

Spring 2006

Review: The Newsletter of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, volume 16, issue 2

Shelley Orr

Liz Engelman

Matt Di Cintio

Michael Dixon

Andrew Knoll

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Shelley Orr, Liz Engelman, Matt Di Cintio, Michael Dixon, Andrew Knoll, Carrie Ryan, Carla Steen, Amy Wegener, Jonathan Wemette, Erica Nagel, D.J. Hopkins, Madeleine Oldham, Amy Jensen, David Dynak, and Maxine Kern



review

Volume 16, Issue 2
Spring/Summer 2006

LMDA review

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driving

by Shelley Orr

I have been thinking about driving, perhaps because I have been doing a lot of it lately. Driving is an activity that has many (necessary) rules and restrictions, yet it is often associated with freedom and control over one's own destiny. This may be the residue of effective mid-20th Century advertising campaigns of US carmakers and real estate developers, who did not want to be restricted by streetcar tracks (and may have contributed to the dearth of public transportation in many mid-western and western US cities today). And although the promise of freedom seems a bit ironic if you sit in traffic long enough, driving still conjures a sense of adventure and of possibility.

Driving also involves taking on significant responsibility and risk. In this issue of *Review*, you will find several examples of dramaturgs driving significant projects.

The issue in a nutshell: first off, read about our upcoming conference "Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally" in the Twin Cities July 20-23. For more information and updates, please go to: www.lmda.org. This issue of *Review* closes with a transcript of a talk on US playwrights and playwriting given by Maxine Kern at a conference in Cairo. In the center of the issue, three dramaturgs discuss their recent Dramaturg Driven projects, and I would like to take a bit

of space introducing you to those.

These three projects were initiated by dramaturgs and supported by LMDA's Dramaturg Driven grants. Each project is a showcase of creative initiative and thoughtful process. The three taken together are a testament to the range of imaginative directions and the diverse fields in which dramaturgs work. No area is too remote or off-limits. These projects show both the expansive and inclusive impulses in our field.

Erica Nagel and Matthew Shook's project involved creating a performance from the stories of a community displaced by the annexation of land for a park in New York state. Nagel chronicles her process and confronts questions such as: Who is the audience for this piece—the familiar faces of the community that the piece takes as its subject or a faceless, wider theatre audience? How do issues of artistic license impact artistic responsibility and accuracy of the portrayal of people's stories? Nagel's description of the creative process and the piece's first presentation show dramaturgs wrestling with difficult questions and making high-stakes decisions.

From forty miles north of New York City, the next project takes us to downtown Seattle. D.J. Hopkins's project addressed questions of how architecture can structure experience. His project focused on a particular building in a particular city, and gathered dramaturgs to consider at length how spaces affect those who travel through and use them. Hopkins's symposium "Theatre and the City" was held in and on the Seattle Public Library. In this issue of *Review*, Hopkins and Madeleine Oldham discuss the experience of visiting the building. Their discussion considers the uses of a space and how architectural design can foster or inhibit particular uses. Hopkins is interested in how the architect, Rem Koolhaas, approached his design and the research process that Koolhaas and his firm undertake for each building. Hopkins's project brings up issues of research, structure, and workability in ways that may be familiar to dramaturgs, but in an arena that is traditionally considered to be outside our bounds.

Our *Review* road trip takes us from an urban west coast site to the Great Salt Lake and the University of Utah, where Amy Jensen and Professor David Dynak organized a three-day Rockies Regional event called "Our Stories, Our Stage: Engaging Our Communities in Performance." This project gathered theatre artists and community members for a workshop led by Michael Rohd of Oregon's Soujourin Theatre. Amy Jensen notes that, "The sessions were incredibly charged, as Hill Air Force Base mediators, ministers, psychiatrists, arts educators, faculty from diverse disciplines, graduate and undergraduate dance, theatre, and film students explored image and story together." The event brought together people with a variety of backgrounds and diverse work environments; one result from the event was the initiation of the Utah Project. In a future issue of *Review* we hope to hear more about how this collaboration among several theatre companies on new play about Utah is coming along.

I hope that you find the sites that you visit in this issue exciting and invigorating. Perhaps this tour can serve to inspire you to drive your own creative projects forward.

I look forward to seeing you in the Twin Cities!

—Shelley Orr

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LMDA

P.O. Box 728
Village Station
New York, NY 10014
212.561.0315
www.lmda.org

LMDA Canada

36 St. Paul Street
Toronto, ON
M5A3H3 Canada
416.214.1992

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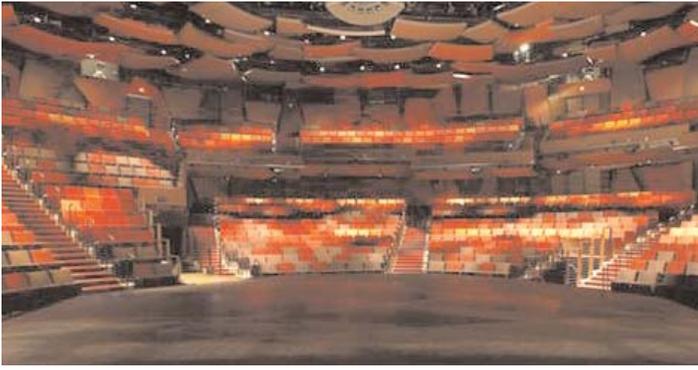
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Review is published twice yearly by the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. Submissions should ideally conform to MLA format (but we're not picky). Spelling differences between Canadian and US English will be preserved. As per the name of our organization, "dramaturg" will be the default spelling, but we will preserve the spelling of any submitter who prefers "dramaturge." The same will hold for "theatre" and "theater."

Inquiries from prospective contributors are encouraged. General inquiries and inquiries regarding feature articles may be directed to Shelley Orr: "Shelley Orr" <orr@email.arizona.edu>.

Regional Updates are now featured on our website, www.lmda.org, and no longer appear in Review. Regional Update inquiries should be directed to your LMDA regional representative or to Megan Monaghan: "Megan Monaghan" <meganm@scr.org>.

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Renderings of the interior spaces of the new Guthrie Theater on the river in Minneapolis. At left is the thrust space, at right, the proscenium.

Atelier Jean Nouvel



LMDA Conference 2006

Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally

Twin Cities, Minnesota

July 20–23

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Thursday, July 20: Open Eyes

12:00-5:00 **Registration**—Guthrie Theater

12:00-2:30 **Tour New Guthrie**: Optional—every half hour

3:30-4:30 **Open Eye Figure Theatre**: a puppetry experience

5:00-6:00 **Keynote Address: Kevin Kling** at Guthrie Theater

6:00 **Dinner and Theatregoing**

10:00 **Conference Bar**: TBA

Friday, July 21: Looking Outward

9:00-1:00 **Registration**

9:00-10:00 **Regional Breakfast**

10:00-12:30 **Twin Cities Theater Tour**: Hop on the Bus!

12:30-2:00 **Catered Lunch** with playwrights at
The Playwrights' Center

2:00-3:00 **PlayLabs Panel**: Actors Talking Turgy

3:30-4:45 **Dramaturg Driven Sessions**

- Travel and the Dramatic Imagination
- Dramaturgy Across the Pond

5:00-6:00 **Panel: Twin Cities Ingredients**—Sharing the Pie

6:00 **Dinner and Theatregoing**

Saturday, July 22: Looking Inward

9:00-11:00 **Registration**

9:00-10:00 **Hot Topics Breakfast**

- Early Career • Freelancers
- Institution-Based Dramaturgs • U Caucus

10:15-11:45 **Affinity Groups: Breakout Sessions**

- U Caucus: Dramaturging Rehearsal
- Early Career/Freelancers/Institution-Based Turgs: Negotiating Skills

12:00-1:00 **Dramaturgs in Relationships: Breakout Sessions**

- Board Games: Dramaturgs & Boards of Directors
- Show Us the Money: Dramaturgs and Funders
- Analyze This: Methods of Play Analysis

1:15-2:15 **Dramaturgs in Relationships, Part 2**

- Prospero's Books: Dramaturgs and Archives
- Beyond Adjectives: Dramaturgs and Marketing
- Who Let the Turgs Out?: Turgs & the Community

2:15-3:15 **Lunch**

3:15-4:45 **Breakout Sessions**

- Lost (and Found) in Translation and Adaptation
- Hooked on Classics: Old as New
- Come Together Right Now: The Multigenerational Audience Revolution

5:00-6:30 **Annual General Meeting**

8:00 **Banquet at Solera Restaurant**

Sunday, July 23: Looking Forward

9:00-10:30 **Board Meeting/Breakfast**

10:30-11:30 **From Empty Space to Cyber Space**: Brooking the Final Frontier with **Porter Anderson**

11:45-12:15 **Wrap Up**

12:30-2:00 **New Executive Committee Meeting**

Go to www.lmda.org for full information on all sessions and for conference updates.

LMDA Conference 2006

Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally

words of welcome from the conference committee

Liz Engelman

We talk about collaboration all the time, and at this time I want to take the time to corroborate collaboration.

This year's conference planning has been collaboration in all the best possible ways: for almost a year, a Twin Cities team of freelancers, institutional, and early career dramaturgs came together, meeting regularly, month after month to bring their individual interests, ideas, and passions to the table. This conference is a product of these gathered ideas, added to the array of what the Twin Cities itself has to offer—as well as what we anticipate being of interest to you. Now, finally, a year later, Matt Di Cintio, Michael Dixon, Andrew Knoll, Carrie Ryan, Carla Steen, Amy Wegener, Jonathan Wemette and I are so pleased to have this special opportunity to share with you the varied virtues of our theatre communities, and are so proud to present them.

I intended to write a paragraph about what excites me about this upcoming conference. I can't. I can't keep it to one paragraph. There are too many things to be passionate about, and proud of. Here are a few highlights.

So it's all about people, places, and things.

People.

Conferences, we all know, are made by the people who attend. We are thrilled to be able to add to our LMDA regulars and conference newcomers a host of Twin Cities artists that contribute to the vibrant local arts scene. Not to be missed is the region's own writer/performer/storyteller Kevin Kling who finds the extraordinary in the everyday, whose mix of humor and heart makes him Minnesota's own hot dish. Also adding art onto the conference platter, Open Eye Figure Theatre co-founders Michael Sommers and Susan Haas and company will be performing from their ever popular *Driveway Tour*—summer puppet event that spreads delight all across the Twin Cities. Playwrights Kia Corthron and Julie Marie Myatt share their world traveler experiences, TCG's Emily Cachapero speaks to the funding climate in the country, board members from Arena Stage, Cornerstone and Steppenwolf share their experiences with their theatres' artistic staffs. A not-to-be-missed conference closer features CNN Senior Producer Porter Anderson—more to be said about him below. And much much more.

Places.

A Twin Cities bus tour, led by Mixed Blood Artistic Director Jack Reuler, Twin Cities critics Rohan Preston and Dominic Papatola, and veteran artist Craig Johnson, lays out for you the history, landscape, art and architecture of both communities, guided tours of the new Guthrie Theater share the newest in architectural feats, The Playwrights' Center plays host to a lunch for conference attendees and its member playwrights—and co-produces a panel with us. Our banquet

will be held at Solera, a fantastic tapas restaurant...and again, much much more.

Things.

The Elliott Hayes Award. The Lessing Award. A book swap. A play swap. Exciting breakout sessions and panels. Great plays at PlayLabs and the opening night and weekend of the new Guthrie Theater with our very own LMDA member Simon Levy's adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*.

All coming soon to a conference near you. Who could ask for anything more?

Come collaborate with us!

Michael Bigelow Dixon

Beginnings and Ends. The conference begins on Thursday with tours of the new Guthrie, which allows conferees a chance to take in all the marvels of this incredible new complex, complete with three theaters, an entire floor of classrooms, an amazing production studio, and the longest cantilevered structure in the world offering breathtaking views of the falls of the Mississippi River. There are restaurants and bars in the building, as well, so break-time may be as enjoyable as the sessions themselves. On Sunday the final program event of the conference offers a challenge to the field from Porter Anderson, who has seen the virtual future and wants to lead us there. He's provocative, funny, and wickedly insightful and his call to arms will doubtless end the weekend on a high note. So I hope you'll come early, stay late, and revel in this conference of ideas, architecture, and performance.

[Editors' Note: In addition to the new Guthrie, the Twin Cities has recently opened several new buildings of architectural note, including an expansion of the Walker Arts Center, an expansion of the Children's Theatre Company, a new wing for the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and a new public library, all designed by world-renowned architects. Learn more at <http://www.arts.minneapolis.org/>]



The new Guthrie: Rendering of the entry to the "Endless Bridge" that stretches out toward the Mississippi and provides space to gather.

Atelier Jean Nouvel
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LMDA Conference 2006

Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally

words of welcome from the conference committee

Matt Di Cintio

Re: “Lost (and Found) in Translation and Adaptation” Panel

Translation and adaptation certainly aren’t new topics of discussion for LMDA. How the old is made new and what the new does to the old are common issues dramaturgs face, whether they’re turging a new Moliere translation or a new play “inspired by” or “based on” a source work. But at this year’s panel we have the advantage of gathering not only highly respected translators and adapters, but also directors who specialize in moving plays from one language and one culture to another. We’ll talk about craft, we’ll hear from some of the country’s most successful translators and adapters about how they get into their source works, how they continually strive for modern relevance in their “old” works. We’ll hear from those who produce that work and how they think about the resulting work within the current geopolitical context. What’s the technique? What’s the responsibility?

Re: “Who Let the Turgs Out?: Turgs & the Community” Panel

Sometimes a dramaturg’s relationship to the community in which a particular work is produced is taken for granted; sometimes it’s made mechanical with traditional study guides and audience talkbacks. During this session, we’ll hear from turgs who have been let out, from artists who work in theater as dramaturgs and as educators, and from artists whose primary media is not in the theater, about how they create their work based on the community they live and work in. How can work be created from within the community, rather than taken to it? With the definition of dramaturgy changing, it seems, with every season, I think there’s much we can learn from these community-based artists about how our field can become even more vital.



That mighty Mississippi at Minneapolis.

photo: www.jdasilva.homestead.com/

Carrie Ryan

I find myself a member of the LMDA conference planning committee in a year when I have just started law school. I’ve found myself looking forward to planning meetings as a periodic return to what I know, to where I’m comfortable, in the midst of this long, challenging new journey. The committee is putting together a range of offerings that really reflect what these twin cities, rightly famous for their theatre, are all about. I’m looking forward to the theatre tour, which will show off the range of companies to be found here. I’m looking forward to the “Hooked on Classics: Old as New” panel, which I’ve been organizing with Carla Steen—it will showcase the many varied approaches and reinventions that theatre artists use to reveal why these seemingly familiar works are revisited so often. But mostly I’m looking forward to everyone coming together, to checking back in, for this great annual gathering.

Carla Steen

Almost every day I drive between St Paul, where I live, and Minneapolis, where I work. Although it’s only a 20-minute drive, my route passes four colleges, three hospitals, one mighty Mississippi—and at least 10 theaters. The 2006 LMDA conference includes a bus tour of the numerous theaters in these enormously theater-blessed cities. From the Mounds Theatre, a 1920s silent movie house recently renovated to be the home for a number of arts organizations, to Mixed Blood Theatre, a ground-breaking culturally-conscious company lodged in a fire house, to the Jungle Theater, which revived a neighborhood through smart, gritty theater produced in a storefront (until they moved into their own theater half a block away), the theater buildings and the companies that occupy them are a fascinating and varied lot. With local theater experts as guides, the theater tour should offer a broad introduction to the breadth and scope of Twin Cities theater, as well as dazzling passengers with our amazing lakes, bluffs, parks, and one mighty Mississippi.

Amy Wegener

It’s an impossibly gorgeous, sunny Minnesota day, and I’m sitting outdoors on the equally impossible-seeming “endless bridge” at the new Guthrie, a feat of architectural physics that soars from the theater’s main gathering spaces toward the sparkling falls of the Mississippi. Right now an anticipatory hush fills this airy structure, which will soon be humming with the buzz of plays and people and the LMDA Conference. Floating in the midst of the city, still a relative newcomer to this Twin Cities landscape, I always marvel at the energy created by the convergence of so many diverse theater companies and possibilities here. Not only are there numerous opportuni-

LMDA Conference 2006

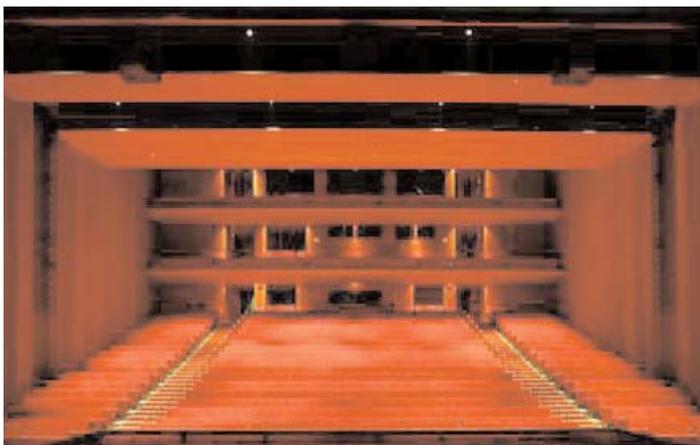
Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally

words of welcome from the conference committee

ties to experience this variety woven through the conference (via tours, theatergoing, and a panel), but this year's LMDA programming dovetails with that of an organization whose outstanding local and national support of writers makes this a very dynamic place to be a literary manager: The Playwrights' Center. The Center's renowned PlayLabs Festival is a wonderful two-week developmental laboratory that features an amazing roster of plays and is run by some of the best people you'll ever meet. PlayLabs has been one of my favorite new play destinations for as long as I can remember—as a visitor beginning in the 1990s and eventual participant who always felt at home there—and it's lovely that The Playwrights' Center's public readings will fall on the same weekend as the LMDA Conference.

Jonathan Wemette

As a (relatively) young Minnesotan interested in playwriting and dramaturgy, I can't help but get excited when I look at the schedule for this summer's LMDA Conference, 'Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally.' It makes fabulous use of the Twin Cities' vibrant artistic scene, providing attendees the opportunity not only to interact with each other, but with the deep pool of local talent and theaters. (In particular, I think any excuse to see keynote speaker Kevin Kling perform is a good one.) Having seen the works-in-progress that bring playwrights Kia Corthron and Julie Marie Myatt to the "Travel and the Dramatic Imagination" session, I know this will be a fascinating look at how new scripts can expand our understanding of a world that has become increasingly baffling. Other sessions that call for in-depth discussions of everything from the bread-and-butter issues of play analysis to the ultramodern concerns of theater in cyberspace round out what will certainly be a hugely informative and entertaining weekend.



A View from the Stage: A rendering of the seating area of the new Guthrie's proscenium theatre.
Atelier Jean Nouvel

Arts Facts about the Twin Cities

Visiting the Twin Cities will open your mind and stir your imagination. The flourishing arts community; peppered with awards, accolades, "firsts," "biggests" and "bests" complement a thriving downtown and lush surroundings.

Arts & museums

- More than 57 museums in the Minneapolis area.
- Mill City Museum won the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2004 Honor Award.
- The Minneapolis Institute of Arts currently ranks among the top ten regional museums in the United States.
- The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden is one of the largest urban sculpture gardens in the country.
- MSN named the Minneapolis Institute of Arts one of the top 10 art museums in the nation.
- The Walker Art Center has been cited several times as one of the 10 most visited art museums in the country.
- *Newsweek* called the Walker Art Center "possibly America's best contemporary art museum."
- The Minnesota Children's Museum was ranked the 8th-best children's museum in the country by *Child* magazine.

Theater & Music

- More theater seats per capita than any other city aside from New York.
- More than 30 theater venues and nearly 100 theater groups in the city.
- More than 10 dance companies & 20 classical music groups.
- 3 Tony Award-winning theaters call Minneapolis home—Children's Theatre Company, Theatre de la Jeune Lune and Guthrie Theater.
- The largest Fringe Festival in the country takes place in Minneapolis with over 750 performances in one week
- Home to the country's oldest continuously running theater: Old Log Theater, the nation's flagship regional theater: the Guthrie, the largest dinner theater: Chanhassen Dinner Theatre, and oldest satirical theater: Brave New Workshop.
- Minneapolis has the 4th most active jazz scene in the country
- On November 5, 1903, three weeks before the Wright brothers made their first airplane flight, the Minnesota Orchestra performed its inaugural concert.
- The Minnesota Opera is now the 16th largest opera company in the nation with an annual budget of almost \$7 million.

From http://arts.minneapolis.org/arts_facts/

Developing a Sense of Community:

Reflections on the balance of community engagement and artistic integrity while creating a Dramaturg-Driven documentary play.

by Erica Nagel

It hadn't rained all summer, so we knew when the sky opened on August 9th, that it wasn't going to let up any time soon. This was the day that we had chosen for our public reading of *Bare Mountains*, the documentary play my collaborators and I had spent the last three months creating. Although the enormous tent kept all but those audience members on the periphery from getting soaked, once the lightning started, it was clear that people were beginning to wonder about the sense of sitting under a large, canvas structure held up by metal poles.

I conferred with the director, Daniel Brunet, and the dramaturg, Erin Detrick, who both agreed that there was no way we could continue. Taking a deep breath, I made my way up to the stage area. "Ladies and Gentlemen," I began, "You have been so polite and patient with us. But we're feeling concerned for your safety. I'd love to say that we have a rain date scheduled for this reading, but unfortunately, I'm moving to Texas tomorrow." I went on to explain that as the writer of the piece, it was extremely useful to my process to hear it out loud, and that we would be moving from under the tent to the much smaller—but covered—Nature Center a few hundred yards away. I invited anyone who felt like braving the storm to join us. That was when Suzanne Brahm, the wife of one of the men we'd interviewed for the play stood up and said, "I've got three umbrellas, and I'd like to hear the rest of the play. I think we've all come a long way to hear our stories told."

Her statement was a perfect crystallization of the community my collaborators and I had gotten to know all summer as we worked on our Dramaturg-Driven project. These descendants of the Ramapo Mountain Folk were intrepid, determined, and fiercely proud of their history. I shouldn't have been surprised that the audience did not want to give up on the reading—they were not in the habit of giving up on anything.

The Ramapo Mountain Folk were inhabitants of colonial mountain towns located forty miles north of New York City. These isolated communities maintained their own subsistence culture for over 200 years, until their towns were destroyed during the creation of the Palisades Interstate Park System in the early and mid-twentieth century. As late as the 1960s, the mountain folk were made to dismantle their own houses as the state forcefully purchased their land. This prolonged use of Eminent Domain created a huge rift between the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) and the displaced communities. Today there is a pervasive feeling among original inhabitants and their descendants that the stories of these communities have been ignored, misrepresented, and hushed up.

I first heard about this conflict from my fiancé, Matthew Shook, who works for the PIPC. If only, we said that day, we could find some funding to help us collect and share this story. That was when I remembered the Dramaturg-Driven grant. What if, I asked Matt, we turned interviews and stories we collected into a play? That spring, in a frenzy of grant proposals and initial conversations, we proposed

to collect interviews, edit them into a play, create a digital audio archive, design and build a traveling exhibit of archival photographs, and rehearse and present a reading of the play all before I moved to Austin to begin graduate school in August. No sweat.

In May and June of 2005, Matt and I interviewed 14 people, most of whom were in their seventies, eighties, and nineties. We asked them about their family history, what they remembered about the years before the state took the land and how it affected them when they were displaced. People's attitudes were varied. Some wanted to vent about the evils of big government, but many wanted to ignore the pain of the past and look boldly towards reconciliation with the park or the future of their family. Most of these interviewees were happy to relate intimate details of their personal history, but as soon as the conflict with the park came up, they would shut down or change the subject. This was especially frustrating, because, while we wanted to collect the family histories and memories for the archive, we were convinced that the stories about the destruction of the towns would become the backbone of the script. One of the best pieces of advice I received to encourage discussion of this sensitive history was during a session at the 2005 LMDA conference about interviewing. During that conversation, one participant offered the suggestion that I frame questions that deal with sensitive subjects by asking "What do you want people to know about ____?" This small change of phrase completely opened up the next interviews. Not only did it invite people to consciously offer an opinion rather than state something as fact, but it also emphasized our goal of sharing this buried history with the public.

As we finished gathering interviews, I began the long process of transcribing and editing the interviews into monologues. At first, decisions about what to cut and what to keep seemed obvious. The sections of the interviews that dealt with the pain of losing their homes, the bitterness toward the park, and the sense of loss that surrounded this history were the moments that felt like the most engaging points of entry for an outside audience. But as I continued finessing the script, I started to notice that my interest in this bitterness and anger had led the play to a pretty dark place, when in fact, the majority of people we spoke to were actively trying to get over their anger and celebrate the beauty that had been preserved by the park's creation. Indeed, the more I got to know them, the clearer it became that one of the most important and enduring facets of this community was their love of and loyalty to the Ramapo Mountain region, regardless of who owned it. In these early drafts, I had been so intent on capturing what I found to be the most exciting elements of this story—betrayal, bitterness, and hurt—I had created a piece that was a dramatic indictment of the park's history, not an honest exploration of the community's story.

I realized that I was guilty of a kind of exoticism concerning this community. I was in danger of becoming what Dwight Conquergood calls "a curator," a researcher or artist who is drawn to the exciting or

dramatic aspects of a community without truly making a commitment to understanding them. Maybe I had asked questions about their family history and fond memories only as a way to set up the horror of displacement that followed. Maybe in the interest of writing a play that would intrigue an outside audience, I had forgotten what this project could mean to the people whose stories we were telling.

I suddenly felt like I was at a turning point, and I needed to make some serious decisions. Was this project ultimately a play based on a community or a community-based play? Did my loyalties lie with my audience or with my subjects? What about the fact that the subjects would most likely be the majority of my audience? And why, as I considered the next steps of revision, did I feel like I had to choose between a play that engaged a community and a play that spoke to an outside audience through its artistic merit?

The final weeks of the writing and editing process became a kind of balancing act. I had already been working towards balancing the reality of the stream-of-consciousness interviews with creating a narrative journey, but now I was also hoping to balance the bitterness and hurt felt by the communities with the decidedly positive effects of the park's creation. As I juggled those ideas, I was also working to balance my own sense of community engagement and artistic integrity.

The first thing Matt and I did to help the script feel more balanced was to go back to the original interview transcripts to find moments where the subjects had talked about their love of the land, or their acknowledgment that without the park those 100,000 acres would be overrun with condos and shopping malls. We also set up interviews with high-level park officials who could provide some historical context and insight into what was gained through the displacement of these communities. This proved invaluable. From our original interviews, we had collected stories of the state stopping up water supplies to drive people out of their homes and park workers sneaking in at midnight to steal the stained glass windows of a mountain church. From our new interview subjects, we learned about the land and animal restoration techniques pioneered by the PIPC, the hundreds of WPA jobs created during the depression to build park roads and buildings, the free summer camps for children of the city slums during the 1940s, and the continued efforts of the park to preserve open space and provide environmental education in New York and New Jersey.

It seems obvious now, but it was an exciting discovery to realize that expanding my own notions of which stories were inherently dramatic and honoring the entirety of the community's history actually increased the artistic complexity of the play. In its new form, the script that had seemed like an open and shut story of big money vs. small town life became an exploration of the idea of "greater good," sacrifice, and preservation of culture vs. preservation of environment.

Still, as the day of the reading approached, I was plagued by the question of what the interviewees would be hoping for when they heard the draft of the play. I did my best to remember that our goal had always been to create a play that celebrated and illuminated the history of which this community was so proud, and we had worked hard to create a script that would make them feel heard and represented. Also, we had been very clear that this reading was of a working draft and that we expected and hoped for feedback from the interviewees. There was nothing to worry about—except maybe those dark rain clouds edging above the horizon.

Which brings us back to the giant dripping tent and a crowd of

people waiting to hear their stories be spoken aloud by two young actors clutching their black script binders against the howling wind. We shuttled audience members to the nature center under a fleet of borrowed umbrellas, broke out the coffee and pastries, and replaced saturated programs with fresh ones. Nearly everyone stayed to hear the rest of the play.

The reading lasted far too long; the script still contained many of the stories that I knew were important to the interviewees, if not to the arc of the play. The audience insisted on clapping after each monologue—both for the performer and for the interviewee who, more often than not, acknowledged the applause with smiles and waves to the crowd. Afterwards, people grabbed us to recount things they had forgotten to tell us, imitate the walks and voices of their ancestors, and to invite us all to the next historical society reunion. Was their excitement due to the success of the play as an artistic effort, or to the simple fact that their stories had been spoken aloud? Had we managed to represent them honestly while also making them feel like their stories were part of a "real play"? Were they conscious of our attempts to balance their voices with our own ideas of art? At the time, as we accepted their soaking wet hugs and sincere congratulations, these questions seemed unimportant.

I wonder now whether the ideas of artistic integrity and community engagement have to exist on either side of the scale, and whether privileging one necessarily means sacrificing the other.

With a few months of perspective though, the idea of balance continues to pester me. I wonder now whether the ideas of artistic integrity and community engagement have to exist on either side of the scale, and whether privileging one necessarily means sacrificing the other. Would including the community in the artistic process have necessarily made the final product any less artistically viable? Would creating the script purely from an artistic standpoint have made the play less effective in making this community feel heard and appreciated? If there is a future life of this play, does it lie in seeking a home for it in the theatre world or is it more important to restage the reading at a local library, inside and out of the rain? What ultimately serves this community better—sharing their stories with others or celebrating them among themselves? Which serves the play better? Which of these am I more obligated to serve? And what would it be like if, when I return to New York this summer and continue to develop the script, I could find ways to abandon this idea of balance in favor of blending or blurring the line between the community and the art?

As a dramaturg, I see myself as a link between theatre and society, an artist who is constantly asking—and helping others to ask—questions about how performance can matter as both a piece of art and a social tool. When I began this project, my ideas about documentary theatre were clear: the stories belonged to the people but the method of sharing the stories was my domain. Working on this project changed all that. It opened my eyes to the power of creating theatre for a very specific audience, theatre that lets a community celebrate itself, and theatre that helps a community recognize the universal in its own history.

IN PRINT: the seattle public library

Introduction
—D.J. Hopkins

A few years ago, when Shelley Orr, Madeleine Oldham, and I conceived the **In Print** section of *Review*, we imagined that a discussion that would not be limited to books about theatre and dramaturgy, but could include books on other subjects, and even discussions of print-related subjects that we thought our readers might find interesting. We weren't sure just what might fall into this third category, but I imagined someone might write about an archive or a collection of some kind. Well, we're finally taking ourselves up on our own offer: Last October, with support from LMDA's Dramaturg Driven funds, I was able to convene a regional get-together in Seattle. The goal of this event was to explore the new Seattle Public Library and to explore as well the ideas prompted by this provocative building.

Over the last five years, much of my work has been devoted to an exploration of the relationship among literature, theatre, and architecture. And from the moment that I learned that it was under construction, one building has captured my imagination as a place that brings all three together: the new Seattle Public Library, designed by internationally renowned, rock-star-status architect, Rem Koolhaas.

The goal of architecture is much like the goal of the theatre: to carefully control the relationship between a space and the people who enter that space, in order to encourage interesting things to happen for the people in that space. What makes architecture so fascinating is that it is not only concerned with the inside of the space, but the outside as well: buildings have an immediate relationship to the locations in which they are built, not just with the people who enter them. In an urban context this means that a building not only affects the experience of its users, that building can have an affect on a whole city. After reading everything that I could find, I had been looking for an opportunity to get to Seattle and to gauge for myself—and, with the help of others—the Seattle's Public Library relationship with its users and its urban environment.

In an article for *The New York Times*, "The Library That Puts on Fishnets and Hits the Disco," the *Times*'s notoriously skeptical architecture critic Herbert raved about Koolhaas's Seattle structure. Muschamp called the library the most important new building of 2004 and one of the greatest examples of contemporary architecture, period. For me, part of what makes this building special is the process by which it was built. As I noted in an article in the Dramaturgy Special Issue of *Theatre Topics* (March 2003), Koolhaas doesn't just design buildings, he dramaturgs them: creative research is the first step that his company undertakes in any of his projects. He studied theories of shopping for Prada when he designed the company's new "epicenter" store in New York City; as a result, the shopping spaces of the store are built around an actual pocket theatre, which takes center stage (so to speak) while the clothes and shoes are pushed off to the margins of the store. [My essay on Prada SoHo is in *Review* 15.2] Koolhaas is an architect who likes to think

as much as he likes to build (perhaps even more), and this library is his masterpiece.

So, pursuing my interest in this building, a small group of theatre people convened in Seattle on October 22, 2005—seems like a lifetime ago now. Several attendees were local Seattlites, but some ambitious archi-tourists came from Vancouver, Tucson, Portland (Oregon), San Francisco, San Diego, and Minneapolis. We began with a tour, led by a knowledgeable guide, Judith van Praag, who not only claimed to have dated the architect's brother, but had done her research on dramaturgs and knew lots about our field by the time she met us. The tour ran nearly two hours, during which time our guide explained the building's conception, its exterior design, aspects of the engineering, and the ideas behind the design of every area of the structure.

A couple highlights from the building:

The Living Room. The Fifth Avenue entrance to the library comes into a single vast room, with various seating and reading areas, the fiction collection, the teen collection (with music as well as reading selections), a coffee cart and café area, and a cleverly designed collapsible gift shop. Stairs lead to the auditorium and escalators to other floors.

The Book Spiral. Levels six through nine are the primary storage area for books, and though each level is flat (as in an ordinary building) these levels are connected by a continuous, gradually sloping ramp. Windows around the exterior and glass and translucent plastic room dividers make the Spiral an open, bright place to go looking for books. Dewey decimal numbers are set into the floor (on removable panels) to facilitate your search.

Following our tour, we got together in a meeting room on the eighth floor of the Book Spiral for snacks and discussion. Presentations by Liz Engelman and Kim Crow structured the day, and drew conversation to other subjects—architecture and theatre, theatre and its role in the urban community—but we began by talking about the building itself. General responses were mixed: the beauty of the building was not debated, but the relevance of a \$100+ million dollar civic landmark was. And the social function of the building itself was debated as well. We had learned that during the research process, Koolhaas and his team determined that a major group of users of public libraries in US cities is the homeless, so the first two floors (the ones with street entrances) were designed to accommodate homeless visitors. This statement stayed with us, and later became a key point of reference in discussions of the social functions of public buildings and social services in the US more broadly.

As a way of trying to come to some provisional conclusions about the library, Madeleine Oldham (a long-time Seattle resident) and I agreed to conduct an email dialogue about the building.

The Seattle Public Library: A Conversation

Madeleine Oldham and D.J. Hopkins

D.J.H.: Let me start with an anecdote from class. I recently had a surprising experience in my dramaturgy seminar. I shared a play with my students, at the start of our unit on new play development, and I thought that the play was smart, cool, and showcased an example of what people are excited about lately; you know, something up-to-the-second. I gave them Anne Washburn’s play *Apparition*, subtitled “*An uneasy play of the underknown*.” It plays with language, it plays with theatrical space, even plays with *Macbeth*—plus it’s genuinely spooky. I thought they’d love it. But no, actually, they hated it. With only a couple exceptions, my students were at best confused by the play, while some had no idea what was going on at all. But then, one student had this to say: “This play is like a theatrical puzzle: it presents a challenge to the audience. The audience has to piece together the clues in every scene in order to find out what’s going on. The play requires an alert audience, an active audience.” Hearing this, I thought: “He totally gets it!” But then the student concluded by saying: “Which is why I hated this play. I don’t want to work in the theatre, I just want to be entertained.”

I mention this anecdote because my student’s description of that play, and his negative reaction to it, could easily be a description of the Seattle Public Library, and the reactions of some visitors when they first arrive at this unconventional space. In fact, to some extent, my own reaction was like that at first.

I had been following the construction of the library for years—for about as long as I’d been a fan of the writings of the Library’s architect, Koolhaas. So when I first arrived at the Seattle Public Library, I was ready and waiting to be blown away and thrilled. And I wasn’t. I walked into the building and found myself in the main reading area, the Living Room. Standing in that cavernous space, my anticipation turned to disappointment: my mind didn’t immediately find a frame of reference to hang on to—nothing presented itself as a single object about which to get excited—let alone by which to navigate. I realize after the fact that I simply didn’t know where to go or what to do with the space; like a musical instrument that I’d heard but never been trained to play, I was presented with the library and didn’t know how to make sense of it or enjoy it. So my initial reaction was, disorientation.

M.O.: That’s so interesting—it’s the opposite of my first response, which was “oh thank god.” I had spent many a long Seattle afternoon trying to find a corner that didn’t reek of piss, and here was a Living Room to welcome me. Gone were the days of dark and dingy. Here was a magnificent cathedral-like space that allowed the whole room to breathe. It was almost like the outside came inside, except without the ever-present danger of rain. I wonder if my response would have been so positive had I not been familiar with the old building. I felt like Koolhaas exploded the space and intro-



LMDA tour group listening to guide Judith van Praag in the “Living Room” of the Seattle Public Library. *photo: Shelley Orr*

duced light and air where none had ever lived before.

I’m definitely down with the puzzle metaphor, though. Especially when someone asked, “but where are the books?” It’s a library, and when you walk in, the books are nowhere to be seen. (In fact, you don’t get to them until like the 9th floor?) The space is not only a physical puzzle, with tons of levels and hidden rooms and secret passageways, but a philosophical puzzle as well. Why does this library radiate activity? Buzz with experience? Isn’t it supposed to be quiet?

I started to think about my perception of the purpose of a library. And I must say, I love any space with enough of a personality to prompt me to ask questions like that. I realized that I’ve always thought you go to the library to grab some books and get out. Libraries depressed me with their closeness and their mustiness. I felt happy about liberating some materials for a little vacation from their dismal surroundings, but I never wanted to spend any time there. This was different. This was a meeting place, a gathering place. A place to unwind, to ponder, to learn. To stay a while.

D.J.: Yes, maybe that’s the secret to what I initially found disconcerting / dizzying: I had come there not to use the library but to be an architect. I was waiting for the library to do something, to show me where to go or what it could do; but the library was waiting for me to do something, and not insisting—like some shopping mall—that I go in a particular direction or along a clearly defined path. The library is a flexible space that makes space for its users’ interests, but, not having anything in mind to do, I was a bit lost for a while.

What brought me around, after giving up trying to “get” the building and just indulging in some pleasant and productive wandering, was discovering all the little details of the building. I fell in love with the carved wood floor of the lower entrance area—an entire floor surface made to resemble printer’s wood blocks grouped together to spell out

words in many languages. So lovely. I'm used to public buildings that are pragmatic and utilitarian (read: ugly), that to find this building full of gratuitous beauty was one of the pleasures of my time in the library.

M.O.: I love that you gave up trying to “get” the building. I feel like a lot of us as dramaturgs are constantly having similar conversations with audience members—encouraging them to stop trying to make sense of everything for a minute and just experience, notice what they are feeling, and then see how that lands with them. Oh that sounds so hippie-dippy. But I just remember having that exact conversation with so many people when we were doing Jordan Harrison's *Finn in the Underworld*. Even some of the super-savvy among us were having trouble with the non-traditional structure of the play.



Top: View of the “Living Room” from one floor above.

Bottom: The all red second floor of the Seattle Public Library.

photos: Shelley Orr

There's something very pleasing to me that non-traditional structure in a building can elicit similar responses, where we are stretched and encouraged to examine what we think is supposed to be happening.

D.J.: The building is full of structures like that, structures that make you pause and think, How does this fit in? Or, What does this do? Or, Why is this entire floor bright red? One of the features of the building that struck me was the theatre that descends like a flight of stairs from the upper entrance level down towards the lower level. A couple of issues of *Review* ago, I wrote a piece about Koolhaas's design for the Prada “Epicenter” store in New York City; that store has a lovely wooden theatre right in the middle. On a larger scale, the theatre in the library (auditorium, really) has a quite similar structure to that of the theatre in Prada SoHo: the theatre is accessed from behind by a flight of stairs that is integrated into the seating area, which is itself tiered like steps; the theatre structure occupies a central part of the building, cutting through and unifying floors by creating an open central volume. A kind of lovely point of reference between the two buildings.

And then there's the Book Spiral, which is just plain cool. And I have to say, I found it easy to find books. The library's computer search engine was cumbersome; but once I had a reference number, getting around the library was simple, and the staff members were helpful and efficient. The computerized shelving and retrieval system was pretty impressive, and worked well the one time I requested a book from storage. Nice to see that this great big structure actually accomplishes the basic tasks it was built to perform.

M.O.: Yes, that is nice. It would indeed be unfortunate if a library did not help one gather information. But I was most taken by the fact that those basic tasks seem to be expanded in this library, as opposed to others. For example, there is so much room for art in the building. You touched on it before when you talked about that gorgeous wooden floor, but even beyond the amazing visual “extras,” there was the fabulous theatre for live performances and lectures, and my favorite of all—rooms you can reserve for practicing music. Some have instruments in them—you can go to the library and play the piano, which would have vastly improved apartment living for me, let me tell you. It's this inclusion of art in the life of the library that I find particularly forward-thinking and potentially transformative for the city, if it can truly function as a free, public cultural center for everyone.

D.J.: The art in the library, and the beauty of the library itself are clearly part of the public agenda that brought about the library. But this agenda goes to the questions that remain unanswered for me regarding the social uses of the library—the sort of thing that my touristic visit cannot measure because my time there was so fleeting. I'd like to know more about the experience of the building by some of the members of the community that the library seeks to serve: the homeless; children and teens; the handicapped; researchers. Other questions linger: Has library use increased? How has the library affected the economics of the neighborhood? Of Seattle as a whole? I suppose that like all civic monuments, the answers to these questions and the overall value of the structure—after the initial “Wow” effect—must be determined over time.

DRAMATURGY AS CATALYST: A ROCKIES DRAMATURG DRIVEN PROJECT

by Amy Jensen

with contributions from David Dynak

As a regional representative aware of the diverse, engaging new work being done in the Rockies (Colorado, Utah and Wyoming), I saw this dramaturg-driven project as a catalyst to put together an event that would highlight that work and explore issues of theatre and community. What I did not anticipate was that in working with Professor David Dynak and the University of Utah, how large a role the community could play, and how this event would be a catalyst for an exciting future.

In my initial proposal, I envisioned including panel discussions on new work and the community, and a workshop for participants that would teach skills and techniques to create new work, ideally with theatre artist Michael Rohd, of Oregon's Sojourn Theatre. Dynak, Associate Dean of the University of Utah's College of Fine Arts and freelance dramaturg, was immediately supportive and wrote grants that funded that a three-day Rohd residency—at no cost to participants.

The event, *Our Stories, Our Stage: Engaging Our Communities in Performance*, took place February 27, 28, and March 1, 2006, on the University of Utah campus in Salt Lake City. Rohd led a series of sessions comprised not only of theatre artists but members of the

community at large: educators, counselors, social workers, and activists that Dynak and his colleague Terri Martin had invited from across the Salt Lake Valley. The sessions were incredibly charged, as Hill Air Force Base mediators, ministers, psychiatrists, arts educators, faculty from diverse disciplines, graduate and undergraduate dance, theatre, and film students explored image and story together. The participants found Rohd's ability to model facilitation through exercises, games, and techniques both accessible and immediately

"I have valued theater as revolutionary, but hadn't seen such potent use of it before."

—participant, on learning more about Rohd's work with Sojourn Theatre

applicable. Several have already put to use these activities in their own work with ESL students, in conflict-resolution with teens, in rehearsals for upcoming productions, and in their development of site-specific performances addressing pressing civic issues.

The sessions introduced participants not only to Rohd's work, but also served as the engine that drove further discussions on the role of new work in building community, as highlighted in a lively panel with:

- Julie Jensen (Resident Playwright, Salt Lake Acting Company),
- Mike Dorrell (Dramaturg, Salt Lake Acting Company),
- Eric Samuelsen (Playwright and Associate Professor, Brigham Young University),
- Kevin Doyle (Associate Professor, Utah State University),
- Roger Bennington (Artistic Director, Tooth & Nail Theatre).

Panelists discussed ways in which they are creating new work with community, such as Bennington's theatre project, *Fabulocity*, a show by and about gay teens. Samuelsen challenged attendees to candidly discuss theatre's lack of dialogue about or response to the highly-charged religious divide in Utah. Panelists and participants responded with several ideas. Charles L. Metten, New American Playwrights Project Director at the Utah Shakespearean Festival asked panelists and participants to submit new work to him. Metten found the session "...practical and inspirational, with new ideas on community and collaboration for my work with NAPP at USF."

A future *LMDA Review* may report back on the proposed Utah Project that took flight towards the end of the last session. Drawing inspiration from Sojourn Theatre's provocative Education Project, several theatre companies agreed in concept to collaborate on a new play about Utah, involving a host of diverse community members. The production would be mounted at several venues, as well as toured to rural and remote regions of the state.



Top: Workshop Leader **Michael Rohd** (center) talks with panelists Bennington and Jensen.

Bottom: Rohd (center) facilitates discussion of poses in a tableaux.

AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS AND PLAYWRITING

by Maxine Kern

In the United States, history and tradition is always on shaky ground. Our history is young, having been around as US based Americans for only 329 years. But American culture is less about being young than it is about the process of becoming an American. Americans are made up of people who have come to US shores from elsewhere with their native traditions in their deepest mind, yet within a generation, those traditions have become a dim memory as people embrace a new and modern freedom of choice without roots. In theater writing and performance, traditions are similarly on shaky ground.

The earliest colonial American Theater was based upon English traditions. English actors and actor managers performed their theater in the US when their own theaters closed most theater doors in an effort to control this dangerous platform for dissent. While American Theatre is given credit for traditions of Realism and Naturalism, this tradition is similarly adopted from both the Moscow Art Theater which visited the USA in the early 1900's, and from the Scandinavian theater of Henrik Ibsen, observed by theater artists visiting abroad around the same time. American minstrelsy, melodrama, vaudeville and musicals were refined, developed and given excitement and new life by American theater but their deep cultural origins arose from communities in Africa, Britain and Europe. Traditions do not really exist in American theater as deeply conceived and invented forms coming from a communal expression and ritual of identity and roots.

In the modern world of theater, given the Theater of the Absurd and the Theater of Imagery and Poetic Realism it is most interesting to look at the dramaturgy of invention for playwrights within these forms. In the United States, rather than breaking apart from a deeply sourced location of communal existence and identity, a writer tends to identify with her particular connection to her society and be ironic, playful, inventive and imaginative in writing about alternate realities based upon the dreams, needs and goals of her everyman. This everyman, as the locus of one's own identity, is an individual acting from within or from outside one's society. The playwriting of Deb Margolin, from her writings within the Absurdist aesthetic with the radical feminist theater group, Split Britches to her writing as a solo playwright in her Joseph Kesserling Award winning play *Three Seconds in the Key*, exemplifies an American theater playwriting journey based upon invention, imagination and hopeful reclamation by the individual everyman and woman.

Deb Margolin, NYC-based Playwright/Performer: Upholding the Dramatist's Authority in her journey from Traditional Theatre to Theater of the Absurd, and finally to a Theater of Images and Magical Realism.

In a book she edited of Deb Margolin's performance pieces, entitled *Of All the Nerve*, Lynda Hart describes Deb Margolin as an artist who, in effect, "cries theater in a crowded fire." Margolin herself describes the theater as her place of safety; a locus from which she can honestly and with a fully engaged and firing nervous system speak about the unspeakable. Death, desire, passion and tenderness are among the unspeakables that get performed and spoken about in Deb Margolin's pieces. She has been writing and performing her

pieces since the mid 80's. First for Split Britches, a theater company of three of which she was a founding member and a resident writer. (Split Britches is a Theater of the Absurd performing group that will most often deconstruct works by traditional playwrights and scenarios by mainstream thinkers.) While writing for Split Britches for example, Margolin wrote several monologues for their production of *Belle Reprieve* a Lesbian/Feminist takeoff on Tennessee Williams's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She also wrote the dialogue and much of the script for their rendition of Louisa May Alcott's more traditional work entitled *Little Women*.

Split Britches with Deb Margolin as its scriptwriter and as a performer went on to create five pieces in repertory. As a writer and performer, Margolin expanded the lens of her focus on personal imagery to a writing that included the collective visions of the three company members who collaborated in a very particular way to create their collective, political and radical feminist stories. The group worked first through a process of creating lists based upon the individual actors' desires for reclamation in political, social and spiritual territories. In her book about the Split Britches Company, Sue Ellen Case describes a process that involves the company in workshop and rehearsal. The basis of this work involved an awareness of bipolar splits in their perception of those in the world who they might love as well as hate. It also consisted of writing out lists of questions about what they always wanted to do on stage, social issues occupying their attention at this time, as well as stories they'd like to tell. Margolin recalls making these lists as it was her job to assimilate the various outcomes of these lists into the scripts that the company would rehearse, shape and perform.

In order to reclaim their histories and possibilities for their lives, the story was always a tale told about opposites and contradictions. Characters would often be portrayed as themselves as well as celebrities who represented their opposites. Deb would write about an Orthodox Jewish man who thanks God each morning that he is not a woman and dress the man in pointed red dancing shoes along with his traditional garb. While the issues that they dealt with were serious and hurtful, as in the misogyny of her character, they used vaudeville



Maxine Kern and a fellow conference participant in Cairo. (Note that Maxine is proudly wearing her 2005 LMDA Conference T-shirt).

and their desire to perform these people to bring humor and layers of flexibility in perception of layers of persona and character to overcome something in these characters that was personally painful.

In the writings post-Split Britches, the dramatist returned to her perception of the world through a single lens. This perception now however much expanded by her maturity, and by the techniques she'd employed to create images of oppositions and contradictions, layering characters and their situations as she developed her performance pieces. Rather than reclaiming characters she might love and hate, she became these characters and reclaimed her voice as the narrator of her work.

In her piece *Of All the Nerve* from the anthology and series of the same name, and in an extended imaginative metaphor that opens the piece, the narrator talks to her ashtray calling it by the name of mother. Exploring themes of loneliness in modern times, she also riffs on elements of modern times and on her sense of safety in the theater compared to a sense of danger in the real world. She humorously tells the tale of the Jazz Performer who is fired for missing the beat. The images are vibrant. The dangers of our world are negotiated between the performer and the audience as her thoughts and her voice reach out to them to see and feel what she has seen and felt.

In her second piece, *970-Debb*, the narrator takes on the world of women concerning the beauty myth. Neutralizing the seduction of the male gaze the narrator imagines a sexy fairy shaped like an N entering a flirting male's nostril turning his flirtation into a sneeze.

Exiting and entering the narrator's world through images, imaginative transformation and from within the emotional locus of a dramatist in communication with the audience, this writer is moving from an absurd theater based upon opposites to opposition and obstacles that can be transformed through poetic realism and magical iconic imagery.

In *Gestation*, another piece in her series, Margolin, now pregnant and very much changed in shape, invites the audience to the party of gestation. In *Of Mice, Bugs and Women*, we hear from the character who has been axed from the writer's novel. Continuing with the theme of extermination and elimination of rejected others, the writer brings up images of wasteland of cities where swamps are turned into outlet stores and libraries where silence once featured for a library dweller, now supplies non-stop musak. Asking the audience to join into her search for clues about "these people who commit daily casual acts of violence", the narrator and writer delve into the depths of the people who commit these acts in her community, expanding her and her audience's awareness of the underlying exigencies and layers of persona that make the who that is operating as these offending characters, these exterminators.

This technique and dynamic of identifying ones opposite, even one's nemesis and becoming that character is a deliberate act on the part of the writer to find out and perhaps demystify the power of this other and the society of this other. By becoming the critic in her piece entitled *Critical Mass* the narrator does more than illustrate and state that the critic is somehow using language to substitute for their inability as people to touch and embrace. But the critic as a patronizing acquaintance in her community, becomes a character in this play with her own sketch in the supermarket, "The Grand Union," where we experience the life of this woman and the suppressed rage that lives closely under the patronizing and self-styled critical woman's skin. When I asked Deb Margolin if she thought that *Critical Mass* was a play as it had quite a bit of dialogue Deb replied that all her perform-

ance writings were plays. That we are none of us one person but that we are all several people and consequently capable of transformation.

Margolin is now writing plays for herself and for others in which her style has shifted significantly from an absurdist perspective and deconstruction of more traditional works to an imaginative and poetic realism, most prominent in works such as *Three Seconds in the Key* and *Index to Idioms*. In both full-length theater pieces, a female protagonist tells the story of her journey as both a woman and a mother. The ordinary daily events of a mother and son in *Three Seconds in the Key* have been heightened by the complications of the mother's contraction of Hodgkin's disease. In order to find her strength to both battle this disease and to continue to raise her son in a loving and healthy manner, she becomes a basketball buddy, huddled together with her son on a couch in their living room watching basketball in front of their TV. The living room expands magically as the mother invites us into her private reveries and memories of her battles with disease, including as well our viewing of the nature of her family's reactions as she faces her struggle for life and her fear for her death. The living room continues to expand magically when a basketball star emerges from the TV and becomes her personal companion and semi-romantic partner. As the play progresses, Jewish-American Mother and the African American basketball star, together find the motivation and the spirit they need to face their individual demons and personal revelations.

The writer's desire for a formalism that would enable her to create voices that she had to imagine rather than overhear, is a movement from the reclaiming of voices and characters within a theatre of the absurd to a theater of images and magical realism. By imagining the deepest sound and quality of language that is spoken by a character that finds his or herself compelled to pursue an action within a dramatic circumstance, the writer is recreating reality within the magical sphere of the space called theater.

Finally I asked Deb Margolin to speak about her most recent theater piece and about the evolution of her writing of *Index to Idioms* and how the process might have differed and how might have been similar to the two previous plays.

Deb Margolin: *Index to Idioms* began as a novel; I thought I was writing a novel that took place on the collapsible boundary between memoir and fiction. I was finally asked to perform at an evening where someone had cancelled, and when I agreed to do so, without knowing what to perform, I decided to take some of these pieces, which were really conceived for the page, and embody them on the stage. I like to say that when my illiterate body met this "literary" text, something very explosive happened, something very sexy; the place where the human body meets the word is a dark alley where all sorts of illicit, magnificent things take place, where some profound education of body and spirit, from which there is no return, transpires, and this definitely happened to me. It was a leap of faith, then, to place a bunch of these emotional and verbal snapshots on the stage, trusting in this new form of theater in the extreme, this form of theater where nothing "happens" in the traditional sense, but where an emotion is an event, where a word or a glance is inherently dramatic; *Index to Idioms* was, in a way, a return to the beginning, the performance artist's storytelling beginning, with all kinds of modern technology, both verbally and physically, at my command. The risk, and reward, was in insisting on this piece as Theater. And I believe it is, in the deepest sense.