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Ken Cerniglia

Kelly Kerwin

Martha Wade Steketee

Magda Romanska

Megan McClain

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Ken Cerniglia, Kelly Kerwin, Martha Wade Steketee, Magda Romanska, Megan McClain, Maren Robinson, and Lojo Simon

LMDA NEW & NOTEWORTHY

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A Note from the President



Times of tumult force us to take stock of our lives: who and how we are in the world, what we value. I am unspeakably grateful for the inspiration I find every day in the daring people and dramaturgical acts that constitute LMDA. As individuals and a community, we have the capacity to look past momentary obstacles toward richer

possibilities... and then we make them happen.

Our upcoming conference theme “Art, Access & Activism” has increased in urgency. Please check out the call for proposals and make plans to join us in Berkeley, June 22-24, 2017.

Wishing you peace,

Ken Cerniglia

dramaturg as producer | KELLY KERWIN

Interview by Martha Wade Steketee

Over the past decade, Kelly Kerwin picked up degrees in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism from

DePaul and Yale, and spent time with Chicago theaters like House, Steppenwolf, and Court, New York theaters like Atlantic, and the Yale Cabaret. She also developed her own projects, creating performance in unusual spaces. Kerwin's recently completed Bly Fellowship grant project seems to have used all of her skills, instincts, and inspirations for creating performance.

Kerwin [proposed POP!](#) to the Bly committee in Fall 2015, a “series of pop-up performance events created by like-minded theater artists to experiment with the audience as participant.” The company she runs with Emily Zemba and Will Rucker called [The Party Line](#), [ultimately presented the POP! events](#).

Each POP! project would occur in a Bushwick, Brooklyn business or public space, explore the audience role as participant. and be free. (The only performance with a fee was the puppet and dinner theater adventure called *A Scandal at the Table* at Hell Phone Speakeasy, with a modest charge to cover the costs of food and gratuities.) “It’s like a pop-up theater, things will pop up and pop down. I just thought the name 'pop' was fun,” Kerwin noted in a recent conversation. Original plans were for the project to happen in summer 2016, but due to artist schedules and other considerations the events finally transpired on September 23, 24, and 25, 2016.



POP! A Classical Affair. Photo by Edward Morris.

The matching of artist and space was replicated by Kerwin and co-producer Emily Zemba multiple times for the multiple POP! events. “Artists would propose the right space for their project, or we proposed a space and artists considered the right project to do.” All the locations fell into place during the summer once a key site, the bar Three Diamond Door, confirmed with some

excitement.

A Scandal at the Table was proposed to Kerwin by her friend Hunter Kaczorowski, a costume designer who has a passion for puppetry. “He wanted to do a puppet dinner party, French and macabre. I knew a place that would support that design and we wouldn’t have to do much to it at all, a French speakeasy restaurant.”

In *A Girl in a Bar*, actor Celeste Arias worked with a single audience member (selected by a project associate) who was presented with Arias's picture and a script, and instructed to approach Arias. The two would then perform a breakup scene, scripted by Emily Zemba.

Another solo piece called *A Classical Affair* involves the pivotal location Three Diamond Door and the pianist Jack Ramsey. “He wanted to experiment with just playing classical piano in a bar where you don’t often hear it. What is that like, to just be at your favorite bar on a Saturday afternoon drinking, and then there’s someone playing Beethoven?”

Receiving the Bly Grant affected Kerwin’s process in several ways. “If I don’t do it, I’m contractually obligated to give the money back, and that would be embarrassing and it would embarrass the people that wrote my letters of recommendation,” she reflected with a laugh.

There were practical and developmental effects too. She held valuable monthly phone calls with Liz Engelman from the selection committee, during which they discussed many issues, such as contingency plans if no venues came through, including U-Haul trucks, parking lots, and cars. Editing to the essence was a lesson too. “Part of working on this was using your producerial and editorial eye to know when your ideas are getting too big.”

The Bly Grant kept her spirits up and kept her on task. “I don’t know if this would have happened without the Bly Grant. It just seemed so big and too hard and too much. But when they say here’s the money, you have to figure it out, that’s the game. I’m pretty gutsy, but I don’t know that we would have had the guts to put our neck on the line without the Bly Grant forcing us to do it.”



POP! A Scandal at the Table. Photo by Edward Morris.

dramaturgy/publication | MAGDA ROMANSKA

Interview by Megan McClain



Magda Romanska, Co-Founder and Executive Director of [The Theatre Times](#), shares how her online theatre news platform is striving to expand access to performing arts news from around the globe.

Tell me about The Theatre Times. What sparked its creation?

The Theatre Times is a non-partisan, global portal for theatre news. The project started with the goal of bringing theatre people and theatre lovers together on one platform, particularly highlighting theatre from historically underprivileged regions and thus, hopefully, drawing attention and resources to these regions.

With more than sixty Regional Managing Editors around the world, we aim to be the most wide-reaching and comprehensive theatre news source online. In addition to our original content, The Theatre Times filters through more than eighty sources, around six hundred articles, and thousands of pages of theatre news every day.

We wanted to develop a large global platform where we can support the infrastructure,

advertising, and tech issues, while our editors can have a space to share their news and build their own readership.

How is The Theatre Times changing the landscape of theatre news?

During much of the last century, Western theatre scholarship and theatre-making have been in a somewhat predatory – colonial and postcolonial – relationship with the rest of the world.

American, British, or Western European theatre scholars and artists would travel to exotic locales – Africa, Asia, South America, or Eastern Europe – to gain some, often superficial, knowledge of the local theatre ecosystem. The entire semiotic landscape of a particular culture would be subsumed to the Western understanding, processed and interpreted through the prism of Western cultural codes and canons.

It's not to say that such a state of affairs has never led to mutually respectful relationships and collaborations, but it has created a lopsided synergy in the way that we've been talking about and making theatre.

Social media and digital tools provide equal access to the virtual public space for everyone, and there is no need for the Western scholars and theatre makers to serve as intercultural intermediaries. By giving a platform to local regional editors, native language speakers, and cultural insiders, The Theatre Times provides a new, twenty-first century model of intercultural exchange. Our editors and collaborators are in charge of their own stories, and they are empowered to be the interpreters of their own cultures.

Thanks to modern technology, developing such a pluralistic model of culture-sharing is no longer a pipe dream.

In what ways do you hope The Theatre Times will continue to grow?

Theatre has been always underfunded, underprivileged, and underserved. Yet, theatre is also the oldest, the most enduring, and the most adaptive and persistent of human art forms. It has been perpetually affected by shortages of all kinds, and yet, it has effectively outlived all political systems, social upheavals, technologies, wars, restrictive social mores of all sorts, bouts of censorship, bans, plagues, and economic and institutional collapses. It is this grit, inventiveness, endurance, and will to connect with your fellow human being that we want to celebrate. We want to grow based on this premise: pride in the history and accomplishments of our art form and conviction in the value of our work.

For those looking to learn more and get involved with The Theatre Times please visit:

<http://www.thetheatretimes.com/join/>

audience engagement, *Bakersfield Mist* / MAREN ROBINSON & LOJO SIMON

Chicago's TimeLine Theatre and Laguna Beach's Bare Bones Theatre both recently presented the Stephen Sachs play [Bakersfield Mist](#), the former in a full production, the latter in a staged reading. Bare Bones Founding Producer Lojo Simon and TimeLine Resident Dramaturg Maren Robinson recently had a conversation about developing audience engagement programming for this play; a condensed version of that chat is below.

MR: Prompting audience conversation is part of the TimeLine [mission](#). When we choose the plays, we often begin by asking, what conversation could we have with our audiences about the play? For *Bakersfield Mist* we were thinking about the gulf between those who have money and those who don't in the U.S., the snap judgments we make about people, and whether or not connection is possible.

LS: It sounds like we have similar experiences in that audience engagement is part of the conversation from the get go. I chose *Bakersfield Mist* because Laguna Beach (where I am) is an arts community, so I knew that would appeal. However, being in California, I was especially interested in a conversation about authenticity.

MR: Authenticity came up in our conversations too. What did that mean to your audiences?

LS: Our conversation centered largely on authentic people vs fake people, and on how we pre-judge people based on socio-economic level, etc. No one who lives here in Laguna Beach would want to live in Bakersfield, so they came into the play with a lot of assumptions about [the character of] Maude.



TimeLine Theatre's production of *Bakersfield Mist*. Photo by Lara Goetsch.

MR: I would say our audiences focused on the humanity and authenticity of the people rather than the painting. The human story was more interesting to them than the actual story on which the play was loosely based.

LS: Yes, I agree. Who was the more authentic human being. Our conversations always come down to the human relationships, regardless of the play.

MR: In our lobbies we keep experimenting with ways of prompting conversation between audience members. In this case we put up images of 3 real Pollocks and 2 fakes and invited audiences to "test their blink". That wasn't contextualization per se but it did ask them to put themselves in Lionel's position so it was tangentially asking them to think about how we judge. It is a small way to make it easier to start talking about a play.

[Additionally] we always plan both pre- and post-show discussions, where we generally have a company member moderate and the dramaturg is just part of the group. It seems to help discussion flow in a different way. We try to keep the form pretty open so that audiences can guide where we go. We also did what is part of our Sunday Scholars series (which is a misnomer in some ways). In this case we had an art teacher, a gallerist and a curator, but we try to not have it be about experts vs. audience, but a way to start a conversation.

LS: For us as well it is more of a conversation than an ask-and-answer or a "lecture"... our

audiences are small enough to allow real dialogue, which is what makes it a unique theatre experience. I always use a facilitator who is an expert to avoid a post-play conversation about the play itself, but rather to steer the conversation to the topic provoked by the play's subject and themes. [In this case it was] Laguna College of Art and Design President Jonathan Burke facilitat[ing] a post-play conversation about art and authenticity.

MR: I'd say that part of [the challenge] is asking good open questions. Often the dramaturg comes up with a few questions and we bounce them around beforehand to make sure they provide some good conversation starters.

LS: I found Bakersfield Mist to be quite effective at raising "important" issues in a palatable way -- through humor and simplicity.

For a look at some of TimeLine's dramaturgical materials for their production, click [here](#).

For more about Bare Bones's audience engagement efforts, click [here](#).

odds & ends

- Have you renewed your membership for 2017? You have until January 22!
- Check out our updated roster of regional reps [here](#) -- reach out to yours, say hello, and let them know what sorts of activities you're interested in attending.
- Looking for a job? Don't forget to check the listings at lmda.org/jobs

MailChimp.