New & Noteworthy, February 2017

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This month's issue features:

- an interview with dramaturg/producer Jennifer Ashley Tepper
- an article with tips for ECDS on finding the right internship
- information about an exciting public event LMDA is hosting for the theater community at large

Jennifer Ashley Tepper with If It Only Even Runs a Minute co-host Kevin Michael Murphy.
JENNIFER ASHLEY TEPPER | Q&A
historian/programming director/producer

The ever-busy Jennifer Ashley Tepper -- author of the book series The Untold Stories of Broadway; Director of Programming at Feinstein's/54 Below; and co-founder/host of If It Only Even Runs a Minute (a concert series presenting the history of and songs from underappreciated musicals) -- answered some questions about her work at the crossroads of several dramaturgy paths.

What were your links to theatre history when you were growing up? Were there specific authors, sources of scripts and recordings, figures in your life, that sparked your interest?

I grew up in Florida and was obsessed with learning about Broadway from afar, mostly through cast albums, but also books, scripts, Tony Awards broadcasts, and Playbill magazine. I loved piecing together what a show was like by reading liner notes and reviews, seeing photos, listening to a score, and imagining what it might have been like. Not Since Carrie by Ken Mandelbaum opened a warp between worlds for my theatre nerd brain, and Everything Was Possible by Ted Chapin really made me feel like I could work in the theatre someday. Underfoot in Show Business by Helene Hanff also blew me away and made me feel very understood.

Where did you come up with the idea for If It Only Even Runs a Minute, and how did you settle on the format?

My friend Kevin Michael Murphy and I bonded over our love of underappreciated musicals, and we became excited about the idea of honoring them in a live concert where we would both invite original team members to share songs and stories, and have new people approach the material. He was obsessed with the rare Broadway photos I would post on Facebook, and this led us to include photos and history in the concert as well. We didn’t have an idea that it would be a series at first, but then we realized that there were so many shows we wanted to celebrate and that we loved putting them all together in an evening. I can’t believe we just presented our 16th edition of the series!

You program for a cabaret venue and produce these events showcasing underappreciated musicals, but I’ve also seen you write passionately about straight plays. Is there a non-musical version of If It Only Even Runs a Minute to be had? Aside from the rarity of getting a cast album of a non-musical, I’m interested in your thoughts about the differences in how we preserve shows in each form.
I do think that, inherently, musicals lend themselves better to this, since you can pull out a song and get a taste of the overall show. A piece of a scene seems less representative a lot of the time. So I don't know if a series like Runs A Minute for plays, would have quite the same impact.

That said, in some ways, it's a lot easier to keep an underappreciated play alive than it is a musical. Anyone can put together a reading of a play -- all you need are people and copies of the play and you can “perform” it without ever having even read it before. To learn a score for a musical takes a lot more time, personnel, and resources. Also, any high school can do any underappreciated play just as easily as they can do one that was a huge hit. All scripts are equal, in that way. But because musicals are dependent on their cast recordings to keep them alive, a lesser-known show without a cast album will hardly ever be produced.

I have such respect for licensing companies for all that they do to encourage productions of both plays and musicals that weren’t huge hits in their original runs!

What changes to do you see in the way authors are supported, and new work is developed/produced, now versus the mid-20th century? Which of those changes are you celebrating, lamenting, hoping will be instituted?

People of all time periods tend to romanticize all other past time periods. The truth is, things are the same more than they are different -- even if they may look different to the untrained eye. Composers used to use Tin Pan Alley to sell sheet music to their songs -- now they use YouTube. It’s not precisely the same, but while technology and society evolve, the basic structures are still there. Camp Tamiment was an adult resort where new writers developed new material and shared it with the clientele; there are several writers’ retreats upstate and regional theaters with the same kind of scrappy yet nurturing environment for new work.

Writers think it used to be easier to get a musical produced, or that it was easier to get hired by a producer, but the truth is that John Kander and Fred Ebb auditioned to write Flora The Red Menace the same way Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty auditioned to write Ragtime. Of course there are pros and cons to working in any given era, but while I would love the low rent and ticket prices of the 1970s, I wouldn’t have loved the unsafe conditions that kept people from coming to the theatre no matter how inexpensive it was. And while I lament that creative producing has been somewhat killed by the gigantic capitalizations of contemporary musicals, we have many things now that we didn’t have back when we had this… from more significant grants and awards for musical theatre writers, to a global market and internet culture that allows a musical written in Japan to
gain a huge amount of fans in Sweden, encouraging a production.

All it takes is reading or hearing about the work of established writers back when they were just starting out, to realize that eras have more in common then they have not in common!

Interview by Jeremy Stoller

**for student dramaturgs and ECDS:**
**FINDING THE RIGHT INTERNSHIP**

So, you know that completing a literary- or dramaturgy-focused internship can be a great way to gain skills, meet professionals, and give you a leg up in your career. But how do you find the program that is right for you, and that will provide a meaningful and rewarding experience?

*Here are a few tips:*

**KNOW YOURSELF**
Do you love new play development, or the dramaturgical twists and turns of reinterpreting classic texts? Are you most passionate by ensemble-created works? Whatever your fancy, there’s a program for you. Why not go after the opportunities that are the *most exciting* to you? “Some people apply to internships in a blanket fashion and fail to consider how they fit into the process,” says current Lark apprentice Alexandra Gonzales. “I strongly advocate coming from a place where you and your needs are at the forefront of any internship decisions.”

**KNOW THE THEATRE AND ITS COMMUNITY**
Before applying for an internship, do your research. Does the theatre’s mission speak to you? What plays and artists does the theatre support? Who is on their staff? Go ahead and Google them. Read articles, essays, plays, and/or books by the artistic leadership of the theatre. These are the brains you could be learning from and the community to which you could be contributing. Read up so you can join the conversations they are having about the theatre field. If you can get in touch with past participants of the internship program, shoot them an email to learn more about their experiences.

**KNOW YOUR LIMITS**
Do you want to work in a particular city? What does the internship provide in terms of
housing and/or payment? Do you have a plan addressing how to live, work, and play within the means provided? Will you need a job outside the internship program to support yourself (and will there be time for that)? There are internships that can compliment a variety of financial situations, so don’t feel as though you must take a full-time unpaid position if you can’t afford to do so. Create a checklist of basic must-haves and deal-breakers to guide you in your search for programs. Also consider your commitment level. The length of internships vary from theater to theater, lasting anywhere from one to twelve months.

![The 2015-16 Apprentice Company at The Lark.](image)

**KNOW YOUR GOALS**

Do you really want to assist a seasoned dramaturg in production? Maybe you’re hoping to write articles and program notes for publication or learn more about season selection. Be an active participant in crafting your internship by setting some clear goals you’d like to accomplish. Those goals may evolve and change during the internship, but having a plan at the outset will help you get the most out of any program.

**UTILIZE YOUR LMDA NETWORK**

Chances are that if there’s a literary or dramaturgy internship out there, someone in LMDA has done it before, or knows something about it. [Facebook’s ECD page](https://www.facebook.com/groups/161548120531662/) is a good place to check in with your peers. Or reach out to your [regional representative](https://www.lmda.org/). We’ve all been in the position of needing advice, and you’ll find that people are generally happy to pay forward the generosity they received.

**KNOW THE PLAN MIGHT CHANGE**

"The first time I applied for an internship, I was rejected by two larger theatres and ended
up at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, which at the time had only four full-time staff members,” says Zoe Rhulen. “Working with such a small staff, I had more responsibility and got much more hands-on experience than I would have at a larger theatre. I was drafting grant proposals while my friends at larger theatres were running errands.” Excellent learning experiences might exist outside of your dream program. Leave yourself open to unexpected opportunities.

Below are some ideas to kick off your research.

**New Play Development Organizations**

- The Lark
- New Dramatists
- Playwrights Center

**Literary or Dramaturgy Internships at Regional Theatres**

*(with focuses on new plays & modern classics)*

- Actors Theatre of Louisville
- Alley Theatre
- Arena Stage
- Berkeley Rep
- The Goodman Theatre
- Oregon Shakespeare Festival

**Companies Creating Interview-based, Physical, or Ensemble Work**

- The Civilians
- Double Edge Theatre
- Rude Mechs

*by Megan McClain*
March 6 - LMDA hosts Reviewing the Situation: Producing Theater and Cultural Awareness

with

Jesse Alick, Ken Cerniglia, Michael McElroy, Victoria Myers, Howard Sherman, Diep Tran, Howard Sherman

6:30pm in NYC (livestreamed on HowlRound)

Do artists and producers have a public responsibility in choosing what stories to tell and how and when to tell them? How do critics and their editors wrestle with a project's historical context, current impact, and personal responses to it? Are there standards audiences should expect producers and critics to follow in evaluating a piece of theater for public consumption? How can rigorous discussions about the portrayal of underrepresented stories/experiences/communities/voices on stage make a positive cultural impact?

In the wake of the recent debate around Big River, Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) is convening a panel of some of the theater industry’s premier thinkers and art makers to discuss the roles and responsibilities of producers, artists, and critics in the portrayal of underrepresented experiences on stage.

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Mar 15 - Conference registration opens

Mar 17 - Dramaturg Driven grant applications close

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