

SEASONS May 2003

The Newsletter of the International Center for Women Playwrights



Logo © Laura Rankin

Guest Editor Elisabeth Arzberger (Germany)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Allison Williams, President, ICWP, Inc. Board of Trustees

Welcome to the second issue of the revived **SEASONS**, the **ICWP Newsletter**! The new Board of Trustees had their first meeting in March, and we are excited about the year to come.

Here's what's going on:

_A revival of HeR-RAH!, the readings of member work that took place in five states last year, and which we hope will have an international scope this year. We're planning for the Fall, which will not tie in with International Women's Day, but which will be farther away from V-Day for greater publicity and more member involvement.

_Continued work on the publication of the "Short Plays from the ICWP" book

_Compilation of the "Monologues from the ICWP" book.

_We have just launched the first stage of new ICWP website design. There will be a phase two re-design that incorporates many new features - check out phase one at <http://www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org/>

If you have suggestions for rewrites on the material (or would like to contribute your writing skills to the project) please let the website committee know by sending your thoughts to **Secretary Margaret McSeveney** at margaret@benhar.screaming.net.

ICWP is hugely indebted to **Sandra Dempsey**, who for the last seven years has ensured ICWP's substantial web presence through her creation and maintenance of the website.

Thank you, Sandra!

soon as the new membership database is up and running and we know more about the scope of the position.

Member **Kim Roff** has volunteered to serve as our Temporary Communications Director, and we look forward to working with Kim on collating and re-structuring all of the information that goes to members, as well as putting a regular contact system in place.

Our members continue to shine with productions, readings, and prizes all over the world. Thank you for being part of ICWP!

ICWP Inc. welcomes 16 new members since the start of 2003!

Ella VERES, New Jersey USA
 Deborah S. GREENHUT, New Jersey USA
 Sybil ST.CLAIRE, Florida USA
 Cynthia MERCATI, Iowa USA
 Marci CRESTANI, California USA
 Laia OBREGON-DANS, Pennsylvania USA
 Maria Louise Hilson KATZENBACH, Colorado USA
 Lisa LOW, Connecticut USA
 Mrinalini KAMATH, New Jersey USA
 Kim KELLY, Texas USA
 Phoebe Parker BORMAN , Ohio USA
 Adrienne PERRY, Arizona USA
 Georgia STELLUTO, Virginia USA
 Elizabeth BOVE, New York USA
 Constance SPENCER, Georgia USA
 Ljubinka Stojanovic, Serbia and Montenegro

In October 2002, ICWP member Mary Steelsmith visited Singapore for a production of one of her plays, THE OLD MAN AND THE SEED. When she returned, she sent this account of her trip to the ICWP-L email discussion List. Although the trip was some time ago, the editor is sure you'll enjoy reading her account.

MY PRODUCTION IN SINGAPORE by Mary Steelsmith

"It's been a couple of weeks since my return from Singapore. So much happened there in such a short time, I've been sorting it out ever since.

19 hours on a plane, without really sleeping, and I was in a dreamy place when I met the famed Malaysian director. brought to Singapore. helming all six short plays that made up

your life in the hands of a cab driver. I learned a bit of Singlish from the cabbies and in a day or two, could converse enough not only to get from one place to the other, but get a sense of their lives lived in these cabs.

And then there was the show. Preview night, I was seated in the fourth row center. My play, THE OLD MAN AND THE SEED is a simple fable of an elderly couple in a garden at sunset, finding deeper meaning in the miracles they've wished for. The director chose to have the characters roll around in tinsel and shout at one another. He also felt free to 'enhance' my dialogue by having the man call the woman a "B-tch." I sat there stunned, feeling the audience's dislike for the work, and silently agreeing with them. This wasn't what I wrote.

I confronted the director about the changes and he promised to drop them for opening night. Opening night rolled around and nothing was changed. The bad words stayed in, the blocking was exactly as the night before. So, what was a foreign playwright, alone in a strange land, to do?

Assessing the situation -- well, I won first prize in the Hewlett Packard/Action Theatre contest, a trip to see my show and the experience of a lifetime. There was nothing I could do to change how it came out on stage. What I had to say to the director meant nothing to him. It was beyond my control.

So, I took a deep breath and let it go. I took joy in being there, in having a group of people from halfway around the world love and understand the work enough to honor me with an award. I found a tough sense of amusement in dealing with a director who imposed his ego over my work, an experience I've found strangely universal.

Still, it bothered me that the audiences would think I had written the play the way they saw it, that they would believe I saw their elderly relatives as howling savages, rolling around the stage in slow motion.

What relief it was to find this hilarious and right on review online..

"Old Man and the Seed": How very, very strange. Believing that the Ng-Loong pairing could not possibly produce anything worse than "Dinner for Two", I was to be unpleasantly surprised _ although here the problem was less with the script than with direction that was visionary in its awfulness. It treated what is essentially a Middle-American bucolic (an old woman plants seeds; an old man complains; the sun sets) to lashings of silver tinsel, melodramatic shouting and choreography that would send its geriatric protagonists off looking for hip replacements. The words fabulous and fantastic may be synonyms, but fable and fantasy are not, and this production seemed to confuse the two. A lasting image lingers: after a supposedly touching dénouement, Ng and Loong wade off into the sunset with half a metre of the accumulated tinsel grasping at their legs like the creature from the glitter lagoon. Avoid.

Kushner, Lucas, Vogel at the Boston Public Library

by GERALYN HORTON

I recently attended one of WORDS ON FIRE events at the Copley Square library. A sad beginning, when we walked up to what would last month have been a bustling beautiful public library, the oldest in the nation, and discovered guards at the door announcing that it was closed due to budget shortfall.

The lecture series - "conversations" about censorship re: the Nazi book burnings-- carried on, however, and attendees were allowed to walk through the darkened galleries to the basement lecture hall, where Robert Brustein moderated a discussion on censorship in the contemporary American theatre featuring Tony Kushner, Craig Lucas, and Paula Vogel. The event began with introductions listing the plays and books written by and honors bestowed upon all the participants--- which was so long that it threatened to take up all the time available and eventuated in embarrassed squirmings from the panelists and giggles from the audience.

Kushner was pretty upbeat. He listed various instances in which his plays had run into trouble, and the brave people at theaters and colleges who had stood up to censorship and pressure; and asserted that the ticket buying public and a few rich benefactors had rushed to the rescue. Encouraging, that. Lucas said he was discouraged and embittered-- though not about his personal situation, as he has recently found a nurturing home at Intiman Theatre in Seattle. He recounted instances of pig headed idiocy and insane censorship from his experiences in Hollywood and in theatre-- including one in which the central-to-the-plot kiss in "Prelude To a Kiss" had been snipped out of an airline's in flight showing of the film. Lucas despaired of critics, and of cowardly ADs pandering to boards filled with bankers, but was satisfied that in spite of critical hostility his published plays such as "The Dying

Gaul" continued to get productions from venturesome small theatres. But he said that theatres are dying every day across the country, and the survivors becoming ever more conservative and fearful.

Vogel was even less optimistic, and as passionate about the suppression of women's voices politically and the attacks on women's human and civil rights as she was about the dumbing down and flattening out of exciting-- and disturbing-- new voices in the theatre.

She gave the

horrible example of a writer she discovered as a play reader: everyone she took the script (about race relations) to agreed that it was brilliant, important, terrifying, and wonderful-- and everyone also said that they could not possibly produce it at their theatre. Some places did give it a "reading", and in response to "feedback" the writer draft by draft took out everything that made his play brilliant, important, terrifying, and wonderful. To no avail-- theatre's still

wouldn't produce it. Vogel said that she has "watched scores of women who have been turned away from theatres, and no one can tell me their work isn't brilliant: I know that it is." Screen writing or TV isn't an option for these women playwrights, they must turn to teaching

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

by Farzana Moon

It was a wonderful, enlightening experience at the Midnight's Children Humanities Festival held at Columbia University .

Throughout the month of March, the Midnight's Children Humanities Festival presented over 25 vibrant dialogues, open roundtable rehearsals, readings and public debates, featuring Salman Rushdie. The Festival was mounted to deepen the experience of viewing the performance of "Midnight's Children", a play based on Rushdie's book of the same name, through an exciting exploration of the ideas, held in public dialogue by scholars, writers, theatre artists and cultural commentators. The Festival provided a cross-fertilization of ideas by thinkers and creators from a host of disciplines, including the performing arts, legal studies, history, comparative literature, anthropology and cultural studies.

Columbia University is a sprawling city by itself with a mixture of Corinthian and Colonial columns, all embellished with the statues of philosophers ancient and medieval. Four panelists were in our group, including me, Vikram Chandra, Michael Cunningham and Neil Bassoondath.

Our moderator was Jayme Koszyn, a young, brilliant woman of great intellect. We met an hour before the session for sound check, which lasted only a few minutes under the glare of lights. The rest of the time we spent talking and getting to know each other. This one hour before the session worked like magic, lending us the luxury of ease and camaraderie. History was the general topic among our group, as to how history effected our own contemporary writing. Vikram Chandra and Neil Bassoondath write about the history after 18th century, so they had much to add to the discussion. My historical sagas fall between 1600-1800, so my comments were brief, laced with a quotation from Oscar Wilde, 'The only duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.' Michael Cunningham is well versed in current history, is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, and his book, The Hour, is adapted to a movie, which I am looking forward to watching when it comes to town.

Columbia University is the spirit of New York city, and I absorbed its warmth and friendship with much delight and gluttony. The members of our panel read from their works, then gave brief speeches, followed by question/answer session with the audience. I decided to talk about the Sufis and Sufism. My speech, which conveys the message of love, peace and harmony, is reproduced below.

We were also interviewed by Radio WNET in New York, after the session, voicing our opinions about the play, Midnight's Children. Columbia University will be posting the audio/video taped sessions of the panelists, on their sites shortly.

Sufism. Sufi is the name first adopted by the devotees of Prophet Muhammad based on his own message of Love and Unity. Though intricately woven into the tapestry of Islam, Sufism is timeless and define-less, free of the limitations of creed or religion. Anyone can be a Sufi who wishes to seek God or Beloved inside the heart of mankind through the fire of love. Filling one's heart with so much love that there is no room left for hatred in there, for anybody or anything. By cultivating such a character of Divine love, the Sufi as the paragon of a Lover is united with God, or Beloved, becoming the vessel of inspiration to share his or her message of unity in multiplicity. Many poets, sages, philosophers have emerged since seventh century onward as Sufis, also called the Masters. Rumi, Hafiz, Al-Hallaj are getting popular, just to name a few of the Sufi poets. The earliest known Sufis came mainly from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Persia, Lebanon, Afghanistan, but now they are found in all parts of the world.

I have taken the liberty of selecting a few of my favorites to share their pearls of wisdom with you. The first one is Rabia, from the city of Basra in Iraq, 8th century. Endowed with wit, charm and wisdom, she was revered by the Sufi Masters as the Mistress of the Sufis. If someone said, we should surrender to God. She would say, what is there to surrender, since everything belongs to God. During a discussion, one Sufi suggested that they should pray to God for opening the door to Truth. Her response was. Was the door ever closed? One day she was sitting beside a lake with her Sufi friend by the name of Hasan when he was seized by this wild impulse to flaunt his miraculous powers, by throwing his prayer rug on the water.
 "Come, Rabia, let's pray here together," Hasan challenged her.
 Rabia in turn tossed her own prayer rug into the air, inviting him to join her there. But then noticing sadness in his eyes, she returned to the ground.
 "Come, Hasan, let's not boast of our divine powers. What you have done, fishes can do, and what I have done, flies can do." Before I recite her poems, this favorite saying of hers falls in rapport with her inspired works.

"I won't serve God like a laborer, expecting wages."

"Oh God, if I worship You for fear of Hell
 Burn me in hell
 If I worship You in hope of Paradise
 Exclude me from Paradise
 But if I worship You for Your Own sake
 Grudge me not Your everlasting Beauty"

Everyone prays to You from fear of the Fire
 And if You do not put them in the Fire
 This is their reward
 Or they pray to You for the Garden
 Full of fruits and flowers
 And that is their prize

For You suffice me

The next Sufi poet is Hafiz, born in the city of Shirz in Iran, 14th century. He is known as the Heart of Sufi poetry for his dazzling sense of candor and perception.

We offer love to everyone
 And in love accept all blame
 For in our Way, to be offended
 Is faithlessness to God

We all sit in His orchestra
 Some play their fiddles
 Some wield their clubs
 Tonight is worthy of music
 Let's get loose with compassion
 Let's drown in the delicious
 Ambience of Love

I have learned so much from God
 That I can no longer call myself
 A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim
 A Buddhist, a Jew
 The truth has shared so much
 Of itself with me
 That I can no longer call myself
 A man, a woman, an angel
 Or even pure soul
 Love has befriended Hafiz so completely
 It has turned to ash
 And freed me
 Of every concept and image
 My mind has ever known

Even after all this time
 The sun never says to the earth
 You owe me
 Look, what happens
 With a love like that
 It lights the whole sky

The last Sufi in selection is Kabir born in the city of Banares in North India, 15th century. He was a Hindu, and had become a Muslim. Many legends are woven around Kabir's life, but the most interesting one is that he was a Hindu who had become a Muslim.

With mind and body

Color is born of color
I see all colors one
What color is a living creature
Solve it if you can

Saints, if I speak
Who will believe it
If I lie it passes for truth
I glimpsed a jewel
Un-pierced and priceless
Without buyer or seller
Glistening, gleaming, it flashed
In my eyes, and filled
The ten directions
A touch of grace from the guru
The invisible, the mark-less appeared
Simple meditation
Absolute stillness
Awakened, simply
I am Ram

'I thought of You so often
That I completely became You
Little by little you drew near
And slowly but slowly I passed away'
(Javad Nurbakhsh)

This, my love for the Sufis, is the theme for my next book, which I am writing about the life of Prophet Muhammed, as the first Sufi of Islam. In conclusion, one Sufic saying of Prophet Muhammad.

'If you love God, sanctify your love by loving God's creatures first.'

NOTES

'You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You'
(St. Augustine)

'Take our salutations, Lord, from any quarter infinite of might and boundless in Your Glory.
You are all that is, since everywhere we find You'
(Bhagavad Gita)

'Whosoever killeth a human being, it shall be as if he has killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if has saved the life of mankind.'

(Talmud)

Arabic word 'Suf' wool, meaning Purity. It refers to the pure white woolen garments worn by the Sufis.

'Step out of the circle of time
And into the circle of love,'
(Rumi)

White/symbolic of eternal light/whirling around the center as atoms to be a part of the Cosmos, one hand toward heaven to receive blessings from the Beloved, and the other turned toward earth to transmit them to mankind.

'The seed of Sufism
Was sown in the time of Adam
Germed in the time of Noah
Budded in the time of Abraham
Began to develop in the time of Moses
Reached maturity in the time of Jesus
Produced pure wine in the time of Muhammad.'
(Shahabudin Suhrawardi)

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF MUSICAL THEATRE

by Judy Freed

One of my New Year's resolutions was to file a somewhat overdue report on the International Festival of Musical Theatre in Cardiff, Wales.
So here it is!

The International Festival of Musical Theatre was held in Cardiff, Wales from October 14 through November 3, 2002. This was the first year of the festival, and I was amazed at both the quality and the quantity of the events presented. There was a host of speakers (including Peter Stone, Robert Kimball, and Stephen Flaherty, among others). There were master classes (including a Sondheim performance class by Julia MacKenzie). There were concerts, exhibitions, and showings of classic movie musicals. There were performances of stage musicals, including a concert performance of RAGTIME that marked the show's European debut. There was a talent competition to find the international musical theatre stars of the future. And there was the Global Search for New Musicals, which showcased 9 new musicals selected from nearly 200 submissions from 16 different countries.

I attended the Festival because one of my musicals, ME AND AL, was selected for the Global Search showcases. (Shameless plug: ME AND AL is a dark comedy inspired by the true story of an optometrist who wanted to be a gangster, and was killed in the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Book by Judy Freed, music by Leo Schwartz, lyrics by Donald Abramson.)

Nine musicals were selected for the showcases. Each musical had 45 minutes of presentation time. Some authors chose to present their first act; other authors decided to present highlights of their show using narration to fill in the missing scenes. The musicals were presented in 3 bills of 3 shows each. Each bill received a director, a music director, and 10 actors. For shows with large casts, this meant editing down the material so that it could be performed by 10 people.

When I was notified that our show had been selected, I became very nervous about being so far away from rehearsals. (I live in the U.S., and due to schedule conflicts, I would not be able to see my musical until its final presentation at the Festival.) But once again, the Festival was organized with international authors in mind. The director spoke with me several times by phone before rehearsals began. He gave me his input about how to edit our material to fit the time and cast size limitations, and graciously accepted my emails about last-minute script cuts and character interpretations.

The music director communicated with the composer by email and by phone before rehearsals; the composer was able to attend rehearsal to work with the music director and the cast. The whole artistic team were talented, experienced professionals. I was impressed by how well-chosen the actors were not only for my piece, but for the other two musicals in our bill as well. I was also amazed by how much they were able to accomplish with only two weeks of rehearsal-- learning three different shows in three totally different musical and presentational styles! They really "got" all three shows, and gave them all strong presentations.

Aside from the fun of seeing my show so well presented, the showcase also offered an excellent marketing opportunity. Each bill of musicals was presented twice. After each presentation, the authors were stationed in the lobby to talk with producers who might be interested in looking at complete scripts and scores of their shows. (As well as producers, directors, and other theater people who just wanted to shake hands and say hello.) The authors were also treated to a reception with all the actors, directors and music directors from all three bills. And one of the bills was broadcast on BBC radio.

Overall, it was a fabulous experience. The only downside was the cost. There is a fee for submitting to the Global Search. And the submission costs add up, especially if you are shipping scripts and scores from overseas. Also, this year the Festival did not have any funds to assist authors with travel or lodging expenses. Hopefully, this will change in the future. (I believe that Julian Woolford is trying to find some travel money for the next Global Search.)

For me, though, the costs were well worth it.

The next International Festival of Musical Theatre will be held in November 2004. The Global Search entry deadline will be in December 2003. If you're interested in submitting a musical, go to www.cardiffmusicals.com and register to receive an

Seasons proudly presents: Rebecca Ritchie's answers to all the questions you always wanted to ask about playwriting and never knew where to send them! As of now the Play Doctor is there for you!

PLAYCRAFT

by Rebecca Ritchie

The Play Doctor is in!

All ICWP members are welcome to submit questions on structural and craft issues for diagnosis.

Disclaimer: Please note that the Play Doctor did her residency in The Well-Made Play; all comments reflect that bias.

Q. Dear Play Doctor:

Salvaging a sinking synopsis isn't my problem identifying whether or not it's sinking is. Any tips on how to craft and then examine for revision a synopsis?

A. The playwright kindly provided the following synopsis for analysis:

Lilian Waxman, a widow in her early sixties, invites Abe Rubenstein, a widower of the same age, for a special treat: a noodle kugel supper. When a problem with Lillian's oven interferes with the planned meal, they talk, argue, and then reconcile.

The purpose of a synopsis is to engage the interest of an artistic director so that she says, Damn! My audience will love that. So the playwright's aim is to set up the synopsis in such a way that it fires the reader's curiosity. There are many ways to do this, but here's one:

Who's on first? Start by identifying the central character. We don't know from the sample above which of the two characters is the central character, Lilian or Abe. To identify the central character, read through your play to pinpoint which character you have given a choice or decision.

Little Red Riding Hood. Red had a choice of two mutually exclusive paths to grandmother's house, one through the forest, the other through the mall. Which character have you given two paths to take, Lilian or Abe? The synopsis says the characters talk, argue, and then reconcile but you don't say what they argued about. Does Lilian want a romantic attachment but is torn because she feels in control only when living alone? Does Abe have to choose between the rational path -- settling down to chemotherapy in the last months of life or the reckless, more life-affirming path of foregoing treatment in lieu of convincing Lil to go on safari with him in Kenya? In your synopsis, identify two paths for at least one of the characters this is your central character. You certainly can give each character a choice, but the dominant choice, the one that drives the action of the play, is your central character. Make the two choices as divergent as possible and make them mutually exclusive. If the central character can pick both paths, you've got no conflict and no play.

Why him do that? Once your synopsis makes clear that your central character has a choice between two mutually exclusive paths of equal pulling power, clarify what motivates her to choose one path over the other. This must be a deeply felt emotion, belief or need that will drive her choice. Focus on what the character really, really wants. It could be purely personal: Power, money, love, independence, chastity, artistic acclaim, artistic competence, isolation, revenge, survival, a decent life. But to grab that artistic director, the motivation should have some underpinning of significance to society in general, some social, economic, political, racial, or public health grounding, for example.

Let's take Abe, for example. He could have a surface choice of eating or not eating the noodle kugel (although how anyone can forego a noodle kugel, especially if it's got about two dozen eggs and those broad egg noodles and brown sugar with almond slivers) But Abe's choice must rest on deeply held feelings. The kugel could remind him of dinners his recently-deceased wife, Ann, made in the early years of their marriage, thereby either drawing him toward Lilian because her kugel is a dream -- or pushing him away because he can't bear to be reminded of his lost paradise with Ann. That's a personal motivation. But if Abe's mother, who went to law school after her children were in school, subsequently married an African-American lawyer from Trinidad, then the kugel could represent the clash of cultures that occurred when his mother stopped making kugel and started making Pigeon Peas for his new stepfather. Lil's offering of kugel could be a chance for Abe to return both to the culture of his heritage and to the loving arms of a mother surrogate. This is a motivation that combines personal and greater social issues, often simply called significance.

As the central character, Abe's eventual decision to eat or not to eat Lil's kugel must be driven by his emotional history and/or social significance.

Buddy can you spare a dime? Change is the final element in dramatic structure. The central character, in making her choice or decision, must change. Big change, small change, doesn't matter, so long as she changes: Becomes more loving, learns to forgive, changes jobs, leaves a marriage, kills a lover, becomes a skinhead, runs for political office, reveals her sexual preference. And since all drama is about relationships, the change must be reflected in a change in the relationship between the central character and another character.

If Abe excuses himself from dining on Lil's kugel because he perceives her as too rabid a civil rights advocate, realizing for the first time that in retirement he just wants a woman who will uncomplainingly fetch and serve Abe has changed. The synopsis must describe the change in the central character -- here that Abe has become more entrenched, a kind of change. And don't be shy go ahead and give away the decision and the change.

The past playing a role in the present. Your synopsis gives us little of the emotional history of Abe or Lilian. Remembering that a character's past can come into the play only to help

In diagnosing a synopsis, remember that the synopsis need only be a few sentences, but it must make clear

- the central character
- the conflict in the central character (the choice between two mutually exclusive paths,) and
- how the central character changes in resolving the conflict.

If you have a question for the script doctor, send an email with "Script Doctor Question" in the subject line.

Send to: Rebecca Ritchie <rtritchie@att.net>

If your question is selected, the answer will appear in the July edition of Seasons

A POST-PLAY DISCUSSION (for M.S.)

by Linda Eisenstein

Let us admit it. There is no such thing as "positive" critique: they always sting. I'd rather be beset with Egypt's plagues -- gnats, pestilence, even the bloody Nile -- than nod politely through my smoldering rage, listen, take copious notes, and try to smile.

There's something vaguely gladiatorial here: thumbs up, thumbs down, the faint but telling sneer along with every jab -- shall we explain why we don't like it? So the list begins, from well-intentioned drivel to pure pain, the litany of my dramaturgic sins.

Christ, I'm not deaf! I heard the silence shriek where I intended laughs, heard the plot creak; and now, a juggler face down in the ruin of all my shiny fragments, what I need isn't advice, my friend. It's much too soon for the post-mortem: See here? I still bleed.

opportunities for other women theatre artists.

When we put out the national call for submissions, we were delighted with the variety that we received. Based on our selected line-up it's clear that women are writing about a vast array of exciting subjects and utilizing a variety of forms. The line-up includes:

Wallflowers and Wildflowers by Primrose Madayag: Set in the bedroom at a Fraternity party, a young girl has barricaded herself in the bathroom intent on suicide and it is up to Sara to discover why.

Cowboy Boots and a Corsage by Katherine Koller: A mother and daughter struggle to maintain their relationship and their prairie home.

West Edmonton Mall by Patti Flather: Christine's only wish is to celebrate her birthday at the West Edmonton Mall, but her journey from her Yukon home is filled with challenges and self-discovery.

Miss/es by Elena Kaufman: Exploring the boundaries of intimacy and sex with a textured web of language and dance.

Across the Lake by Twilla MacLeod: A poetic exploration of memory, the key moments that remain when someone you love dies.

The Drive by Lindsay Price: A bride tries to build bridges between her fiancé and his lesbian sister during the long journey to the wedding with her future sister-in-law.

Chick Night by Alison McLean: It's the weekend and these four suburban wives and full time moms are out to have some fun, leaving their individual crises behind! (Staged reading).

Plus we have a Master Class in Visceral playwriting offered by Linda Griffiths, Dramaturgical Workshops for Playwrights offered by Moynan King, "Self Care for the Self Employed", a Violence Against Women Workshop, a panel "From Page to Stage to Print" and a forum on the Status of Women in Canadian Theatre.

Already there have been challenging moments. Perhaps the most amusing was doing an interview with a local male reporter who seemed fixated on why a theatre festival dedicated to women was necessary. I talked about the challenges that still exist for women and about how some of us write in a style contrary to the accepted norm. Of course he misquoted me and when I referred to some women playwrights using a more cyclical structure, it read that "women playwrights tend to be more cynical". I can hardly wait to see what gets written about the festival itself!

I have been doing a lot of interesting reading lately, as those working on theses tend to do, and I have encountered this question over and over, which I thought might make for an interesting topic of discussion, or at least which I would be interested to hear people's thoughts on:

In October 1988, during the First International Women Playwrights Conference, Chilean playwright Isidora Aguirre was one panelist to discuss women playwrights as social and political critics. In her statement, she suggests an inherent difference between men and women in general. "The woman is a lioness fighting to protect her cubs," she remarks. She goes on to discuss the woman's "natural function" as protectress of future generations, with "characteristic optimism," thereby giving us all an innate interest in the humanitarian side of things, which is reflected in our writing and choice of themes, as opposed to a man's "natural lust for power".

At this same conference, Mexican playwright Sabina Berman discussed "the form and nature of women's plays", pointing to the action gaps, pauses, and "scenes in which nothing happens" which she finds to be characteristic of the work of women. She sees the usual criticisms of this style of writing to be a reflection of the problems male critics have with intimacy.

What I'm getting at here, is that there are some women playwrights who believe that there is an inherent difference between works by women and works by men. And then there are those such as Daniela Fischerova, a Czech playwright who has actually been criticized for writing in a style which is "too masculine [read: unemotional and intellectual]," who would most certainly deny this difference. So after this long-windedness, my question to you all is: Does one's gender necessarily influence/determine one's voice when writing, as some feel other parts of one's background might? Is there a style that is inherently "female"?

Sarah said:

I do not think that one's gender has jack to do with the writer's voice. Writers write what they know/feel/are interested in - regardless of gender.

To be honest, it has always irritated me to hear the identification "woman writer." You never hear anyone say "man writer." It's a form of ghettoization to me. (And yes, I know that's not a word, but it expresses my opinion.)

It's the same thing that made me angry when I saw "gay mystery writer" attached to some of my favorite mystery novelists. What the hell did the sexuality of the writer have to do with his/her ability to write a mystery? To make matters worse, these writers are often shunted

That's why a producer I was working with had to prove I was a woman to a movie money man who couldn't believe any woman could have written the script he'd just read.

It's this silly notion that gender or sexuality is the only influence on what we do.

 PERL said:

The amazing Sri Lankan playwright Somalatha Subasinghe said at that first conference [ICWP conference - Ed] in Buffalo -- either in a session or talking at a dinner one night: (I paraphrase)

"The difference between the man and the woman.
 The man looks up and sees a hole in the roof.
 The woman looks up and sees the hole in the roof that is letting in the rain that is coming down on the book of the child who can no longer read it."

She believed that men see some objective reality - a hole in the roof which can be analyzed and quantified -- and that women see the effects of that reality in a more humanistic way - the child can no longer read. The world will be less because of that hole. She was and still is one of the most amazing human beings I ever met - trained in both a buddhist tradition and western literature she always could see the discussion as gender or culture or even political differences. (she performed Lorca in Cuba I believe). Personally I think there are different ways in which we may observe and produce our art - but that shouldn't be the only lens we see. And certainly not the easy way out for theatres to blow off women playwrights!

 Linda said:

Wow! What an intriguing observation! Many of us have puzzled over the outright hostility some male critics have to a specific kind of "women's play" and this kind of structure -- but never fingered this possibility. Click!

Let me say that I do not always observe a difference between "men's" and "women's" plays -- we've talked about that more than once here [The ICWP-L List - Ed]. However...in 20 years of theatre going and seeing hundreds of new plays, I have observed trends in women's writing, that seem to reflect the different ways that women operate in the world:

- I've noticed more women writing "ensemble plays" -- that is, multiple protagonists -- diffusing the main action/interest of the play between more than one viewer-identified

These are very interesting observations, Linda...and some things that I'm wrestling with as I start working on adapting BELLES OF THE MILL into a screenplay. We have come to see the musical as an ensemble piece from the start, out of which emerge the central character whose story is being told. And in my screenwriting class, our instructor (a woman and former playwright, now screenwriter) talked about having a clear protagonist and antagonist in the script...which BELLES won't, even as a movie. I find that too literal and simplistic. No doubt that will add to the difficulties of getting a large historical period piece filmed...but nobody said this would be easy.

Linda said:

It'll be an uphill battle! Because so much of film is predicated on a formula, down to what freaking page of your script should have specific actions taking place on them! (ADAPTATION has a funny riff on the Robert McKee workshops.) There are films that break this mold -- THE HOURS, for example -- but they're few and far between.

There is an interesting book on alternative structures in screenwriting written by 2 Canadian writers -- here's a tidbit about it from the ICWParchives:

"The book I've found most helpful is Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules* (2nd edn, Boston, Focal Press, 1995), which is not about anarchy but about knowing what the conventional patterns are and understanding when and why you want to deviate from them."

Rebecca said:

As I have probably said on this list before (apologies for boring you):

5 points:

1. I DON'T think there are two gendered voices. I think I can say this with some confidence b.c one of my plays is adapted from the writings of an AIS intersex individual, H.A. Barbin, who spent the first 22 years of life identified and socially conditioned as a woman. Which voice is Barbin's? Which voice is mine when I translate Barbin's French narrative and splice it into my original monologues and dialogue, and nobody who hears can tell

exclusive or universal to women, as the 'hole-in-roof' parable suggests. The lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall's writing exudes excessive privilege (she was a multimillionaire heiress and owned more neckties than Imelda Marcos had pairs of shoes) and she became a Fascist sympathiser. James Hogg (worked as shepherd, virtually illiterate until he taught himself to read at age 20) has far better social awareness in many respects.

4. I've been told that my writing is 'too unemotional,' 'too linear,' and sounds like I've been 'brainwashed by the patriarchy.' Maybe I have. I don't know. I can't see out of my cave, though I am trying. I have gotten letters that say, 'Dear MR ----- we like your synopsis, we want to read this play.' So perhaps I want to believe that voice isn't necessarily gendered, because if it is, then mine is sometimes a lie and I don't even always realise that I'm lying.

5. I write plays with ensemble casts (some of them, not all) because I am interested in how communities and societies function. I am interested in THE POLIS AS A CHARACTER. And there are women in these ensembles because women are part of the polis, whether that fact is recognised by the government/men of their society or not. We already get enough of 'women write domestic, not political.' So is the story now that when we write political not domestic we're still being quintessentially female?

6. This game of defining/segregating women's writing is a lot like the social code in Dr. Seuss's THE SNEETCHES. As soon as a critical mass of us start doing the same thing, it becomes a 'female' thing to do, and thus can be used to ghettoize us.

Geralyn said:

As writers, I don't think this is something we need to theorize about-- we write what we write. We can imagine within a huge range, contain multitudes; or mine a single small segment of the human experience. So?

As audience and as readers--- esp if we are reading for a theatre-- we may feel a preference for or feel a lack of the kinds of plays that might be associated with a "womanly" sensibility, and it's good to affirm our "right" to see or perform or write such plays. Men have been dismissing women's work as inferior when it is merely different for far too long. If all the men and half the women on the reading committee like play X, and all the women and a single man like play Z, then play Z ought to have as much claim to production as X--- because

of course, were always working to be or seem "manly". (they still are, alas) This always stuck me as something between ridiculous and evil: neither femininity nor manliness a worthy goal for a human being. People choosing to be willfully ignorant, to wall themselves off from entire ranges of experience and thought because it was assigned to the other sex? Fortunately, some paths, like the path of the writer, positively encourage the one who follows it to have "unsuitable" thoughts and experiences, if only in imagination.

And I too get "You've got to decide whose play this is!" from colleagues, and "Dear Mr. -----" letters. But I encourage that by sending my criticism and my non-domestic plays out under my initials. In high school I read the studies that showed that the same essay was perceived as an A product when it appeared under a man's name and a B effort when bearing a woman's-- by both men and women. As for criticism, women pundits were rare as hen's teeth. I started using my initials when a freshman in college--- the grad students who did the grading were going to have to judge my writing w/o the female discount.

Mike said:

One of the things that affects our perception of what a male or female voice is in theater is what theater itself labels and affirms, through its process of acceptance and rejection, as male and female voices.

I'm reminded of a comment I heard second hand of something that Geralyn had said -- that when theaters say they're interested in "alternative" theater, they are really only interested in a particular kind of "alternative" theater. They are not in fact interested in all theater that is different from the mainstream. Similarly, by suggesting and supporting "women's" plays, I believe that theaters in general have something very specific in mind. Plays chosen as "women's" plays have set attributes that signify them as such, while other plays by women, plays that don't adhere to what the producing bodies feel is a "womanly" mode of expression are left out.

This is probably done for a couple of reasons, the most basic of which would be for marketing purposes. If the theater feels that it's doing plays for women, it assumes that the audience it will receive will have expectations that will be met, so it chooses plays that feed what it perceives as its audience's needs. (This may be an invalid observation, since I know a lot of theaters who don't seem to have a clue as to what human beings want to watch.)

primarily funny, RoboDramaturg says "It's a Farce" (or worse yet "It's trying to be a Farce") when that wasn't your intention at all.

In the same way, pre-formed ideas of what a woman's voice is or a woman's play is imprisoned into a particular definition. Through the process of reward and punishment that is the theater's acceptance/rejection process, these definitions are solidified, codified, set as the standard and passed on, ensuring that the trend will continue. Writers who write such plays are rewarded, receive prizes and productions, and writers who don't write these plays must either begin writing them or struggle in obscurity.

It's not just women's plays that get this treatment. It's all theater. And while there is no set code of taste (or lack thereof) or convention as in Hollywood, theater still manages to stifle its own expression and hinder itself through the inherited ideals of its artistic directors and dramaturgs. I remember seeing PROOF recently, having heard so many wonderful things about it, all the reviews and accolades, and yet I came away with this sense of *deja vu*. I'd seen the entire play before. It was exactly like most of the other "award-winning" plays I'd seen regurgitated from the LORTS and Broadway. It clicked along like a machine.

A couple of weeks ago I saw IN THE BLOOD. Heard great things about it. Couldn't stand it. Again, it was a machine, going through all the hoops that theater of its type hops through. Here was the poorly disguised allegory, the people with symbolic names, the artsy language. I read the author's bio in the program to see where this thing came from, and here she had received awards, was considered for a Pulitzer -- it made me want to kill myself.

I don't deny that one's sex may make for underlying differences in perception and expression. I just think that distinctions between what theaters consider a woman's voice or a man's voice is a self-perpetuated artifice supported and passed on by theaters and theater educators themselves.

Mimi said:

Carol Gilligan's work on "Voice" -- *In A Different Voice* -- she is a psychologist at Harvard and has worked with Tina Packer and Kristin Linklaeter -- Shakespeare and Company -- speaks to the relation of Voice to gender and moral development. In her latest book, *The Birth of Pleasure*, she analyzes the myth of Psyche and Cupid and what it teaches us about the way women and men at different stages cut off the inner and expressive voice of intimacy and blissful connection to others (women in adolescence, men at age 5). She speaks about the way that patriarchy inhibits the development and expression of bliss in all genders. We rage about ourselves and others in patriarchy which is fueled by the voices of

theatre/stage fill up with unspoken and sometimes unspeakable emotion, enter characters who are not "protagonists," but who use their voices to create connection. Enter another voice, one not heard for over two thousand years.

To me, it is not a biological gendered voice we are talking about, but an other-than-patriarchal voice, a voice that seeks to express a the joy, wisdom, truth, and power of intimate connection with an Other, with "Other" referring to anyone and anything that is not ourselves.

A long way of saying: Do not take the rejections of your Voices personally! It is a two thousand year old learned "deafness" that cannot hear you. And let us all never lose our courage as we re-create the human and the world through our art, a world in which we can all hear each Other.

Opportunities Notices

\$\$\$ means a fee is charged.

The Dramatist Guild of America discourages the charging of reading fees

For more info on that see <http://www.dramaguild.com>

One Act Play Depot

is once again accepting submissions. This time around they are particularly interested in one-act plays suitable for high school performers and audiences. They want Black Comedy, along with well-written dramatic and comedic pieces, but NOT Musicals, One-person Shows and Farces. Deadline May 16, 2003

Further details via their website - <http://oneactplays.net/submissions.html>

Not Quite Opera Productions

is seeking original musicals for a new works festival in the fall. Deadline June 1.

Send a script, a recording, a cover letter, a resume, and a SASE to

Anne Nygren Doherty

Not Quite Opera Productions, 1524 Vicente St., San Francisco, CA 94116.

Questions? Visit <http://www.notquiteopera.org>

Foothill Theatre Company

is seeking submissions for a staged reading series entitled New Voices of the Wild West.

They want unproduced works of any genre relating to the rural or semi-rural American

West. Small stipend including housing for the duration of the rehearsal and staged reading.

Some or all of travel expenses covered. Possible future production. Accepted year round.

Send a query or a script w/SASE to

Gary Wright, Literary Manager,

Foothill Theatre Company, Box 1812, Nevada City, CA 95959.

ONASSIS International Competition for Theatrical Play

Closing date: 30 June, 2003

Play in English, French or Greek; or German, Italian or Spanish with English or Greek translation (no musical opera, operetta, pantomime, poetry or adaptations).

1st prize \$150,000, 2nd prize \$100,000, 3rd \$75,000.

Plays with purely local content, without broader interest, not considered.

Maximum one per entrant.

For conditions refer to <http://www.onassis.gr>

or email pubrel@onassis.org

Distinctions may be awarded. Address entries to

Secretariat of Onassis International Prizes, 7 Eschinou str, 105 58 Athens, Greece.

Inneract Productions: Quality Theatre by Artists of Color

for a full length or fully developed one-act play, by an Asian American playwright for our fall 2003 staged reading series. Subject: Contemporary. InnerAct Productions is a not-for-profit organization committed to making available to practitioners of color a greater opportunity for professional caliber work and compensation in the theatre industry.

Artistically/Aesthetically - the company produces works that depict accurate representations, cultural ideals and experiences of contemporary American life. Deadline: August 31, 2003

Submission: Send play synopsis to

Dr. John S. Foster,

Artistic Director, InnerAct Productions, 138 South Oxford Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217

or email to jfoster@inneractpd.com

MEMBERS' BOOK CHOICE

recommended by Rebecca Nesvet

Basic technical advice

A Sense Of Direction

by William Ball

Barnes and Noble website reviewers give it five stars and say it is a must read for any director

Basic organising-the-vision advice

The Empty Space

by Peter Brook

- it's a thin little indispensable book

ear's comment: he's just WON DER FUL - one of the doyens among the directors at European stages. he's working with a multi-ethnic troupe in France, performing all over the world. his version of

And here's a gap in the market

My college directing teacher, Daniel Elihu Kramer, who assigns Ball, Brook, and Charles Marowitz, says that he wishes there were a thorough basic directing book written by a woman. He exhorted the women in our class to write one, and said if we did he'd assign it.

BOOKS BY SISTERS & LISTERS

Take Stage!: How to Direct and Produce a Lesbian Play by Carolyn Gage

Scarecrow Press, \$45.00 Paper 0-8108-3208-9 April 1997 216pp

Take Stage! is the first comprehensive "how-to" book for lesbians wanting to produce or direct lesbian theatre. Controversial and anecdotal, Take Stage! is written for the lesbian with no previous experience with theatre or lesbian organization. In addition to chapters on auditioning, rehearsals, selecting the script, booking space, and assembling a staff, the book includes chapters on issues of special interest to lesbians.

Take Stage! includes information on how to challenge the "isms"--lookism, racism, classism, ageism, and other prejudices with which lesbian culture is currently engaged. It also looks at problems of accountability in non-hierarchical structures, boundary-setting among all-volunteer staffs, sabotage via hidden agendas or disassociative behaviors, horizontal hostility, and internalized homophobia. The appendix contains sample contracts, audition forms, light plots, budgets, and schedules.

From the decision to produce the play to opening night and touring, Take Stage! covers all the bases and provides a healthy dose of moral support.

About The Author: **Carolyn Gage** is a freelance writer with several degrees, honors, and awards, and a member of the Dramatists Guild.

links

<http://www.playdatabase.com>

An excellent, free site where you can list your plays and monologues.

A big site -- 20,000+ plays listed, including most published plays. And like Amazon, it has a feature where people can rate your plays.

<http://www.storyfoundry.com>

Another terrific site where you can list your play synopses - free!

Run by playwright Robert Mattson. It's a very simple form-driven site -- you input the info and it appears instantly. It's a searchable database, by length, genre, & # of characters (m/f). And best of all, there are no fees. You control the rights, and there are links to your

- **To join ICWPInc. visit the website <http://www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org> and click on the link for Membership Form**
- **To Subscribe to the ICWP-L email discussion list send an email to: listadmin@internationalwomenplaywrights.org**