as someone who tends to come at issues from an oppositional point of view, I wish that we had been more open to exploring issues from those points of view, instead of trying to find consensus all the time. What one tends to hear at conferences—and this is in no way unique to LMDA—are the same points of view over and over again. I say this not because I'm interested in fights—but rather because I think the “let's all just get along,” strategy of collaboration is what's taught more often than the model challenging the institutional voice. Such oppositional voices are not just refreshing—they are necessary to the well-being of any organization. And organizations and institutions tend to quickly atrophy and become resistant to change, although they provide stability.

That's my story.

# theater manifesto competition

*A Theater Manifesto Competition was held earlier this year, sponsored by The Playwrights' Center—Executive Director Polly Carl, and the Guthrie Theater—Artistic Director Joe Dowling, in association with Anna Deavere Smith's Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Vanderbilt University Theatre. The Project Directors were Michael Bigelow Dixon and Polly Carl. A distinguished panel, including Morgan Jenness, Tony Kushner, and Diana Son, selected the winning manifesto. Below we are happy to present the winning manifesto "Elect Better Actors" by Ian Maxwell MacKinnon and the "Neo-Romantic Manifesto" by Celise Kalke and Brian Bergstrom, which received honorable mention from the judges.*

## **ELECT BETTER ACTORS: A MANIFESTO FOR ACTORVISTS, FACILITAINERS, PERFPOLS, DEMOCRAHOLICS, POETICIANS, PARTISAN ARTISANS, ARTICIPANTS, AND THE GREAT SHAMANCIPATORS TO COME**

**By Ian Maxwell MacKinnon**

### **Theater and Politics**

The first theater was a coronation pageant for a guy on a platform high above a crowd.

The king played god, a god-man, or the person god had chosen. At the same time, the first cities, built on mud platforms, were theaters themselves. Not just for defense or flood protection; cities put themselves up onstage to impress any audience that approached from across the wasteland. In ancient Greece, Solon the legislator asked Thespis the actor if he was ashamed of telling so many lies in front of so many people. Thespis said there was no harm in pretending to be someone else in a play. According to Plutarch, Solon replied, "If we honor and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business"—that is, politics.

The ideal of a politics without pretending remains strong, even though we regularly support pretenders in politics. For saying the people's attention could be diverted with spectacles, the playwright-politician Machiavelli was given one of the worst reputations in history. But from Ur to Ronald Reagan, theater and politics have been married; they cannot be divorced. The politician who says he is not acting is acting. The actor who says he is not political is political. But the marriage of theater and politics needs work. As Reagan goes to the great beyond, we must go beyond Reagan and get the degraded fields of theater and politics to save each other. What is the solution? Elect better actors.

It will be a long march, but it's the only way that theater will have a renaissance. Theater people must take some seats away from elected politicians. Actors are used to having jobs outside the theater, so this shouldn't be too shocking. Given the reputations of both actors and politicians for being shallow publicity hounds, many will have a frightening vision of more line-counting, scene-stealing prima donnas when told we should take their marriage further, but theater and politics are as rational as any other two fields where people meet to collaborate.

In 1997, Congress voted to abolish the National Endowment for the Arts. Though it survived, the NEA is barely alive. When stacked against competing claims for slices of the public pie, economic arguments for subsidizing the arts are losing ground. Yes, when going to a show, people eat in restaurants, take taxis, and sleep in hotels. Yes, music education may make kids better at math and science, thus making the nation more competitive. Yes, artists bring back decaying neighborhoods and increase property values.

But in hard economic times, these arguments fall flat. Look at what's being cut from budgets across the country now.

Artists moan that the U.S. spends more on military bands than it

does on the NEA, but that's partly because more military people have gone into politics than artists. Theater must counter its image as a weakling that is dependent on handouts. People of the theater must consider changing the direction of their careers. If they go into politics, they can shock the system into revitalizing the theater, or what will be left to applaud?

Only when they take political power will theater people get the respect and subsidy they dream of, but they must do it as theater people—not as celebrities like Sonny Bono or Jesse Ventura who use name-recognition to change careers. And don't run if you're just going to increase funding for the theater as it currently exists. Subsidize theaters and troupes that use drama to explore issues society and government are wrestling with and to provide possible solutions.

Theater that gets funding from the commonwealth should be more about the needs of the commonwealth. If we're going to throw money down a hole, theater should be a good hole, like subways. Public transportation is a good model for public theater: Even if it loses money, it's still necessary, and you get somewhere. As taxpayers, we fund war games, dramatic public service announcements, and the playing out of disaster scenarios—complete with actors, cops, politicians, and doctors. As for playing out scenarios of ecological, economic, or educational importance, our politicians are content to hear reports and give speeches.

The French director Jean Vilar had a notion of theater as public service: He wanted it funded like water, gas, and electricity. To him, "Popular Theater" meant getting the populace to the theater, no matter what was playing. I like the image of the theater person as a public servant—as the old theater saying goes, "Dinner is served!" The defenders of the arts like to point out that little France gives \$7 billion to the arts every year, while the big U.S.A. only gives \$100 million. But without all that cushy state subsidy, the real revolution in theater practice could happen here first, when theater people rise up and take the day jobs that hold the purse-strings, preferably defeating the politicians who score points by attacking images and actors and scripts. Who cares if what the pols attack is sexist, racist violent crap—at least it's fictional! The sexist, violent, racist crap the pols give us is REAL!

What if an Anna Deavere Smith or a Danny Hoch ran for office? They could literally represent their constituents! In Brazil, when theater director Augusto Boal was elected to Parliament, he hired his theater company as his legislative staff. They invented Legislative Theater: interactive forum techniques with which they explored problems people faced everyday and created legislation to help them. Thirteen of their bills became law. It is better that ideas fail in theater

before they fail in reality; too often, our laws are written by lobbyists who work without any public input. If theater people take office as theater people and fail to get anything done, at least they won't fail the way ordinary politicians do.

If they succeed in getting things done, what would those things be? There would be a ripple effect throughout government, society, and culture:

**Citizenship.** Theater would make civic life less boring. Right now, for the endless meetings of democracy, the people and their politicians show up, but there's no show. Instead of shows, we get a variety of talk: focus groups, citizens' panels, fact-finding commissions, etc. Discussion is essential, but decisions are too often made by the strategists of boredom who depend on our falling asleep or going home. These meetings keep up appearances; they are artificial. But better artifice is needed to infuse new life into citizenship. Wouldn't it make more sense for coalitions to present plays instead of having members go to the microphone to voice variations on the same position? We often yield our speaking time to others; why not yield to a play? Plays about the issues that present themselves to the assembly. Governments can have their actors, and activists can have theirs. Such theater would pump fresh blood into the issues. It would make politics more exciting and the tough job of being a citizen more interesting.

**The Law.** Our culture can't get enough of watching TV shows and movies about the law. Legal conflict is inherently dramatic. But at present, there are few opportunities for actors in the real justice system. Actors are employed by the state in undercover operations, and they are hired to play the roles of people who can't appear in court. New work for actors could be created in police academies, law schools, and prisons. The "Law and Literature" movement, which now uses novels in such places to teach ethics, could be adapted to include theater. Live actors would help police cadets, law students, prisoners, and prison guards realize the human dimensions of justice more clearly. A second opening for actors could be in the field of Restorative Justice, which is an alternative to the adversarial system of justice that dominates the country. In Restorative Justice, sentencing circles contain the victim, offender, family, friends, case workers, employers, and other interested members of the community, who all take turns speaking until a sentence has been crafted that is accepted by everyone. Instead of serving time, the criminal serves the community. Theater could have a strong role in this process of reconciliation, helping to show the sides of all concerned. Actors could be middlemen, illustrating what happened, what's happening, and what might happen. Just as theater-in-the-round is powerful in part because the audience sees itself, such sentencing circles would be powerful because they would let the community look at itself and take back part of the justice system.

**The News.** The news media regularly use theatrical metaphors to describe the world of politics. Such invocations of theater are like pulling out a crucifix against a vampire, proof of our wariness of being suckered. But what about the reporters themselves? Don't they use makeup? Aren't they under hot lights, introduced by theme music and snazzy graphics, reading from scripts, giving us the most dramatic stories they can? Let's get thespians to do the news more creatively, wildly, with more license. Such news wouldn't be just the setup for a Jay Leno-style punchline. Good troupes of actors, writers, and directors would give us deeper, more meaningful takes on what's happening than the formulaic tripe the networks now offer us as

"objective." The US government actually funded "Living Newspapers" via the Federal Theater Project in the 1930s. We could update this form with all the latest technological advantages while keeping the primal energy that only the theater can bring.

**Business and work.** Entertainment is one of America's last major exports to the world, along with arms, grain, and some technology. The force of shows can be as powerful as the shows of force. Here at home, theatrical skills come in handy in business, whether you're a manager or a worker. Managers' theater ranges from morale-building skits to seminars on management as a performance art to the mass employment of actors in advertising. Unions use theater to paint the struggles of labor in black-and-white terms that call members to action. We need a new kind of theater about business and economic questions. Instead of a think tank, why not a theater tank? And meanwhile, what about the people who have no work? When governments moved welfare recipients off the rolls, they were sent to something called workfare. Welfare checks had to be earned in jobs that were either make-work or that threatened the jobs of other low-income workers. Instead of workfare, how about playfare? If workfare is about instilling the importance of showing up and being on time, why not have them do theater? The mass of unemployed actors could be paired with the chronically unemployed to study self-presentation, speech, collaboration, creativity, and expression. Epics of the underclass could be produced to show where they're coming from and where they might be going. And at the other end of the scale, there are those who are overworked: The average American works around 48 hours a week. There isn't enough leisure for us to be engaged in politics or theater right now. One slogan might be: "Elect better actors. They'll fight for your free time."

**Education.** In 1998, Philip Bigler of McLean, Virginia won the National Teacher of the Year Award for introducing theater into his classroom, getting his students to run the 1960 presidential campaigns, argue the death penalty before the Supreme Court, and govern ancient Athens. Theater leapt out of the auditorium and invaded the classroom. In most places, arts education is viewed as a luxury and is the first to be eliminated in budget cuts. Bigler shows us how theater can be integrated into the rest of the curriculum, thus fending off the axe. Meanwhile, classroom subjects such as English, history, and science could be brought into school theater programs to create new plays. There could even be collaboration between theater and sports programs. By emphasizing the physical arts of the actor, which are usually ignored in the high school theater club, athletes and actors could learn together some new ways to sweat.

At the college level, there's a scam going on. Even though unemployment is so high for actors, states keep taking money from those star-struck enough to want a degree in theater. "State Theater" may sound Communist, but all 50 states have state theaters—in their universities. At the same time, states offer few opportunities to teach and do theater to those who graduate. If we want more jobs for them, we need to elect better actors. But where will they come from? They may not exist yet. We need new programs and institutes to train them by teaching politics and theater together as partners. The liberal arts should teach the arts of liberty, and theater is one teacher that's been laid off too long.

**Social services.** Social services are given massive if unstable funding by governments. In the 1930s, this included the performance of federally funded plays in asylums, orphanages, hospitals, clinics, and



prisons. There was even a traveling play about syphilis. Hallie Flanagan was not torn by the question of whether this was relief work or art; it could be both. Now experiential therapy is being championed by experts as a way of getting people off the couch, out of their chairs, and into emotions for which talk alone has no key. There's more than just Psychodrama. In Brazil and around the world, therapists have used the theater games and exercises of Augusto Boal to help people stop destructive behaviors and start constructive ones. Drama therapy needs more degree programs in the United States. The better actors we elect will work to ensure that theater is practiced as a healing art in places such as foster homes, senior centers, settlement houses, and homeless shelters.

Religion. What is "faith in government"? There has always been a connecting passage between state houses, playhouses, and houses of worship: All three places need some belief to carry on. The do-it-yourself spirit supported by the First Amendment allows people to tap into energies similar to those of the people who began the horizontal movements that only much later erected the vertical spires, steeples, minarets, and towers. It will be a leap of faith for any theater person who goes into politics. No arts council will give him or her a grant to run for office. Such artists might draw inspiration from the flexible walking campaigns of Jesus, Paul, Moses, Buddha, Lao Tse, and Rumi; they remind us of the "street credibility" that's necessary for a faith to grow. When Florida governor Lawton Chiles walked his whole state, it wasn't just to show he was healthy; he was evoking the ideals of pilgrimage. Likewise, the theater can go horizontally into the everyday lives of people. Ward heelers can be ward healers.

### Conclusion

When asked what he thought about new theater architecture in the 1930s, Edward Gordon Craig said we already have enough theaters. It was new actors that needed to be built. Taxpayers now fund

the construction of stadiums, hotels, convention centers, entertainment districts, and—occasionally—theaters, which are built because they're prestigious: People can point to them for hundreds of years, and they still look impressive. But theater is not a building. It builds relations between people. For once, let's fund the creation of theater companies that can last hundreds of years. Let's fund the creation of an epic play or two that could be performed that long.

Theater exists somewhere between the talk people say they are sick of and the action that people are demanding happen NOW. And theater can help us build a stronger state to deal with the massive problems the world is facing. The state is, in the words of the philosopher F. R. Ankersmit, "the institutionalization of our readiness to look at ourselves from the top down." If so, we are having trouble seeing ourselves. And theater is an institution for seeing.

Once we get started down this new road, the only way to stop us would be if government began to fund the arts the way President Nixon did when he tried to buy out artists by throwing money at the NEA. By now we should know that what is given can be taken away. We need to be elected, not appointed.

America was founded as a "city on a hill" that would show the rest of the world how to act. George Washington said Americans were "actors on a most auspicious theater which seems to be peculiarly designed by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity." All the world may be a stage, but that doesn't mean we can leave actual theaters behind. We need theater's pinch to say whether or not we are dreaming.

This manifesto is about creating new work for the theater. By entering politics, theater people will discover new sources of income, new ways of getting press, new contacts, and new venues. Don't just get to know your legislators—become your legislators! Don't bite the hand that doesn't feed you—become the hand that feeds you!

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# Neo-Romantic Manifesto

by Celise Kalke and Brian Bergstrom

L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!

A MANIFESTO

toward

a politically VIBRANT

technologically SAVVY

queer-centered, SEX POSITIVE

NEO-ROMANTICISM

... Intro: the Romantics ...

CUT TO: the 19th Century: Romanticism emerges, revolutionizes literature, art, philosophy. We break with the ossified Cartesianism of the Neo-Classicists, insist on the irrational, on. IMAGINATION, EMOTION, LOVE! We create art that is vibrant, moody, unapologetically idiomatic, radical. Think Goethe. Think Pushkin. Think Byron. But especially, THINK BRONTË. As Romantics, we learn how to feel,

how to trust that,

how to

run wild beneath the moon, the sun, the stars.

then came

the modernists

CUT TO: the long upheaval called the Industrial Revolution: the emergence of the modern. We break with previous art, previous thinking, previous tradition, break everything. FROM MODERNISM, WE

LEARNED TO LOVE THE NEW. TO EMBRACE THE MACHINE. TO BARE THE DEVICE. TO OBSERVE THE OBSERVER. TO SEE OURSELVES AS ACTORS IN HISTORY. TO LOOK BEYOND GOD. TO FEED OFF OF SHOCK.

As Modernists we learned to live in the glare of own creations as if we had invented

Our own moon

Our own sun

Our own stars.

And then

there were

Postmodernists

CUT TO: the next technological revolution: global capitalism, post-industrial industry, life lived by and through webs of circuitry, wires, fiber optics and faxes. The scientism, the rationality, the monologism, the narrative of knowledge production inherited from the modernists seems inadequate to the vistas of multiplicity now swinging into view. We could now see what had been there all along but were too busy with our various -ization-based projects (modernization, civilization, colonization, nationalization, industrialization, commercialization, etc. etc. etc.) to recognize. Difference again matters. Information becomes a matter of negotiation, a result of play. From the Postmodernists, we learned

TO SEE HISTORIES NOT HISTORY. TO COUNTER LOGIC WITH PLAY. TO RENDER POLITICAL THE PERSONAL. TO REMEMBER HOW TO THINK WITH OUR BODIES. TO APPRECIATE ALTERITY. TO RELATIVIZE GOD, EMBRACE GODS. TO WORSHIP MONSTERS. TO DETACH FROM MEANING. TO DECONSTRUCT WHAT HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED.

As Postmodernists, we learned to refuse the fascist comforts of unitary meaning, normative growth, sanctification through repetition. We learned to play amid the rubble as if within us we each held the moon, the sun, the stars

and they were made just

for

Us.

But,



## A NEW CUT HAS OCCURRED

NOW is the time of a new revolution NOW is the time of the

Neo-Romantics

CUT TO: the Now as it turns itself inside out and into the future, surrounded by the ashes of deconstruction, the hangover from modernization, the brutal, mechanized penetrations and isolations that make up everyday life within the integrated circuit. What do we need? What have we lost? What can we do as we remember the collapse of Romanticism into "Autonomous" Solipsism, Modernism into Fascism, Post-modernism into the Echo-chamber of Irrelevance? How can we retain the insights gained from the flowerings of each? What now?

NOW we need LOVE we need EXCESS we need CONNECTION

EMOTION IS A POLITICAL WEAPON  
IT DESTROYS THAT WHICH STULTIFIES IT BY IGNORING IT

Theses toward a Neo-Romantic Revolution:

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE LOVE by IGNORING the NORM.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE the HUMAN by IGNORING the BOUNDARY.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE political POSSIBILITY by IGNORING the ALTERNATIVE.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE LANGUAGE by IGNORING LINGUISTICS.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE SEX by QUEERING all DESIRE.  
[including that of those crazy, lusty heterosexuals]

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE DIFFERENCE by reuniting FEELING and SKIN.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE TECHNOLOGY by CONNECTING.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE the THEATRICAL by melting FORM into CONTENT.

Neo-Romantics CELEBRATE the possibility of ART by IGNORING GOOD TASTE.

Neo-Romantic Moments in Recent Theatre History  
& the mandates for American Theatre they embody and put forth

### EXAMPLE:

In Prague, 1996, deceased Czech Director Petr Lebl put on a definitive Neo-Romantic production of THE MAIDS. †Performed in Czech, it is a French play by Genet. It is a play about playing: two players play their mistress being served by a maid. †It is sexual and abject, social realism pushed screaming into the theatre of the absurd. †In Lebl's production, absurdism and deconstruction melt and meld and achieve the Neo-Romantic. First, two male prisoners play at being two Maids playing Mistress and Maid. Then halfway through the scene, the prisoners deconstruct their prison and are in their boudoir, only to be joined by two women playing the Maids playing Mistress and Maid. †An absurd twosome is joined by a postmodern twosome, and together they become a Neo-Romantic quartet. †At the climax of the play, Lebl directs the male Maid to speak in Czech while the female Maid speaks French. Language is rescued from linguistics and transformed into aesthetics, while deconstruction is rescued from infinite regression and transformed into a new mode of feeling.

### MANDATE:

Neo-Romanticism offers an opportunity to create politically vibrant theatre disengaging language from signifiers of class and race. It transforms these signifiers into theatrical beauty. Note the word transform: it does not read "discard" or "transcend." †

### EXAMPLE:

Chuck Mee and Les Waters adapt Aeschylus' The Suppliant Women into a post-modern, post-feminist and ultimately Neo-Romantic celebra-

tion of love. †Yes, love. Not just love, but BIG LOVE, the name of the new beast, and in its belly, a kernel: when the angry bride rescues the sensitive bridegroom from the bloody vengeance of her sisters, it is Neo-Romantic connection she finds hidden like a diamond in the bloody refuse of the gender wars. †

MANDATE:

Neo-Romanticism offers an opportunity for even heterosexual love to be difficult, attacked, analyzed, fought over, and to emerge not as a given but as a gem.

EXAMPLE:

Ruth Margraff and Fred Ho premiere their extraordinary opera NIGHT VISION in 2000, telling the story of a super-star vampire eating her way out of the Third World to take over New York. †In a vision/dream/press conference she returns to her home in the Arabian Desert. †The vampire's screams, the incoherent story, the raw emotions over rawer music all combine to create a Neo-Romantic excess of politics, ideas, and feeling that floods the stage like blood from a wound rent in the throat of the sky.

MANDATE:

Neo-Romanticism offers a freedom of dramatic structure and form that allows politics and complicated thought to transmogrify into pure emotion. †

EXAMPLE:

1999: Suzan-Lori Parks writes FUCKING A. In the climactic moment, our heroine, an abortionist, aborts her own grandchild and then slaughters her son to save him from torture. Melodramatic, yes, but a melodrama that rises as part and parcel of a dystopia created out of the shards of America's past and present. It is melodrama used as a medium of politics, of self-awareness, of a Real that feels more real than realism, that sears the beholder and smells like the blood of the never known and unremembered.

MANDATE:

Neo-Romanticism allows playwrights to portray euphoria and despair, utopia and dystopia, to risk emotional excess and push it to the point that it forces Brechtian awareness and mobilizes political action borne from the viscera's connection to the mind.

EXAMPLE:

In STOP KISS, by Diana Son, two self-identified straight women kiss, then are bashed. But this is just the premise, the set-up, the scaffold. Love in this play resides elsewhere, when one 'lover' loves the other enough to become the caregiver for her disfigured and paralyzed friend. The moment of connection happens when one woman helps the other in a wheelchair change her clothes.

MANDATE:

The Neo-Romantic knows and celebrates the difference between sex and love. The Neo-Romantic observes the difference between coming out and creating community. The Neo-Romantic strives to rescue love from first kisses and first dates, from engagements and weddings, from comforting banality undergirded with violence. Neo-Romantics know love is valuable when it is hard and uncompromising. Neo-Romantics see the beauty inherent in the act of changing clothes.

NEO ROMANTIC ART WILL ALWAYS FEEL TOO MUCH

As Neo-Romantics, we will always be accused of being Over the Top, Out of Bounds, Beyond the Pale, Un-Realistic, Ornamental, Idiosyncratic, Too Loud.

Our wattage will always be too hot. Our art will always burn.  
But new skin after searing is always more sensitive.

WE ARE IN THIS MOMENT ALREADY

THE NEO-ROMANTIC IS ALREADY HERE

THE QUESTIONS NOW:

HOW DO WE USE WHAT WE KNOW?

HOW DO WE USE WHAT WE FEEL?

HOW DO WE PRESERVE OUR NERVE?

HOW DO WE CLAIM THE REVOLUTION AS OUR OWN?

WE KNOW THE COSTS AND THE RISKS AND THE HISTORY OF FAILURE

WE REMEMBER

but

WE FEEL, ANYWAY. WE CONNECT, ANYWAY. WE LOVE, ANYWAY.

WE ATTACK FROM THE RADICAL SPACE OF ANYWAY.

WE CELEBRATE. ANYWAY.

WE CREATE.

ANYWAY.

the Sun, the Moon, the Stars: our Spotlights—

watch as we ravish the sky

L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!

Celise Kalke + Brian Bergstrom

Dramaturgs Scholars Neo-Romantics

*Celise Kalke and Brian Bergstrom met working on an adaptation of the Japanese playwright, Chikamatsu, at Court Theatre in Chicago. Since then they have seen many plays, movies and concerts in an effort to synthesize their respective and collective aesthetic sensibilities, as well as have a good time between critical outbursts. Bergstrom is a PhD candidate in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Chicago, and has been published in the Chicago weekly New City. Kalke works at the Public Theatre. Freelance work includes the Chicago premiere of IN THE BLOOD by Suzan-Lori Parks, and a multi-year collaboration with Independent Art HERE in New York City. Kalke and Bergstrom would like to thank the creators of the films MOULIN ROUGE and SECRETARY for their part in inspiring the NEO-ROMANTIC Manifesto.*

## PULLET SURPRISE: CALL FOR NOMINATIONS



Okay, folks, it's time to give another award. As we all know, there is the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, etc., but has there ever in the history of dramaturgy (which goes oh so far back) been an award for the best blooper—that goof, that mistake, that dramaturgy no-no that is so fun, or so embarrassing or just so wrong?

Well, it's time. At the next LMDA conference in Philadelphia, we will award the first Pullet Surprise to the Turg who's the subject of the best anecdote about a dramaturgy blooper/goof/foul that has happened in recent turgical history. These anecdotes can be submitted by the turg her or himself, or by another turg.... Hmmmm, tasty.

In order for your story to be considered, you must send in your anecdote by March 15, 2004. Again, the winner will be plucked and roasted at the June LMDA conference.

**THIS IS YOUR FOUR MONTH WARNING.** What can you hatch? Was it that time they read the play with only the odd pages (and didn't notice)? Or the time they couldn't decide between Cheerios or Cocoa Puffs and you faked the research? Or were you not aware that heuvos was a double entendre in Spanish?? Do tell!

Send your story to Liz Engelman at [lengelman@mccarter.org](mailto:lengelman@mccarter.org).  
**DON'T BE CHICKEN!**

# Know Your Regional Vice Presidents!

LMDA is pleased to announce that all the Regional VP slots are filled! Now all LMDA members can stay connected with 'turgs in their area through their Regional VP. Please feel invited to send news about theatrical happenings in your neck of the woods to your VP. Many regions hold LMDA gatherings throughout the year (often in connection with theatre festivals and the like)—your Regional VP can make you aware of those events. Or if you have an idea for an event, please contact your VP. Below is a list of the VPs along with their e-mail addresses. And now, as Michele Volansky might say: "connect already!!"

**BUTTE** (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota): Kathleen McLennan—kathleen\_mclennan@und.nodak.edu

**CANADA**: Brian Quirt—bquirt@interlog.com

**GREATER MIDWEST** (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin): Paul Kosidowski—pkosidowski@MilwaukeeRep.com, Amy Wegener—awegener@actorstheatre.org

**METRO CHICAGO**: Rachel Shteir—rshteir@depaul.edu

**HOMESTEAD** (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas): Kae Koger—akoger@ou.edu

**METRO PHILADELPHIA**: Shannon O'Donnell—srodonnell@yahoo.com

**MID-ATLANTIC** (Delaware, Maryland, DC, Virginia, West Virginia): Mary Resing—mary@woollymammoth.net

**NYC**: Elizabeth Bennett—ebennett@mtc-nyc.org

**NORTHEAST** (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire,

New Jersey, NY State, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont): [Marge Betley (on sabbatical)—mbetley@gevatheatre.org], Ilana Brownstein—sparkleturgy@earthlink.net

**NORTHWEST** (Northern California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington): Lue Douthit—lued@osfashland.org

**PLAINS STATES** (Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska): Susan Gregg—sgregg@repstl.org, Carter Lewis—carterwl@earthlink.net

**ROCKIES** (Colorado, Utah, Wyoming): Amy Jensen—amythyst-jensen@netscape.net

**SOUTHEAST** (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee): Freddie Ashley—freddie.ashley@woodruffcenter.org, Gwen Orel—gorel@asf.net

**SOUTHWEST** (Arizona, Southern California, Nevada, New Mexico): Allison Horsley—ahorsley@ljp.ucsd.edu

*Review's* PROJECTS-IN-PROCESS section invites you to send accounts of your project-in-process.

The PROJECTS-IN-PROCESS series is looking to foster a discussion that anticipates future work, so this section provides a forum for dramaturgs and other artists to DISCUSS their ONGOING WORK. Share your current obsessions, accounts of recent work, and your plans for the future. PHOTOGRAPHS documenting your project — at any point between inception and completion — are especially welcome.

To start, send a short, preliminary, 100-word description of your project to Jacob Zimmer. Completed PROJECT descriptions will be approximately 1000 words.

Jacob Zimmer, editor  
PROJECTS-IN-PROCESS  
smallwoodenshoe@hotmail.com

# call for submissions