New & Noteworthy, April 2019

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Dramaturgy and directing found me. I started as an actor, but there has always been an organic conversation between directing and dramaturgy in my work. In 2000, I directed *Henry IV, Part I* with GreenStage in Seattle. That’s when I found my artistic voice. I love the rehearsal process; the collaboration and camaraderie, the trial and error, the excitement that comes with discovery, the evolution of story and character. I never really enjoyed performing. Directing was a natural fit. Over the next 10 years I directed classical work and new plays. In 2011, an artistic director paired me up with a playwright who was adapting Sophocles’ *Ajax*. After our first conversation, the playwright said how glad he was to work with a director who was also a dramaturg. That’s when it clicked for me. I’d been dramaturging for years in my approach as a director. I just hadn’t called it that.

How do you see the roles overlapping?
My work as a dramaturg has made me a better director, and vice versa. Having a strong dramaturgical foundation supports every directorial choice in service of the play. My work as a director allows me to visualize a script as it develops. It’s not just director-dramaturgs who embody this hybrid artistic approach. The internet and mobile devices have democratized dramaturgy. Everyone in the rehearsal room—every actor, designer, and stage manager—has access to a host of information that feeds the artistic process.

You've had the opportunity to work on a series of Shakespeare plays. What do you enjoy most about the directorial work on Shakespeare's play specifically the Henry's?

Working on Shakespeare demands a high level of prep work but it pays off tenfold. Directing *Henry IV (I and II)* and *Henry V* are highlights of my career. They’re some of the most intelligent, heartbreaking, funny plays of his (or any) canon. Each play looks at the politics around what it means to be a good leader and the affect of war on a country, balanced so beautifully by the humanity of the personal relationships. What made it such a joyful experience was the company of actors and designers who returned year after year to tell the story. It was unique at the time to bring so many artists back together; particularly on a non-union theatre's budget. Even today, people move from company to company so quickly that it’s almost impossible to find an artistic home as a freelance artist. Our collective desire to keep coming back is a testament to that incredible group of artists and the story we were telling. I’d love to find that again.

In addition to your Shakespeare expertise, you also have new play experience. What do you like most about working on new plays?

There’s an immediacy and relevancy inherent in new plays that’s exhilarating. Today's playwrights are experimenting with form and language and challenging the status quo with plays that represent the 21st century with 21st century voices. New plays explore today's socio-political issues, which makes for meaty conversations in the rehearsal room, with the audience, and with community partners. Directing Sadie Hasler’s *Pramkicker* for Taffety Punk in D.C. during the Supreme Court nominee confirmation hearings created an energy only theatre can capture. *Pramkicker* puts the human side of the decision to have a child—which often gets lost in the political debate—center stage.
You say that your work often centers on shifting and broadening perspectives on the world -- what role do dramaturgs play in that process?

Theatre gives us the opportunity to share another person’s experience, both through the diversity of the stories we tell and the audiences we bring together. Dramaturgs are fortunate to touch on script development, rehearsal, community partnerships, and audience engagement. We’re the ones best suited to connect the audience to the rehearsal process without disturbing that safe space or revealing too much of the magic of a play. Being able to move between those different groups creates a bridge, which can shift someone’s perspective and send ripples out into the community. We need more bridge builders.

Linda Lombardi is a director and dramaturg attracted to work that shifts our perspective and broadens our understanding of the world. Directing credits include Perfect Arrangement (world premiere); Pramkicker (DC premiere); Henry IV, Part I; Henry IV, Part II; Henry V; Domestic Animals; Ajax; and The White Devil. Production dramaturgy credits include Building the Wall, All the Way, Disgraced, and Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. Locally, she has worked with Taffety Punk Theatre Company, Folger Theatre, Studio Theatre, Mosaic Theater Company, Forum Theatre, Longacre Lea, Factory 449, Theater Alliance, Catholic University of America, and Source Festival. A member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation’s 2017-18 Observership class and Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, she is a nominator for The Kilroy List, a member of the artistic council for the Eugene O’Neil Theater Center, and a script reader for Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Great Plains Theatre Conference, and Bay Area Playwrights Festival.

(Photo 1: Headshot by Jendayi Asha Creative. Photo 2: Jason Marr in GreenStage’s...
Comedian and Dramaturg // Kate Langsdorf

I work as a stand-up and as a sketch comedy writer, and by “work” I mean that I one time got a $50 gift card and that I sometimes get a ticket good for one free drink at the bar after my set. I’m a bit surprised that there aren’t more dramaturgs who do stand-up comedy. Judith Shelton, an excellent teacher, says that all you need to do stand-up is a microphone and a point of view. No one has more and better-researched opinions than dramaturgs and literary managers. Here’s a wee rundown of how my background in dramaturgy shapes my sketch and stand-up comedy.

This month, I completed the sketch program at UCB. (I got a diploma and everything! It was signed by Amy Poehler! Digitally signed. She doesn’t know who I am. But neither did the president of Cal State Long Beach, so I take back all of my downplaying of this accomplishment. Amy Poehler signed my diploma; look upon my sketch comedy, ye mighty, and despair!) Each sketch is basically a 4-minute play. Y’all have seen Saturday Night Live. You get it. For my grad show, one sketch was a First Lady Cosplayers Convention. The research that went into vendor-booth names alone is enough to fill a study guide. Not every sketch needs research -- As a general rule, the stupider the better. But the pieces that tickle me just so dive deep. My dramaturgy background drives me to add layers to create a consistent and well-researched world.

How much time did I spend re-writing the lyrics Billy Joel’s “We Didn’t Start the Fire” in its entirety to line up with the January 22, 2019 news cycle? More than was warranted for a joke that expired after two open mics. But I tweeted the whole thing and an editor from Politico hailed it as “kinda funny,” so I feel that I’ve unlocked a new level of comic-dramaturgy self-actualization.
In topical bits like this, or like in the opening monologues for late-night TV shows, the “text” you’re working with is everything in the news. Your job is to connect the factual headline with a bigger truth. The funny thing to me about the “We Didn’t Start the Fire” bit is that there was enough news in one day to cover a century’s worth of headlines. It’s the whole song. In an open mic, the audience thinks the joke’s over like 8 times before it actually ends. And because every day has been like this since 2016, there are too many newsworthy items on a given day for anyone to process. People who pay attention to the news (as most dramaturgs do) are deeply overwhelmed. An elaborate Billy Joel joke takes the edge off for three-and-a-half minutes while the audience is assured that it’s not just them: Today was a lot.

Comedy connects people to each other so that we’re all a little less alone out there. The more specific the joke, the more relatable people find it. To put it in theatre education terms, comics facilitate the “text-to-text, text-to-world, and text-to-self” connections.

TL;DR: Comedy is just getting on stage and giving a study guide to everything happening in the world. If you ever want to give it a try, there are open mics in every major city in America. Let me know when you’ll be there so I can come laugh at your well-researched jokes.

The Kennedy Center
New Play Dramaturgy Intensive 2019
This was the Year of the 50th Anniversary of the Kennedy Center
American College Theater Festival's Birth!

2019 Kennedy Center Dramaturgy Fellows
(Back row let to right)
Rebecca Weaver, Jacksonville State University
Noah Ezell, College of Charleston
Easton Benson, Central Washington University
Devon Hayakawa, Ball State University

"The Guardians of Dramaturgy on the Potomac"
(Front row left to right)
Mark Bly
Anne Morgan

Upcoming Regional Events
Events organized alphabetically by region. Scroll down for details. Also, make sure to join the Facebook pages of the region(s) in which you live and work. That way, you will receive updated information: https://lmda.org/map.

-CANADA
LMDA Canada online Happy Hour with Special Guest Laurel Green, discussing the many hats she wears (Dramaturg/Director/Producer), date and time TBA. Stay tuned for details!

-MID-ATLANTIC
A panel conversation on civic dramaturgy in late-spring 2019. Stay tuned for details! Contact Hannah Ratner if you’d like to volunteer to assist with this event: midatlantic@lmda.org

-NEW YORK
Speed-networking event in NYC coming May 2019! Speed-networking applies the concept of speed-dating to your professional life, resulting in a rapid-fire networking session where you can meet some of the greatest dramaturgical minds in NYC! Participants will rotate through a room of dramaturgs from all backgrounds and levels of experiences. You will have 7 minutes per person to make a fast impression. Get your business cards and elevator pitch ready to make some speedy introductions! Stay tuned for details!

-NORTHEAST
A panel on socially conscious season planning in the late-spring 2019. Stay tuned for details! Contact Talya Kingston if you’d like to volunteer to assist with this event: northeast@lmda.org

*Many of our events come from ideas suggested by members like you! Please send us your ideas: https://lmda.org/map*

Regional questions? Reach out to the VP of Regional Activity Jacqueline Goldfinger (regional@lmda.org).

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!

Join us in Chicago for #LMDA19
June 20-22, 2019

Registration is now open!
Go to lmda.org/conference to register today!

The 2019 LMDA Conference in Chicago is looking for volunteers! Volunteers are crucial in the success of our annual conference, and we would not be able to produce our events without their generous support.

If you are interested in volunteering for the conference, please find additional information and the application form HERE.

CALL FOR TRANSLATORS

As we look ahead to #LMDA20 (in Mexico City!), we could use help with a few things - 1) LMDA members who can translate the call for the 2019 and 2020 conference into Spanish/Portuguese, 2) Names/contact information for translators in Mexico City 3) Leads on potential artists to connect with in Mexico and the surrounding area.

Please send any leads to Martine (president@lmda.org).

Interested in contributing to the next newsletter? Have content ideas?
E-mail communications@lmda.org.

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