1-2021

LMDA New and Noteworthy, January 2021

Emily DeDakis
Nakissa Etemad
Jeanne Tiehen

Follow this and additional works at: https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/lmdanewsletter
Nakissa Etemad: New Associate Artistic Director at Marin Theatre Co. - & proud dramaturg

In conversation with LMDA member Emily DeDakis

I interviewed Nakissa on her 47th day on the job. We first met through LMDA’s Mentor Match in 2015, and became fast friends and close colleagues. Read more about Nakissa and her new position in American Theatre magazine.

It’s so good to talk to you about this! It’s such an exciting job for you - and for dramaturgy.

This is a new position at Marin Theatre Company. I’m really proud and happy that they’ve chosen a dramaturg for this position that’s more commonly held by directors. I think it shows their belief in new work and playwriting. It’s also significant and meaningful to have a dramaturg and a literary mind in a leadership position at a theatre company. [Dramaturgs] always think from multiple perspectives and we formulate diverse and just ways of using language to bridge different points of view. We are diplomacy creatures. And what better leaders to cultivate a collaborative and inspiring environment?

What’s your work history been to this point? It’s interesting to map that trajectory.

I’ve been fortunate in my career to have been both a staff dramaturg and a freelancer, and to have worked on both coasts of the U.S. In the first half of my career, everything fell into
I had a mentor, Todd Salovey at San Diego Rep, who told me I'd be a good dramaturg, brought me in as a literary intern, and made me the dramaturg on the first show he ever directed there. I was doing professional world premieres while I was still in school, first as an undergrad and then as an MFA dramaturg at UCSD. I spent the first half of my career in regional theatres [San Diego Rep, San Jose Rep and The Wilma Theater] — and then fell in love and moved to England. So I had a two-and-a-half-year hiatus where I went to Le Cordon Bleu cooking school and planned my wedding long-distance. I got into the London theatre scene by watching it [ — and hanging with Tom Stoppard when Blanka Zizka visited!]. And when we got back from England, the second half of my career was freelance, primarily as a dramaturg. I got to be more picky about how I spend my time and who I work with. I created long-term relationships with playwrights [including an Elliott Hayes Award-winning collaboration with Marcus Gardley] and became a Resident Artist of Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco.

I soon realized I’ve been at this 28 years, I’m on a leadership track: I want to impart my experience, help shape the mission statement, have more authority to make change, and find better, more hopeful and more joyful ways of doing the work that we do.

**What skills are you digging into for the new position?**

I’m the daughter of a rocket scientist and a multimedia painter so I have both sides of the brain in fast motion all the time — both the analytical / logical / structural, and the creative / multidisciplinary / colorful. I’m still using [my dramaturgical] skills of listening and analyzing and interpreting and reporting, but now I’m coming from a place of power and leadership. I’m used to being in the playwright’s corner, and now I also need to advocate for my company. So I’m trying to protect and nurture the artists while also growing the company and having it be a mutually beneficial place for both to triumph.

**Are you thinking about pushing boundaries?**

For me, pushing boundaries is doing the plays you really believe in. For so many years, regional theatres were stuck doing the box-office hits and the known quantities. Part of the reason we’re having this outcry to change the landscape and systems of American theatre is that there are communities in our own backyards who have something vital to say and who deserve to see their own stories, and who have their own artists that are telling amazing stories, and those are the ones we need to amplify, not just the big hits from New York.
today’s world, I’m not just ‘Nakissa the dramaturg’ I’m also the Iranian American woman dramaturg/producer/translator who is Associate Artistic Director. My company is considered a predominantly white institution and I am bringing to them my decades of experience with writers of many cultures. And because I’m a dramaturg, I’m not afraid of bringing the innovators, the risktakers, the newcomers just starting out, the work that will most definitely break the mold...

**What kind of space do you want to create for artists?**

Welcoming, inviting, nourishing, exciting, collaborative, provocative… I want to create a lab of writers that we start from the ground up, we learn together workshop-style. Led by dramaturgs. I want to ask questions and inspire answers. I want to be able to reinvent ourselves. My favorite part of theatre-making is the brain-storming sessions — it’s always been that for me. It’s when we have a big question or something that doesn’t quite feel right and we talk it out together. Inevitably, the solution reveals itself if you are all open enough and listen for it.

The goal is to be the place that everyone wants to work. Be the place where playwrights have the best production of their plays and where all artists feel they can thrive. When I work as a dramaturg I want the play to thrive and be the best it can possibly be, so I use those same guiding principles in helping my company move forward.

*Stay tuned for Nakissa’s ongoing and deliciously vociferous advocacy for dramaturgy at MTC and beyond — “The theatre world has not responded fast enough to putting dramaturgs in power,” she says. “In my theatre company, the dramaturgs will not be ignored; they are going to be given proper credit; they will have a voice; they will be prominent” — and join her demands for a Tony Award for Dramaturgy, ‘cause where the *&%$ is that?*

---

Nakissa Etemad is an Iranian American dramaturg, producer, & French translator and LMDA’s Regional VP Metro Bay Area. She is a Resident Artist of Golden Thread Productions and a member of MENATMA and the Anti-Racism Task Force of LMDA. She has specialized in new BIPOC plays and musicals for over 25 years, recently working with Yussef El Guindi on Hotter Than Egypt (2020 Colorado New Play Summit), Heather Raffo’s Noura (Marin Theatre Company/Golden Thread) and ReOrient 2019 Fest of Short Plays (Golden Thread). Former dramaturg and literary manager for The Wilma Theater, San Jose Rep, and San Diego Repertory Theatre, and former Executive VP Freelance for LMDA. Received the Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy 2015 for her work with Marcus Gardley. M.F.A. in Dramaturgy, UC San Diego.

Dr Emily DeDakis (she/her) is a writer, producer and dramaturg from the southeast U.S. In 2005 she moved to Belfast, where she works with Accidental (an independent fringe theatre) and Fighting Words (a youth writing centre, where she mentors and coordinates teen playwriting projects). Emily has developed dozens of scripts and performances
Adapting for Zoom: An Experiment with Chekhov

By Jeanne Tiehen

The choice to do The Three Sisters in fall 2020 at Susquehanna University came about after other plans seemed infeasible. I needed to choose something that could accommodate a large cast and still work on Zoom. Having witnessed my Acting Styles class do Chekhov monologues last spring after we went remote, I knew Chekhov’s writing and tone resonated particularly well through the medium and reflected sentiments of 2020.

After conversations with theatre colleagues about the perils of Zoom, one suggested that the best Zoom theatre was theatre written specifically for Zoom. This motivated me to write my own adaptation of The Three Sisters for Zoom. I worked from a public domain translation and referenced other adaptations when a particular phrase or idea seemed outdated. The intent of the play was to honor the core story of Chekhov’s The Three Sisters so our majors could have the experience of diving deep into the playwright’s work with substantial acting analysis. Some of The Three Sisters references to marriage and love were modernized. Other references were updated or cut if I thought a modern Zoom audience would not be able to follow. Due to Zoom lag, sometimes lines were cut if a character only appeared for one moment, or lines were added to make that appearance more noteworthy.

I also made a more drastic change of adding characters and creating it as a play-within-a-play. I added a Dramaturg who wants to contextualize the play, a Director who wants the play to work, an Assistant Director who is trying to make the Director happy, and an IT character who eventually plays Ferapont when that ‘actor’ has wi-fi problems. Doing so allowed us to poke fun that this is not an ideal theatre experience and that Zoom can present difficulties in managing a production. This choice lightened the expectations and
in, adlib about the problem, as sometimes even the random fire alarm going off in a
dorm meant an actor had to leave for 10 minutes. The characters of Rode and Fedotik also
poorly attempted to do dialects in my adaptation to add some more humor to the play.
Screen fatigue is real, and the appearance of spontaneity helped a long play from getting
too monotonous.

Discoveries and changes were made often in rehearsal. Occasionally I would have to add
a character name so it was clear who a line was directed at, as placement of body and
eyes were not enough to make that evident on screen. I sometimes added lines that
addressed where a character was or why they abruptly entered or exited a scene, because
without a physical stage exits and entrances were much more striking. I made the
directorial choice to have actors directly look at the camera at moments of intimacy with
another character; the popularity of film makes the camera relationship one has to be
acutely aware of with Zoom acting. When actors pulled each other aside for private
conversations, I added lines or visual interaction with the camera to distinguish this. I tried
to keep the Chekhov spirit of people talking but not always listening with ‘stage’ business,
but also had to do so economically as to not upstage others as all Zoom screens are the
same size. While the show was fully costumed and we provided actors with lighting
instruments and backdrops, we also tried to add more technical software to enhance the
appearance of the play. In the end, we kept this simple as the play’s adaptation made the
sometimes clumsiness of Zoom a part of this play’s conceptual experience.

Ultimately, the production was always focused on process more than product, which I
argue is not inconsistent with academic theatre. While the medium presented challenges,
the opportunities to work with dramaturgs and students on the adaptation, to talk more in-
depth about characters in the intimacy of a small Zoom room, and the focus on acting
regarding the nuance and detail a camera sees felt equally rewarding. The only
final dress rather than attempt this delicate production under more challenging circumstances. Thankfully, it now lives on indefinitely on Youtube, and our students have been able share their work with loved ones across the country that may not have had such a chance even pre-pandemic.

---

**Without Borders: Dramaturgy in the New Decade**  
**Sin Fronteras: Dramaturgismo en la Nueva Década**  
**JUNE 2021**  
**MEXICO CITY, MX**  
**Junio de 2021**  
**Ciudad de México, México**

Without Borders: Dramaturgy in the New Decade

LMDA's 2021 annual international conference will take place in Ciudad de México, hosted by the newly established LMDA México and with the support of the Coordinación Nacional de Teatro of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL).

For those who want to attend but cannot join us in Mexico City, this in-person gathering will be live-streamed and will mix online synchronous and asynchronous content.

"Without Borders: Dramaturgy in the New Decade" seeks proposals for the conference sessions including panels, roundtables, workshops, and other dynamic conversations about what constitutes the idea of “dramaturgy without borders.” We are interested in engaging with artists from around the globe to explore ways in which dramaturgy is practiced.

[Proposals for the asynchronous digital content](#), [proposals for the synchronous digital content](#) and [proposals for the in-person gathering in Mexico City](#) will be accepted through March 31st, 2021, 11:59 PM EST. And all accepted applicants will be notified of the committee’s decision by April 30th, 2021.

If you have any further questions, feel free to contact Brenda Muñoz, conference coordinator, at lmdamexico@lmda.org.

---

**Happy Birthday Gotthold Ephraim Lessing!**
Last week was the official kickoff for Lessing Week where dramaturgs throughout the Americas can raise money to support Early Career Dramaturgs' involvement in LMDA.

Traditionally, this week is celebrated through the sale of baked goods at theaters, universities and other arts-based institutions. Given the nature of the world, bake sales are impossible. Instead we are focusing on donations through Facebook, on Mr. Gotthold's page, of course, as well as accepting donations through the LMDA website. On the question that says "Would you like to make your donation in honor of someone?" Simply check 'yes' after the question and put in 'ECD Travel Grant'.

Your donation will go to a self-identifying ECD to cover conferences fees, and if applicable, travel expenses. Since 2016, we have been able to support 19 ECDs! Please consider donating today to support ECDs in 2021.

Renew Your Membership Today!

Our 2020 memberships expired on January 20th, so now is the time to renew! Please visit our website to select one of the following memberships, all of which include full member benefits, voting rights, and eligibility for office:

- Institutional: $200 – for theatres, universities, agencies, and other organizations; includes up to four individual memberships with individual member profiles
- Individual: $80 – regular ol' professional membership!
- Early Career: $40 – discounted individual membership for students, interns, and those within five years of graduation
- Introductory: $25 – a first-year discount for new members (tell your friends and colleagues!)

Please log in to www.lmda.org to renew your membership and update your profile for 2021 now! Should you have questions or concerns about the renewal process or your membership, please contact LMDA Administrator Lindsey Barr at lmdanyc@gmail.com.
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.

---

**Region Facebook Groups**

- **Canada**
- **Mountain West** (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado)
- **Greater Midwest** (IL, IN, IA, western KY, MI, MN, OH, WI)
- **Metro Bay Area**
- **Metro Chicago**
- **Metro NYC**
- **Metro Boston**
- **Central Appalachia** (WV, VA, eastern KY, northern TN, and western NC)
- **Florida**
- **Metro Philadelphia**
- **Mexico**
- **Mid-Atlantic** (DC/Maryland/DE)
- **Northeast** (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York State, Rhode Island, Vermont, Pennsylvania)
- **Northwest** (Idaho, Oregon, Washington)
- **Southern California**
- **Plains** (Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska)
- **Southeast** (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, eastern North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, southern Tennessee, western NC)
- **Southwest** (Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, California)
- **Third Coast** (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas)

---

**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](mailto:communications@lmda.org).

---

**Pandemic Response: Resources for Artist**
Want to keep up with the conversation about the latest in dramaturgical activity?

- Follow us on Social Media (@LMDAmericas) by clicking on the logos below!

- Subscribe to our listserv