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LMDA New & Noteworthy, January 2019

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LMDA NEW & NOTEWORTHY

January 2019

Vol. 4, No. 4

Happy New Year

BREAKING OUT OF THE BUBBLE

BY HEATHER HELINSKY

IN CONVERSATION WITH ERIN WASHBURN

Playwrights want to be produced. As dramaturgs, we're their advocates, and unless they're one of the lucky ones with national name recognition, they often need our help getting the word out about their work. When we travel to a different region, we become aware that someone from our home community--who may be getting all the local productions, receiving a major local grant funding, and writing those plays that excite and inspire us--are unknowns when you say their names in a completely different theatre ecosystem.

Erin Washburn, who stepped into the role as InterAct's new Literary Manager & Patron Services Manager in November 2017, didn't waste time to create a pilot project through the National New Play Network to help local playwrights break out of the bubble. "Within any city there's limited funds and resources, and it seems to me that the future of theatre is collaboration and sharing." With this impulse, Washburn, who is still in her 20s, took the initiative to write a proposal and secured \$10,000 in funding from NNPN for the project. From January to June 2018, she sent three playwrights and directors to three of the network's core member theatre--Cleveland Public Theatre, InterAct Theatre Company of Philadelphia, and Kitchen Dog Theatre of Dallas--to develop new work outside the comfort of their home community.



With the funding from NNPN for the pilot program of Cross-Pollination, each of the three theatres hosted a workshop by a writer from another theatre company's community. First, Philadelphia's James Ijames, who was recently awarded the 2018 Kesselring Prize, was a lesser-known voice to the Cleveland Public Theatre when he was sent to workshop *history of walking*. Cleveland playwright Lisa Langford was sent down south to Kitchen Dog Theatre to develop *Rastus and Hattie*, a play where black friends visit white friends and discover their dinner is served by two black robots, and her experience resulted in radical changes to the second act. Finally, Jonathan Norton, a Texas playwright, was brought up to InterAct, and learned what culturally specific moments in his play *A Love Offering*, resonated with Philadelphia audiences.



It's important to note that many of these playwrights already had an artistic home. Since Washburn started working in the Philadelphia community, she's seen it the ecology of new play development change because of organizations like The Foundry, PlayPenn, and Orbiter 3. These companies, initiated by dramaturgs Jacqueline Goldfinger, Michele Volansky, and Maura Krause (respectively), laid the groundwork to encourage Philadelphia writers to stay and make a living here instead of migrating to other cities. "These organizations encourage writers to take control of their own work, whether by self-producing or by getting involved in the rehearsal process. For example, Erlina Ortiz, co-founder and resident playwright for Power Street Theatre Company, decided she's not going to wait for white theatre companies to produce her voice as a Latina writer--she's going to produce it herself as an act of empowerment."

Considering all these positive changes, Washburn used her vantage point as an institutional dramaturg to address other challenges of new play development. She feels it can be a cyclical problem. "The reason the theatre works at all is that we cultivate relationships. We may not have a lot of economic power, but we form connections with each other that keep us buoyed. If you don't build a trust with someone, you probably won't hire them at your company or produce their work. Yet, we're living in a time, with resources like the New Play Exchange, where it's never been easier to see all these new voices and begin to form that trust. And then there's issues of race, gender, and class, which limit people's access and so limit their ability to meet artistic leaders. Ultimately, we can't build relationships with new writers if we're just relying on the writers we know and have produced at our companies before--we have to put in the work to make those new bonds."

Washburn hopes that initiatives like the Cross-Pollination, piloted with NNPN with the potential to grow into a larger program, can address these new play development issues

and inspire other ideas. She believes, “it takes a lot of work to push us out of our own spheres. As a dramaturg, I’m interested in how different collaborators can work together. It’s gratifying to give the writers the space they needed to work, and new collaborators to push them to make new discoveries in the rehearsal room.”

(Photo 1: Erin Washburn)

(Photo 2: From *American Theatre Magazine* of the *history of walking*, Cross-Pollination workshop featuring Leilani Barrett, Ryan Edlinger, Ashley Aquilla, Abraham McNeil Adams, Mary-Francis Renee Miller, and Davis Aguila at a reading of *history of walking* by James Ijames, directed by Beth Wood, at Cleveland Public Theatre’s 2018 Entry Point New Play Development Festival as part of Cross-Pollination. Photo by Steve Wagner.)

JOINING THE TEAM: DRAMATURGING *THE WOLVES*

BY MORGAN GRAMBO



I did not expect my theatrical “hyphenate” (director-dramaturg-writer) to ever conclude with “former competitive soccer player”, but the time has come where it has felt like an appropriate addition. Currently, I am serving as the production dramaturg on the [University of Iowa’s production of *The Wolves*](#) by Sarah DeLappe that runs January 31 to February 9, 2019. My focus within my MFA program is feminist theatre and dramaturgies, and needless to say this play has been on my mind since it premiered to acclaim in 2016. I’m not the only one - in fact, it’s the third most produced play of the 2018-2019 season according to [American Theatre](#). When the opportunity arose to work on a production of the play, I was surprised by the intense emotional connection that began to develop through the process of production.

Alongside the athleticism of these women, the topics they discuss, from genocide to parents to their periods, all deserve equal consideration. Working as a dramaturg in the room exploring these topics alongside the rest of the team has felt like a fresh gulp of air that I didn’t know I needed. Especially in the last year, where teens across the country have shown us the utmost empathy and ability to lead, I love the space that DeLappe has created to give these young women an opportunity to discuss these ideas.

Outside of the ideas functioning within the dialogue and surrounding events of the play, my role as dramaturg deeply expanded due to my familiarity with the physical world that *The Wolves* explores. From six to eighteen years old, I played soccer (as well as numerous other team sports), eventually joining an elite team in high school - not unlike the one that we see in the play. In this way, my role expanded to include an Assistant Director/Soccer Coach position as well. The play requires the utmost examination of the story being told not only through the events that unfold week-to-week in the warm-ups, but how the physicality grows and shifts as the play continues. A dramaturgical eye on the storytelling developed through the physical world has been what I believe to be my most significant contribution to our process.



Working alongside our director, Mary Beth Easley (Head of Directing at the University of Iowa), we created the everything from the stationary stretches in the play up to the complex passing drills that the team seamlessly transitions in and out of in their discussions. It's been quite the experience of meshing my understanding of what would most likely be true to this world and what the production needs theatrically. Most of the time, those worlds marry quite nicely. Watching these young women in this nightly journey can sometimes be challenging, as some of the harsher realities of the play fall close to my own experience in their shoes.

While my role as dramaturg in our process is perhaps blurrier than most dramaturgs working on *The Wolves* due to my addition of Assistant Director/Soccer Coach, my previous experience is so near to experience of the subjects of the play that it has opened up a whole new relationship with this type of physical theatre and my own dramaturgical practice. I've been able to trust my pre-existing knowledge so much more than any other production process I've had to date. I've been able to articulate ideas and find clues within the text that would normally require much more time and reassurance from other eyes. Although I have utilized my soccer-playing sister and father as sounding boards more than I have ever had, or anticipated, in my theatrical career. Most significantly, I've gained a confidence that I hope will continue into my next project.

(Photo 1: Photo by Mariana Tejeda. Mary Beth Easley working with cast member, Tricia Pabst, #46.)

(Photo 2: Morgan Grambo playing soccer in high school.)

#LMDA19 Call for Proposals

LMDA: Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas
2019 CALL FOR PROPOSALS:
CROSSING BORDERS, Pt. 2: Action in a Time of Division
June 20-22, 2019 • Chicago, IL



Portal now open! SUBMIT PROPOSALS [HERE!](#)

OVERVIEW

Chicago, IL is a city of contradictions: one of the most segregated places in the U.S., yet a proud sanctuary city; a site of wealth and privilege juxtaposed with poverty and disinvestment; and a symbol of the greatest community cohesion and some of the worst systemic injustices in the nation.

Crossing Borders, Pt. 2 welcomes panels, roundtables, workshops, and other dynamic conversations about what constitutes “action” for positive social change in a time of crisis; and which illumine how we build pathways to collaboration across imagined and real borders – including, but not limited to, the ones found in our host communities in Chicago. We invite presenters to explore how artists and academics instigate positive action in a time of division, asking:

How might dramaturgs...

- facilitate necessary conversations within our institutions and communities?
- promote inclusion on our stages and throughout our practice?
- shape programming to speak to the pressing issues of the moment?
- cultivate new audiences and foster new artists?
- spur political engagement and facilitate direct political actions?
- understand how borders as physical and social constructs impact the way theaters solicit, produce, and commodify art and artists?
- Interrogate how and when dramaturgs choose to reinforce or disrupt borders?

VENUE & ACCOMODATIONS

Crossing Borders, Pt. 2 will be held on Chicago's Columbia College campus. Lodging will be available at the Grant Park Best Western (across from Columbia), as well as through Columbia College. We also encourage attendees to explore Chicago's plentiful [Airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com) options.

LMDA's VALUES

LMDA promotes the belief that theatre is a vital art form that has the power to nourish, educate, and transform individuals and their communities and that dramaturgy is central to the process of theatre-making. To this end, we invite proposals for papers, presentations, panels, and other containers for discussion on the conference theme or other topics related to dramaturgical and literary management practice.

LMDA encourages and prioritize proposals from diverse voices and artists. The conference venue is a fully accessible space – please contact the committee with any questions or access needs you would like to identify.

Our member-service organization is committed to the following objectives:

- to affirm, support, and broaden the roles that literary managers and dramaturgs play in the theatre;
- to promote the exchange of information about the function, practice, and value of literary management and dramaturgy;
- to encourage cooperation among the practitioners and theoreticians of dramaturgy;
- to expand the boundaries of the field and enrich our conversation about the making of live performance by welcoming colleagues from disciplines such as dance, opera, and performance art; and
- to put emphasis on international exchange, as well as a commitment to diversity of form, culture, and content.

The deadline for proposals is FRIDAY, FEB 1, 2019. Members of the LMDA Conference Planning

Committee will review and respond to all applicants, and we thank you for your ideas.

Please fill out the form below and email conference@lmda.org with any questions.

NOTE: This Google Form is optimized for desktop.

(Photo: Mural in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago)

Upcoming Regional Events

- Metro Philly: January/February, Bake-Off and networking with local new work organizations
- Plains: April 1, Online happy hour and networking
- Third Coast: April, Networking and discussion event around *Wolf at the Door* at Kitchen Dog Theatre
- Florida: April, Networking and discussion event around *The Cake* at Asolo Theatre
- Metro NYC: May, Speed Networking Event
- Rockies/Butte/Big Sky: Spring, Online Panel on the Playwright/Dramaturg relationship
- Mid-Atlantic: Spring, A panel conversation on Civic Dramaturgy



Want to know if regional meetups are happening near you! Click [HERE](#) to find your region!

Regional questions? Reach out to the VP of Regional Activity Jacqueline Goldfinger (regional@lmda.org).



Join us in Chicago for #LMDA19

Put it on your calendar now!

June 20-22, 2019.

Keep an eye on lmda.org/conference for information for next year's conference!

CALL FOR TRANSLATORS

As we look ahead to #LMDA20 (pssst...in Mexico City), we could use help with a few things - 1) LMDA members who can translate the call for the 2019 and 2020 conference into Spanish/Portuguese, 2) Names/contact information for translators in Mexico City 3) Leads on potential artists to connect with in Mexico and the surrounding area.

Please send any leads to Martine (president@lmda.org).

Interested in contributing to the next newsletter? Have content ideas?

E-mail communications@lmda.org.

Want to keep up with the conversation about the latest in dramaturgical activity?

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