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HEAD TO HEAD

1997 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
FRIDAY, JUNE 13 - MONDAY, JUNE 16
(University Pre-conference: June 12)
The Yale School of Drama
New Haven, Connecticut

Dramaturgs and Their Friends Celebrate the End of Twentieth-century Theatre

1998 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NEW YORK CITY

Dramaturgs and Their Friends Anticipate the Theatre of the Twenty-first Century.

Our exciting 1997 conference at Yale, June 13-16 and preceded by the University Pre-Conference on June 12, will call together theatre artists and thinkers from other disciplines to reflect upon the theatre of the twentieth century. Watch for your conference brochure and registration materials, arriving in your mailboxes soon.

The Conference will feature interviews, debates, screenings and performances, along with the usual LMDA Conference schmooze sessions and gatherings.

Members planning to attend the University Pre-conference should arrive at Yale by noon on Thursday, June 12. The Pre-conference will extend into the evening. Conference registration and pre-conference activities will take place on Friday morning, June 13, with the official Opening Session commencing at about 1 p.m. (Both residence hall and hotel housing will be available to all Conference participants beginning on Thursday night, and **Thursday night arrival is strongly recommended** for anyone traveling from outside the New York/New England region.)

There is a small airport in New Haven, with direct or connecting flights from several major hub cities. However, most airborne Conference participants will probably find themselves landing in Hartford (about 1 hour away by car), or one of the New York area airports (Newark, Kennedy, or LaGuardia—all serviced by Connecticut Limousine: allow up to 3 hours for limo travel to New Haven; approximately 2 hours by passenger car). Or, if you're planning to arrive in New York City prior to the conference, the train ride to New Haven is 1.5 hours.

We'll keep you posted. For more information please call our conference coordinator, Melanie Deas, at 203-865-4551. See you in New Haven!

The 1997 Conference Committee

LMDA'S STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE REGARDING RENT LAWSUIT

In response to the overwhelming requests from the press and other interested parties for LMDA's official position on the Rent lawsuit, Board President Peggy Marks and President Jayme Koszyn prepared and released the following statement.

Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, Inc. ("LMDA") wishes to offer a statement in support of Lynn Thomson's efforts to gain due recognition for her contributions to the musical RENT.

LMDA recognizes that, in all but highly unusual circumstances, the work of a dramaturg on an individual play or production does not constitute a copyrightable contribution of such magnitude that it would entitle its creator to the benefits of joint authorship or co-authorship of the play under copyright law. LMDA believes that the evolution of the script for RENT, however, constituted just such an unusual circumstance, due to the nature of Ms. Thomson's contributions.

Although we are saddened by the tragedy that has made this lawsuit necessary, we support Ms. Thomson in her brave stand to assert her rights in connection with her contributions to RENT.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that this lawsuit does not signal a decline in the close cooperative relationship between and among dramaturgs, playwrights and producers. At most it may provide clarity in future situations and underscore the advisability of committing verbal agreements to some form of writing for the purpose of memorializing the participants' understanding. Such arrangement will benefit not only dramaturgs but every party in the process of bringing a dramatist's work to the stage.

DRAMATURGS AT LARGE

A LETTER FROM CANADA

Recently, Brian Quirt wrote to LMDA President Jayme Koszyn regarding Lynn Thomson's article "An Open Letter to My Colleagues" which appeared in Vol. 8, Issue 1 of the *LMDA Review*. The following is an excerpt from that letter.

I'm a freelance dramaturg/director. I sometimes direct the work I'm dramaturging, but I often work solely as a dramaturg. No one knows what to pay me. I've come up with a fee schedule. And sometimes I even get paid what I ask for. In either case, I'm very interested not only in fee structures, but the issue of creative responsibility and acknowledgment.

[Lynn Thomson's] article ended with a list of questions. Have you begun to develop answers? I intend to discuss them with my Canadian colleagues when we meet in Calgary in late February and would be happy to present to them any preliminary conclusions you have reached and pass on to you the content of our discussion.

It's a very muddy issue. I think it is essential that the LMDA address this. Lynn is so right that we must stop debating the definition of dramaturgy and do something to facilitate those things we know we do. This issue must be on the agenda at Yale.

As well, I enclose a letter sent to some 120 Canadian artists and teachers informing them of the LMDA's activities and asking them to join. Members of the Canadian caucus will be meeting in Calgary on February 28 to discuss our own issues and needs; I hope that by the Yale conference our numbers will be much stronger.

*Brian Quirt is a freelance dramaturg/director based in Toronto.
He is also the Canadian Sub-regional rep for Ontario.*

Dramaturgs at Large, cont.

My Involvement with RENT

by Billy Aronson

In the mid 80s I became infatuated with *La Bohème*. It seemed to me that Puccini had captured something gorgeous and ineffable about the way love can transform the universe in an instant. But while walking from City Opera to my Hell's Kitchen apartment, I kept being struck by the contrast between the luscious world Puccini's artists got to inhabit and mine. I decided to write an updated *Bohème* about New York artists struggling to create in the face of contemporary realities: a homeless population that was increasing geometrically, AIDS, the worship of money becoming fashionable, and leaders who demonized the arts. As dark as my characters' world would be, it could still be transformed by love, though the transformation would feel more peculiar/precarious than in Puccini's opera.

To find a composer I went to Ira Weitzman, Director of Musical Theatre at Playwrights Horizons, who recommended me to two composers he was excited about, one of whom was Jonathan Larson. Though Jon's music had a different feel than what I'd imagined for the project, and his sense that the show should be the next *Hair* wasn't exactly what I'd had in mind, I found his melodies extremely compelling and fun, and he was very charged up about the *Bohème* idea, and we both wanted badly to be working on something. So we plunged ahead.

In initial discussions Jon convinced me to set the show in the East Village, and I laid out a basic outline for the plot that followed the choppy structure of Puccini's opera: 1) The lovers meet and are instantly in love, 2) A minute later they're celebrating joyously, 3) A year later they're fighting constantly, 4) Another year later she's dying. Then I wrote a first scene of the libretto, which began with songs called "Rent" and "Santa Fe" and ended with "I Should Tell You." Jon wrote music for those three songs and played them for me on the Casio, the songs sounded terrific. But as I proceeded to try to generate a whole libretto working within the parameters we'd set, I could never make it work. The characters weren't becoming vivid, and the feeling I'd wanted to communicate wasn't coming through. So we put the project aside and got busy with other things.

In the fall of '91 Jon called to ask if he could go ahead with *Rent* on his own. I liked his thought about where he wanted the script to go, but I didn't feel I was the writer to take it there. So I gave him the green light, and he promised that I'd be credited for the "original concept and additional lyrics" (he kept the 3 songs, though many of my lyrics were changed along the way), and that I'd be compensated fairly "if any such miracle as a production occurs."

Over the next few years, every now and then Jon would show me what he'd done and ask for feedback. I'd offer a suggestion or two, but I was more of a cheerleader than a critic. Though the show was miles from what I'd envisioned, it was clear that he had tapped into a source of enormous inspiration, and was on a courageous, promising journey.

And then came the production. A few nights before the first preview, Jon called me to discuss how my bio should be worded in the program. At the end of our conversation I asked how

the show was looking and he said, with complete confidence, "It's great!" and urged me to hurry up and reserve my comps.

About a week after Jon died I went to see *Rent* at New York Theatre Workshop, but had a rough time concentrating on the action. I felt like I was at a glorious celebration for somebody who was never going to walk in the door. But by the Broadway opening I was able to relax enough to sit back and admire everybody's great work. I felt proud to have been a part of it, and lucky to have known Jon Larson.

A Dramaturg Changes Hats:

Tim Sanford on Career Flexibility

The idea that dramaturgy can serve as viable career preparation in alternate fields springs of necessity from the self-evident fact that there are fewer full-time career positions in dramaturgy in the United States than dramaturgs. No wonder we never quite relinquish our perpetual penchant for defining ourselves. (How in tune with the times we are. We should have our own self-help book.) In many cases, the dramaturg/literary management position can be a revolving door.

Still, I've managed to come through that door to the inside. Jayme asked me to talk about how being a dramaturg prepared me for my current position. Part of the answer is obvious. We're a writer's theater. We produce new plays. As literary manager I often was the first to read and meet the writers we went on to develop. So that work continues, just with higher stakes. What's perhaps more interesting is how I've felt prepared to deal with the learning curve that has come with the new job.

About seven years ago, Playwrights Horizons Artistic Director, André Bishop, used to poke fun at a kind of enwalled egg-headedness I sometimes manifested, a quality that I think can be endemic to the job. I took my imprimatur as literary manager very seriously. Get to know the writers. Gather information. Read, breathe, taste writers writers. After a while my worldview doubtless seemed a bit insular. Still, my primary task was to establish relationships with writers and secondarily directors. And here's the rub. Ultimately, dramaturgy is a people skill, a skill based on knowledge, respect, passion, and an ability to communicate. These are the strengths I've tried to draw on in my current job. Because dramaturgy can be a back room job with limited career potential, we sometimes have a tendency to make ourselves invisible. There's no place for invisibility in my current position (although humility and unobtrusiveness are still appreciated). But we also talk about dramaturgy as a function. Artistic directing is also a function. So the first step is to learn the rules. Then live up to the role.

Tim Sanford is the Artistic Director at Playwrights Horizons in New York City and a former LMDA co-president.

REGIONAL NEWS

by Michele Volansky

The past several months have been incredibly busy for me as the Secretary of LMDA. Since August, I've had the opportunity to talk, fax and e-mail many regional vice-presidents and many members about LMDA and what it means to be a regional vice-president. The response has been overwhelming. And positive. I feel as though there is a lot of activity and discussion happening in and around the country. What excites me the most is that it feels as though LMDA is working as it should—as a means for theatre professionals to share experiences, discuss common goals and to spend time talking together. So often, we are locked into our own rehearsals, offices, and plays, never having the opportunity to communicate. The fact that regional activity is taking place encourages me.

I sent letters out to all of the regional vice-presidents during the early fall in order to gauge how many wished to remain as a regional vice-president. While I did hear from a fair number of enthusiastic members eager to continue in that capacity and encouraged to hold more frequent regional meetings, there is still a portion of regional vice-presidents who I've not heard from or spoken to. If you are currently a v.p. and would like to continue—please call me. If you are not interested in continuing as a v.p.—again, please call. I've discovered that there are many members who would love the opportunity to serve their region should you not have an interest in doing so.

Letters were also sent to all members in regions that were not represented and I am delighted to say that (hopefully), all but one region is represented (Homestead). It seems as though the membership is carefully thinking about LMDA and the role members play in it, with thoughtful reasons and responses to my invitation to serve as a regional vice-president. Since we are a member-driven service organization, this seems to be an indicator that we are heading in a strong direction. Further, there is a drive to recruit more members within each region, a desire to meet on a more regular basis and the impulse to seek out other theatre artists to participate in regional activities.

Meetings have been held in Chicago, the District of Columbia, the Mid-Atlantic region, metro NYC and Ontario, with the regional vice-presidents keeping me posted on concerns questions and highlights. Some of the topics at meetings include touching base with working dramaturgs who are not members (and encouraging them to join), the role large-institution dramaturgs play in LMDA versus small theatre dramaturgs and the continued marriage between academic and professional theatre dramaturgs and theatre artists. The discussions have been, by all accounts, very productive and hopeful. There

seems to be some concern about the size of some regions and the difficulties in getting members together, but several regions seem to be working through that. I think I now have a current and up-to-date listing of the regional vice-presidents and I encourage you to contact one another, as well as me, to share your information and questions. I know of meetings that are planned in the Southeast and in Canada (when the Canadian theatre community heads to Alberta for "playrites 97"). I look forward to hearing what other regions are doing in the months leading up to the conference in New Haven.

—Michele Volansky is the Dramaturg and Literary Manager for Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, 312-335-1818 x813

THE ADVOCACY CAUCUS NEEDS YOU!

As described in the last newsletter, one goal of the Advocacy Caucus is to formulate contract models for dramaturgs. We cannot accomplish our task without your participation. Indeed, if we are to improve the working conditions for all, we must become an active and united force.

What we need from you now is information: please send us details about past or current contracts pertaining to staff positions as Literary Managers and/or Dramaturgs as well as freelance work. We also need to know how you feel about these contracts. What did you like? What would you change? What were/are salaries? Fees? Fee structure? Benefits? **ALL INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL.**

I stress that without informed understanding of current practices and your feelings about them, the committee cannot do the support work. Address your responses to Lynn M. Thomson, Advocacy Caucus, LMDA. If you prefer, you may fax at 212-643-8259, or call either Emily Morse, 718-389-0115, or Lynn at 212-643-8259.

Regional News, cont.

Mid-Atlantic/D.C. Metropolitan Regional Report

by Darrel de Chaby

Some 20 LMDA members in the mid-Atlantic region (Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C.) have been busy over the winter exchanging views and information. As a new Regional Vice-President for the Metropolitan D.C. area, I have invited all members in my region to send me copies of their resumes for use in networking. I have also solicited their views on the related questions: "How can we improve the present system of first readings of scripts, and what can we do to advance ourselves professionally?" I have been sending members information on grant opportunities that cross my desk here at the National Endowment for the Humanities. All members of LMDA and those who are interested in the organization in the mid-Atlantic region are welcome to call me. I'd like for all of us to keep in touch. If you have any questions, comments or ideas please call my daytime number 202-606-8289.

Dramaturgy Northwest

Web Site

The Northwest Region of LMDA and the University of Puget Sound want to remind everyone of their ongoing web site project. The page contains RESOURCES (bibliographies, anthologies, source books, and e-mail lists), EVENTS (dates, times, and places for plays, play readings, conferences, seminars and other activities of regional and national interest), FAQs and LINKS to web sites for Northwest theatres, Northwest theatre programs, new play development, playwright, theatrical periods, national and international theatre resources. The project dramaturgs are Robert Menna (Seattle Playwrights Alliance) and Geoff Proehl (University of Puget Sound).

The web site address is <http://www.ups.edu/cta/theatre/dramaturgy/index.htm>.

Research Exchange

LMDA member Robert Menna is continuing work compiling a list of research that members would be willing to share with other dramaturgs. Dramaturgs who have information to share, please e-mail Robert at rmenna@concentric.com with a list of plays and projects you have research for. Conversely, if you are researching a project you may send an inquiry to Robert and he will put you in touch with any dramaturgs on the list who may have what you are looking for.

New York Regional

Monthly Meetings

After a holiday break, the monthly meetings have restarted. Julie Bleha organized January's meeting which was held at Cafe Tacci, near Columbia. If you do not receive an e-mail message or a phone call regarding the meeting by the 20th of the month, please call the LMDA office at 212-642-2657.

Metrolist

There is a new "listserv" for the NYCmetro region of LMDA. This should stimulate communication in the region and help develop a sense of community. We hope that the list will become a conduit of valuable information, assistance, and creativity. For instance, we hope that if you are working on projects that are papering or offering staff rates for certain performances you'll use the list to let your colleagues know about such opportunities. Bronwyn Eisenberg has set up and administers the service. Send e-mail to the following address: lmda-nycmetro@netcom.com and the mail will be forwarded to everyone on the list. To be added to the list send your request to lmda-nycmetro-request@netcom.com.

REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS! CALL YOURS TODAY!

Regional VP's Regional VP's Regional VP's Regional VP's

Bayou States: Susan Willis, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, 334-271-5817 **Canada:** D.D. Kugler, Northern Lights, 403-471-1586 **Canadian Sub-Regions:** EAST—Paula Dankert, 902-425-0918 QUÉBEC— Linda Gaboriau 514-288-3384, ONTARIO— Brian Quirt 416-214-1992, WEST and BC— Rob Moffat **Greater Chicago:** Richard Pettengill, Goodman Theatre, 312-443-3839 Michele Volansky, Steppenwolf, 312-335-1888 Gavin Witt, Court Theatre, 312-702-7005 **Florida:** Chris Angermann, Florida Studio Theatre, 941-366-9017 **Homestead:** Unrepresented **Metropolitan New York:** Victoria Abrash, Ping Chong, 212-505-9802 Lynn M. Thompson, 212-643-8259 **Northern California:** Tony Kelly, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, 510-204-8901 **Mid-Atlantic:** Tricia Roche, George St. Playhouse, 908- 846-2895 **Southern California:** John Glore, South Coast Repertory, 714-957-2602 Alan Havis, UCSD, 619-534-8597 Jan Lewis, Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, 310-477-2055 **Northeast:** David Kent, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, 508-454-6324 **North Mid-West:** Guy Sanville, Purple Rose, 313-475-5817 Joan Sween, Midwest Theatre Network, 507-281-1472 **Northwest:** Robert Menna, Seattle Playwrights Alliance, 206-545-7010 Geoff Proehl, University of Puget Sound, 206-756-3754 **Ohio River:** Liz Engelman, Actors Theatre of Louisville, 502-584-1265 Scott Kanoff, The Cleveland Play House, 216-795-7010 **Plains States:** Susan Gregg, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, 314-968-7340 **Southeast:** Chris Baker, University of North Carolina, Adam Versenyi, UNC, Chapel Hill, 919-962-2496 Claudia Carter Covington, Charlotte Rep, 704-375-4796 **Southwest:** David Mong, Salt Lake Acting Co., 801-363-0526 **Washington D.C. Metropolitan:** Darrel de Chaby 202-606-8289

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