LMDA Newsletters: Canada and the United States

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LMDA New & Noteworthy, June 2020

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Hello, Everyone!

I hope this newsletter finds you well. Our world and spaces are still in turmoil and I have to admit that it still weighs heavily on me that we have so much to do in regards to Anti-Racism while also acknowledging that so many of us are out of paid employment. I have faith that we will find our way through this time and figure out how to take care of ourselves and each other while fighting the good fight.

The 2020 LMDA conference was such an incredible time. Per the usual, I did not get to enjoy much of it as I would have liked as I was busy working with Brenda and the rest of the conference team to make sure things went as smoothly as possible. Yet, I do have some highlights from the conference that I would love to share. The Dramaturging the Phoenix panel was such an amazing way to kick off the synchronous part of the conference. I think the questions and provocations that were found in those sessions were timely and relevant. You can find the link to that session in the Conference Hub and on HowlRound. As we move forward into whatever the new normal is for theatre, I hope we are taking the questions from this panel with us to make sure that we don’t go back to normal. Normal was not working for us and I think our role as questioners necessitates that we use our voices and platforms to actively advocate that theatre must be different on the other side of this pandemic.

After that, the rest of the conference was a blur. What I distinctly remember is watching Twitter and the conversations being had as a result of the conference. I enjoyed finding out
how the conference was going and the conversations it sparked. I also love that the conversations moved from these organized sessions into the online conference bars. It makes me hopeful that the future of theatre, at the very least from a dramaturgical perspective, is interested in committing to anti-racist work and making our dramaturgical spaces more racially and ethnically diverse.

I hope that you enjoyed the conference. The content from the conference is still available through the end of August for you to watch. I am so thankful for Brenda Munoz, Lourdes Guzman, and Lindsey Barr’s help in making this virtual conference run as it did during those (virtually) action packed days. I am also thankful and humbled by the graciousness of the rest of the conference team (Brian, Ken, Bryan, Jeremy, and Susanna) and the volunteers who helped us reframe the conference on short notice. Most of all, I am thankful for everyone who shared their thoughts and expertise during the asynchronous and synchronous aspects of the conference. The amazing and careful ways we think about our craft makes my heart sing.

See you in Mexico City (fingers crossed) in 2021!

Best,
Martine Kei Green-Rogers, Past-President

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**ECD Travel Grant Recipients**

**Responses from LMDA#2020**

Manuela Sosa:
My first LMDA conference was unlike any other in history. After kicking myself for not making the trip to Chicago last year, there’s no way I was going to miss the first one held in Latin America, in one of the most amazing cities in the world.

Although the virtual conference had way fewer tequila-fueled dramaturgical debates than I expected, it did ignite my passions in other ways. I was unprepared for the joy I’d feel simply from hearing others discuss theatre in my mother tongue. Having grown up in the US and Canada, the vocabulary lesson alone was impactful. I had no idea what to call a dramaturg in Spanish! This has already sparked many thoughts in my trilingual brain around the effect of language on how we view and express
our artistic identities.

I would prefer to have had these realizations in person, while on the hunt for tacos at three in the morning, but this year’s virtual gathering had its own unique highlights for me. I randomly reunited with friends from my theatre community in New York and watched my dear friend and “pioneer dramaturg” prove herself wrong. I also enjoyed watching theatre artists who are used to liveness, to hearing people laugh and cry in the flesh now grappling with new tech challenges and doing so with grace. “Can you guys hear me?” I heard a lot of you, and it was a pleasure to listen, not only to your stories but to the birds of Mexico City, and the sounds of Norwegian book titles. I will paraphrase Rocío Galicia who put it beautifully in her talk “Dramaturgismo en el contexto de lo hiper”: we are not physically together, yet we are opening the door to our intimate spaces, to our different worlds, to our corazones.

Until next year—nos vemos en el bar!

**Sarah Kiker:**

I’m grateful to have been awarded one of the ECD grants this year, even though we weren’t able to meet all together in Mexico City. As someone who is essentially new to this field, it was immensely valuable for me to meet all of you, hear about your work, and simply share a space with other dramaturgs and literary managers.

I initially discovered the field about midway through my sophomore year of college when I met a dramaturg for the first time. As he described his job to me, I thought “oh, that’s exactly what I need to be doing” but I didn’t know any other dramaturgs. My university had nothing close to a dramaturgy program, so I cobbled one together. After a year teaching English Language Arts to 5th graders in Phoenix, I landed the dramaturgy apprenticeship with Olney Theatre Center in Maryland.

Something unique about my apprenticeship is that I’m the only person on staff with the word “dramaturg” in their title. My mentors of course all practice dramaturgy and have taught me so much, but up until the conference, I could count on one hand the number of dramaturgs I knew personally. Meeting everyone at the conference bars and regional lunch was meaningful to me because I feel more connected to this world than ever before. Thank you for that opportunity.
Liam E. Gibbs:
Though I’ve been an LMDA member for a few years, I have not previously been able to attend the conference, so I’m glad I was able to gather virtually with the community this year. I found the digital transformation of the conference especially engaging: I took in asynchronous content on my own time and at my own pace, engaged with dynamic conversations in the chat box during panels and discussions, and downloaded recommended plays as they were being featured!

One of my favorite sessions focused on rebuilding the New Play Exchange for dramaturgs. I’m an avid NPX user with hundreds of scripts on my desktop waiting to be read, and I’m excited to see how the platform will expand over the next few years. This session featured the liveliest chat of the weekend, with illuminating discussions about what it means to be a dramaturg, the value of our work, how we can better advocate for ourselves, and how NPX can support us. The conversation encapsulated what I loved most about the conference: dramaturgs of all specialties and career stages collaborating and imagining how we can build a better practice and industry.

I’ll admit, with theatre production halted nationwide for the past three months as well as the near future, and multiple humanitarian crises threatening and taking lives, I had mixed feelings about spending so much time thinking about theatre. But ultimately, I appreciated the opportunity to take a pause with fellow dramaturgs and dream up a better dramaturgical practice, theatre industry, and world together. From establishing anti-racist rehearsal rooms and exploding the canon to advocating for more equitable working practices and forging social change in our communities, I left this conference feeling so excited about the possibilities for the future of our field.

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**Dramaturgy the Phoenix**

What are the Dramaturging the Phoenix essays? They are views on dramaturgy from the floor, from a window, from a forest, from a narrow sidewalk and more. Views on classical literature and past plagues. Views from an audience on an unexpected closing night – and new views of what an audience means now. Views on silence and the meaningfulness of rest, and reminders that we need time and space to fuel the Imagination. Views on commercial and regional theatres – as well as what community theatre should mean. [Discover and discuss!](#)
Watch the session from the conference [here](#)!

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**Solomon Sir Jones Films**

From [YaleNews](#): "The Rev. Solomon Sir Jones recorded this 1925 Juneteenth parade in Texas. A collection of his films, 29 in all, held by Yale’s Beinecke Library, provides a rich record of African-American life in the 1920s. [The full collection](#) has been digitized for free, public viewing.

Juneteenth is the holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States and celebrating the freedom of African Americans. The date references June 19, 1865 — the day Major General Gordon Granger of the U.S. Army arrived in Galveston, Texas, to enforce the more than two-and-a-half-year-old Emancipation Proclamation. Many Texan enslavers had defied it, continuing to hold enslaved people captive for years after they’d been legally freed. As of June 2020, Juneteenth is recognized as a state holiday or special day of observance in 48 of the 50 U.S. states. For decades, activists have been advocating for Juneteenth to become a national holiday."

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**Contribute to the Newsletter!**

Have an idea, process, approach, etc. you'd like to share with the LMDA? Pitch your piece for the next LMDA Newsletter. Our next newsletter will be published September 2020!

Email communications@lmda.org.

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Your Dramaturgy Ad Here!

We’re reserving this high-value newsletter real estate for our Institutional Members. Do you have a job posting you want our readers to see, an M.F.A. program looking for a well-qualified applicant pool, or a festival you want to make sure smart dramaturgs have on their radar? This is the place for it! Institutional Memberships are only $200, and they come with four individual member profiles for your organization to divvy out as you see fit.

Let your organizational leadership know that we’d love them to join the LMDA party!

Pandemic Response: Resources for Artists

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