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# LMDA New & Noteworthy, volume 3, no. 2

Amy Stoller

Jeremy Stoller

Andrea Kovich

L. E. Webster

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# LMDA NEW & NOTEWORTHY

## November 2017

### Vol. 3, No. 2

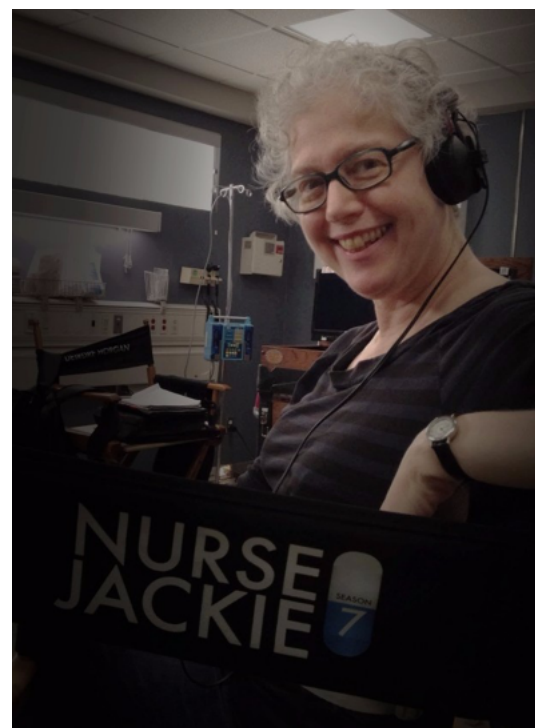
This month, we share profiles of two dramaturgs - one who combines dramaturgy and dialect design; another who is exploring new work and social justice.

## Q+A | AMY STOLLER

**Dramaturg / Dialect Designer**

**Tell us about some projects you're working on at the moment.**

I'm prepping an upcoming production of Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*. It's set in a mill-town in 1910s Lancashire. In England it's a classic, frequently revived on stage; it's also been filmed there, for big and small screens, at least five times. Here in the US it's almost unknown; it closed on Broadway in 1912 after 32 performances, and didn't do appreciably better 10 years later, despite being retitled.



**Do your dialect coaching and production dramaturgy work inform each other?**

My dramaturgy evolved naturally from my dialect work. I don't think I can give actors the best help with pronunciation unless I also understand what their characters are talking

about. So I do lots of research to be sure I'm as fully informed as possible about anything that might affect text interpretation, and I share it so the company can be fully informed, too! In the beginning, I created a fairly brief Glossary to share with the cast and director. It grew into a Glossary-and-Text-Notes. Next came Addenda, for items requiring more explanation. Now it's usually the Glossary and Text Notes plus The Big Book (usually a two-to-three-inch binder stuffed with information), one or more YouTube playlists, and sometimes books I've purchased to share with the cast. (Those go back home with me once we move into the theatre.) These days I try to save paper by making unusually long documents available only in Dropbox, and also making a slideshow presentation of many of the photographs I've found, set to period music (using music mentioned in the text, if any). I'll show this to the cast and director on Day One or Two, then export it as a video to the Dropbox. Of course the Dropbox contains many audio and video resources for the accent and dialect, together with my dialect breakdown.

I sometimes do dramaturgy without dialect design, but I never do production dialect design without dramaturgy. I scale the historical-contextual research to a minimum if there's a dramaturg of record on board, of course. That lets me enjoy playing well with them.

**Do you have a wishlist for the way the industry approaches dialect work? Any big things you wish would evolve over the next few years?**

I wish more producers and directors understood that:

- Any time you have an actor who doesn't naturally speak the way their character does, and who doesn't have a history of performing in that speech pattern, it makes sense to hire a dialect designer. Even more so if the actor has no track record of performing in accents other than their own!

- The design part of the job is similar to costume design: researching and selecting from a range of authentic speech patterns, and/or devising new speech patterns, to create a community or family sound for a full cast of characters, or individual speech identities for one or more characters in a production. Then comes tailoring the speech pattern(s) to the needs of the production and the abilities of the performers. But the coaching part is more like choreography for the mouth. Speech is *physical* work, and new accents require building new muscle memory. This takes time to develop, and time to master. So it's more efficient to hire your dialect designer when you hire the rest of your design team, and to factor dialect time into the rehearsal schedule from the get-go. For many shows, in my perfect world, I'd start working with the cast a month before rehearsals begin. Equity rules prohibit that, not without reason, but it would be nice.

- I can't imagine producing a musical and hiring the choreographer shortly before opening, or hiring a chorus who've never sung and danced before. But you'd be surprised how often I've been asked to come in to "fix" the dialect work on a production that's starting tech—a few times the day before opening!—and which may have been cast without regard to the actors' abilities in this area. If you bring your dialect designer on board for auditions,

or at least well before rehearsals begin, you're working for instead of against the success of this aspect of your show.

*Interview by Jeremy Stoller*

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## Q+A | ANDREA KOVICH

*A Seattle-based freelance dramaturg, Andrea Kovich discusses her current project - a new musical - and her upcoming work, which combines theater and social justice.*



### **What was your first interaction with dramaturgy?**

I'd say my first really memorable interaction with dramaturgy was at a public lecture given by Seattle Opera about Puccini's *La Bohème*. The lecturer -who later became the company's Resident Dramaturg - was so animated and passionate about the opera. It made me think, "That's how I want to feel about my work. I want to love what I do so much that I get excited just talking about it."

### **Right now you are on a team developing *Howl's Moving Castle, A New Musical* at Book-It. Where are you in the process now?**

I've just finished creating an actors' packet and we're about to start rehearsals. By the time this interview [is posted], I'll be working on the program materials, a blog article, and a preliminary lobby design. Then we open December 2nd!

### **This script is still in development. How has this shaped your pre-rehearsal process?**

Usually I have historical background to research, but with a fantasy that's set in another world, my research process has been different. The author's background [has been] very important.

## **What has it been like working with a musical?**

The last time I worked on a new musical, I was brought into the process after about a year and a half of development. This one we're trying to develop and produce in about 6 months. Which, for a musical, is quite fast. It's been a challenging process, also very exciting!

## **And what has it been like working with an adaptation?**

Most Book-It productions are world premieres created by in-house or local adapters in Book-It's trademark style. The style is very literary— the narrative text is preserved, so it's sort of Brechtian in that you never forget you are watching a book. Because of this style, the source material is incredibly important and there's a lot to analyze. Basically, we are distilling a 400-page book into a theatrical 2-hour version.

## **Why this play now?**

Ah yes, the essential question! The popular 2004 anime movie is significantly different from the book. The movie is fantastic in its own right, but there's more to explore in the book in terms of character development and themes.

I think we are especially in need of some magic [right now]. Adults need to remember what it was like to be a child. Children need spaces where they can just be children- can enjoy the wonder of seeing a book come to life. Underneath all the magic, this is a tale about a young woman learning to reject the storyline written for her by others- and discovering her very real inner power.

## **And, why this play here? At Book-It? In Seattle, Washington?**

This show probably couldn't have been created anywhere else. The team includes Book-It's Co-Artistic Director Myra Platt and Seattle-based musician/ songwriter Justin Huertas, starring the amazing Sara Porkalob—It's really a homegrown effort.

## **I can't wait to see this show. What's next for you?**

I'm super excited about an upcoming project I'm working on with Sound Theatre Company. I'm co-curating a reading series focusing on playwrights who have disabilities. We're also discussing a potential summer production of a play by a disabled playwright. With these projects, I really hope to stimulate conversations about the representation of people with disabilities in theatre and promote the work of playwrights with disabilities. The theatre scene in Seattle is trying to be more inclusive. However, this effort has not yet extended to include the disability community. We talk about achieving a greater diversity of representation onstage, but the work we're doing is still very ableist. It'd be great to hear

people say, “Let’s do something about that!” And then actually do something.

*Tickets to “Howl’s Moving Castle, a New Musical” can be purchased at [book-it.org](http://book-it.org).*

*Interview by L.E. Webster*

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## events / announcements

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LMDA raised its entire \$3,000 goal for its Fall Fund Drive, for website improvements. Thank you to all who contributed!

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### REGIONAL - METRO BAY AREA

**Going on now thru December 10:** Metro Bay Area LMDA Partnership with Golden Thread Productions, ReOrient 2017 Festival of Short Plays. At Potrero Stage, San Francisco.

Think you know the Middle East? Think again. This biennial festival will turn San Francisco into a mecca for innovative, spirited, and thought-provoking theatre from and about the Middle East, welcoming artists who challenge the dominant depictions of the Middle East and audiences who seek unconventional and provocative programming. This year, Regional VP Nakissa Etemad is curating a partnership between LMDA & Golden Thread to provide local dramaturgs to work on publications, new play development, and research for the festival, and participate in a dramaturgy panel at the ReOrient Forum on Thanksgiving weekend. If you would like to get involved in ReOrient, please contact Nakissa at: [metrobayarea@lmda.org](mailto:metrobayarea@lmda.org). For more info and tickets, visit <http://www.goldenthread.org/2017-season/reorient2017/>

And look out for our dramaturgs’ postings throughout November on the Golden Thread and LMDA websites!

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