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the lmda review

The Newsletter of
Literary Managers and
Dramaturgs of the Americas
Vol. 12, Issue 2, Spring, 2002

literary
managers
& dramaturgs
of the Americas

When children learn to count they naturally add and multiply. Subtraction and division are harder to teach them, perhaps because reducing the world is an adult skill.

--Jeannette Winterson

Section I: Relevance, Residency & Playwriting

I realized again this Christmas, the power of the theatre. While sitting on her bed, in Lacey, Washington—with my partner, my sisters and my father held captive at the downstairs dining table, nervously playing monopoly—my mother attempted a cold stare. After failing a few times, she gave in and went straight to the heart of the matter: *If only I could go back, not let you watch that play...tell you, Gretchen, that play is evil! That play is immoral, wrong! I spend nights, thinking, if only I wouldn't have let you watch that play...*

I imagine it is a conversation we have all had in one form or another—an attempt at identifying the source of some strange thing, some anomaly, something possibly beautiful, possibly horrible. And of course, I could go on for hours telling you what exactly my mom was trying to seize in her desperate attempt for cause and effect. She had a shopping list of “perhaps it was” and “maybe you could have”’s both before and after the theatre summons. However, it was this particular effort that simultaneously revolted and thrilled me: in a miraculous over-simplification, she was right on.

I am proof. Theatre can change a person, in and out. Still, she was wrong in her overall analysis—it was not one show. It was, I think, more the act of believing, the act of making, the act of trying on, the letting go, and the letting in that inspired my own little personal revolution. It changed my behavior; it changed my day-to-day goals; it changed my beliefs and it changed my interactions with others. It was (and remains) the most radical occurrence in my life. No wonder it scares my mother.

My expectations for the theatrical experience are, to say the least, monstrous. And yet, I know the real limitations of producing work—at best, we are often left with a product we can feel “pretty good” about—before moving on to the next project. And often, this cycle of frustrations starts with the new play development process.

As we turn from the themes of the Denver Conference (community, relevancy, ecology), to the themes of the Vancouver Conference (new play development), we have an opportunity to put the philosophies of the former to work on the practicalities of the latter. As Conference Coordinators Rachel Ditor and Megan Monaghan say in their article about the Conference, “It seems like it is time, now that we have won some ground in the debate about why new work is important at all, that we have a family discussion—**an all-out in-house stay-up-late pound-the-table session about what is not working in play development.**” Rachel, Megan, and Kugler have been working to plan an outstanding conference; make your travel plans now to join us in Vancouver.

The majority of this *Review* is filled with detailed reports from the NYSCA-sponsored Dramaturgy Residency Project. I am proud to offer these complete reports to the membership as it offers us yet another opportunity to analyze what I (as the incoming VP Public Relations) like to call our “infiltration techniques.” It is obvious from the Reports that the completed Residencies allowed both dramaturg and institution to reconsider the process of new play dramaturgy—and, as we continue these Residencies and other similar projects, it seems there will be further opportunities to imagine and create new visions for the development of new plays, and for the role of the dramaturg in that process. I am particularly interested in the urging Todd London from New Dramatists makes in his interview, “I believe we—as a theatre community—haven't yet found an organic, appropriate place for dramaturgs in the theatrical process. So, I'd recommend a period of trial and error, experimental residencies over longer periods, unlikely (*continued*)

partnerships." These Residency Reports offer us a great foundation on which to explore, imagine and dream for an affective dramaturgy, and a transformative theatre.

The *Review* ends with a series of announcements and articles, including the official announcement of Michele Volansky as president-elect. In her article, Michele outlines her plans and sets the tone for her tenure as LMDA president. Also, in the spirit of organizational updates, Brian Quirt takes a moment to describe current events in LMDA Canada. Finally, we end with an article that came as a direct result of the Residency Project: Maxine Kern offers a glimpse into a panel discussion at New Dramatists that encourages us to consider a musical view of playwriting. In all, this *Review* offers us an opportunity to multiply our world, to consider and reconsider the role of the dramaturg and the potential for theatre-making.

I look forward to seeing you all in Vancouver!

-GRETCHEN HALEY, MARCH 2002

The Dramaturgy Residency Project

AN OVERVIEW BY
MAXINE KERN,
PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR

The NYSCA-sponsored Dramaturgy Residency Project, which went into effect for periods of time between January 2001 and August 2001, targeted short-term residencies on two theater projects, and one six month residency with a playwright's development center. All three venues were chosen because they could both accommodate a dramaturg and benefit from having a dramaturg on board.

Susan Jonas, Theater Officer at NYSCA, was very helpful in finding the resident companies. Once the companies were identified, and a liaison at the theater established, that liaison and I devised a job description and profile for the dramaturgy candidate. The theater liaison was able to represent the culture of the theater, define the needs of the institution for a particular set of dramaturgical skills, articulate the required level of dramaturgical experience, and suggest personality characteristics that would fit in well.

We drafted a template contract that stated the goals for the dramaturgical residency, and we

established a workable time period to have the dramaturg on board. A roster of candidates from the active LMDA membership was scanned for potential dramaturgs and these candidates were approached concerning availability, and encouraged to submit their resumes in application for these positions. Many candidates sent in resumes, and each institution devised a selection procedure (some interviewed candidates, some surveyed their staff and playwright membership), and eventually selected a dramaturg.

Upon selection, a contract was drawn up between the theater and LMDA describing the goals, job description, stipend fee, timeframe on site, and date of completion of the residency. This contract was sent to the selected dramaturg for additions or adjustments. In one instance the grant funding was supplemented by the theater, and that supplement was included in the contract. Once both parties had signed the contract, the dramaturg and the institution had only occasional input from LMDA. Throughout the residencies, however, I was on hand to provide assistance if the terms of the residency were in question.

The three residencies (New Dramatists, INTAR Hispanic American Arts Center, Voice & Vision Theatre) are documented in final reports filed by the three

institutions, and by the three resident dramaturgs, in response to a brief form listing questions about their collaboration. In general, the three experiences were highly rewarding. The final reports provide a clear picture of the accomplishments of these residencies, as well as areas of improvement that one might look toward in future residencies.

One of the goals for LMDA in submitting these various reports to the *LMDA Review* is to help the membership evaluate our experience with these residencies, and consider the possibility of seeking funding for similar projects. While this was only a pilot program, the reports speak of theaters and dramaturgs experiencing strong instances of near ideal dramaturgical relationships. At INTAR, Brad Rothbart was instrumental in facilitating break-through writing for a new plays workshop. At the Voice & Vision Retreat, Kristen Gandrow was able to interact with many artists and facilitate collaboration on projects that have been launched for further development. During my residency at New Dramatists, I was able to demonstrate a constructive dramaturgical presence.

Although in all instances the dramaturgs were found to be a good match with the theatres, we have learned the importance of a

more clearly articulated selection process, guided by the needs of the institution. For this grant, a small committee of senior LMDA members was consulted for input about possible candidates for these residencies. In the future it would be valuable to find a procedure whereby any LMDA member could apply for candidacy, with ample time for the theater and the administrator to look over their applications and references.

We also learned from these reports about the importance of finding funding that allows more time: for dramaturgs and venues to establish trusting relationships between the artists; for the venues to prepare the artists for the benefits of dramaturgical input.

Finally, in all these reports we find that LMDA dramaturgs were able to make significant relationships with theaters and theater artists that will be ongoing. In general I would say that the benefits to LMDA are twofold. A good match provides an opportunity to practice dramaturgy as it is intended, and as a result, allows an evolving understanding about the illusive role of the dramaturg. I definitely recommend that LMDA seek funding to continue offering these residencies to our membership, and to the theater community.

REPORTS FOLLOWING:

1. A. Voice & Vision
B. Kristen Gandrow
2. A. INTAR Hispanic American Arts Center
B. Brad Rothbart
3. A. New Dramatists
B. Maxine Kern

RESIDENCY PROJECT ONE: KRISTEN GANDROW AT VOICE & VISION

A. *From the Artistic Director,
Jane Ruth Wagner*

LMDA's grant of \$2500 to us in June 2001 enabled Voice & Vision to bring LMDA dramaturg Kristen Gandrow with us to our annual Summer Envision Retreat. Kristen's dramaturgical guidance was a powerful and significant force behind the development of playwright-performer Brenda Currin's new script, now under the working title of *My Moby Dick*.

Voice & Vision is a not-for-profit company dedicated to developing theater works with women and girls at the core. Based in New York City, we provide a greenhouse for diverse and daring women to articulate their visions in a professional theater context. For eleven years, co-founders Jean Ruth Wagner and Marya Mazor have guided the company and its resources to unearth rarely seen classics by women writers as well as to develop and produce original works by some of the United States' most innovative theater artists, including Kia Corthron, Mabou Mines, Estelle Parsons, Lynn Nottage, Karen Hartman, Lola Pashalinski, Linda Chapman, Regina Taylor, Stephanie Fleischman, Ana Maria Simo, and Chiori Miyagawa, to name but a few.

In its first three years, Voice & Vision created the Retreat for Women Theater Artists, held annually at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, which gave over 130 artists the chance to explore and develop new work free from the pressures of city living and commercial production.

Since these early years, with the continued support of NYSCA and the Jerome Foundation, the Retreat has grown and taken place at several different locations, including Vassar College, and most recently (this past summer) at Bard College.

LMDA dramaturg Kristen Gandrow's work with Brenda Currin this past summer at Bard was a terrific asset for Brenda and a real contribution towards Voice & Vision's developmental mission. Brenda came to the Retreat with a basic idea but no script yet, and over the course of ten days—with Kristen's help—she completed a 30-page draft of the first act. Kristen was intimately involved in every step of this work, acting as a sounding board and advisor during the entire writing process. As Brenda had no director working with her, she relied even more heavily on Kristen for feedback. In the end, Brenda couldn't say enough about how helpful Kristen was in the creation of her work. In Brenda's own words, "Kristen's eagerness helped to relieve my self-consciousness about my ideas, which were beginnings and seedlings. She helped me frame them in the larger abstract which made them seem important and worthwhile to me. Or we would hammer them out into practical, workable, theatrical units."

Kristen's residency with us this summer at Bard was invaluable to us in that we are a developmental company and often, as in the case of Brenda's project, the work we bring on-board is in its earliest stage of development. What sometimes hurts us is our lack of resources to staff (Retreats in particular) with enough dramaturgical support. Often, as would have been the case this

summer, one dramaturg would have had to cover four or five projects. This past summer, however, because of LMDA's grant, Brenda got all the focused attention she could have asked for. As a result, Brenda's project was one of only three that we selected to be part of our Envision Lab, in which we continue to support a work's growth beyond the summer Retreat. This may not have happened without Kristen's guidance in bringing the first stage of her project into such clear focus.

If we were to design this process again, one suggested improvement would be bringing the dramaturg on board earlier, so that she could have been involved in the selection process (or projects), as well as in our goal-setting meetings with the artists.

LMDA should absolutely initiate similar dramaturgical residencies in the future. In the development of new work, it is imperative to have committed, dedicated, highly professional dramaturgs to help shepherd new plays into being. Kristen was just such a person.

We can not speak highly enough of Kristen, and can not thank you enough for contributing her talents to Voice & Vision.

**B. Interview with the Dramaturg,
Kristen Gandrow**

Q: What was the institution you worked with?

A: I worked with Voice & Vision, a NYC company focusing primarily on the development of women's work in the theatre.

Q: What was your general function while you were there?

A. Primarily, I was involved in one-on-one dramaturgy with an individual playwright developing initial ideas into a play; the focus was on structure, plot, and character development—conceiving of manageable tasks that the playwright could then take and complete once back home from the Retreat setting in which we met.

*I also worked on production dramaturgy during a 20-hour rehearsal process for workshop-level presentation by college students of Virginia Woolf's *Freshwater*.*

Finally, I also was involved in general dramaturgical conversation and consultation with other playwrights, actors, directors, collaborators, re: several other theatre projects being developed at a 10-day Retreat.

Q: In what ways did your relationship to the institution serve its intended purpose?

A: The individual playwright benefited most obviously, never having had dramaturgical support before. The company added an eager and knowledgeable dramaturg to its roster of potential collaborators for future projects. As a dramaturg, I was able to function very creatively with other theatre artists, enhancing their understanding of the value of bringing a dramaturg into any theatrical collaboration.

Q: If you were designing this process again, in what ways could this relationship be improved?

A: Although I'm very appreciative of the opportunity, and I'd welcome the chance to work with artists at Voice & Vision's Retreat again, I bet other dramaturgs would be grateful for the chance to formally apply for this gig. I got the job because I heard a presentation at the LMDA Conference and thus could relate my high level of interest personally. But for people who don't attend the conference, I'm not sure there was any publicity—even on the free discussion listserv.

Q: Has this residency been meaningful to you as a dramaturg?

A: The residency grant was extremely helpful to me as a somewhat experienced dramaturg just entering the professional field because, as much as doing the work, I needed to meet the people with whom I can collaborate! Once connected to people and projects at the Voice & Vision Retreat, I've sustained several vital relationships with people who also attended. Not all of these were those folks with whom I was "assigned" to work by the Voice & Vision artistic director, although those people are now friends and in two cases, ongoing collaborators of mine.

Q: In your opinion, should LMDA initiate similar dramaturgical residencies in the future?

A: YES! YES! This was one of my (only) two fully professional dramaturgical activities outside of grad school & my hometown's small professional theatre. (OK, it helped that both were in New York.) This kind of work is exactly what I needed to

propel myself fully into the field... and now I'm employed fulltime as a dramaturg and program administrator in new play development. I knew I belonged in the field and had a lot to offer, but making the transition from an MFA program to the working world is very difficult, because there are few jobs and highly qualified (read: experienced) competitors for each and every position.

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**RESIDENCY PROJECT TWO:
BRAD ROTHBART AT
INTAR HISPANIC AMERICAN
ARTS CENTER**

**A. Interview with the Managing
Director, Lorenzo Mans**

Q: Who was your dramaturg and what is your institution? Please provide a brief professional description.

A: Brad Rothbart was our dramaturg.

We are INTAR Hispanic American Arts Center. We are a Latino theater that produces plays in English by Latino writers from the US.

Q: What was Brad's general function?

A: We have a yearly program called the NewWorks Lab that presents four workshop productions during four consecutive weekends. A developmental process with directors, actors & designers precedes the presentations. Brad Rothbart was assigned as the dramaturg for last year's NewWorks Lab.

Aside from the four NewWorks Lab projects, he was assigned to work on a piece that had been part of the previous NewWorks Lab. In my mind, this was the most important assignment.

Q: In what ways did this relationship serve its intended purpose?

The piece from the previous NewWorks Lab was *Pilgrim's Passion* by Henry Guzman. This was the third time that Mr. Guzman was part of the NewWorks Lab. The problem that we experienced with *Pilgrim's Passion* was that his first draft was unwieldy, but instead of honing down the first draft, he threw it out the window and started from square one again, resulting in three drafts, each one more unwieldy than the last. In spite of that, everyone at INTAR felt very strongly that this piece was a strong possibility for a full production in the future, if we could get a draft that was viable.

This piece has an episodic nature and requires a rather large cast, but we were willing to accept that, if the central character's journey was clear in action and meaning. Mr. Rothbart read all three drafts first, then met with Mr. Guzman for several long sessions, just the two of them in a quiet room. At the end of the process, Mr. Guzman and Mr. Rothbart were both very enthusiastic.

I'm still waiting for the new draft, but I feel that, with Mr. Rothbart's help, INTAR did as much as it could to help Mr. Guzman. I am sure that Mr. Rothbart's input had a very

positive effect. Perhaps it will reflect itself in a new piece by Mr. Guzman.

In terms of the four pieces that were part of the NewWorks Lab, one of them was more promising than the rest, but the writer needed (and asked for) dramaturgical assistance. It was *Tight Embrace* by Jorge Ignacio Cortifias. This ended up being a total artistic success. A lot of the credit goes to Mr. Rothbart, who had a very inspiring influence on the playwright. After a few meetings, Mr. Cortifias went away for a week and completely changed the second act of his three-act play. The result was astonishing. There was also great chemistry between the director and the designers that helped make this a success, but Mr. Cortifias told me that his conversations with Mr. Rothbart were invaluable. As far as the other three projects, I can't say that having Mr. Rothbart on staff made much difference, but he did the best he could.

In general, we were all very pleased with Mr. Rothbart.

Q: If you were designing the process again, in what ways could this relationship be improved?

A: The relationship between a dramaturg and a playwright is a very delicate one. It takes emotional and intellectual trust from both sides. One cannot expect it to produce positive results every time. When I was negotiating this residency with Maxine Kern, I had a very specific task in mind, concerning the two plays mentioned above: *Tight*

Embrace and Pilgrim's Passion. We both understood the kind of mind we were looking for, and Mr. Rothbart was very much the right person.

This time, Mr. Rothbart came in for a short period to intervene in two difficult situations. As far as I'm concerned, he was successful. But writing a play takes time with, sometimes, long breaks in the middle of the process. Besides, the writer has to be not only willing, but interested in working with a dramaturg. A lot of writers are very resentful of dramaturgical intervention. I wish that INTAR had the resources to commission playwrights and assign the right dramaturg to each project.

Q: *Has this residency been meaningful to your institution?*

I was originally hired by INTAR as a Literary Manager / Dramaturg. In the course of the years, our institution has been streamlined several times.

I've ended up taking on a great part of the administrative aspect (sometimes all of it), so that I have found it impossible to serve as a dramaturg even when I felt it was really needed. We have been operating without an official Managing Director for a few years now. Last year, I spoke to Michael Garces about the need of a dramaturg in residence for the NewWorks Lab and he was instrumental in getting us the LMDA residency. This year's NewWorks Lab is going to focus on performance art and monologues, so the need for a dramaturg is not so pressing. Having Mr. Rothbart in residence made it clear to everyone that we have to make

it possible to hire a full time Managing Director in order to free my time to act as a dramaturg, or we'll have to be able to hire a dramaturg for specific projects.

Q: *In your opinion, should LMDA initiate similar dramaturgical residencies in the future?*

Absolutely. I would only suggest trying to have longer residencies, in order to follow through a project from beginning to end.

B. Interview with the Dramaturg, Brad Rothbart

Q: *What was the institution you worked with?*

A: I worked at INTAR, a leading Latino/a producing organization in New York City.

Q: *What was your general function while you were there?*

A: I served as the dramaturg for the 2001 INTAR NewWorks Lab.

Q: *In what ways did this relationship serve its intended purpose?*

A: I worked as a pre-production dramaturg, meeting with playwrights, discussing their scripts, what they felt the strong and weak points of the work were, and helping them to refine the work before production. I also ascertained what the playwright wanted to achieved through production in the NewWorks Lab, and served as an advocate for the playwright's vision in my meetings with the directors and producers.

Q: *If you were designing this process again, in what ways could this relationship be improved?*

A: I must begin with a caveat. As I understood it, the purpose of the NYSCA-funded Residency was to place dramaturgs in theatres that did not currently have them. This is an admirable, and much-needed, goal. However, in working in a situation that has very little experience with dramaturgs, there is often a lack of understanding about the differing functions of the dramaturg, what a dramaturg's responsibilities actually are, what is outside the purview of a dramaturg...

In my case, the experience was extreme, as I was dramaturging a Laboratory that included three playwrights, three directors, two producers, and a nine-member Latino/a Theatre Company. Outside of one director who was very supportive, and one playwright who had had negative experiences with dramaturgs in the past, no one had any idea about the function of a dramaturg. I was very lucky in that the man who brought me on board, Lorenzo Mans, had originally been trained as a dramaturg although he was now functioning as a Managing Director.

I would call on LMDA to develop information about the roles of a dramaturg and purposes of dramaturgy that could then be handed out to everyone involved in the residency.

In terms of specific issues, as this was a Laboratory, I wish that I had been brought into the

process early enough to help choose the work to be presented, rather than being jobbed in once plays were selected. I wish that there had been an awareness of the dramaturg's usefulness in casting, so that I could have had a seat at the casting table. I wish that there had been more one-on-one pre-production contact with directors, so that they understood the possibility of my presence in the rehearsal room, not as a threat to their authority, but as an assistant in refining their vision.

Overall, I feel very good about the work I did for INTAR. However, I feel that I was not used to my full capacity, and that sometimes I was used inappropriately. I feel that these issues arose out of simple ignorance of my function on the creative team, and could be solved through education.

Q: Has this residency been meaningful to you as a dramaturg?

A: Absolutely. For the first time in my life, I was treated with the respect due a consulting professional. I was shown every courtesy, and realized that the work I do is meaningful, and that I have a real contribution to make. I had the opportunity to discover the work of a marginalized community, while working with some outstanding playwrights. As the only non-Latino on the project, not only did I learn a tremendous amount about Latino/a culture, I also served the valuable function of allowing playwrights to see what sections of their work were culturally inculcated shorthand that would not be clear to a non-Latino/a audience.

On the career development front, I developed relationships with a number of very talented artists. Most of these relationships continue to this day.

Q: In your opinion, should LMDA initiate similar dramaturgical residencies in the future?

A: I cannot emphasize how strongly I feel that these residencies are not only fruitful, but necessary. I think they are an essential part of raising consciousness about the importance and function of dramaturgs in American theatre. They must continue.

However, since the very charge of these residencies is to bring dramaturgy to theatres that don't currently have a dramaturg, there must be education—not only of the host theatre, but of the dramaturg. The dramaturg must understand that s/he is walking into a situation where dramaturgs and dramaturgy are not necessarily understood as being essential to the theatrical process. Due to this, there might be confusion, hostility, and even outright resistance to the performance of dramaturgical work. It is important that anyone accepting a residency be prepared for these issues.

Finally, I would like to urge that the pool of candidates be narrowed to early-career and freelance dramaturgs. As the function of the residency is to bring dramaturgs into theatres that do not currently have such a position, so should it be to bring dramaturgs who currently do not have such a position into the selected theatres.

RESIDENCY PROJECT THREE: MAXINE KERN AT NEW DRAMATISTS

A. Interview with the Artistic Director, Todd London

Q: Who was your dramaturg and what is your institution? (Please provide a brief professional description.)

A: Maxine Kern was in residence at New Dramatists part-time for most of the period of March 1-June 30, 2001.

New Dramatists is the nation's premier center for the support and development of playwrights. For over 52 years, New Dramatists has been finding and nurturing talented playwrights by giving them the time, space, and tools to develop their craft, so that they may fulfill their potential and make lasting contributions to the theatre. Member playwrights have included: Robert Anderson, Lee Blessing, Constance Congdon, Alice Childress, Darrah Cloud, Horton Foote, Richard Foreman, Maria Irene Fornes, Mary Gallagher, Phillip Kan Gotanda, John Guare, William Inge, Lyle Kessler, James Baldwin, Willy Holtzman, Donald Margulies, Joe Masteroff, Suzan-Lori Parks, Paula Vogel, Mac Wellman and August Wilson.

Q: What was Maxine's general function while she was there?

A: Maxine's role was designed as a reactive one. As dramaturgy at New Dramatists is writer-driven, she was here to respond to the writers' invitations to enter into dramaturgical discussions of their work. She began by asking playwrights to contact her with

questions that they would like her to consider in terms of their plays.

From that single offer, she received enough responses to read and discuss plays to fill up most of her time during the four-month residency. Along with reading plays by playwrights who were in the midst of writing or rewriting work, she was able to interact with the playwrights who were holding readings at New Dramatists while she was on-site.

Her residency included two days of office hours per week and attendance at most of the New Dramatists activities, readings, meetings and events.

Whenever possible, she would read a playwright's play, have a discussion with the playwright about their goals for the play and the reading, hear the reading, and then have a follow-up post-reading discussion with the playwright.

Q: In what ways did this relationship serve its intended purpose?

A: Maxine's residency exceeded our expectations. The resident playwrights here had in the past, despite some positive individual experiences, expressed little interest in having a resident dramaturg. Maxine was a great resource, however, and a significant number of playwrights took advantage of her compassionate expertise. She engaged in serious, in-depth conversations on writers' individual works in a way that seemed both satisfying and inspiring to the playwrights, and which provided some relief

to a small, overworked staff.

Q: If you were designing this process again, in what ways could this relationship be improved?

A: The residency was a surprise boon to us, but we didn't have much time to prepare for it. It would probably work best over a longer period of time, with advance time to forewarn the playwrights. The dramaturgical process here works best over time—as opposed to more deliberate production dramaturgy—because it allows for the building of trust and the formation of working relationships, as opposed to the kind of shotgun marriages that often define American dramaturgy in producing theatres. I also believe this residency worked because of Maxine's extraordinary blend of intelligence, rigor, and sensitivity—love for writing. I'm not sure that a less experienced or talented dramaturg could have earned the universal respect she did. So, I'd want to design a program that would encourage more experienced dramaturgs to apply.

Q: Has this residency been meaningful to you as an institution?

A: I think it has, though it was too short-lived to tell. It showed everyone—the playwrights especially—the value of adding a specifically dramaturgical voice to the mix of artistic staff and resident directors (even though we have no fewer than four trained or former dramaturgs on staff). It was also great to have Maxine's mind at

work on more general conversations that could take place here—her roundtable on musical structure in playwriting, for example. It may also have served to mitigate the playwrights' general distrust of dramaturgs.

Q: In your opinion, should LMDA initiate similar dramaturgical residencies in the future?

A: I think LMDA should initiate similar residencies, in an experimental sort of way. Rather than placing dramaturgs in existing structures, it seems to me valuable to explore ways dramaturgs can interact with institutions and individual artists. I believe we—as a theatre community—haven't yet found an organic, appropriate place for dramaturgs in the theatrical process. So, I'd recommend a period of trial and error, experimental residencies over longer periods, unlikely partnerships. Maybe something will come of it that will benefit all of us.

B. Interview with the Dramaturg, Maxine Kern

Q: What was the institution you worked with?

A: New Dramatists is a playwright's center. At New Dramatists, playwrights are selected for a seven-year membership in a venue that provides readings, script copying, housing while visiting NYC, and other member activities. This well-respected playwright's organization celebrated its 50th year anniversary and won a Tony Award during the tenure of this residency.

Q: *What was your general function while you were there?*

A: I met with playwrights in response to their questions about their plays. After contacting the playwright membership, several asked for my general comments as well as specific feedback about particular aspects of their plays. Often, I was able to look at plays getting ready for further readings. Once a play received a reading, I was also able to respond to the readings in a more informed manner.

Q: *In what ways did this relationship serve its intended purpose?*

A: This relationship served its intended purpose quite well. When the time was available, I was able to get on board with the playwright's script and goals at two significant points in its development – before and after a reading. After the reading, the playwright and I could engage in a conversation that included the comments of others who had attended the reading. This procedure was rewarding as it kept the playwright in control of their work, and made them the final evaluator of a variety of responses. I helped to keep these observations meaningful for the playwright, and yet I wasn't ever perceived to be determining the playwright's decisions.

Q: *If you were designing this process again, in what ways could this relationship be improved?*

A: The major difference that I would propose has to do with time. The development of trusting relationships, the ability to learn a playwright's goals, and the opportunities for playwrights to contact an in-house dramaturg when their

script required one, all had to do with either having enough time together, or being in the right place at the right time. Very wisely, Todd London and the New Dramatists playwrights and staff asked that the resident dramaturg attend all New Dramatists' functions and be on site at least two days a week. Without that investment of time, I wouldn't have been able to form the relationships that I did.

With more preparation time, New Dramatists might have been able to introduce additional pathways that led playwrights to an in-house dramaturg in preparation for my arrival. Also, a longer residency would have deepened the relationships that I was able to form, and allowed time for more relationships to begin.

Q: *Has this residency been meaningful to you as a dramaturg?*

A: This residency has been more than meaningful, it has shown me an ideal situation in which a dramaturg can function and grow. The closeness to the playwright's process and life has been eye-opening. In most situations, a dramaturg is in part a producer. Yet in a playwright's center, I was able to settle into the life of a play apart from the concerns of a production. It made me think more deeply about the nature of writing and the need we have as a theater community to reward playwrights with a process not compromised by immediate producing needs.

At New Dramatists, I was invited to attend a series of playwright focus groups for proactive writers addressing the theater community. I have

always felt the importance of new works and the role of the playwright as social conscience, philosopher, and poet. But at New Dramatists, I could see that role in action, and more thoroughly contemplate my role as a dramaturg/critic. As such, I'm even more encouraged to advocate for good writing and resonant plays structured to provide long-term pleasure and insight for audiences and theaters alike.

Q: *In your opinion, should LMDA initiate similar dramaturgical residencies in the future?*

A: I believe that it is important for LMDA to fund future residencies of this sort. I have formed strong relationships with playwrights that I will most likely maintain as part of my professional life. New Dramatists has identified dramaturgy as an active part of their function, and included that goal in the language of the newsletter to their membership, as well as in their funding applications. To this end, I helped shape a description of the benefits of dramaturgy for New Dramatists' grant applications. In a similar way, we can better describe our benefits to funding agencies. It makes good sense for us to illustrate the benefits of dramaturgy, by having an active presence as dramaturgs in theaters and play development centers through residencies that separate the dramaturgical function from the role of producer/administrator.

[Editor's Note: *Many thanks to Maxine Kern for collecting these reports and allowing us to print them here.*]

Section II: Articles & Announcements

MICHELE VOLANSKY, PRESIDENT-ELECT OF LMDA

It is my pleasure to announce that Michele Volansky is President-Elect of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA). Michele and her slate of Executive Officers were unanimously approved by Active (voting) members in the recent election:

- 150 ballots (106 USA, 42 Canada, 2 abroad) were mailed to Active Members;
- 74 ballots were returned;
- 74 ballots endorsed Michele and her slate.

Michele will assume presidential responsibilities during the second business meeting at the Annual Conference (Vancouver, June 13-16).

The incoming Executive Committee includes:

- Michele Volansky, President
- Liz Engelman, VP, Communications
- Des Gallant, VP, Development
- Gretchen Haley, VP, Public Relations
- Maxine Kern, Treasurer
- DD Kugler, Past-President
- Winston Neutel, VP, Technology
- Brian Quirt, VP, Canada
- Lynn M. Thomson, VP, Advocacy

Immediately following, please find Michele's thoughts on the direction of LMDA...

—DD KUGLER,
PRESIDENT, LMDA

LMDA AT THE CROSSROADS

LMDA is at a crossroads. After nearly twenty years as a member-driven service organization, after nearly twenty years of defining the profession to the theater community and the public at large, after enduring a tremendous amount of internal soul searching, LMDA is prepared to step into the spotlight. In an historic vote, the membership of LMDA unanimously approved the *Employment Guidelines* and set a timetable for their dissemination. The importance of this event cannot be overstated.

As an organization, LMDA has weathered many storms, including declining membership, a conflicted mission and public outcry. I feel fully confident that we are moving towards an upward trend. At this writing, LMDA has unprecedented membership numbers, including an ever-growing student caucus. With the recent conference in Denver, this contingent was made an official part of the organization. We believe that the combination of our website, our discussion listserv, the numerous LMDA publications, and the more prominent role dramaturgs are playing in the theater landscape, has contributed to this extraordinary growth.

It is our hope that these *Employment Guidelines* can serve as a springboard for discussion not only between dramaturgs and their employers, but also between other artists, administrators and producers. It is an important document to LMDA because it signifies our collective strength, our unified voice, and our unique ability to generate change by example. In light of the terrible tragedies which befell New York in the fall, we believe that now, more than ever, is the time to bring those

with differing opinions — on a multitude of topics — together, in an attempt to move forward. We are prepared, as an organization and as a profession, to initiate this dialogue.

As part of our three-year plan, I have recently added a new Executive Committee member who will deal exclusively with issues of public relations. I intend to forge solid relationships with similar organizations, such as SSD&C, Actors Equity, TCG and the Dramatists Guild, to add to our already-successful collaboration with ATHE. I believe that the path to a productive and healthy dialogue is through open and honest communication, and through such conversations, I hope to bridge the gap of suspicion and mistrust. I look forward to both the complex — the dissemination of the *Employment Guidelines*—and the seemingly mundane—losing the “e” in dramaturge from the stylebooks. I hope to place stories about institutional and freelance dramaturgs and literary managers in publications as national as the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*, and as local as hometown newspapers.

I propose an aggressive fund-raising campaign in conjunction with these public forays, all the while continuing our mission of affirming, broadening and encouraging the profession. I hope to hold several regional meetings between executive committee members and the membership as a means of further unifying the organization. Finally, I look towards our annual gatherings as a place of thoughtful introspection and shared experience. In all, the upcoming two years will continue LMDA in an exciting and forward-moving path. Twenty years from now, on our fortieth birthday, I

look forward to knowing we seized this opportunity to hold the spotlight and to lead the theatre community in the possibilities for change, dialogue, and meaningful theatre-making.

--MICHELE VOLANSKY,
PRESIDENT-ELECT, LMDA

CONFERENCE 2002: VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Insanity: (n) doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results. (Folk saying)

The reading. The workshop. The staged reading. The dreaded "talk-back." And the resulting new play that looks... just like all the other new plays created or developed using these standard methods. Is it insanity to expect those methods to produce a variety of work? Or will the results be the same, every time?

So... why do so many new play development programs look alike? Are we producing plays that are unique in how they reflect our artistic vision? What role do we have as dramaturgs in defining what that vision is? What gains and losses have we taken in carving out programs and festivals that are intended to support and showcase new plays? How are we responding to, and supporting the growth of, new work that challenges, excites, and confounds us? What is not working in new play development?

If we can say that theatre is a way of communicating the world to our communities, then it is especially true that in new plays we have an opportunity to communicate the best of our imagination to our audiences—speaking directly from our hearts. It seems like it is time,

now that we have won some ground in the debate about why new work is important at all, that we have a family discussion—an all-out in-house stay-up-late pound-the-table session about what is not working in play development. Because if we can't have this discussion, then who can?

This is the territory that we want to tread with you in Vancouver, British Columbia, at our June conference. We invite you to bring all your experience, passion, and imagination to the table to spend a few days challenging our assumptions about play development, and our role in the processes we create, sustain, promote, and tolerate.

--CONFERENCE COORDINATORS
RACHEL DITOR,
FREELANCE DRAMATURG,
VANCOUVER
MEGAN MONAGHAN,
LITERARY DIRECTOR,
ALLIANCE THEATRE, ATLANTA

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW (tentative)

Venue: Simon Fraser University

Thursday, June 13/02

10:00-08:00 Registration
12:00-01:00 Lunch (provided)
01:00-05:00 University/Student Caucus
05:00-08:00 Dinner
08:00-09:30 Keynote
09:30- Meet & Greet

Friday, June 14/02

08:00-09:00 Executive Meeting
09:00-09:30 Introduction
09:30-01:00 Breakouts: Radical Propositions
01:00-02:00 Bus to Granville Island
02:00-03:00 Lunch (with Playwrights)
03:00-04:15 Playwright Interviews
04:15-04:45 Break
04:45-06:00 Business Meeting #1: Reports

06:00-07:30 Playwright Wine & Cheese Tasting
07:30-10:00 Dimmer / Performance
10:00-11:00 Bus to SFU
11:00- Meet & Greet

Saturday, June 15/02

09:00-10:15 Play Development Workshops: A
1. Developing Musicals
2. Dramaturgy: Inside & Outside
3. Festivals: Re-examining Risk
10:15-10:45 Break
10:45-12:00 Play Development Workshops: B
1. Commission to Production
2. Responding to Current Events
3. Issues in Artistic Leadership
12:00-02:00 Lunch
02:00-04:00 Advocacy Caucus
04:00-04:30 Break
04:30-06:00 Business Meeting #2: New Business
06:00-07:00 Break
07:00-08:30 Reception & Banquet
08:30-09:30 Awards
09:30- Meet & Greet

Sunday, June 16/02

09:00-10:00 Board Meeting
10:00-11:00 Breakfast Regional
11:00-12:00 Conf03 Planning
12:00-01:00 Executive Meeting

LMDA CANADA REPORT

LMDA Canada held its annual meeting on March 1, 2002, in Calgary during the Alberta Theatre Projects' playRites Festival. More than a dozen members discussed their most exciting current projects and addressed a variety of hot topics, including commissions, play development in regional theatres, the challenges of long-term planning, the creation of new playwright programs, pure theatrical exploration and research, the gap between development and commitment to production, teen writing programs and the desire to work on a national scale. A

productive and, as always, fascinating discussion.

We also reviewed our plans for disseminating the *Employment Guidelines* in Canada and the upcoming Vancouver Conference and its focus on developmental activities.

LMDA Canada will once again sponsor its Mini-Conference on Dramaturgy with the Theatre Centre, July 8 and 9, 2002, in Toronto. Everyone is invited to this intense and fabulous event, now entering its fifth year.

As well, LMDA Canada will be meeting in June in Ottawa and publishing newsletters in May and September. For more information about the LMDA in Canada, contact Brian Quirt at bquirt@interlog.com. Please note full contact information at the end of the *Review*.

* * * * *

THE MUSICAL STRUCTURE OF PLAYWRITING: A PANEL DISCUSSION

The first thing I notice about a text is its music—the sound of the words, the rhythms of the dialogue, the shifting tones and intensities of people interacting, the sweep, even the pauses. Whenever I hear music in a voice on stage or offstage, I listen. My grandmother's voice was musical. I was persuaded by my grandmother's voice. Whenever I hear or read Shakespeare's plays, I'm struck by the ways in which they are musical; I am persuaded by Shakespeare's plays. Music, with its rhythms, tones, dynamics, sense of intention, and its many sounds, enters my body and soul directly. When I listen to music,

I'm receiving meaning in its deepest and most persuasive form.

In our critical vocabulary, we ask a piece to deliver its meaning in logical yet intellectually challenging ways. But how do we experience meaning, logic, truth or the fullness of the content and context, before the stage experience is complete? I propose that the playwright's inherent wisdom about her story (dream, fairy tale) has its voice in the ongoing musical elements of a play.

Playwrights know that the deepest structure of their writing comes from subterranean and, as yet, unarticulated messages for the world. Visual images launch them forward. Characters and dialogue speak out to them. But I suggest that the composition and structure of a piece is derived musically from what the playwright inherently knows about her story. Meaning is coded secretly, intangibly and mysteriously within the sounds and musical dynamics that a playwright constructs moment by moment. The images created in our minds are formed as we listen to the sounds the actors speak and the rhythms of their movements in space as their well-trained and emotionally tuned voices and bodies act upon a watching and a listening audience.

In a panel discussion at New Dramatists in the shaky fall of this year, we discussed the musical structure of their plays with playwrights, Keith Glover, Ruth Margraff and Caridad Svich. I spoke with these playwrights because their plays tend to work in particularly musical ways. Both during the panel and in conversations that led to the panel, I heard terminology that might well

help us talk critically about the musical aspects of a play.

Keith Glover spoke about *tonal language* that shifted from character to character. Just as in jazz, where not every note is written out, the interplay and jazz of speeches allow for pauses and rests to be used by actors at play on stage. Keith thinks *note* when he writes dialogue, and he knows whether a character is an alto or bass with few or many notes in their speech pattern. He thinks about the *key* of a scene—is it minor, major, dominant or not a scene with many notes or sounds on stage at one time? Some sounds, such as British accents when they occur in his writing, tend to ride on top of his scenes.

For Keith, setting up a structure without a musical framework can remove the accidental that makes it exciting. He feels that music makes one able to understand something emotional as it transcends race, color and age. It makes any experience a bigger experience, and it channels something communal about being human. A musical approach to writing provides that opportunity.

Caridad Svich speaks of writing for a *sonic landscape*. She thinks of plays as a closed world with everything in the mix. It may open with a fugue; it may include a modern chorus on stage, with repetitive or looped images that portray the ways in which characters respond to each other. There is heard music in a scene of noise, and static music in a scene of silence. Music keeps the experience bigger, in the playwright's body. As the characters do what their needs and desires drive them to do, the playwright can be more responsive

when the process is musical and open. It has tempo with allegro sections and staccato sections; it has a mixture of elements as internalized images speak differently.

Ruth Magraff consciously employs music as a part of her writing process. Inspired by a specific composer for each piece, Ruth seeks to understand original forms that are *simple, minimalist and non-ornamental*. Inspired by these forms and by composers, she finds her story and tells it from within the universe of that composition.

"I've worked with a lot of different composers of different types of music. When I come to a piece, I come almost as a blank slate and I start over every time really inspired by the type of music that I'm working with. If I'm working with jazz, I have to listen and hear in a completely different way, and the characters are completely different than if I'm working with a classical violinist. So the characters, the

world, everything comes from first of all the instrument. I get very inspired by the actual structure of the instrument, the actual structure of the sound, and the associations that I make with the type of music in my own history and imagination."

Ruth's *CryPitch Carols* was evoked by Michael Pierce's violin music. Its nostalgic tone transported her to a place in Michigan when she was small. It reminded her of snow and winterland motel music and singing Christmas Carols with a simple faith. The piece was written in quatrains and rhymes and created a language that came out of that time. The characters were based upon her memory of widows who, with their vibrato and their startled sense of the nuclear winter they found themselves in, sought to be closer to the nativity. It both contrasted with, and settled into, her child's world of Christmas Carols and faith in a sheltered world.

These playwrights are strongly attached to musical forms in their playwriting process, and in the language of their plays. I don't suggest that music is the only element in a playwright's toolbox, but I am suggesting that the musical structure of playwriting deserves greater notice in our critical vocabulary. We will do well in theater to ask if an audience can engage with the sound of the text, with the rhythms of the actors, with the intangible qualities that reach the souls of writers and listeners alike. Music delivers. We take it in spiritually and emotionally as it delivers meaning. Without a musical element, plays are lacking something deep, persuasive and meaningful in human experiences of any chosen subject or world. The musicality of a play determines whether or not the audience hears, gets the points more deeply, and is persuaded by that ongoing, mysterious wisdom.

--MAXINE KERN

BUSINESS ITEMS

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW ADMINISTRATOR...CYNTHIA CROOT...

A NOTE FROM CYNDI:

I'm available to answer any of your institutional, professional and organizational questions about LMDA. Typically, I field a lot of password, membership, and general information queries. In addition to keeping members informed about LMDA doings via email, phone, and written correspondence, I'm also the person to contact if you'd like to receive copies of our publications, get information about upcoming conferences and events, or post a notice to the LMDA Review or listserv. Please feel free to reach me at LMDA2000@aol.com, or by phone: 212-561-0315.

Here is how to stay in touch:

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