LMDA New & Noteworthy, November 2018

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On an autumn afternoon in Bushwick in 2016 – with the presidential election right around the corner – about a dozen women-identifying artists (mostly performers and theatre makers) gathered together to form what would become The Daughters Collective. Our initial vision was twofold: to build a thriving theatrical culture built on a collective basis and to center ritual in our work as a groundbreaking and experimental form of storytelling.

Then, Trump was elected president, and our purpose became even clearer. Theatre as survival. Ritual as healing. The Daughters Collective sought an end to patriarchy by experimenting with collective as a company structure, and by examining the ways we perform ritual storytelling through healing experiences of audience-participatory performance. The way Daughters and other performing collectives like us experiment with this kind of collaboration has the opportunity to feed into dramaturgical practice and new work structure. If collective artmaking is counterculture, there’s room for that collective energy to seep onto the stage. With Daughters approaching collective and ritual hand-in-hand, we’re offering an alternative to the norm in times of deep despair.
When creating Daughters, founding members Melanie Monaco and Katrina Mattson examined what was challenging for women-identifying artists in this industry. We aimed to provide just one alternative entity to the establishments that were denying our growth. Daughters is creating art in extremely saturated New York City, and we spend time outside of the collective in the network of the New York arts scene. We saw an opportunity to grapple with company structure, as well as story structure, as a form of resistance or rebellion against problematic norms in the theatre industry. “If top-down hierarchies benefit the person in charge, and very often it’s a man, then this collective rule is, in essence, anti-patriarchy,” says Monaco. And, clearly, we are not the first collective to form in response to the mess that is capitalistic patriarchy. We’ve taken cues from the likes of Guerrilla Girls and the Witches of Bushwick, just to name only two for there are many others who have influenced us. In gathering Daughters, Monaco understood that “the scale of our work in the face of our political reality is too immense” to create work in a structure that functions traditionally.

Because we move on a collective basis, we are able to create work that is specific to our energy. Our Ritual Evenings have become a hallmark of our body of work. While Daughters is not averse to all traditional theatre making styles – we’ve developed and staged two new plays and a musical – our artistic style is best showcased in these evenings. In the spirit of a salon meets Allan Kaprow’s Happenings of the 1960s, our rituals are guided and interactive. We staged our first ritual, Return to the Light, in January 2018, and our second ritual, The Chaos Invocation, in August 2018. Magdalen Zinky, another member of the collective, describes our rituals as “organized rhythms that seek comfort in structure…and transform time.” This approach to a textless dramaturgy takes hold over seven movements, a concept inspired by the ritualistic work of Sibyl Kempson. (Zinky and a couple of other members of the Daughters Collective studied under Kempson’s tutelage at Sarah Lawrence College.) These seven steps resemble important moments in a ritual movement, i.e. celebration or reflection. Zinky mentions how “handy these seven steps are to the ritual process,” functioning similarly to Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s journey’s eight steps. This mythic structure is important for the unfolding story by separating its parts into a rhythm in order to make meaning of the whole.

Making this kind of work in such a tumultuous socio-political moment is a balancing act of activity and care. Zinky mentioned that “there’s a healing aspect of our work,” because ritual expects and requires a transformation. Our participatory rituals have been successful thanks to the collaborative sculpting of each part. One director is capable of collaborating a single vision, but 15 collaborators orchestrating 7 parts of a show is an experiment in devised storytelling worth pursuing. By the end of the ritual, we’ve transformed time to create a new social experience with our audience that is naturally joyful and loving. Zinky muses, “How [lucky] are we that we can put more love into the world by creating it ourselves?”
The Daughters Collective is now in its second year. It’s an honor to think dramaturgically with these women; this collective structure is the heart of our social-making art and we will continue to expand our collective to create more circles of ritualized experience. Making this kind of experimental art in such a collaborative way has taught the collective a lot about what works and what doesn’t in our pursuits. As our world’s socio-political situation gets darker and darker, there’s great strength to be found in community and The Daughters Collective is eager to examine that strength with loving and radical art.

You can follow The Daughters Collective on Social Media @TheDaughtersCo on Twitter and @DaughtersCollective on Facebook.

Gabriella Steinberg is the Theatre Division Assistant at the Library for the Performing Arts, NYPL. She has provided dramaturgy for new and classic plays throughout the United States and abroad in Ireland. She did her Literary fellowship at Geva Theatre Center and has worked with Playbill.com, Second Stage Theatre, 92Y, and The Public Theater. Staff critic with Theasy.com. Dramaturgy coordinator with The Daughters Collective. Graduate of Sarah Lawrence College. Gabriella also organizes with DSA and IfNotNow.

Q+A | CELISE KALKE

Celise Kalke is excited to become the Managing Director at Synchronicity Theatre in Atlanta. Since 2005, Celise led the Alliance Theatre’s New Work programs, notably the Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwright Competition and the Reiser Atlanta Artist’s Lab. She served as Dramaturg for many Alliance productions and world premieres. Before moving to Atlanta Celise served as the Director of the Literary Department for New York’s Public Theatre producing the New Work Now! reading festival while working as a Dramaturg for Shakespeare’s work. Her career began at Chicago’s Court Theatre and the Juilliard School. Her administrative skills have been displayed as a new work producer, Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) conference planner, LMDA Administrator, and administrator in the Brooklyn Academy of Music Education Department.

How did you first get involved with dramaturgy?

I am a classically trained violist (Oberlin Conservatory BFA/BA) and took dramatic literature classes whenever I could. A friend (now an editor on This is Us) dared me to be the dramaturg for a campus production of As You Like It. I did the script prep work, suggesting cuts, thinking about doubling, timelines and was hooked. Then after moving to Prague, the
Czech Republic, I got a grant to study at the Prague alternative and puppetry department studying dramaturgy. That led to dramaturgical work with the company Misery Loves Company and working with the Prague Narodni Divadlo and Divadlo Pod Palmovkou. I was so excited to see the action dramaturgy of a theatre community in transition. Also dramaturgy as an adaptation process. It was an exciting discipline in an exciting time. I was hooked and have worked as a dramaturg ever since.

What are some of the highlights (so far!) in your career?

Working with George C. Wolfe at New York’s Public Theatre. He makes me think more imaginatively and with more confidence. Doing text work with Jimmy Smiths on *Much Ado About Nothing* (at the Public). Working with all the Alliance/Kendeda competition winners at the Alliance (Tarell Alvin McCraney, Meg Miroshnik, Mike Lew, Madhuri Shekar just to name a few). Launching the Reiser Atlanta Artists Lab. Working with JoAnne Akalaitis at Court Theatre in Chicago. Helping (in a freelance capacity) Jason Loewith when he ran Next Theatre with Chicago's premiere of Suzan-Lori Parks (In the Blood).

What do you hope your legacy will be at Alliance?

A lasting commitment and energy around National and Atlanta-based new writers. That has been part of the Alliance since the late 1970s. Susan Booth invigorated the commitment, and I got to manage the programs that grew out of that invigoration.

What are you looking forward to the most at Synchronicity? And how will your background in dramaturgy and new play development influence your work in as a Managing Director?

I've been a producer of new work since 2003, managing readings and working closely with marketing and development departments for years. I've always managed a budget and monitored ticket sales. At the Alliance I managed a board New Work committee. Supporting a dynamic mission like Synchronicity's (Uplifting the voices of women and girls) is for me a dramaturgical act. I'm looking forward to expanding the reach of our exciting mission and strategizing our audience growth plan. Also working with Rachel May, who has created a home for women creating new work and trying new aspects of theatre.

Check out the *American Theatre* announcement of Kalke's new position [here](#).

*Interview by Amanda Dawson*
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?

- Follow us on Social Media (@LMDAmericas) by clicking on the logos below!

- Subscribe to our listserv

- THE LMDA Social Media Team is working on spotlighting some ECDs over the new few months on all social media, but specifically on our Instagram account. If you are working on (have worked on) any dramaturgical projects (from September 2018-March 2019) that you think our followers would benefit from hearing about, please shoot Amanda Dawson (DrMrsDawson@gmail.com) an email with your info and a blurb about the project! We are looking forward to highlighting the dramaturgical impact on the projects.