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Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 22, issue 1, part 1

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D.D. Kugler

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Review

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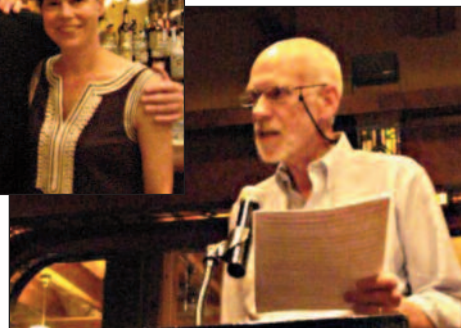
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Photo: Brian Quirt



Lessing Photos: Vicki Stroich



LITERARY MANAGERS
& DRAMATURGS
OF THE AMERICAS

EDITORS' NOTES

We're trying something new at *Review*: we are finally acknowledging that this is an online journal. In response to this introspective breakthrough, we're testing a new model of releasing content serially, as do other online publications. It'll give us the excuse to be in touch with our readers more often. Let us know how you think it works...

I'm thrilled with this installment of *Review*: the speeches associated with D.D. Kugler's 2011 Lessing award are just so lovely. Geoff Proehl and Vanessa Porteous have written smart, compassionate encomiums to Kugler, and Kugler's acceptance speech is smart, insightful, and unfailingly generous — which is all very “Kugler.”

Looking ahead to forthcoming installments in this issue, we'll have a report / travelogue from Brian Quirt, a conversation about theatrical translation between Adam Versenyi and Hector Garcia, and more.

In other news, this will be my last issue as editor of *Review*. I've had a long tenure, a lot of fun, and I've read a lot of great writing about dramaturgy. The editorship is being handed to Sydney Cheek O'Donnell, who has served for two years as Associate Editor. She's already been doing great work for *Review*, so I know she'll continue to do so.

As for me, I've already begun a four-year term of service as Co-editor and, later, Editor of *Theatre Topics*, one of the journals published by the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE). I'm looking forward to assembling a special issue of *Topics* on dramaturgy. I hope you'll write something for it.

DJH

The “more” to which D.J. so modestly refers in his editorial note is his own Elliott Hayes Award acceptance speech, which I insisted we include in this issue, along with LMDA President Danielle Mages Amato's heart-felt introduction to D.J.'s accomplishments as the Editor of *Review*.

It is my great honor to succeed D.J. Hopkins as Editor of this journal. His excellent leadership and nearly super-human effort to transform *Review* from a newsletter to a professional journal with profound, inspiring, and peer-reviewed content gave me pause about accepting this post. I will never fill his editorial shoes, or come up with a word like “encomium,” for that matter. But being allowed to curate an ongoing conversation about dramaturgy in order to, as D.J. put it in his speech, “preserve the voice of a collaborator whose ideas have a tendency to disappear into other people's products” is an opportunity I ultimately could not refuse. Like D.J. and many others, I am attracted to what we might call meta-dramaturgy (after metacognition): the process of dramaturging our own dramaturgical processes. And, like D.J., I am also interested in the application of dramaturgical processes in non-theatrical settings.

As we forge ahead at *Review*, we will seek out new ways to engage our readers in conversations that are as inspirational as the ones LMDA members experience at our annual conferences. In the meantime, please send me comments, questions, or suggestions at scheek@gmail.com. Or go to LMDA's Facebook page and start a conversation about the current issue. I look forward to hearing from you.

SCO

Review

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Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to D.J. Hopkins: <dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu>. Review Volume 21 number 1, Winter 2011.

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THE 2011 LESSING AWARD

D.D. KUGLER

“You Might Be Pretty Good at This”

An Introduction by Geoff Proehl

Walt Whitman is, like Nietzsche, one of those oft-abused writers, given as gifts to the wrong people at the wrong time for the wrong reason, and yet, his words, at least some of them, are for me like the Bible verses I once memorized.

So I was not surprised when these eight familiar lines entered my thoughts, even though they are both right and wrong for tonight:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns
before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide,
and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured
with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

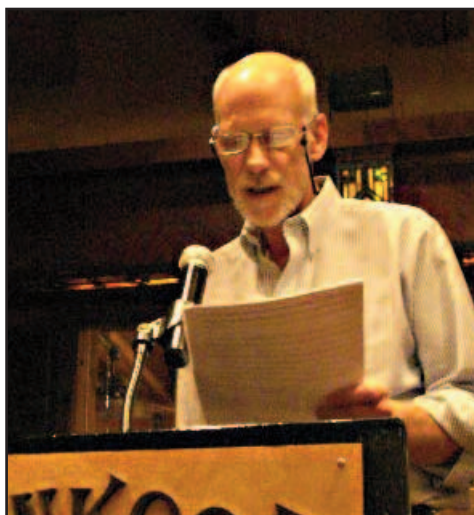
What is right is this image — beautiful and profound — of looking in perfect silence, and in it I see Kugler looking at his stars: words on a coffee-stained sheet of paper, dancer or actor in a pool of light.

Most of us look at texts; many of us are good at it, but the difference between those of us who are good and those who are great is in what we see there. For me, “perfect silence” marks the acuity and passion with which Kugler attends to this sheet of paper, dancer, actor, taken in with love, with wonder, and without pre-conception.

Of his texts, Kugler asks, to steal some words from Lee Devin, two questions: “What are the parts to this thing?” (This particular, unique, one-of-a-kind thing.) And, “How do they go together?”

Kugler shows us, as well as anyone in the field, how to do this, and, more importantly, what it means to have faith in creative artists' choices about those parts and their arrangement, faith that these choices will reveal themselves if we begin, not from what's wrong

GEOFF PROEHL teaches, dramaturgs, and directs at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. His most recent book is *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey* with DD Kugler, Mark Lamos, and Michael Lupu (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2008; Outstanding Book Award, 2009, Association for Theatre in Higher Education).



Geoff Proehl, at the 2011 LMDA Conference in Denver. Photo: Vicki Stroich.

— in Kugler’s words, “any asshole can do that” — but from the assumption that if we bring ourselves to the work (the only self we can bring) and attend to what is there in a “perfect silence,” we will discover not only how those swirling pieces constellate themselves but also how to move from silence into, not a lecture, but a conversation.

Kugler’s leap is for me the “mystical moist night air” that releases, on rare and not so rare occasions, an energy so serious, joyous, and terrible as to make pain and pleasure properly indistinguishable.

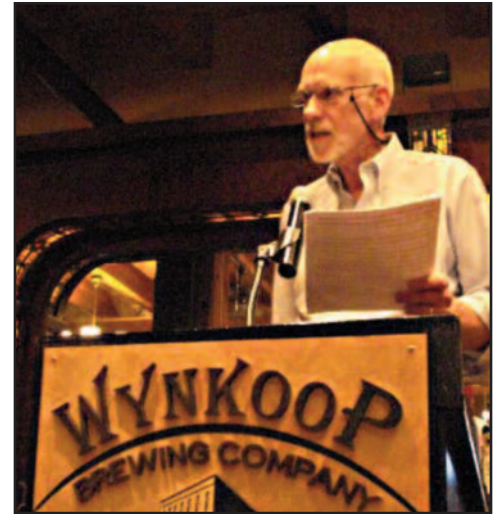
Where the analogy goes wrong is in the poem’s apparent disdain for columns, charts, and diagrams. Anyone who has worked or studied with Kugler knows that he loves these tools.

To undercut assumption and discover form, Kugler pours over consecutive drafts; creates detailed play reports and precise textual breakdowns; reads and re-reads plays for their production elements; lists tensions; creates constellations (his term) from those tensions; re-figures two-dimensional knowledge into three-dimensional terms; mines images, sounds, production histories, and other research, so that he can then return to the intuitions of the night.

Whitman’s poem implies we have to choose deadening communal analysis or isolated intuitive appreciation. Kugler’s work defies this dilemma. It lives, instead, on the edge of such tensions, embraces and nurtures it, and so joins the work of Anne Cattaneo, Arthur Ballet, Michael Lupu, and Mark Bly as one of the first books we pick up when we want to understand what it means to do dramaturgy.

As an MFA student in Toronto, Kugler chose a new play for his directing thesis. Richard Rose, a gifted artist and Kugler’s advisor, questioned the choice. Why not direct a known quantity? Kugler chose, instead, to wander off on his own. After Rose saw in production the play Kugler had seen on the page, his words were succinct, “You might be pretty good at this.”

He was right.



Geoff Proehl, at the 2011 LMDA Conference in Denver. Photo: Vicki Stroich.

THE 2011 LESSING AWARD

D.D. KUGLER

An Introduction by Vanessa Porteous

Once, I heard a friend of DD Kugler's say that, many years ago, he used to send Kugler reviews of imaginary shows. Kugler was living in a distant fishing village, so he never knew the productions didn't exist. He would write back with his thoughts and they'd debate. When he heard the truth, Kugler didn't seem to mind. He said he thought of that correspondence as an important part of his artistic development. The exchange is what seemed to matter most.

Is there anyone more *like himself* than DD Kugler? There are many telling details. Born in a town called Superior, Nebraska. The son of a preacher man. In 1969, during the Vietnam War, Kugler did a subtle analysis of his situation. He decided that though he might fight in some wars, he wouldn't fight in that one. So he fled the draft and came to Canada. He read Kafka in an attic in Toronto, studied Melville on the prairies, worked as a fisherman on the south shore of Nova Scotia, and was drawn into theatre in his thirties. It was a community production of *The Sound of Music*. He played a Nazi.

Kugler has always, it seems, been exactly Kugler. Back in the days of snail mail, he never wrote letters; he sent postcards, which he typed. They read like telegrams, long after telegrams; email before email. His style has never changed: staccato fragments punctuated by dot-dot-dots.

Well before smart-phones, Kugler had a device that beeped when the Blue Jays got a run on base. In Fringe line-ups, he'd wear it on a lanyard round his neck, together with a tiny laminated Fringe schedule he would make to help maximize the number of plays he could see in one day. He once divulged that he seriously considered rotating the spoons in his cutlery drawer. It seemed out of balance to him somehow, that only the ones on top got used.

Even the way Kugler looks never seems to alter: his bald head, his big hands, his little glasses, those shining brown eyes. A collision of ellipses, intersecting like geometry, always in motion, restless but sure.

After Kugler completed his MFA in directing at York, Richard Rose

VANESSA PORTEOUS is a director and dramaturg based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, where she has been the Artistic Director of Alberta Theatre Projects since May 2009. Directing highlights at Alberta Theatre Projects include the world premiere of *Heartbreaker* by Morwyn Brebner; *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood; the world premieres of *Tyland* by Greg MacArthur (Enbridge playRites Festival 2010) and *The Erotic Anguish of Don Juan* by The Old Trout Puppet Workshop (2009; remount in 2011); *The Syringa Tree* starring Meg Roe; the world premieres of *Why Freud Fainted* by David Rhymer, and of *Pinocchio* by The Old Trout Puppet Workshop; and *Proof, Plan B, The Hobbit*, and the world premiere of *Respectable* by Ron Chambers. Other favourite directing work includes *Queen Lear* for Urban Curvz Theatre, *The Enchanted Child* with the Calgary Opera Emerging Artists Ensemble, and *When That I Was* for The Shakespeare Company, for which she won a Betty Mitchell Award for Outstanding Direction in 2009. This season, Vanessa's production of *The Penelopiad* was remounted at the Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver, and Vanessa will dramaturg the world premieres of the English translation of *Thinking of Yu* by Carole Fréchette, translated by John Murrell, and *Playing With Fire: The Theo Fleury Story* by Kirstie McLellan Day, both for Alberta Theatre Projects. From 1998–2006, Vanessa was a dramaturg on staff at Alberta Theatre Projects, where she oversaw the development and production of over thirty new Canadian plays. Vanessa is a proud member of LMDA and of Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

hired him to be the dramaturg at Necessary Angel in Toronto, where he stayed from 1985 to 1993. They updated the Casanova story for the AIDS era in a play called *Newhouse*; they adapted Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*; they did a stage version of Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*. These shows smashed dramatic convention to pieces. They were ambitious, epic stories, refracted through a vivid contemporary sensibility.

From 1993 to 1998, Kugler was Artistic Director of Northern Light Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta. He rewrote the mandate to include the phrase "provocative scripts — language-rich texts that are dark, poetic, funny."

He did Howard Barker in a bus barn, Daniel MacIvor in a gay bar. He did a play about a chef's last meal, complete with food for the audience. For one staged reading, the actors sat around a table of sand, lit by hundreds of candles. I still remember his production of *7 Lears* at the local college. The audience was nestled in a grove of real trees. You could smell the sap.

His shows blasted our notions of what was possible in theatre. I am one of many in Edmonton at that time who would say those productions changed us.

A longtime member of the LMDA, Kugler was our first Canadian President, from 2000 to 2002. Throughout his career, he has freelanced as a director and dramaturg of plays, opera, and dance. Since 1998, his base-line gig has been at Simon Fraser University, where he is Professor in the Theatre Area of the School for Contemporary Arts. He's currently an Associate Dean. In 2010, he received an award for Excellence in Teaching.

As a prof, Kugler combines rigour and generosity. There's a quiz every day, forcing the students to remember seemingly unimportant details of the script. For Kugler, these minutiae are far from trivial. Rather, they are metonyms, telling little facts that signify the whole. He values the people as much as the text, so he quizzes his students on the names of their classmates too. He grades them highly for speaking up against what he calls "the stream of consensus." He thinks consensus is the enemy of art.

There are so many of us whose paths have been radically re-routed because we encountered Kugler. Though I never took a class with him, I am one of the many he has taught.

My first job in the theatre was a summer internship at Northern Light. My task was to sort through boxes in the basement, re-cataloguing old show reports and crumbling newspaper clippings. Late one afternoon, Kugler came out of his office. He took off his glasses and rubbed his head. "Have a look at my Canada Council grant," he said. "I'd like your thoughts." Surely I was surprised. But I was so ignorant, so arrogant, I covered his nine pages in red pen. "Too opaque," I wrote. "Too many juxtapositions. And what's with all the dot-dot-dots?"

Kugler stared at me for one short moment. Then he sat me down in that dusty basement, and we worked through his grant together, line-by-line.

He hired me as a reader, a blurb-writer, a curator, an assistant director, a collaborator, a programmer, an artistic confidante. In passing, he taught me the word for all that: dramaturgy.

That is exactly Kugler. He sees what you can be when you didn't know. He names it — you're surprised. He gets you to do it. You try. You're his student, an apprentice, suddenly a colleague. Flash. All it takes is one short moment, one glance of those bright brown eyes.

I wish I could fill the night air with words of praise for Kugler. "Here is the man," I want to say. "Here are his accomplishments, his virtues, his contradictions. Here is what I admire about him," I would shout to those stars in Walt Whitman's poem. "Here is what I love." But Kugler wouldn't like that. It would wreck the perfect silence, and, like the character in the poem, he would slip away. His modesty is as ferocious as his dramaturgy. Before this speech, he said to me, "Please keep it short."

Fine then. Just this: Kugler, I hope you know that what Geoff said is true. As a teacher, a director, a dramaturg, and an artist, your gift is the radical leap of faith. You unleash a serious, joyous, terrible, and terrific energy. I have seen it, felt it. It's a fact. An undeniable detail that signifies the whole.

Ladies and gentleman, the recipient of the Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Award for a lifetime of achievement in the field of dramaturgy, my colleague and friend, DD Kugler.

THE 2011 LESSING AWARD

D.D. KUGLER

Welcoming Failure, Acknowledging Subjectivity

Acceptance Speech by D.D. Kugler

Thank you, Geoff, and thank you, Vanessa, for your kind words.

It wasn't until 1989, when I attended my first LMDA conference in San Francisco, that I began to call myself a dramaturg — it felt like the appropriate umbrella term for the work that I had begun undertaking. This is my 22nd LMDA conference over the last 23 years, and I've been rewarded with friendships and conversations that have extended over that entire time. LMDA, especially the conference, has been central to my artistic and professional growth, and I am extremely grateful for this honour.

I'd like to take this opportunity to speak briefly about two undervalued dramaturgical values — failure and subjectivity. But first, some context.

Artists make choices — aesthetic choices — that's what we do. A dramaturg considers the values implied by those artistic choices. A dramaturg also encourages, and facilitates, a consideration of those choices among collaborators. A dramaturgical sensibility — shared by dramaturgs and non-dramaturgs alike — considers the hierarchy of values revealed in the accumulation of those artistic choices. In short, values shape choices; choices reveal values.

FAILURE

Many of my students' choices reveal the value of "perfection." They are embarrassed, become discouraged, and even apologize that their work isn't "perfect." I'm mystified. What would perfect look like if you got there? I ask. They have no idea. So I invite them to choose, instead, the value of "failure." In fact, I wear a couple of t-shirts emblazoned with the words "fail better." Those words come, as most of you know, from Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho*. Here's the complete passage: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Failure is easy if you don't try — and we have all seen those scripts, those productions. But Beckett also says "ever tried" and "try again." Beckett doesn't just say "fail,"



D.D. Kugler at the 2011 LMDA Conference in Denver. Photo: Vicki Stroich.

he says “fail better” — emphasis not on “fail,” but upon “better.” Fail *better*.

Failing better means choosing not to settle for what we already know works. It means attempting choices that may eventually exceed our grasp. In the terms of keynote speaker, Adam Lerner, it means risking not being excellent in order to allow for the possibility of being awesome.

But, for me, failing better also means leaving each script unfinished enough to invite the collaboration of other artists in production, and it means leaving each production unfinished enough to invite the collaboration of an audience.

Maybe that’s what “perfect” would look like — a landscape filled with theatre artists who, work after work, successively fail better.

SUBJECTIVITY

As an assignment in my undergraduate dramaturgy class, students write a one-page play report in subsequent weeks on three consecutive drafts of a play in development. I ask the students to isolate the changes from draft to draft, and then encourage them to imagine the playwright’s hierarchy of values implicit in those changes, that succession of choices. After completing the first report, students read their descriptions of that same play aloud in class, and there is an astonishing variety in their inclusion of characters, plot elements, images, and themes. Confronted by this demonstration of difference, I remind the students that they can never describe the play; they can only describe themselves describing the play. That’s what we bring to the work — ourselves. Not objectivity, but our unique subjectivity.

In dramaturgical circles there’s much debate about whether the dramaturg should locate herself inside or outside the rehearsal / production process. I have no methodology, so I fall happily on both sides of this argument. I invoke Julian Barnes who, in *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, considers Gericault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa* with both his “informed eye” and his “ignorant eye.” “Let us re-imagine our eye into ignorance,” he says, and then a little later adds, “The ignorant eye yields, with a certain reluctance, to the informed eye” (130).

When I begin a project, I do not bring knowledge, but I do bring experience. This “informed eye” is shaped not only by my theatre experience, but also by all the experiences I have accumulated during my often wayward life. But of equal, if not greater importance, is my “ignorant eye.” In fact, I often begin a new process by saying that I offer my collaborators the gift of my ignorance. Sometimes, like Barnes, I have to re-imagine myself into ignorance; but most of the time, I find my ignorance a readily available and inexhaustible resource. But to be honest, in addition to my informed and ignorant eye, I also bring my energy, my focus, and a wide range of often surprising impulses that I have increasingly come to respect. In short, I bring all the things that make me, me.

In *Dramaturgy in American Theatre*, director Travis Preston and dramaturg Royston Coppenger provide an excellent essay titled “The Way We Work.” Talking about Coppenger’s role, Preston states:

There is no role or set of functions that Royston consistently fulfills in our projects. What he should do varies enormously

according to the project, my needs, and, above all, his predilection. This is not to say, for example, that Royston might not research a play; he often does. His reasons for doing so, however, are entirely in response to his own artistic needs and interests. Neither does he have an analytical function, though he might provide analysis. Royston is defined in the production process by the very fact of his presence. I do not think of him as a dramaturg. I think of him as Royston. (173)

When I begin a project I can only offer myself — my whole history of experience, my vast ignorance, my unique impulses and proclivities. My strength, if I have any at all, is that I bring my absolute *subjectivity* fully to the service of each project.

Anne Cataneo.

Arthur Ballet.

Michael Lupu.

Mark Bly.

DD Kugler.

I’m haunted by my flawed memory of a *Sesame Street* song: “One of these things is not like the others, one of these things doesn’t belong.” And it’s not just that I’m Canadian. Previous Lessing Awards have honoured senior dramaturgs associated with major theatre institutions. As I have a primarily freelance dramaturgy career with independent artists, and with small to (at most) mid-sized theatres, this award demonstrates refreshing LMDA recognition of the role played by freelance dramaturgs in our diverse theatre landscape.

With that in mind, please allow me to accept the Lessing Award on behalf of Canadian dramaturgs and freelance dramaturgs everywhere.

Thank you.



Proehl, Kugler, and Porteous at the 2011 LMDA Conference in Denver. Photo: Vicki Stroich.

DD KUGLER is a freelance director/dramaturg and, since January 1998, a Professor in the Theatre Area at Simon Fraser University (SFU), where he teaches directing, dramaturgy, play-making, and his version of theatre history. In 2010, Kugler was presented with one of three SFU's Excellence in Teaching Awards. At SFU Contemporary Arts, he has directed Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* and *The Possibilities*, Charles L. Mee's *Big Love*, Michael Hollingsworth's *History of the Village of the Small Huts: Laurier*, Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, and *Harmonia* — the first play in Ned Dicken's seven-play City of Wine project. Since arriving in Vancouver, Kugler has been the dramaturg on the premieres of Lucia Frangione's *Espresso* (Pacific Theatre), Linz Kenyon's *Cowboy King* and *The I.O.U Land* (Caravan Farm Theatre), and four theatre / dance works *Spektator*, *Cyclops*, *Reptile-Diva*, and *[storm]* (Battery Opera). He was also the director / dramaturg of the premieres of Peter Dickinson's *The Objecthood of Chairs*, Mansel Robinson's *Picking Up Chekhov* (Alberta Theatre Projects), and Kathleen Oliver's *Carols' Christmas* (Arts Club Theatre).

During five seasons (1993–98) as Artistic Director of Edmonton's Northern Light Theatre, Kugler primarily developed and directed Canadian writers: the premieres of Padma Viswanathan's *House of Sacred Cows*, Tom Cone's *True Mummy*, Vern Thiessen's *Blowfish*, Connie Gault's *Otherwise Bob*, and Gordon Pengilly's *Metastasis: Chain of Ruin*. He also directed the second production of Eugene Stickland's *Some Assembly Required*, and Colleen Wagner's *The Monument*.

Kugler served eight seasons (1985–93) as Production Dramaturg with Toronto's Necessary Angel Theatre on productions of Jason Sherman's *Two in the Back*, *Three in the Head*, Colleen Wagner's *The Monument*, David Young's *Glenn*, John Krizanc's *The Half of It*, Michael Springate's *Dog and Crow*, and productions of two Howard Barker texts: *The Europeans* and *The Castle*. During his tenure at Necessary Angel, Kugler also adapted Marc Diamond's *Property* and, in collaboration with Artistic Director Richard Rose, he co-authored *Newhouse*, as well as the adaptations of Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, and Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*.

Kugler's freelance career includes work as director / dramaturg at Arts Club (Vancouver), Alberta Playwrights Network, Alberta Theatre Projects (Calgary), Battery Opera (Vancouver), Canadian Opera Company (Toronto), Caravan Farm Theatre (Armstrong, BC), Globe Theatre (Regina), Gwaandak Theatre (Whitehorse), Magnus Theatre (Thunder Bay), Mulgrave Road Theatre (Nova Scotia), Nakai Theatre Ensemble (Whitehorse), National Arts Centre (Ottawa), Ottawa Shakespeare Festival, Pacific Theatre (Vancouver), Playwrights Theatre Centre (Vancouver), Playwrights Workshop Montreal, Saskatchewan Playwrights' Centre, The Stratford Festival, The Theatre Centre (Toronto), Touchstone Theatre (Vancouver), and Twenty-Fifth Street Theatre (Saskatoon).

A long-time member of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, Kugler served a two-year term as LMDA's first Canadian President (2000–2002).

2011 Elliott Hayes Award

Introduction by Danielle Mages Amato

DANIELLE MAGES AMATO holds an MFA in Dramaturgy and a PhD in Drama and Theatre from the University of California-San Diego. She currently works as the Literary Manager and Dramaturg at The Old Globe in San Diego, and she serves as the president of LMDA. Danielle spent four years as the dramaturg and literary manager of The Studio Theatre in Washington, DC. She has taught theatre at UC-San Diego, the University of San Diego, West Kentucky Community and Technical College, and Kingwood College.

The LMDA Prize in Dramaturgy recognizes exemplary contributions by dramaturgs to the conception, development and production of theatre or to educational projects in dramaturgy. The Elliott Hayes award recognizes work on a specific project; and projects may include, productions, publications, season planning and implementation, educational programs or advocacy for the profession.

In my experience, the presentation of this award is celebrated with a sense of joyous mystery and surprise. Often these presentation speeches give a full description of the project without naming the award recipient until the end of the speech, leaving you as the audience to gradually figure it out as you listen.

However, the project that is being honored this year is unique and well-known to possibly all of us, and I fear this technique will not work.

Let's give it a try: Here's a description of the project from one of its nominators, Liz Engleman: "This dramaturg has turned a paper newsletter into an online journal; a periodical that can compete with any other online journal, and would surpass most of them in its successful realization of vibrant visuals, critical and creative content, and quality of contributors."

Liz is speaking, of course, of D.J. Hopkins and the exceptional work that he has done on the publication *Review*.

To be clear: *Review* is LMDA's journal of dramaturgy, but *Review* as it currently exists not a project that LMDA planned and executed through D.J. Rather, D.J. used LMDA to do this work – to creatively expand and imagine a publication that would serve the dramaturgical community. He has transformed what was once a photocopied newsletter into an exceptional online journal featuring peer-reviewed, MLA-indexed content. It even has an ISSN number.

I want to share some thoughts from Geoff Proehl on the history of *Review* and on the work that D.J. has done. Geoff writes that the organization's first newsletter was published in January 1986.

“Its editor, unknown and uncredited, thought enough of the publication’s future to bravely mark it as Volume 1 Issue 1, Winter Issue, 1986.” Geoff continues: “At times we have lost track of where we had been (volume 8 issues 1 and 2 occurs twice). At times we have lost track of the issue itself, some numbers no more than a listing in a chronology or incomplete fragments, like texts of old Greek plays marked as much by their gaps as their presences. Individuals have edited the *Review* for a year or two, but no one has been crazy enough to adopt this child and take it into his or her family.”

D.J. has been editor or co-editor of the publication for almost eight years. During that time, he has overseen 17 issues of *Review*, thoughtfully curated and carefully edited the work of 111 contributions by 163 authors. One last quote from Geoff Proehl: “D.J. understands the value of *Review* as a journal of thought, and so stands with a league of humanists and scientists who have nourished growth in their fields through thoughtful, periodical publications that could reflect the growth of the field, and in so doing, spur future development.”

I’m pleased that I did not have to vote on the selection committee and that I merely have the pleasure of presenting this award to someone I’ve known so long and respect so highly. I first met D.J. in 1995 when I was a prospective graduate student at UCSD. He and Shelley Orr, who was at that time not yet his wife but merely his secret girlfriend, took me to see a production of Naomi Iizuka’s play *Skin* and talked to me about being a dramaturg. And I thought right away: these are people I want to be like. This is a way I want to see theatre and see the world. Since that time, D.J. has been a significant influence on how I understand what it means to be a dramaturg and theatre thinker and theatre artist.

I’m not the only one who has been influenced by D.J. in this way. As Liz writes: “DJ has opened the lens of my eyes and brain in terms of how I relate matters dramaturgical to what I do and see around me, and vice versa. Through *Review*, D.J. both creates perspectives on our work and dramaturgs the perspectives of others.”

A dramaturg for dramaturgs. I don’t know what higher compliment we have to offer. I’m very pleased to present the 2011 Elliott Hayes Award to D.J. Hopkins.



D.J. Hopkins and Danielle Mages Amato at the 2011 LMDA Conference in Denver. Photo: Vicki Stroich.

2011 Elliott Hayes Award

Acceptance Speech by D.J. Hopkins

Thank you. I'm going to talk about three things: 1. I'm going to say a few words of thanks, 2. I'm going to talk about pornography, 3. I'm going to talk about writing, and then I'm going to sit down. (For some reason, Danielle asked me not to prepare any visual aids...)

Receiving the Elliott Hayes award is a profoundly humbling honor, not least because it is one that I share with many. This year marks the 25th anniversary of *Review*, a landmark that in itself deserves recognition and celebration. I've been editor for only the last eight years, so there are many shoulders on which I'm standing, especially the previous editors'.

Among those many shoulders, I'd like to especially thank the following people: Shelley Orr, with whom I was co-editor for two years; she has been a great collaborator and a great source of support, both professionally and personally. I'd like to thank the LMDA Presidents for whom I've had the pleasure of running this newsletter / 'zine / journal: Michele Volansky, Liz Engelman, Brian Quirt, Shelley, and now Danielle. Danielle and Janine Sobeck have accomplished the most recent sea change at the LMDA website and to *Review*. Thanks to their tech savvy, *Review* now offers a lovely and user-friendly online reading experience (though I will still keep emailing a pdf to Norm Frisch if he keeps asking for one). My thanks to Liz and Geoff Proehl, who have been great supporters and colleagues and people I just wish I saw more often. And special thanks to recent editorial collaborators: Sydné Mahone, guest editor for last fall's fabulous special issue on African American dramaturgy; and *Review*'s Associate Editors Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell and Lauren Beck; to everyone on our active, growing editorial board; and to *Review*'s many contributors. You are all rock stars!

A few months ago, when talking with her about *Review*, Liz Engelman told me that she thought my position as editor was one of the best jobs in dramaturgy, because I get to work with other dramaturgs. In saying this, Liz committed a classic act of great dramaturgy: she revealed something about my work to me, something that should

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have been completely obvious, but yet something that I had never noticed. I realized in retrospect that I've loved this field and the people in it enough to choose — whether consciously or not — to make a significant amount of my work in this field about working with other people in this field and about the field itself.

I had another revelation about our field recently, when reading a review of a new book by Sasha Grey. Grey is best known as an adult performer, and her book is a collection of photographs taken on the sets of pornographic videos. As Grey says of her photos: "I started taking a camera with me to capture my experiences on set," and she did so with the intent that each photo would be "a moment in time, a memory for myself — [as opposed to] the video that would be seen by thousands." Grey goes on to observe: "There are so many photos of me, taken by other people, that [...] I have no control over"; and she concludes: "Documenting myself *has almost become a necessity*" (emphasis added).*

So, Grey is taking photographs of herself in the moment of being photographed by other people. I find something interesting about what Grey is doing, and about how she describes it. First, I have to set aside the question: "If you're so skeptical about the way you might be represented, why are you making porn?" She's obviously an intelligent woman. I imagine saying to her: "You could do anything! You could be a dramaturg!" But then, I'm afraid that the reply might be: [Sasha Grey wrinkles nose, shakes head] "No, I'm good."

Setting those thoughts aside, I'm interested in her practice of re-photography. Grey is creating an alternate narrative of herself in performance, a kind of "counter-porn": it's still porn, but it's her porn.

In Grey's astute introduction to what is otherwise just another book of smut, I find a parallel to my own interest in dramaturgy, and my interest in dramaturgs' writing about their own work.

Writing about dramaturgy offers the opportunity to preserve the voice of a collaborator whose ideas have a tendency to disappear into other people's products. This tendency toward professional disappearance has often given urgency to my own writing, and has motivated me for eight years to be, essentially, the curator of eight volumes of writing by and about dramaturgs.

For me, writing about dramaturgy has almost become a necessity. It has been a pleasure and an honor to work with so many people who feel the same.

The Special Issue on African American dramaturgy exemplifies the perspective of writing becoming a necessity, as does the essay by Dalia Basiouny in the Spring / Summer 2011 issue. Dalia writes about the verbatim theatre project that she made and performed on Tahrir Square during the 2010–11 Egyptian revolution.

And I should also add: I'm interested in unlikely juxtapositions, when writers apply other fields' views to dramaturgy, or look at other fields dramaturgically. Some of my favorite contributions to *Review* have featured outside-the-box thinking that has a lot in common with the creative logic practiced by the terrific keynote speaker for the 2011 LMDA Conference, Adam Lerner. An essay on the theatricality of a clothing store, a "theatre review" of a building, a comparison between production notebooks and the giant garbage patch in the Pacific Ocean: critically disruptive playfulness is a discursive mode that I have encouraged on the (virtual) pages of *Review*.

So, if you haven't done so recently — or ever?— visit your journal at <lmda.org/review>. And don't hesitate to get in touch with me or Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell if there's something that you want to write about — or, better yet, if there's something that has almost become a necessity for you to write about.

Once again, my profound thanks.

* Sasha Grey, *Neti Sex*, Vice Books: 2011.

Journey to China

BY BRIAN
QUIRT



BRIAN QUIRT is the Artistic Director of Nightswimming (Toronto): nightswimmingtheatre.com. He is a past-president of LMDA and a current member of its Board of Directors, and has twice received the Elliott Hayes Award. This article is based on material first published by the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT). Visit pact.ca for more information on its activities and programs. Photos from the Congress can be found on the Facebook pages for PACT and Nightswimming.

All photos by Brian Quirt

I'm flying to Beijing. Thoughts on internationalism occupy me while on a flight that not only leaves my home city on a perfect fall day but one that unexpectedly flies over the lake north of Toronto on which our cottage is built. One of North America's many Eagle Lakes, its wings are formed by two large bays, one of them where my grandfather logged the land in the teens and 1920s; at the "head" of the lake his father built a chapel for a village now long dispersed. Where I was married. From 20,000-plus feet, the beach on "our" land is clearly visible, as is the rocky island in the bay — unsurprisingly, called Rocky Island — which we've looked upon, several generations of Quirts, for nearly 100 years.

The plane flies on and although our destination is far to the west, our direction is north over Lake Nipissing to James Bay and rapidly into Arctic airspace, the plane filled with Canadians, a large Argentinean tour group (love their caps), and, naturally, many Chinese.

All of us — in one way or another — seeking connection, a view of the world beyond our own lives, the sight of beautiful, strange, unknown things that may reshape our lives back home, or enhance them, or perhaps more likely, distract us from them.

It does seem appropriate that we are flying northward, traveling through a truly unknown land, to reach China, much as the explorers — Franklin, et al — once attempted to do.

They also sought contact, new ideas, commercial opportunities, escape. It — travel, adventure, escape — seems so easy today; just time and money are required, and suddenly fourteen hours later one walks into Beijing. Not that time or money are easily come by — we all think we have too little of each; and often that is true. But many



of us are rich (relatively) in both regards, and a journey such as this is a powerful reminder to wield both more wisely, more adventurously, and to greater effect.

But, still, why crave international contact? What can, should, ought it offer to our work in the theatre, if not to our own lives?

That is the quest at hand. To identify for PACT (the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, which I'm representing at a theatre conference in Xiamen [shaw-men], China), its members, its leaders, and its "stakeholders," what a vast international network such as the International Theatre Institute (ITI) can offer. And, indeed, what it can offer that is unique, which opportunities for contact and collaboration it presents that are not already available through the plethora of international organizations that any Canadian performing arts organization could link to, such as IETM, The Fence, IPAY, APAP, or ISPA.

Are the values and goals of ITI in some way different due to its origins within UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)? Does its particular mandate — to foster "the power of the performing arts as an indispensable bridge-builder for mutual international understanding and peace" (www.iti-worldwide.org) — raise the bar for the relationships and partnerships that it encourages and supports? More tangibly, what might members of PACT gain from interaction with ITI's Centres around the world, and how might PACT cultivate a rich palette of exchange for individuals in Canada with artists, administrators, and academics committed to theatre and dance elsewhere in the world?

And how to ensure that this is more than cultural tourism?

By that I mean the visiting of cultural sites, viewing of artworks from other cultures, encountering the stories — ancient and new — of other cultures without participating in them. Perhaps my assumption that such a thing is shallow — even as I regularly do it myself — is unworthy. Even a relatively brief, surface encounter with another culture can still have impact; even that level of cultural interaction can provide valuable perspective on one's own culture by putting its assumptions, prejudices, preferences, and limitations under a microscope. My trip will begin with several days in Beijing, one of the world's leading destinations for cultural tourists. My time there may turn out to be the ideal preparation, the door opening as it were, to the ITI Congress in Xiamen and all the possibilities that at this point it still presents for me and for PACT. Ah, the anticipation, the feeling of waiting in the theatre lobby, then in the seats, then the lights going down or the performers entering the space. A story is to be enacted.

Now, below, snow and ice. We are well and truly in the Arctic, soaring above it, true, a portal to a world far to the west, the Far East, so-called, and all it may offer.

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The Journey to Xiqu (shi-chu) was the theme of the 33rd Congress of the International Theatre Institute, held in Xiamen, September 19–24, 2011. Subtitled *Empowering the Performing Arts*, the Congress was designed to immerse delegates in Chinese performance traditions, ancient and contemporary, while addressing new and bold directions for ITI itself.

Xiqu is a term describing the world of Chinese opera, an overarching



New ITI Executive Committee.

idea of creation and presentation that encompasses the many genres of Chinese music theatre. The focus on it as a conference theme revolved not only around the forms' ancient histories, but more importantly as a cry for retaining the traditional elements of *Xiqu* in the face of the onslaught of Western modes of storytelling and performance. Many of the sessions that addressed *Xiqu* dealt with it as an endangered species under siege by contemporary cultural trends. Many speakers debated the degree to which *Xiqu* can or must respond to Western cultural tropes and to the accelerated pace of modern international culture. Should *Xiqu* adapt to regional differences and Western traditions, or should it be preserved at the risk of becoming a static form, a museum of historical performance ideas? Or, as one speaker contended, perhaps such a museum is worth having, if only as an inspiration for new work. The bottom line: if it is adapted, will that dilute or destroy *Xiqu* and the underlying principles of its approach to performance? If it is not adapted, will it wither, die and not even be valuable as a museum of past genres, of how some of our ancestors told their stories?

An integral component of the ITI Congress was a showcase of Chinese opera and theatre, presented each night over the course of the week's activities, alongside master classes illuminating musical, choreographic, and gestural elements integral to a number of China's many opera genres. The evening performances included productions of Gaojia Opera, Gezai Opera, Yueju Opera (my favourite, an all-female form created in 1906 but drawing on 800 years of performance history), Liyuan Opera, Yuju Opera, Chuanju Opera, and, of course, Beijing Opera. Contemporary work was represented by Fujian People's Art Theatre's production of *Thunderstorm* and several new works created specifically for the Congress. Foremost among these was *House/Home*, a devised piece developed by a multi-national group of artists as part of ITI's New Project Group (NPG), produced by Theatre-Communications-Group-force-of-nature Emilya Cachapero.

This array of performances was infused into many of the Congress

sessions in the form of brief, powerful excerpts presented on the floor of the conference room, where more than three hundred delegates from sixty-five-plus countries (out of ITI's membership of more than one hundred nations) ringed the makeshift stage. It was truly as close to a United Nations of the performing arts as one is likely to experience. Delegations, ranging in size from one (for example, me, representing Canada; the first Canadian at an ITI Congress in many years), to large groups from Bangladesh, the Philippines, Russia, China, the Arab Theatre Institute, Germany and the United States — whose team included TCG Executive Director Teresa Eyring and TCG staff member Kevin Bitterman, alongside head of delegation Emilya and a group assembled from across America.

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Why another network? A network is no more effective or interesting than the people who populate it and the leaders who shape and inspire it. The ITI network is unlike any other in the world. Its curious and powerful confluence of interests and obsessions — few of them my own, at least until now — took me outside my own quotidian affairs, demanded that I find some perspective and information and opinions about performance in other parts of the world. New ideas and facts abounded, from the political and economic forces that limit access to copying and printing in Nigeria, to the multiplicity of forms within Chinese Opera, to the activism of the Philippine delegation, to the love of the Sheik of Fujairah (one of the United Arab Emirates and a major supporter of ITI) for solo-drama, to the strengths and peculiarities of state theatre complexes in Germany. All in a single week.

Fleeting, the question of how and what I might apply to my own work crossed my mind, and flitted away. It returns, that thought about application, but now I chase it away, knowing it was the experience itself rather than its application that will remain valuable.

And yes, here I am writing about it for LMDA's *Review*, working with PACT to prepare for ITI's 2013 Congress, and collaborating with TCG, among others. And so, the cultural tourist is once again at work, skeptical but in equal parts inspired by the Congress, the Great Wall (to which I made pilgrimage, like all good visitors to Beijing), the faces I encountered, the stories I watched, the voices I heard.

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The International Theatre Institute is best known for establishing World Theatre Day (March 27) and World Dance Day (April 29), each designed to draw attention to the work and achievements of artists in these fields. ITI was established in the aftermath of World War Two by UNESCO and a group of international theatre artists. It was inaugurated in 1948 at its first Congress, held in Prague, and has since grown into the largest performing arts network in the world. ITI is based in Paris at UNESCO headquarters but is comprised of ITI Centres and Cooperating Members in 100 nations, each of which operates within its country to provide services and networking to its member organizations and individuals. Each centre contributes to ITI's administrative body in Paris; it is, in essence, a loosely federated network of distinct national organizations, a hundred spokes each connected to the central hub of the ITI Secretariat, currently led by Swiss writer Tobias Biancone, who serves as General Secretary.

Its mandate is to “promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in performing arts in order to consolidate peace and friendship between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding, and to increase creative cooperation between all people in the performing arts.” In addition to the national centres, ITI’s activities are carried out by a dozen specialized committees that operate across the centres and are responsible for an impressive volume of work each year, for example a multi-year partnership between ITI Centres in Germany and the Sudan investigating the peace building mission of theatres in conflict zones.

What makes ITI unique is that it is not a festival, or a producer, or a marketplace; it is not a forum in which to sell your work, or fill your season. It is a network with an idealistic mission that gathers together a remarkable collection of devoted theatre makers, providing them with the infrastructure to create programs, develop exchanges, promote ideas and establish debates. It is driven largely by individuals acting with the support of their country’s ITI Centre, each of which is designed uniquely to serve that nation’s performing arts community. As a result, no two centres are alike. Among the largest is ITI Germany which operates a wide array of programs; but the size of each centre is not necessarily a sign of its strength or impact. Each offers a window into its country’s artistic community and a doorway for those eager to connect and contact artists in each nation.

One of the most striking figures at the Congress was Ramendu Majumdar, the Bangladeshi President of ITI. He acknowledged the challenges currently facing ITI, writing in his introduction to the Congress thoughts similar to my own: “Why should one be a member of his/her national ITI Centre? Why should a country be a member of this organization?”

In Canada, the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) was asking the same questions. PACT joined ITI as a Cooperating Member in 2010, wishing to explore the value of this global network to Canadian theatre organizations and artists. Having long promoted World Theatre Day in Canada, and wanting to establish an international component among its services, PACT asked me



Pipers on the Great Wall.

to represent Canada at the Xiamen Congress.

What PACT has encountered is an organization going through a challenging transition, a network striving to redefine its value in a world where vast improvements in electronic communication are threatening to make such organizations obsolete. (Why join a network such as ITI when I can now so easily locate and email someone across the globe and use an online translation program to communicate with them?) Do such organizations continue to serve their constituencies, and what value could PACT derive from being a member? My journey to Xiamen demonstrated, both professionally and personally, that the value of ITI and the personal contact that its network offers, remains invaluable in today’s accelerated world. Perhaps more than ever.

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On the Great Wall at Mutianyu, north of Beijing, the feeling is disorienting. It’s not as awe-inspiring as I expected. It’s the opposite; it’s familiar. I’m unmoved. I’m not moved. What is happening? I’m aware of the beauty of the landscape, the age of the wall, the achievement (and human cost) of the construction. I’m disoriented — and not just by the surreal surroundings...the U.S. bagpipe band with kilts and regalia, the teenage line dancers in spandex, the South American folk dancers in full costume, the Mongolian warrior dancers, all of them posing on the Wall for photos with one another. A piper offers to take my picture.

I travel — a lot. Not as much as some, but more than most. This year, more than three months on the road with visits to China, Cuba, Malta, the UK, Mexico, the US, and many places in Canada. I love it and have traveled a great deal for many years. The moment on the Wall disturbs me. Have I ruined it? Have I made one trip too many, damaging the awe, the wonder that the best travel almost always engenders, the craving for beauty that only my addiction to serial travels can fully satisfy. Has the fix worn off? And if it has, what then? Has one of the constants of my life since I first went to Barbados with my family, age 2, expired? Why am I here?





A Strand of Hemp, by the Hangzhou Yue Opera Troupe.

Have I traveled too much?

It was a moment — well, to be frank, more than a few moments, all of them unsettling — of dislocation and fear. Dislocation: a feeling that shadowed me through my trip in China, a land that is so Western and so not-Western (at least in the few areas I touched). Why is this place not as different as I expected? Fear: is it that I can't perceive or experience the difference — cultural, historical, personal — and if so has travel, in fact, damaged me, made me incapable of feeling the very wonder and awe that drives the search to visit and experience new places?

And so, on the Great Wall, a core value of mine was shaken, challenged and tested. I did recover — in part through the surreal images of pipers and Peruvian dancers and simply other people from all over standing on that fragment of wall, perhaps feeling some of the same dislocation, perhaps feeling the same wonder I was seeking. And in doing that, watching them watching this extraordinary place, I found my way back to the sensation I thought I'd lost. I was there. Familiar as it was, I was there, standing on a wall in China where I never thought I'd stand, mere hours (ok, forty-eight) after leaving Canada. Had I traveled more slowly, would the journey have better prepared me? Or did I merely have to speed up my travel metabolism and accept what was in front of me?

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The ITI Congress focused much of its attention on the activities of the network's many committees, which carry out much of its artistic, academic, and promotional work. Among those that are particularly active and intriguing are the New Project Group (for which LMDA past-President Liz Engelman has been a dramaturg), the Young Practitioners Committee (leading projects connecting ITI members under age thirty-five; its meetings included participants from fourteen countries), the International Playwrights Forum (operating international playwriting competitions) and the Dramatic Theatre Committee (organizing ITI sessions at festivals around the

world). It is an impressive forum of passionate, largely volunteer and self-directed labour that clearly accomplishes an enormous amount in the course of each two-year cycle. As you would expect, some committees are far more active than others, and all have their idiosyncrasies. (These often included crises of policy and/or leadership that at times led to entertaining and/or irritating personal squabbles and political manoeuvring. These were equal parts invigorating to observe and frustrating to wait out.)

The most important session of the Congress dealt with revisions to the organization's Charter and elections to its Executive Council. Speeches by candidates from more than twenty countries were quite moving. Several African candidates, Ambrose Mbia of Cameroon in particular, spoke eloquently about how ITI can offer a vital means for African artists to make contact with colleagues around the world. They reminded the Assembly that many ITI countries in Africa are emerging from years of conflict and that theatre artists with access to few resources face government disinterest — and often hostility — as they attempt to make their work. Between rounds of debate and voting, demonstrations of Gezi Opera and all-female Nanyin music were presented, generating vivid, strange, disturbing and provocative images. This remarkable session captured, for me, the essence of the International Theatre Institute. It is a brilliant, at times troubling, often contentious, and sometimes eccentric gathering of voices. Like all the best theatre we hope to see, it was beautiful, ugly, and rich simultaneously.

The 33rd ITI Congress completed its official General Assembly sessions with the announcement of its new Executive Council, reports from the institute's twelve committees and working groups, and the passage of a series of propositions related to an ambitious list of plans for the coming two years.

Additional resolutions expressed support for ITI Centres in Switzerland, Austria, and the Netherlands, where severe cuts to cultural funding are threatening ITI activities. Further motions amplified the



A Strand of Hemp, by the Hangzhou Yue Opera Troupe.

sensation of sitting within a UN-like environment, with countries proposing resolutions to strengthen ITI's voice in speaking out against the violation of the rights of theatre artists and in support of the right of free artistic expression. Since several ITI committees are actively involved in theatre in conflict zones around the world, these issues are very real to many of the members attending the Congress. One example was referenced by the head of the Philippine delegation: Vilma Labrador reminded the Assembly that ITI offered critical support to the Philippine Centre during its years in exile when the then-dictatorship ruling the country threatened the Centre with dissolution. ITI continues to address these issues in many parts of the world today.

ITI, like UNESCO, is deeply committed to strengthening human rights worldwide. One of the challenges for me as a participant in the Congress — and beneficiary as a theatre professional and as a cultural tourist — was confronting the irony that China has, shall we say, deficiencies in the area of human rights, including in the months before the Congress the high profile imprisonment of the artist Ai Weiwei. Holding the Congress in Xiamen was, on some levels at least, a promotional tool for China. While this wasn't raised in sessions I attended, I came to terms with it; the door that was opened to the Chinese theatre community did, I choose to believe, represent a valuable new pathway for the international community to connect with artists there. After all, Canada's Prime Minister visited China in February 2012 to promote a wide array of economic and political initiatives between the two countries.

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The Journey to Xiqu provided by our Chinese hosts introduced us to new worlds of performance; the journey also showcased a diversity of forms (of opera) many of which are culturally endangered, like species under attack as their environment is degraded. This ecological calamity was debated in one of the Congress's most electric sessions, *Empowering the Performing Arts — How can it contribute to a culturally diverse future?* This session didn't address the topic of diversity in the familiar North American context of either who is on stage or who is writing the plays. Instead, the symposium asked its speakers to confront "the inability of countries to safeguard their cultural identity, promote their culture and support education and innovation in the arts." Among the speakers was Rong Guangrun, former president of the Shanghai Theatre Academy, who addressed the issue of *Xiqu's* cultural survival. The fact that these ancient forms live on — unlike, say, Baroque opera, which though revived, is not a living tradition — is remarkable. How they will survive, and whether they will need to cross-breed with other species of performance in order to survive, is an issue of enormous importance to the Chinese performing arts.

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Highlights from the Congress:

+ Global Speed Dating showcased eighteen artistic projects through four-minute speeches accompanied by PowerPoint presentations. Among those that stood out were the FITMO/FAB Festival that takes place each year in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. www.culturafrique.net

+ Talking to a Chinese university student, who told me about her



Delegates at the ITI Congress in Xiamen

travels within China and to Australia and the US and noted that from her perspective Xiamen with a population of 3.5 million, was a "small city." In many ways this brief conversation was as informative, moving and memorable as almost any other I experienced during the Congress. Such a moment isn't unique to ITI — this is what we seek from any conference, especially in a multi-national context — but the openness of ITI to the young Chinese students who volunteered throughout the week was wonderful to behold; and, in fact, reminded me of LMDA's eagerness to welcome young voices into its events.

+ The wonderful student who led the volunteer contingent, whose energy and four-language announcements (Mandarin, English, French, and Spanish) were a treat. She quickly befriended many delegates and was an excellent ambassador for her community.

+ *A Strand of Hemp* presented by the Hangzhou Yue Opera Troupe was a delightful surprise, offering new insights into the myriad worlds of Chinese opera. The window provided by the Congress into these worlds may well have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience so many regional operas at once. This show was beautiful, the singing was striking, and the audience loved both the comedic twists of the story and the virtuosic performances of the leads. Many audience members were taking photos during the performance. This was permitted — or at least tolerated — and seems to be quite common, so I joined in, happily snapping photos and breaking a taboo that is so universal in North America that we make announcements from the stage prohibiting it.

+ Lunch with two elders of ITI, and their insights into its past, and one of the brightest of a new generation invigorating the organization as it moves into the future.

+ Meeting Hong Kong artist Janice Poon, whom I first met at the 2010 LMDA Conference in Banff. How can we link Canadian, Hong Kong, and mainland Chinese playwrights?



Performance of Gezi Opera at the ITI Congress.

+ Admiring the amazing work of the simultaneous translators.

+ That my initial cynicism about the many national Centres jockeying for status in elections and committee activities was later overwhelmed by the resolutions passed on behalf of human and indigenous rights, including a proposed festival to be held in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea. (Although I suspect that more recent events may delay such a vision.) These reinforce a communal belief that the performing arts — and even more so the individuals devoted to this cultural work — can effect powerful change far beyond the theatres in which our works are performed. This faith and the activism that expresses it left me enormously impressed and inspired.

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How do we find the people we need but don't know? Email, Google, Twitter, Facebook, and dozens of other contemporary tools make it easier than ever to find and contact individuals and organizations. (Though less so in China, where it was impossible for me to post Congress reports on Facebook. I sent reports by email to Nightswimming's Producer, which she and PACT posted on my behalf.) None of those, however, replace the experience of seeing several forms of opera in their homeland, where the local audience (rather than a foreign audience watching a touring production like a circus elephant forced to entertain far from its own soil) informs and contributes to the experience. It's not a new observation, but today any reminder that we should gather to converse in person, that we should develop the networks we need through eye contact rather than typing — these are very welcome.

More important, of course, is being exposed to what we are not searching for. The Congress, at every turn, was a great reminder of how narrow our North American theatre vocabulary is, and how much we don't know about what is happening in other nations, on other continents.

The Congress concluded its official activities by announcing the

location of the next Congress in November 2013: Havana, Cuba. In making the announcement, the ITI President noted that Cuba is a country with a rich cultural heritage whose artists are seeking to end their isolation from the rest of the world. It would be difficult to find a statement more fitting to the ideals, achievements, and activities of ITI. All conferences, of course, wrap up with back-slapping messages about the organization's impact. In this case, they might be accurate. Ji Guoping, President of ITI China, closed the Assembly by saying that he "trusts that because of this Congress, theatre has a better tomorrow."

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It's my final day in Beijing. The breakfast buffet is Western, I'm reading *The New Yorker* — as though I'm already home, re-familiarizing myself with that landscape. A young Chinese server asks me politely how to pronounce that word. What word? That one, she says, pointing to my t-shirt, on the front of which is the slogan "Dramaturg, eh?," a souvenir of the 2010 LMDA Conference in Banff. She said she'd looked up the word on the restaurant's computer, but hadn't been able to find it. I said, "Well, that's not surprising," and told her how to pronounce "dramaturg" in English. She repeated it twice, thanked me, and went on with her work day. She never asked what it meant.

I don't travel too much. I travel too little.