

2015

LMDA Conference GE Lessing Award, 2015

Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas

Beth Bickers

Presentation of Lessing Award by Beth Bickers

There are easily twenty people who could have given this speech, but I've chosen to have one very selfish moment and to do it myself.

There is a woman who expresses great admiration for the generations who have gone before her and left an enormous impact on the theatre community. But I would ask, did *they* watch Bruce Springsteen's ass as he sang standing on a table? I don't think so. Did *they* get Kevin Spacey fired from a supply closet? I don't think so.

Artists like Laura Eason, David Grimm, David Adjmi, Rob Askins, Taylor Mac, Daniel Alexander Jones, Marcus Gardley and Bill Rauch have all nestled in her extraordinary hands as they have built careers. She has challenged them to be the bravest artists they can be. She has challenged them to be the most honorable human beings they can be. And everybody is better for it. She was never less demanding of herself. I think she maybe thinks she hasn't given enough, challenged enough, tackled enough, fixed enough, whether it's challenging the city on its political policies or challenging a writer on their bravery in their approach to a play. So it feels incredibly right on this evening in this room full of people who understand better than any other room of people tonight what it means to identify as a dramaturg and a defender of the artists we are and the artists around us. So I'm going to switch voices and share some thoughts from playwrights who know Morgan well.

Tom Gibbons writes:

"She was my agent for many years, but I've never found out certain things about her. How old is she? Where does she live? What planet is she from? During one of our first meetings, probing for some insight, I asked her if she was married. She told me she had married a man many years before so he could obtain his green card. Her expression grew thoughtful, and after a moment she added, 'Actually, I might *still* be married to him.'

What I quickly realized---what she's celebrated for---is her preternatural dramaturgical astuteness. Once she came to a preview performance of one of my plays at InterAct Theatre in Philadelphia. For several months I'd been wrestling with the ending of Act One, with only partial success. It worked, but it didn't quite click. I sat beside her in the last row, nervously awaiting her reaction. The moment the intermission lights came up, she turned to me and said, 'You should change *this*.' And suddenly, to my mingled elation and chagrin, everything clicked beautifully."

Naomi Iizuka writes:

"She is a force of nature. She's fierce and brilliant and brave. She's a truth teller, a visionary, an alchemist, and a pioneer. She's also a warrior queen, when she needs to be. I am in awe of her. She makes extraordinary things happen. I'm pretty certain she has super powers. She has been a muse and an inspiration to me for many years, as she has been for countless others. I'm so happy that she's being honored today. She deserves it mightily. She is the reason why many of us are here doing what we do. Keep leading the way! And we will all follow!"

And David Adjmi asked me to read this:

“In 2006, I’d been suffering from a chronic illness no one could diagnose. I had no money, I couldn’t afford an apartment, I was living with my mother. She said, let me take you out for sushi. We had dinner in the east village. She had her uni with quail eggs. She ate fried shrimp heads. She was in heaven. As we were leaving the restaurant I started sobbing. I said, ‘I walk these streets every day, and I feel like I’m a ghost. I’m sick, and I’m just watching all these people from the outside.’ She stopped me, she held my face in her hands. She said, ‘No. You are on the inside, and these people are all on the outside.’ And because she could see me that way, I could see myself through the largesse of that vision. There are great dramaturgs, but what makes her so incredibly special is her expansiveness of vision. She can see into the fragile nucleus of something. She can, to quote Arnold Schoenberg, “see through walls.” In the mobius strip of her mind an outside can be turned into an inside. Her acts of dramaturgy aren’t just for plays, they are for human lives. That’s what makes her great, in my eyes.”

Her acts of dramaturgy aren’t just for plays, they are for human lives. Perfectly said.

Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas is thrilled to present the GE Lessing Award for career achievement to Morgan Jenness.