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The Youth Respondent Method: An Exploration of Reception Studies with Youth in New Work Development for Theatre for Young Audiences

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The Youth Respondent Method: An Exploration of Reception Studies with Youth in New Work Development for Theatre for Young Audiences

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather John Auletti, an extremely hard worker, whose formal education concluded at the age of twelve; and for his daughter and my mother, Jeanette Leahey, the hardest worker I know.

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Throughout my life I've lived in many different places: New York City, St Joseph, Boston, Chicago, Austin, and Washington DC. Each of these geographic locations greatly differ in terms of pace, culture, theatrical ecology, diversity of people, among many other characteristics which shaped my life, ideas, and relationship with artistic work as an audience member, scholar, and artist. More than anything, I value the individuals – the artists, scholars, colleagues, family, and friends – I have met in these different regions. They challenge, inspire, and support me throughout this journey.

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The Youth Respondent Method: An Exploration of Reception Studies with Youth in New Work Development for Theatre for Young Audiences

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I define the youth respondent method as a process by which artists and/or producers involve children and/or young adults through planned theatre activities or discussions with the objective of answering specific questions about the development of the work and collect feedback to improve the text or further the production. This pluralistic practice grants agency for the target audience, while informing the creators of the possibilities of the play and answering challenging questions regarding the work. Considering a continuum that places creative dramatics and children's theatre at its poles, the youth respondent method demonstrates a merger of the two genres affiliated with youth, theatre, and play. My dissertation documents the youth respondent method's application in a number of mid-twentieth century and contemporary case studies from the U.S., all of which received national attention through festivals and professional productions at regional theatres throughout the country. These case studies include: Playwright Charlotte Chorpenning's work with the Goodman Theatre (1940s), Deni Kruger's play *Muddy Boots* (2005), Jason Tremblay's play *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted Her Name Back* (2009), Lydia Diamond's play *Harriet Jacobs* (2008), and Duncan Sheik and Stephen Sater's musical *Spring Awakening* (2006). This diverse group of plays and musicals relied on variations of the youth respondent method at different stages of their development and production processes, in

which youth took the reins to serve as collaborative creators. The child is another essential collaborator in determining how their generation can make a better future through the practice and art of theatre. I examine the dialectics between artists, scholars, producers, and children, applying the youth respondent method. This model strengthens Theatre for Young Audience (TYA) plays while it gives children the agency to learn, exchange ideas, and address subjects that are important to them. TYA is a continually expanding field, although there is a significant lack of scholarship documenting its growth and such important practices as this method. By documenting various forms of the best of this practice, I hope to educate other scholars and practitioners about its vitality.

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Introduction

Locating Moments: Defining the Youth Respondent Method

In the spring of 2008, Adventure Stage Chicago (ASC), in association with the Chicago Humanities Festival, produced the world premiere of noted playwright José Cruz González's play *The Blue House* for young audiences. For a city whose native artists often identify it as the theatre capital of the United States, Chicago contains surprisingly few children's theatres and fewer still that attain any critical attention. ASC serves as one of its professional children's theatres and the area's leading children's theatre in producing new work for young audiences. Even so, the company's eight-year production history includes only five world premiere plays. The theatre falls under the auspices of the Northwestern Settlement House and performs on the Vittum stage, a two hundred and ninety-nine seat proscenium house with little wing space that often serves as the residence for dance companies from around the city. The company prides itself on creating stories about its Chicago community to serve Chicago audiences with work such as *The Blue House*.

The play's protagonist, Maricela, is a thirteen-year-old girl living in the present-day Chicago neighborhood of Pilsen, located on the lower west side of the city. Ghosts lead Maricela to an abandoned lot, where they died a century before in a fire at the blue house. The play explores the history of Pilsen as a port for immigrants – people of Slavic decent arriving to the U.S. during the late nineteenth century and undocumented Mexican families in the twenty-first century. Before working with youth who helped generate ideas for the play, the writer selected the community to focus on, created a female protagonist who traced her history in

relation to her neighborhood's, and desired to address the clash of the ever-changing populations of the past and the present. For the rest of the play, Cruz González decided he would rely on middle school students to help create the structure for the narrative and much of the detail for his new work. ASC Director and Artistic Director Tom Arvetis, and the writer partnered with Betsy Quinn, a drama education specialist and teacher at Evanston's Haven Middle School, to work on generating ideas and feedback for *The Blue House* with her middle school students.

While attending the 2006 Bonderman National Youth Theatre Playwriting Development Workshop and Symposium, Quinn and Cruz González participated in a number of new play development workshops where artistic teams solicited feedback from children. Inspired by the immersion, they decided to employ a variation of the method with Quinn's students for a commission that Cruz González recently received from ASC. The participating students represented the target audience age of ten years old and older. Cruz González and Quinn, with the assistance of eighteen Northwestern creative drama undergraduate students, created a list of questions about the play. Instead of directly asking the one hundred and forty youth participants these questions, they explored possible answers with the students through drama exercises and play. This was Cruz González's first experience with attaining feedback from youth via creative drama to inform his playwriting.

During the three Saturday mornings dedicated to the program, the participants devised possibilities to tell the story of the fictional blue house and its characters. For the first week – working in four classrooms – they imagined they played together in an empty lot, which eventually became the piece's setting and where the Blue House formerly resided. From discussions and the participants portraying characters during in-role exercises, the idea emerged that a developer (who recently bought the lot) planned to develop condos in the area, thus

furthering the gentrification in Pilsen. The youth made the decision that this sale would erase the history of the location, which helped the writer find the play's conflict.

During the second week, Quinn and Cruz González removed themselves from the drama in order to observe and take more notes. In the participants' creative play, objects came to life to warn the children of the ghosts in the space. For instance, the students imagined a music box that suddenly began to play to warn the characters of danger. This music box, including the various ideas about setting, character and plot, emerged from the process drama, and eventually found their way into *The Blue House*. Cruz González said, "This world is interactive and moving and it's so amazing to watch it. You learn so much by what it is doing." For the third Saturday, Cruz González again involved himself in the drama and asked the participants questions, which they responded to in-role. Also, the facilitators playing the character Ms. Betnorakate allowed children to ask them questions, which Cruz González recorded. For instance, he asked the question, "How do the little girl and the ghost communicate with each other?" Quinn asked a student to portray "Maricela" and one of the college students to portray the ghost who communicated with the girl. Within a few exchanges of impromptu dialogue, the "Maricela" said, "The ghost is writing in my diary." They both began to pretend to write in the diary together. This pivotal moment helped Cruz González to define the rules of ghosts in the play. In an interview, the writer said of the children's assistance, "Those were probably the most powerful, articulate, insightful and deep discussions I've ever had with anyone." The group informed the play by cohesively working together through drama exercises.

Quinn described the pride and the empowerment the children felt seeing their ideas realized onstage a year later when they all saw the production. Both the writer and teacher believed in the effectiveness of the collaboration, and would repeat it for the development of

other new plays. The writer broke away from a traditional structure of creating a play by himself and then sharing it only with his director, designers, actors, and dramaturg in preparation for an audience. Cruz González embraced a process where he directly confronted the audience at the work's inception. He said in an interview:

> I think that the children come to understand that we're in the same place here. In this place we're the same. We are artists and collaborators. There's no hierarchical way of placing people. And that is…their voice is respected. To me that's important. It's really amazing to see them grow, whether in the process or imagining what they'll be like when they're collaborating with somebody else. What I've discovered with process is I've become rigid with old standards that we're taught. It's not thinking or working that way anymore because we all belong here. And I think young people are much more open to going there than adults. So again that's something I really love about mixing up collaborators. You have different viewpoints of what it is you're looking at.

As Cruz González illuminates, the architecture of playmaking is changing in that theatres, artists, educators, and youth work together on a more equal plane where many voices are considered. The lack of time, tightened budgets, and a focus on traditional curriculums makes these immersions challenging for schools and theatres. However, while they are rarely possible, they often illuminate the work and prove invaluable to the involved participants' education and cognitive and emotional growth. They inform the writer about the possibility of his play serving the target audience. Cruz González's engagement with Quinn's students to write *The Blue House* is an example of what I label as the youth respondent method.

With much elasticity, I define the youth respondent method as a process by which artists and/or producers involve participants through planned theatre activities or discussions with the objective of answering specific questions about the development of the work and collect feedback to improve the text or further the production. This pluralistic practice grants agency for the target audience, while informing the creators of the possibilities of the play and answering challenging questions regarding the work. For this study, the target audience's age ranges from eleven to nineteen, depending on each work discussed. Considering a continuum that places creative dramatics and children's theatre at its poles, the youth respondent method demonstrates a merger of the two genres affiliated with youth, theatre, and play. Master teacher, scholar, and writer of *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*, Nellie McCaslin defines creative dramatics as "informal drama that is created by participants" (8). She believes the term is interchangeable with playmaking. As examples of creative drama McCaslin offers story creation and the exploration and the development of ideas and feelings through dramatic enactment (8). These processes are also inherent to the youth respondent method. Children's Theatre scholars Davis and Evans' text *Theatre, Children and Youth* describes "children's theatre" as an all-encompassing form of theatre designed for audiences ranging in age from early childhood to adolescence. The term theatre for young audiences (TYA) represents both theatre for children (twelve and below the age of twelve) and theatre for youth (ages twelve and older) (40). Because TYA focuses on the product and creative dramatics on the process, many scholars believed the fields oppositional. In *Theatre for Children*, forerunner in American children's theatre Winifred Ward describes the practices of Peter Slade, Drama Advisor to the Birmingham Educational Committee and leading drama teacher primarily working in the 1950s. He believed that creative drama and children's theatre competed with rather than complimented each other

(26). Davis and Evans, in agreement that the two fields should not dramatically overlap, writes, "Creative dramatics and children's theatre should be treated as separate – through mutually complimentary – phases of a total children's drama program" (19). The youth respondent method relies upon the merger of creative drama techniques and TYA to include the audience in the creation process. Sometimes the process lends itself to discovering specific moments of the play while at other times answering global questions about it. In the scenario of *The Blue House,* the entire play grew and changed as a result of this practice. This dissertation explores the various applications of the youth respondent method that differ but serve the goal of involving the audience in the works' development. I describe it as the "youth" respondent method because the target audiences for these projects thus far have been children and teens. The method complicates a traditional power dynamic in which the audience strictly receives the theatrical event as spectators; instead they contribute to the creation process. For artists, this nontraditional method to create work focuses on collaboration versus artists creating in isolation. As a result of this method, the audience becomes a stronger voice within the production. Youth serve as active producers, who no longer are the next generation of artists and future spectators but the "it" generation of artists and audiences. Throughout the play development process, playwrights create with the guidance of directors and dramaturgs. In creating for young audiences, another collaborator is joining the development discussion: the youth respondent.

My dissertation documents the youth respondent method's application in a number of mid-twentieth century and contemporary case studies from the U.S., all of which received national attention through festivals and professional productions at regional theatres throughout the country. These case studies include: Playwright Charlotte Chorpenning's work with the Goodman Theatre (1940s), Deni Kruger's play *Muddy Boots* (2005), Jason Tremblay's play

Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted Her Name Back (2009), Lydia Diamond's play *Harriet Jacobs* (2008), and Duncan Sheik and Stephen Sater's musical *Spring Awakening* (2006). In defining youth I studied work that applies to a large target age range of audiences, primarily from the age of eleven to nineteen. Because the youth respondent method is rarely documented or even applies, the study must rely on its application with a broad age range. This diverse group of plays and musicals relied on variations of the youth respondent method at different stages of their development and production processes, in which youth took the reins to serve as collaborative creators.

In 1931, children's theatre playwright Charlotte Chorpenning began incorporating child audiences' feedback into the development of her work – an early form of the youth respondent method. She conducted extensive reception studies with child audiences to discover what they found entertaining in her stage adaptations of fairytales at The Goodman Theatre. Besides listening to audiences' responses (e.g., laughing, wiggling, and in-awe stillness) during the performance, she interviewed children during the intermission. Chorpenning altered productions of her plays between acts based upon children's feedback and their behavior as audience members. She genuinely took into account the children's opinions to create finer children's theatre and to make her work more enjoyable and interesting for the target audience. This first chapter addresses her work as a progressive leader in the arts while attempting to teach her audiences her morality. Unfortunately, little remains of the extensive data from her reception practices. Whether she made written records or not is unknown, since no archive houses this material. But her respect for children's involvement in the creation process is evident in her writing and well as much of her methodology.

This chapter also focuses on the development of Deni Krueger's *Muddy Boots* at the 2007 Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Playwriting for Youth: National Competition and Symposium. For *Muddy Boots*, the following questions related to the audience's perception became important in dramaturgical conversations: What is the target audience age for this play? What is the play saying about the war? What happens to the Dad while serving in Iraq? Does the audience need to know if he returns safely? Since its inception, the Bonderman Festival has relied on its strong relationship with local Indiana schools to assist in new play development. After a week of developing the play further, the dramaturg and the rest of the artistic team facilitate a school residency with the participating students. The team conducts creative drama activities about the play's issues, explores how to collaboratively develop a TYA play, and poses final questions about the play's development to the students. Working with elementary and middle school classes, often, their responses lead to solutions that further prepare the play for its public reading for audiences of other artists, publishers, and the class of youth who worked with the artistic team. This TYA project highlights a specific moment in which the youth respondent method developed the play and imparted agency to the collaborators responding to the piece. Playwrights, directors, and dramaturgs played active roles in the classroom to educate as well as develop work.

In 2008, the selection, development, and discussion surrounding Lydia Diamond's *Harriet Jacobs* came to fruition with the feedback of Steppenwolf Theatre's Young Adults Councils (consisting of high school students from Chicago-area public schools), the regional theatre's Steppenwolf for Young Adults program, and via an extensive workshop at the New Visions/New Voices Festival at the Kennedy Center. As a result of the strong collaboration on Diamond's 2005 theatrical adaptation of Toni Morison's *The Bluest Eye*, director Hallie Gordon

and the writer partnered on Diamond's adaptation of *Harriet Jacobs* – a new play based on the monograph *Harriet Jacobs: Diary of a Slave Girl*. This second chapter will examine the development of this TYA play through an education department in a regional theatre setting, particularly the challenges and successes of developing work in this environment and youth's involvement in the process. This case study will illustrate the progressive decisions of the department to involve youth in the development to directly serve the audience and also to bolster the reputation of the education program, as well as the entire institution. With the Steppenwolf for Young Adults program, prior to the implementation of the Steppenwolf Young Adults Council, teachers from participating Chicago schools helped select literature for Steppenwolf Theatre's artistic staff to adapt into plays for high school audiences. Over the past five years, the education program began to incorporate the input and ideas of representative young adults from participating schools, which formally became the Steppenwolf Young Adults Council. For the production, Steppenwolf introduced new curricula in Chicago Public School classes attending the production. Discussions focused on the play's themes, with the hope that students would think more critically about the play in relation to their own lives.

Harriet Jacobs partially was developed at the New Visions/ New Voices festival at the Kennedy Center, where the chapter's second case study *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted Her Name Back* by Jason Tremblay also received some development work. *Katrina*'s first production was at The University of Texas in the fall of 2006. The play depicts a child surviving Hurricane Katrina, and much of its development occurred at academic and professional institutions. Both examples articulate youth's involvement and influence on these plays within these complicated settings. I also discuss how youth (middle school aged children and older) played important participants in the development of *Katrina*. For instance, in preparation for a

reading at Northwestern University for *Katrina*, as the dramaturg, I created a lesson plan using creative drama techniques to address the ending of the play for an in-school workshop with sixth graders. In this instance, the youth respondent method failed to provide a suitable ending for the play. I analyze how the model needed modification to address our goals as well as the education of the participating students.

The third chapter focuses on youth's social media habits for the 2005 musical *Spring Awakening*. As active producers, teens (primarily girls thirteen years old and older) served as the grassroots moguls who used social media such as Myspace, YouTube, blogs, and various other social networking means to discuss and promote the show. This chapter examines children's and teens' roles in this campaign, the musical that inspired them and succeeded, in part, because of their involvement, and the paradigm shift in marketing and audience engagement this constituency helped facilitate. As a result of youths' successful online activity, The Atlantic Theatre and producers of the show replicated and formalized fans' practices to generate excitement, discussion, and ticket sales for the target youth demographic. Teens' creative reception of the musical via technology gained them agency in the role of a producer, while it helped the musical locate its core audience and succeed critically and economically.

All these examples demonstrate different and productive iterations of the youth respondent method. Chorpenning and her Northwestern and DePaul students listened attentively to audiences, facilitated process dramas, and asked questions of the attending youth during intermissions and as they exited. These immediate reception studies and gathering of this empirical data altered her plays during the production process. Krueger relied on the youth respondent method during the writing and workshop of *Muddy Boots*. She posed a specific question to the participating children regarding the resolution of her play. The answer, provided

by a student, dramatically changed its ending. Both Diamond and Tremblay employed the youth respondent method at various stages of their works' creations – in their selection, play development, production, etc. For *Spring Awakening*, artists and producers recognized the success of youth's social media practices to engage, exchange, and (via grassroots methods) promote the hit musical. In each instance, artists and institutions incorporated but never completely analyzed the data that influenced the alteration of their work, often as a result of lack of time, funding, and participants.

Although the case studies vastly differ in time, place, the age of the target participants and how and when youth participated with artists for the youth respondent method, each illuminates how youth played a pivotal role in the creation and production of these works. They present the reciprocal relationship between artists and audiences to learn, listen, and directly engage. As a dramaturg, educator, and facilitator of audience engagement, I am invested in these rare occasions when the art and the audience respond to each other. When youth are integrated into the process of the play's development, they learn experientially and help inform the play's creation. From this direct contact, artists learn about the youth's perspective on their work. In scholar and playwright David Woods' 1999 publication *Theatre for Children: A Guide to Writing, Adapting, Directing, and Acting*, he contends that TYA professionals appear too easily satisfied with informally acquiring feedback from teachers and occasionally soliciting answers from children leaving the theatre to determine audiences' responses to their work. He writes, "It seems, through many of these efforts, an assessment of a kind of general effectiveness has been sought, but we have too often been satisfied with less specific outcomes of the process" (47). The work conducted in this dissertation highlights how artists attempt to actively reach out to the

audience, excavate deeper to uncover their interests and tastes, and subsequently apply it in an effort to grow their work and further capture the audience's interest.

I selected works that employed the youth respondent method and that also reflect and challenge traditional definitions of TYA, theatre for youth, and children's theatre. I argue that all the included plays and musical case studies are appropriate for intergenerational audiences and not just children and/or teens or adults. TYA Scholars Woods, Davis and Evans, and Moses Goldberg, writer of *Children's Theatre: a Philosophy and a Method*, raise the question, "What constitutes a Theatre for Young Audience (TYA) play?" and definitively define it. According to Davis and Evans, until the late 1970s, children's theatre was an all-inclusive term that represented the field of theatre for young audiences (37). The term "children's theatre" did not represent this adolescent audience population. The overarching term "theatre for young audiences," created by Davis and Evans in the 1980s, represented audiences of children, preteens, and teenagers (38). Children's theatre only applied to performances for child audience members between the ages of five to approximately twelve. The proper term is "theatre for children" (Davis and Evans 39). The term "theatre for youth" is defined as productions intended for audience members older than twelve years old (Davis and Evans 40). Goldberg distinguishes the child audience into age categories as specific as five to six year olds, seven to nine year olds, ten to thirteen year olds, and fourteen to eighteen year olds. He describes personality attributes he associates with these ages (e.g., seven to nine year olds inhabit a "glorious" period of childhood) and what type of TYA work he feels appeals to these specific ages. (e.g.,"Boys in this age group like science and sports while girls like romance and everyday-life stories" (90)). Goldberg differentiates what types of TYA plays appeal to each gender, without any evidence for these conjectures besides the stereotypes that girls do not like science or sports and boys do

not like interpersonal stories. In general, these very specific distinctions in TYA vocabulary seem very limiting to broadening audiences.

Many TYA playwrights define what constitutes a TYA play and what appeals to children by examining their own plays. The British children's theatre playwright and theatrical adaptor of Ronald Dahl's *BFG* (*Big Friendly Giant*) Woods writes: "Theatre for children is a separate art form with qualities that make it quite distinct from adult theatre. It is not simplified adult theatre; it has its own dynamic and its own rewards" (5). Woods also describes common theatrical characteristics of children's theatre such as the deployment of large-scale sets, puppets, magic, colorful design elements, music, mime and movement (57). Although these are prevalent traits of children's theatre, they are not characteristic of all TYA plays. For instance, James Stills' *Amber Waves* (2003), intended for a child audience older than eight years old, tells the story of a midwestern family losing their farm. This well-known and frequently produced TYA play, which also appealed to families, lacks all of Woods' children's theatre elements. Instead, it calls for minimalism in design and performance. *Amber Waves*, among many other examples of important TYA plays, illustrates the mislabeling of what constitutes TYA and what qualities of the work child audiences will find entertaining. The necessity to staunchly define what represents TYA and the identity of its audiences does not legitimize the field but rather inspires misassumptions about the work and its audiences, hence further marginalizing it.

TYA definitions include what it is not and whom it is for, rather than what it aspires to do, how it is in conversation with the entire field of theatre, and how it hopes to be accessible to everyone. Perhaps creating work specifically for children does inspire us to work harder and more collaboratively because the field hopes to practice what it teaches. Inherently, the work in TYA attempts to educate or impart knowledge to the next generation. Ward writes that Mark

Twain deemed children's theatre one of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century because it most effectively taught morals and promoted good conduct through visual metaphors. He believed the lessons "go straight to the heart, which is the rightist of right places for them" (77). Often, issues and ideas addressed in TYA progressively consider identity, personal discovery and growth. For instance, Laurie Brooks' *The Wrestling Season* (2001), consisting of a series of wrestling matches marked with dialogue, and Sarah Gubbins' *FML: How Carson McCullers' Saved My Life* (2012), relying on video animation and game theory, represent just two of the TYA pieces that address gender identity, sexual orientation, and bullying. Musicals and plays such as Quiara Alegría Hudes' *Barrio Grrl!* (2009), in which comic book-like characters are brought to life, and Luis Alfaro's *Black Butterfly, Jaguar Girl, Piñata Woman and Other Super Hero Girls Like Me* (1995), a series of poems, soliloquies, and monologues discuss growing up Latina in urban areas on the east and west coast. These few examples of high-quality, new TYA plays break away from definitions of what TYA should be, its usual structure, and the traditional and "child-friendly" topics many assume TYA exclusively addresses. Instead, they reinforce that TYA writers hope their audiences emotionally and cognitively grow from experiencing the work, while they desire to introduce them to new ideas and share points of identification.

Much scholarship regarding children's theatre from the 1950s until the present focuses on differentiating children's theatre from adult theatre. Woods describes how much of what is labeled children's theatre lacks clarity, focus, and sincerity (11). He continues his argument by exploring predictable season planning: "The need for good modern plays, whether original or dramatizations of stories, is great. At least one play in modern dress each season is highly desirable both for the sake of variety and because children like them" (110). Theatres that produce TYA do reflect the entire field of theatre regarding in their shared fear of producing new

and original work. Researching many seasons for large regional children's theatres, midsize institutions, education departments in regional theatres with productions, and small children's theatres around the country, I concur that the prescriptive season planning Woods finds problematic remains rampant in TYA. Many plays based on recognizable fairytale and folk tale titles and adaptations of popular contemporary work dominate seasons with few new and original plays. For instance, the largest children's theatre in the country The Children's Theatre Company (CTC) for the 2011-12 season does not include any new original plays or musicals. Next season is filled with work based on new adaptations of contemporary and classic books, similar to the 2012-2013 seasons at Childsplay (AZ) and Seattle Children's Theatre and many other small and large TYA theatres across the country. Optimistically, each season contains at least one world premiere or second production of an original play or musical and these theatres facilitate extensive new play development programs.

Woods' criticism encompasses traditional season planning choices but also the quality of these productions. Much of theatre in the U.S., regardless of age of audience, suffers the same issues of lacking "focus" and "sincerity." Recently the Theatre Development Fund in collaboration with Artistic Director of New Dramatists Todd London and scholar Ben Pesner conducted a comprehensive study of new play development in the American theatre and published their findings in *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the New American Play* (2009). London writes, "This study describes acollaboration in crisis. Our report locates that crisis not in individual writers, artistic directors, or producers, but in a system of theatrical production that has become increasingly alienating to individual artists and inhospitable to the cultivation of new work for the stage, despite an apparent dedication to it" (2). London's study includes Childsplay Theatre in Arizona and Seattle Children's Theatre, besides a number of other

institutions that produce work entirely or in part for young audiences. He lauds these theatres for taking the risk of developing new work, which many of their colleague theatres do not.

My dissertation contends that the endemic problems of contemporary theatre are not limited to certain subjectivities of theatre, including TYA. Development processes for professional theatre for both adult and child audiences share many of the same challenges. Some of these issues include: a lack of producing enough high quality work, a lack of time and resources, and a lack of full and diverse audiences. Perhaps, as Woods argues, "If the children's theatres of this country, by presenting only superior plays, can develop in the boys and girls who will be the adult audiences of tomorrow, a more discriminating taste in drama than their parents have, they will have made a distinct contribution to American life" (81). Placing a greater emphasis on producing work of better quality for all young audiences will cultivate not only the next generation of artists but audiences. Besides improving the quality of work and telling new stories, the field needs to embrace new modes of communication and development to reach these audiences such as audience engagement, web-communication, and social media.

A prevalent ideology exists that children's theatre is in competition with other forms of entertainment media such as film, television, and the internet. Woods writes, "Millions of children know no other theatre than the moving picture, the radio and television, and these, of course, are not really theatre at all…They don't say, 'Go to, let's have a real theatre,' because, having no basis for comparison, they can't realize the lack of complete satisfaction in the plays of the mass media" (71). Many prominent scholars and leading practitioners, including Ward, Davis and Evans, and Chorpenning agreed with this philosophy, that film and television threatened the welfare of children's theatre. As seen with *Spring Awakening*, media becomes a tool to further enhance TYA, not only in the capacity of production with design elements but

through communication and collaboration. These fields are not in competition. For instance, the CTC, working in residency programs, created an interactive website for the youth participants to respond to the design renderings for productions. Designers asked specific questions of the students to gain their feedback. Students' blogged, answered questions, and submitted drawings after an initial visit with designers. The analog communication became online communication to continue the relationship between the students and the artists, who do not all live in Minneapolis (Children's Theatre Company website). This recently developed program is another example of the youth respondent method. The theatrical event becomes the fodder for the exchange between the institution and the audience, regardless of age, concerning the creation and the execution of the art.

These contemporary practices, such as the use of web technology, are often necessary to the youth respondent method. But the method's roots began with the progressive risk-takers who originated the field and challenged who TYA was for and how it was created. Theatre intended for young audiences originated in France in 1784 with works created to entertain the children of the court written by forward thinking actress and storyteller Madame Genlis. Genlis created a triptych entitled *Le Theatre D'Education*; according to Ward, the bestselling work carried a progressive pedagogy filled with tomes on morality (3). As early as 2000 BC, the Chinese created spectacle driven religious festivals intended for young audiences with jugglers, sword dancers, and puppets (Ward 15). Christmas pantomimes arose in the early eighteenth century as comic entertainment not just for children but for families. In the U.S., children's theatre gained popularity during the twentieth century. In 1903, the newly formed Children's Educational Theatre opened a production of an adaptation of *The Tempest* at the Alliance Building on Jefferson and East Broadway with immigrant children in the roles. Many of the children didn't

speak English but began to learn it from their involvement. Alice Minnie Hertz, who helmed the Children's Educational Theatre, directed the production intended for an audience of the immigrant children and their families living near the settlement house where the performance took place. Neighborhood families, anticipating the production, bought all the copies of the play from local bookstores. At a nickel a seat, audiences witnessed their children perform the classic in elaborate costumes on fully realized sets. Hertz desired the production to create solidarity in the community, educate primarily non-English speaking youth about English drama, and assist with families' transition or assimilation into American English-speaking culture (Davis and Evans 100). Maude Adams' 1905 production of the London hit *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie at the Empire Theatre on Broadway and *The Blue Bird* at the New Theatre in 1910 followed, serving middle- and upper-class demographics. In 1921, Clare Tree Major created the Threshold Players and produced and toured plays such as *Treasure Island*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Pinocchio* (Davis and Evans 101). Instead of creating original works, classical literature, short stories, and fairytales served as source material. At Northwestern University in the1920s, Winifred Ward established the Children's Theatre of Evanston, Illinois. Ward invented creative drama, process-centered drama in which facilitators lead participants to imagine, create, respond, and participate in scenes around a given theme. Ward, both an educator and a theatrical director, unintentionally merged her talents with dramatic play and theatre, hence forming creative dramatics. With her Northwestern students, she produced many children's theatre plays for young audiences in Evanston, particularly the work of playwright Charlotte Chorpenning.

In 1931, Chorpenning began writing and directing plays for the children's theatre branch of Chicago's Goodman Theatre. For over twenty-one years, she entertained young audiences with her adaptations of fairytales, fables, and classic children's literature. By her death in 1955,

she doubled the canon of children's theatre plays. As the artistic director of the Goodman Children's Theatre and as a faculty member of Northwestern University's theatre department, Chorpenning conducted extensive reception studies with child audiences to discover what they consistently found entertaining in children's theatre. In addition to delighting children with her spectacular productions, Chorpenning intended to morally educate young audiences. In *Twenty-One Years with Children's Theatre*, Chorpenning writes, "The child wants to be the character he is watching on stage, to feel what he feels" (43). Chorpenning's oeuvre suited the tastes of mainstream mid-twentieth century American culture but inspired the idea that children's theatre could cohabitate in a regional theatre. Her work not only benefited children and audiences but students in education, sociology, and theatre at both DePaul University and Northwestern University, in addition to the Evanston Public School System and Chicago's Settlement House movement. The history of the American children's theatre represents a merger of art, pedagogy, and community building helmed by progressive female leaders, such as Hertz, Adams, Major, Ward, and Chorpenning. Their work changed the lives of artists, educators, and audiences around the country within their generation and for generations to come.

In 1980, Aurand Harris wrote *The Arkansaw Bear*, which redefined subjects appropriate for children's theatre. In *The Arkansaw Bear*, young Tish's grandfather nears death. Tish runs to a special tree in her backyard, wishes on a star that her grandfather will not die, and eventually meets the World's Greatest Dancing Bear. He, like Tish's grandfather, is dying – although the World's Greatest Dancing Bear tries to escape it. Together Tish and the World's Greatest Dancing Bear learn about the inevitability of death and that we all must die to make room for the next generation of bears, particularly the Arkansas Bear. Early productions of the play shocked audiences because the work addressed the taboo subject of death for children. But because of the

quality of the work, how the characters grappled with the subject, and the reality that all humans – regardless of age – deal with death, audiences and artists accepted the play, and it became one of the most widely produced TYA plays in history, with over thousands of productions at small theatres, universities, middle and high schools, regional theatres, and community theatres. In his 1997 article, "How Dare you Call this Children's Theatre! Confessions of an Artoholic," artistic director of the Hartford Children's Theatre Alan Levy writes of his propensity to produce high quality family and children's theatre plays and musicals that often cause outrage in his adult audience members, who feel the subject matter is not appropriate for their children. They felt plays and musicals such as Suzan Zeder's *Mother Hicks* (1980) and Maurice Sendak's *Really Rosie* (1978) were not for children because they contained controversial themes such as violence, witchcraft, and cruelty. When Levy produced *The Arkansas Bear*, however, his audiences embraced the play's seemingly controversial topic. In "Aurand Harris: Playwright and Ambassador," scholar Rachel Fordyce writes, "It is unlikely that *The Arkansaw Bear* would have been, or could have been produced prior to 1970. Either motivated by squeamishness, prudence, or moral reticence, many authors and playwrights eschewed difficult subjects for children" (183). She goes onto argue that although some playwrights attempted to address more challenging issues, they were met with criticism from teachers, parents, and producers, who thought children could not handle such difficult and uncomfortable topics. After *The Arkansaw Bear*, children's theatre artists gained more confidence to address challenging subjects. Ward writes, "If the children's theatre of this country, by presenting only superior plays, can develop in the boys and girls who will be the adult audiences of to-morrow a more discriminating taste in drama than their parents have, they will have made a distinct contribution to American life." (81). Annually,

writers and artists create hundreds of original plays and devised work, attempting to challenge the concept of TYA and what is suitable for young audiences.

TYA's extensive history elucidates the field's artists' aspirations not only to entertain but to educate, to present artistically virtuosic work while also challenging audiences, and not to create the ephemeral audience of today but the dedicated audience of tomorrow. The play development practices that involve the input, ideas, and taste of the target youth audience serve as the major point of inquiry in my dissertation. How do contemporary companies, artists, and educators attempt to invite young audiences into the process of development? Historically, youth served as actors, thus initially influencing the creation of work from the vantage point of performers. Educator-artists recognized the importance of observing the audience and allowing their visceral reactions to influence artistic decisions about the work. From my research, I realize that this process of including youth into the creation of work became more formalized over time with the institutionalization of TYA in professional theatres and academic settings, as well as schools' needs to justify these integrations through their curricula. Besides examining the models to attain feedback, what information emerges from these collaborations and how this information influences the work are core questions of this dissertation; the answers to these questions will be revealed by examining the format whereby this information was retrieved, when it was retrieved, and by considering the population involved. None of the case studies employed assessment practices or collected data. Instead, they are based upon conversations with the artists about what goals they hoped to achieve and what they discovered through the process. This leads to the final question of my research: What do youth gain from their participation in the youth respondent method?

To study the youth respondent method I relied upon interviews, archival research from the Arizona State Drama Child Collection, and documentation from professional and academic productions of new plays, many of which I dramaturged. My interviewees' professional interests in theatre vastly differed, although they share the common goal of creating strong work for young audiences in an effort to further the field, engender the next generation of adult theatergoers, and make positive social change. Some of these interviewees include heads of major education programs, such as Education Director of Steppenwolf Theatre Hallie Gordon and Kennedy Center Producing Director for Young Audiences Peter Kim Kovac. Both Gordon and Kovac spoke about how they balance their roles as theatre administrators and artists. Playwrights I interviewed, such as Lydia Diamond, José Cruz González, and Deni Krueger discussed their processes as writers and their investment in listening and learning from young audiences. Interviewed Artistic Directors and Associates such as Tom Arvetis from Adventure Stage Chicago, Bonderman Artistic Director Dorothy Webb, and Associate Artistic Director of the Atlantic Theatre Christian Parker shared their excitement in developing work for young audiences and their challenges and successes serving intergenerational audiences. Each of these interviews addresses the integration of a form of the youth respondent method and the potential, the success, and the challenges of involving audiences in the development and production of new plays and musicals for young audiences. I include my point of view on the work as well, since I served as the dramaturg for many of these productions. Through these interviews I gained insight on the practices these various companies employ when developing with and for young audiences, their personal and institutional pedagogical philosophies, how they believe their work propels the field, their processes' and outcomes' shortcomings, and their evaluation practices. In

order to reflect on these current practices discussed in the interviews, I investigated the documented philosophy and practices that laid the ground work for this study.

Arizona State University (ASU) Drama Child Collection houses the most extensive archives of material addressing child drama, children's and youth theatre, and creative dramatics in the U.S. The repository contains all past publications from American Alliance in Theatre Education, International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People, *Youth Theatre Journal*, and *Stage of the Art*, which proved invaluable to my research. One of the unique aspects of the archive is that it houses the work of many different theatre companies, all of whom are invested in sharing their histories and knowledge of the field with the current and future generations. The Child Drama Library houses the archives for most major national TYA companies such as The Coterie Theatre in Kansas City, Dallas Children's Theatre, Honolulu Theatre for Youth, Metro Theatre in St. Louis, Seattle Children's Theatre, and Childsplay in Arizona. Early in my research, I traveled to the archive and pored through their extensive collection, attempting to locate where and how children participated in the development of previous work. Specifically, I hoped to uncover data from Charlotte Chorpenning's archives on the reception studies she conducted at the Goodman with children. She discusses some of her research in *Twenty-One Years with Children's Theatre*, which became an important text in this investigation to better understand her philosophy and passions about her art and pedagogy. Prior to my visit to the ASU Drama Collection, as a master's student at Northwestern University, I researched a second collection, which holds smaller archives for Ward, Chorpenning, and the creative drama and children's theatre work created with Northwestern University. Northwestern's archive contains primarily photographs of productions, rehearsals and classes, while ASU primarily contains published texts by these scholar-artists. Neither site carries the

empirical data, which would illuminate Chorpenning's full process of collecting ideas and feedback from youth. Instead at ASU, I recognized the large number of studies which depended on youths' feedback.

One of the many development processes that demonstrated the power and possibility of listening to and applying young people's thoughts is *The Yellow Boat* by David Saar. The archive holds the extensive documentation for the development of this work. The play *The Yellow Boat* tells the story of Benjamin, an extremely creative and gifted child born with congenital hemophilia, who contracted the HIV virus from contaminated Factor VIII and died of AIDS-related complications at the age of eight in 1987. Benjamin created colorful and beautiful drawings which chronicled his life, including his family, friends, school, illness, happiness, fear, and the adversity he encountered. The title of the play originated from a folksong that describes three boats, "One was blue, one was red and one was yellow as the sun. They sailed far out to sea. The blue one returned to the harbor. The red one sailed home, too. But the yellow boat sailed up to the sun." Benjamin always concluded his bedtime ritual by saying, "Mom, you can be the red boat or the blue boat, but I am the yellow boat" (*The Yellow Boat*). In an effort to share the imagination, grace, and memory of Benjamin's life, and to heal, Saar (the Artistic Director of Childsplay and leading TYA director) created the play by collaborating with his wife Sonja, friends and medical and social workers who worked with the family, and many of the couple's colleagues in TYA. The piece premiered at Childsplay at the Tempe Performing Arts Center in 1993. During the process of its development, it received a workshop at the University of Texas at Austin, with faculty and students, and also at the Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices program. Faculty, theatres, dramaturgs, directors, writers, actors, designers, academic universities, theatres, and communities all participated in the creation of this pivotal work, which

addressed illness, survival, death, loss, fear, discrimination, hope, creativity, and love, among many others themes. At the heart and creation of this story was a child, who not only inspired the play, but who created its visual vocabulary. Benjamin's drawings, housed at the ASU child drama archive, informed every stage of the work's development and every subsequent production. The production and script require projections of the images, and often the original drawings tour as an accompanying exhibit. The archive contains all of these drawings, including dramaturgical notes, programs, and written audience responses to the work. This collection helped inform the type of material I hoped to gather for each of my case studies to fully understand children's involvement in their development.

Scholarship concerning reception studies serves as a primary theoretical framework for this dissertation because of my research's connection to audiences. The formal qualitative study of audiences' interests, investments, relevance and enrichment with work began during the mid- to late twentieth century. For instance, Bretolt Brecht's hyperawareness of the audience and concern for their engagement with the theatrical event resonates through his scholarship, such as that gathered in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (1964), as it did throughout all his work. Brecht employed "the distancing effect," essentially actions that "prevent the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer" (91). Brecht always considered the position of the audience, whether and when to draw them into proximity or alienate them from the stage. In 1977, scholar Jerome Rothenberg wrote in "New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetic of Performance," "Along with the artist, the audience enters the performance arena as participant – or, ideally, the audience disappears as the distinction between doer and viewer…begins to blur" (15). With my research, I'm invested in

these moments of blurring between the art and the audience. Scholar Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997) and theatre historian with an interest in semiology Patrice Pavis' *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of the Theatre* (1982) further unpack this theory that audiences act as active and engaged participants rather than passive receivers of information. Bennett's and Pavis' texts are foundational to my research. Bennett contends that the theatre, as a cultural commodity, is a discourse of reception and production, which function simultaneously (106). To understand the art, the influence, and the relevance of the event the work must be examined in tandem of considering both the audience and their responses to the work. This belief in reflecting on the audience, identifying who the target audience is, as well as their collective and individual responses to the production, were imperatives for the creators of each of my case studies. Krueger asked of her audience a single revealing question; the target audience helped select Diamond's work; Tremblay's play received exposure from target audiences in different regions who contributed similar general feedback; and the producers of *Spring Awakening* identified systems created by target audience fans to describe their powerful responses to the work. Besides acting as viewers, the audiences' visceral and analytical responses shaped the work.

Artists depended on audience semiological responses to work. Pavis writes, "Semiology investigates the signifying oppositions between signs belonging to different systems, it makes codes binary, suggests a hierarchy between materials at a given point in the performance" (19). Chorpenning and Krueger both concentrated on the details of the work received by audiences in order to implement change. They both broke a hierarchy based upon age in order to create their best work for the same population they closely listened to and whose reactions they closely interpreted. Bennett notes that work such as Pavis' on the relevance of semiotics, which brings

the audience to the forefront, creates a greater understanding of the discourse of the work itself and all its intricacies (119). These details acknowledged and questioned by the audience are most telling in the youth respondent method.

Examining interpretations of the young audience in scholarly texts focused on TYA enabled a more comprehensive interpretation of the youth respondent method. Charlotte Chorpenning's 1954 publication *Twenty-One Years with Children's Theatre* documents her work as educational theatre director at the Goodman Theatre. She describes her experiences, processes, and the children's theatre tropes associated with many of her most successful productions, such as *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and experiences teaching at Northwestern while developing work. This narrative, filled with the details of the teacher-director-artist's work, illuminates the first example of the youth respondent method. Unfortunately, many of the specific details of her studies she decides not to include in her monographic, which is more autobiographical in tone. The overall themes and feminist pedagogical ideas of the text proved indispensible in analyzing the youth respondent method. Chorpenning dedicates a chapter to, "How I Used What the Children Taught Me." She makes the statement, "The general principles of plays for children and for adults are the same" (49). Instead of making assumptive generalizations about the youth audience, she spoke to youth individually about their experiences at the theatre she created for them and continued to improve with their suggestions. *Twenty-One Years with Children's Theatre* serves as a primary text discussed in the first chapter regarding Chorpenning's reliance on a form of the youth respondent method.

As mentioned before, the comprehensive 1982 scholarly TYA text, Davis and Evans' *Theatre, Children, and Youth*, attempts to represent and discuss all the participants in TYA collaborations, including theatres, writers, designers, performers, directors, producers, audiences,

and schools. Since this dissertation elaborates on the practice of TYA, this text proved beneficial in describing work rooted in institutions dedicated to producing theatre exclusively for young audiences and academic institutions with a strong dedication to the field and its study. The scholars philosophically recognize the importance of studying the audience to create work. They contend that the key for successful children's theatre is to identify what challenges, interests and entertains the child audience, and, in effect, to address the child audience's needs, desires, and lives (49). Davis and Evans' describe the growth and relevance of the field, in examining it as an independent field in theatre. When the book was written scholars and artists began to divide theatre history, performance studies, Asian American theatre, African American theatre, community based theatre, feminist theatre, and children's theatre and its age-based forms into different disciplines of American theatre. *Theatre, Children, and Youth* is one of the TYA texts that makes this discernment to further study and assess the field's growth.

The 1997 publication *Dramaturgy in the American Theatre: a Source Book,* edited by Susan Jonas (formerly of the Ensemble Studio Theatre), Geoffrey Proehl (University of Puget Sound), and Michael Lupu (Guthrie Theatre) reveals the diversity in the field of dramaturgy and its relevance to artistic collaborations. Many of the articles in the text explore the merger of dramaturgy and audience engagement, particularly examining new play development of efficacious TYA plays. The articles that describe this integration between theatre education outreach and new play development include "Dramaturging Education" by Richard Pettengill. Pettengill, formerly Education Director at the Goodman Theatre and now chair of Chicago's Lake Forest College's theatre program, describes the matinees the Goodman presents to high school audiences and all the activities affiliated with the program. This traditional example of programming for young audiences within a large regional theatre from the point of view of a

dramaturg helped unpack the development of TYA plays, such as *Harriet Jacobs*, in large, institutionalized settings. In "Once and Future Audiences: Dramaturgy and Children's Theatre," playwright and pedagogue Suzan Zeder discusses the trend in regional theatres to turn to their dramaturgy, education, and outreach programs to cultivate young and diverse audiences. An essential part of my discussion addresses how dramaturgy and engagement work in tandem to serve audiences.

Geoffrey Proehl, in his 2008 publication *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and journey*, beautifully describes the role of the dramaturg, her potential contributions in new play development, and the sensibility of listening and speaking that is important to the art and connecting to the audience. He writes:

> Dramaturgs watch, listen, exchange glances, think, feel, drink coffee or bottled water or vodka, smoke (less now than before), they ask questions, and, they talk. Designers design; actors act; directors direct; but what dramaturgs most seem to do is talk. Words tumble from them as they seek the perfect syllable, the right inflection, the opportune moment to help make the floor fall away. (28)

The permeability Proehl describes between various settings and their dexterity to listen and respond describe the nature of the facilitation necessary with the youth respondent method. His work illuminates the dexterity of the dramaturg and how to give and receive information imperative to all the case study processes discussed. Connected to these notions of dramaturgy and new play development is *Outrageous Fortune: the Life and Times of the New American Play* (2009). Theatre Development Fund, with London's assistance, conducted a study about the role and lifestyles of playwrights in relationship to artists, administrators, and the regional

theatre. The provocative findings of this study destabilize assumptions about the system of playmaking in the U.S. For instance, from surveying theaters, administrators, and writers, many of who are affiliated with children's theatres (e.g., Childsplay), there is a desire to dispose of the "cookie cutter" model of playmaking and look to more collaborations, in which the artist works with a loyal theatre, a dedicated artistic team, and a stronger guarantee of production (137). The flexibility and progressive playmaking London describes are inherent to the youth respondent method.

I advocate that the child is another essential collaborator in creating this tool and determining how their generation can make a better future through the practice and art of theatre. Peter Brosius, the Artistic Director of the Minneapolis' Children's Theatre Company (CTC), believes in the power of the youth audience. In the fall of 2001, *Theatre* published the article "How do you make social change?" Brosius, interviewed for the article with other leaders in theatre, said of his mission:

> Children are America's underclass. Among industrialized countries, the United States ranks first in a half a dozen categories, including defense spending, health technology, and the number of millionaires and billionaires. We rank sixteenth, however, in efforts to lift children out of poverty, eighteenth in the income gap between rich and poor children, and last in protecting children against gun violence. Children cannot vote, many have no voice, and few are empowered with the tools necessary to change their lives and the lives of others. Theatre can and must be one of those tools. (70)

CTC often produces TYA plays and musicals that explore important issues that affect children, including illness, death, prejudice, religion, and war, among many other life-changing events. These plays raise awareness about the intended issue, make audiences question how that issue directly influences their individual lives, and demonstrate the strength and perseverance of the young characters who represent the identities of the audience members. Many of these issues, not traditionally associated with or considered relevant to children, when addressed with the young audience through the works' development and production arts, theatres, and adults begin to realize these subjects relevance in their children's lives. For my study, I examine the dialectics between artists, scholars, producers, and children, applying the youth respondent method. This model strengthens TYA plays while it gives children the agency to learn, exchange ideas, and address subjects that are important to them. TYA is a continually expanding field, although there is a significant lack of scholarship documenting its growth and such important practices as this method. By documenting various forms of the best of this practice, I hope to educate other scholars and practitioners, in an effort to perpetuate its growth, vitality, and use in new play development for works for all audiences.

Chapter 1

The Legacy of the Youth Responded Method

In Rives Collins' class at Northwestern University, we read plays by Charlotte Chorpenning for the first day of our "Introduction to Children's Theatre" course. Professor Collins arbitrarily handed out scripts of her adaptations of *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, among many others to the class of twenty-five graduate and undergraduate students. The number of plays he circulated surprised the class. Besides the plays themselves, he gave us no information on the works or the writer. As a result, many of us conducted research independently and learned about Chorpenning's pioneer status in the field. When reading *Cinderella*, I found the play static, formulaic, and very similar to the source fairytale. The adaption closely followed the Grimm fairytale but for the stage it was lengthened, used dialogue instead of prose, and invented new characters. I feared that this might represent the type of children's theatre play I would read throughout the semester and find exclusively in the field, particularly because Chorpenning serves as one of its major icons. If this was the case, I was concerned that children's theatre was not the course of study for me. During our next children's theatre class, many of the students also voiced the same concerns. Collins properly introduced Chorpenning, her significance in the field, and how TYA grew in both quality and quantity since she wrote her plays during the period from the 1930s through the 1950s. He described her as one of the forerunners in children's theatre with work that received much praise as well as criticism.

In addition, we discussed how she consistently valued children and their thoughts, which I found most interesting.

As a student keen to explore TYA, its origins, its contemporary resonance, and its subject matter's relevance and entertainment of children I felt drawn to learning more about Chorpenning and the complicated and influential nature of her work. Deni Krueger, a graduate of the Drama and Theatre for Youth program at the University of Texas at Austin, also experienced a similar interest in and connection to the writer when she learned of Chorpenning's work in a children's theatre literature course. Krueger explored the leader's work as a scholar and a teacher but also from the point of view of a playwright. In Krueger's teaching and writing, she greatly values the child's investment in the play creation process, an attitude she shares with her forerunners. Her respect and love for children – her own and all – drives her work and motivation to write for them, regardless of how complicated the subject. She is an example of a contemporary artist inspired by Chorpenning's dedication and craft, which required the contributions of young voices. This chapter explores how both women employed versions of the youth respondent method in their work.

When she began writing in the 1930s, Charlotte Chorpenning included children of all ages' (eight to fifteen year-olds) feedback in the development of her plays for young audiences, changing the relatively new field of children's theatre. Her immense interest in children, coupled with her failure as a playwright for adult audiences, contributed to her unparalleled dedication to the field. She remains The Goodman Theatre's most produced writer, although the institution historically serves adult audiences. She relied on her child audiences to inform her works' development. In addition, the writer created experiments to attain attending-children's feedback regarding her productions. She encouraged children's creative involvement in the dramatic

processes by observing them as they watched her shows, by educating them in classrooms, and by asking for their critical feedback in order to further improve her work as a writer, director, and teacher (*Twenty-One Years* 17).

This writer-director-educator created a form of entertainment that solidified children's theatre in the U.S., particularly because of the quantity of her work. From 1931 until 1951, Chorpenning produced more than eighty productions at The Goodman Theatre, serving audiences of over forty-five thousand children. She was drawn to adaptations of fairytales and folktales imbued with many moral lessons and woven through fanciful and lengthened narratives. Through an informal interview process and participant observer studies with her child audiences, Chorpenning altered her plays and their subsequent productions. The children's theatre pioneer doubled the number of scripts for children's theatre in a twenty-year period by inventing some of the first audience reception studies. She also integrated some early community-based theatre practices into her pedagogy and methodology as a director and as a writer. (*Twenty-One* 12)

Chorpenning entertained, educated, and introduced theatre to children; however, her work and practices as a director, producer, and playwright engender criticism because her plays contain many racist and misogynistic characters, in addition to rather static dialogue and predictable plots that may lead one to question her credibility as a successful writer and director. Throughout her career (and posthumously), critics labeled her a moralist rather than an artist, who advocated a conservative and traditional value system at the expense of creating good art. Also, many of her students and actors viewed her as a dictator in the rehearsal room who lacked the ability to collaborate (Bedard 86). Despite these well-founded criticisms, she and many of

her female colleagues in children's theatre and creative dramatics (e.g., Winifred Ward) established themselves as leaders in a male dominated theatre hierarchy in the 1930s and 1940s.

The first part of this chapter explores Chorpenning's professional life as a writer-director-pedagogue by examining her work at The Goodman Theatre and Northwestern University. Also considered are her community-based theatre work and reception studies with youth, which she conducted as an educator throughout the country and particularly in Chicago. I argue that she used a form of the youth respondent method to create plays for young audiences and that, in turn, her plays entertained and educated them. In order to construct this argument, I analyze material from her archives and the research of other scholars and practitioners relevant to her work in the fields of theatre education and children's theatre.

To demonstrate Chorpenning's reception studies via a contemporary lens, this chapter also examines the structure of the Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Playwriting for Youth: National Competition and Symposium, and the selection process and response methods associated with it. In particular, it considers how ten through twelve year-old children were involved in the response process during the development week with the play Deni Krueger's *Muddy Boots*, which served as the primary case study. In order for an immersion of children's feedback to occur, the dramaturg must act as an educator and a translator between the writer and the child respondents, who represent the target audience. Both Kruger and I implicitly relied on our own adaptation of the youth respondent method to answer specific questions about the play. In an effort to provide further context for this engagement, the chapter will describe the role of the dramaturg as a facilitator in the youth respondent method.

Charlotte Chorpenning as a Learner and Early Educator

Chorpenning relied on her talents as a progressive pedagogue and as an invested and enthusiastic student to learn and develop children's theatre that directly served her young audience. She employed theatre techniques to teach her students, although she lacked any formal training in the field. Challenging a traditionalist education system, she used innovative ideals and expressed budding aspirations as a means to teach Shakespeare. As an educator, she incorporated drama into the classroom and eventually pursued a career in theatre as a result of this inclusion. In *Spotlight on the Child: Studies in the History of American Children's Theatre*, TYA scholar Roger Bedard constructs Chorpenning's history. Chorpenning was born in 1872 in Iowa. At the age of eighteen, she went to Iowa Agricultural College and then onto Iowa's Cornell College. In 1901, she took a position teaching English and history at an Episcopal school for girls called Wolfe Hall in Denver. She was frustrated by the conservative school and felt it limited her abilities as a teacher (Bedard 86). In 1904, she accepted employment at the Normal School in Winona, Minnesota, where she encountered similar conflicts and frustrations. In the English classes she taught at the Normal school she made her students act out the Shakespearean plays they read in class. Some of the faculty supported her progressive pedagogical practices, while other more conservative members of the Normal School faculty and administration felt it was an unproductive and ineffective method to teach and understand Shakespeare. These more traditional teachers believed that students properly learned from reading the material silently to themselves and then taking reading comprehension tests to evaluate what they retained from the work. These teachers believed that children should learn basic subjects thoroughly and rigorously through traditional methods. Challenging this conservative pedagogy, Chorpenning recognized that her students gained a greater understanding

of the material when they performed the characters and embodied the text. Dressed in costume pieces and under Chorpenning's direction, her teenage students made personal connections to the classical plays that they only previously encountered by reading to themselves. Chorpenning said, "[They] always discovered for themselves the famous scenes and enthusiastically acted them out for the class, scenes which I would have been afraid to try to interpret through reading them" (Bedard 86). She allowed her students the agency to make their own analytical and performative interpretations of the literature. She recognized her students' different learning styles and how to teach to those different styles. For instance, some of her students were more skilled at speaking and collaboration than writing or reading. By discussing and performing the plays, she allowed these students to capitalize on their talents. Her ability to acknowledge that many of her students gained a greater understanding of material by acting out a story became intrinsic to her pedagogy.

Her pedagogical practices somewhat gestured towards many of John Dewey's educational theories found in *The Child and the Curriculum*, among his other treatises. While on faculty in the Philosophy Department at the University of Chicago, Dewey started the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where he practiced many of the pedagogical beliefs that provided material for *The School and Social Progress* (1899). In *100 Years of Learning at The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools*, William Harms and Ida DePencier write about Dewey's intention to challenge conventional conservative attitudes about childhood education and "how a school could become a cooperative community" (15). Chorpenning's work with Chicago's Hull House[1] reflects this investment in collaboration and community that Dewey

[1] Hull-House, Chicago's first social settlement, was the private home of Jane Addams and other Hull-House residents. was a place where immigrants gathered to learn, to eat, and to acquire the tools necessary to put down roots in Chicago. The residents of Hull-House, at the request of the

proposes in his pedagogical practices. Perhaps unintentionally, she practiced Dewey's theory that learning must be both a social and interactive process, and that material must be presented in a way that allows the student to relate the information to prior experiences and visceral interactions in an effort to deepen the connection with this new knowledge.

Chorpenning anticipated much of Howard Gardner's work from the late twenty-first century. Chorpenning's early twentieth century pedagogical work foreshadowed the bases of many of his theories, particularly those addressing the vocabularies of knowledge and multiple intelligences identified in *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (2006). Gardner identifies the eight intelligences as linguistic, logic-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. As a theatre-maker and preceding Gardner's work, Chorpenning encouraged her students to capitalize on many of these types of methodologies to learn about writing, reading, and discursive text analysis. Implicitly, she taught her students about collaboration, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Characteristic of her career of creating work before studying how to create it, her education as a writer commenced, when she published a short story. In 1906, she published a story in *Collier*'s magazine, which gained her some national attention. In 1912, with the

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surrounding community, began to offer practical classes that might help the new immigrants become more integrated into American society, such as English, cooking, sewing and technical skills, and American governmentThe residents were the women and men who chose to live at Hull-Housethey paid rent and contributed to the activities and services that the Settlement was committed to providing to their neighbors. These services included, but were not limited to, a nursery and a kindergarten, a public kitchen, and access to public baths and a playground. Hull-House became not only a cultural center with music, art, and theater offerings, but also a safe haven and a place where the immigrants living on Chicago's Near West Side could find companionship and support and the assistance they needed for coping with the modern city. (http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/hull_house.html)

encouragement of her husband and daughter[2], she decided to further pursue her love of theatre and writing and went to study at George Pierce Baker's prestigious playwriting class, Workshop 47, at Harvard and Radcliffe Universities (Bedard 90). In 1912, Baker originated the "47 workshop" class in playwriting while teaching in the English Department. Besides beginning the Harvard Theatre Collection at the Harvard University Library, he started the Harvard Dramatic Club and was a pioneer in post-secondary theatre education. In *Professing Performance*, performance scholar Sharon Jackson describes Baker's arduous battle for dramatic literature and dramatic arts to be recognized at Harvard University in a separate department and not assumed by the department of English. Before inevitably leaving to teach at Yale, Baker tried to institutionalize a theatre department at Harvard, an institution that greatly questioned the legitimacy of theatre as an academic discipline. Jackson writes, "Baker's efforts to move the dramatic 'page' to the dramatic 'stage' challenged emerging literary definitions" (63). After much labor, the workshop became one of the first forums connected to an academic institution for colleague writers and students to share and discuss their plays, precisely the type of

[2] Charlotte Barrows married John C. Chorpenning in 1896 and soon thereafter had a daughter. John's poor health necessitated he live in an area of high altitude and his daughter, suffering from dissimilar health problems, was unable to live in areas of high altitude. Chorpenning remained with her daughter, teaching at the Normal School in Winona Minnesota, while John Chorpenning resided in Denver, Colorado. Although the couple was separated by geographic distance, they regularly corresponded through letters. John recognized his wife's talents as a writer, an interest she had throughout her life although something she ever actively pursued professionally. Her husband was a strong advocate of her career and also a theatre enthusiast. In 1913, Chorpenning's husband passed away while traveling to join his wife in Cambridge. From this point forward, Chorpenning became engrossed in her work and dedicated all her time to it. After a full although often challenging career as a teacher Chorpenning, now played the role of the student, albeit one who was much older than many of her classmates. Her personal challenges made her a stronger student and excel amongst her colleagues, although her initial return to academics was not met without great doubts. She began writing for children after h death when she was 60 years old.

collaborative environment Chorpenning embraced and implemented in her teachings to her own students.

While at Harvard, in 1913, she continued to work on her first play, *Between the Lines*, which she submitted for entrance to Workshop 47. In a work written many years later, *Twenty-One Years with Children's Theatre*, Chorpenning describes the terror she felt on the first day of her seminar playwriting class when Professor Baker read the play aloud to the class. Chorpenning writes of "no longer facing [her] class but [her] teacher" (Chorpenning 5). At first the room was silent, something she always experienced as a writer without an outside reader, but then she relished the dialogue her work engendered among her colleagues and professor (Chorpenning 45). In Cambridge, she read and saw plays, as well as worked on the development of various pieces of her own work. The training she received from the workshop strengthened her skills as a pedagogue. She improved her abilities to listen, to understand others' academic needs, and to think more as an interdisciplinary educator. As a student, she developed an understanding and a strengthened desire to create pluralistic and discussion-based lessons for when she reentered the professional world as a teacher.

After her first year, she graduated from the course with distinction and received the invitation, with six other students, to remain an additional year to study with the advanced playwriting class. Besides developing her skills as a playwright, she gained experience as an actor and a director. During her final year of study, she was awarded the Craig Prize for her play *Between the Lines*, which subsequently garnered a production in 1916 at the Cattle Square Theatre in Boston; however, the work received poor critical and box office responses. During the early years of her flourishing career in Chicago, she continued to work on her plays for adult audiences. In 1925, her play *The Sheepman* was produced in Hartford with a young Spencer

Tracy appearing in it. Chorpenning hoped the production would go on to play a New York house, but instead, due to poor reviews it closed on October 21, 1925 in Hartford. Critics described the production as "futile" and "mechanical" with lines that are "well-nigh impossible." During her professional career as a playwright, she wrote nine plays for adults, seven of which remained unproduced. After the lack of success with *Between the Lines* in 1916, she returned to teach at the Normal School in Minnesota, where she felt the same discontentment with the conservative nature of school as she felt teaching there in the past.

Return to Minnesota and Community-Based Teaching

With Chorpenning's return to the Normal School following the workshop, she became more invested in working with both the community and her students in what would properly be characterized as an early form of community-based theatre. In *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Baz Krenshaw describes community-based theatre "as an ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience" (20). Thus Chorpenning's actors derived from the community in order to address community problems. This community-based theatre falls under the rubric of applied theatre. The Central School of Speech and Drama defines the practice of applied theatre as an "intervention, communication, development, empowerment, and expression when working with individuals in a specific community" (Central School of Speech website). Chorpenning served as the community liaison by facilitating these applied theatre projects that often addressed issues of education and youth pertinent to Winona. In *Applied Theatre: The Gift of Theatre*, practitioner Helen Nicholson notes that community-based theatre, and by extension applied drama, aspires to use theatre and drama practices to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies (3). Chorpenning's mission became serving the community through theatre.

Chorpenning explored the use of theatre in a variety of community settings not solely to entertain, but also to create the potential of positive social change. Ultimately, she wanted to improve the lives of individuals and communities, such as Winona. Combining her artistic interests and sociological perspectives, she practiced an iteration of community-based theatre with her students and some of the residents in the town of Winona. No matter the setting, she implored her artistic collaborators and students to "get thoroughly acquainted with your neighborhood." She wrote, "You must know the influences that will shape the demands of your audience" (Chorpenning 4). Chorpenning recognized that in order to create community-based work[3], she needed to learn who her collaborators were as individuals and their needs. She wanted to serve as a professional playwright in the community and attempted to write about Winona: she created a series of theatre workshops for the town to address its concerns, stories, and ideological perspectives.

In the first and most important step in her process, she held a discussion with her participants (members of the community) on major community interests and concerns. As a result of this dialogue, she and her collaborators constructed a narrative outline with pertinent themes. Through improvisations and scene work, she facilitated workshops with the participants to write the play, which would be performed for the community (Bedard 88). In 1919, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* published her article, "Putting on a Community Play," which described her process of developing the work in Winona. The article extensively addresses how to create community-based plays in any community and the functions of the leader in such a project (33). Chorpenning felt that it was far better that the leader was not a

[3] Certainly, Chorpenning did not assign this exact term community-based theatre to the work that she was doing in the Midwest, although her labor fits the diverse definition of the application of theatre in the community with the community in mind.

professional from out of town, but a local with an interest in theatre. In terms of the content of the play, she reiterates that the importance that it must have meaning for the community in order for it to be effective (40). In Chorpenning's confident and authoritative voice, the article rigorously details every stage of how to produce a community-based play after this conversation with the community members - from choosing the subject, to casting it, to sharing the work with a public audience. Her detailed analysis attracted national attention.

In 1921, reading the article and hearing of the success of Chorpenning's work with communities, Neva Boyd invited Chorpenning to present her community-based techniques at the Recreation Training School of Chicago. Boyd, an artist and theorist, used a form of creative drama for socio-intellectual development in children. With the Recreational Training School she taught group games, gymnastics, dancing, dramatic arts, play theory, and social problems. When at Hull House, she ran movement and recreational groups for children, and eventually she worked with the Recreational Project in the Works Progress Administration (WPA).[4] Due to the success of the workshop Chorpenning facilitated, Boyd offered her a teaching position at the Recreation Training School that allowed Chorpenning to further explore her community-based theatre practices ("Putting On A Community Play" 40). The major difficulty Chorpenning faced was applying the same techniques she developed in a relatively small town to a major urban center with a far more diverse population.

For her new position, Chorpenning wrote material and produced work with students and educators in Chicago neighborhoods. She worked with a large, uneducated, and impoverished

[4] In 1927, Boyd joined the faculty at Northwestern University as a sociologist.

immigrant population who participated in the public recreational drama groups. This was a strikingly different population than the primarily middle and upper class white families she worked with in Winona. There is little archival evidence addressing how her pedagogy was influenced by this immersion. Working with diverse student populations must have influenced her pedagogy, as well as how she related to her students as an upper-middle class white female teacher from a small town. But because it is recorded that she was successful and continued to work with the programs, she must have considered how this diverse population and her identity influenced her pedagogy and her relationships with her students and the teachers she helped train.

During this time, the workshops she taught for teachers served as a form of professional development where teachers learned, devised, and practiced new lessons to implement in their classrooms (Bedard 88). In addition, Chorpenning and Boyd collaborated on developing their progressive drama techniques in application to social work and community building. From these experiences, Chorpenning began her journey of applying these methods to children and children's theatre. With her young students she explored the story of *Rumpelstiltskin* while teaching a creative dramatics class at the Gads Hill Center. The participating children's intensity in recreating the story and how they expanded the tale inspired her (4). Chorpenning recognized the potential for play development through children's imagination with story drama based play.

Northwestern University and the Collaboration with Winfred Ward

In 1927, the Recreation Training School merged with Northwestern University (NU), and Chorpenning began teaching at Northwestern in the Sociology Department and the School of Speech. She taught practical courses and supervised her students' fieldwork at Northwestern's

Settlement House, Gads Hill Center, Hull House, Chicago Commons, Hyde Park Neighborhood Club, and Howell Neighborhood House (*Twenty-One Years* 19-23). The university capitalized on Chorpenning's many talents as an artist, sociologist, and educator. For each class or project, she drew from her wealth of experience and training to best serve the needs of the institution and her students. Her collaboration with Winifred Ward became her greatest achievement while at the university.

Winifred Ward was one of the originators of creative drama story dramatizations, which further assisted Chorpenning in her work as a teacher and a playwright. While at Northwestern, Ward devised concepts around creative drama and play. In *Theatre, Children and Youth*, Davis and Evans define creative drama as a process in which participants act out a story that their leader shares with them, which serves as the most up to date definition (230). In essence, creative dramatics is activities that value process over product, with the experience of the participants as the goal. In *Theatre for Children*, Ward describes how creative drama may include dramatic play, story enactment, imagination journeys, theatre games, music, and dance, among other forms (21). Ward believed that children creating their own plays and stories from improvised characters and dialogues were worth infinitely more than their taking part in formal plays, although she observed the important connection between creative drama and children's theatre (Ward 221). In 1924, Ward was appointed supervisor of the newly created creative dramatics curricula of the Evanston Public Schools in the now well-known District 65[5] and, in the following year, founded The Children's Theatre of Evanston, which survived until 1976. The theatre's mission was to provide a strong children's theatre to Evanston Township, while

[5] The District 65 Drama Department, established in 1927, is the longest thriving creative drama program in the United States. Under the guidance of creative drama specialists, this nationally renowned drama department provides the children of Evanston with extensive theatre education.

also providing Northwestern's speech students a laboratory to hone their skills as artists and to study theatre for young audiences by working directly with the target audience.

As a result of her experience as a playwright, Chorpenning supervised Ward when she created the Children's Theatre of Evanston (*Twenty-One Years*). Ward and her Northwestern creative drama students mounted productions for local Evanston Public School stages by using creative drama techniques and story dramatization. With a classroom of children, Ward and her students would share a fairytale, ask the children questions about the story, play games affiliated with the story to better understand its themes, and then restage the story with the children playing the characters and the Northwestern students serving as the narrators or group leaders. Because Chorpenning was a skilled storyteller, Ward recognized her potential in writing for children, perhaps in a more formal way than how Ward worked with her students.

Ward practiced both children's theatre as well as creative dramatics. She felt that creative dramatics, in which children created, formed characters, and played, was not for an audience. But these activities prepared children to perform in children's theatre. In 1928, she asked Chorpenning to write an adaption of *The Wizard of Oz*, which she produced in same year at the Children's Theatre of Evanston. Due to the success of the project, the theatre produced the following three adaptations by Chorpenning within two years: *The Emperor's New Clothes, The Princess and the Vagabond*, and *The King's Ears*. With Ward's encouragement, Chorpenning continued on her journey as a children's theatre playwright. At this tine, The Goodman Theatre, with its former connections to the Theatre School at DePaul, recognized her potential as a writer for young audiences, as well as an educator for its professional training program.

The Goodman Theatre: Canvas for Reception Studies

In 1932 at the age of sixty, Chorpenning accepted the position of director of children's theatre at The Goodman, formally located at the Art Institute of Chicago. Initially, The Goodman asked her to produce material she deemed unacceptable for children, much less any theatrical audience, unless the scripts were drastically altered. She found the plays appropriate only for adult audiences rather than children and disliked the quality of the writing in many instances (Bedard 91). The Goodman primarily produced classics for this younger audience, which Chorpenning felt were incomprehensible to them. Ironically, The Goodman Theatre's current Student Subscription Series for Chicago high schools gives matinee performances of whatever is on the mainstage for this young audience. Although much of the work is theatrically evocative, many of the program's participating teachers share the same criticism that Chorpenning had regarding this type of programming for youth from fifty years prior. They, like Chorpenning, ask: if youth cannot relate to the material or to the characters onstage, why not program specifically for this younger population (if there is a priority to serving this population at The Goodman Theatre)? Chorpenning's solution was to spend twenty years writing adaptations for the theatre's children's productions.

At Northwestern, she continued to teach playwriting and creative drama, in addition to the following hybrid sociology and drama classes: "Social Aspects of Dramatic Activity," "Dramatics and Personality Development," and the "Dramatic Group and the Social Process" (Bedard 91). Chorpenning recruited her students from these courses to collect data for her elaborate child audience response experiments. Combining her skills as an educator, sociologist, and artist, she relied heavily on reception studies with her child audiences to further develop her plays and her productions.

Chorpenning instructed students to sit in different areas of the old Goodman house (at the Art Institute) to take notes on children's reactions to the production. The students watched the productions multiple times to draw correlations about children's frequent physical and verbal responses to the work. Particularly invested in this method, Chorpenning relied on children's natural reactions during productions to develop theories on what made effective children's theatre, as well as what entertained, baffled, and educated her young audiences. The impetus for this research originated from her sociological and community-based theatre methodologies of watching, listening, and learning from her target audience. She traversed community-based theatre and traditional playmaking practices by utilizing her youth respondent method, creative drama techniques, and education as a playwright. Theatre historian and former Director of the Goodman Theatre School (1929-1960) Maurice Gnesin wrote about Chorpenning in his introduction to *Twenty-One Years with Children's Theatre*:

> There is an alchemy working in her spirit which allows her to enter the world of a child as a companion, as a sharer of the child's life, without divesting herself of the maturity which allows her to store up, analyze, and study the child in its world. This is a rare combination of gifts, so rare indeed that I know no one else who shares it in any significant degree. (xi)

Gnesin notes his colleague's ability to relate to children, while also relying on her training and experience to analyze children's needs and desires. Similar to Gnesin, other colleagues attributed Chorpenning's success to her deference towards children and her facility in identifying with them.

Chorpenning recognized that in order to create high-quality, entertaining, and educational work for young audiences, one must go directly to the source. As she demonstrated throughout her career as a director and a playwright, integrating the audience's feedback in new play development is a multivalent process, necessitating the artist's investment in history, textual and performative analysis, sociology, semiotics, and an understanding of, and a respect for, the target audience both participating in the study and eventually watching the performance. Her multidisciplinary approach to playmaking introduced traditionally marginalized collaborators into the process: diverse students, women, and children. The traditional theatre hierarchy dominated by the director and writer was destabilized by the inclusion of this population's feedback to the work. The playwright, director, and the audience all contributed their thoughts. Chorpenning gained extensive feedback from educators and the target audience.

A prime example of this was when Chorpenning altered the 1955 premiere of *President Lincoln's Secret Messenger: Boy Detective to President* in order to best suit her child audience. In presenting that work, one of Chorpenning's college students initially wanted her to add the verbatim notes a reporter made on Lincoln's speech. Unfortunately, the inclusion of the notes raised temporal questions for the children about when exactly Lincoln lived and also came across as didactic and distancing to them. As a result of the children's responses, Chorpenning refused to accept the suggested change and ultimately omitted it (Chorpenning 130). In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Susan Bennett writes how producers fail to acknowledge the diversity in audiences' responses to the work, particularly those which do not conform to mainstream tastes (8). Although this claim accurately applies to regional theatre's misperceptions about their audiences, Chorpenning's unique work challenged this claim because she considered individual audience reactions and did not assume an audience's uniform response

to her work.

Chorpenning and Actor Training

As a director at The Goodman Theatre, Chorpenning believed in honest and truthful acting. As both a producer and acting pedagogue, she taught with other Goodman associates including acting head Dr. Maurice Gnesin, who trained his students in voice and movement, but felt the best training was to immerse young actors in productions alongside professionals in the repertory company. Gnesin commented, "If people are interested in theatre, really interested, they'll come to see anything you put on, as long as they know your heart's in it" (*Twenty-One Years* 90). Gnesin wanted his students to leave the school with ideology that good theatre varied in form and style (90). As a colleague of Gnesin's, Chorpenning strongly believed in the same fundamentals of learning and presenting an honest commitment to acting. For instance, she described the necessity for her actors to thoroughly identify with the characters they played onstage to assist the child audience in their understanding of these characters (21). Some examples of the characters that she wanted her audiences and actors to identify with were ghosts, genies, animals, and fairies, many of whom spoke in rhyme and through mime and were rather unrealistic in nature. Chorpenning embraced and taught her students from different types of children's theatre plays, where many of these types of characters made appearances. In her 1930 article, "The Significance of Drama as an Instrument of Character Enrichment," she describes in great detail the various types of plays she encountered in children's theatre: "nourishment plays," any play that leads them to a new experience that stretches the spirit to understand an unfamiliar way of life; "interpretive plays," plays that look deeper into the ordinary; "medicine plays," plays which examine the human experience to cleanse and restore; and "release plays," which are plays of fancy, entertainment, and wish fulfillment (836).

It is difficult to determine whether Chorpenning was averse to non-realism in children's theatre, she felt incapable of producing it, or lacked much exposure to other forms of performance. She felt that it was necessary that all her works were clearly interpretable, which she believed was only accomplishable through the style of realism. She believed that every play must have a clear beginning, middle and end with a chain of linear and logical events. This dedication to writing well-made plays (works with tight plots, dialogue representative of real life, and a theatrical climax toward the end of the play) left little room for theatrical exploration. Her writing lacked experimentation and expressionism because the characters and plots were only slightly embellished from the original characters of the fairytales, which crippled the quality of her plays. Since her work was primarily produced over that of other writers, The Goodman Theatre's child audiences received little exposure to diverse types of work, styles, or writers.

Chorpenning's Experiments: Empirical Data

Chorpenning began her reception studies on her first day at The Goodman Theatre. She attended every performance of every production in an effort to sit in different parts of the house to take notes on children's wiggling, laughing, and yawning. Chorpenning wrote:

> Early in the check-up of my experiments, I found that it made a good deal of difference in my findings, from which side of the house I had been watching. While sitting front I would make an observation, walk to the back and find it did not apply; or sitting in the right reaction of the house I would cross to the lobby to observe on the left side, and again disagree with myself. (Chorpenning 92)

By arranging for free tickets for students to attend repeat performances, Chorpenning instructed her students to observe children's reactions during performances and to ask them questions

during the intermissions and post-performances about their viewing experiences regarding what they enjoyed and learned from the play and thought about its dramaturgy.

Regrettably, although Chorpenning was an artist and educator who published extensive treatises on the definition of children's theatre and playwriting pedagogy, very little of her praxis on the development of her own work exists for today's scholars and practitioners to study, including all of her empirical data and her articulations on how she revised her work as a result of this research. Many scholars apply her larger theoretical ideas while her more detailed work is erased by history; notes, observations from her students, her multiple drafts of scripts, and interviews with child audience members that she and her Northwestern students conducted are lost. Why are such grand omissions in the career of a leader in the American theatre and theatre education? In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes how histories of minorities and women are often forgotten. He writes they remain "unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized" (Xvii). Confusion and only conjecture remains regarding her legacy, a phenomenon Hayden White describes in *The Names of History: on the Poetics of Knowledge:*

> What happens to the words of history when they are used as the raw materials for words about history? What do we do with history's words? What are our obligations to those words spoken in the past, only some of which find their way into the (official) record, but most of which are lost and can be recovered only with the most arduous labor? What are historians' obligations to the words of the dead? (viii)

White asks the question, "What is our obligation to locate and reclaim this lost history?"

The loss of her work is immense; because even our limited knowledge of her experiments changed the way artists create and consider children's theatre. The Goodman discarded many of its archives when the theatre and administrative offices moved from the Art Institute location to 170 North Dearborn in Chicago's Loop. As a result, little information remains about the children's theatre that resided at the original Goodman Theatre location and programming for young audiences no longer exists at the institution. Susan Bennett's article "The Making of Theatre History" describes the erasure of history, which Joe Roach attributes as the archive of memory as entertaining a highly rigorous and highly specialized process of forgetting. In "Lost in Archives?" Head of Reference at The Folger Shakespeare Library Georgianna Zeigler writes, "Even if you look in the places where you would expect to find traces of them [women], they have often remained invisible through omission" (315).

Maybe Chorpenning, who rarely wrote of her practices, failed to see the importance of retaining her notes after she applied them. Instead, perhaps she assumed her students would retain and pass on the knowledge. Bennett describes how papers by women survived in local libraries, dank basements, attics, and flea markets with poor preservation and not in the same pristine manner important documents created by men were retained (*The Making of Theatre History* 67). The Winona, Minnesota Public Library contains remnants (e.g., articles, a blurb bibliography, photos) of Chorpenning's early life and career; Northwestern University houses a few lesson plans and many photographs from her work in classrooms at the university and from The Goodman; and Arizona Child Drama Archive contains many articles from scholars, fans, and friends about the imprint of her career on the field. Considering the fact that she doubled the number of children's theatre plays in her lifetime, this reflects a paltry amount of material. A

single conference paper remains, which evidences her almost scientific methodology on how to observe and interview children for her "experiments."

In an untitled paper for the Children's Theatre Conference (which became the American Alliance in Theatre Education), Chorpenning and Kenneth Graham (first scholar to receive a Ph.D. in Children's Theatre and former Theatre Chair at the University of Minnesota) reported on the evaluation format Chorpenning followed for her reception study in response to *Jack and the Beanstalk*. As demonstrated by this study and her writings, Chorpenning was primarily concerned with children's identification with the protagonist. She believed that the pleasure of the performance as well as its efficacious value for young attendees derived from children's ability to see themselves as the leading character. She drew conclusions by asking the following questions for her students to consider: Do children around you identify themselves with Jack? Was this identification held when the protagonist was offstage or not the focus of the scene? Did the audience share the identification with those around them? And how did the audience leave the theatre (e.g., exhausted, overestimated, refreshed)? In regards to children identifying with Jack, she made interpretations by observing their motor responses (i.e., "very small movements like Jack"). She observed their reactions to supporting and antagonist characters, their delight in Jack's triumphs, their expressions of fear when he was in danger, and if and how they demonstrated their compassion for the characters (3).

Chorpenning's reception studies often interpreted groups' responses to her work. But she recognized that emotions could be caught; more or less, she recognized that children in the audience would mimic each other's behavior (e.g., a few children laughing will provoke more to laugh or if a child screams in fear, other children will scream because one child has). Besides interpreting children's comprehension of the narrative, Chorpenning spent much time observing

when children expressed fear. Chorpenning wrote, "A crucial matter in children's theatre plays is the portion of excitement and the fear which it may arouse. Danger, dramatically faced and overcome is one of the most bracing delights a child audience can experience" (Chorpenning 3). In order for Chorpenning to determine children's fear or excitement, she and her students observed their detailed physical responses (e.g., clenched fist, tension, hiding face in hands). And, the second component she examined was restlessness, whether children were bored and how that might be contagious. If children created their own distractions, fell asleep, and looked around the theatre at anything else but the stage, she noted these reactions and changed the play accordingly. Based on observing the audiences' apathy, she noted when she felt that the children thought the stage picture was monotonous, or an actor was not speaking loudly enough, or the play contained too much exposition, among other elements.

From these observations, she recognized it was important for the audience to identify with the main character; the story should continue to rise and eventually fall; moments of breath or "exercise spots" were necessary to allow children space and time to move in their seats; sometimes children would move depending what was happening on stage; the play should be free of overtones, jokes, and ideas that would only appeal to adults; and the production and acting needed to be clear. As colleagues observed, "She was brilliant, energetic, preserving, and never, never satisfied with shoddy work" (Bedard 92). For instance, Chorpenning would never include jokes about popular culture or current news events that were unrecognizable to children if they would not further their education.

The Role of Evaluating Empathy

Chorpenning recognized the importance to her young audiences of identifying with her protagonists. In "Creativity of Everyday Moral Reasoning: Empathy, Disgust, and Moral Persuasion," educators David Pizarro, Brian Betweiler-Bedell, and Paula Bloom discuss the relevance of empathy with identification and eventual individual and societal social change. The authors write, "By carefully crafting a tale causing an individual to feel the predicament of someone else, many writers and directors force individuals to critically evaluate their moral beliefs" (93). Teaching morality was of great concern to Chorpenning. Whether children carried out the specific moral behavior her plays tried to teach or audiences empathized and/or sympathized with the characters remains unclear. Sociologists Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer in their study *Empathy and Its Development* define empathy as feeling *with* rather than feeling *for* (i.e., the definition of sympathy) (777). How Chorpenning located these terminological differences in her studies is unknown. However, in her monograph, she employs the relatively new word empathy (to the 1940s) rather than sympathy. She recognized and valued the difference of this terminology and carefully selected what word best represented the goals for her work. Quite possibly she believed that empathy could lead to change while sympathy may not. Eisenberg and Strayer note in their analysis, "Empathy, not sympathy, may generate subsequent cooperative and altruistic behaviors" (23-32). Chorpenning wanted her child audience to learn and relate to her child protagonists, which could only be accomplished by empathizing with their fear and hope and aspirations.

Another omission in Chorpenning's scholarship is how she actually measured empathy in her studies. Today, the primary practices to measure children's empathetic responses to theatre for young audiences are conducted by selecting a sample population of children who attended a

performance (frequently from a school) and then conducting a single or a series of detailed interviews soon after the performance with the subjects. University of Kansas Professor Jeanne Klein conducted such research to measure children's empathy in response to *Crying to Laugh*, a presentational play for children five to eight years old, which explicitly demonstrates emotional expression. From her 1990s study, Klein concludes in her subsequent article *Performing Factors that Inhibit Empathy and Trigger Distancing: Crying to Laugh* that young audiences feel "compassion" for characters they empathize or sympathize with but distance themselves when they encounter theatrical situations where they reflect upon personal experiences and expectations. Klein urges that these forms of resonances will inhibit empathy rather than incite it (62). These conclusions contradict the response from Chorpenning's analyses with larger study populations, but perhaps Chorpenning's work lacks the detail Klein found in conducting individual interviews. Chorpenning's studies focused first on how to improve her plays and then children's long-term relationships with the themes of the work.

Much of Chorpenning's work as a theatre educator revolved around teaching citizenship, identity, and individualism, all notions indirectly affiliated with learning about empathy. Chorpenning recognized and understood that children acquire moral and social lessons in the classroom working with mentors and peers, which influences how they feel about themselves in respect to others. By learning about their own identity, they are able to deconstruct and relate to others' similarities and differences. A professor from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Laurence Splitter argues in "Identity, Citizenship and Moral Education" that including discussions of culture, ethnicity, and sociology will lead to discussions regarding morality, diversity and empathy (484). He contends that by discussing the identities, beliefs, and values of the participants and students will develop a stronger self-identity and recognize commonalities

and differences in others, thus strengthening their sense of empathy. For instance, creating discussion-based lesson plans regarding diversity and what it means to be a member of a community are examples of methods to initiate the conversation with a class. In conjunction, Splitter cautions that these lessons lead to teaching children a moral code, which often reflects the value system of the educator and perhaps not the parents' or that of the children themselves. Chorpenning's pedagogy and her plays taught didactic moral lessons. For instance, her characters' success and happiness was found by financial means; beauty is deemed good; and difference is often treated as bizarre and needing to be isolated. As a playwright, she served primarily white, upper class children and students. Many of her plays served this audience and their parents' conservative ideas of morality.

In contrast, her creative dramatics and community-based theatre practices often served underprivileged and racially diverse children. The classes aptly lent themselves to the exploration of empathy. Chorpenning shared her identity and politics in her classrooms, which helped facilitate this education. In "Teaching and Learning Moral Values through Kindergarten Curriculum" educator Al-Hooli Abeer astutely writes:

> Teaching is an art. However many skills go into it, as do so many skills go into an artist's efforts, the decisions that must be made about when and how to combine these skills; the knowledge to do this is not a technical skill. No doubt it can be learned, but it also comes from one's underlying beliefs and passions about children and the world. (234)

Chorpenning brought her passions as an artist, teacher, and intellectual to all aspects of her work, which led to lessons of morality and empathy.

Ahead and Behind the Times

Chorpenning blurred the line between the artist and the audience, thus making the audience an active member of the production. In "New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetics of Performance," anthropologist Jerome Rothenberg writes of audiences that "Along with artists, the audience enters the performance arena as a participant – or, ideally, the audience disappears as the distinction between doer and viewer…begins to blur" (14). Without being aware of it, throughout her career Chorpenning acknowledged this blurring. During her first day at The Goodman Theatre, as she watched with a child audience the current production, she realized she was not only teaching the children, but more importantly, they were educating her (*Twenty-One Years* 7). Chorpenning's practice of collecting empirical data in an effort to change performance was far ahead of its time. Bennett delineates the historical development of reception studies; in particular, she describes the lack of dramatic theory on audiences until the emergence of performance theory in the 1980s (*Theatre Audiences* 9). Although Chorpenning never identified her work as reception studies per say, she desired the same information from conducting contemporary studies of audiences. Bennett asks the following questions regarding reception studies: "Audiences clearly play a role in the theatre, but what kind of role? And what kind of audience? What constitutes the theatrical event in which they play that part?" (9). Chorpenning asked similar questions of spectators' response to cultivate her work and her audiences. As one of her many playwriting students attested, "Chorpenning was loved at the Goodman…She observed, she listened, and was never afraid to adapt or correct or change things in her own scripts according to the audience" (Bedard 92).

She approached her work as a sociologist by examining group dynamics and the subjectivities of her audiences. The intersection between the study of theatre and sociology is a

complicated one. In the 1989 article "The Sociology of Theatre: Problems and Perspectives," Maria Shevtsova accounts for such slow progress towards the establishment of a dialogue between theatre and sociology. She argues that theatre scholars and artists consider sociology to be hinged on empirical research that contradicts qualitative analysis traditionally relied upon in theatre studies (23). In general, many theatre scholars veer away from applying sociological research to their studies. But in a marginalized subfield such as children's theatre, the inclusion of sociological studies meets less resistance and is found helpful in studying children. Davis and Evans write, "Chorpenning especially wanted to know everything that could be surmised or proved about a child's physical, mental, and emotional growth, and how this life might expand if he became a member of the audience" (15). She placed great emphasis on understanding the individual audience member rather than conflating all child audience members into a single identity of "the child." For instance, if a single child in an audience of two hundred children laughed, Chorpenning wanted to understand why she laughed. Besides her experiments' sociological nature, they were scientific, relying on data gathering and population counts.

One student playwright described how Chorpenning stationed herself at the center of the house facing the audience in order to gather the children's immediate responses. She wanted to witness immediately how they responded to the work rather than solely interview them following the performance. In tandem with her sociological studies and as a progressive, Chorpenning relied on semiotics. Author of *Analyzing Performance, Theater, Dance, and Film*, Patrice Pavis defines semiology as "to organize the performance and the text as a possible circuit of meaning whose productivity and coherence are more or less great according to the theatre event in question, but also according to the analyst" (13). Chorpenning created signals for her audience to draw inferences about her plays and their characters. For instance, if a child screamed in

terror when the witch from *Hansel and Gretel* appeared, Chorpenning knew the performance, design elements, and writing cohesively and effectively accomplished the fear and intense interest she wanted to engender from the child audience. From this type of analysis, Chorpenning surmised tenets of children's theatre, such as editing excessive exposition (i.e., "Don't tell it, show it").

Interestingly, in contradiction, Bennett describes the impossibility of establishing such exact models for semiotic theatre studies. She writes, "The actual results of diverse semiotic readings of theatre has not been the original target of their investigations: that is, they have not produced a model by which a complete analysis of performance can be constructed" (104). Because of the formulaic nature of Chorpenning's work, she did create a consistent model, although the model perhaps yielded very similar results for each production. Because her work was formulaic in nature, she must have reached a point as a writer and a director where she could anticipate audience reactions early in the creation process. For instance, by listening to audience responses to similarly structured jokes, she eventually may have been able to decipher how much laughter some reoccurring material would receive. Although obsessed with detail and routine, she practiced the same audience reception method for every production.

Many critics contend that Chorpenning homogenized all spectators as a white, affluent, and heterosexual and wanted to control them. Professor Stephani Etheridge Woodson, in "Constructing 'Childhood' and Creating 'Children' in the 1950s: Isabel Burger and Charlotte Chorpenning," addresses the lack of consideration for marginalized spectators in Chorpenning's work and makes the claim that she tried "to control" her audiences. Woodson writes, "[t]he domain of childhood exists as hotly contested public space 'where different social, economic, and political interests compete for control'" (132). In the realm of theatre, regardless of the

demographic of the audience, producers try to control their audiences' reactions, hoping they have a positive theatergoing experience to ensure return visits to future productions. The control associated with children is a hotly contested domain. Although Chorpenning used the word "control," her studies demonstrate that she allowed her child audiences to control many of the changes she made in her work.

Woodson also contends Chorpenning put little consideration towards the diversity of her audiences, which is not reflective of how she considered the audience itself but is true of some of the problematical material she produced for them. Following the traditional storylines of fairytales, many of her heroines present the same submissive identities towards men found in the original texts, although they speak more dialogue. Beauty is prized over intelligence in every instance and female characters lack agency and serve as weak role models. Also, the works trafficked in cultural and racial stereotypes. Casts were universally white. In terms of the productions, black face was used for *Little Black Sambo*, as well as for *Aladdin.* Interestingly, Chorpenning noted the diversity of her audience for the production of *Aladdin*. She acknowledged how three different audiences reacted verbally and physically to the work: an audience of affluent suburban children from a parent teacher association, an audience from the Settlement House, and the usual ticket buying Saturday matinee audience (Chorpenning 11). In "Rethinking Representations," Gillian Swanson notes that readings occur at the intersection offered by the text and the spectator's own social and cultural identities. When determining factors (such as race and class, as well as gender) are incorporated into the readings, a tension is created with the assumed readings of the text (16). Chorpenning's studies acknowledged this tension in diverse audiences. She noted the similarity that all the children leaned into the stage during the harrowing moments when Aladdin was in danger. When Aladdin realized his ring

was magic the children from the various audiences reacted differently: the suburban audience stayed quiet, turning imaginary rings on their fingers; a number of the Settlement House children screamed in delight about the power of the ring; and the Saturday audience reacted in whispers. Chorpenning considered all the children's reactions, which she interpreted as their understanding the importance and power of the rings based on their responses (11).

Chorpenning's plays lacked any ingenuity in structure and character. She wrote, "A story must have a beginning, middle, an end, or to use another wording, a problem, complication and solution; a character whose play it is; and meaning." She believed that it was imperative for children to identify with the characters and events that took place onstage, and that, in order for them to draw these connections the material must be revealed in a linear fashion that replicated real life. Woodson argues that Chorpenning relied on realism to enforce traditional behavior patterns, socialize the children, and, more or less, to act as another adult control over children. She writes, "Chorpenning's promotion of realism and her unswerving interest in control of the child's mind, emotions, and body construct theatre which is 'circumscribed by a morality which goes way beyond the more transparent didacticism and pedagogy of its earliest modes and into the hearts of writing'" (141). Chorpenning attempted to teach a moral code but her definition of the word "control" may not have been different than Woodson's definition of exercising authoritative or domineering influence. Chorpenning's embrace of realism also reflected the desired programming of The Goodman Theatre, which produced classical works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, O'Neill, Wilder, as well as an array of drawing room plays and musicals in the 1930s and 1940s.

Reflections

Although much of Chorpenning's history is lost, her greatest ideal remains omnipresent in the field: that youth are valuable agents of culture. Chorpenning distinguished what qualified as adult theatre and children's theatre by relying on children's opinions, in turn empowering children rather than controlling them. Guided by her target audience, she created works that educated, interested, and appealed to their individuality. TYA scholar Carlos Lorenz in "The Rhetoric of Theatre for Young Audiences" writes, "Understanding that the child had to be factored into the theatre experience not simply as the object toward whom the rhetoric was directed but rather as an active, thinking, feeling participant, a co-maker of meaning, Chorpenning began to create dramaturgy that addressed towards the creation of child centered drama" (102). Regardless of whether she practiced community-based theatre, children's theatre, or theatre in education, they were all forms of "child-centered drama" for Chorpenning. The writer-director-educator contends, "I must find out how to control my gathering audience without repressing them" (7). Even though Chorpenning invokes the word "control," she asserts that she needed to learn from children's dramaturgical sensibilities in order to create work that was appropriate for them. Her focus never drifted away from serving children with work they helped to create.

Chorpenning recognized the individuality of her audience members in an effort to deduce her findings. For instance, Chorpenning describes how, prior to her appointment, The Goodman assumed children of any age reacted the same way. She observed how children of differing ages reacted to a production: a small child clung to her mother throughout the performance, seen by all the people in the audience; an older child, who was most likely eight or nine, shouted and jumped throughout the show; and two twelve-year-old boys apathetically sat flipping through

their programs, obviously bored by the performance which was more appropriate for a younger audience (Chorpenning 6-7). As the director of the children's theatre, she immediately differentiated programming for various age levels and to suit the maturity of children.

Through her narratives, questions regarding race, ethnicity, socioeconomic subjectivities of her audiences and characters arise for contemporary scholars. They find her work particularly problematic. Today, Chorpenning's work remains rather un-producible because of the formulaic nature of her plays and the problematic ways she interpreted race and gender, which are even more inappropriate for a twenty-first century audience. These examples illuminate some of the many flaws of her work and practices. Likewise, her work presents many virtues. Chorpenning conducted in-depth sociological, semiotic, and reception studies to examine the commonalities and differences in audience reactions of differing socioeconomic, racial, and regional identities. And as a director and pedagogue, she relied on a form of community-based theatre to create work. She premised much of her evaluations on children's physical reactions to her productions. For example, she and her students noted children's "emotional releases," "focal points," and "restlessness," among many things. From these readings, it is clear Chorpenning embraced children's grandiose verbal and physical reactions (i.e., Chorpenning notes a moment of success when all the children in the audience screamed and jumped out of their seats, some running to the stage, to warn the character Jack from the approaching Giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk*) (9). In *Theorizing the Child*, children's studies scholar Allison James and colleagues write about how in Western societies' children's maturity is determined by their ability to restrain themselves and control their social behavior (159). Chorpenning's practices did not align with this Western theory. She believed that children should have the privilege to react to her work as active audience members. She created exercise spots, spaces that children could clap, shout, jump up

and down, and/or stand. These moments were placed during points of transition that "led the audience from their overcharge of emotion into quiet concentration" (17). Chorpenning learned how to educate and to entertain young audiences while imparting lessons on morality and inscribing mainstream social codes. Her flaws helped facilitate her drive to produce work, as did her hyper-concern to teach her audiences her definitions of good and bad, which permeated all her plays. Chorpenning's playwriting practices laid the groundwork for the contemporary reception studies practiced today by theatre for young audience artists and scholars to learn and to serve the target child audience. Her foundational work as a dramatist, educator, and scholar changed the fields of theatre and educational theatre. The evidence of her influence permeates in classrooms, through plays, and in productions helmed by her generations of successors, including writers, dramaturgs, and educators, among many other positions in theatre in education and TYA.

The Youth Respondent Method Through the Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Playwriting for Youth: National Competition and Symposium

A day before the final staged reading of *Muddy Boots* at the Bonderman Festival the artistic team still grappled with the a pivotal dramaturgical question, "How does the evil snake convince Abby to let him touch her?" The playwright Deni Krueger, director Mark Lutwak, and I, as the dramaturg, knew we began the workshop with a strong play and throughout the week, as a team, made the work stronger. The play's protagonist was a seven-year-old named Abby, whose father was leaving for the Iraq War in 2006. The dialogue between Abby and her brother was both funny and authentic, the father's leaving for Iraq clearly tore the family apart, and the idea of the snake character was evocative though unclear. Throughout the development week, the artistic team was confused about the snake and why he kept trying to inflict pain upon Abby

and her family. He spoke in poetry and rhyme, appeared only to her, and threatened the family with harm and the possibility of death. The snake and what he represented also confused the students who read *Muddy Boots* and attended our first cold reading of the play at the beginning of the week. The day before the festival's showcase of plays the artistic team led a residency at the school with our assigned group of students. With the team's support, I decided that the lesson plan should be both educational and address the questions the children raised, while helping us further explore the snake character.

After leading the classroom of thirty students in physical activities embodying the snake and then in-role exercises (where the facilitator played Abby and the children played the snake), we arbitrarily divided the children into pairs. Each member of the pairs faced each other – one in-role as Abby and the other in-role as the snake. The child playing the snake tried to entice Abby to let him touch her. The children as the snakes offered the Abbys candy, money, tickets to a monster truck rally, and then, as the snake, a shy little girl offered to Abby his protection to keep her father safe in Iraq. This eight-year-old child solved the play and the riddle of the snake. Further discussions with the children revealed that they understood the play's themes regarding the protection of family, the work's relationship with the war in Iraq, and a little girl's sacrifice for her father. In one afternoon, over three hours, both the artistic team and the children from the fourth grade class began to learn about war, family, and playwriting. As a participating dramaturg, this was my first TYA collaboration where new play development and theatre education effectively worked in tandem.

For the Bonderman's 2007 reading of *Muddy Boots*, the following questions addressed with the involvement of the children became inherent to the dramaturgical conversation: What is the target audience age for this play? What is the play saying about the war? What happens to

Dad while serving in Iraq? Does the audience need to know if he returns safely? What is the snake, and what does he want? Throughout the week, the dramaturg, director, and playwright worked on script development with the actors in rehearsal. We found the most clarity in the classroom during the education workshops and from the pre- and post-show discussions with the students. The Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Playwriting for Youth: National Competition and Symposium's play development methodology integrates a form of the youth respondent method[6]. The mission of this biennial workshop "is to encourage writers to create artistic theatrical scripts for young audiences." It provides a forum through which each playwright receives constructive criticism and the support of a development team consisting of a professional director and dramaturg (Indiana Repertory Theatre website). In his article "The Bonderman and Beyond: Developing New Works for Young Audiences," educator and scholar John Newman[7] writes about founding artistic director Dorothy Webb's recognition that TYA plays needed more development resources and time. All too frequently, she witnessed underdeveloped plays rushed into production. Although many of these plays' ideas were interesting, they required more time, supportive collaborators, and rehearsal (9). In order to improve this truncated process, she created a space where writers could work with the leaders of the field to further develop their plays and introduce their pieces to the TYA community at-large.

Concurrently, she believes that children, the target audience, are necessary participants in this development process. Children's integration is often considered a luxury and not inherent to

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[6] In 1998, the Bonderman was again recognized nationally when it received the national Children's Theatre Foundation's Medallion Award for excellence in playwriting for young audiences.

[7] In 2007, a graduate of New York University's Ph.D. program in Educational Theatre, Newman defended his dissertation entitled *Spotlight on Process: New Play Development at the Bonderman Playwriting Symposium*. The document is a comprehensive guide on the history and practices of the festival.

many professional institutions that commission TYA plays. The Bonderman demonstrates how children's feedback is a necessity to the TYA play development process. Webb's philosophy is that the youth respondent method is essential to the development of new work for youth. She said in an interview with me:

> I spent a lot of time with the teachers. Orienting them to not tell the children how the play would sound or look but just to help them read it and understand the script. And now I need to spend more time, I've discovered, with the playwright and the team about how you get answers. Not just "what are the children volunteering," but now you've got a problem. And you know it's a problem and you don't know exactly how to solve it. What can you do in a way that exercises an activity with children when they're on site with them that might clarify it

As Webb describes, the festival illustrates this methodology that relies on a reciprocal relationship between theatre education and new play development with artists, educators, and children in order to create TYA plays.

A Brief History of the Festival and its Audience

Playwrights working on children's theatre create work for a very specific audience based upon age, which presents both opportunities and limitations in serving this demographic. Artists involved in TYA always must consider whether their work addresses the interests of a young audience. In 2007, Peter Brosius, then the artistic director of The Honolulu Children's Theatre and the present artistic director of The Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis, delivered an eloquent keynote address at the Bonderman Festival. Brosius described TYA artists, administrators, and scholars' love of the audience. He stated, "We're in a very wonderful

position because so unlike most adult theatres, we like our audience. We love that they push us, and they challenge us. They teach us and demand us forever to be more honest, more daring, more challenging and hopefully more true to ourselves" (2). TYA writers' investment in their audiences entices many to talk directly to them about the effectiveness of their work. Garnering child audience feedback through written and verbal communication is a practice that is of interest to many TYA playwrights and artists. For example, Sandy Asher (*The Oregon Project*), Ric Averill (*Alex and the Shrink World*) and Barry Kornhauser (*Lincoln's Log*) frequently integrate audience feedback into their adaptations and original work. Many common questions that these writers raise include: What image of the play most resonates with you? Can you briefly describe the play to someone else? What moments of the play do you find confusing? The first time that Webb thought the process of integrating children's feedback was truly productive was while working with playwright and director José Cruz González. She observed:

> The children were so clustered around him. And the children kept getting closer and closer and he was writing and his dramaturg kept writing and writing and he was asking question after question. And these were kindergarten through first graders, which scared me to death because I never used that age group as a respondent. He said, "I learned a lot."

This affinity for the audience of children is truly emblematic of the entire company involved with the Bonderman Festival, particularly that of Janet Allen, the artistic director of the Indiana Repertory Theatre (IRT), and Webb. Allen and Webb have always been extremely devoted to children and family programming in their work.

In 1983, Webb, then a professor of theatre at Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI), recognized the lack of opportunities for writers, directors, and other artists in theatre for young audiences in the United States. She envisioned that they could collaboratively join together and nationally showcase their work in an effort to create high quality dramatic literature for young audiences. In addition, she wanted to create a well-attended forum where those concerned with the field could address the major practices, challenges and further development of work and education for young audiences (Webb interview). In 1985 the first festival commenced, involving a full production of Rachel Burchard's *Hallelujah Hopscotch*. Within a structure of a three-day symposium presentations included *Hallelujah Hopscotch*, as well as the staged reading of five semi-finalist plays. Members of the theatre for young audience field gathered to attend workshops, lectures, and performances. The first gathering hosted by the Children's Theatre Foundation of America featured performances of four new plays representing each state in the region. In 1991, the symposium moved to the IRT. In 1993, Bonderman expanded to an eight-day development lab for four finalist playwrights culminating in the national symposium, primarily taking place at the IRT. In 1995, the Bonderman's growth led to moving it to a biennial festival with the Kennedy Center's New Vision/New Voices festival.

New Visions/New Voices and the Bonderman

Although both festivals serve the same constituencies of TYA playwrights, artists, theatres and audiences, they are distinctly different festivals. First, a primary difference exits in programming. New Visions/New Voices programs work commissioned and/or associated with theatres. Theatres conduct much of the initial vetting in selecting writer and director collaborators. Once those applications are received, members of the Kennedy Center Education

staff and two outside readers choose the finalist projects. The Bonderman seeks unsolicited work and prefers not to showcase plays already associated with theatres with planned productions in the future. The Bonderman provides an opportunity for less established writers to collaborate with professional theatres, dramaturgs, and directors to create new collaborations and to experience what it means to work at a top regional theatre with some of the best artists in theatre for young audiences. Also, more adjudicators are involved in the selection process for the Bonderman; the initial round of blind applications is read by a larger group of readers, which includes scholars, artists, writers, and administrators. Extensive feedback is given to each applicant as well, which makes it a very rigorous and discursive process. This initial feedback is extremely helpful to the future life of the projects, regardless of whether or not they are vetted further for the festival. Also, it makes evaluators read the work more carefully. For the semifinalist/finalist selection, the group of readers becomes smaller, with a select few tenured readers, in addition to Webb, Allen, and James Still. Still is the IRT's resident playwright and an accomplished writer with vested interest in writing for children. In "Getting to the Next Level" for *Stage of the Art,* Webb states, "Our goal for the selected plays is to get them to the next level of development" (10). The backgrounds of the playwrights and how they hope to use the week to develop their work are considered at this stage of the selection process. The more specific the writer's goals and intentions the more viable the piece becomes to the festival. From this process, four-semifinalists and four finalists are chosen to participate in the festival.

Because the scripts are unsolicited, the quality of the plays received is very diverse. Many of the writers have never written for a play before, let along one for young audiences. Most next-generation writers from graduate programs who lack a TYA emphasis, writers from emerging writer groups, and other more experienced writers who lack exposure to the depth and

diversity of children's theatre find the Bonderman as their first foray into the field. Often writers who make it to the semi-finalist/finalist round are trained as educators or studied theatre for young audiences at the graduate level but not necessarily playwriting. In an interview, Krueger said of her entry and learning experience at the Bonderman:

> I think I learned to write a play in graduate school; I learned to craft a play at the Bonderman. Each of my encounters at the Bonderman taught me to understand how a play lives on its own, beyond the confines of a playwright's mind and 12 pt black letters on white paper, so it can move through space and time and be experienced the way it was intended.

The Bonderman not only provides a learning experience about the field of TYA but also participation in the festival teaches about playmaking and developing work in a workshop environment. Most experienced TYA writer, who also teaches playwriting and playwriting for youth courses, agrees that regardless of whether the work is TYA or not, the writer needs to be first a strong writer and able to write a good play, which is the case with many of the Bonderman finalists.

There is a focus on American writers at the Bonderman, while New Visions/New Voices is divided between projects from U.S. institutions and international work. Some of the most exciting and challenging productions for TYA are from abroad. Also, much European work is far more theatrical and less scripted. Since the inclusion of international work is relatively new for New Visions/New Voices and the festival requires scripted plays in English, the international work is primarily from England and Australia. As a result, plays from both festivals share similar traditional dramatic structures, not necessarily linear in nature but likewise not explicitly

movement or image based without a playscript. Another major difference is that the Bonderman doesn't showcase musicals, while New Visions/New Voices showcases one or two musicals every festival. Both festivals focus on development versus presentation. That said, because attending leaders in the field look to find work and writers to produce, the final products of the festivals need to be strong to gain their attention.

Even though the stakes are high for artists to be professionally recognized, the Bonderman creates a personable setting at the IRT that helps relieve some of this pressure. The institution has very friendly environment with a welcoming staff and a theatre that produces traditional regional theatre work such as *Dracula*, *A Christmas Carol*, and a plays by American writers such as Arthur Miller, August Wilson, and Neil Simon. The institution's education department is strong and provides varied and sophisticated programming for young audiences and theatre in education opportunities. These programming decisions attest to the IRT's investment in serving intergenerational audiences. In addition, it serves as a conducive environment to develop plays for young audiences. Krueger attested to her warm and productive Bonderman experiences, "When all is said and done, the Bonderman was not simply a contest to win or a marker to put on a resume. It was a gift. Of experience. Of asking. Of crafting a play. In many ways, the Bonderman has been a playwriting home for me." The nature and location of the festival allows for the playwrights to dedicate much time to writing.

Because the Bonderman takes place in early spring, the festival must grapple with often debilitating winter weather. Besides visiting the Indianapolis museums, there is little distraction. Many playwrights take this time to write and collaborate with their team. The intimate environment helps beget relationships and camaraderie with teams because of the organic circumstances affiliated with geography and time. Also, the Bonderman's milieu is academic,

with its extensive use of dramaturgs, collaborations with Indiana schools, and its deeper partnerships with graduate programs where students shadow and participate on the teams. New Visions/New Voices creates observations and apprenticeships with KCACTF (Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival) and with ASSITEJ (translated in English as the International Association of Theaters for Children and Young People) undergraduate and graduate students. Still, students are more present and active participants at the Bonderman than they are as observers at New Visions/New Voices.

One of the greatest reasons for the success of the Bonderman is the flexibility of the festival. As a progressive and insightful artistic director/curator, Webb recognizes that the same development process cannot serve every play the same way. The work and the models that create it must be able to adapt to the needs of the writers (Newman 9). Frequently, the workshop days are divided between closed rehearsals and time allocated for the writer to write. The collaborative team chooses how that time is dedicated. The Kennedy Center doesn't allow for such flexibility, but does work closely with writers and directors to make sure that the allocation of time and assigned spaces in the building serve their needs. For final presentations, teams must perform for less than two hours. The Bonderman doesn't have a specific time restraint for presentations. But steps regarding the presentation of the reading, integration with Indiana public school classrooms, and the written feedback from the ultimate performance reading are prearranged and required.

Perhaps the greatest difference between New Visions/New Voices and the Bonderman is the inclusion of children in the development and the feedback process. This type of immersion is not of interest to New Visions/New Voices but inherent to the Bonderman. In an interview with me Webb said, "Playwrights need to hear this. They need to hear what the children are saying."

Regardless of a lack of time or interest, it is mandatory for writers to collaborate and receive feedback from young audiences as part of the Bonderman process and Webb's philosophy as an educator, artist, and curator.

Many different forms of feedback exist for new plays, and New Visions/New Voices and the Bonderman employ different response methods. New Visions/New Voices prefers immediate feedback following the reading. This method is criticized because many attendees and participants find the immediate feedback too difficult to hear just after their reading. Newman describes how immediate post-show discussions may provide exactly what a playwright wants to hear while they may also put playwrights on the defensive and make them feel like they must deviate from their original visions to serve a judging audience (13). In recent years, the Bonderman moved to a written feedback session, in which the dramaturg and the writer craft questions that the audience responds to in a written format. These surveys are collected and eventually returned to the playwright. Since the audience of attendees includes practitioners, audience members, scholars, and students, the feedback represents the diversity of the field. This practice allows playwrights more control in how they are critiqued and enables them to ask for the feedback they specifically need. For many, this directed feedback helps them locate what is most helpful in terms of the next stage with in the development of their piece.

A major focus of the Bonderman within this very flexible play development process is the sharing of feedback throughout the week with all the participating artists and the students. At New Visions/New Voices the teams seem very isolated from one another. Although a desire exists to mingle with other teams, with the lack of planned events and tight schedules, there is less opportunity for these planned inter-team meetings. The Kennedy Center's austerity certainly is more regal but also more intimidating and this influences the limited interaction of the teams.

At the Bonderman during the first evening that the teams arrive, writers are asked to read their plays aloud for the entire company without actors but by themselves. As a dramaturg, I've witnessed this request at a number of festivals. From my experience, it is one of the most useful and intimidating requests for writers, making them feel very vulnerable and exposed but also allowing them to hear the play with their intentions and voice. As a result of this reading, it begins to unite the teams, lets them consider the work ahead of them, informs the other teams of the caliber of work that their colleagues are producing, and brings the writers together. After these initial readings, the response is positive and supportive; it begins to inspire a dialogue about the work.

***Muddy Boots*' Development and Youth Respondent Integration**

Playwrights actively participate in the selection of which age group of child respondents they feel best suit their play. As John Newman writes, "Local school classes at specific grade levels are selected to serve as 'experts,' hearing and responding to the play at three different points during the development week" (13). The pairing of the director, dramaturg, and school with the playwright is based on the directors' interest in work and the dramaturgs' experience with a certain type of work, as well as the school's curricular connections to the text. Webb stresses the vital importance of picking the right school and teacher to work with the playwright. She also strongly believes that part of her work is to fully prepare the teacher for the immersion in order for it to be a good and productive match with the playwright and the students.

The collaborators in the group need training in education, theatre, and openness to facilitating the workshop with children. They must be able to listen to the ideas of child respondents and to decipher their responses to work. For *Muddy Boots*, Mark Lutwak directed

the reading workshop. Lutwak was the former artistic director of the Honolulu Theatre for Young Audiences, where he played a major role in making new work the focus of the theatre, in addition to building one of the most successful theatres for young audience programs in the country. Currently he serves as the Education Director of the Cincinnati Playhouse, which demonstrates his continued dedication to educational theatre and children. He understands that the quality of theatre for young audiences must match that of any theatre. Lutwak was an excellent match with Deni Krueger. Krueger received her MFA from the University of Texas (UT) at Austin's Drama and Theatre for Youth and Playwriting programs. As a writer, her interest is focused on theatre for young audiences, primarily because of her study at UT in the Drama and Theatre for Youth Program and history as an educator. She participated in the 2005 Bonderman Symposium with her play *Pennies in My Hand,* and she was commissioned by Stage One's Children's Theatre of Louisville to write *A Little Bit of Perfect*, which never went to production. Krueger lives with her husband and children in Vilseck, Germany. Her husband, who is in the U.S. Marine Corps, is stationed abroad; certainly this is an inspiration for her autobiographical play *Muddy Boots*. Krueger is a gifted teacher and brings an authenticity to her work. As a writer, she understands the importance of not writing down to a younger audience. Besides me, as the dramaturg, the last member of the team was Gary Minyard, who served as the assistant dramaturg and was an MFA candidate at Arizona State University. Minyard is an accomplished director, who after graduating served as the education director of the Arizona Theatre Company and then in 2009 was named the Artistic Director of the Pennsylvania Youth Theatre School of the Performing Arts in Bethlehem. He was extremely open to learning new methodologies, like the youth respondent method, in addition to assisting me in the process.

The central role of the Bonderman dramaturg is to work with students from the paired class to attain useful feedback to develop the plays, in conjunction with working with the writer to serve all her goals with the play's development throughout the workshop week. In "Getting to the Next Level," Laurie Brooks contends that dramaturgs are to help to hear the play in honest but non-judgmental terms, what the script needs to communicate. She feels the dramaturg's second function is to assist the playwright in locating what he or she wants to communicate through his/her play (11). The Bonderman embraces both risk and discovery in terms of work, conversations, and more than anything in its artists and youth respondents. For instance, the festival is open to work in an early development stage and written by relatively new writers. In terms of the process, the Bonderman takes risk in assembling teams that have no previous experience working with each other. Also, Webb leaves it up to the teams to develop their lesson plan for their class immersion, often the responsibility of the dramaturg. Brooks also acknowledges that risk must be celebrated (12). The dramaturg, especially at the festival, serves as the instigators of this risk and as the team member who brings cohesion to the development conversations, which reflects my experience dramaturging at the Bonderman. Dramaturgs act as conduits for challenging the boundaries of the writer and her/his work.

They are to serve as advocates for the plays, but in order to truly accomplish this goal they must serve as advocates for the playwrights. At the Bonderman quickly developing a relationship with your writer is crucial, particularly because much needs to be accomplished within a week's time with an often less experienced playwright. In "New Play Development and the 'New' Dramaturg: The Dramaturg's Approach to the First Draft," Paul Castagno, who is head of the program at the University of Alabama, describes the elements that a dramaturg of new play development must take into account. They must have strong and open communication

skills (e.g., delivering concise and clear notes). They must have an understanding of the creative process regarding where in the draft process the writer is. At festivals like the Bonderman, it's working with the playwright to make manageable goals, defining what is accomplishable within the time period and most beneficial for the writer to work on with the resources available to her. Locating redundancy in the script and where cuts can be made are other responsibilities. Defining where the "point of attack" or where the play begins and where the play ends is another. It's also helping the writer develop the characters' voices and clarifying the themes of the work. Theoretically, the examination of these elements is very clear. While collaborating with a playwright, however, the work becomes less prescriptive and is more about the relationship, which was the case with Krueger. For instance, both Lutwak and I figured out early in the process that asking questions to Krueger about her children helped her write for the characters they represented in the play. Playwrights must trust their dramaturgs will support their decisions, while also offering guidance. It's finding a mode of communication to relay notes to writers from the dramaturg's knowledge and experiential skill-set but also her personality and taste. Scholar and dramaturg Geoff Proehl writes in *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey*:

> A dramaturg – the first person with this title – is never essential to the rehearsal and production process…Dramaturgy, however – this deep, often personal, even idiosyncratic understanding of the forms and rhythms crucial to a play as written or conceived and performed – is inseparable from theatre making, whether or not the word itself is ever used. To many audience members, the dramaturgy of the play will itself be as invisible as its sometimes silent cousin, the dramaturg. (20)

A dramaturg's responsibility is to observe: the play, her collaborators, and the audience. The youth respondent method is part of this process, assisted by the dramaturg delineating what is working and what is not with the audience. As Brooks writes, "The dramaturg becomes a guide through the wildness of possibilities the play presents, and the director functions as navigator, planning the course of the journey" (12). Perhaps the child audience, who contributes ideas and reactions, becomes the course or terrain of the journey to discover the play.

Muddy Boots was a well-developed (close to being ready for production) piece when selected by the Bonderman. In addition, Krueger's history of being a finalist in the 2005 competition made her realize that she needed to submit a full draft, with very specific questions for the work's future development, and a somewhat clear trajectory as to how she wanted to use the workshop and presentation week at the Bonderman. When she submitted the project she wanted to know more about the characters and felt the work lacked an ending. She was confident that if she could write the ending of the play within the course of the week, she could clarify the rest of the play.

During her 2005 Bonderman experience, Krueger changed little of the play based on the feedback she received from the classroom of students. The team did not make the connection that the classroom experience was a fruitful opportunity to attain feedback to develop the play further or to ask the class specific questions regarding the work. Instead they used the classroom experience to teach the children about theatre through theatre games and a general discussion on new play development. She found students' responses to the first read through of *Pennies in My Hand* to be very useful in recognizing what children enjoyed, understood, and struggled within the text. The integration that occurred in the classroom during the end of the week did not yield

the same productive results. The immersion helped the children in the class to learn more about the world of the play but the results of the exercises failed to inspire Krueger's writing.

For *Muddy Boots*, Krueger hoped there was a way to integrate more of the children's thoughts into the work; the play had multiple points of entry to answer challenging questions regarding the play's structure, characters, and themes through the youth respondent method. *Muddy Boots* is a linear play that takes place in one location, the family's backyard of their house on a military post. Abby, the play's seven-year-old protagonist, finds a snake in the family's backyard who makes threatening visits to her and whom believes he can speak. The snake may be real but his ability to talk is imagined by Abby. The play is also autobiographical in nature. The least present character in the play is Mom, who represents Krueger. As the dramaturg, I could sense that Krueger was uncomfortable about inserting herself into the play, although she wrote the piece because it was about her life, family, and their fears. For instance, even in the list of characters Mom lacks any description besides her age. Often when Krueger made changes she considered her own children's vocal cadence and their problem solving skills: Abby was certainly her seven-year-old daughter and six-year-old Jay, her son. The artistic team realized the importance of asking questions about Krueger's family to help her dissect the dramaturgy of the play. By sharing the piece in a classroom, Krueger was able to see many children, other than her own, embody and vocalize her text, which became helpfully distancing for her to realize what from her life was useful and what was not for the target audience.

Artists and audiences alike may incorrectly assume the piece is easy to produce because of its linear structure, with light touches of fantasy, such as the integration of the speaking snake. Because the play resides in one location with a series of short scenes, a straightforward plot, and detailed characters that carryout specific action, most directors would immediately make a

realistic interpretation of the work. But the tensions the family endures are not simple to address directorially or dramaturgically in a production for family audiences. The play's family struggle to survive the fact that their father is being deployed, hence leaving the family for at least a period of time, if not indefinitely, because of the life-risks of war. Their phobias, fears, and defense mechanisms for how each character grapples with loss, pain, anger, and fear are illustrated in the piece. Mom copes by getting angry and breaking dishes in the kitchen when the children are playing outside. Jay tells imaginary stories of Saudi Arabia based on what he heard on television, from friends and in books, often diving into stereotypes of what he thought it would be like (e.g., filled with rubies, land of sand, etc). Abby invents a language for the personified snake to address her father's departure. Krueger also employs many symbols or totems in her work. For instance, muddy boots, parachutes, and the snake are all items that are reoccurring and relevant to the characters in the play. Abby often hides Dad's boots when she doesn't want him to leave the house or, as in the last scene of the play, the country. How and when the frequency of these items appear, such as the boots, become significant questions in tracking the work's narrative arc. Their gravitas and what was of greater or lesser importance also became factors to consider with the youth respondents. Krueger often writes metaphorically and grapples with challenging subject matter, such as military deployment and loss. For instance, the snake character, in poetry, often suggests that he will touch Abby and her family in a way that will hurt them. For Krueger this hurt is physical and emotional, and connotes the separation of the family. None of the team knew whether the child audience would clearly interpret these metaphors and symbols.

The team wondered how the child audience would interpret the play's stance on the war. Krueger wrote a play that is antiwar while also relaying a message of support for the troops, a

complicated philosophy for any audience to immediately interpret. Abby says, "It doesn't ever end. Does it?" referring to her nightmares regarding the snake but also Krueger's feelings about the war in Iraq and war in general. Dad is supported by his family, but they do not understand why the war needs to take him away. At the beginning of the play, Abby plays a game with her father where she calls out, "SAAAFFFFEEE!!!!" (4). The game serves as a metaphor to keep Dad safe in Iraq. The work is not overwhelmingly political, but because it is told from the point of view of a military family it is very respectful of the armed services while also presenting a negative stance regarding the U.S.'s involvement in Iraq. For instance, instead of expressing dutiful support or sadness to Dad's inevitable departure, Mom becomes defiant and angry, which is assumed by her throwing dishes to relieve her frustration and her passive aggressive arguments with her husband about his departure. Her deep affection for him is evident throughout the play, but her unwillingness to accept his deployment and the military conflict that requires it is also clear.

The work went through considerable changes over the course of the week as a result of the interactions Krueger had with the third and fourth grade students from New Augusta Academy. The artistic team had three major interactions with the students: The first immersion was an initial reading of the piece at the beginning of the workshop week at the IRT; the second immersion was at New Augusta Academy in the students' classroom facilitating a creative drama lesson; and for the final immersion, the children attended and responded to the public reading of *Muddy Boots* at the IRT.

The team and the actors were anxious that the first read was in front of an audience. During the reading of the piece the twenty-seven children attentively listened, laughed, and related to the children's banter. Following the reading of the play, I asked the class a series of

prepared questions that arose from hearing their responses during the reading. The first question I posed to the students was, "What are some of the pictures you imagined in your mind while you were hearing the play?" The students responded: campfire, 1940s, the snake, the oak tree, the tent, the big flame of fire, the hissing, the garlic, the trains, the parachutes, and the snake's red evil eyes. In their responses, the children identified major symbols and objects from the play, such as the oak tree where much of the central action took place and the parachute Jay talked about to save his Dad. Surprisingly, the children were very unclear about the time period of the play and repeatedly mentioned they thought the year it took place was 1940. Since the play was written and occurred during the Iraq War in 2006, it was somewhat shocking how unaware the children were of current events and, to any degree, how these events may possibly affect their lives. They were confused as to where Dad was going. Many thought he was going off to fight in World War II. This was extremely interesting in terms of what the children had been exposed to historically and what they had not. It reminded the writer of the educational value of the play with its ability to teach students about the war in Iraq as an event. She also learned from these discussions that the play would likely have a very different meaning and resonance to children with parents in the military. According to the teacher from New Augusta Academy, none of her students' parents were in the military, perhaps explaining some of their lack of knowledge about the Iraq War.

Based upon the initial question it was clear that the children were invested in the snake, which led to my second inquiry, "What do you think about the snake?" They responded with "his voice, red eyes, being bitten, his threats about biting, the way he dances, his fangs and his teeth." Overall, the children seemed to recall the snake's appearance and recognize he was threatening. Besides inferring that he was evil, the children didn't really offer extensive opinions of what they

thought about the snake or the cause of his actions. They seemed confused how the snake was connected to Abby's father, which was one of Krueger's concerns regarding how children perceived the snake. In addition, she was afraid that the children may be scared by the snake and had me ask the follow-up question, "Was the snake scary or not?" The children confidently responded that all snakes are scary, and they changed the conversation through their feedback to describe what type of snake it may be. Clearly, the children seemed excited to discover more about the snake and enthusiastically embraced their fear of him. Some of the children during the questions responded that the snake wanted "to kill," "cause life and death," "ensue evil over all humanity," and "take complete control." But overall the children were unclear what the snake wanted because it was unclear in the play. This realization raised two primary questions for the team, which we planned to consider in the classroom immersion: What does the snake want? And what does he tell Abby?

At the end of the discussion, we allowed the audience to ask the artistic team questions and the following were raised: "Are you guys going to tell us what happens to the Dad? Why is the play called *Muddy Boots*? How old are the young actors? Are they all related (the actors)? Was Abby meant to be really mature for a seven-year-old?" These response questions regarding Abby's maturity and what happens to her father also became dramaturgical talking points for the team. The writer, director and I felt Abby was realistically precocious and perhaps presented a heightened vocabulary that may have been a bit jarring for the young audience, which we all thought was acceptable in an effort to further the play and express the complexity of her character. In general, the children's questions represented a range of ideas regarding the play but also the performance of the reading, the later set of questions being less useful to our inquiry of the play.

Over the course of the week, the children's questions and responses frequently arose in discussion on how to further develop the play. Lutwak appointed me to plan the structure of the creative drama lesson, the next stage of the immersion process with the class. The lesson I created was based on the two primary questions we surmised from the question and answer period after the reading: What does the snake want? And what does he tell Abby? I relied on the creative dramatic techniques of Brian Way, which he explores in his 1974 text *Development through Drama*, to plan the lesson. Way's practices are focused on play as part of a natural learning environment for children. As stated in *The History of Creative Drama*, Way feels that drama is an extension of play (112). He places a greater value on process over product. In creative drama lessons inspired by his philosophy, children do extensive work in pairs as well as in groups, which is an example of this interactive play. Because Way feels that children really don't learn much by seeing theatre or experiencing children's theatre, he is far more focused in children's active engagement with each other. I decided that the lesson would hinge on these same notions of interaction and play. We would learn from the children by the play they conducted with each other and with us. This reliance on play created an additional entry point to use further creative dramatic activities. In *The TRU Meaning of Children's Theatre*, TYA scholar Mark Dudas Wood describes children's unceasing sense of play as inspiring in the creation of work for young audiences through innovative and experimental activities to inform these audiences (41). These theories contrast with some of Winifred Ward's, the originator of creative drama and a colleague of Charlotte Chorpenning's, who focused on ending in a drama or a culminating performance. Way and Dudas are more interested in the exploration of ideas, a process similar to the youth respondent method. Because the method is extremely

multidisciplinary in nature, it resonates with Way's reliance on interdisciplinary work: music, history, and current events are purviews to explore stories, all areas reflected in my lesson plan.

The artistic team began the 45-minute lesson by discussing who we were and what our roles were with *Muddy Boots* (e.g., the role of the writer, director, and dramaturg). In response, the children asked us questions to further learn about our training and education to prepare us to hold these jobs. This conversation helped establish a greater rapport with the class. The team also relayed how the students' feedback and ideas with the play might be incorporated into the work. We discussed how they may inspire Krueger to further develop the piece and how they would answer many of our questions. For instance, the students' questions from the first read-through about when the play was set inspired Krueger to clarify this in the text. Giving them other examples of how their feedback already assisted in changing the play helped make them aware they were vital members of the development of this work.

By exploring the work through creative dramatics, we wanted to take these ideas to a more aggressive level, so it was not exclusively the children's response to hearing the work but them actively participating in the choices the characters were making. Assunta Kent writes in "'I was there!': Creative Drama for Social Change" about the impact of employing creative dramatics in an effort to inspire ideas. She describes how by embodying events participants actively engage rather than passively watch. By participating, they gain a personal imprint and connection to the work. By making decisions about the characters they play or portray, children are further involved. Since these immersions are focused on process versus product, multiple iterations of ideas and scenarios can be explored in the classroom. Some of these discoveries will be added to the text directly, while others will influence the narrative arc, and some won't

have an effect on the work at all. Ultimately our lesson focused on the snake's relationship to Abby and the audience's to him. We read to the children some of the poetry said by the snake:

> A place… I want a place I need…a place for fear, to plant the seed. A place once safe in land and tree and hope and love and family. Oh little one…can you hear me? (3)

After reading this entry and a few other examples, we asked the children to draw what the snake look liked and words that the snake made them feel. Using paper and crayons and pencils the classroom teacher provided, the children drew for about ten minutes. Besides using the exercise to see how they visually interpreted the snake, we asked the children to volunteer some of the words and images they wrote. Some of the words they contributed included: "hate," "fear," and "tricked," among others. This multidisciplinary approach allowed the children to express themselves through another learning mode, which did not necessitate verbal communication, while also allowing students with stronger critical thinking skills to consider how to explain their images to the class and to us as the artists. Also, it served as a method to prepare the youth respondents for the next major activity concerning the snake. We arbitrarily divided the thirty children into two separate groups to facilitate a "guided imagery" concerning the confrontation between Abby and the snake. For the guided imagery, we asked the children to close their eyes, and I, as the guide for one group, and Lutwak, as the guide for the other[8], described from Abby's point of view (and in great detail) the world of her backyard as the snake approached her. We described how Abby came upon the snake for the final time and used the children's descriptions of him to embellish our stories. This guided imagery applied to the children's visual and aural senses and prepared them for the drama activity. Next, we asked the children stand in their pairs. Children in each pair faced each other – one in-role as Abby and the other in-role as the snake.

[8] The division of the class into two groups was arbitrary.

The child playing the snake had to try to entice Abby to let him touch her. Also, the children tried to problem solve and add logical explanations as to what the snake may want. Throughout this process Krueger took notes on the children's responses. Eventually, one shy little girl offered Abby to keep her father safe in Iraq. Immediately, Krueger gravitated towards this really clever response. For Krueger, it inspired the play's climatic moment and merged the power and possible harm of the snake with Abby's confrontation with somewhat understanding her father's deployment. Besides adding to the play and solving a challenging point that Krueger grappled with throughout the entire week, the child felt empowered by the attention and Krueger's interest in her thoughts. Kent writes:

> Creative Drama can be a powerful tool for the theatre for social change by transforming visionary creative artists into leaders – and passive observers into fully active participants – and by modeling more egalitarian, interactive relationships between teacher/guides and other participants. (71)

The children expressed a pride, an interest, and a healthy sense of ownership with their involvement with the piece, particularly the little girl. Because she significantly influenced the end of the play, she felt her voice was heard. Besides critically thinking, imagining, problem solving, expressing themselves verbally, through drawing, and through body language, the children understood the play and the challenging situation that the family encountered. As Way contends with similar scenarios, these discoveries were made with children as active participants in engaged play (113). At the final reading, Krueger publicly thanked the class for their feedback, which shaped the play. They accurately felt that they played an important role in this development process and were able to recognize all the ideas that they had contributed during the

reading, such as the description of the snake, his poetry, the relationship of the children with their parents, and the threat that the snake ultimately used on Abby.

At the expense of time and resources, integrating the youth respondent method in play development processes requires a belief in its effectiveness, a principle that Webb acts on and the reason she ensures its practice at the Bonderman Festival. As a curator, she realizes that the method does not always yield results that improve the quality of all the plays, but even if only for one instance or discovery of a moment, she finds the method invaluable. She witnesses its reciprocal effect in improving work while teaching and learning from children. After the final readings of each of the Bonderman finalist plays, the artistic teams meet with their assigned class for one final time. Because the children have played with the team, a level of ease and camaraderie is evident in this final discussion. Wood describes how children's play leads to innovation and experimentation, in addition to frankly saying what they find clear and what they do not (41). Having become familiar with each other though play, without inhibition, they discuss questions they still have about the play, what they don't like and what they do, and ways they would like to see the play further improved. Finally, they want to know what is the next stage for the play, where they will be able to see it, and how their questions and ideas influence its final product. For Krueger, this immersion with children is perhaps her greatest takeaway from the Bonderman. She said in an interview:

> And at the heart of my experiences at the Bonderman came from the chance to work with young people: watching them in the theatre, listening to their ideas, working with them improvisationally in the classroom. Every time my incredible artistic team worked with the students, I found something that belonged in my play, something I was unable to see because I wear that scarlet 'A' for adult on my chest. You see, as an adult, it's easy to

> think we have all of the answers for children. We know what's right for them. We know what they should see. We know what they should do. We know how the play should work because we've been to school and know all the answers. But in the middle of all of this…knowing…lies what is missing at the core of how to write for young people. Young people don't always know. They ask. And if you're lucky and they love your play, they ask a lot!

Through the youth respondent method writers like Krueger are able to locate the voice and interests of children. Institutions such as the IRT, programs like the Bonderman, and driven leaders such as Webb make this immersion possible, thus building the field and enhancing the quality of plays. With programs such as the Bonderman, time is dedicated to creating an immersion with the artist and the child, as Chorpenning did with her play and production development practices. Artists, like Krueger, continue to rely on Chorpenning's practices of listening to the audience's reactions; asking informed questions of youth while answering theirs about the work; and merging theatre education, children's theatre, and pedagogy in an effort to create work that directly serves the audience. The legacy of Charlotte Chorpenning is that contemporary writers and artists, such as those found with the Bonderman Festival, find new meaning in youth feedback for their plays for young audiences, which attract the next generation of artists and spectators in the field.

Chapter 2

New Play Development with the Target Audience: The Youth Respondent Methods Application in Theatre Training Programs and Professional Theatre Settings

My professional career as a dramaturg began with *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted her Name Back* by Jason Tremblay, which received productions at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin in 2007, The Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices festival in 2008, and Adventure Stage Chicago (ASC) in 2009. Similar to the rest of the country, captivated by the effects of Hurricane Katrina, Tremblay was inspired to write a play about the event and its immediate aftermath. Displaced by the storm, a group of musician friends stayed with Tremblay and his family in Austin. They shared stories, songs, and their passion for New Orleans and its people. From this personal connection, Tremblay located the subject and context for a TYA play, which he wrote for children's theatre playwright and Professor Suzan Zeder's Playwriting for Young Audiences course during the spring of 2006, while he was an MFA playwriting student at the University of Texas at Austin. He had spent much time in New Orleans prior to the storm, and much of his life before graduate school as a musician, both of which influenced the creation of this work. Ultimately, Tremblay and the artistic team felt at times pleased, successful, and disappointed by the entire play development and production processes, which gained the writer the greatest national attention in his career but also perhaps the greatest frustration. Limitations with development, resources, artists, and time created issues with the project. As a writer who formerly wrote children's literature, this was his first foray writing a play for young audiences and incorporating children's feedback in the early development of his work. As his dramaturg, throughout the entire process and multiple productions, with some

success and even greater failure, I continued to advocate for young audiences' involvement to better understand the play and Katrina – its title character.

Harriet Jacobs represents another play for which artists employed youths' feedback in the early stages of its development. Playwright Lydia Diamond partnered with director-collaborator and Steppenwolf Education Director Hallie Gordon to create a piece for Steppenwolf for Young Adults (SYA). This second collaboration followed after the team had worked together on the theatrical adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, produced during the SYA 2005-2006 season. Produced at Steppenwolf in the spring of 2008, *Harriet Jacobs* grapples with nineteenth century slavery and the voices of African American women. The autobiographical account *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861, chronicles the life of Harriet Jacobs, a slave and eventually a freed abolitionist. Few monographs written by African and African American slaves exist, besides Jacobs' and Fredrick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* published in 1845. Public high school curriculums rarely include either of these narratives. With great investment, Diamond wrote the adaptation of the text and included slave narratives she researched at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., which she loosely adapted. On the genesis of the piece, she said in an interview:

> I discovered the novel shortly after high school and rediscovered it during college. When I first read it, I didn't think of myself as a playwright. And then I thought this is something that should be a play. But I didn't think I had the tools. I didn't know how to even begin. And so I didn't think of it much more. And when Hallie approached me to work with her again at Steppenwolf at the Theatre for Young Adults venue, it seemed like a good thing to do.

Facing many restrictions with programming to order to serve curricular needs, Gordon primarily relied on adapting books to attract public schools' participation in SYA. The educator-director took a risk and began producing adaptations of literature not found on the ninth through twelfth grade required reading lists, such as *Harriet Jacobs*. She felt that educators' confidence in the superior work produced for SYA and their support of her taste allowed her to program material that sometimes diverged from the preexisting curriculum. SYA represents one of the strongest theatre education programs in the country, with a focus in originating work for young audiences, despite its lack of ample funding, resources, and time to create work. The program must often stage plays on top of sets for concurrently running mainstage Steppenwolf productions, which limits the design and staging possibilities in creating the appropriate world for the SYA play.

Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted her Name Back and *Harriet Jacobs* are two plays written specifically for young audiences of middle and high school aged students. These works' development processes—following workshops at the Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices program in Washington D.C. during the 2006 festival for *Harriet Jacobs* and the 2008 festival for *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted her Name Back*—continued on trajectories similar to any new work produced at a regional or professional children's theatre: a rehearsal process that lasted three weeks, technical (tech) rehearsals for two full days, and a short number of previews followed by the opening of these shows with four-week runs – playing primarily for matinee houses of school groups. In addition, the plays benefited from some nontraditional development practices, such as the continued inclusion of young audiences' feedback. For both works, the collaborators believed a more extensive immersion with youth would have continued to improve their works' quality. As a result of these plays restaging extremely challenging events about

significant moments in American history while battling a lack of time, the artistic collaborators – including writers, directors, casts, dramaturgs, designers, and theatre education staffs – needed and wanted to further consider these issues and how they interpreted them with and for their intended audience. Some audiences questioned the authenticity of these retellings, while simultaneously the artistic collaborators questioned their authority to tell these stories about African American culture and history.

This chapter examines both the successes (e.g., multiple productions, reaching large audiences, educating audiences about the subjects of these individual works) and also the many limitations these plays experienced in their development processes, which include a lack of development within the rehearsal process and tension between the playwrights and their producing organizations regarding how to produce and market the work. New Dramatists Artistic Director Todd London and colleagues from Theatre Communications Group (TCG) diagnosed many of the problems of the American theatre among companies, artists, and work. His 2010 study, *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the New American Play*, describes the current crisis in the theatre whereas it has become far more alienating to individual artists and inhospitable to the cultivation of new work for the stage, despite an apparent dedication to it (2). As a graduate student Tremblay received a full workshop production at UT, which provided him with the most resources and agency in the trajectory of the development and production of the work. He encountered a dramatic transition from working in a university setting to professional theatres, grappling with many of the issues London acknowledges in the industry. Diamond and Gordon understood how to negotiate working in a large regional theatre as a result of their experience as administrators and artists in the terrain, which allowed them to benefit from the

support and structure the system provided while also understanding the concessions they felt they needed to make to ensure their success.

In each case, these plays' subject matters, quality, and the work of these writers respectively attracted Adventure Stage Chicago (ASC) and Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Steppenwolf is an institution that produces plays with and for its ensemble. In addition to the inclusion of more African American actors in the primarily white ensemble, the theatre has made aggressive efforts to showcase work by writers of color, such as the extremely successful 2010 productions of Tarell McCraney's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, *In the Red and Brown Water* and *The Brothers Size / Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet* (2010) and Tanya Saracho's adaptation of Sandra Cisneros' book *House on Mango Street* (2009) for the SYA season. ASC's production history includes at least four new plays out of over fifteen productions, with some adaptations but many original works. The themes and/or cast of each of their plays address diversity and multiculturalism. Initially, both *Katrina…* and *Harriet Jacobs* relied on the interest and questions of youth respondents in the early stages of their geneses, but these inquiries did not continue throughout the new play development processes due to time constraints and funding issues. With limited consultation from young audiences throughout the process, what insights did these writers loose?

In addition, these writers embarked to create educational, informative, and entertaining plays for a specifically aged audience of young teenagers, which proved awarding but also reductive in terms of creating a larger audience for these premiere productions, which eventually transcended the boundaries of certain age groups and were marketed for intergenerational audiences. For instance, this past year, Kansas City Repertory produced *Harriet Jacobs* and marketed it to intergenerational audiences. The University of Texas' graduate school production

of *Katrina: the Girl Who Wanted Her Name Back* had a number of evening performances and members of the displaced community from New Orleans of all ages received complimentary tickets. In Chicago, these projects' spectators were young and, in the case of Steppenwolf, the programming acquired a younger audience in comparison to the predominantly older audiences who attend the theatre's mainstage shows. The superlative production would have been of interest to a more varied audience, who lacked an opportunity to see the daytime shows. For ASC, school audiences made up most of the houses and limited marketing, engagement activities, and (similar to SYA) the lack of evening performances created challenges to introducing the work to intergenerational audiences, including the displaced community from New Orleans who relocated to Chicago. Calling the shows theatre for youth plays – work intended for junior and high school-aged spectators according to Davis and Evans in *Theatre, Children, and Youth* (38) – created boundaries for their material, production values, and the discourse surrounding the plays, particularly in terms of challenging the audiences about their thoughts on race and racism. These ideas are unpacked in my deconstruction of the development process for these plays. In this chapter, I examine the early integration of young audiences' feedback for these plays in the context of their ultimate development pathways, while considering where, by whom, and how these immersions influenced the playwrights' processes and affected the audiences' responses to their works.

Development and Production Pathway for *Katrina*…

Hurricane Katrina's destruction and the U.S.'s bureaucratic neglect painted a new image of The Big Easy, known as the birthplace of jazz, an American crossroad of multiculturalism, and residence for ancestral spirits who mingle among the living. The seven-day storm in 2005 forever marked the identity of New Orleans. A national fear arose that such incompetence and

devastation would surely rip through Crescent City once, if not many times, more. Red tape continued to bind the city and its people: as of August 2008, less than half of schools and hospitals reopened; only twenty-two percent of residents who returned received guaranteed rebuilding assistance from the government; and the Army Corps of Engineers reported that the infrastructure in place to rebuild the levees would not sustain a category five, four, or even possibly a category three storm, such as Hurricane Katrina. As of the fall of 2010, the infamous Ninth Ward is described as mostly abandoned rural land.

These grave statistics that penetrated the American psyche undoubtedly pervaded Tremblay's creative process while he attempted to write a play privileging the story of a single survivor – a well-defined fictional character that he hoped was identifiable to young audiences. The writer believed that by telling the story of a young African American girl born and raised in New Orleans, he could introduce youth to the vibrancy of the city and the disaster that threatened its vitality and people. The protagonist Katrina is a twelve-year-old girl left in charge of her elderly Aunt Beluah, and neighbor, Mr. Theibux, during the Hurricane. Her father, Big Daddy, intends to meet them at the neighborhood church after finishing boarding up all the houses on Claiborne Avenue. Katrina doesn't understand her father's need to aid everyone on their street or why she is in charge of her aunt and grumpy neighbor, both of whom are in wheelchairs. Because of the current stigmatism it carries, she hates that her name is Katrina.

Throughout the play, Katrina grapples with questions of self-identity such as: Who am I? What does my name represent? What is my heritage? What is my culture? Who is a part of my community? In scholar Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Greif*, she writes, "A traditional method of intervention in the history of racism has been the demand for public recognition. This often takes the form of transforming

the marginalized, racialized person from being the object bearing the grief to being a subject speaking the grievance" (174). Cheng is critical of this cultural phenomenon that describes what Tremblay purported onstage: the victim, Katrina, who represented the bearing of national torment and racism, transforms into a vocal representative for the grievances she and her community endured. And she became the sacrificial savior, who rescued her community. She encounters a collision of the past and the present of New Orleans while envisioning its future. Katrina confronts her fears, as well as the content of her character, on her journey to be reunited with her father. The young audience witnesses an individual's preparation for the storm, her experience when the levees break, and ultimately her struggle for survival. During the climax of the storm, Katrina ritualistically relinquishes her name to it.

> You want my name? Take it! It's yours! I don't ever want to hear it again! Toss it into the deepest river! Blow it past the highest peaks! Erase the word from the world! (6)

Throughout the storm's aftermath, along with her aunt and neighbor, Katrina meets a series of ghosts and travels to places of historical and cultural significance, such as Preservation Hall. In the historic jazz club located in the New Orleans' French Quarter, Katrina finds refuge. Tremblay decided to rely on well-known locations, which many Americans (particularly tourists of New Orleans) associate with city, such as Preservation Hall. I perceive this as a form of cultural tourism. Instead of introducing audiences to what the people of New Orleans identify as "real jazz music" and of greater historical importance, the writer chose what is recognizable in the American zeitgeist. Also, the path that Katrina's character traveled was not geographically feasible for a person on foot during the storm. The map that Tremblay eventually created for her frustrated him because of its inaccuracy, which he felt at a certain point he could not correct because of the significance he allotted to Preservation Hall within the narrative. For instance,

the iconic location, which reopened shortly after Hurricane Katrina, plays to primarily tourists visiting The Quarter and received little devastation from the storm, as it was located on higher ground and – problematically so – received heavier surveillance from law enforcement because of the area's material affluence. Finding refuge in the small hall created a zigzag fictional roadmap for the character and her aunt and neighbor during the storm.

While at the hall, she meets her counterpart or sidekick Stalebred Locoum, inspired by the real historical figure from the 1900s and once the leader of the Razzy Dazzy Spasm child band. During the 1930s, white America christened the all-white group of boys as the originators of jazz. Later this racist myth was dispelled. As Donald Marquis writes in *In Search Of Buddy Bolden: First Man Of Jazz*, jazz aficionados recognized African American Buddy Bolden, a coronet player from New Orleans, as the true originator (6). Tremblay was intrigued by this cultural mythology and wanted to make a child counterpart for Katrina, which he found in the creation of the trickster Stalebread. After the death of Mr. Theibux from exhaustion, Katrina, Stalebread, and her Aunt attempt to make it to the family's church but are stranded on the infamous East Ten Freeway, with hundreds of other New Orleans residents. While there, Katrina, gravely dehydrated, finds (with Stalebread's help and ghost powers) an accidently discarded garbage bag of unopened water bottles. The exposure to the natural elements, the destruction of her home, and the loss of Mr. Theibux add to the protagonist's overwhelming experience, which leads to self-realization. Instead of keeping all the water for herself and her aunt, she begins to dispense the bottles to the musicians, who represent the stranded people of New Orleans trying to find refuge on the overpass. In the process of assisting everyone else, she forgets to save any for herself. Katrina begins to realize that she cares about her community.

Besides writing a TYA play to fulfill a course assignment, Tremblay hoped *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted Her Name Back* privileged the story of the individual and corrected some of the misrepresentations perpetuated by the reoccurring graphic images of violence and looting in New Orleans that streamed over the television and on the internet during the fall of 2005. Secondly, there was a desire to create an informative, educational, and entertaining play with performances that spoke to young audiences, particularly a middle- school and high-school-aged target audience. Tremblay wanted the play to hold meaning for young audiences around the country, so that children appreciated the story wherever it was produced. He was hopeful that audiences living in different regions would have very different positive responses to the work.

Tremblay's goals for the project were well-founded, but what privilege did he have to tell this story as a white male, not from New Orleans or directly related to anyone from the area? Grappling with this question, the writer decided to reproduce the devastating storm onstage and depict the survival tactics of New Orleaneans immediately following the levees breaking. In order to create an approximately fifty-minute or so play, Tremblay conflated the journey of many of the characters, particularly the protagonist to relay different aspects of the event. He decided not to take an ethnographic approach by interviewing young survivors about their experiences to write the play. The work is an historical fiction – based upon an actual event, but the writer has taken liberties with the characters and story that may or may not be based in reality. Although the play never received this direct criticism, the artistic team was concerned that a greater distance in time was needed to tell this highly volatile story, which perhaps led to some of the disinterest in the work. This, coupled by the fact this story was being written from a white writer's perspective, who was over two hundred miles away from where the storm hit, made one question the piece's accuracy and authenticity further, particularly since it attained national

attention in the TYA world. What facts were missing from this interpretation because of lack of time to discover, research, and explore? Most of his research came from personal knowledge, including his interest in the origins of jazz and his travels to New Orleans, besides media outlets. Tremblay appropriated ideas, characters, current and historical figures to create a structure for the piece. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor writes in *The Archive and the Repertory: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, "Some acts of appropriation are safer, and potentially less offensive, than others class, racial, and linguistic affinities often supersede bonds that grow out of geographic and national interconnectedness" (194). From a position of power, as a white graduate student with the protection of a university setting that encourages risk, Tremblay confidently created the world of Kartina and the storm. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, pedagogue and scholar bell hooks writes about the anger that erupts in white liberals when their embracement of the "universal subjectivity" is challenged. She writes about how whites attempt to deflect racism by arguing everyone is the same regardless of being of different racial subjectivities (2). Following hooks' perception, Tremblay seemed to believe in this "universal subjectivity," making him feel he had the authority to tell this story because racially there are no differences. Rarely through the process did any artists or audience members challenge his debatable authority.

During the University of Texas' season planning for the 2005-2006 season, Tremblay's play was selected for production. At the time it was just a fledging idea and not a full script, but the committee was excited about the concept. With Zeder's support and Tremblay graduating at the end of the season, it was a worthy risk to take on the writer and the play. UT has an excellent history of producing works by their MFA playwrights through the regular season, as well as through its New Works Festival. Scholar David Eshelman's article "The Art of the New-Play

Reading: Legitimacy and the New-Play Showcase" argues that playwrights are not guaranteed their work will be produced during their graduate careers while the work of actors, designers, and directors will. In comparing readings to productions he contends, "To be real in theatre seems to require more thorough mimesis than a reading provides. Production gives embodiment—an attempt at creating onstage the world of a play" (84). Graduating playwrights should receive full productions at the end of their academic careers to experience one of their works realized with greater resources than most small professional theatres can provide. It is an opportunity to learn about collaboration with designers and how to continue to develop their work.

As was the case for ASC, theatres that plan subsequent professional productions of these works often view the university productions as extremely sophisticated workshops as part of the play's development pathway. This allows the theatre to retain the premiere status, which is of interest to many producing institutions, and it helps cut down on their development costs. Most writers learn from their first production or university workshop production how they want to continue to develop the work for their second production. By listening to audiences and seeing how the work is staged, writers begin to truly understand their plays. Graduate programs such as UT, Brown University, Yale University, Carnegie Mellon University, University of Iowa, University of Ohio, University of San Diego, University of Southern California, and California Institute of the Arts all offer excellent culminating production and development workshop opportunities. Jill Dolan argues in *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* that a majority of the work produced at universities, which is also reflective of the homogeneity of American regional theatre, are popular regional hits and classical plays that confirm versus challenge theatre's style or content (51). Producing new work by graduate

students challenges this trend and adds to the diversity of content, writers, and styles of these often traditional, classical, and white college seasons lacking new work. The academy must not completely reflect the professional theatre world, particularly in terms of sharing its programming limitations. Institutions of higher learning must be willing to take risks in their season selections, particularly because they serve as advocates for their student writers. New play productions, such as *Katrina*…, create collaborations where designers, actors, directors and writers are exposed to the malleability of new works in the playmaking process. For productions in particular, graduate student writers are given the room to explore and to fail in an effort to learn, as was the case for the artistic team for *Katrina*…

Working with an early draft, Tremblay and I began collaborating during the spring of 2006 in preparation for the fall show. We intensely focused on the script's development over the summer and in the fall during the show's rehearsal period. Opening on October 13, 2006, the work was produced on the UT mainstage Oscar Brockett Theatre with graduate and undergraduates students from the Theatre and Dance Department and Music Department, as well as artists from the Austin theatre and music communities. The artistic director of the storefront Yellow Tape Theatre Company Jonathon Morgon directed the play. The project was a unique integration of the university and other cultural organizations in the city, which fostered a generative mix of ideas, diversity of ages and races of the collaborators, and assisted in attracting audiences from outside the university. Because Tremblay incorporated a jazz band, we collaborated with four professional musicians from Austin who also had strong associations with New Orleans, many of them having lived in the city. Because the musicians had the time and investment in the show's topic, they attended many of the rehearsals, working on the music as a band and also rehearsing – with the entire acting company – their roles in the show as people of

New Orleans. The production had nine performances, including two matinees for over five hundred Austin public high school and middle school students.

Tremblay was encouraged by his colleagues and advisor to continue to work on the play post-production, although it received mixed reviews. The chief arts reviewer at the *Austin Chronicle,* Robert Faires wrote of the Austin production:

> The wound that this tragedy left on our hearts is still fresh, still tender, and we are open to a play that seeks to honor that, as it's clear that this play and this production and everyone connected with it seek to do. Unfortunately, much of the time it feels like director Jonathon Morgan, his cast, and the other artists involved are, like Katrina's characters, stuck in one place that's hard to get through. (Arts Section)

In part because of the criticism, the collaborators questioned whether the production's issues had more to do with the play or its direction. Because all of the collaborators believed in the play's message, we continued to find ways to further develop it. Discussing the piece with my former advisor and current department chair of Northwestern University's Theatre Department, Rives Collins, I proposed the idea of doing a workshop and reading of the play over the summer of 2007 at the University, which he enthusiastically made possible. ASC Artistic Director Tom Arvetis attended the reading and decided to further pursue the development with Tremblay and myself. The play was read at the 2008 New Visions/New Voices festival, opened on April 5, 2009 at ASC and ran until May 21, 2009. In 2010, the play was published by Playscripts, Inc., a publishing company of new plays and musicals with an investment in children's theatre.

Application of the Youth Respondent Method in the Development of *Katrina*…in Higher Education

For Tremblay, a major cultural shift occurred when the play moved from development in a university setting to a professional play development workshop at a professional children's theatre. Because of the national scene's evident interest in the work, the play's development process continued outside the relatively cloistered environment in Austin. Tremblay no longer had access to the state-of-the art facilities, multiple professors and students to provide feedback, and the ability to work in classrooms with students as a result of the university's relationship with drama in education facilitated by the UT Drama and Theatre for Youth program. Graduate playwriting programs offer roadmaps to the extremely competitive and critical theatre profession, which do not always lead to a direct or immediate route to instant professional success. Professors understanding the complexity of the professional terrain realize the need to train their students about professional development: how to get work produced, how to respond to feedback and criticisms, and how to diversify oneself in the field. Professor, playwright, and children's literature novelist Laurie Brooks stated in an interview:

> Often students will ask me, "Do you think my play is good enough to produce?" or "Do you think I'm a good enough writer?" These kinds of questions are irrelevant. I never make judgments about the future of a writer or his work. The real question is: "Do you have what it takes to succeed as a writer?" A writer needs talent and the willingness to work hard, but above all else, must be determined. Not everyone, no matter how talented, will have all three of these essentials. I believe that teachers of the arts need to be encouraging of their students. The field will self-select without help from higher education professionals deciding who is and is not 'good enough,' but students without nurturing may never have the opportunity to discover what they might become.

As a strong advocate for the passion and interests of her students, Brooks refuses to predict their success in the field and instead nurtures their development and rewards their hard work. Describing the profession as self-selective is very accurate and graduate training is one of the benchmarks of attaining some level of success, coupled with having specific goals for certain projects. For Tremblay, who often wrote abstract pieces, this work followed a more linear structure. Besides being compelled to write for a young audience and on a subject matter he was passionate about, he was aware that writing *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted her Name Back* would draw attention in 2006. He was attempting to demonstrate the versatility of his artistic voice while serving a new demographic, which was greatly encouraged by the UT program. Discussing her enthusiasm for this diversity in her MFA playwrights' work, Susan Zeder in an interview said:

> I am most passionate about our students having opportunities to explore and experiment with diverse styles, genres and approaches to not only their playwriting but also ways of making new work. There is no single style or approach to the work enshrined in either this program or this faculty. We cherish a diversity of voices, approaches, techniques and feel that it is our job to provide mentoring, effective feedback and resources that will enable our students to do their very best work. Equally important to formal classes and playwriting workshops are opportunities to see that work on its feet and in three-dimensionally both in development workshops and in production.

Strong training programs like UT attract many writers who realize the importance to write for various audiences and in different genres, which was the case for Tremblay, who was mildly interested and eventually fully invested in TYA as a result of Zeder's Playwriting for Youth course. A number of major national graduate programs offer playwriting for youth courses

besides UT, including Arizona State University and the University of Wisconsin. Zeder offers her class every few years and encourages graduate students in the Drama and Theatre for Youth program and the UT Playwriting program to enroll. Tremblay took the course in the spring of 2006, where he first worked with children in a form of the youth respondent method.

Suzan Zeder's Playwriting for Youth course hinges on principles that apply to every theatre that wants to find a young audience: the writer must have the ability to tap into his/her youthful identity to create young and identifiable protagonists within the body of a good play, which would be of interest to any audience. The philosophy of Zeder's course relies on a paradox that writers must "draw upon the power of their literal and metaphoric childhood, to bring the unbridled imagination of the child to the stage and to speak with a mythic authenticity to audiences of all ages," while always remembering "there is no such thing as Playwriting for Youth. The tools of craft, the skills of the artist, the discipline required, and the respect due both the art and the audience are exactly the same whether the performance is aimed at young people or adults" (2011 syllabus). During this one-semester course, students work on a series of short exercises including devising activities, the creation of monologues, and writing in different genres such as fantasy and realism. The final project of the semester is to write thirty-five to fifty pages of a play aimed at family and young audiences or an adult play that has a focus on young characters or the world of a child. Zeder's syllabus and the assigned projects reflect her philosophy that work under the auspices of the term "children's theatre" can serve diversified audiences. She allows her students, as she does herself as a writer, to decide whom their work is appropriate for; this flexibility is a guiding principle of the course and challenges the marginalization of TYA. For instance, if it's written for young audiences, it doesn't mean the work will not be of interest to adults. Conversely, if the work was written with an adult audience

in mind, it doesn't mean the work is inappropriate for children. By taking this course, it is clear that students will attain training in how to write a good play that will fit their own tastes and the audience of their choosing.

Zeder's pedagogy advocates for collaboration with colleagues, professionals, and youth, which directly aligns with the youth respondent method and the tenets of the course. She describes the blurring of process and product in contemporary playwriting: that solitary writers have been joined by collaborators or sometimes replaced by multiple co-creators or devisors to helm work. "Interactive development" is a course requirement, where students work with an outside group in the community to create a short ensemble play or explore a work that is in progress. For the application of this exercise in developing *Katrina…*, Tremblay worked with a class of thirty eighth grade students from the Austin public schools, who provided him with generous written and oral feedback about the first draft of the play. It is an example of what I define as the youth respondent method. The students he was paired with were all from Austin and lacked any immediate connections to New Orleans. However, as part of the Austin community, the class had a definite awareness of the disaster besides what they had seen on television. As cited in the "Katrina Evacuees in Austin, Texas: Analysis of Needs Assessment Data Report," over more than 220,000 evacuees arrived in Texas on September 4, 2005, with five thousand to seven thousand people evacuated to the Austin Convention Center located downtown. It was highly likely that the school matriculated children who had relocated and joined other classes.

Tremblay had five students read the play aloud to the class. Subsequent to the reading, he facilitated a discussion with the class rather than explore the play though any theatre exercises, as we had done with the case study *Muddy Boots* in relation to the youth respondent

method. The conversation was apparently light and general, the children said they liked the idea of the play and its characters, and raised a couple of important questions about the ghost characters. He then presented a questionnaire to the students following the reading. In *Drama Structures: A Practical Handbook for Teachers*, creative drama specialist Cecily O'Neil contends skilled questions are the drama teacher's most useful tools (139). Regardless if the questions were basic in nature or very specific and analytical; the enthusiastic students always shared compelling responses, which influenced the next stage of the play's development.

The first question Tremblay posed on the feedback sheet was, "What did you like most [about the play]?" The children responded with specificity at times and at other points with very clear broad strokes of ideas. One child mentioned she liked "the blurred line between life and death" and how she had to keep guessing who was dead and who was alive. Theatrically, how to tell which characters were ghosts and whether the ghosts followed the rules of the play concerned the writer. Tremblay noted this idea and explored it later, based upon the discussion. Sometimes students responded very specifically; one student said they really liked the burial of Mr. Thibeux at sea. A couple of educators felt that at points the play became too dark for young audiences, particularly in moments such as the death of Mr. Thibeux. Both the children and the playwright seemed to disagree, so these moments remained.

In his Playwriting for Youth course, Tremblay received feedback from his classmates that the character of Stalebread was very confusing. Tremblay asked an astute question to see if the children understood that Stalebread was dead and a ghost: "Where does he live?" He was concerned that if he simply asked if they thought he was a ghost or not, everyone would just agree he was. Since he's a ghost, Tremblay was anticipating the response that Stalebread could live anywhere, which many of the students wrote on their forms. Other children, who may have

been unclear about this point or perhaps the question, wrote Preservation Hall or the instrument case he popped out of at the beginning of the show, among other locations. As a result of a number of responses that indicated confusion, Tremblay created an elaborate and fictional story about the burning down of Preservation Hall to give Stalebread a fuller storyline. In Tremblay's revision of history, Stalebread sets Madame Josie Arlington's house aflame because she didn't properly pay his band. Historically, Arlington was known as the Madame of New Orleans legalized Red Light district during the 1800s. She tried to model her life on European aristocracy but, among other things, often got into brawls with associates, one of which caused a fire in 1905 that burned down her home. The actual Stalebread Lacoume had no relationship with the fire. It's very possible the historical figures knew each other because they lived and worked in the same district and time period of Storyville, but otherwise there is no proven connection between them. Tremblay felt comfortable fictionalizing their meeting in order to clarify the narrative that Stalebread was a ghost and that he was "stuck" because of the accidental homicide of Josie Arlington; in turn, this justified a number of other elements in the plot, particularly regarding the apparition of the Woman Without a Face. Also, he made the decision not to go into great detail about Arlington's history as a Madame; though the story alludes she was part of the underbelly culture of New Orleans. Subtle questions, such as whether Stalebread was a ghost or not, led to extensive and important changes to further elucidate the entire work.

Tremblay also asked questions regarding the visual world of the play, such as "What does Preservation Hall look like?" In response, one student thought it was a "large, cavernous, and mysterious space." Another student responded to the question, "Lots of pictures on the wall" and "a grand manner." In reality, Preservation Hall is an extremely small two-story building with a single-room playing space, where patrons sit on the floor. The set designer for the Austin

production Lisa Larratta wanted to create an abstract world not overly reflective of the actual locations. This was an effort to heighten the theatricality of the piece while also creating some distance for the audience to allow them to imagine their own New Orleans. The students' brief responses influenced the design—but the conversations were not continued, which would have further influenced these concepts. Resident ASC Sound Designer Mikhail Fiksel (who designed the Chicago production) said of the integration of children's feedback into the design process, "I think theatre can be powerful, and especially so with youth who can engage with it on a more honest, more visceral and less jaded [level]." Rarely do questions regarding the design of the production arise in post-show discussions, particularly regarding sound and lighting. Audiences would be better educated about the importance of these elements by involving children in these early discussions regarding design. As evidenced by these limited findings, the youth respondent method is of interest to designers and could be further incorporated, not only to influence the design but also to educate young audiences about these disciplines.

The five students who were cast in the classroom reading of the play responded in greater detail about the characters and their relationships to each other, in comparison to the rest of the class. They appreciated the intergenerational connections, particularly between Aunt Beulah and Katrina. The same group also raised important questions in the written feedback about Big Daddy. They were confused about who he delivered his monologues to as he was alone trying to find his daughter. Tremblay initially wrote the character as if he was addressing the audience, but it was also very unclear in the production at UT that was the intention. During post-show discussions, the same questions were raised. As a result of the consistent confusion, Tremblay decided to create a new character, Gustavo, who was part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Gustavo initially tries to arrest Big Daddy but then joins him on his

crusade to find his daughter Katrina. For Tremblay, the creation of this character allowed him to make the play more indicting of local and national government, as well as solve the issue of Big Daddy soliloquizing.

Throughout the work's entire development process over a two-year period, working with students from Evanston's District 65 Martin Luther King Jr. Laboratory School was our second and final organized interaction with the target audience exploring the youth respondent method for this play. In the classroom with middle school-aged students and in the rehearsal room with college-aged students, we hoped to meet a number of goals with the development of the play including solving the ending of the piece, the rules and continuity of the characters, and moments of productive direct address. Through an arrangement with Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, the school hosted a reading of *Katrina*...Tremblay and I were in residence for a week in Evanston to further develop the play with an ensemble of Northwestern students. The young cast played an important role in informing the process by contributing their thoughts as well as talents to the further development of the piece. Much was accomplished working in a state-of-the-art space and on its stage for the entire week. Not having participated in the first classroom immersion because I had yet to be assigned to dramaturg the project, I looked forward to working with a group of students from King Lab and to apply creative drama practices to new play development.

Dramaturgs' presence and responsibilities are not restricted to the library and the rehearsal room but also in fostering connections outside of these spaces to promote and further the develop the work. With *Katrina*…I elaborated on my skills as a researcher, a new play development dramaturg, a director, and as an educator throughout the process, especially during this workshop week. Suzan Zeder writes in "The Once and Future Audience: Dramaturgy and

Children's Theater," "Dramaturgs in increasing numbers find themselves coming out of the library and rehearsal hall and into the classroom" (110). Besides answering major questions about the play with the sixth grade students, we wanted to create a reciprocal relationship, in which students felt the workshops were enjoyable and educational. These desires to accomplish so many goals under less than ideal circumstances hindered the new play development leg of our process.

For the youth respondent method to effectively work there must be a dedication to the process and the work from all collaborators including the participating youth. I had circulated the latest draft of the script with the two King Lab teachers, whose fifty students were participating during an afterschool hour-long drama session. I had taught at the school before and had a familiarity with the teachers and their drama programming. The educators wanted to involve as many children as possible. There was a great excitement about the play, although the work was only read by one of the two participating classes for lack of time, which created challenges. We had not planned to do a reading of the play with the actors for the workshop because their afterschool program only lasted an hour and a half, but it was critical for them to be familiar with the script. This created an immense challenge because many of the planned activities with the group were contingent on having read the work, and that would have been most helpful to our play development process. The group that had read the play would have been bored by us extensively summarizing it. And the other group, who knew very little information about it, would become confused about the activities related to it. O'Neill evaluated the effectiveness of her creative dramatic activities by a number of factors throughout the process including analyzing the atmosphere in the room, the students' commitment to the work, the ways they reflect on the entire experience, and their abilities to draw parallels between the dramatic

situation and the real world (145). For our immersion, because only half of our students had read the work, they immediately lacked a commitment to the text but were interested in the subject of a little girl who shared the storm's name. Another challenge we faced is that we were working in a theatre at King Lab and the activities required a more intimate space. Creating a drama space that is effective to work in is an issue for many teaching artists, who are usually unaware what type of space that they will be in with students. Having taught at the school before, I had requested to work in a classroom to avoid the "echoing hall" and "vastness" of the theatre that O'Neil suggests can be problematic (147), but it was necessary for us to work in a larger space to accommodate the two classes of students. In terms of other challenging environmental factors, the usually well-behaved students from the program seemed overtired and very rambunctious. As an outsider, I felt uncomfortable disciplining the children. As a result, the teachers monitoring of the students' behavior ultimately became disruptive.

We began the lesson with a movement exercise as a warm-up with half the students on the stage and the other half seated. Nellie McCaslin in *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond* addresses the incorporation of music and movement activities early in the drama lesson plan:

> Feelings can be expressed in movement and stories told through mime and body language…I have found movement is the best way to begin work in creative drama with most groups, letting words come when the players are ready. Even with highly verbal students, dialogue is usually limited at first, but as they become more sure of themselves words and details are added. (52)

With this large group perhaps the reverse would have been more appropriate – to begin with verbal activities and then end with physical. Tremblay brought a compilation of music and

sounds from the original production to play in the background. I asked the students to move with the tone of the music as I described different moments of the play, such as the storm blowing through New Orleans. Students had the freedom to pretend to be whatever they desired, whether that was the people of New Orleans or abstract ideas. Because the participants were sixth graders growing more unfamiliar with their developing bodies, movement activities made them uncomfortable – particularly because of the configuration of the space, in which half of their classmates watched them perform. Instead of acclimating the students into the world of the drama, this instead caused them to be hyper self-conscious and distracted, which I interpreted through their body language and their lack of feedback during follow-up questions.

The first activity didn't assist in building a relationship with the students; instead it perhaps caused them to become more disengaged. Regardless, we embarked on our next activity, "Values Clarification," created by Michael Rohd, a theatre artist and educator who is inspired by techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed and wrote the practical text *Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual*. Much of Rohd's praxis as an educator and a director is based on the work of director, educator, and activist Augusto Boal, particularly exercises found in Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. His techniques rely on Boal's image theatre, a series of exercises and games designed to uncover essential truths about societies and cultures primarily through embodiment versus verbalized language (xix). Rohd's training manual *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue* contains activities, such as "Values Clarification," which he hopes will inspire dialogue between artists, community workers, and youth (1). Many of the activities attempt to build trust. Through the application of this particular activity with our group, we hoped to learn what children remembered about the storm from the year before, and the details of their relationship to it and the people of New

Orleans. We wanted to know if the play held meaning in other regions and if children were interested in the subject matter. Also, we wanted to discover how their knowledge influenced their interpretation of the play. I adapted the activity so the students could remain in their theatre seats to participate. I read aloud a series of statements, such as "I know someone from New Orleans" and "I watched the aftermath of the storm on TV." The students had to stand for the statements that they agreed with, remain seated for the ones they didn't, and raise their hands if they were unsure. The statements became more confrontational in nature; for instance, "Hurricane Katrina had no effect on me." After reading these more critical questions, we would discuss them. From the "Values Clarification" activity, we learned that the students were invested in and had a relationship to the world of the play. Many commented that they had extended family in New Orleans and they watched the entire event on TV. These responses assured Tremblay that youth from other regions were interested in the play's subject matter.

For the final exercise, which was the most productive, we asked the participants to write monologues as the character Katrina trying to find her father in the storm. We read students a few of Katrina's monologues from the play and then allotted students about ten minutes to write their own. This creative free writing exercise the students seemed to enjoy the most of all the activities, and they were very enthusiastic to share their work with Tremblay. He appreciated their work but could not clearly see how it applied to the development of his. As a result, he asked to let the students keep their monologues to further explore themselves. The workshop left Tremblay less interested in pursing the children's feedback further. We entered the workshop with general rather than specific dramaturgical questions in mind, while simultaneously trying to accomplish too many different things: entertain and interest the students, play educational theatre games with them, teach them about the world of the play, and learn about the play from them.

With so many disparate goals, little was effectively accomplished. We continued to work on preparing for the reading, which went extremely well though the attendance was low. The future director and producer of the work, Arvetis, attended the reading, which resulted in the theatre deciding to submit the work to the New Visions/New Voices Festival.

New Visions/New Voices Play Development Festival

Both *Harriet Jacobs* and *Katrina…* made major developmental strides at the New Visions/New Voices Festival at the Kennedy Center, an institution with an investment in nurturing new works and young artists, creating performances for intergenerational audiences, and touring productions while serving the nation as a leader in arts education. New Visions/New Voices is a week-long development program that occurs every other year for playwrights and theatres to stimulate and support the creation of new plays and musicals for young audiences and families. The festival culminates in a weekend of rehearsed readings and discussions with professionals in the field from around the world. Since its inception in 1991, eighty new plays, musicals, and operas from seventy-two playwrights and thirty-two composers, working from fifty-one states and seven international companies, have been produced. New Visions/New Voices is unique in that the pieces chosen for the festival are connected to institutions rather than being selected as unsolicited scripts. Often the program has a relationship with the submitting theatres and a familiarity with the artistic collaborators. This becomes a challenge for the program to become acquainted with younger and newer companies.

Much of the work arises from well-known children's theatres or from large regional theatre institutions interested in specifically producing children's shows but not on their mainstage. This reifies the issue that the term TYA and the selection process for festivals, such

as New Vision/New Voices, isolate the field and its artists as only appropriate for one audience age range. The Kennedy Center programs the rest of its season as "family programming," which accurately describes their programming and welcomes a diversified audience. When the festival ventures to choose works that appeal to intergenerational audiences, this has often led to a greater number of subsequent productions and more artistic success for these works. For instance, Laura Scheldhardt's 2006 entry, *The K of D*, a monologue about abuse, was commissioned by Brown Trinity Theatre. Schelhardt was a relatively new writer who had no previous experience in TYA. Subsequent to the festival, she received over five productions of the piece nationally, more than any of her other plays. And often the work is produced in theatres for both adult and young audiences. For instance, as a result of attending the festival, Woolly Mammoth Theatre decided to produce the piece in its new rehearsal/black box space in 2007 with ensemble member Kimberly Gilbert. Woolly doesn't have an education program, nor does it intentionally produce for child audiences. The production of this work is a primary example of the possible dexterity of programming for an audience of diverse ages. Artistic Director Howard Schalwitz liked the piece, Scheldhardt's writing style, and his ensemble member's performance in it.

While this piece has yet to receive a production, many attendees felt writer/librettist Chris Dimond and composer Michael Kooman's musical *Dani Girl* was the strongest showing during the 2008 conference. The writer and composer team had never worked on a TYA play before. They were concerned the piece, a musical comedy about a little girl who dies of cancer, would be construed as just for young audiences because of the young age of the protagonist. As a result, they asked Kennedy Center Director of Youth and Family Programs Kim Peter Kovac to announce prior to the reading that the piece was not for young audiences but just had a young

protagonist, who was then performed by an adult actress. Kovac encouraged them to let the audience of professionals interpret the target audience for themselves, but the artists refused. Regardless that the piece was lauded as the festival favorite, most TYA producers, concurring with the preshow announcement, felt it was not appropriate for their child audience because of the death of the lead and her counterpart, who also dies from cancer. Having participated in the festival that year, I was surprised by TYA producers' reactions, particularly because they all have helmed work about illness, such as *The Yellow Boat*.

Harriet Jacobs is an example of work that was eventually seen as appropriate for an intergenerational audience; it was produced at the Kansas City Repertory, directed by Jessica Thebus in 2010. While it was at Steppenwolf, however, the work was specifically intended for a high school-aged audience. Gordon and Diamond made huge strides within the thirty-hour development week at the festival. In particular, they decided to add music to the play, as well as cast an entirely black ensemble. Diamond spoke about why she made the decision to cast an African American ensemble:

> When applying for New Visions/New Voices, I made this choice. We also used that process to learn that this could work. We learned that it worked beautifully. I have an issue with the American theatre's comfort around the showing of African Americans in a historical context. We seem to be more comfortable with that. And to be contributing to that genre was frightening for me. And to be adding to that genre for young people without really earning it and telling a story that was different somehow, that contributed some way.

Diamond did not want to the same images of violence associated with slavery perpetuated onstage. Contrastingly, Diamond added monologues describing graphic images of violence to the play, which she adapted from those she collected during New Visions/New Voices from the Library of Congress' slave narrative archive. For instance, the actress playing her white mistress recites a narrative as a slave about her master taking her baby away and how she is beaten by her mistress (13). In part, the writer cast a black ensemble to avoid restaging the destructive images of white bodies dominating black ones. But Diamonds' thoughts are unclear as to why the verbal perpetuation of violence is acceptable in the play. An interesting mimetic choice is created in having a black actress portray a white mistress, while also reciting a narrative about the mistreatment she suffers from her mistress. In agreement with Diamond's contention that American culture is too easily accepting of these violent restagings, scholar Saidiya Hartman contends in *Scenes of Subjection*:

> I have chosen not to reproduce [Fredrick] Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. (3)

Hartman feels a grave discomfort in circulating these theatrical images in a written form. Considering this, it is surprising that Diamond included the additional adaptations of slave narratives at all, because they are far more violent than any of the physical stagings Gordon directed, not truly authentic, and non-specific. Also, they provided information about the violent acts but not the identities of the enslaved people these acts were perpetrated against, thus they became universalizing. Every narrative recycled the same images and language of violence told by anonymous victims. In addition, because Jacobs was literate and wrote an autobiography, her

story is privileged over that of illiterate slaves, whose histories were lost. Despite these concerns, according to both Gordon and Diamond, the primarily white and older audience at New Visions/New Voices seemed compelled by the piece and accepting of the choices the artists made. In the time the play was accepted as a finalist for the workshop in D.C., Diamond had completed a skeletal draft of the play, which allowed the team to fully explore and create the world of *Harriet Jacobs*.

For Tremblay, the workshop at New Visions/New Voices was helpful in further clarifying the play but also proved frustrating because the play was ready for a full production. In comparison, at the same point of the submission process, Gordon and Diamond submitted a treatment of *Harriet Jacobs* while Tremblay was already working on a second post-production draft. At this stage, *Katrina…*would have benefited from more feedback via a form of the youth respondent method instead of a workshop where the reading of the play was rehearsed. Kovac said in an interview that they have never involved children in the development process because of the timing of the festival in May when schools are letting out: "The Bonderman does and since they've broken the quota we'll let them do that. We don't want to force something on somebody. It's a director/writer team already here. We don't want to force children on them." According to Kovac no team had ever requested youth input or collaboration; and we, too, never raised this question ourselves as a team. But observers have requested the presence of young people during New Visions/New Voices festival. Playwright/actor Walt Vail attended as an official observer for the festival for *TYA Today* and urged in his article "New Visions/New Voices" that the festival needs to include youth, since it is specifically for young audiences. He felt it would be of greater benefit if the plays were "tested" with young audiences (13). Tremblay was certainly tested by the audience in the critical response session immediately

following the production. They seemed frustrated by both the play and also the white writer. The audience wanted to know about Tremblay's research and how he decided to tell the story as a white artist. In *White*, film scholar Richard Dyer describes whites claim to speak for humanity because they are in greater positions of power (3), which was the case with Tremblay. In addition, several audience members felt it was too soon to tell the story. Regardless of Tremblay's connections to New Orleans, the work trafficked in the city's cultural stereotypes, which the audience commented on in the feedback session. For instance, The Quarter is a major setting in the play, where geographically Katrina did not live. The Creole character Beulah communicates with spirits and practices voodoo and is labeled "crazy." Perhaps the greatest example of cultural tourism was inherent to its narrative structure: the reliance on live jazz music played by a jazz band. Tremblay claimed that most of his other work is written in the jazz aesthetic and that was true of the first draft of *Katrina...* In "Making Language: The Jazz Aesthetic and Feminist Foundations," Scholar and artist Joni Jones/Omi Osun's writes, "A theatrical jazz aesthetic is also a performance form which often relies on the subjective experience of a character, a memory-laden sense of time and place, a keen attention to the visual/physical/imagistic aspects of the writer's work, and a multivocalic, polyrhythmic, musically-driven language" (92). Tremblay included long and gorgeous passages inspired by music he had listened to and played, such as Katrina's dialogue:

> KATRINA:
> The shadows glide below.
> Swim down the streets.
> Up into windows.
> I don't think I let her in.
> That's Thibeaux countin' miracles

Like a banker countin' money. (45)

Through the development stages and the productions the abstract and poetic quality of the language was sacrificed to clarify the narrative. Despite producers being enthralled with the work on the page and its poetry, it was dampened with the audiences' poor reaction to the piece. By the conclusion of New Visions/New Voices, Tremblay was disappointed and felt that the production in Chicago at ASC would illuminate how the play should further change. After a brief workshop in Chicago where some of the language was clarified, the script had few other changes for the premiere production. As I lived in Chicago, I was retained as dramaturg to serve as the representative for the absent writer. Because of lack of funding, Tremblay was not able to be present for most of the rehearsal process and was only in residence for the first week and the last stage of tech. Because the production used professional musicians, they were not required to attend rehearsal, which they often didn't. Also, they lacked connections to New Orleans and felt disconnected from the project. Despite the fact a musical language was developed, their integration was never complete, further crippling the show. Again, the production received mixed reviews, particularly in terms of the clash of the script and the music. Besides its publication, there are no current plans for subsequent productions. Of the two case studies, the collaborators on *Harriet Jacobs* seemed to have a more generative experience at the New Visions/New Voices festival and went onto to have multiple successful productions.

Harriet Jacobs' **Development at SYA**

Similarly to Tremblay, Diamond wanted to privilege the story of the individual, amidst a brutal time period in American history. She said in an interview:

A huge part of the writing process was to make sure that I was not living in archetypes

> and stereotypes and images that were slightly callous to what slavery is and was. That I was telling Harriet's story, not the story of slavery. That I was honoring it, that it should exist for a reason.

Diamond was extremely invested in the work, but she was unable to be present for much of the rehearsal process. As a result of a lack of funding, the extended residency she did had for *The Bluest Eye*'s rehearsal process was not possible for *Harriet Jacobs*. As one of the leading and largest theatre education programs in the country, SYA endures the same systemic challenges that all national education programs encounter while operating within a large institution. SYA's mission is "to bring high-quality theatre to young adults across the Chicago area," with the aspiration of creating the next generation of theatre enthusiasts and practitioners (www.steppenwolf.org). Despite the fact that the program's mission is to ensure the stability of the theatre by locating the audience of the future, implicitly it is also to find funding from education grants and donors invested in youth so as to provide support for the entire theatre, which is the case for most professional theatres education programs.

Steppenwolf is a leader in the contemporary American regional theatre movement, which began to create professional theatre in urban areas around the country outside of New York City. In *Beyond Broadway: The Quest for Permanent Theatres*, theater historian Julius Novik's writes a detailed historiography of the American regional theater system in the late 1940s, including Margo Jones and Nina Vance founding a regional theatre in Texas (eventually known as the Alley Theatre in 1947) and Zelda Fischandler's founding of Arena Stage in 1950. He writes, "They [are theatres] all incorporated as nonprofit institutions, and most of them operate on deficits. They survive by going to the public as good causes…they solicit funds from foundations, from government, and from private donors…This means they are in effect partly

supported by the general public; this seems to me, ought to obligate them to serve the general public" (3). Today, theatres' season planning choices are influenced by this demand to gauge the general audience's taste and serve its needs in order to sell tickets and secure funding influences theatres' season planning choices. In regional theatres around the country, including Steppenwolf, programming primarily includes America classics, such as *The Crucible* (Steppenwolf 2008), and successful plays that originated in New York, such as Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (Steppenwolf 2007). To incorporate new work, which has not been tested in other markets or has received press, becomes a programming risk. Limitations always exist in programming, development, administration, and production, as a result of financial hurdles of the nonprofit regional theater system. All of these factors influence the choices Gordon and her collaborators make for the SYA season.

A paradox exists that the most marginalized department is often education, which receives the least funding but often attracts the most for the overall producing organization. By engaging in collaborations with artists such as Diamond, SYA attempts to combat this reality. The program is divided into three areas: the SYA season, the Steppenwolf Young Adult Council (SYAC), and workshops for educators and community groups employing immersive drama techniques. The department produces two full-scale shows annually, performed during the week for students and for the public during the weekend as matinees. The program has grown from producing strictly adaptations, such as *Tale of Two Cities* by Laura Eason, to original new work, such as *Samuel J & K* by Mat Smart. Through teen events, students can see a mainstage show at a discounted price, participate in a discussion with affiliated artists or special guests related to the show, and attend an event hosted by the SYAC. Members of SYAC serve as the collaborators

and respondents in the youth respondent method because these representative teenagers' feedback is incorporated into season planning and also the development of work.

SYAC's Participation in the Youth Respondent Method

SYAC is an after-school program for high school students who want to learn the inner workings of professional theatre from Steppenwolf artists and administrators. In addition to meetings with professionals, council members attend plays in Chicago, learn play analysis skills, and organize events for their peers around Steppenwolf productions. This innovative and holistic program not only privileges what it means to be an artist in theatre but also an administrator. The group's presence has garnered much national attention through TCG (because the entire group attended the 2011 LA TCG conference). As exemplified by the youth respondent method, these teens are pivotal in the artistic creation of work and also the engagement with audiences. This form of the method demonstrates the reciprocal relationship of learning from teens while also educating and serving their artistic desires. The SYAC attends and moderates dialogues with audiences of teachers as well as students from a peer insider's perspective, and often comments on the Steppenwolf blog. For instance, in 2008 SYAC member Maria Maia commented on a MaTEENe of *The Glass Menagerie*:

> I must admit that I was both surprised and proud of the dialogue I heard that day. Safyia, a fellow Young Adult Council member, and I led the MaTEENe post-show. At first we were a bit worried that we would have to really push the conversation along. To our relief, seconds after the first question was uttered we had lifted off. There was never an awkward silence, or a moment when the dialogue was lacking. Everybody was in sync and feeding off the energy and ideas that were flying through the air.

As evidenced by this post, there is a great sense of pride in this SYAC member's relationship to the program, the high-caliber work it produces, and in regards to engaging with the audience. Her relationship with the council is intertwined with the goal of inspiring dialogue and serving as an ambassador for the theatre. She's a leader who's rallying peers and recognizing the link of theatre to conversation to social change.

Steppenwolf's SYA programming is selected in part by the Young Adult Council, but this selection process represents a conglomeration of demands by the institution. Also, the programming must meet curriculum standards of Chicago Public Schools. Gordon, her administrative staff, and the SYAC raise pertinent questions about the importance of creating plays about significant moments in our American history. They ask progressive questions regarding race, class, regionalism, sexuality, and gender in the selection process for these plays. For instance, *The Elephant Man* was framed around questions of difference and acceptance, posed by the SYAC when they read the play. Besides doing works by primarily American writers, there are important questions about the national doctrine these works raise: What does it mean to be a citizen? What does it mean to be an American? What does it mean to serve as a cultural diplomat? What does it mean to be urban? And, like any artist, Gordon and the SYAC ask of these works, why here and why now? In order to create full seasons of work, the SYA programming has begun to pair classic plays or adaptations of literature with new plays inspired by this work, hence instilling the sense of a complete season and creating an ongoing dialogue.

Besides season selection, the SYAC assists in the new play development process by responding to work during the early reading and workshop phases. This immersion, which is another example of the youth respondent method, has yet to be fully institutionalized in a manner of SYAC's involvement in the SYA season. Gordon and Diamond relied on youth's feedback

for an early draft of *Harriet Jacobs*, which both artists felt was not yet ready for a public reading. Diamond said that although the council was present, they only offered a couple of comments, many of which were not recorded. In a second experience with a form of the youth respondent method, the artist learned from youth she workshopped *The Bluest Eye* with at London's Old Vic with the New Voices program in 2005. The Old Vic's program targets audiences between the age of eighteen and thirty and provides a plethora of development opportunities for artists to engage with audiences. For Diamond's experience, participating young people provide feedback of the work over a workshop week. She said, "It gave me a sense of its importance. That the kids were connecting and identifying and being moved by it and being angered by it and being intrigued with it and active in it. It told me that it matters." For Diamond, who often writes plays about historical moments and figures related to the African American Diaspora, youth's knowledge and interest in these subject matters and their identification with them are pertinent to her work. Bennett contends that reception studies are often to interpret moments but (as Diamond found useful) may be employed to investigate a polemic or a whole event (11). For the writer, she felt the SYAC enjoyed the play by interpreting their physical (e.g., leaning toward the stage) and vocal responses (e.g., laughing) during readings, workshops, and previews of the play. But just interpreting audiences' reactions during the performances still left many questions for the creative team in terms of what youth were learning from the show and about its complex subject matter.

Outreach: Revised to Audience Engagement

For both *Katrina…*and *Harriet Jacobs* a working assumption existed that these plays were intended to generate outreach in the communities where they were produced and for the constituencies they addressed. Outreach in theatre includes those activities in which the

institution reaches out to an external cultural institution or community, separate from the production, in an effort to involve the population. Although both of these productions conducted extensive outreach projects within the community and particularly for students, the artists (particularly with *Harriet Jacobs*) did not use these experiences extensively enough to learn about the plays or the target population. These works' interactions with "outreach" were not about the exchange of ideas but rather imparting an ideology on the audience, which was representative of the artistic team's. Learning about students' thoughts before the performance and afterwards in the classroom to augment the artists' thoughts on the play never truly occurred. The problematic term "outreach" really no longer carries this definition. The term "outreach" generates an image of a one-sided relationship between the theatre and the external organization, in which the theatre contacts, bestows resources upon and subsequently "rescues" the organization by inviting it to the production. In "Educational Outreach and Ideology, or Why Do we Do What We do," TYA scholar Manon Van de Water raises similar questions regarding outreach. She contends that the term holds a meaning of reaching out, extending one's hand to offer something that theatres have that the constituency or audience needs (20). Van de Water writes,

> Implicitly or explicitly we are positioning ourselves as the authority and the audience as the Other, eager to consume the ethical universals we offer our artistic and educational endeavors. But whose universals are we talking about? And what is the relationship between the production and organization of knowledge to the forms of authority situated in our material practices? (20)

Without specific goals or an exchange of ideas, the point of outreach seems rather anemic. Outreach can lead to the tokenization of a specific audience, making a production accessible to a

targeted audience for a single experience instead of creating a long-term generative relationship with that constituency. The relationship appears colonizing: a theatrical institution feels empowered to educate, change, and imbue a new knowledge to a marginalized group, thus building their appreciation for a higher form of culture.

In reality, "outreach," perhaps renamed "audience engagement," optimistically serves as a dialectic, in which all participating institutions and constituencies exchange ideas, learn through their differences (primarily in terms of practices and content), and the relationship becomes reoccurring versus ephemeral through multiple and long-term projects, as is the case with SYAC. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, Victor Turner describes community as:

> It is as though there are two major 'models' for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is a society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchal system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less.' The second which emerges recognizably in the luminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated communitas, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. (96)

Communities perpetually change, as their boundaries expand and sometimes retract based upon the relationships built. The engagement conducted for *Katrina*.... built community bridges among the university, schools, families who relocated to Austin, and the organizations working with survivors of Katrina. The artistic team was invested in creating a work that helped make theses connections. Also, there was a primary interest in involving displaced members of the

New Orleans community living in Austin. A high percentage of displaced students matriculated in Austin Public Schools[9]. Because of state budget cuts in the arts, a decreased investment in field trips and a lack of time for test taking, and issues with transportation, it was a challenge to fill student matinees at UT. Also, the fact that it was a new play, without any name recognition, and focused on a challenging subject made it even harder to fill houses. Of the nine schools that participated, many chose to see the production because displaced students joined their classrooms that fall, and they felt the show served as a potential entry point for all their students to discuss the event. For these schools, the engagement team (including DTY graduate students Nat Miller and Sally Baker) created a study guide intended for teachers and students to use as an introduction to the show. The contents of the black and white guide included: the dramaturgical note, the plot synopsis, a treatise on the sound and music associated with New Orleans that appeared in the show, a section on the culture of New Orleans and particular locations discussed in the play, maps, a section on acting, renderings of the set design, information on Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans, and sections on displacement, relocation, community, volunteerism, tolerance, among others. Even though all of this extensive information was included, we, as educators, raise the question, "Was the guide used in classrooms by teachers and individually by students in preparation to see the show?" In "Creating a Study Guide," educator Laura Kelley, contends that study guides should enhance the experience of attending the show (13). Similar to many program notes, often guides elaborate on themes and research that is pertinent to the show.

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[9] An April 6, 2010 article, from Texas Education Agency, "Katrina students show strong performance gains after four years in Texas schools," reported that 46,504 evacuees from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida enrolled in Texas public schools in August of 2006. The study also found that students, who relocated to Texas because of Hurricane Katrina, made significant academic progress during the past five years and are performing slightly better than a demographically and economically matched set of Texas students.

Unlike program notes, the guide directly addresses the show with a synopsis, quotations, and breakdowns of the characters. Also, all of the activities attempt to inspire discussion, primarily regarding the socio-political underpinnings of the play. Many of these creative drama activities originate from improvisations based upon Viola Spolin's work, Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed applications, and Michael Rohd's practical guide *Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual*, as was the case with the *Katrina*…guide. Perhaps if these guides were placed online and contained an interactive element (e.g., survey, quiz, game) this could further ensure the guides were used and a form of engagement occurred with the artistic team.

The proceeds from the student matinees were donated to the Texas Interagency Disaster Relief Fund, which was affiliated with the Texas branch of the United Way. Via networking with spokespersons from the community who relocated to Austin from New Orleans, I was able to engender collaboration with this organization, who directly served families. During the matinees, members of their staff collected donations. We arranged with the university to distribute free tickets for TIDR caseworkers and relocated families to attend the production[10]. This was a challenging and not a well-planned endeavor. Very few of the families who requested tickets attended the production. Austin lacks a well-developed public transportation system, and many of the families lacked cars, making it difficult for them to see the show. Displaced families who did see the production liked it more than most other audiences. More than the production itself, they valued that there was a discussion of the incident and appreciated it was

[10] Our Texas Interfaith Interagency Relief (TIDR) contact was Shaun Leumex. To promote the free tickets and the show, Tremblay and I went to some of the case managers' weekly meetings. In addition to distributing the free tickets, TIDR sent representatives to each of the performances to collect donations.

through a fully-realized performance. But interacting with this organization taught Tremblay more about the culture, people, and location depicted in his play.

We collaborated with the organization Alive-in-Truth: The New Orleans Disaster Relief Oral History and Memory Project. Alive-in-Truth recorded life histories of people from New Orleans and nearby areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. On September 4, 2005 at the Austin Convention Center, volunteers from Alive-in-Truth collected the oral histories of many of the six thousand relocated New Orleans residents. Alive-in-Truth's exhibit, which consists of eight oral histories and portraits of their narrators, became the lobby display for our production and remained up for an extended time period after the production closed at UT. The sophisticated exhibit effectively told authentic stories of the individuals and identified names, places, and locations. Also, they were used for an exercise at the intermission with the students who remained in the theatre. The engagement endeavors for the project in Austin reached various communities with different levels of effectiveness and there were possibilities to use them further in the new play development.

Steppenwolf's education program attempts to practice progressive methodologies while employing best practices and creativity to serve its audiences. Current TCG president Teresa Eyring said in her fall 2010 American Theatre editorial "Back-to-School Musings,"

> For those of us in theatre and theatre education, it's important to remember that being creative does not necessarily require arts participation, though artistry typically engages creative muscles. And if there is a way to systematically bring creativity training into the classroom, art--especially a cooperative activity such as theatre--can only help. That is the good work so many of our theatres have done over the years. (10)

The program attempts to involve students in the art-making, the polemics of the work, the institution, and the theatre created in the classroom, which Eyring advocates. With the commencement of *Harriet Jacobs*, Gordon began inviting Michael Rohd to facilitate workshops with teaching artists, who subsequently taught in classrooms of students who attended the production. I attended the 2008 workshop they conducted for their production of *The Elephant Man*. Rohd facilitated with a group of eight teachers, some new to the program and others tenured teaching artists. The discussion led to finding a thematic link, which influenced the goals of the discussion and lesson plans that the teachers would facilitate in classrooms. For *The Elephant Man*, the notion of "normal" became the decided topic, which seemed rather generic in nature. In addition, the term "normal" was never deeply considered, what was thought abnormal, and who defines these boundaries. Immediately Rohd began demonstrating exercises associated with the theme of normal and then the teaching artists began to create their own over the two-day facilitation. Teachers used exercises such as sculpting, image work, and improvisations to apply the concept, although the greater concern was for the exercise versus the application of the ideology of normalcy.

In terms of engagement for *Harriet Jacob*, a Steppenwolf teaching artist led a pre-show class at every participating school. After the show, a post-show discussion occurred; and after leaving Steppenwolf, another class immersion took place, again led by a Steppenwolf teaching artist. Besides these discussion-related activities, dramaturgical articles on the power of Jacob's monograph were explored in relationship to Post-bellum. In preparation for these forty-five minute pre-show and post-show discussions Gordon asks such questions as, "What are the core values of the production to impart in the lesson?" With the class of thirty-three ninth graders, the teaching artist facilitated a discussion on the play, focusing on the topic of what is freedom.

Students were asked to offer one-word descriptions of the play. Some responses to this inquiry included: freedom, light, honesty, slavery, self-reliance, truth, slavery, life, death, trust, and justice. Then the teaching artist asked the students to describe the play in three sentences, which garnered less of a response and most students remained silent. In general, the class was invested in the conversation. In the next exercise, students were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements: I could identify with one of the characters in the show; if I was Harriet, I know what I would have done; that Mrs. Norcumm (the wife of the plantation owner) was not free; and even though Harriet was confined for seven years, she was free." The teaching artist used these prompts to induce a conversation about the notion of freedom. Some of these questions included: "Why was Harriet hiding in the attic?" The students felt it was an intelligent choice that allowed her to stay with her children and was better than living a life of slavery. Also, the teaching artist asked if they felt that remaining in the annex for seven years was too long a period of time and whether Harriet should have tried to escape to the north sooner. The students attributed it to her following the directions of her grandmother, who was a freed slave who owned the home, and also to be able to stay sheltered from the hard outside world. A major point of contention for the students regarded Harriet's decision to sleep with a young white lawyer in an attempt to attain freedom. Many students had very mixed responses to this choice Harriet made, particularly the young women in the class who were considering the sexual politics of her decision. All these exercises regarding the students' interpretations of the themes of the play would have been helpful for Diamond in the continued development of the play for subsequent productions. For the last exercise, students were asked to create different tableau images from the play by breaking up into small groups of two or three people. Within these groups a leader was chosen to serve as the sculptor, and the other members of the group

represented clay to be molded. This exercise is also very much a trust exercise because one student is empowered to move the other students' bodies. Interestingly, in the production of *Harriet Jacobs* the entire cast was black actors. Part of the omission from the lesson was a discussion of why the cast was entirely African American. In these smaller groups, the students took on traditional roles reflecting their racial identities. White boys became slave owners while black girls became their slaves. The images were more troubling, and the students didn't seem to fully understand who or what they were embodying. Ironically, Diamond passionately discussed her discomfort with the perpetuation of violence on black bodies by white persecutors:

> But a huge part of that was knowing that I needed to not have images of white people standing over black people, domineering. Not to see a black woman hit by a white man. I also think that for audiences these images are moving. If I'm black, I protect myself. I don't want to see that. I shut down. Or I go into a place of questioning whether I actually need to watch this which then takes me out of the experience of the play. If I'm white, I think—what I've noticed, since I'm not white—is that there's a tendency to feel defensive and attacked and criticized—which is also removing—because I didn't do this.

Although these horrific images were not perpetuated onstage, they were embodied and ambivalently accepted by the students in the classroom – inherently what Diamond was fighting against even in a theatrical space. These students seemed to lack a true understanding of the play and production that Gordon and Diamond hoped to convey. With the youth respondent method, these types of engagement activities do not need to remain separate from the playmaking, as they were often with these two case studies. Artists could have learned by watching youth engage in these exercises how the audience was responding to the play, what they understood, and what they did not. Written with the intention to serve young audiences, *Katrina…* and *Harriet Jacobs*

employed the youth respondent method primarily at their inceptions for brief periods and intermittently throughout the process. Both of these works extensive development processes and engagement immersions would have better informed their respective processes if they worked cohesively. They attempted to artistically address extremely complicated topics in our national psyche – topics that Americans are both fascinated and tormented by regardless of age.

Chapter 3

Social Media: A Tool for Audience Engagement and the Youth Respondent Method

I look online to decide what I want to see when I go to New York City. I search the websites of my favorite theatres, the *New York Times* highly recommended list, and theatre enthusiast Isaac Butler's blog "Parabasis." My attention kept being drawn to the musical *Spring Awakening*. I looked at the show's website and fans' responses and thought this might be an interesting evening of theatre. *Spring Awakening* seemed edgy, and it was attracting younger audiences. On December 16, 2007, without knowing it, I attended John Gallagher, Jr.'s final performance as Moritz Stiefel. The reaction from onstage and in the audience was mesmerizing. Throughout the entire show, which felt like a concert, the audience sang and laughed as if they knew all the lines. They were the most interactive and engaged audience I had witnessed in all my extensive theatergoing experience. After the curtain call, Gallagher thanked the audience and all his fellow actors. With much grace and electric energy, he sang "The Bitch of Living" for one final encore as Moritz. As a collective, his fellow cast members and the audience cheered him on and wept.

Although I knew little of the musical before seeing it, I knew this piece was special and artistically interesting. But what particularly moved me was the audience's relationship to the performance to one another. Susan Bennett contends, "Audiences derive pleasure from those who accompany them to a performance (patrons rarely visit the theatre alone) and from the emission of barely perceptible signs of pleasure as well as loud laughter and secret tears – their contagiousness is necessary for everyone's pleasure" (72). Regardless if the youth, primarily

teenagers, in the audience that December evening came with their parents, friends, or alone, no one in that audience felt alone; instead, the entire audience knew that they together experienced something theatrically special. During the following weeks, hundreds of YouTube clips illegally captured during the performance and the encore, streamed on the internet. Surely, the broadcasted final moments of this virtuosic performance intrigued other youth surfing the web to find a show to see.

The 2006 Broadway production of the musical *Spring Awakening* captivated the next young generation of theatre-goers in great part because of their use of technology. Besides the work's critical and artistic success and its salacious and evocative subject matter and characters, the show attracted fans via the internet and social media. Social media are types of online media where information is uploaded primarily through users' submissions. Web-surfers are no longer simply consumers of content but active content producers; these platforms encourage communication as interactive dialogue. NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman's June 25, 2010 web-stream announcement on the findings of "Audience 2.0" addressed how Americans use electronic media to participate in the arts. He reported, "We are faced with the internet, social media, and other new technologies, and I believe the arts field must embrace them and integrate them into our work." The usage of technology in theatre for marketing, content, and audience engagement is a new frontier in the field.

As of 2011, the theatre culture has begun to embrace the application of social media and technology in work, both to promote it and to engender further conversations with its audiences. Social media's inherent dialogical purpose lends itself well to a field that thrives on conversation. Positions with the title Social Media Coordinator, Manager, or Director appear with more frequency on web staff lists of regional theatres, including institutions such as the

Public Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, and Center Theatre Group. Graduate training programs in arts management and administration, such as Yale, Columbia, and DePaul, offer courses and specializations in social media audience engagement and marketing for the arts. According to the NEA, people who participate in the arts through electronic media are nearly three times as likely to attend live arts events as non-media participants (59 percent versus 21 percent). In addition, they attend twice as many arts events on average (6 events versus 3 events in one year) and go to a greater variety of live art forms. Media-based arts participation appears to encourage rather than replace attendance at live art events.

Although social media usage is becoming one of the most powerful marketing and engagement tools, the field of theatre is one of the last frontiers to truly embrace its networks to reach new audiences and reinvigorate veteran audiences. Social media becomes a vehicle to attract younger audiences, the coveted audience of most American theatres. In an interview with Woolly Mammoth's Marketing and Social Media Director, Alli Houseworth described the field of theatre as behind in social media usage. She contends that theatre as an art form, even more so than classical music and opera, is hesitant to embrace new forms and change. She also believes the slow growth of social media's integration into theatre is a result of the poor economy. Older regional theatre artistic directors lacked an interest in social media and thought that it would not stimulate their older subscribers. Ironically, the fastest growing demographic on Facebook are adults over the age of forty (Facebook). The next generation of theatre administrators, who embrace the use of social media and its culture, are just beginning to enter upper management positions and aggressively implement social media campaigns.

As the technology continues to advance, social media's population continues to grow (e.g., according to Facebook the site has over 600 million active users as of 2011). With each of

these technological advancements, younger generations fully embrace the mediums and enthusiastically adopted both the traditional and new forms. Social media expert Victory Carty attested in *Wired and Mobilizing: Social Movements, New Technology, and Electoral Politics* that young Americans aged eighteen to twenty-nine reported they learned more from digital sources about the 2008 presidential election than from any other media or print source. The Obama presidential campaign capitalized on their young constituency's interest in social media, in a manner many other industries observed, including the field of theatre. The producers of *Spring Awakening* organized teens' grassroots social media habits to help young audiences promote and express their enthusiasm for the musical.

Teens unknowingly engineered one of the first extensive forays in social media usage for professional theatre via their personal activity on Myspace, YouTube, blogs, and various other social networking conduits. Young audiences (thirteen years old and older) for *Spring Awakening* acted as youth respondents in terms of the marketing and audience engagement affiliated with the musical. In all of my cases studies, *Spring Awakening* is the only example where many of the performers were youths (teenagers of thirteen or older), so in fact young adults were heavily involved in the artistic development of the production, in addition to the social media campaign via a variation of the youth respondent method. Producers desiring younger audiences realized technology was a means to reach them, in great part, because this young demographic had already actively reached out to their peers through social media sites to encourage them to see the show. Eventually, producers cultivated youths' preexisting efforts in promoting the show to further reach the piece's target audience of teenagers. This chapter will examine youths' interest in *Spring Awakening* and how The Atlantic Theatre served this demographic with its production and its engagement practices inspired by youths' online

activity. With *Spring Awakening*, a paradigm shift occurred in theatre marketing and audience engagement by incorporating social media. The goal to find younger audiences was met through creating a show that spoke to them. Examining the show, its subject matter, and its young and dedicated cast explains why it was of interest to a younger audience. By considering teens' online practices concerning the show, I'll demonstrate how *Spring Awakening's* social media campaign was launched by teens – as youth respondents – and how they propelled the work's development and publicity campaign. This case study reveals that teens' creative reception to work via technology gained them agency in the role of producer, in addition to helping the musical locate its core audience – youth –and succeed critically and economically.

History and Production History of *Spring Awakening*

Spring Awakening is a rock musical adaptation of the controversial 1891 German play of the same title by Frank Wedekind, featuring music by Duncan Sheik and a book and lyrics by Steven Sater. In 1864, Wedekind was born in Germany to radical activist parents. He achieved stage success in Munich with the first of his two of *Lulu* plays: *Erdgeist* (*Earth Spirit*, 1895), in which the free loving heroine both seduces men and women until she encounters Jack the Ripper. In the late nineteenth century, teenage suicide was an alarming social problem in Europe; 110 schoolboys killed themselves between 1883 and 1889 (*Psychology Today* website). This cultural phenomenon influenced the socially conscious, sardonic, and heartfelt writer. The subject matter suited the modern expressionist writing style that he pioneered, in which characters spoke directly with little embellishment and actors, in turn, delivered lines with a quickened pace. In addition, Wedekind loved the circus, cabaret, vaudeville and embraced poetry, caricature, and bizarre symbolism. In *Messingkauf Dialogues*, Bertolt Brecht expressed how the work of "one of the great educators of the new Europe" influenced his; Brecht even

named his son after Wedekind. Samuel Beckett also found great inspiration in the controversial Wedekind's work and it appealed to his sense of counterculture.

Spring Awakening was written sometime between autumn 1890 and spring 1891 while Wedekind was working in an advertising agency. The work did not receive its first performance until fifteen years later on November 20, 1906, when it premiered at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin under the direction of Max Reinhardt. The play carries the subtitle *A Children's Tragedy*, partially because of its macabre themes concerning youth. Due to the controversial nature of the script, which addresses the sexually-oppressive culture of end of the century Germany and offers a vivid dramatization of erotic fantasies, the play was banned, first during World War I and then again during World War II.

In the 1960s, writer and librettist Steven Sater was introduced to Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* as a teenager. He said, "I always thought of it as an opera-in-waiting. It was full of yearning, adolescent desire, and rebellion." Not until he became acquainted with Duncan Sheik's work in popular music in the late 1990s did Sater decide to collaborate with Sheik on the creation of a musical adaption of the play with a contemporary twist. In Sheik's words, the "music would be relevant" for young people today. The composer lacked any training in musical theatre and had little interest in the form. He was seduced by the source text, and he thought rock music could invigorate the score. The artists began to adapt the script and write songs just as the Columbine High School Shooting occurred in Jefferson County, Colorado on Tuesday, April 20, 1999, in which twelve students and teachers were killed and over twenty-one wounded by two students with guns. The event further compelled the artists to realize the possible contemporary resonance of the piece, particularly because of the works' themes of teenage anger, violence,

oppression, and suicide. Shortly thereafter, the writing partners invited director Michael Mayer into the collaboration, who recently worked on the musical *American Idiot* (2010).

Spring Awakening received a number of workshops and concert readings, including workshops at La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego, California, and at the Roundabout Theatre Company in New York City, and a concert reading at Lincoln Center in February 2005. It premiered Off-Broadway at The Atlantic Theatre Company on May 19, 2006 and ran through August 5, 2006. Dramaturg for *Spring Awakening* and Associate Artistic Director at The Atlantic Theatre Christian Parker said of the work in an interview:

> It was one of those situations where a happy alchemy of collaborators were put together and working in the same direction. Neil Pepe and I were the people who just nudged that forward and made sure it was moving in the right direction and asked the right dramaturgical questions along the way, as they were scouring the script for what songs made sense and what songs didn't make sense, how to create a sense of linearity out of a script that is largely nonlinear because of the line of the story that they wanted to tell that was a more linear story.

A true sense of collaboration was engendered with its development among all the involved artists who shared the mission to create something high concept, new, dynamic, and also focused on the vitality of youth culture. Throughout *Spring Awakening*'s development process, a commercial run on Broadway seemed inconceivable. In *Spring Awakening: In the Flesh*, *New York Post* critic David Cote writes, "*Spring Awakening* shouldn't work – especially on Broadway, where innovation and risk are typically verboten….The cast and crew of *Spring Awakening* gave Broadway, the establishment, history, and the Good Old Days a jolt" (19). Due to its

overwhelming critical and financial success with The Atlantic Theatre Company, it transferred. The musical opened on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on December 10, 2006 and closed on January 18, 2009, after thirty previews and eight hundred and eighty eight performances.

The innovation and the virtuosity of the set design and blocking attracted this younger audience. Set designer Christine Jones designed the upstage brick wall to be a collage of sepia images and daguerreotype photographs that resembled a series of posters a teenager would display in her bedroom, only with nineteenth century steampunk flair. Lighting Designer Kevin Adams worked closely with Jones in imagining how his eight-foot fluorescent neon tubes, reminiscent of artist Dan Flavin's work, would light the space. The Tony award winner referred to the design as "nineteenth-century objects with twenty-first century light sculptures" (Cote 69). Susan Hilferty's costumes accentuated the time period juxtaposition by creating clothes characteristic of the late eighteen hundreds with contemporary sex appeal (e.g., the actresses' dresses were shorter with lower cut necklines, the actors' wore well-fitted jackets). The cohesion of the design with Michael Mayer's direction formed a world that played with time and spoke directly to a young audience of teens today.

The space was blocked for a proscenium stage with onstage seating stage right and stage left. All the actors remained onstage throughout the performance and some actors, who were described as swing, were placed in the onstage seats wearing contemporary street clothes. The swing members blended in with the audience until they would join the actors and sing at heightened points during the musical (e.g., the singing of "A Bitch of Living"). Teens appeared very surprised that some of the people seated next to them broke out in song. When members of the swing sang with the cast it conveyed that youth still encounter the same questions and

problems, regardless if it's the nineteenth century or the twenty-first. Mayer and Jones anticipated that the audience would have to be young for this onstage seating convention to work. The onstage seating, which included twenty-six seats, was designated for younger audience members and the ticket price was in the $20 range. In the *New York Times*, writer Ben Sisario described the onstage seating:

> The sound and sightlines can be spotty, but there are other, rarer benefits. Seated on a plain wooden chair, you are close enough to the actors to feel the stomping of their feet and hear their natural, unamplified voices. And in what could be the highlight of the evening or its most uncomfortable moment (or both), a stageside seat also offers a chance to see a frenzied teenage sex scene, including some frenzied body parts — the actors range in age from 16 to 24 — in revealing proximity. (Theatre 2/16/06)

This Brechtian gesture of having the audience onstage is one of the many aspects of the musical, which transformed the text into an accessible one for young audiences. In short, the choice was an example of the distancing effect or alienation effect; these elements "prevent the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer" (Brecht 57). The audience seated onstage voyeuristically observed the traditionally seated audience, as the traditionally seated audience was always hyperaware of them.

The young audience who encountered the show from this stage seating vantage point observed every erotic and physically revealing detail of the production while sitting next to cast members. At the end of act one, Wendla and Melchior have sex on an elevated wooden platform rigged by ropes attached to the fly system. The audience onstage witnessed the actors expose

parts of their bodies in order to perform the scene. As Rebecca Scheinder writes in *The Explicit Body in Performance*:

> A mass of orifices and appendages, details and tactile surfaces, the explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality—all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege (102).

The onstage audience could analyze the performers' bodies because of their proximity: the actors "explicit" bodies were on display. Audiences identified with the awkwardness of their young bodies and the detailed interactions the characters had with each other. The closeness of the seats also added to the concert feel of the performance.

The collaborators felt the show was stronger and more "at home" and "youthful" when it was performed at The Atlantic Theatre, located on 16th Street and 9th Avenue or the Village. Parker believes that a greater number of young professionals in their early twenties attended the production at The Atlantic in comparison to its Broadway run, although more teens attended the Broadway show. Susan Bennett writes, "Geographic location is always important. A play must be produced in a location that attracts an audience. Audiences who never attend the mainstream theatres of urban centres, either by choice or lack of access, may be regular theatre-goers at community theatres, clubs, or places they work" (120). The urban, grassroots feel of the piece in The Atlantic space downtown added an authenticity to the show and hip youthful energy that seemed to be lost a bit with the glamour of Broadway. Much of the coverage of the work describes how the young performers, collaborators, and audiences assumed the piece would not

go to Broadway, a place where the collaborators thought the rock music score, dark themes, and young bodies would be unwelcome.

Nevertheless, the work made it to Broadway with great success because of the overwhelming response Off Broadway, and Decca Broadway Records released the original cast recording on December 12, 2006, winning the Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album in 2008. The Broadway production won eight Tony Awards, including best musical and best direction for a musical; four Drama Desk awards, including Outstanding Musical; three Outer Critic Circle Awards and a number of Lortel awards, Drama League Awards, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical. A U.S. National tour (with one stop in Toronto, Canada) opened on August 15, 2008 at The Balboa Theatre in San Diego, California. The national tour ended on May 23, 2010 in Orlando, Florida. A non-equity U.S. tour began at Shryock Auditorium on October 14, 2010 in Carbondale, Illinois. The non-equity U.S. tour ended its run on May 15, 2011 in Ottawa, Canada at the Centrepointe Theatre. The musical was also produced abroad. The London production began January 23, 2009 at the Lyric Hammersmith, transferred to the Novello Theatre on March 21, 2009, and closed on May 30, 2009. The London production won four awards at the Laurence Olivier Awards in 2010, including best musical and best sound design. Everywhere the production traveled it was both a critical and economic success, particularly with young audiences.

Critical Analysis of *Spring Awakening*:
Appeal to Youth and Construction of the Leading Teenage Girl

The musical, which very much follows the structure of the play, begins with an argument over the length of Wendla Bergmann's skirt with her mother, and then wanders into a conversation about how her mother is not fully telling her about reproduction, life and death.

Melchior Gabor (the play's young, atheist protagonist) and Moritz Stiefel (his naïve counterpart) confide in each other that recently they have both become tormented by sexual dreams. Melchior is knowledgeable about the mechanics of sexual reproduction through researching medical books, but Moritz is completely unaware. Because the next classroom only holds sixty pupils, Moritz must rank at least sixtieth in his class in order to remain at school. He and Ernst Robel are tied academically; the next quarter will determine who will be expelled.

Wendla encounters Melchior in the forest. After recounting a dream she had where she was an abused child, Wendla tells Melchior about how their schoolmate Martha is abused. Wendla asks Melchior to show her how it feels to be beaten. He hits her, but not very hard, provoking Wendla to yell at him to hit her harder. Suddenly Melchior violently beats her with a switch and then runs off crying. Soon after, Wendla finds Melchior in a hayloft. He kisses her. Wendla kisses him back and they start having sexual intercourse without Wendla knowing what is happening. Meanwhile, despite great effort, Moritz's academic situation does not improve, and he is expelled from school. Moritz has a breakdown, blaming both himself and his parents for not better preparing him for the world. Alone, he meets Ilse, a former friend who ran away to live a Bohemian life. She offers to take Moritz in, but he rejects her offer. After she leaves, Moritz shoots himself. The professors at the school and parents blame Melchior for Moritz's suicide because of an essay on sexuality that Melchior wrote for him. They refuse to let Melchior defend himself, and he is forced to go to a reformatory. Wendla suddenly falls ill. A doctor prescribes pills for anemia but tells her mother that she is pregnant. Wendla is helpless and confused when her mother takes her to get an abortion. Soon after, an escaped Melchior hides in a cemetery where he discovers Wendla's tombstone. Moritz contemplates committing

suicide but, because of visits by the ghosts of his best friend and young love, he decides to live on to preserve their memories.

Besides the young and attractive bodies and compelling narrative that seduced audiences, the style and accessibility of the contemporary *Spring Awakening* interested the young audience. Sater, Sheik and Mayer took some liberties with the material to suit contemporary and youthful audiences. In the preface to the libretto, Sater said of writing the book and lyrics for the musical *Spring Awakening,* "…I soon found that once we had access, through song, to the inner working of our characters' hearts and minds, we engaged with them differently; we embarked on journeys with them. Before long, we found ourselves altering the structure, even the substance of our source material to account for the places those songs had taken us" (viii). The theatrical innovation and reimagining of the 1891 text helped create a target audience of American teens. Parker said the artistic collaboration was atypical for an American musical: "[The contemporary adaptation] shows a good sort of alignment of the sensibility of the piece, the ensemble nature of the piece, the rock and roll music, that subverting of a lot of the ingrained expectations of the way musical theatre needs to work. [The Atlantic] had never done a musical before, partially because of those reasons." Dramaturgically two threads of the original narrative were updated: first, the removal of the Masked Man, which absolved the protagonist Melchior of his guilt and feelings of loss, in addition to removing the voice of a parental figure who would save Melchior from the fate of his friends. And secondly, Melchior and Wendla have consensual sex rather than Melchior raping her.

In the original text, the adult Masked Man, who served as the narrator, appears to rescue Melchior from suicide by imparting his wisdom. At the end of the musical, Melchior is greeted by the two ghosts of Wendla and Moritz; they encourage him not to take his own life, which they

express in song. In the musical, very few adult characters express compassion for the teens, besides Melchior's mother who feels remorse for the failing Moritz. The idea of an adult rescuing Melchior from committing suicide at the last instance of the musical might have been very disempowering for contemporary youth. Melchior, with the help of his young friends, needed to make that decision for himself, which keeps the musical focused on youth culture and power. Regardless, his decision to not take his own life remains rather ambiguous because it lacks theatrical clarity, though producers claim this is the decision the young character makes. Also, there is a coda song entitled "Purple Summer," in which life and the season are celebrated. Audiences assume Melchior completes the triptych, takes his own life, and accompanies his friend and lover. Then he and the company burst into uplifting song. The artistic collaborators define themselves as rebellious and resistant to traditional Broadway but the work's ending follows a classical Broadway ending, perhaps to relay a positive message to the young audience. Scholar Stacy Wolf writes in *A Problem Like Maria*, "The Broadway musical's reputation as optimistic and escapist corresponds to the predominant characterization of this era in American history, as these are the years known for *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best"* (13). The rather ambiguous ending that celebrates community and finding oneself carries a similar tone of optimism that Wolf describes which is rather false with the tragic conclusion, the portentous and dark tone throughout the musical, and the future of Germany in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Producers and the artistic team attempted to make Wendla's character more intellectually hungry, socially aware, independent, and interesting to a contemporary young audience filled with girls. Parker stated, "They felt like the gender sensibility of the ninetieth century had changed and that girls have more agency now, which they wanted reflected in someway in the

musical, so Wendla was not just a victim of circumstance." Still, the contemporary rendering of Wendla lacks the empowerment the male characters possess, many decisions are made for her, and she remains a victim. Even when the audience first encounters Wendla, they see a seventeen-year-old actress attired in a short, white, lacy baby-doll dress standing on a pedestal as her mother hems her skirt. She softly sings, "Mama who bore me, mama who gave me no way to handle things" (5). Her portentous and fearful proclamation displays how naïve and defenseless she is, and on the bare black stage she immediately appears as a victim. In *Female Masculinity*, scholar Judith Halberstam contends, "For girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodeled into compliant forms of femininity" (6). Wendla's character is restrained by her mother, society, and, literally, Melchior; she is punished for becoming pregnant, and she is repressed by the constructs of the nineteenth century world as well as her lack of knowledge about her body.

The Wedekind play expresses a deep misogyny, which is less present in the musical: Melchior rapes Wendla in the hayloft at the end of act one, after he beats her with a stick. In the musical, Wendla asks to be beaten, stating she's "never felt anything before" (48). She desires to feel and her intentions infer a sexual frustration, an inability to communicate her sexual desire, and a manifestation of sadomasochism. She's heard from her friend Martha how her father beats her, which allows Martha to "feel." Wendla initiates the transgression by giving Melchior a stick and then asking him to beat her. The incident reaches a climax: Melchior, now dominating the situation, screams, "You bitch. I'll beat the hell out of you" (49). Melchior enters a state of violent sexually driven rage. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex*," Judith Butler's contends that "gender is a copy with no original" and that the genders are in "pathetic"

dependence on one another, which always places them at risk. Melchior lacked many options for his future and, as a female, Wendla had even fewer. In *Spring Awakening* (the musical), the two teens come together without much knowledge of what they are doing but beyond that it may be wrong. Both of them feel lost in the constraints of society and find a brief refuge in each other with little hope that things will improve by this "pathetic" and heteronormative codependence.

Throughout the play, Wendla is very much constructed as a voiceless figure lacking any agency. In the play, not the musical, she is impregnated by rape. In the musical, a scene divides the beating scene and the scene when the couple engages in consensual sex. Sater writes, "We worked hard to flesh out a fuller scene between them, to let our would-be lovers struggle to make sense of what they have so brutally done – to offer one another forgiveness, before they fall into each other's arms" (xiii). Sater exaggerates by saying there is "forgiveness" in the scene when it seems generated more by lust in addition to confusion. Melchior's knowledge is strictly theoretical, while Wendla had no knowledge at all and is led by Melchior. From the play to the musical, she is altered from material object to inquisitive victim: her mother refused to talk to her about sex, which perpetuated her ignorance. She engaged in a series of sexual acts without clear knowledge of the possible effects, while her partner had a greater knowledge than she did. As a result, she became pregnant and was beaten by her mother, who then took her to have an abortion against her will. She abandoned her there, during which she died from the unsafe procedure in a filthy backroom. Jill Dolan writes in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, "Rape is treated as a male ritual, a property crime of men against men in which women are victims in the homosocial exchange" (93). Rather than love, Melchior seemed to rape or have sex with Wendla more for escapism and rebellion against a masculine society and his own frustration of being controlled by it, which included his parents, teachers, and peers. Theatrically it was treated as a

climatic ritual that the audience knew would separate the characters permanently while emotionally drawing them closer together. Whether the actual act itself was rape, statutory rape, or consensual sex was rather ambiguous and left to the audience's interpretation, but regardless of what type of sex act it was she became further victimized. She's separated from her love, is forced to have an abortion, and then is killed by it. Melchior's need to find a partner to test his research made Wendla the body for his dissection. In both the play and the musical, Wendla inhabited a male dominated world whose matriarchal figures left her in the actual and metaphorical dark. Wendla was more vibrant, present, and vocal in the musical, although she was still very unequal to her more complex and inquisitive male counterparts. Based upon YouTube slips, message boards, and blogs, fans discussed whether Wendla was the victim of rape or not. Predominantly, young fans' attraction to Wendla concerned her musical talents. For all the characters, when they broke out in song they appeared most empowered.

The Music's, Performers', and Staging's Investment in Youth Culture

The play being set in the late 1800s while the performers sang contemporary rock songs further accentuated the work's play with temporality. Throughout time, youth have dealt with the same societal and personal questions raised in the show. The collaborators felt that rock music served as a release for adolescents and a way to mute pain analogous to the characters' experiences (Cote viii). Producers thought Duncan Sheik's rock score would hinder the production from going to Broadway because it suited a concert setting. Sater writes in his introduction of the transformation of the text into a musical, "Subtitled 'A Children's Tragedy,' Wedekind's play is full of the unheard, anguished cries of young people. It struck me that pop music – rock music – is the exact place that adolescents for the last few generations have found release from, and expression of, that same mute pain" (Cote viii). The songs served as the

narrator. The audience learned about the characters' vivid and oppressed emotional lives and angst through their musical soliloquies. Because of the music in this contemporary adaptation, their stories became more visceral, amplified and relevant to younger audience members who identified with the theatrical device. The band of four musicians wearing street clothes joined the actors onstage. Songs were always performed as direct address to the audience. As Sater wrote, "Then, perhaps there is something in the nature of the song itself that opens the door to story – that admits us to the heart of the singer – as if every song tells of a sort of unacknowledged 'I want.' For what we sing is what is unspoken, what is hidden. The 'real story' (viii).[11] The songs allowed the characters to utter the feelings and ideas that they were unable to exclaim in life. Lyrics such as "The Bitch of Living," "Touch Me," and "Totally Fucked" allowed the characters, as well as the audience, personal release.

Youth decoded the music and its lyrics to find personal meaning. Among intergenerational audiences, younger members seemed to immediately access the language and situations, while their parents may have reflected on the memories from their teenage lives. As Pierre Bourdieu writes in *Distinction: A Social Critique*: "A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded" (3). In many ways, everyone in the *Spring Awakening* audience had the cultural code:

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[11] Parker said in an interview regarding employing the songs to portray inner life, "I think one of the concerns I had when I first read it was that actually there wasn't a one-to-one correlation between the pressures that were faced in the late 19th century in Germany and now. The particular social pressures were unique to a culture and time to an extent that don't necessarily translate. And I think one of the things that was very successful about the production was that the decision to make most of the music and the expression of the music be essentially interior monologue so that it's not happening in real time and it's just jumping out and communicating in a more contemporary vernacular allowed the audience to juxtapose the two things or draw their own conclusions about what was still resonant and what was not still resonant, whether there is a correlation between a particular social illness portrayed in the musical and the frustration that we have now."

they all were either experiencing or had experienced the frustrations the teen characters endured concerning sex, gender, sexuality, power, and control, all of which they conveyed through song. Perhaps every audience member had not encountered suicide, failing out of school and abuse in their immediate lives but invariably they had through friends, family, and acquaintances. Bennett discusses how the director and playwright have motivations to shape the audiences' appeal and response via the tools of the text and direction (*Theatre Audiences* 18). The music played a major role in this shaping and helping the audience to empathize and identify with the struggling characters and their victimization by the cloistered adult world. Chief theatre critic for *The Washington Post* Peter Marks discussed the integration of music: "As an electric guitar caterwauls and drum set pulsates, the teens pour out their souls in a succession of anguished anthems and elegiac hymns. Rock, it seems, is not merely the universal music of outrage, but in the startlingly inventive *Spring Awakening* it's also an outlet for a new way of telling us that the hormones want what they want" (Style, co1). Marks goes onto discuss how the music not only connotes outrage but age and passion and beginnings for youth through the work's score. The work attracted critics and fans through its innovative style, energy, and identification with youth culture.

A major attraction for younger audiences were the musical stars that the production created, which in turn fueled fans' social media practices and engagement with the production. Fans of the production became enamored by the three leads in the show, in addition to being fascinated by the entire ensemble, many of whom originated their roles Off-Broadway and reprised them on Broadway. One of the challenges of many recent Broadway shows is that movie stars are cast in order to bolster ticket sales, regardless of their abilities to perform onstage. *Spring Awakening* was unique and followed a more traditional casting system.

Characteristic of the golden age of musicals, the musical made stars that all continued to have solid careers in theatre, film, and television. Much of the attention was focused on Lea Michele (Wendla), John Gallagher, Jr. (Moritz), and Jonathan Groff (Melchior), the three leads. Lea Michele played Cosette in *Les Miserables* and was very much a Broadway child star. Already well-known by the industry, she was fourteen when she began participating in the concert readings of the show and began performing the role when she was seventeen, the legal age to perform Wendla because of a New York State law that prohibited minors to play a part that required nudity. Lesser known to the New York musical scene, John Gallagher, Jr. had starred in a number of small independent films as well as performed in a number of off-Broadway plays, including David Lindsay-Abaire's *Fuddy Meers* (1999) and *Rabbit Hole* (2005). He was a songwriter and singer and guitar player, but more of the folk-rock genre than of the musical theatre ilk. Jonathan Groff was a recent college graduate and a waiter before he landed the role of Melchior Gabor, which made him famous as a heartthrob. Wolf contends that "The star must fit in enough to be popular yet be distinguishable enough to be exceptional" (*Problem Like Maria* 34). A fan culture was created by young audiences identifying with the leads. Fans believed they could replicate the virtuosic performances that helped brand the stars as sexy, young, and accessible. Parker spoke of the fame the stars experienced and the "cult-like" followings that ensued. Many of the cast had to use pseudonyms online and on Facebook.

By the time the show arrived on Broadway, the entire ensemble modeled for a Gap advertisement wearing brightly colored sweaters, stripped scarves and enthusiastic smiles. The advertisement graced a mega-billboard on Times Square. Even MTV ventured into the world of theatre by focusing on the musical. On May 4, 2006 the company hosted MTV's "The Big Ten," a mix of the ten most popular videos of the moment hosted by pop stars including music star

Bow Wow, and film and television stars Wilmer Valderrama, Josh Hartnett, and Jared Leto. The stars also participated in an event at the famous Serendipity ice cream shop. A sundae was named after them with strawberries, raspberry sauce, whipped cream and licorice. These sophisticated publicity stunts and synergistic marketing of both the theatrical experience and the products of the companies showcased the cast in a traditional fan appeal manner (i.e., "buy these goods, and you can be like us"). In addition, the light, fun, and frivolous nature of the advertisements and their products contrasted the dark tone and edgier content of the show. In many ways, the advertisements communicated the message that the actors, in reality, shared little with the tormented, suicidal characters they portrayed onstage. A cadre of images and promotional events delivered the message that these were new stars "just like you." Regardless of how earnest their beginnings, each of the actors had vocal training, agents, equity cards, and much experience onstage, in television and on film. The mythology that the cast was a group of novices, and they developed their talents through hard work and humble beginnings helped build their intense fandom.

Much attention was drawn to the "performances" of the rising stars offstage, in particular to John Gallagher, Jr., who played Moritz Stiefel. In interviews, Gallagher consistently acknowledged that he was slightly older than the rest of the company, that he was not a good student when he was in school (similar to his character), that his experience was primarily as a performer in plays, and that his musical training was in folk and in rock from both his family of folk musicians and that his songwriting and performing in his own band Old Springs Pike. His virtuosic performance and identification as an outsider drew greater attention. The actor/musician's MySpace page has over five hundred sixty thousand hits (as of May 18, 2011), in addition to having multiple inauthentic pages on MySpace and Facebook created by fans

claiming to be Gallagher, Jr. Varied perceptions about the rising talent were certainly spun, drawn from fans, the media, and the performer himself. As Wolf writes, "The notion of a star elides the distinction among these different selves who reside in one body, as the star is not only the person or the actor or the character but all three" (*Problem Like Maria* 33). All the stars kept their personal lives separate to an extent, but there was great interest in discovering their private lives, as seen on each of the stars MySpace pages where inquiries about their relationship statuses and sexual orientation were raised.[12] Still, cast members maintained official pages and produced YouTube clips about their experiences working on the show that were intended for fans. Often the cast appreciated the support and responded to postings that their fans made on their official pages. This authentic and personable online access to the cast made them more relatable with the teen audience, which furthered fans' interest.

Spring Awakening's **Social Media Campaign and Youth Involvement**

Youths' online fan practices for *Spring Awakening* fueled the eventual social media campaign for both audience engagement and marketing. In 2008, 8.2 million children under the age of eighteen were web users. By 2011, the number of teen users surpassed the twenty million mark (Carty 10). This young and devoted demographic ignited a paradigmatic shift in how producers attract audiences to see their productions. In an interview, New York producer Marc

[12] Jonathan Groff and Lea Michele went on to star in the television show *Glee*. Groff was guest starring on *Glee* as Jesse St. James, the male lead of rival glee club, Vocal Adrenaline, for eight episodes. He also serves as a love interest for his former *Spring Awakening* co-star Lea Michele's character, Rachel Berry. *Newsweek* critic Ramin Satoodeh stated that Groff was unconvincing in the role of the straight Jesse ("he seems more like your average theater queen, a better romantic match for Kurt than Rachel"). Groff's performance was defended by *Glee* creator Ryan Murphy and guest star Kristin Chenoweth, both of whom described Satoodeh's essay as homophobic; it was also condemned by GLAAD president Jarrett Barrios. Groff is set to return to Glee at the end of the second season. In2009, Groff told Broadway.com during the National Equality Month in Washington, D.C., that he is "gay and proud."

Falato, who raised $600,000 for the show, acknowledged how the grassroots efforts and fans' creative and technological expression of love for the musical greatly propelled its success; the practices made him and the rest of the theatre industry seriously note the power of grassroots marketing efforts via the internet. The versatility, the low cost, the multiple points of entry to engage with social media and the constant updating of sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr (short-form blog), and Twitter all created platforms for *Spring Awakening* audiences to engage. As youth respondents, teens' consistent and creative online expression helped producers and collaborators tap into the youth discourse about the show, discover how to further build young audiences, and find what was of interest to this demographic about the piece.

When the production began its run at The Atlantic in 2006, there were fewer than three hundred hits and a hundred fans on the show's MySpace page, which eventually grew to the millions. Within months, noticing the sharp incline of web-based activity, producers began to track material fans posted on message boards, blogs, along with MySpace pages they helmed. Youths generated some of the most persuasive marketing and discussion for the show as a response to their identification with the work. As described in *Wired and Mobilizing*, marketers learn much information about youth by monitoring their consistent social media habits (120). Producers recognized these connections, particularly in capitalizing on the formations of social groups with young consumers and identifying material from the show that significantly interested them. On fans' personal pages appeared pictures of the stars, images of themselves meeting the cast at the stage door, illegally snapped photos on youths' cell phones from during the show, besides a large amount of information about the content and fans' personal experiences attending the theatre. How the show changed every night, who was appearing in what part, whether swing performers got their chance to perform one of the characters or an understudy

went on all became fascinating fodder that was discussed in detail on the chat boards and the MySpace pages. Youths blogged about the show and analyzed the text critically, such as Wendlaradical who wrote on safans.livejournal.com, "Wendla is confused and frustrated with the information her parents give her about life, and starts to take that frustration out on the people around her. She reunites with Moritz and finds comfort in him, bonding with him over their confusion about life and the struggles they face." Many teens created short stories or fan fiction based on the play, which producers read to find out information regarding their interests.

In terms of other creative forms of expression, youth began recording themselves singing the songs and posting them on YouTube. For instance, with great passion and fervor, youth sang "Don't Do Sadness" and "Blue Wind," among others. They attempted to replicate the singers' performances from the show and often recounted their experiences on these videos. A subtle competition between fans existed, as to who could create the best and most sophisticated MySpace page with the most up to date and accurate information on it. Also, the quality of the YouTube videos continued to improve, as well as the execution of the songs. Because many of the cast were young and discovered with the show, fans felt they, too, could be discovered via YouTube. In many ways, youth delivered the songs and material like an audition. Other fans posted comments on their videos, primarily of support and infrequently with criticism. *Spring Awakening* began launching auditions via YouTube to find teens to join the next cast for extensions and the tours. As a result of numerous blogs, fans began to productively organize the blogs onto one different site, such as safans.livejournal.com. Besides creating an exchange of information and ideas, all these interactions formed an online community. In *Utopia in Performance*, scholar Jill Dolan writes, "Audiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse, that along with intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new

investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres" (10). These communities were both ephemeral in nature, with a community of youth who saw the show at the theatre as an audience and a community of audience members, subsequent to seeing the production, contributing their thoughts online over an extended period of time. On these sites, teens found a refuge in locating other teens who shared a common interest in musical theatre, which may have ostracized them in school with their peers not invested in the form.

Fans also shared their political and sociological beliefs on these sites, where current topics regarding sex education, among others, were introduced. In *Girls Make Media*, Mary Kearney writes of the boom of the digital revolution in the late 1990s considering how girls were active users. She writes, "…not just through chat rooms, and instant messaging, but also by engaging in web design, producing their own websites. As a result of the increased presence of girl-made media, American popular culture is becoming further diversified and democratized" (3). From hearing the buzz about the show often through viral means, the audience for the production continued to grow and fans' presence intensified on the internet. Young *Spring Awakening* audiences wielded the tools of technology to engage with each other on the show and to openly share their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations along with the growing success of the show and the star power of its performers.

Fans interacted on these sites before seeing the show and/or after, thus further influencing their engagement. A study by consultants Wolf, Brown, Brown & Jackson-Dumont entitled "Activating Your Audience," examined the stages and timeline of social media usage in the audience experience including pre-performance or preshow activities, activities during the performance, and activities after the performance or post-show (35-38). Audience engagement helps discover the audience's response to the entire theatergoing experience. Susan Bennett

writes, "The involvement of the audience in the theatrical event is undoubtedly complex. In all its stages, from preproduction to postproduction, and especially on the duration of the performance itself, the traditional role for the spectator, as individual and member of the collective gathering is reactive" (204). Audiences can engage via social media about a production in preparation to seeing it, during it, and then after seeing it. For *Spring Awakening*, teens often discovered the music on MySpace and information on how to buy tickets on The Atlantic's website. During the show, they could take pictures on their mobile devices and then tag them on their Facebook page. After the show, they could follow it on Twitter and post on the show's official blog. After seeing the show, fans would purchase songs from iTunes or buy the full CD online; after memorizing the songs they would record and broadcast themselves singing on YouTube. Because there are many different forms of social media, there are many iterations of how individuals engage with it. With all these activities, other fans posted comments regarding their thoughts on the material, thus creating a dialogue. The discussions ranged from commenting on an actor as "hot" to discussing what they liked about the play and the production's design.

In order to facilitate how youth engaged with the production, producers observed and analyzed youths' responses to the show (as youth respondents) in an effort to improve and fully serve their young peers about to experience this cultural text. Producers, recognizing the increased social media activity for the show and how it contributed to the selling of tickets, began creating official Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube domains late in 2005 to further organize fans and direct attention for online audience engagement. They continued to organize the tools that their young constituency actively embraced. When The Atlantic began to helm these sites, they added content only individuals directly affiliated with the production or the

theatre could post, thus attracting fans to experience an insider's view. Young fans gained access to photos of the cast backstage, blogs and YouTube videos created by the cast, status updates about future tours and events, etc. The official *Spring Awakening* MySpace profile's has received one 1,283,660 hits as of November 10, 2011. Rehearsal footage, interviews with the cast, clips from backstage and the stars' dressing rooms fill the page. Much of the page is dedicated to the cast and fans expressing their respect and support for each other. Although most of the fans who posted the over four thousand comments may never meet the original or any of the touring cast members, a relationship via digital means was created. On the MySpace blog one of the touring Ilse's wrote:

> Dear Guilty Ones: There are no words to describe how this show has changed my life. I cannot believe that I have gotten the privilege to be a part of telling such a unique, beautiful story. It has been the greatest gift to perform this show every night and portray such a beautiful character. I have fallen in love with Ilse and she will forever be a part of me. Thank you all so much for your support, your gifts and your kind words at the stage door and for making me feel like a rock star. I feel like the luckiest person alive! What would the show be without you?? I've had the time of my life and this music has healed me. This has been my biggest dream come true. Here we are, two years later and I'm still so in love with *Spring Awakening*. This experience will always be in my heart and I will never let it go. Thank you for letting a Canadian bobbed brunette travel to 44 beautiful cities in your country! "Something started crazy... Sweet and unknown." I hope to see you on stage soon...It's been awful sweet to be a little butterfly. Lots of Love and Blue Wind forever, Steffi D.

This "love letter," similar to many of the other blogs, is personable and well-written. It exclaims the actress' devotion to the show and to her fans, many of whom she has met at the stage door. The letter also implies that the actress experienced pain in her life and the music has "healed" her, perhaps in a similar way that fans have been healed by the show. She suggests that from humble beginnings, she worked hard enough and was lucky enough to make it into the show. This conveys to young fans that if they work hard enough, even if they think a goal is unattainable, they too can make their dreams come true, such as perhaps performing in *Spring Awakening*. In order to keep youths interested in the show, the marketing campaign continued to allude that anyone could at least audition and everyone had a chance to join the celebrated cast. This was another practice to make the work accessible. For instance, fifteen-year-old Lauren Silver posted, "Is there gonna be a website where people can post their audition videos for the next tour of spring awakening now that the tour website is no longer in functioning?" (MySpace). Similar posts from fans inquiring about audition opportunities are common on all of the social media platforms about the show. Besides the artistic collaborators who've joined the site, most of the "friends" on the MySpace page are now entering their latter twenties and joined the site when they were in their early to late teens. The fans' and professionals' images mingle together for the show. Although the producers enabled young fans to have greater access to material, they also gave away merchandise and opportunities to meet the cast and creators by participating on these sites through quizzes, lotteries, and other interactive exercises. With every program teens created online, producers were invested in discovering how it further improved their experience with the *Spring Awakening* brand.

Digital technologies and social media allow for group formation and support among individuals. Around half of American children between ten and seventeen regularly visit internet

chat rooms, where they give their opinions and express their natural sociability with peers (Carty 16). Many children and teenagers employ the internet as a primary outlet to socialize and to express themselves. Falato described that in order for the social media strategy facilitated by The Atlantic to be successful, it was necessary for the community of online users to meet in-person. Producers organized street teams, groups of young fans who signed-up online to meet in-person to discuss the show. The team of over one hundred kids, called The Guilty Ones (also the title of a song from the show), would meet near The Atlantic for pizza, which was provided by the theatre. Who attended these events that occurred every three to five months fluctuated, which just demonstrated that more buzz about the show was being generated and reaching a continually growing audience. Overall, this event created a greater sense of community. In *Distinction: A Social Critique,* Pierre Bourdieu theorizes:

> There is an economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic. Sociology endeavors to establish the conditions in which the consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced, and at the same time to describe the different ways of appropriating such of these objects as are regarded at a particular moment as works of art, and the social conditions of the mode of appropriation that is considered legitimate. (1)

Spring Awakening was a highly desired cultural commodity that suited the taste of young theatre-goers and young people who became interested in theatre because of the musical. The 1996 musical *Rent*, which ran for twelve years on Broadway, carried a similar cultural capital, particularly with the population of RENT-Heads, the young devoted fans of the musical. Similar to *Spring Awakening*'s onstage seating, *Rent* producers offered thirty-four seats in the front two rows of the orchestra for twenty dollars each, two hours before the performance. With *Rent* the sense of community was engendered entirely in analog because technology with social media

was only in its early stages. Perhaps the community was equally large, since *Rent* was the ninth longest-running Broadway show, but its fans were dispersed throughout the nation with little dialogue among them because of geographic and logistical constraints. Director of Social Media at the Arts and Cultural Agency Treespot in Washington D.C., Devon Smith said in an interview, "With social media, having an additional online relationship allows you to have conversation with people at any time. It allows you to have a different relationship with your audience members. It's not so much about selling the tickets as it is about engaging in the different kinds of conversations you can have with an audience." Infeasible for *Rent* fans because little social media did existed in the 1990s, for *Spring Awakening* these e-relationships were engendered with some ease, primarily through the activity of dedicated young audiences. Youth were able to instigate and disseminate the marketing for the show, which bolstered their agency in their engagement with this cultural text.

The greatest current debate regarding social media usage in the theatre is whether it is best suited to sell tickets or to engage audiences. According to a study presented at the Spring 2011 LORT (League of Resident Theatres) Conference, audience's greater investment in social media usage in relationship to their theatergoing experience focused on audience engagement with the purchasing of tickets as a secondary investment. For *Spring Awakening*, as a result of its online presence and the quality of the show tickets sales went extremely well. The social media campaign ultimately became about maintaining fans and enhancing audience's experience seeing *Spring Awakening*. Devon Smith said in an interview, "I think the trick with arts organizations and theatres more specifically is to start thinking less about using social media to sell another ticket and more use of social media to bridge the gap between the times when their audiences are in the physical spaces." In contrast, Houseworth contends, "I don't understand why

we're still talking about audience engagement and marketing as two separate things. That is my real question. I can't respond your question because it makes me so angry that we've segmented audience engagement from marketing." Using social media to sell tickets and to engage audiences is not mutually exclusive, as seen with *Spring Awakening*. Social Media attracts audience to buy tickets to see a show, which hopes to enlighten, educate, and entertain. In turn, it is the theatre's hope that the audience continues the dialogue and engages with it and other patrons at the theatre and then online via social media engines. There are multiple functions of social media to customize audiences' leisure experiences. Besides purchasing seats, audiences desire technological interpretive aids they can easily access, such as finding the theatre's website on their iPhone. *Spring Awakening* was the show that ignited this first social media-theatre immersion, inspired not by the institution but by the musical's savvy audience of teens. Producers listened to their audience's interests and wants with the goal of successfully serving them. The social media campaign employed for *Spring Awakening* hinged on this dialogue between audience members and producers, which was conducted all online through teens' actions and producers' analysis of the content teens produced.

Why is *Spring Awakening* for the young audience?

The goal of attaining younger and more diverse audiences interests every theatre in the United States. Entertaining patrons who are primarily senior citizens is a grave concern for theatres, particularly because they feel they cannot sustain without their dedicated subscribers (older audiences) who they think will die out. Bennett writes, "No longer can audiences for the theatrical events be identified by profiles of the typical ticket holder at the established institution. The audience is as likely to be found in a public park or a union hall or a community centre as in a conventional theatre space" (207). Looking to find a much younger generation of theatre-

goers – atypical patrons – is part of the reimagining of the theatre and influences the practices used to attract this younger audience. Theatres embrace the notion that this generalized younger and diverse target audience will save the American theatre. Ironically, only a few theatres that really want to serve this audience produce material to attract a younger and more diverse one. Besides savvy programming choices, these theatres employ marketing and engagement activities, such as flex passes and reasonable ticket pricing, to interest this younger and often less financially secure demographic.

New plays and musicals such as *Spring Awakening*, *[title of show]*, *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *The Book of Mormon* and *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* attracted younger demographics. They were not written with the intention of exclusively serving sixteen to twenty-five year-olds, but they attracted this audience. Perhaps these shows captured the interest of this younger audience age range because of their content, the youthful identities of the affiliated artists, and the shows' identifiable protagonists. Neil Pepe, Artistic Director of The Atlantic Theatre, said of *Spring Awakening*, "When we got into previews at The Atlantic, one of the things that you couldn't have predicted was the effect of having fourteen teenagers onstage singing these incredible songs and talking very truthfully about what it means to go through that time of your life. It was definitely the youngest audiences we had ever gotten and the most diverse" (Cote 16). Eventually, once theatres, including The Atlantic, realized the potential of tapping into this younger demographic, the publicity, advertisement campaigns, and word-of-mouth buzz reflected this interest to find younger patrons. Parker said of locating a young audience:

> We knew this would appeal to younger audiences for sure but we knew that wasn't necessarily the audience we were going to get right out the gate. You know, we are a

> mainstream theatre doing risky work and stuff but our average ticket buyer is certainly not a teenager or even someone in their early 20s. We knew it would take time for it to catch fire, but we did attract a youngish audience because of our traditional older audiences initially. It was interesting to see how many people who saw it in its earliest week here were recommending it to younger people that they knew or brought their kids back to it or sent their kids to it.

Older traditional audiences of The Atlantic were generating the initial buzz about the show and, by word of mouth, sharing it with this younger generation, believing the show was also of interest to them. Instead of dismissing it as not for the American theatre, this older audience also recognized the young bodies onstage, the music, and the subject matter of the piece would resonate with youth and attract this audience to the theatre.

The definition of theatre for young audiences, children's theatre, and youth theatre must allow for flexibility, such as identifying *Spring Awakening* as a show for youth which is not immediately identified as children's theatre or youth theatre. The work is appropriate for teens which is defined as theatre for youth. Children's Theatre scholar Moses Goldberg's definition of children's theatre from *Children's Theatre* is a formal theatrical experience for an audience of children (20). A misperception exists that TYA must originate from a producing and/or academic institution and by writers with the intention of creating work for young audiences. Limitations such as necessitating that work is affiliated with a theatre institutionalizes the work and makes it difficult to assume work created outside of those designated settings constitutes TYA. In the United States, a handful of regional theatres are strictly dedicated to creating work for younger audiences (e.g., Seattle Children's Theatre, Minneapolis Children's Theatre Company, and Childsplay). Often these theatres create work to educate and to also socialize the audience,

besides introducing them to important art. However, work does not have to originate from these specific institutions to have the same positive effects on youth. Many 1970s and 1980s treatises on children's theatre present theories on why it should teach morality. For instance, Davis and Evans write, "Every group engaged in producing theatre for the young should have clear-cut and valid motives related to the audience and uncontaminated by selfishness and self-service" (42). Many pieces, including *Spring Awakening*, were artistic vehicles that would appeal to them. They were also designed to satisfy traditional audiences. The priority was to create a strong work of art that was the vision of the artistic collaborators. Specifically, the goals were to defy artistic convention, to be ready to produce the work off-Broadway, and the lofty aspiration to see the show to Broadway (Parker interview). Parker felt the piece did appeal to multigenerational audiences for various reasons. He said, "Everyone's been through adolescence. It would express something everyone would relate to in retrospect but also have resonance with young people. In some ways the play is built as a look back on adolescence more than it is before for people who are teenagers—although, obviously that audience did grasp onto it" (Parker interview). Although Davis and Evans want children's theatre always to teach values and morality, as progressive educators, they also recognize the flexibility in defining work for children's theatre. For example, Davis and Evans write, "No single form or style is, in and of itself, superior to any other. Therefore, it is as foolish to reject the play script as unnecessary as it is to assert that the script is the exclusive vehicle for successful production" (43). This education in morality is less evident in *Spring Awakening*, which advocates freedom of expression and feeling.

Spring Awakening's challenging themes regarding violence and sex were productively unpacked via social media, though the internet is usually accused of being a platform of negative exposure and means to take advantage of youth. A general criticism of social media is that it

preoccupies and over-stimulates young adults and children, in addition to making them vulnerable to marketers that are monitoring their every move to manipulate them. There is a fear that marketers co-opt children via their online activity to expose them to sex, junk food, drugs, and alcohol usage, among other negative stimulants. Although social media is a newer forum for this negative type of exposure and possible corruption, these criticisms have been made of nearly every technological, media, and artistic device or genre (e.g., film, theatre, music, radio, television, etc.). Negative and violent types of marketing are omnipresent on the internet, television, billboards, and in classrooms and on the playground. Without avoiding or destroying these platforms, which are advancing our society and increasing our access to information and knowledge, we must be critical and discerning of the material that appears on them and how we can educate our children as to why it is problematic and how to avoid its challenging aspects.

Spring Awakening was labeled controversial because of the visceral discussion and depiction of sex onstage and subtle commentary on sexual education. The production received much online exposure that teens and children easily accessed, which some parents accepted their children engaging in while others did not. For teens and youth, the internet became a secret means to learn and share about the show, often outside of their parents' purview. There exists an embarrassment for parents to discuss sex with their children. The 2011 Missouri legislature passed a bill enabling parents to remove their children from sexual education courses; a Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll reported that in spite of the fact that only fifteen percent of Americans say they want abstinence-only sex education in the schools, thirty percent of principals of public middle schools and high schools where sex education is taught report that their schools teach abstinence-only; according to NPR, forty-seven percent of schools teach abstinence-plus, while only twenty percent teach that making responsible decisions about sex is

more important than abstinence. Perhaps Americans' fear of their children having sex, their children's sexual exploration, and of their inability to openly communicate these ideas became the cause of concern regarding the piece (or at least what producers thought they had to explain). The parent characters in *Spring Awakening* assume their children are not having sex and do not teach them about it, which causes their demise. The production anticipated an adverse response to the explicit material from parents. In preparation for this response, producers Ira Pittelman and Tom Hulce posted a letter about the content on the musical's website to parents:

> Dear Parents: When we decided to bring this show to Broadway, we knew that the issues explored in Frank Wedekind's 1891 banned play were still relevant today…We have received such a major response, not just from young people, but from parents wanting to share their unique experience with *Spring Awakening* and its role in helping start a conversation with their sons and daughters. They tell us that the musical opens the door to discuss the topics the "Adults" in the show fear to discuss or are determined to ignore. We have been surprised and gratified by these stories and the fact that so many parents report that the show's characters and plot inspire such meaningful dialogue --- sometimes at the theater, sometimes later at home, and sometimes both. We thought the best way to illustrate this would be to have you hear from other parents and teens who have experienced *Spring Awakening* together and draw your own conclusions whether you would like to share the musical with your family.

Producers positioned the musical as a conversation starter between parents and children. Through this highly artistic offering parents and children could have a dialogue about how the themes in the play resonated with their lives and relationships to each other. According to Parker, there was little negative feedback from parents about the show and its subject matter. By

using a social media device, the website, to inform parents about the content of the show and by giving positive examples from other parents about its virtues, including educational possibilities, producers informed parents about what they and their children were seeing.

When asking children's theatre artistic directors what they were most excited about in theatre for young audiences, a number confessed that they thought *Spring Awakening* was the best work they had seen for youth in a number of years, although it was not an evident fit for children's theatre. Despite the fact that the show didn't originate in an institution dedicated to TYA, even these leaders recognized the attributes of the work for young audiences, including, for instance, exposure to Bill T. Jones' choreography, among many other elements of the artistic and design aesthetic. Parker said, "Bringing in Bill T. Jones to do the choreography was a stroke of genius because he had a vocabulary that was very good stylistically in line with what they were trying to do with the music." In addition, the challenging discussions regarding sexual exploration and virtuosic and diverse performances by young performers, among other features, made the piece fit for an intergenerational audience.

Spring Awakening was an artistic sensation that found one of the most coveted audiences in American theatre vis-à-vis viral e-communication. These systems change how the next generation processes information: how they think, how they receive it, how they react to it, and at what speed. Social media is creating new forms of socialization and redefining the word community. As children today grown-up digital, they are learning these new socialization patterns and openly and honestly expressing themselves for the entire digital world to witness. As a result, many of their interests, desires, and beliefs are easily located on the web.

Theatres with an investment to attain younger audiences that recognize adults in their twenties, teens, and children are becoming empowered through this expression online. The industry is attempting to respond to their needs and desires, whereas it largely ignored or marginalized youth before. Younger audiences are much further along in navigating social media with much ease and enthusiasm, while theatres' interest is very much piqued but still concerned about its productiveness and digitized communication's relationship to a live and ephemeral art form. The opportunities and possibilities to engage online are infinite. However, in any iteration of the scenario, the work must be good or at least of great interest to the audience to engender this further exploration. Houseworth astutely contends,

> If you just produce a good show, people will come see it.' That's the best way to develop audiences. Just produce a good show. And I thought, 'You're right and you did it.' He produces work that artistically appeals to different demographics whether it be the young or people of color. When I use social media younger people see it. Although if you're not interested in going to the theatre, then you're still not going to go to the theatre. I can't Tweet that, 'I'm going to sell tickets to 20 young people who have never been to the theatre before.' It takes time and I have to get to them in a roundabout way: hook them on my brand and get them to like me as a person and get them to come.

The overt agenda of audience engagement is to provide context for the event and personalize the experience for audience members, providing a further opportunity to interact with the art and its subject matter. Effectively and productively, this engagement assists in the selling of seats while simultaneously educating the audience. These sites are for the multitude of fans that crave to continue the experience outside of the allotted performance time. Also, online trafficking educates companies about the work audiences find appealing. Wolf contends in

Changed for the Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical, "Although exploring fan websites cannot unlock the complex mystery of musical theatre reception, it can reveal some clear patterns of use, engagement, and utterances of feeling." Because social media's usage was proven effective early in the campaign for *Spring Awakening*, led and practiced by the production's target audience, The Atlantic theatre and commercial producers immediately gravitated towards adopting it. Young audiences taught a traditional system a new method to deepen their relationship with the production and compel producers to see what attracted them to it. Producers listened to this younger demographic and as a result accomplished the goal of decreasing the age of its usually older audience. Since the production, The Atlantic has been known to produce even edgy and newer work (e.g., Simon Stephens' *Bluebird*, Adam Rapp's *Dreams of Flying Dreams of Falling*, *Chimichangas and Zoloft* by Fernanda Coppel). Although the show was of interest to younger audiences, never was it called a theatre for young audience musical. The producers did not ghettoize the work by labeling it as TYA or of exclusive interest to a young audience. Instead they learned what was of interest to youth culture by treating them as respondents and artists, and, as a result, the musical became more inclusive and intergenerational. Attending *Spring Awakening*, I was not only struck that the audience was primarily young and their energetic but also that many seemed to bring their parents with them to experience the show.

Conclusion: The Young Artistic Collaborator

Traditionally dramaturgs research, develop work with the writers, prepare the actor's packet and study guides, write script reports, communicate with agents on the status of scripts, lead talkbacks, build lobby displays, and collaborate in a rehearsal room, among other things. As a professional dramaturg and literary manger, one learns the position requires working with marketing and in development, in addition to serving as the intellectual for the theatre and the liaison with the public. The position is multivalent and, as a result of its flexibility, challenging to define. After over a decade serving as a dramaturg for regional theatres as part of the staff and as a freelancer at small storefront theatres, for week-long workshops, and in academic settings, I understand how to navigate a rehearsal room, when to listen, when to contribute, when to assist and when to lead. Proehl writes of dramaturgy:

> To many audience members the dramaturgy of the play will itself be invisible as its sometimes silent cousin, the dramaturg. And yet, it is this invisibility – this dramaturgy which is felt but not quite seen – that enables so many palpable wonders and terrors. (20)

I am a dramaturg who is invested in telling stories that do not always follow linear structures but those that deviate in language, form, and design. I am interested in works that educate, complicate identity politics, and serve intergenerational audiences. The rooms I produce my best work I share with collaborates who destabilize the theatre hierarchy, who challenge themselves

and all their fellow artists about the work while expressing a deep respect for each others' craft. Through each of my case studies – *Muddy Boots*, *Katrina…*, *Harriet Jacobs*, and *Spring Awakening* – I approached each work as a dramaturg or as an audience member with a dramaturgical sensibility. The art exhibited onstage and learning about and/or participating in the process of their creation served as the entrance to study the child respondent method. Besides interviewing members of the artistic teams and administrators from the affiliated institutions where the work was produced, I made first-hand observations as to how the art was made, how representatives from the target audience were involved, and my contribution to the creation. Operating as both an observer and a participant, I considered what was effective about the youth respondent method and what proved challenging to the art, audience, and artists. In some instances, I felt the method failed when artists were not invested in the process, when the participating students seemed bored and disinterested, and when little of what was achieved onstage was a result of the integration of this method. At other moments, I experienced how artists felt their work transformed as a result of this method and how they located answers to questions they once grappled with independently regarding the works' development. Simultaneously, youth participating in these experiences felt pride in being able to identify how their ideas contributed to the realized plays and musicals. Each relationship between artist and target audience differed, as did the youth respondent method to attain feedback. With the various iterations of the youth respondent method, these relationships were reciprocal, in that there was an exchange of ideas and creativity between audience and artist. In order to study this method, the collaborations between institutions, artists, and audiences were analyzed. All the artists involved in these processes relied on collaborations in an effort to create their best work.

Playwright and frequent divisor with Pig Iron Theatre, Deborah Stein, wrote in her blog entry "What I Mean When I Talk About Collaboration" for *HowlRound*:

> It is a truism that all theater is collaborative; the community aspect is a huge reason why so many of us do it. But I often find myself facing the reality that a large segment of the institutional American theater is set up in ways that limit, constrict, or otherwise thwart true collaboration.

My model rehearsal room is rare, as is the type of collaboration I desire for this room. The practice of true collaboration, as Stein describes, requires a unity, which she believes emerges from the strength of the collective, who includes an ensemble of writers, performers, directors, a dramaturgically-minded designer, "the leader, the guide, the sifter, the problem-solver, the avid and rigorous collector of whimsy," and often these roles double.

This desired collaboration I experienced with the workshop of *Muddy Boots* at the Bonderman Festival, particularly with the writer Deni Krueger and the audience of fifth grade students, represents this type of collaboration. A day before the staged reading of *Muddy Boots* at the 2007 Bonderman Festival, the artistic team was still grappling with the pivotal dramaturgical question of "How does the evil snake control the child protagonist Abby?" We decided to address this question in an education residency (e.g., in-school drama workshop) that I led with a class of thirty fifth grade students. The lesson plan for the workshop explored the dramaturgy of the snake character's tactics. For one of the activities, we divided the class into pairs with students either playing "Abby" or the "Snake." The child playing the "Snake" was asked to discover ploys to entice "Abby." The "Snakes" offered the "Abbys" candy, money, tickets to a monster truck rally, among other things. And then, one shy little girl offered "Abby"

to keep her father safe in Iraq, which answered our critical dramaturgical question and was subsequently added to the play. Krueger and I observing this single moment quietly uttered by the child dramatically altered the play tonally and its narrative conclusion. When the children attended the reading, the child recognized the change of the ending that her performance influenced, which gave her a sense of empowerment, as well as contentment, to recognize her discovery in the tapestry of the play.

This was my firsthand encounter with the reciprocal relationship between dramaturgy and creative drama. For *Muddy Boots*, the youth respondents influenced the narrative structure of the play during its development but, as was the case in this situation, the dramaturg was necessary to help the writer interpolate the children's creative response. Concurrently, new play development practices educated students in the language and theatre arts and offered them an opportunity to discuss the difficult subject of the play – a parent leaving for war. This moment shaped my dissertation project, motivating me to locate other such instances and ask challenging questions related to the practices, while also discovering another responsibility as the dramaturg to facilitate audience engagement not only after the production has opened but throughout its development. All my case studies demonstrate different and productive iterations of the youth respondent method. From studying the youth respondent method used in these examples, I found that a new more collaborative form of development exits that disrupts the traditional playmaking process. In this process, the audience becomes a collaborator, who moves from passive observer to active participant.

Chorpenning's reception studies and gathering of empirical data altered her plays during the production process. Krueger relied on the youth respondent method developed through a series of question and post-reading discussions of the developing play and a creative drama class.

Both Diamond and Tremblay employed practices of the youth respondent method at every stage of creation for their plays produced at regional institutions. In the case of *Spring Awakening*, artists and produces recognized the success of youth's social media practices to engage, exchange, and via grassroots methods promote the hit off-Broadway and then Broadway musical. In turn, youths' participation in the *Spring Awakening* campaign illuminated that the show was for multigenerational audiences. The success of these plays dramatically varied considering number of productions, financial success, and critical acclaim. But in each interaction, collaborators recognized the importance and relevance of involving young audiences' thoughts, questions, and ideas in their creation processes. Primarily, as a result of being in the moment of creation, these collaborators retained little documentation of their findings but articulated in length how youth shaped their thoughts and ideas about their work.

The practices, often rooted in creative dramatics, inquiry-based feedback, and reception studies, are inherently intergenerational with origins from child drama. The work this method inspires to create also attempts to serve audiences of differing ages. Instead of isolating the idea of TYA, it opens the possibilities of various points of intersection and qualifies it as theatre for families and is reflective of the ages of collaborators who helped create the work. In *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*, Marvin Carlson describes the conventional theatre space as one in which there is the viewer and then the viewed – separated by performance, which often maintains a hierarchal spatial division. The youth respondent method begins to create a slippage between these segregated spaces so the audience and the artist traverse each other's territory. In order for this movement to occur, collaboration must exist. The youth respondent method is contingent on collaboration: the pluralistic practice allows the voice of the audience to move from silence to in the moment discourse.

As the youth respondent method continues to further progress in inviting young people into the process, it may resemble the work produced by the Albany Park Theatre Project (APTP) in Chicago – a community based theatre. APTP is an ensemble of youth artists, who collectively write, choreograph, compose, and stage original performance works based on their own and others' real-life stories often related to their community. Since 1997, APTP has created more than fifty performance works integrating theater, music, and dance. They have performed for more than 25,000 people at their ninety-seat home theater in Albany Park and at venues throughout Chicago and beyond. The company shares stories of urban teens, immigrants, and working-class Americans; it cultivates future artists while encouraging the continued education of its ensemble; and through theatre attempts to "humanize issues that impact real people but too often get discussed as abstract concepts;" and enriches the cultural vitality of Albany Park. Through this model of production, youth serve as the primary collaborators, who inspire the ideas of their work, the development, and every aspect of the production. Their audiences consist of members of the Albany Park community, many of whom have connections to the performers, as well as professionals from the Chicago-area interested in the company's work, dedication to social justice, and/or the themes of the play. The company doesn't set out to produce work for young audiences but instead serve an intergenerational. Resident sound designer with the company, Mikhail Fiksel said in an interview:

> There is a lot of [youth] feedback in the work that APTP does. But all of that is by/from the young actors themselves. By the sheer nature of their performers, their plays are often accessible by young people, but their primary focus is the stories of the community, with a target audience (if any) being families from the community.

The pluralistic work APTP hopes to create places youth at the center of its development process because they are the performers, directors, writers, dramaturgs, and the audience.

Writer and scholar, Susan Chandler Haedicke "Dramaturgy in Community Based Theatre" writes:

> Community based dramaturgy helps transform the passive spectator into the active subject of the situation: the individual who can change the course of action. This dramaturgy is inseparable from cultural politicization and community activism. (130)

The youth respondent method is a collaborative conglomeration of dramaturgy, theatre in education, and reception audiences. This process forecasts the next vital progression of theatre when more attention is paid to listening, communicating, and making choices about our art by learning from the intergenerational audience, and in turn teaching, entertaining, and influencing the audience about their choices and futures both onstage and off.

From this study, I recognized that the youth respondent method could be identified and tracked as a model of new play development. Although this study was concerned with work produced for intergenerational audiences – middle school aged children, teenagers, young adults and adults – this method, which bridges pedagogy and practice, could be conceived for any aged audience. Theatres are invested in further connecting with their audiences in an effort to diversify and to build new and younger constituencies to replace older ones. In order to accomplish this transformation, these institutions must embrace risk in terms of programming and development of work. This dissertation addresses an alternative development method that contains this element of risk, which is empowering to the audience. Proehl writes, "The vision of liquid collaboration is an overly scheduled world is often just that: vision, not reality.

Conversation takes time and given the reality that most theatres – academic and professional – work with staggering time deficits on something like an ever-quickening production line, frustration around silences produced by day planners without empty slots is a given" (41). It requires a greater investment of time, finances, and granting of agency to the audience. The youth respondent creates a new and rigorous commitment that is a challenge for theatres but also results in a deeper connection with the audience, which is desired. The audience is respected as a fellow collaborator in this practice rather than a solely a receptor of the material performed onstage. To a degree, this processes begins to fulfill the purpose of engaging with the audience. The youth respondent method becomes another discourse to converse with the audience on their perceptions of the work, the relevance of its themes, and its interest to them. Through this method, as was the situation with each of the case studies and articulated in the accompanying interviews, the artists took a greater investment in the audience, connected with them through a more personalized experience, and developed a greater respect for them.

Many discoveries about the possibility to connect with the target audience were made in this study, while how successful and specifically what the impact of this work on the audience was were not identified. What locates a performance as successful is inherently subjective. A financial success may not be an artistic success and an artistic or financial success may or may not have relied on an audience engagement method, such as the youth respondent model. Many factors contribute to what deems a work successful. Through this qualitative study the processes of the youth respondent method, who the collaborators were, and when and how the method was carried out were the greater points of concern than what was a successful immersion. In terms of the future of this study, it is my hope to not only incorporate the data created by youth through the method but also the target audiences thoughts about their engagement with the project (e.g.,

what youth learned, felt, were dissatisfied by, enjoyed, and felt empowered by). Interpreting youths' reactions to the model and interviewing young participants would assist in solidifying this processes' challenges and successes. A slippage exists in defining TYA by how it is created and what it is. As seen with each of this dissertation's case studies, the work was initially created for one specific audience and through development, productions, and building audiences grew to becoming work for intergenerational audiences and the diverse audiences of the future. The youth respondent method breaks a divide between the audience and the artist. The process creates an entrance for theatres to have a dialogue with their audiences about the work and subjects that invigorate them, and institutions learn how to further challenge their audiences and provide them with new work and material. With the application of this process, young audiences learn how theater is made and how their ideas and feedback may contribute to it. This practice is educational and invigorating to the audiences, theatres, and artists of today and of the future.

APPENDIX:

INTERVIEWS

Interview of Alli Houseworth
Former Marketing Director Woolley Mammoth

Why is social media important to you and your work?

Alli: Well, that's a complicated question. I think that it's primarily important because we're facing a big sociological shift in communications as a whole. I think the decline of the newspaper industry is the most applicable example. As a society, we're moving away from a culture where we seek out the advice of an expert, which would require waiting. You want to see a show, a review, you'd wait to see what a critic of the NY Times says, and then, you base your decisions on that. But now because of the advances in technology we have access to information faster and easier than ever before so the role of the critic has changed. That's not to say that people don't value the opinion of a critic; I think a really great review can increase sales. But it essentially…social media creates a network of word of mouth. So I think that it's my job to be captain to what all kinds of people are saying about shows and to leverage what the film critic has to say.

How new is social media usage in theatre? From what I found, people keep saying that theatre is one of the last terrains to discover social media. Do you find that to be true or do you think that is a field that will grasp it even more in the future?

Alli: I think that we are absolutely incredibly far behind. I would say not just theatre but the performing arts in general tend to be behind the curve. If you look to tech companies they are ahead of the curve, but performing arts are behind. It's disconcerting to me to find opera

companies and classical music companies seem to be more advanced with social media than theatre companies.

I don't know why. Maybe they are in a worse place and are therefore more desperate and more willing to try things faster. I think for theatre there are a lot of reasons why we're not up to speed - especially in commercial theatre. A lot of it has to do with unions you know whereas classical music you can make an audio recording and it is pretty easy to solicit participation in that way. If anyone is musically inclined they can play a piece of music. They can contribute they can do mash ups they can send in their own vocal recordings. But not everyone is an actor. Theatre is a cooperative process. You can't send in a reading of a sonnet or what have you. And also the union restrictions make it difficult for people in my position to use social media. I have to be wary of recording and wary of intellectual property with designers, how that gets distributed, who gets credit, etc. But also in the regional model if you look back to…here's my theory. The regional theatre model as we all know it was created in the late 50s early 60s and only very recently did we see the first founding artistic directors begin to retire. And then we were all expecting this mass exodus of the leaders of regional theatre because they were all at retirement age. And then the economy fell in 2008 and so these people held onto their jobs. They didn't leave. If you chart the growth of social media, Facebook was created in 2004 and Twitter was founded in 2007. I think that had all those people left and the economy had not tanked, a new upper management would have come in in 2007/2008 and there would have been a much faster adoption of social media because a younger generation of upper level management would have understood the culture. But they didn't so we're still hanging out with people who are used to the old producing model and the old producing way of doing things with print mail, print

advertising, that sort of thing. You can say that a lot of people in upper management in regional theatre are closed off to the idea. They don't want to do it because they don't know it and they don't trust it, but also because they don't know what it is. There is a fear of adopting a new principle where you don't necessarily know the outcome when the method you've been using for the last 30 years has been working. "Why should I funnel this vast amount of resources into this new way of thinking that I don't know will work?" In addition to that we have the thing with our patron base. The base still have the late 50s 60s people attending the theatre. They attend the most, have the highest income, bring in the most revenue, and most likely not to be on social media. But you should ask them the statistics. The people over the age of 40 are the most growing demographic across the board who are using social media. So I think it has to be…I would never stop print advertising or mailers. You have to do both. How do you do both? Do you keep a marketing person on staff who knows direct mail and subscriptions who understand print advertising and hire a new person who understand the online and social stuff? I think that would be ideal, but nobody has the money to do that. I don't think the problem is that people don't...I think are slow to understand the importance of social media in the industry. The challenges are twofold: first, we need to understand how to use it because it's not a broadcast medium it is social and engagement; second, we also don't have the money to build the internal resources to hire a social media consultant on staff. There aren't many theatres that had the foresight to do that. Woolly was one and Portland Center Stage and the Writers Theatre were the first group who hired someone on staff to do social media as their job.

What was the last one you mentioned?

Alli: Writers Theatre in Chicago.

I didn't know that. That's fascinating. How active is their social media?

Alli: It's fairly active. In this instance I'm talking about people who have social media or new media in their title. So they're expected to do that more than 50% of their workload.

I had a conversation about where someone who does this lives. Engagement? Is this something you deal with constantly in marketing and dramaturgy? Does it live in its own world?

Alli: Do you want me to respond to that in respects of commercial or regional theatre?

Let's go with regional theatre and then some on commercial.

Alli: It's definitely the $64,000 question. Because it's an engagement strategy—it's not just about marketing—as far as what we know marketing to be traditionally. If I were a consultant and was advising a group on how to use social media, I would ask what your goals are. What's your mission? What are you trying to achieve? What kind of voice do you want to promote out into the world? In my opinion it belongs in the marketing communications world, but that's because I don't think of marketing in the traditional sense. For me personally it is a branding tool. At Woolly we try to make it encompass literary, development, sales, everything, production as well. So for me the staff that is the most in the know about everything that is going on in the organization is the marketing and communications department. Because you have to promote the activities in the theatre anyway so you're always tapped into the events and what's happening across the board. I think Center stage in their blogging comes from dramaturgy department. I think Woolly's social media has a strong dramaturgical bent because we produce new plays and that's our mission and that's important to us, but it's not just about sales ever. In the commercial world, I would actually say the commercial theatre is further behind than regional theatre in the use of social media. They are older and they are much more stubborn and much more set in their ways. They are also from a producing model much more concerned about the bottom line. It's commercial. They have an advertising office they have a press office they have marketing offices

which are fairly new. The first marketing office on Broadway started in the late 80s. They were big on grassroots stuff like going out to gay bars. So no one really knows who has charge of social media. A press office will have access to a Twitter account and Tweet out a press release or feature story. And, the ad agency will post on Facebook a photo of House Burnt, but does that keep consistency of tone? No, because you have multiple people in literal different offices in different buildings in NYC doing different work which loses consistency of voice, which is one of the most important things. I've always imagined the commercial world as some sort of revolutionary, but if you're a lead producer in a show like *Spring Awakening* you hire another lead producer that has nothing to do with an audience. So the lead producer can focus on the artistic development and investor relations, and then, they basically work with the other person who advises the press office, marketing, and advertising. That person would run the social media. They're like literally in the same room, the person who is in touch with the artists and the one who is driving the entire communications strategy.

In my recent research, there was a conference in Chicago grappling with the debate between whether social media is more for audience engagement or marketing. The conference leaned more toward audience engagement. Isn't it a simultaneous effort?

Alli: I'm going to say something that you're going to quote me on and I'll kick myself in the face. I don't understand why we're still talking about audience engagement and marketing as two separate things. That is my real question. I can't respond your question because it makes me so angry that we've segmented audience engagement from marketing.

I agree with you completely. Overtly, it's about engaging the audience to come see the show to have this experience and to buy seats so they can continue the experience. There is a morality that is attached to selling it such as capitalism. Yet, audience engagement is euphoric and has something to do with selling seats too. Then, there's the argument that you can participate in the social media and never have to go see the show. What's the point of that?

Ali. If they like what they get from social media they will buy a seat. If you have a conversation with a person—I don't care what industry you're in— if they like you they will come back to you and buy something from you. My final answer is: I don't know why we talk about them as two separate things.

Do you feel like it's regionally led trend right now or is the US solely doing it? Are there any foreign countries pursuing social media campaigns for theatres?

Alli: I actually don't know what's happening internationally. I don't know much about international theatre at all, but my impression has been that it's always been less commercial than American theatre, which I think is a fact. It's always been a little more about having a conversation probably because the work that is produced is a little less safe. So if you're less commercial and you're doing work that is more controversial which sparks conversation. I mean, conversation is all social media is. So you would think that they would adopt those principles nationally. I do know that the National in England is the best ever in my opinion. They hit everything commercial and not commercial, institution and not institution. Somehow they can do it all.

Do you feel like social media's prime purpose is not just conversations about how they want to capture younger and more diverse audiences, since the irony is they are not producing work or catering to younger or more diverse audiences. Do you feel like social media is a tool to attract those younger audiences?

Alli: Sigh. Yeah. That's a pretty loaded question too because the last interview I did for my thesis was with Kevin McCollum who produced *Heights* and *Avenue Q* and *Rent*. And he was very anti- audience development. And he said something I will never forget: "If you just produce a good show people will come see it." That's the best way to develop audiences. Just produce a good show. And I thought, you're right and you did it. Because he produced work that artistically appealed to different demographics whether it be younger or people of color. When I

use social media younger people see it, but if they are not interested in going to the theatre then you're still not going to get them there. I can't Tweet and say I'm going to sell tickets to 20 young people who have never been to the theatre before. It takes time and I have to get to them in a roundabout way… hook them on my brand and get them to like me as a person and get them to come.

Could you share an example of a social media campaign that you've used at Woolly or elsewhere? In addition, could you talk about some of the stages and major steps of those that were successful?

Alli: Yes. My favorite one to talk about is the *Golem Goes to Washington* Campaign. Can I tell you two stories about that? The first one involves an artist and the second one involves all the major touch points of communications. With *Golem* the idea came from driving in a zip car who we have a business partnership with taking … (restart tape) Last summer we had a show here at Woolly called *One Man Lord of the Rings* which was written, created, and performed by a man named Charlie Ross who is Canadian who has traveled the world with this one man show called *One Man Star Wars.* So he was in Washington with the *Lord of the Rings* show and he had been at Woolly twice with the *Star Wars* show but this was the first time for *Lord of the Rings*. I was taking Charlie out to a television interview in Virginia and picked him up in a zip car. Interestingly zip car is one of his business operations. We were driving along the mall to get to Virginia and he was talking about how the last time he was in Washington it was too cold to the tourist stuff and no one was around because it was the holidays. I knew that Charlie had his own personal blog. I said, "Why don't you go around town and take photos of yourself in front of these landmarks and put them on your blog and I can repost the link from you blog to our stuff. "And he said, "Great, that would be great. I'd love to do that." We get to Virginia and I had the idea to photograph him in front of the zip car because zip cars heat on social media and I wanted

to promote zip car for business. I sent it out and from that I got the idea of "What if Charlie went to all these different landmarks instead of being Charlie he was the character of Gollum from the show? It makes for a better photo because it's a more interesting looking character and you can spin it in this funny way, having this bizarre Gollum character attacking Washington. So he agreed to do that. I took him around town and took photos of him at various landmarks and various businesses and every day we posted a photo. I think it went on for about four weeks. We posted a photo of him in front of one of these restaurants. But to make it a successful social media campaign you need a strong network. You can't ever make anything go by role. If anyone comes to you saying they'll do a viral video campaign. You can't just make something great. You have to have a strategy. So when I was creating a list of locations I made sure they had a Face book account and a Twitter and they were active in those mediums. So instead of going to a restaurant across the street from Woolly I made sure we went to a restaurant that had an active social media base. So we went to Chef Jeff's because of the way he does his business. And with Chef Jeff's in particular, I was able to email him and say "Hey can we do this thing and will you re-Tweet it and repost it to your people after we do it?" And that's the key. You don't want to be the only one putting the message out there. You want people to re-Tweet and repost because you're reaching networks beyond your own personal network. That's how you build a follower base and that's how you get more interest. It's publicity in that way. So for me that was a success because we were reaching audiences that we wouldn't normally reach through a traditional Woolly social media base. However I think that as an institution the two perks were engaging with an artist and created a good experience for him and something he was excited about and he wanted to do and replicate in other cities he goes to in the future. And it was the first major social media campaign done at Woolly, so there was a lot of staff involvement and excitement as

well. So not only were the businesses re-Tweeting but the staff was as well. I was new here at the time so the staff's being so excited by it and being on board was a great internal institutional support. For the social media fundraising campaign was hugely important because we actually made money from that. For me the huge success was the engagement with staff and artists.

My second story was recent, what we did around the *Agony and Ecstasy* of Steve Jobs. And you can go and look at it on our Facebook page. It was called show us your eye crazy. We were in the fortunate position of having the iPad 2 released about two weeks before our first performance. Maybe one week. Another strategy while creating a social media campaign is having to hook—and I would have to say it's a marketing, pr, and social media strategy---to be aware of current events happening around town that have to do with your show. Like Capital Pride is happening during *Booty Candy*. You have to be a part of Pride. So if the iPad 2 is released before you do the *Agony and Ecstasy* of Steve Jobs you have to be there. You have to use that to leverage your show because then it becomes news. It's not just about the arts; it's news about something beyond the arts. They are getting coverage and exposure in this different world. I was in Texas and I sent every member of my department to a different Apple store in the DC area and they waited in line all day. They got there really early—the first ones—and the idea was that they would talk to everyone in line waiting for the iPad 2 and tell them about the show, pass out postcards, and report like journalists what was happening throughout the day in the lines. So they would Tweet and they would Facebook what was happening, like, "Oh the line is five people at this time" or "here's a photo of so and so" that they would send back to Woolly so we could post it on Facebook. They also wore tee shirts with the show logo on the front and the QR code on the back so whoever was standing in line could scan the back of their tee shirts and be sent to the show's website. And for that show we had QR codes on everything.

<u>I just found out about QR codes and I think they're great.</u>

Alli: Yes, QR codes are great. We have them on everything for Steve Jobs and *Stand Alone Die Ou*t. We put them everywhere because we knew tech people would know what they were and that's what we wanted in the audience. At the same time, we had in advance asked Woolly staff to contribute stories of their apple obsessions which were posted on the blog throughout the day. I was in Texas so I was Tweeting and Facebook from the iPad 2 line at the popup apple store in downtown Austin that they set up for South by Southwest. The cool thing that happened there...there were a few things. One was actual journalists showed up at the Georgetown location around 5 or 6 o'clock whereas we had been there all day. So we actually had a journalist from the Examiner asking one of my staff members what had happened. They were like "Oh I'm so glad you were here to tell me what's been going on." And we had a few blogs and articles. That was a huge success because we got picked up in other print or online journalism publications which were super helpful for us. We actually got a call later from a woman who worked at one of the Apple stores who wanted to purchase group tickets to the show and promote the show to her staff. And of course we wanted Apple staff members to go see the show; that was an important group for us to get. The other thing successful was another one of our staff members had a conversation with this guy that is the head of this fetish community in DC—and where would you ever meet a guy like this—and his name was British Lucky Paul who has been a huge help and support for us in promoting *Booty Candy*. So we developed a relationship with a stranger who was able to help us out with a show later on. So the highlights there to break it down is to create an entire public relations campaign around the show so you're tapping into social media, marketing, press so you're covering all your bases there. Obviously it was artistically aligned with the show. And we tapped into a current news event.

Alli, thank you so much. You have shared valuable information especially on social media. Thank you.

Interview of Devon Smith by Kristin Leahey
Public Broadcasting

Devon, can you talk about your interest in social media—how that started and about your training in it?

Devon: Sure. I was working at the corporation for public broadcasting, working on their strategic brand for the 2010 fiscal year. They had just gotten a new large corporation for digital media so I was helping them work through this strategy for how they should be sending money from the federal government to help public media stations connect with their audience more online. I just had a great opportunity to talk to leaders in the field and speak to a lot of deep thinkers about how public media should be engaging with audiences online. And I went back to working with Yale Repertory Theatre after the other project was done and they wanted me to launch the strategy for their social media campaign. They had been on MySpace back in the day (late 2010) but wasn't on Facebook, wasn't on Twitter, hadn't done social media. But my job was to create a strategy for them on how they should create their social media and there wasn't a lot of knowledge in the department around use of social media strategically. After going out in the theatre field and started talking to you, and a lot of the other regional theatres who are doing what just trying to figure out what is going on out there. There was really no one who was looking at the field at large and how the field was used in social media. So I started looking at the processes by looking at what other theatres were doing and what was working and what wasn't. The first big project I put together was on Facebook. The 80 or so border/regional theatres and put together an index on how they were using Facebook and the return on investment they were getting on Facebook. And I put together this sort of list of all these 80 theatres ranked by how well they're doing on Facebook. It showed the amount of effort they

were putting in and the amount of engagement they were getting out of their audiences. And I started blogging about that particular topic and things just launched from there.

Was that study mainly for regional theatre?

Devon: Yes. These theatres are bringing in $2 million to $10 million although a couple are larger than that and they're scattered all over the US.

In terms of the use of social media for theatres and from your findings and others, is theatre a nascent realm for using social media? Is that true and is it growing? I keep hearing from colleagues and others who say "theatre has not caught on to social media as quickly as other organizations and now we're starting to catch on." Is this true, and if so, are we catching up?

Devon: Theatre and arts more generally even though they are nonprofits, they're really focused on that detail and finance mechanism. So far most theatres have focused on social media as a way to sell tickets; whereas you know a branch I've worked with Treespot so have a lot of professional service organizations. In those situations they're spending a lot more time thinking about awareness of an issue and empowering their users to spread word of mouth online. There is a lot more community engagement effort on social media. I think the trick with arts' organizations and theatres more specifically is to start thinking less about using social media to sell another ticket and more use of social media to bridge the gap between the times when their audiences are in the physical spaces. So as a theatre, I am only speaking to you—an audience member—once a year, maybe twice a year, maybe at most five or six times a year before social media. I only get to see you when I'm in physical proximity to you. With social media, having an additional online relationship allows you to have conversation with people throughout the year at any time. It allows you to have a different relationship with your audience members. It's not so

much about selling the tickets as it is about engaging in the different kinds of conversations you can have with an audience.

So you're observing there is a distinction between audience engagement and marketing in terms of the use of social media?

Devon: Yeah, I mean if you're only using social media for advertising and sort of getting your name out there, there are a lot better platforms and formats than created a large fan base on Facebook. Digital advertising still works and some traditional advertising still works. So if the vast majority advertising for your theatre is on social media, you're probably not being very effective on it.

What social media tools do you find to be the most persuasive or fulfilling or successful in your own work? From the recent conference in Chicago, it sounds like your big form is Tweeting and Twitter; if you could talk about that and others as well that would be really helpful.

Devon: Yeah. So I think it depends on each…it's not about the tools or the platforms; it's about what people are using each of those for. I think if you paint in really broad strokes, each platform is a really great opportunity to have a really connected group of people and the theatre can be your audience. But your audience is going to be all gathered on Facebook. Facebook is a great way to have an ongoing conversation with them, a sort of back and forth, because all conversations are threaded on Facebook, it's easy to keep track of them. On Twitter I think you have a lot of different kinds of constituents. Theatres might have followers or might be following journalists who are local trends. You're having a different kind of conversation on Twitter, much more one-on-one having you know fifty different conversations with fifty different people whereas on Facebook I might be having one conversation with fifty people. It's a different way to use both of those tools. We're starting to see more experimentation with platforms like YouTube and what it means to be a performing arts company that also has the capability to

create original content on YouTube. And then looking to a platform like Four Square where more of the social interaction happens between users than between the theatre company and the user. So how do we use these social platforms to empower audience members to connect with each other rather than just connecting with us?

Have you been using QR at all?

Devon: Yes, so it's interesting that I just came back from a long trip across the Southeast Asia and saw QR codes everywhere. Even in the most remote villages from the middle of nowhere in Asia I would see QR codes in shop windows as a form of advertising. And any mall or retail outlet I would see a ton of QR codes and on subway systems as just a way to get information. And in the States QR codes are much less common and we're definitely in an area where the media is very excited by the possibility of QR codes but the population by and large does not know what one is and doesn't see the value in it or understand how to use it. I think a few theatre companies have experimented. Most recently Nashville Children's Theatre is experimenting with QR codes on their Facebook page. And they're allowing audience members to download programs (a paper version of a program but on QR code) from their Facebook page before they arrive at the theatre to attend the event. It's a good way to experiment because they are both going green and it increases the number of programs that they are getting out but reduces the number of programs they have to print by using QR codes as a way to download information. I think this is just the tip of the iceberg with what QR codes can allow theatre companies to actually do. It's an interesting case study there.

In terms of younger audiences and *Spring Awakening* and the grassroots social Media campaign that successfully attracted that population, it also seems at the same time current statistics suggest that the growing population of social media users is leaning toward 45 and older. Do you find that social media is also attracting audiences of certain age groups?

Devon: Two things you'll find useful. The reason 45 and older are the quickest growing social media users is because they have such a small base to begin with which if you start with 50 people, adding another 25-50% increase. The reason that stuff is tossed out there is because there was such a small user base to begin with. The over 45 population is growing quickly but as a sort of raw number they are still a small number of social media use. I think what's interesting about younger users is that they are entirely dependent on mobile. I saw a great Pew study—I think it was on the internet just the other day—that the average female teen sends about 6,000 text messages a month. The average male teen sends about 4,000 text messages a month. So it's not just girls who are doing it. Guys are just as interested. Teens rely basing their internet experience as mobile first and PC second whereas my generation in their 20s and 30s base their internet experience on PC first and mobile second. And this is very different from folks who are in their 40s and 50s who very much think traditional first PC second, mobile far behind. I think mobile technology creates a different kind of social experience. In Four Square where it's fundamentally different than Facebook because the Four Square assumption is that you're out and about and not sitting behind a desk. So the kind of social experience is that Four Square and other mobile social opportunities allow for are just really different, and I think it's the future of social exploration is having the idea that you're going to be mobile and you're not going to be sitting behind a computer when you have these social experiences.

Do you feel like, in terms of different social media usages there's one that's more prevalent now or one that's most popular with this younger demographic?

Devon: Certainly, text message has always been a main point too. I know platforms like Forum Spring began as Q&A platform that definitely had a strong teen sector/demographic with asking anonymous questions and having anonymous people answer back to you. It's a little gossipy. Tumblre has always been a teen or late teen early 20s demographic for short term blogging. Sitting right between Twitter and a regular blogging platform. When I think of platforms, I think that teens and younger people are getting interested in shorter and shorter forms of content. So a big study came out recently about teens says they aren't blogging but they're more interested in text messaging. So they're interested in getting a message out there and being conversational but not in writing a 1000 word blog post. They're more interested in posting pictures and a 200 character commentary about that photo. I don't know if that's because younger people are looking at the world differently and are actually interested in short form content or it's just because they're younger and younger people tend to have shorter things to say and having developed the communicative capacity to talk in longer formats and content. I don't know if the future of social media is shorter form content or if it just happens to be the case because younger folks when they're young create shorter form content and when they grow older develop into longer form content.

Is there a particular theatre project or project related to a show that you could explain the steps you went through in order to infuse a social media campaign?

Devon: I'm sure you've talked to Ali about everything Lori has been doing and I've been really impressed with following them and their media campaigns they've been doing. In terms of building social from the ground up Arena Stage and the new play development community has been really impressive in asking how we have not captured the new play market and social media

from the beginning. They are interested in the process of building what new play development is and what it means to Arena Stage. More generally it's hard to point towards any forward-looking theatre companies. I was having a conversation at Culture Lab. But it's interesting to see that museums seem to have really been on the forefront of these new social media art's organizations. I think one of the reasons is that you have people in their spaces for a longer period of time and when people are in their spaces they can be more social. I may go to a museum and I may go there with three or four of my friends and we're going to walk around the museum for two or three hours and we're going to have a conversation during the entirety of those two or three hours. (switched tape sides) The thing with theatres is they're only open like two or three weeks at a time. And when I see a theatre space, for the vast majority of the time that I'm at that theatre I'm supposed to be silent. So trying to figure out where social media fits in that experience of being at a theatre is very different than a museum. I think a museum has a different capacity to engage with their audiences.

Are you aware of any particular controversies that have arisen with using these tools at all? I have noticed there has been talk/controversy over the use of Tweet Seats, for instance. That, I think, is distracting to the audience. Have there been any other occasions?

Devon: I don't remember the specific details but last fall--I think it was a theatre company in Chicago—an artistic director commented on the blog of a critic I believe and it made a big…it started driving a conversation about what the personal responsibility was of staff members, whether they were speaking for their companies using social media. I think another example is Mike Spacey posting on his blog an excerpt of a Yelp review by a random Yelp user that talked about his performance piece at Woolly. Someone came to see it and he took offense to what the user on Yelp was saying because this was a work in progress and the person reviewing in on

Yelp took it for granted that they could review a piece of theatre the same way they would a restaurant. And that started a conversation around how do we talk to our audience members about online reviews. Do theatre companies have the ability or the right to have that conversation with our audiences? I think it's a really interesting question.

Devon, thank you for sharing your insights and for your time. Thank you.

Mikail Fiskel - Freelance Sound Design
Responses to questions by Kristin Leahey

What interests you in theatre for Young Audiences?

It's a broad question. Obviously there is the basic notion of "art" in young people's lives, empathy, etc… Nothing new…. Perhaps for me, involving younger audience can allow for a more potent experience.

I think theatre can be powerful, and especially so with youth who can engage with it on a more honest, more visceral and less jaded. Oftentimes, older audiences respond cerebrally first, almost hiding behind critical analysis, distancing themselves. The modern audience has a tendency to lean back and perceive theatre as a one-directional stimulus. Younger people, especially those of the modern day interactive world, can engage and can do so a lot more freely and deeper. In a way, perhaps subconsciously, they recognize live performance as a dialogue, a two-way experience, and if a production succeeds in reaching the intended young audience, it can be very evocative, powerful and significant. For both the audience and the performer

What projects for young audiences (e.g., Lifeline, AST, and APTP) have you been involved with that children's feedback was part of the development of the play/musical development and/or the rendering of the production?

None of the YA projects I worked on involved direct feedback as a step in the actual process, but many of them rely on preview audiences to gauge the success of our efforts and to make any final adjustments. Adventure Stage Chicago conducts a Q and A after every performance, and since the previews (1-3 performances after tech is completed) would be followed by additional rehearsals, this would be a perfect time to digest the audience responses and the

questions/comments made during the Q&A and the show itself. Not exactly scientific, but a helpful tool to finesse things. Lifeline Theatre does not conduct Q&A, but also continues rehearsals after previews. Redmoon's Winter Pageant goes into another week of full day rehearsals after a multi-performance weekend. Many changes (often those informed by audience response) are implemented, sometimes very drastic ones and so the final product could be rather majorly adjusted after the audiences are involved.

Obviously, there is a lot of "children" feedback in the work that APTP does. But all of that is by/from the young actors themselves. And furthermore, I don't know if I would consider APTP's orientation as Theatre by Young Audiences. By the sheer nature of their performers, their plays are often accessible by young people, but their primary focus is the stories of the community, with a target audience (if any) being families from the community.

If so, were children ever involved in informing the design (whether it is sound or composing music or set, lights, costumes, etc.) during the process?

Sometimes the adjustments made would be designed related. But rarely from any direct involvement, just observed responses. A quick example would be this:

For Redmoon's Winter Pageant 2010, one of the musical numbers involved a spectacle moment using bubble machines. We were working on a musical and lyrical bridge to coincide with that moment. First preview (and every preview that followed) made it clear that the release of the bubble essentially triggered such delight and excitement in the young audiences (kids would start screaming, running around, and actively engaging with the performers). It was evident any lyrical content, especially story-telling would be complete lost in the chaos. And the song was

adjust to be a simple musical bed during the bubble moment, and incorporated a settling down aspect to try to cue our excited audience to move on with our show.

Do you think that children's immersion in these processes is useful? Does it create stronger work for the target audience?

It certainly could be useful. But as I've indicated I don't have any experience in that. And I would say that there is also definitely a value in young people experience theatre as "consumers" of art and encourage to have a response that is un-prompted, one might say "unadulterated" (pun unintended) response to piece of theatre.

For Katrina, the music and the play did not always function cohesively. Acknowledging there were issues in the script, why else was this the case? What did you want to accomplish with that design? What was challenging and exciting about it?

I'd say it was rehearsal structure issue. We opted for using professional musicians (which had its pros and cons). They were paid for performances not rehearsals. None of them were from New Orleans, and though they were all nice and willing participants, there was a sense of lack of incentive to rehearse and really work on the development of the play. By the virtue of their extensive experience in the "gigging" world they were more used to and prepared to "show up and play". As a result, it fell upon myself and the music director to plan/create ideas and the musicians didn't really join the process until tech. And so there was never really a connection/involvement one desires in an ensemble piece such as Katrina.

I think for the most part the goals of the production were accomplished – a musical language was developed, the musicians played an active role in the production, etc. The next, more ambitious

step would be full integration of the musicians beyond just a great moving pit band, perhaps beyond sonic component. Giving the musical characters agendas, stakes, and perhaps, storylines. But that would require a rather different development process.

Follow up about APTP.

I don't qualify APTP as theatre for Young Audiences, because unlike most TYA companies, APTP does not SET OUT to produce a work for young people. Their mission is to tell the stories of/from their community and to do so in an inventive, evocative and ultimately effective way. They don't preoccupy themselves with who chooses (or will choose) to "listen" to those stories. Of course, people from their own community are interested and support the telling of these stories, and so do their peers (other youth) but also their families, and people outside of community of all ages and backgrounds and involvement (or lack their of) with Albany Park or the subjects explored in their project. And yes, being a youth ensemble, there is perhaps, a hint of youth perspective, but it is not the intended target audience or primary identifying aspect.

At APTP how are you involved in the development process of work? How is it different than working on a new work at a regional or storefront theatre? How are youth involved with the development of work at APTP? How much agency do they have? What are you teaching them?

APTP is a company dedicated to devised work, in which the youth ensemble participates in almost every step of the development process. They interview, contribute to transcripts, workshop and experiment on staging, etc, etc… My involvement with the project seems to be far beyond a designer. I often seem to step into a role of a director, choreographer, just a brain/eyes/ears in the room. This seems to be the case with most designers on the project…. A lot of early development seems to be about work-shopping with the ensemble, reacting to their proposals, curating/guiding – but they are strong creative force in the room that often can inform the direction a particular piece/sequence can take. Sometimes, I come forward with a staging suggestion (sometimes related to sound, sometimes not), and that can spark the development, but it is rare that the ensemble is simply told what to do. I think that beyond undeniable performance skills, their honesty and earnestness are their best tool/weapon to make powerful theatre. As such they have to believe and be invested in their work, not simply execute it. As such, my job (much unlike the work in a regional/storefront theatre) is to inspire and to teach tools/techniques (e.g. basic Foley concepts in the case of the "Francisco and The Cow" piece in Feast), and then, observe/respond/adjust/build on. This is still design but perhaps a little more nuanced aspect of it.

David Feiner - Artistic Director Albany Park Theatre
Reponses to questions by Kristin Leahey

Who are the artists and mentors that you find inspiring to the art you make? How have you shared this appreciation for these certain artists with the ensemble of youth artists you work with?

From my years studying and making theater in college, to my earliest years working in professional theater, through my years in graduate school, and the 16 years since, there are a good number of writers and directors whose work has inspired and shaped me, but whose art no longer especially appeals to me. Nonetheless, their influence has without a doubt influenced the way I make theater today.

The two theatergoing experiences that most significantly inspired me were seeing Complicite's "Three Lives of Lucy Cabrol" and Ex Machina's "Seven Streams of the River Ota." Both expanded my notion of how we can tell stories in the theater. Both were at once extremely precise in their staging and storytelling, yet expansive in their theatricality and imagination. Also, while both companies were clearly sophisticated ensembles with considerable expertise and access to top design teams and production values, there was a clear connection between their theatricality and simple forms of play. I remember leaving the theater simultaneously wowed and feeling inspired that I could do something in the same spirit with my own company.

In 2008, I took my artistic staff and design team to see Complicite's "A Disappearing Number" in Ann Arbor. In 2010, we went again to see it in New York. I wish I'd taken the teen ensemble to see it in Ann Arbor.

Do you see a lot of performance? Is there anything in particular you try to see? What are some of the productions/performances/plays that you've really gravitated toward (those that perhaps made you think differently about your art)?

I don't often go to see plays anymore. I prefer original work, with some authorial contribution by the ensemble that performs it. At the same time, I'm drawn to work with relatively accessible or clear storytelling, rather than highly abstracted work. I'm also drawn to virtuoso imagination; I love moments when theatrical imagination, skilled performance, and storytelling converge in ways that I've never seen before, and that I didn't expect. I also see a fair amount of dance. I'll make it a point to see anything Complicite does.

What do think about the play development process in regional theatre? Do you think it works? (Happy to provide a more detailed description of what that process I'm referring to is but I'm assuming you know what I'm asking) If not, why do we keep creating work using this model?

I haven't paid attention to the play development process in regional theater since I left drama school in 1995. It's irrelevant to the work I do today.

What's the role of social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, etc.) in your work with APTP? Do you think it's a helpful to make people aware of APTP and to update people who are supporters of the company?

We use Facebook and YouTube to communicate with "fans" of Albany Park Theater Project. One of the elements that draw people to APTP is the feeling of participating in our community. For some of our audience members, Facebook has been a way to do that between productions,

since it's fairly easy for us to share updates. But we haven't used it yet in a profound way, or found it to have a profound effect.

Why is the word "play" assigned to describe the work APTP makes?

Well, I don't really care what word is used to describe APTP's work, as long as it's not "skit" or "sketch." I don't think "play" is entirely accurate, as it conjures something rather more conventional and text-bound in many people's minds. But it's easy, and it's less pretentious sounding and more grounded than "work" or "piece" or "performance," which can scare some audience members. I do consider play as a verb to be a completely accurate word to use to describe our creative process, as we spend a lot of time playing together as we develop our...um, plays.

Does APTP have subscribers?

Nope. We do roughly one new play a year - and we only debut a new play when we feel it's pretty much ready. So, our model is incompatible with subscriptions. Plus, we've sold pretty much every ticket for the past ten years, so we haven't needed subscribers.

Who is APTP's core audience?

We have numerous groups that make up our core audience. Members of the Albany Park community (residents, business people, teachers), many of whom have a connection to our teen performers make up approximately 30% of our audience. Another 20% or so of our audience comes through group sales to student groups or other interest groups with a particular affinity for our social justice mission. About half of our audience is middle-class professionals, also allied with our social justice mission, or interested in the theme of a particular play.

How many teens have participated in the college planning program? Has the organization tracked the participating teen's progress after graduating from high school? How many have graduated from college?

Approximately 85% have gone on to college, and approximately 65% have graduate college by the age of 25, as compared with the citywide statistic that 8% of teens who enter a Chicago public high school will graduate college by the age of 25.

Interview of José Cruz –Part One- By Kristin Leahey

Playwright and Director

<u>What led you to become a playwright?</u>

José: I started as a playwright and later in my career I was trained as a director. I got my MFA in directing from the University of California at Irvine in the mid 80s. When I finished I was writing but I was never comfortable about sharing my work. It wasn't until I was at South Coast Repertory, right out of grad school, that I began working at the theatre there. The theatre at the time was the tenth largest company in the United States terms of budget and audience. The thing that really fascinated me about working at South Coast was their commitment to developing new work. I began working as a production assistant. I was in the literary office working with workshops of plays and writers. And that just excited me. So by the time I was at South Coast, I had been brought on for an NEA directing fellowship which brought me there full time for a year. One of the things we proposed to the NEA was some sort of sessions. I was intrigued in terms of two things. One was developing new works but also as a student going through the dramatic literature of the time, there was not anything or very little about Latino artists and plays, and plays written in English primarily by artists living in this country who were born and raised in this country telling those stories. And I wondered if there was a way to blend new work and the development of plays by Latino writers. So I proposed that to the artistic directors and their first question was "Are there Latino playwrights?" And I said, "Yes" and crossed my fingers hoping I was right. And then began the Hispanic Playwrights Project in 1985-1986 seasons. We put a national call out to companies and schools across the country and received about 108-109 plays that first season. Thus began this project that was to develop plays by Latino writers with

the idea of mainstreaming these writers. What we did then was -the amazing thing -as we ended up producing two of the plays the next season from the plays that we work shopped. That was an amazing feat to have two plays. Two of the writers were Arturo Iron and Lisa Loomer. Lisa Loomer would go on to write a number of other plays, but one of the plays that she actually helped theatre for young audiences with was *Bocon*. So it was just an amazing project and that project ceased after 19 years. But over those 19 years, one of the most important things was the development of new dramatic literature and fostering many writers. Along the way, one of the things I was interested in was developing dramatic literature for young people. We began to commission some of the writers for plays that we could produce and perform for young people in Orange County. One of the first playwrights was Roy Convoy; he is now chair at San Fran State. That began the process. During that whole process of helping other writers find their voice, I just wasn't hearing the voice that I had been raised with in terms of stories to be told. I continued to keep working. It was really the children that gave me the permission to write because I would go into the communities where we were teaching creative drama to children who didn't have any literature. I could connect with these children, so I began to write with them and eventually started writing for them. That's where the seeds of writing began. It was really by the mid to late 1980's I was beginning to say "I like this; this is kinda cool." I continued to do that either commissioning writers or by doing it outside myself. And that's how it started.

Have you ever written plays for adult audiences?

José: In fact I do both. Just last season I had a play produced at the Marquee Perform (which is really Planted Garden) in April I had an adult piece as part of the Humana festival at Actor's Theatre in Louisville. Then, in August I did a piece that was a *Rip Van Winkle*—a community based project out in Lost Hills, CA in the central valley. Working with the town in Lost Hills -

population less than 2000- and I had an 8-month interview with the community and discovered how to tell their story through *Rip Van Winkle.* In that piece that actually had adults as well as children and first time folks performing. In *Earth Songs* which actually opens this week at Metro. I leave on Wednesday to go to tech and do the opening. This piece has (similar to the Cornerstone project) 49 members of performers. It has the acting ensemble of Metro, the dance ensemble, a choir of 18 children and 12 seniors, a percussion ensemble, a beautiful director, and an original music score. Greg Bolin, who I believe is going to your university working on his PhD, is the composer on this project. I go back and forth in terms of young plays and adult plays.

What has been your experience with community-based theatre producing new work?

José: It's a wonderful experience. What you do is go to communities who just don't have — particularly this town Lost Hills two hours north of LA—the central valley in CA is one of the richest places of agricultural land in the world. It's amazing what it can produce there. But you also have the poorest working land. In Lost Hills, this community is made up of migrant workers and their only source of pride in their little town is their junior high/elementary school. About 500 kids go there. There's nothing in that town. There are two little stores and the hamburger/gas stops where everybody mostly just passes right through the town. The freeway passes right in the middle of this town. So there's really not a whole lot to do out there. And in the Central Valley there are lots of issues; people have to deal with drug addiction and alcohol and domestic violence. It's much like any city in this country but on a smaller scale. There's nothing for the children to do. We've been months going to interview different communities and towns. Ultimately we decided on Lost Hills because there was something cool about the place—even the name. And then we began this process of working with community by interviewing and

getting involved with community leadership. I think the long and short to your question is this is a unique process because you're doing theatre with people who have never had that experience. For example, in the production we had 46 folks involved. We had a family of three generation—the youngest being 5 and the oldest being in their mid sixties or something. We had teenagers and young people and adults and one of the mile markers was going to work at six in the morning and get out at six in the evening and be at rehearsal at seven p.m. It was amazing. Their lives had been changed. I know our lives had been changed as artists. And often times you're working as an artist and sometimes there just isn't a connection especially with adult audiences. They're subscribers and they're here to just see the show. There's a removed feeling with the people no longer one on one. It's not the same with children; they're children. But with this one, this was one of those magical moments where everything just connected. You connected with the people. You connected with the art. And you see art actually making a difference in people's life's because all the arts have been cut from their school.

What are some of the differences between writing a TYA play and an adult play?

José: You've got certain parameters that you have to work within. My feeling about the work whether adult or young audiences is that at the base it's gotta be good and the challenge for me is making it so that all family members could see it—a parent as well as a grandparent as well as a kid. I want it to be able to work on many levels. That's one of the things for me, a standard I like to work with. In terms of parameters, a number of the pieces I've been writing have been written in the format of touring. So you're talking about working with a small cast, having a piece that has to be trucked in, a setting that can easily be put up and struck. You're looking at sometimes one of the things that I'm dealing with is issues—either social issues or issues with diversity—

and we're working at how do companies deal with these issues in particular with color. For example, *Salt and Pepper* one of the things when I wrote it was with a child's play in mind, "How is this going to help child's play but also in terms of the representation of artists that they had there. How do you mix the two so that they do what they need to do and yet still deal with the issues that I'm interested in?" And ultimately other theatre companies have to deal with these same issues. I think one of the things about the form is that you have to get to these questions much quicker than in adult pieces. Everything is compressed into two acts. You have to go from zero to fifty very quickly.

Do you think it's a trend of playwrights right now to write with smaller casts in mind?

José: "Is there a trend?" I think just in theatre in general we always have that…it's always been difficult to get a play produced with large casts even at adult theatre. It's just really tough. Most of our TYA companies are touring. That's where the need is. So in terms of work I've been doing I've been trying to address that need. I'd love to write some places at a place where I could. But it's gotta be a big space.

As a director, how does that influence your writing?

José: I try not to direct my own work; in fact, I don't direct my own work. In particular anything that's new because I feel I can finesse it as a director. If there's a whole in the writing, I can fix it in the directing through more spectacle or sleight-of-hand sort of thing and I don't think that's a good thing. I want the work to stand up by it self. When I do direct something it's really difficult for me to get out of my head the productions I've seen of that play, but I'll do it much later. I won't do it in a professional setting; I'll do it in a university where I teach, where's it's focusing on my students or a tour but it's not that visible.

You have worked with protagonists of both genders is it easier to capture one gender's voice? And how do you respond to writing about another gender, the female gender?

José: Good question. I think for me, I love going back and forth between the two genders. I think to me it's…I look at an actress and I create. I just love them. A great of them is a part of me. They come from me. There's a piece I'm working on right now called *Thaddeus and Tila, a Crane Frog Love Tale.* And it's about a teenage frog named Thaddeus and a teenage crane named Tila. There's something about these two that I can relate to. They're teenagers but they're not yet teenagers; they're like 12 year olds. Little kids even though teenagers. The two are so awkward and together they recognize that they are not alone in this feeling. In those two characters there are some similarities and some differences. In terms of *Salt and Pepper*, I wanted this character to be strong and she's got her own issues with her father being a pecan picker and what that feels like what that means to her. But here's a kid that loves to read and to me she's a hero character along with Salt. But a hero character in a different way –she is a girl that plays against type. She is a champion of books and teaches a little boy to also come to a love of reading.

Your work often mixes realism with fantasy. What is your inspiration for doing that?

José: Here's an example. I don't know if you know Louis Plasagard [3-4 seconds of silence] originally came with a conversation that I had with Cory Madden at the Marked Day performance. And I had talked about the mother beast reading as a straight child not a beast or beast-like. And I thought that was an interesting idea." How do you deal with that world of the human and the world of a beast?" The beast came first even the name came first-Wuluman. Lily

was a being but we discovered that she's still too human. So we created a culture, two different cultures that had started in the same place but had gone off into two directions. The being began a Zobeing, a plant-like culture. And the Wulumans were still based on plants but they would exist by the night. And the Zobeings would exist by the day. In that the generation progressing from human to fantasy world. Another example would be just walking through my neighborhood just brainstorming I saw this family husband driving up in the middle of the road in his car—half in the car half in the street—yelling at the top of his lungs to his wife who was standing right on the grass in front of the house and the kids were standing in the middle and they both were screaming at the top of their lungs to each other and as I walked by I thought to myself as those kids were watching their parents, that house just went kaboom. It literally blew up. And that hard reality moment ended up becoming something in the play about *kaboom.* There are kabooms on different levels in the play. Lily and her home goes *kaboom* - a world that's going *kaboom*. And that's how I'll take something like that and find a way to tell it in a story metaphorically.

Some of your plays deal with historical elements as well as modern elements. Is there a difference in writing for different periods?

José: Yes. You have to research. I spent a lot of time researching *Highest Heaven.* It came out of some issues for me personally in California when we were dealing with that initiative called 187. Basically cutting services and going backwards in thinking and how we handle immigrant issues in California. Many of us felt it was an immigrant bashing initiative. And that angered me because I studied history in college and I could just see that that we had returned back to this cycle of fear. You know the first people to pick on are immigrants. And so that's what this initiative felt like to me. And in my research I found that in the 1930s during the depression, whenever we are going through an economic crisis that's when these things happen. That

Mexican-Americans or Mexicans of Mexican descent were put on trains and repatriated to Mexico. They were just dumped—left there. It happened to hundreds of thousands of people. And I thought "How can that be?" And at the same time the reality of, we will eventually migrate down to a place called Magdalena Bay to have their calves. Monarch butterflies travel from North American to these butterfly sanctuaries in the mountains of Mexico. It takes six generations for those butterflies to return. And there's something ingrained in their collective memories. "How do they make it happen?" They do it. And I thought to myself "These animals don't have borders. There are no borders for these butterflies." Now it begs a larger question, because people ask me this question, "You know you wanting to open up the borders and stuff like that?" All I'm saying is that this is what I was reacting to at the time. The trouble was in researching this repatriation, I was calling my grandmother who basically grew up here—she was a woman who came here from Mexico. And I said, "Grandma, what do you remember of the Depression?" And she said, "Muy malo, muy malo, very bad, very bad." I thought about her answer. She said "I remember when I was a little girl I was put on a train and we were sent to Mexico." And suddenly that thing I had read in a book was actually living history to my grandmother. The week before I had written a scene where Juracan was on the train with his mother and he's really sad and she's trying to cheer him up. And I said, "Grandmother what do you remember about that train ride?" And she said, "You know I'd never been on a train before; I was a little girl. It was the best thing I'd ever witnessed. It was so fun. We'd stop and get off the train and make fires, we'd eat and get back on the train and go." And I realized that from a child's perspective I had gotten it all wrong. It was really about the mother being saddened about what had happened. To the little child, to him, it was something adventurous. Suddenly a new

scene based on that conversation. In terms of my writing I go back and forth between reality and whimsy and fantasy. And *Lily* was a big step for me even though I'm further into that world.

Since many of your plays deal with socially challenging issues, when do you decide to write a play of that nature and do you select the topic first or the protagonist first? What is your process?

José: Sometimes, as in *Lily*, for me it was the image of this little girl and this mother and everything that followed. The issue of war and I was stuck in New York on September 11 for five days. One of the things that came out of it for me—and *Lily* changed after that—was what happened to children trying to survive war? How do they cope? That came later. In *Highest Heaven* the first vision that came to me was a butterfly. One of the coolest experiences, in terms of dramaturgy, was going to this butterfly sanctuary on the west coast called Pismo Beach. And Pismo Beach has these eucalyptus trees and thousands of monarch butterflies there. I went and read the play there by myself and it was amazing to sit there with all of these butterflies and read this play. It informed me in so many ways about that play.

Could you talk about the process of new play development and the collaboration that you go through?

José: I am finding more and more that I like to have a lot of people in the room. Eric Johnson's workshop, who directed *Lily* and *FPLOY* at the Bonderman, was one of the coolest experiences for me and this really opened up my mind in terms of how to use the workshop. And another graduate from your program Rick Smith was an amazing person. I met him at the Bonderman through Dorothy Webb. Rick was brought on and ultimately we discovered that Rick was a visual dramaturg for the path of *Lily* because it was so visual. It was Rick and Eric and Cory Madden that really help me find *Lily*. Because I had a lot of stuff there but I had to focus it. And

through the workshop at Bonderman, it gave me an interesting way to talk about the play in a different way. And it was a way through images. For example, Rick would be rehearsing and he would be just sketching images of *Lily* and the moment and then he would show me those later on. For example, there are moons in the play. And he began to ask questions just through the visual about the moons. "Are the waning? Are the crescent shaped? Are they full?" It began to help me answer questions about charting something like that. And then the scenes he created. If Lily could be put into a children's book, those images would go into that book. They were amazing. Half way through the process we went to a school. Usually we are connected with a class on your project. So the children read the play and when you arrive they're there to greet you with your cast and you hear the play out loud with the cast for the first time along with these children and afterwards you break away and talk to the kids about what they understood. And in that process, the children were actually the dramaturgs. They were asking sincere questions. Adults may be able to say it, but it just resonates with me when children say it. One of the things a little second grader said was "Where's the mom's and Lily's safe place?" The little boy was worried about the mother. And ultimately that safe place was found in the play. We went and visited the school about halfway through the process. One of the coolest things was we ended up doing this breaking up the class into three sections and asking them to write the story. The first group wrote the first part of the story, the second group wrote the second part, and the third wrote the third. And then we put all these pictures together that we had drawn and we could tell that they could chart Lily clear through to the end. But what was clear was the amazing moment of new play development happening in this new way. There was a lot discovered there. Actually before we went into production with *Lily*, we returned back to the paper for weeks just exploring the play. We had all the designers there - the cast of actors, a puppeteer, a video animator, the

director and myself for a week. And they bombarded me with questions. And I think through that process I think I answered every question I possibly could but came to realize it's not a play anymore it's like a film script. So I to go back and I had to own the play again. Get down to its most basic. But out of this came the newest version of *Lily.* When we went into production the team was there, the sound designer and videographer were there the entire time. And so we were able to continue to make adjustments. Even the way Eric approached the first day of rehearsal. The set was there. Everything was completed. So we went into rehearsal. The first thing he asked everybody there—designers, actors, everyone—to take a scenic piece from this play and explore what you can do with it and share it with us. And we shared it. And eventually somehow all of that was found in the production. There was a lot of new ways of collaborating that I found exciting rather than this stuffy dusty old way of doing traditional theatre. I thought that the new play development was more innovative than anything I had done as an adult.

Could you talk about the differences between working with the Bonderman, the Mark Taper Forum, other professional theatres and university theatres to produce a play?

José: Of course. Let me give you an example of a sort of a normal touring show at a professional theatre company. Not to say that one is less than another. It's just about resources. If it's a touring show they'll truck it in, the actors will set it, perform it, and strike it. With the Tapers production of *Lily*, they had, first of all, a Lord 3 contract, which state the actors are getting the same amount of money that the main stage actors are getting. There's a big difference in terms of that. Secondly, they have a five-member production team that is actually there as crew. They have a 3 hour load time. They come up and they load the show in with lights, sound, and a 17-foot truck. The actors show up, they perform, and they leave. Then it's truck. So these smaller companies have to take everything in. These guys are converting that whole space into a theatre -

pretty amazing. It's in terms of level and it all comes down to resources. And because of what *Lily* required with video animation…I can't even remember you question any more.

Kristin: It's all right. You answered the question well.

José: The thing about me is I'm always looking to be wowed. And it doesn't have to be anything with a big budget. I am just looking for some really creative thinking about how you approach a piece in terms of interpretation. I think what Reives Collins did at Northwestern was one of the most creative and inventive and uncostly in what they were able to do with how the letter rained down with Hannah ….that little umbrella. And on the end of that umbrella she would just release these little letters. It was perfect. So inventive and so theatrical I was so impressed with it. I love that inventiveness and problem-solving ways of doing things within the parameters of those productions, whether it's at a university or a professional theatre. I remember one year when we were doing *Heaven* at a workshop at New Vision/New Voices, the artistic director of a children's theatre company saw the play and we were having breakfast at one of the hotels that they were putting us up in and he just couldn't imagine how that would happen. I thought wow, this is a director of a children's theatre company? Is that possible? Well, the way Child's Play ended up doing it was the simplest way to do it. There's a scene where a hundred butterflies come flying up in the air. What Child's Play did was they had a ramp back stage and below it there was a little hole that the actor could remove—just a little piece of wood—and there was a hand underneath that held a fan beneath the platform. And they would just release these papier-mâché butterflies. We had to cut them to a certain degree a certain size in order for them to be caught by the air but they would rise in the air about 10-12 feet and it was glorious. And so simple. That was something not a whole lot of tech but what an amazing image.

How involved do you stay with a production when it goes into production?

José: I'm finding myself wanting to be more and more involved. I'm there saying "hey that's really cool" but mainly respecting the director's interpretation. But I'm finding now I want to be involved more not as a director but just to make sure that how they're interpreting matches up with what I was trying to say. I'm learning that it helps me become a better artist. We're collaborating instead of being like, "Oh, I'm just the playwright. I don't want to do that anymore. I want to be involved and a part of the creation of this thing. It's about collaboration.

Do you do a lot of rewriting during the rehearsal process?

José: By the time I'm in production, I try not to. Usually the ideal is to do only cosmetic things. Major rewriting is not a good thing because it could unravel really easily on your production and become something else.

Do you think there's a tendency for playwrights to differ on that point, rewriting? I know some playwrights that actually do a lot of rewriting during the rehearsal period. Is that common or do most people reserve?

José: There's a lot of rewriting during the workshop phase. I go through lots of drafts. I went through that with *Two Donuts* and *Salt and Pepper* and *Highest Heaven,* but by the time it get to production, a company has made a decision to produce it and is feeling comfortable with that workshop phase where you finally present and share it. When you're in production that's where we're just touching things up and cleaning things up—if nothing else than for my own sanity. It's not getting into major rewrites.

I have some questions in regards to your look at the diversity of Latino culture in your plays. How do you feel about Latino artists now being represented?

José: What I've noticed with companies across the country is that they may have an artist of color, whether African American or Latino or Asian American, but usually there is someone in the community they may work with or want to work with but they just haven't. One of things I've been trying to do is create work that first of all…in my travels I'm finding more and more communities that are dealing with this issue. Here in Los Angeles we've been dealing with this issue forever. In the Midwest and on the east we're seeing more and more migration of communities arriving in places that are less expensive to live there's more work and opportunities and all these communities evolving and all these companies going "How do we address this? How do we start this conversation?" And sometimes they have someone in their company or not but want to. So that's an interesting journey. I think some of the work that I'm doing is trying to address that issue. Here's another voice that is a part of America. How do we acknowledge and include that voice? And I think *Salt and Pepper* has been a good example of that in trying to introduce this little character. And also it's a hero character for those Latino children. Usually they will not see themselves reflected on stage. They won't see that.

For future Latino artists how is their work being produced? Is it more recognized? Is it easier now? Is it harder now than when you began your career?

José: The '80's was an important time period for the development of new Latino writers. The last playwright that came out of the Hispanic playwriting closet was Nilo Cruz. He won the Pulitzer Prize. I would say that there's been tremendous change. Now you can go to the library and pick up any of his books and anthologies. But has it really changed. I don't know if it has. You have

to have also artists of color in these institutions. I think that's really important because then if we don't have somebody there when the art is being talked about and made, if someone is not in the room, there's no one there for that question to be asked and raised. That's an important thing for emerging artists that to be creative you also have the responsibility of those who…[phone problems]…any artists of color. That is the point. Having those conversations because it is about inclusion. That is really an important part of participating.

I know that you often integrate music into your plays. How important is that in your work? How does that inspire you?

José: The new show called *Oak Jake's Skirt*. It's based on a book. In that book it's the story of an old hermit farmer who lives by himself until one day he finds a trunk in the middle of the road and ultimately finds out what's inside the trunk which is seven calico skirts. And he uses those skirts to patch up his pants and make new clothes for his scarecrow and little by little his life is enriched with color and it makes him happier. It's a really simple story. One of the things I wanted to do is add bluegrass music to it. And I thought it would be appropriate for this piece. Rick Angel has done the music for this piece; they'll tour it—begin actual rehearsals in January—at Child's Play and tour and probably come back in the fall for the company. It's a four-character piece but it's got live bluegrass music to it. I wanted to add bluegrass and I felt it was appropriate to this piece.

Have some of your plays been translated for a Spanish-speaking audience? And where have they been performed?

José: Some of them have been translated into Spanish - *Salt and Pepper* and *The Highest Heaven.* They have never been performed.

My last question is "What piece are you currently working on? I've heard you're going out to Metro?"

José: I've got *Earth Song* opening on Friday with Carol North actually playing one of the lead roles and her husband Nick. And *Earth Song* is a piece that is the winter solstice celebration for the city of St. Louis. It's got a 49-member ensemble. It's sort of a piece with little traditional text. It is basically sung. It is a play without words. That piece goes up in December/late January. *Old Jake's Skirt* premieres at Child's Play. And in March, *Thaddeus* and Rieves Collins' *Tila* premieres at Cincinnati playhouse in the park.

José, you are very busy and yet so generous with your time. Thank you so much.

Interview of José Cruz -Part Two - By Kristin Leahey
Playwright and Director

<u>What was your process before using this term I'm coining as "child responded method"?</u>

José: It was, you know, going in and just writing and I'd find myself and have a draft and taking it and working with the director and a team of actors and that kind of stuff. It's really just reaching in the dark and finding stuff. Early on in the process trying to understand all the components writing a play involves and how it grows. The emotional part of it as well—"Why am I feeling this way? Why am I frustrated? Why can't I seem to break or go around this?" So I had to learn that as well. But the process, this process now that I'm doing is, to me, light years in terms of what I've learned and gained. Now I can open up the process of creation up to collaborators of any age. You just never know where a brilliant insight, a question, an idea, or an image can come from. Instead of just one person, why not a hundred people?

<u>You mentioned yesterday that you began using this during three projects. Could you talk about each of those projects, their process and how they developed?</u>

Well my first intro to working with young people was at the Bonderman with *Two Donuts*. And later on I returned with *Lily Plants* a Garden. And then the other process has been with *Borders Don't Cater*. And then this latest process—I guess there are four—is now working here with Humana's Festival with Adventure Stage Theatre with DePaul University. With *Two Donuts* coming here to Indiana and working with a team of actors, a director, a dramaturg, and the element of having children be a part was something I had never done. It was fascinating. I wasn't

sure how to use that tool. It was a new tool that I had to discover. It wasn't until *Lily* that I really had the time between this project and *Two Donuts* to realize this is a tool as an artist that can help you in your journey to discover your play. And so I'll give you an example with *Two Donuts.* On that project were Gary Cornhauser and Graham Whitehead. Graham was the dramaturg and Gary was the director, and, of course, the actors. And so the children came, heard the play read on the first day of rehearsal and we had a discussion. That was really amazing to have that instant process given to you right then and there from the people who you're writing for. The second part of it was going to the school. And that's where I felt I was most lost. What can we share? Do a report about what we're doing? I learned about how brilliant Gary is. He talked to elementary school kids about Aristotle's six elements. And I thought "Whoa, how can he do that in such a simple way that is so amazing?" I came out thinking well you know at least we got up early it's a waste of writing time to come to this thing. I came to this thinking we have to go out there and do this thing. But it really helped me. The final process is the children coming to see the work and immediately going in and talking to them about it. Again this was a feeling of newness, yet a love for me, but not understanding it. But it wasn't until coming back for *Lily* that I could understand this tool. Also the way we put the team together. They and I were interested in how a child can track something visually. We used that tool now to our advantage and tracked stuff and ultimately collaborated with those children. There were things in the actual reading based upon what we had charted with them that day we went to the school. It opened up again for me the power of your collaborator and how it doesn't have to be an adult. It can be the children that ask the important questions that you are so adult and grown up and sophisticated.

Have you ever heard of this process used by other playwrights before the Bonderman?

José: No. I hadn't. And I was going to mention the other two processes I learned through this tool, trying to open up the door to these tools and Cornerstone approaches toward community based theatre where you would go to a community and interview an entire community, oldest to youngest with different scenarios and places. Food was always important to that. And then coming back, sharing the stories/scenario and script and they were a part of that. That developed listening, being still, and learning to be still. Because as a younger writer I went through all the emotions of "God they hated it." But to get past that is "Okay. Listen. What are people doing? What are they listening to?" And having a dialogue work. That was a gift, a tool that got sharpened. And ultimately working in this field—theatre for young audiences—with the collaborators and everything. The other element in this process is now knowing all the tools that you can use in new ways so that when Betsy Quinn approached me at the Bonderman last year with this idea involving more people with the process I was ready for it. Everything up to that point had been so successful. It all meshed. This sounds really talented and exciting and not scary, but something that's going to challenge me as a writer in ways that I have never been challenged before or since. Writing is a private process but just to say "here's this thing I want to do and I want you to be a part of it if you want to; let's see what we can come up with together." And that has been really…over the years I've always been private. But now I don't want it to be over. I think I do better work that way. And it gets everybody involved and they care what we're doing. So it's a great way to just…you have a thousand, hundred thousand questions in your head.

What do you think the students you're working with are getting from that?

José: That's a good question. I think that the children come to understand that we're in the same place here. In this place we're the same. We are artists and collaborators. There's no hierarchical way of placing people. And that is…their voice is respected. To me that's important. It's really amazing to see them grow whether in the process or imagining what they'll be like when they're collaborating with somebody else. What I've discovered with process is I've become rigid with old standards that we're taught. It's not thinking or working that way anymore because we all belong here. And I think young people are much more open to going there than adults. So again that's something I really love about mixing up collaborators. You have different viewpoints of what it is you're looking at.

What are some of the moments you've experienced through *Blue House* that have been influenced by these sessions? I know you've talked about a few of them yesterday.

José: Well you know involving all these young people. And some really amazing creative drama students in Betsy's program for undergrad and grad students at DePaul. Working with young people in elementary through high school and college. The whole spectrum of people who have worked through this process. So this is the first time I have ever had that kind of involvement before the play is even written. One of the things that I wanted to ask Betsy and that we've talked about was "Is there a series of questions you wanted to ask them that they could extrapolate?" She spent weeks working with them and exploring with them. That's amazing, the preparation for the weekend workshops with the kids. I came in at one point to see what they were doing at the school. I was blown away, just walking into a room where the kids are playing in an imaginary lot and suddenly Betsy comes in and scares them as the real estate lady and kicks

them off the lot. And they all run out of the room to another room and stick together and ask each other what's going on there. So you have the young people and the college kids who are a part of that generating. The other thing about that was what was there and what they were feeling and seeing and deciding they wanted to go back. They were all planning this out. So they'd sneak back into the room at night and looking through the lot and come back and draw what they saw in the house—picture frames and what was in those picture frames. And all these clues rise up. It was amazing to watch. This world is interactive and moving and it's so amazing to watch it. You learn so much by what it's doing. That was amazing. We went back at one point. Actually spent a day with Betsy in her big classroom and we talked about questions from that and ghosts and what scares you. We did some process stuff there. And that work that came out of it. Betsy always talked about the kids reading the script and how they were beside themselves. We read part of the play to the group that helped out and it was great to see what questions they have. I have to tell you that reading…that was probably the most powerful articulate insightful and deep discussions I've ever had with anyone. The group of people about the play. And it put adults to shame as to the quality of discourse we were having going into politics and these articulate things that blew my mind. Things like…there was something there that needs to be a part of.

> **It sounds like through the discussion the kids really influenced the play totally but there were also moments. Is there anything in particular you can think of that became a part of the plot or in terms of characters?**

José: There were both things. But also how they would make leaps about the question of mortality for a young person. They were making some of those connections because they don't

think of those things. And that was amazing, Betsy can tell you some of those moments, but that's what struck me the most. Making those connections.

How does your correspondence/exchange of ideas/discourse change as you're working on different stages of the play with the kids? With this one you began at a very early stage and now you're at the mid stage. How's the conversation with them?

José: We shared the script the first draft to them when I was here last time and in this process this week we haven't had any interaction really except for yesterday we went over to a community center and we had a little glimpse there of what the kids were tracking. It taught us something about their sense of language and what they're tracking and what does la lalona mean to them as opposed to a non-native-Spanish-speaking person who may not know that culture. That culture-specific reference. "How do you make it so that two different audiences (different age audiences) can track something at the same time and the light to on at the same time?" I learned yesterday that the lights go on at different times and it's now about trying to figure out how to negotiate the structure so that the lights go on at the same time. That was interesting. In this process, this week has been dealing more with the company. We went and worked with our young collaborators who have come away from that in just a short time. I would love to get back to that. I don't think we need another process. I would love another process to happen but I don't think we'll be able to get there.

What are the processes that you have used? Have you used creative drama and Q&A?

José : I guess the process that Betsy has used—these are things I don't know much about but has been opened to me as tools for storytelling and to use to write better plays and compelling stories and be broad enough for a large audience in that world. It has been an

amazing journey and process to me because it is a process that takes a lot of time. It takes a long time to go through this but any process takes a long time anyway. It's interesting going on this journey because I am right now so connected to so many of these people who have met. They have become close to me and these are things you feel more bonded to. It's like inviting people over to your house and saying this is your house too. This has really been good…given me many benefits. Not just discussion with people about art.

I think it is amazing how many different communities you've worked with for this piece. How has this been as an experience and a challenge?

José: Working at Haven on the weekend drama with young people there were very few young people of color, particularly Latino children, it was catered to public school classes. I was interested to go and reach out to that community. And so we were able to go to the Back of the Yards and go there and work with kids. It was fascinating because in talking to the Latino community and asking them about legends and folklore and stuff, we talked about one of the first things is ghosts. One of the things that they…their mythology runs deep within them and lives in them. Their ghost spirits are part of that whole thing. And so one of the things she's so tired of having to do is go to that house and bless it so it purges it of the bad spirits. So that was something interesting. But the kids knew less about ghosts but this one kid talked about a ghost experience that happened to his father. And these kids were talking about these things—ghosts coming out and sleeping in bed with the parents and the parents freaking out—things like that they talked about so real to them. The other thing fascinating was seeing when Betsy came in and saw what she was working with and this tells me why you have to have great drama in every class and school in this country. You have to have it. To see those young people and what art has done in their lives and how they communicate complex things in such articulate human ways is

astounding. If we had more classes like that our future would be better. I was interested to see that this community doesn't get that. And Betsy coming in and working with these children in this place that's pretty stable and secure and she has her system. The moment she walked into that space—it was chaos before she got in there and people having to yell at the top of their lungs to get the kids attention—when she was there, none of that happened. Betsy was like a magic woman who never had to raise her voice. She just has these techniques; everyone was just in awe of her. Really simple things – like having everyone sitting in chairs. It allowed everyone to hear one another; that room just echoes. Certainly by doing these kinds of things Betsy showed she knew what she was doing. By doing this, it made it more like a classroom setting. She dresses in a way that makes it feel like she's teaching. These kinds of little details she did help emphasize focus. Once that was done, we had one kid who was acting out. And she was great with how she dealt with him, the three strikes and you're out rule. Very simple concepts but boy they landed! They all started to work on ideas from then on. I was working in Lost Hills, California on a theatre piece with four hundred people two hours north of central valley and I went in and we were interviewing at the junior high school there. There were musical instruments on the floor of the gymnasium. Their music program was there. "What are we doing, you know? We're raising a community that doesn't have any way to communicate. It broke my heart. I think it's an amazing program. The other part of it is how available NYU, Becky, and Bobby at DePaul (as a dramaturg) and her students were to the students. It has been great in that sense that educators can see how we can involve our students and other folks who are in the same environment.

How do you archive input when you're in the room with students?

José: I write everything down. I don't have a notepad; I just take the scripts and write on the page, update it. You read the piece and I would make notes. The notes I make mostly are on the

script itself. Lenora's sitting right by me. And in our relationship, she'll turn to me and whisper to me like "I don't get this" or "I don't know if this was raised before" and I'll take her note and write it down. Lots of times I won't understand the note later and I'll ask her to repeat it and then write it down again so when I come back to that I know what it is. After the read, I'll take the sheet, date it, and start taking it to Grove City. I try to ask them what they've been talking about and look to it and then look at the page and make changes. If it's a big question or observation. Like today, I ran out of paper taking notes on the second half of the play. There are tons of questions and observations in there. I try to write as soon as possible to put it in there. And then I take that information and begin to make it and go "what can I accomplish tonight?" and set goals for tonight and what I think I can do. What I like to do is go back to my computer and make any corrections that I found in the reading. They tend to be cosmetic stuff. And if I have the stamina, I'll try working on something. But when I feel I'm taxed I'll shut it down, sleep, and then come back and tackle this section. It's pretty methodical in that way.

Can you talk a little about the value of hearing an audience responds to a piece during the process?

José: It's amazing to have your play read by actors and have an audience there to hear it and participate. I look at what the bodies are saying and what they're hearing and how they respond to it. Sometimes you get images and stuff. When she spoke Spanish, you could have heard a pin drop. Those kids were like boom because when they heard a language that was spoken at home that they don't hear in an academic or creative setting, it surprised them and caught them. And when someone is speaking Spanish and someone is not speaking Spanish, how are they tracking that? I was looking at what they're tracking. The rewrite I try to do is streamline it. Taking lines to make either audience member—Spanish speaking or non Spanish speaking—so that they're not two concepts separate but one main point. Sometimes people revisit these plays over and

over again and go "oh, well I have to do this" but you have to rediscover it. That was helpful. I think the kids were able to articulate really well yesterday about stuff. This is good. There are certain things that are working. They are processing it, getting it, made it to a, b, c, and maybe d. I'm trying not to be the center of attention. I want to cut the cello tape and let the conversation go. In a way I am really a fly listening. I know not to talk too much about it because you spend a lot of energy and you want to live in surprise as you continue to bring in stuff.

Are mostly kids involved in the productions?

José: Yes, I believe so. I know Mary Kate has been very conscientious about organizing a bus of students from the community to come and see the show for free and I think that's great. We also talked yesterday, based on what we heard that times are good to mix up the audience so you have half a house of Spanish-speakers or people who speak two or more languages just to see what that mix is like. I like that idea. To me it goes back to what Danny Hawkins says about going in there and trying to mix up this audience so you have a different dynamic happening there and that informs the audience in a meaningful way about what they're watching. The perceptions may be turned a little bit too both sides. She's again with Mary Kate I have to say there are some unique producing things she's doing here that can be applied in different places. It depends on the success it will be as a piece of art by the company and how it will be received by the community is as a piece of art.

As to this "child response practice" do you think it will become a standard practice in TYA development?

José: Well, I don't know if every process is…every process is unique and has different factors that have to come into play. I think time and resources in this process have been spread through

the Chicago Humanities Festival, Adventure Stage, NYU and DePaul in terms of how they have brought these different things together in order for us to take as much time to develop. It is a luxury. Many times many theatres don't have that luxury. The other part though is that there can be refined in any new play development so that it can ultimately help the theatre, the writer, and engage in a much deeper way. One thing I learned with Cornerstone where, I was creating art but I knew that art and I knew who those actors are going to be. I knew that mother and that son and daughter of…there's something really deep about that. And in the regional theatre, you don't have that audience. Subscribers are coming in and you don't know anything. And in good storytelling you're trying to connect with them in that way. But this, to me, is a different way of making art that was really cool and personal and connecting with people on such a deeper level than I ever have as an artist in the old tradition.

Do you think this is a practice that you will use now in all of your work?

José: You know I've applied it this week. It's all about planning which has been amazing with this group. The amount of planning that you have to do in order to achieve these things. Again, another element that I don't know I'll have again. You have established theatres but do they have the people to help you do that. In this case what's really cool is that a lot of the artists I'm working with are very brave and still evolving as artists and I think that's perfect because we're shaking things up and rediscovering the wheel for ourselves. It's exciting. To me to look at this process I don't feel like I'm out of it, I'm a part of it and we're all in the same place.

José, thank you so much for all your great insights. Thank you.

Laurie Brooks Interview Question by Kristin Leahey
Playwright and Educator

What pedagogical experiences have you had teaching writers for playwriting, playwriting for youth, and in other genres of writing?

Taught playwriting at The Cultural Arts Center, an arts magnet high school in Syosset, NY, for four years. Ten years as Assistant Professor at New York University, Steinhardt School, Graduate Program in Educational Theatre.

Numerous workshops in playwriting and dramaturgy at national gatherings and festivals such as: American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE); Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN); Theatre for Young Audiences USA (TYA/USA); Featured Artist, Theatre Communications Group National Conference, Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, MN; Bonderman National Playwriting Symposium, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Indianapolis, IN; and New York State Theatre Education Association (NYSTEA).

Library/School visits with children as young as eight through high school.

Artist in Residence/Lecturer: University of Texas at Austin; University of Missouri, Kansas City and Arizona State University.

Local Fiction Writing workshops at Virginia Piper Writing Center, Changing Hands Bookshop, Tucson Book Festival and Arizona Thespian Festival.

What are you most passionate about your students learning/discovering in your classes?

In addition to the basics of the craft, particularly structure, the development of the individual writer is of paramount importance to me. I believe that writers advance through learning the craft, broad practical experience and developing a strong sense of self. Two psychological elements that I discuss in my teaching are fear and audacity. Fear can halt a writer in her tracks, but if recognized and dealt with, can be overcome. For example, I don't believe in the phenomenon of writer's block. These "blocks" are really fear. Funny thing about fear is that once you face it head-on, it's not quite so scary anymore. The second concept, audacity, is crucial to a writer's success. Playwrights must have the audacity to believe they can succeed even when others tell them they can't. They need to be prepared to take risks, because if they don't have the audacity to be wrong, make a big mistake, as my teacher used to say to me, then they'll never come up with anything original. I say to young writers, arm yourself with information, be brave, risk and believe in you.

What are some of the greatest challenges that you and your students face within an institutional academic setting? Also, what are some of the greatest challenges that you find in introducing students to the professional world, particularly as a professional playwright and author?

Class size can make a huge difference because writers need individual attention and instruction. Once the teacher has covered the basics, writers need commentary that addresses specific issues in their work. Smaller class size allows for this kind of personal focus and students tend not to slip through the cracks. Also, larger classes put huge pressure on the instructor to read too much material in too short a time span.

Often students will ask me, “Do you think my play is good enough to produce?” or “Do you think I’m a good enough writer?” These kinds of questions are irrelevant. I never make judgments about the future of a writer or his work. The real question is: Do you have what it takes to succeed as a writer? A writer needs talent and the willingness to work hard, but above all else, must be determined. Not everyone, no matter how talented, will have all three of these essentials.

I believe that teachers of the arts need to be encouraging to their students. The field will self-select without help from higher education professionals deciding who is and is not “good enough,” but students without nurturing may never have the opportunity to discover what they might become.

There is a paucity of opportunities for readings and productions of new work at universities and colleges. The development of playwrights needs to include the experience of new play development, since that is such a large part of success in the theatre world. I believe that more readings, particularly of one-acts would help fledgling playwrights, who need to have the experience of working with directors, designers and dramaturgs. Student teams could be supervised by professionals within the university.

Laurie, thank you for sharing your thoughts. Thank you.

Interview with Hallie Gordon by Kristin Leahey
Artistic and Educational Director at Steppenwolf Theatre Company

What was your relationship to *Harriet Jacobs*?

Hallie: I am the artistic and educational director at Steppenwolf Theatre Company for Steppenwolf Young Adults. And I was the director of *Harriet Jacobs*.

Last time we talked, you mentioned how throughout the year you were redefining and changing the educational department. What were some of the changes you made over the course of the year, now that you've had time to reflect on it?

Hallie: I think the biggest change was when Steppenwolf itself became more focused in terms of what they wanted to be as an art organization and institution and Martha Lavey the artistic director really was interested in engagement with the audience. We started doing talkbacks after every show for the subscription series. In thinking about that and looking at the work that Steppenwolf for Young Adults (SYA) was doing, the natural inclination was to have more of an engagement with the students. So my job is to figure out what is the best way to do that. One of the ways that I looked at was how are we going into the classroom when we were doing residencies. Then, we would go into the classroom before and after a class came and saw one of our productions—one of our SYA productions. But we went in with a lesson plan but no real kind of conversation between the teaching artist about artistically why we're doing this production and how we want to present this to students. We talked about plot, did a writing exercise, did a performance exercise, they came and saw the show, we came back out, asked them about the show, did some more exercises, and that was it. We didn't really allow for a moment of reflection a moment of real conversation that the students could engage in. With Michael Rhodes' help we did teacher training and we took both *Elephant Man* and *Harriet*

Jacobs and looked at them and said, "What is the line of inquiry that we want to go in with these? Now this is nothing new; Lincoln Center has been doing this for a long time with teachers. But it really helped me focus this idea. With *Harriet Jacobs*, it wasn't so much about going into the classroom and saying "Okay this is what the plot's about. This is who Harriet Jacobs is. This is the time period." You know? It was more about this idea of going into the classroom and asking this question "What does freedom mean?" And knowing that *Harriet* explores that and starts to understand that throughout the process of the play—as well as the fact that there are so many other themes and racism and all that other stuff that's going on but really what we wanted to do was open the minds of these students so they could walk into the production and get whatever is most meaningful to them and then have that discussion when they come back out. Also—and to me this was the most important thing—is not having a teaching artist walk into the classroom with "I need to get through a b and c in order to know that this was successful" because what happened when I went out and visited the classroom and visited the teaching artist, because they had such an agenda, they didn't allow for spontaneity in the classroom. They didn't allow for a student to ask a question that wasn't part of their lesson plan and that defeats the purpose of why we're in there. So this kind of allowed teaching artists to teach individually using their own aesthetic but also coming in with a clear kind of focus, a line of inquiry, and allowing that to open up the students for conversation.

How successful do you think that was?

Hallie: I think it was really successful. I think what it also did was it opened up more of a conversation during the post-show discussions. The post-show discussion wasn't so much about "what is it like being an actor" and "how long have you been acting." Those are all valid questions, but it was now more about an inquiry into the process. "What was it like performing

such challenging material" and "do you agree with Harriet's choices" and "did you personally learn something from this experience." Or "I don't understand why this choice was made, why she made this choice or he made that choice." And a discussion about that would take place. I think it allowed—enabled them to really speak from a place of curiosity and focus.

I would love to talk a bit about how you decided to do this adaptation of *Harriet.* Why was this book selected in particular?

Hallie: I didn't select the book. Lydia Diamond did. Lydia and I had worked on *The Bluest Eye* so we had already established an artistic relationship. So I wanted to work with her again. I said, "If there's anything you're interested in adapting" I was interested in doing another adaptation with her. And we went around and she wasn't sure, and then, she brought *Harriet Jacobs* to me and I read it. I was blown away that I had never heard of this woman prior to that. I went back and did research and looked on public school reading lists and *Harriet Jacobs* was on there, but I had never read it. I read the book and I was totally moved by it. I thought it would be great.

What was Lydia's relationship with the book?

Hallie: She had read this book in college and I think that she was also dismayed at the fact that she had never been presented with this literature before. But you'd have to ask her for the specifics. I'm not sure about this myself.

When you went to New Visions/New Voices, you went with a proposal, correct?

Hallie: We applied with a proposal—no script.

And when you went to the first rehearsal, did you have a script?

Hallie: When we were accepted, we needed a first draft of the script. There's a time lapse. So they needed the first draft because they had to cast it. So Lydia wrote a solid first skeletal draft that we walked into New Visions/New Voices with.

So that wasn't something that you had good collaboration on?

Hallie: I don't think so.

Was that from DC?

Hallie: No; McKinely Johnson worked with us from the beginning and he is someone that Lydia was interested in working with.

Did you bring one of the New Visions/New Voices dramaturgs to it?

Hallie: We actually didn't use a dramaturg. Lydia was not interested in using a dramaturg because the process wasn't ready for one yet.

Did the actors contribute? (I have worked with some of those actors).

Hallie: Did you really? How cool.

Yes. I know that some teams had the experience where the actors were very involved with the development process. We noticed from ours that the actors weren't so involved.

Hallie: I don't remember. It doesn't seem that they were that involved. Once in a while, Lydia would say something like, "does that line ring true to you?" and they'd say yes or no. Over all they were very present and smart actors, but there for us to hear the play.

What did you learn from that and how did the audience respond to it? Did that help your process? How was your experience at New Visions/New Voices and at the reading?

Hallie: Yes. One of the biggest questions—one of the things Lydia wanted to do with an all African American cast even though there are white characters in it. One of the things we wanted to do was cast with all black actors and see if it would work or if it would be too strange. It became clear from hearing it and from audience response that it was going to work and it was the only way it would really work and get across what Lydia wanted to get across. I think it also helped us in terms of how rhythms and sound and music can play a part in it and what was actually lacking was the balance between the devastating circumstances and the personal joy of a relationship. I think that we saw that was lacking and it was very depressing. You can't sustain that for that long. There needs to be more joy somewhere in there.

Was that a response of an audience member or was that something you saw?

Hallie: I think it was something that we realized. I feel like one of the challenges with the discussion after the reading in front of an audience was that it wasn't very critical. I felt like I wanted more specific feedback and I didn't need so much affirmation as much as I needed to know if it was understood or if it made sense. What's missing? What of her story is not understandable? Was the timeline understandable? Everyone was really polite with each other, which was nice but I've been doing this for a while. I don't need politeness. I need to know what's wrong with it.

How did you both come to the decision to put black characters in signature white roles? Were you able to read the audience or could you just hear it and you knew it would apply and work?

Hallie: All of the above. We had people coming up to us saying "we didn't really like it but it seems like the only way it could work." It's interesting because it turned out to be a slightly controversial, having an all black cast do that. We knew that potentially that could happen but we had the school of thought that this is not a black story but America's story. And by not having Caucasians present, it's as if we are not taking responsibility—we as in the white population—are not taking responsibility for this being America's story. But we are putting it on African Americans and this is their story and they are telling it. And that's legitimate. I totally understand that. There's another school of thought that is more "well you're not really bringing out the harsh reality. You're toning it down a little bit." And my feeling and Lydia's is that if you have a fifty year old white man coming onto a thirteen year old black girl that you are automatically going to shut down to that actual theatre piece that is happening. And, you are going to be icky by the actual fact that there's an actual actor up there acting this way and that there's something that is so awful about witnessing something like that even if you're not projecting that they're an actor but that they're a character. That'll stop you from going deeper into the story.

Would you say that is for all audiences or specifically a high school audience?

Hallie: I think for all audiences. I think there is such a cliché that the white man degrading the black man that there's a part of us that's saying "oh we've seen this before. Yes, I know this is awful. We were awful. I feel guilty. I don't want to go on anymore. I don't want to watch this." Or "I don't even want to see this if that's what it's going to be about." But when you have an all African American cast, you have African American actors portraying the white, what you start to realize that these were people treating other people this way. It's almost as if we take race out of

it—or that's what we were trying to do. Now there are different schools on what it meant to them. Which I think is a worthy conversation and great to have. But in a way by neutralizing it we make it more universal and personal.

Did teachers come to you with that concern?

Hallie: I don't think there was a concern. I think that during the post show discussion the kids brought it up. And when they did, I said "well why do you think that choice was made?" And a lot of them said because it makes it more universal. It is about humanity. They got that. It's about humanity, about the way human beings treat each other. We know white people did this. We as a society allowed this to happen and it's still happening. I think they got it.

After NV/NV you had a second workshop here at Steppenwolf and you had a script by that point in time. What was worked on then? Did you work on the music?

Hallie: We worked a lot on the music. This was a really complicated piece. We really needed more time. The script wasn't—the play is really two acts and what we have is a really solid one act. I think the play has no ending and I think we're all aware of that. What we tried to do with the music—we almost lost what we learned at NV/NV with the music and we tried to make it more [than it needed to be]. Or the composer tried to make it more than what the piece really needed. So we spent a lot of time trying to figure out what the balance was and we spent a lot of time figuring out why Harriet is talking to the audience. "What is her goal in speaking to us? And I think the music was challenging."

When did you add the slave narratives? Was it there from the beginning or the second workshop?

Hallie: I don't remember ask Lydia. I'm not sure. I think it might have been the second draft. I don't think we went into NV/NV with them. I could be wrong though.

By the end of that second workshop, did you feel like one of the prevailing questions still needed an answer?

Hallie: There were still structural concerns and music concerns that I don't think were answered before we went into rehearsal. And it was worked out more through the rehearsal process. [Noise of agreement]

Did you start talking about the outreach then? In terms of working at the schools and with Lydia's involvement?

Hallie: Lydia got the TCG NEA grant so we were able to bring her in to do residencies and she was able to hang around more than normal. She went out into the schools. She did a workshop with the CPL. She went to a school with Urban Prep and met with the class and that was great because she was there for the talkback. Then, they went to the school the next day so they all knew her and had just seen the play. She was like a rock star for them.

I have some questions about the play in particular now. Why did you choose to do this play now?

Hallie: Steppenwolf's theme that year was "what does it mean to be an American" and Harriet's story was really accurate in terms of that question. We talked about the black body performing and the white body performing.

How was that relevant to you as a director? The female body in performance and sexuality as well.

Hallie: Yeah, the sexual politics of this story was interesting in terms of the time period and what we talk about when we talk about slavery and racism. We really don't talk about sexual politics and that's so much of it and so much of the relationship black men also had to watch their wives, daughters, and sisters being raped or used by white men and having to leave the premise in order to let that happen. It affected everyone. It affected the white men's wives who knew what was going on and had to raise her children knowing her husband was sleeping with a servant. Obviously it affected the servant in the way she had no ownership even of her body. The sexual dynamics—when we talked about Harriet Jacobs we talked about how everybody is enslaved one way or another to the institution of slavery.

How did you relate it with contemporary sexualization of the female body? What were the kids' responses?

Hallie: It's interesting because I thought by putting this piece in a period piece with some modern elements it would feel far away enough for them to feel comfortable talking about their sexuality in terms of the play. It only happened on a couple of occasions. They were not comfortable in my view. They understood the relationship and the connection we were making. They were not comfortable talking about it.

I wonder if it came up in different forms like in one of the workshops where they weren't explicitly talking about it, but more or less while creating the scenarios.

Hallie: Not as much. I think partly because it's too close to them. I think partly because they don't feel safe enough in their school with their teachers. It's happened to them. It's happened to someone they know. It is happening to them. Or they have no relationship to it whatsoever. It's a huge topic to undergo in such a short period of time. Kids were more open to *The Bluest Eye* in terms of sexuality components of that than with Harriet Jacobs.

How so?

Hallie: There was something about *The Bluest Eye* that feels…well its fiction. So I think the mere fact that its fiction allows you to…you know that scene where the father rapes the daughter. I remember in New York when we did it, this girl in the front row stood up in tears just saying her best friend was raped by her father and how she knows of people who have been through this. I think Kola's story was so real. Where Harriet's story is so unreal even though it really happened. It is…you're trying to understand the whole arc of the life of being a slave whereas in *Bluest Eye* it's the story of a little girl who is continually abused by her friends and has no place to go. As a teenager it feels like an outsider. You understand that.

What made you decide to incorporate the slave narratives? (I know it came up in talkback).

Hallie: I think you should talk to Lydia about that. I think for me it's because there's this idea that—and it's interesting because some of the students we talked about this in the post show discussion and had some white and black students say they don't visualize slavery as this mass event, like a holocaust type thing where thousands and thousands were affected by it. But the

realization that these are personal stories like Harriet's was new to them. And the slave narratives helped in understanding that. It took the bigness and made it personal.

Were there certain ones that kids talked a lot about?

Hallie: Yes, there's this one that some of us fought about. It's this slave narrative about a man whose master made him be the one to beat the slaves. He beat a 12 year old so bad that she died. He says that he had to do it; it was either me or them. The choice he made was to kill rather than be killed and students did not understand that at all. They said I would much rather die than kill someone else; I can't believe he made that choice. And the actor personalized it too much and he shouldn't have. So the kids kept asking "would you do that, would you do that?" and he's like "me the actor?" and they would say "Yeah would you do that?" and he's like "well we're not talking about the actor; we're talking about a period in time" and they couldn't understand and couldn't get passed that. This was an ongoing conversation we had. Students were really upset by that narrative.

How did they keep talking about it? Did they keep talking about it in the workshops or in feedbacks?

Hallie: I think in some of the workshops it was brought up, but mostly in the feed backs it was always brought up - almost always.

Interesting. What were other things that kept coming up in the talkbacks, responses even during performance that you weren't anticipating at all?

Hallie: Well that and the all black cast were the two big ones. I think…I don't know what else.

Was there anything else that came up that was really odd or struck you as a new way of seeing the play?

Hallie: There were a lot of comments—which I really appreciated—about the set and the costumes and how the white people costumes and what it meant that there was no fabric on them. It was skeletal. And what does the set mean and the movement of the piece.

You mean the plot/narrative movement or physical movement?

Hallie: The physical movement on stage transitions. A lot of comments on transitions.

Did anyone talk about identifying with the characters at all?

Hallie: I don't remember. I think that's a challenging question for this piece because you're asking them to think of themselves as a slave. I think that a lot of women/girls related to certain aspects of Harriet.

I know one thing that came up a lot in the workshops was the idea of systems and the freedom of systems and how systems still exist. Did that come up in the talkback, in terms of the system working like this, the skeletal systems of the hat and stuff as a metaphor for the idea of the black?

Hallie: In a little bit yes. I think that…we talked about the institution of slavery and the affect it had on the entire community and how it still does. I think that something important to Lydia was the foundation that was laid by slavery meaning that whole cities were creative by slaves—Manhattan, Brooklyn Bridge. All these banks, all these higher institutions existed because of slaves. I think that there's a need for Lydia to have an acknowledgement of that.

Thinking of it like a post mortem, what were the really successful aspects of the production in regards to kids responses and interactions with it, and what were some of the things that you felt could be explored more or in another production because it didn't work with this piece?

Hallie: I think that the movement was very successful; the kids loved the movement and rhythm that we had. I think they liked the fact that they were on stage the whole time and they were this ensemble telling the story. That aesthetic worked really well. I don't think the music quite worked although the kids really liked it. I would do it differently this time. It didn't connect to the people in the way that I wanted it and hoped it would. But I think that students really enjoyed learning about Harriet. They didn't know about her before. There were some students who were like "I had no idea how much I take for granted knowing how to read a write. I didn't know I wasn't allowed to do that." That's nothing I was trying to…it wasn't about literacy. I didn't even think about it on that level. And there was only one little scene about that and so I thought it was interesting that quite a few kids really latched onto that.

What did you learn from this set of workshops for the next set you'll be doing in the fall in terms of the structure?

Hallie: I don't know. Every workshop is different. It really depends on the script and the artist and the writer. It's really different.

Were the teachers very responsive to this one as much as the students?

Hallie: Yes. Yeah. They really were.

I think that's all my questions…are there any other thoughts you'd like to add?

Hallie: It just feels so far away.

Will Lydia keep working on the piece?

Hallie: I hope so. I really hope so. That's another big thing. There was no ending. Her life begins where our play ends, really. I don't…you can't really wrap it up. It's the first act of a second act play. We got a lot of comments about finishing it and whether she would finish it.

Were you constrained making it a 90-minute play for NV/NV?

Hallie: Yeah, and I would do that differently because we'll see how that goes next time because we'll have two plays that both have intermissions. So we'll see how that goes. I think Lydia also didn't know how to get into that. It's a whole other book almost. How do you do it without making it feel like separate plays? How do you…it would change the entire structure and we didn't have time to do that. And I think Lydia's initial interest at the beginning was her as coming of age story which is what we told.

Did you have basically a year of developing this piece?

Hallie: I think we actually had two years.

Oh, was it produced in the spring?

Hallie: Yeah.

Final question: With your collaboration with Lydia in terms of *The Bluest Eye* and this piece, did you feel it was strikingly different or similar?

Hallie: That's interesting. I think this process was different. I think we went in with a much stronger script with *Bluest Eye* to begin with. I think Harriet came a long way but I feel

like…that the concept of *Harriet Jacobs* was very challenging in the amount of time that we had from start of rehearsal to opening and Lydia was a part of most of that. It was just different. I wish I had had her around more and had her around less. And partly I think because I with *The Bluest Eye* the narrative was so specific. I knew the landscape of that a lot more than I knew the landscape of *Harriet*.

Thank you so much.

Hallie: You're welcome.

Professor Suzan Zeder – University of Texas at Austin
Responses to questions by Kristin Leahey

What's the role and relevance of collaboration?

All of us in the playwriting and directing area feel that collaboration is vitally important and is indeed at the very core of our curriculum. Every spring we offer a course in collaboration alternately taught by Steven Dietz and Charlie Otte. Steven comes to the course from the perspective of the playwright bringing together most of the graduate playwrights, all of the graduate actors, a large percentage of the graduate designers and often PPP students. The course focuses on generative work conducted by student teams that are constantly changing. Students breath life into short work and let the work go in a single week. Pairings change every week with new leaders and formulations, like a sort of speed dating for collaborators.

Charlie Otte's focus is slightly different and reflects his interest and expertise in integrated media, projected scenery, sound design and other technologies. His course also involves undergraduate students working in collaboration with grad students. We strongly encourage all of our playwrights and directors to take both courses. Our production season and other new work venues such as the New Works Festival, UTNT and Once Upon a Weekend also have collaboration at their core, bringing together creative teams to develop and produce new work. In addition, students are highly encouraged to form lasting collaborative relationships, which often culminate in the founding of professional companies and ensembles that last far past grad school.

What are you most passionate about?

I am most passionate about our students having opportunities to explore and experiment with diverse styles, genres and approaches to not only their playwriting but also ways of making new work. There is no single style or approach to the work enshrined in either this program or this faculty. We cherish a diversity of voices, approaches, techniques and feel that it is our job to provide mentoring, effective feedback and resources that will enable our students to do their very best work. Equally important to formal classes and playwriting workshops are opportunities to see that work on its feet and in 3D both in professional development workshops and in production.

Could you discuss Partnerships?

We have a number of professional partnerships both formally and informally centered in our program. We have just negotiated a very exciting interaction between the department and the Seattle Children's Theatre where we will be exchanging actors, designers, directors and perhaps someday playwrights. This year, three of our MFA actors will go to Seattle for the majority of the spring semester to be part of the ensemble in a new play commissioned by SCT from Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Schenkkan. Next year, we will co-produce my script, *The Edge of Peace* with five equity actors from Seattle, six graduate student actors, three MFA designers and I am sure several DTYC students working on education and outreach materials. This is a major undertaking from both of our institutions and is still in the formative stages. It enables the professional theatre to be able to take a risk on play with a large cast and an unfamiliar title and it provides real time training experiences for our grad students. Many professional theatres are looking to the universities and colleges as safe

havens in which to develop their own work. We are constantly barraged by requests from the field to host this or that truly fabulous workshop. But it is rare indeed for a professional theatre to treat the student work with equal respect and to bring students into their main stage production seasons. That is one reason why we're so excited about our developing relationship with SCT.

On an informal basis, we partner with most of the leading New Play development and theatres by sending our playwrights and directors to them over the summer for short term residency programs. At present we have such relationships with the O'Neill Center, Arena Stage, Play Penn, The Orchard Project, Steppenwolf, etc. Our students also regularly accompany faculty when they are invited to attend major symposiums, convening's and conferences.

Further evidence of our dedication to professional partnering is the fact that virtually every student production involving our playwrights and directors receive a one on one session with a guest respondent drawn from some of the leading directors, dramaturgs, producers and publishers of new work in the United States. We feel that these interactions between students and major figures in the field are vitally important.

What are some of the greatest challenges?

Probably the greatest challenge faced by the faculty of this program is finding the time to balance our own professional work with the demands of teaching, mentorship, supervising student production and interactions with both grad and undergrad students. My colleagues are compulsively generous with their time and I am constantly astonished at the ways in which they are able to maintain professional work of the highest caliber without neglecting

their duties as teachers, mentors and friends of our students. I think time is also a huge challenge for many of our graduate playwrights, who are truly at a midpoint in their careers and have professional demands of their own. At this very moment one of our 2nd year grad students has a play in rehearsal at the Roundabout theatre in New York. He skypes into class on a regular basis reads the work of his colleagues from afar and provides detailed notes to his peers. All this while juggling his first major professional production in NY. Many of our students face similar challenges- escaping for weekends to attend readings and workshops of their work, or happily to accept awards that have received.

How does the program prepare graduate students?

Hopefully the answers to all my previous questions give you some idea of how we prepare our playwriting students in terms of professional development. Many of our students wind up staying in Austin, at least for a time, because the theatrical climate is so rich here. Others return back to New York, Chicago, Atlanta or New Orleans where they pick up the growing careers they left to attend graduate school. What is most important here, is that we do not view graduate school as a time away from their careers or as a preliminary step in preparation for vibrant and robust professional life. We do all we can to facilitate, support and encourage ongoing activity throughout the entire three years of grad school.

Thank you so much for your time and sharing information. Thank You

Professor Velina Hasu-Houston – University of Southern California
Responses to questions by Kristin Leahey

What's the role and relevance of collaboration with your writers among their playwright graduate student colleagues, interdepartmentally with other graduate students within the theatre department and other departments in the university, and within the regional community (arts and otherwise)?

For the most part, graduate students in our Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program are writing individual projects. Collaboration occurs when these projects move into a presentation or production mode, requiring the students to integrate their creativity with other theatre artists, as is the nature of the discipline.

The kind of collaboration that occurs among the dramatic writing students themselves is not so much in the actual writing, but in the peer dramaturgy that they provide to each other in writing workshops; the commentary, ideological support, and constructive criticism that they share with each other in the process of presenting work in class and having an interactive discussion/investigation of the work.

In a mode of presentation (staged readings) or production, students in our program work with other students – both undergraduate and graduate – in the School of Theatre. This includes (sometimes) directors and almost always acting students, production students, and design students. Most of these students are undergraduates although sometimes MFA dramatic writers are collaborating with MFA actors.

Collaboration between MFA Dramatic Writing students and students from other university departments also takes place on occasion. This includes working with students, for example, from the Thornton School of Music on plays that include music or on musical theatre (or opera). Last year, I had a student who collaborated with someone in the Roski School of Fine Arts on the dramatization of a graphic novel for which my student created the characters and story while the fine arts student drew the characters and landscape in storyboards.

I am not wholly aware of our students' collaborations with artists in the regional arts community or otherwise. Of those I am aware, they generally tend to involve the natural dimensions of collaboration specific to theatre, i.e. theatre artists from the various arenas of theatre working together with the playwright to bring a play to fruition as a reading or production.

Such collaboration is a necessary part of the creative process for the theatre artist. It is relevant to all that we do to create theatre, with several areas of expertise (playwriting, directing, producing, designing, and acting) merging to create a whole.

What are you most passionate about your students' learning/discovering from their graduate education in playwriting?

We have given a great deal of consideration to the learning outcomes that we have for our students. We believe that the student should gain a level of mastery of the central concepts of dramatic writing, including:

- Ability to cultivate a distinctive and authentic voice and vision
- Expertise in character development including desire, multidimensionality, the "geography" of mapping character, and the ability to tackle the "unanswerables" – questions that cannot be merely quantified or completely described on stage – via actions and consequences; ability to research dimensions of character and story in order to

authenticate dramatic representations; ability to convey feeling – passion – that goes beyond mere emotion and to employ empathy

- Expertise in story development including an understanding of progressive action, the nature of conflict, and use of stage time as something other than real time
- Ability to execute dramatic dialogue including the ability to use dimensions of language to enhance the play's sensory expression and emotional life; ability to utilize metaphor and imagery to expand subtext and deeper implications of the dramatic work
- Awareness of dramatic writing's capacity for connecting to all disciplines in the investigation of the critical questions of humanity; ability to reflect the world through the prism of the play, ability to think critically about issues challenging society and the global community via critical studies in theatre and to mine these issues for subjects of humanistic significance
- Ability to think in terms of total theatre – utilizing music, dance, media, sports, and other elements – to create a world on stage all its own; and own the courage to explore form with intelligence and creativity
- Ability to understand the process of presentation and production, and the responsibilities of the writer as a collaborator in that process, including the ability to absorb and apply constructive criticism and revise and refine the work towards greater professional excellence as well as the ability to adapt, learn, initiate, and be proactive creatively and intellectually.
- A broad knowledge of the subareas – playwriting, screenwriting, television writing – within the area with substantial proficiency in one or two; ability to develop and complete a professionally promising thesis portfolio comprised of projects that speak to mastery of

craft in dramatic writing; ability to operate as a good citizen in the profession and in society, exhibiting integrity, a sense of ethics, and morality.

How do you feel about partnerships between professional theatres and academic institutions, whereas students work on shows in conjunction with professionals? Often funding is provided by the University for full-productions that are labeled workshops, and there is a greater dedication of time and resources than professional theatres find with standard non-for-profit rehearsal/production schedules and budgets? In your experience, what are the rewards and challenges of these partnerships?

The rewards of a partnership between an academic institution and a professional theatre are the experiences that a young artist can gain in being exposed to the workings of a professional theatre. Such situations also provide valuable networking resources. The challenges are that students are often placed in areas that do not represent their expertise, but I think it is healthy to experience many aspects of life in a professional theatre. Some program associations offer acting students the chance to create new roles. Playwriting students may get to work in active literary departments and observe the submission process close at hand. Certainly, the School of Theatre provides a beneficial experience in producing students' plays with a greater dedication of resources. The professional theatres cannot match the investment made by academic institutions in their students' work. But they do provide educational views from the inside out.

What are some of the greatest challenges that you and your students face within an institutional academic setting? Also, what are some of the greatest challenges that you find in introducing students to the professional world?

Students in the MFA in Dramatic Writing program face the same kinds of issues that non-university individuals do in sharpening their dramatic acumen, learning to create more richly and effectively, and keeping the muses viable. As they confront the professional world, the chief challenge that they face is the fact that there are so many playwrights and a limited number of theatres, that subjectivity abounds in the selection process, and, if they are not writing characters and stories that are white and mainstream, they also face additional challenges to find homes for their work in an American theatre that increasingly produces a majority of mainstream work with women playwrights and playwrights of color viewed as specialized voices in peripheral categories. Since we have a great many students who are female and/or persons of color whose stories often reflect the American world of their experience, we know that they face challenges above and beyond the typical variety that most artists face. We, however, continue to urge them to write from their passion.

How does the program prepare graduate playwriting students in terms of professional development? Are there any trends as to where graduates go and what they participate in immediately after graduating?

The program focuses primarily on literary maturation of voice, vision, art, and craft; however, we are quite mindful of professional development and do all that we can to mentor students in those respects, both formally and informally. Business affairs and marketing are part of most of our master classes. Guest artists come form a variety of arenas of focus to discuss various aspects of professional development with our students.

Our graduates illustrate the success that dedicated, first-rate study in a stellar dramatic writing program can deliver. Boni B. Alvarez's *Ruby, Tragically Rotund* had its world premiere production at Playwrights' Arena/Los Angeles Theatre Center; Julie Taiwo Oni's *Tether* and

Alexis Roblan's *Genesis* were featured at The Inkubator Festival, Washington, DC; *Tether* is slated for production at Doorway Arts. Oni's play *Societee & Thymedia* was work shopped with her as director at Los Angeles' Askew Theatre Company. While still a student, Donald Jolly had his play, *Bonded,* produced at California Institute of the Arts; it will open professionally at Playwrights' Arena in 2011. Janine Salinas' *Soledad* received its world premiere at Josefina Lopez's (*Real Women Have Curves*) CASA 0101 Theatre, Los Angeles. Salinas' screenplay, *Tercio De Muerte*, was awarded a Quarter Finalist position for the Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In addition, Salinas' screenplay, *Las Mujeres Del Mar*, was a Dramatists Guild of America Wendy Wasserstein Prize nominee; the stage version was presented at the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre and was a Bay Area Playwright's Festival finalist. Salinas also was the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship. Mayank Keshaviah had a workshop of his *Rangoon* at New York's Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, which has optioned it for production. Jolly, Roblan, Salinas, and Megan Breen have worked at Center Theatre Group's Mark Taper Forum including work shopping of their plays as part of Taper's Writers' Workshop. JP Smith's *Among the Sand and Smog* received two San Antonio productions by 24th Street Players and The San Pedro Playhouse. His *Into the Pines* received accolades in the National Latino Playwriting Competition, Borderlands Theatre Company. Gabriel Rivas Gomez's *Chasing Monsters* had its world première at Los Angeles' Company of Angels. Shane Sakhrani will have nationwide readings of his play, *The Doctor is Indian*, by Salaam Theatre. Sakhrani's play was also a finalist in Alliance Theatre Company's Kendeda graduate playwriting competition. His play, *A Widow of No Importance*, had a staged reading in the East West Players Writer's Gallery in conjunction with the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles. Breen's *My First, My Fist, My Bleeding Seeded Spirit* was a finalist in

the John F. Kennedy Center/ American College Theatre Festival graduate playwriting competition.

Current students' have been equally as involved in the profession. In 2009, Kevin King's *The Idea Man* was produced by Los Angeles' Elephant Theatre and garnered the Best New Play Ovation Award, LA's equivalent of New York's Tony Awards. Cort Brinkerhoff's *Squat* was produced by The Alive Theatre, Long Beach, California, at its Cherry Poppin' Play Festival. Stephanie Swirsky won The Kirstie McDonald Mori Emerging Playwright Award for her play, *Lashon Hara*, which was published as part of the prize. King's work along with alumni Alvarez and Salinas was produced by Chalk Theatre Company. Kirsa Rein's play was a finalist in the American College Theatre Festival's John Cauble Short Play competition. We are excited that our students are making inroads across the country with their plays and also in the film arena.

Does USC offer playwriting for youth classes?

No, we do not have theatre for young audiences writing classes per se. In THTR 510 Writing the Short Drama, students do have the ability to focus on TYA, but usually do not. A few have written longer plays involving TYA themes. Overall, however, this category of theatre is not included in our curriculum.

Thanks, Velina! Hope the beginning of the semester is going extremely well!

Interview of Dorothy Webb by Kristin Leahey
Artistic Director at Bonderman

When did you become involved with the Bonderman?

Dorothy: I was required...my very own university with students it just you are required...simply. We had to be involved with the Bonderman and watch the process. Myself and Sherry Drummond took the class together and became good friends. They chose... a playwright that we would shadow. And I remember we didn't have to do as many hours as we did, but we both just got engulfed in the play and the playwright and the actors and the students. I mean, the whole process – we just didn't want to miss a thing. So we were hooked! That was the first push in for us. Since then...can't see ourselves not doing it.

Dorothy: The theatre world is going to change all the time. You lock into a form or a style and say, 'This is best. And we must always do it this way because the world keeps changing and therefore the forms and styles keep changing. And at that time I was looking at Children's Theatre, which was mostly fairytales and myths. I was thinking, "Yeah, the kids are way ahead of that." Although talking about – call it Tall-Peoples Theatre, it's applicable to Children's Theatre. Lots of seeds got planted on the way to finally incorporating children in the Bonderman...And then I saw New Voices...and I was struck that the children were saying what they thought that the adults wanted them to say.

I know at New Voices they haven't used children participation for a very long time – yeah, that's very interesting. What are your thoughts on children not participating?

Dorothy: Not too long after they started it, they were using a panel to respond to the play. Before the Lort Model was even adapted for the theatre. And I remember this one little boy who looked

like a miniature CEO with his briefcase and his 3 piece suit, who was about 4 foot tall, sitting there moving around watching all of the adults. And I thought, and I'm sure Tim Peter did too, this isn't helping the children and it's certainly not helping the playwright. And I began to think, because of my work included dramatics and we're constantly working with children in centers around the city, that when I read through the play – they had wonderful ideas and great questions and I kept thinking, "Playwrights needs to hear this. They need to hear what the children are saying." And thank goodness one of the first that came in when I introduced this, not the very first time, but was Jose Cruz Gonzalez, who when I looked up at the first reading and they were huddled in the campus then – we gave them the readings in the lecture halls – divided up a little corner of the yard for them – the children were so clustered around Jose (and Jose not a very tall man) that I could hardly see Jose. And the children kept getting closer and closer and he was writing and his dramaturg kept writing and writing and he was asking question after question. And these were kindergarten through first graders, which scared me to death because I never used that age group as a respondent. He said, "I learned a lot."...And then we went back mid-week, like we still do, and then the children had made a list. They knew how they would do a tire; they knew how they would do little-girl-footsteps. Their imaginations had just taken over and I had never thought of that. And at the final reading he had them bring their art projects; they put them up on a big display about how the children were handling this. And also the questions they asked because – the only teacher I could find, willing, with that age group to do this was in clear out in Caramel, Indiana which is the ritzier area of our city...and I had really wondered how it would be best if they would have had more intercity kids with us – they would understand the questions better. These kids got it. They even related it to the schoolyard bully. It's amazing! But Jose was amazing...it's how well the playwright uses the process, too. And now that dramaturgs

are so much more savvy, the interns – to do what you did, with your lessons – they help the playwright find answers to the questions....We have evolved now in their way as we try now to structure it. Before I just sort of threw them all together. I spent a lot of time with the teachers. Orienting them to not tell the children how the play would sound or look, but just to help them read it and understand the script. And now I need to spend more time, I've discovered, with the playwright and the team about how you get answers. Not just 'what are the children volunteering', but now you've got a problem. And you know it's a problem and you don't know exactly how to solve it.

What can you do in a way of an exercise activity with children when the playwright is on site?

Dorothy: Lou Clark, the year before, also was very good with needing that. And as a playwright herself she understood, when she served the role of dramaturg, the things that the playwright would need to learn. And she was able to stay at the Sharing School, not her high school, but the elementary school. We don't have the corner on how to do it right...Most the time it gets a little better. I think even the children want to chime in here...

I'm just thinking – about the great writers, like Knoll, who benefitted a great deal from the children. Here he had this piece he had been working on, *THE YOUNGER GENIE,* and the high schoolers told him, and even the actors, they were able to help him mold that into a great piece.

Dorothy: And what's interesting, in this particular project, was that Sherry then asked permission to do the play of *YOUNGER GENIE*...to see it and to work with those high school kids one more time. That's important.

I feel, like, in terms of the dramaturgy that I do, my skills as a creative dramatist really informed my dramaturgy...and I try to use that process in everything.

Dorothy, originally, you said "people were opposed to the idea of including kids in the process." Why do you think people were opposed to that idea?

Dorothy: It pulls away time from the playwright to actually be working on the script. That I was taking too much of his time by taking him to a school, having him interact with the children the first time out...amazingly enough the playwrights have never complained.

That's interesting.

Dorothy: Even the first time volunteers, the ones who came in the first time – they come out saying, "I'm glad I did this. I'm glad I had that input from the children because it really helped a great deal."

Dorothy: Some marriages are better than others. That's why picking the school and prepping the teacher, before anyone gets here, is absolutely vital. One of the playwrights in the evaluation last time suggested maybe...not letting the children read the play, but hear it performed. And I thought, "Well, I think if you've got children who want to go to the theatre..." but part of what I do in the orientation or now at least do for me...we work on theatre. The concept of theatre, how theatre works, with the hope that they can see this script in the context of something that's will be on the stage. So that some of the things that they may not understand, if they got up and improved it in the classroom, if they acted it out, they wouldn't need words to make it clear.

As time has gone on, have you found it more difficult to get access to schools and classrooms?

Dorothy: Not necessarily more difficult. It's the cost and the time away from the curriculum. The teachers are very creative...a lot of them sit now on the theatre advisory board or IRT. Because

they do a big network and they do playwriting in a wide kept...and they do satellite connections to watch theaters. They have people who they send to the schools for plays. So they have quite a wide circle of resources that benefit teachers that are not extremely into theatre. When I started, teachers had only seen a play in high school.

How did you decide on the Bonderman symposium, we talked earlier about how Susan Zeder encouraged you to do a second Bonderman, what was the means for it?

Dorothy: I already had a biding interest in playwriting. And I had a deep interest for Theatre for the Young. And if I looked at the script, beyond just a few, I was very discouraged that we were not advancing the field. Now I go to what is now AATE Children's Theatre Conference and I think – it seemed like they were always doing something to fill. Never got to an upper level thinking...and I kept grumbling about it...and a colleague of mine, at the time I was at the Children's Theatre Museum and he was the theatre director – he said, "Well what are you going to do about it?" And I thought, "Well what could I possibly do?" Besides write a paper. And then the thought can to me, "Well why don't we do a conference." And at that time, ATA was organized by region and there was one umbrella organization over all of the regions. So our region is very important and I approached Bruce Hinely, who was a honcho in the region, about co-producing this conference that has an emphasis on playwriting only. So we did and they supported it. And we brought in new scripts from out of state and from every region about their theaters. And they put those out along with ours....and we just had a marvelous reception. I thought at last, "At last I'm doing something new and different." And then Susan said, "Do it again, do it again. When are they going to do it again?" And all I would say is, "I'll help you. This must go on." And I kept thinking that I'd like to see what else we could come up with. I knew it would take me a year to raise the money...one year to raise the money and one day to

spend it...and someday they'll model their program from this one...and of course it could be very different...and finally Orlin Corey conceded, because he had at one time been head of the American College Theatre Festival, so he interceded with, the people at the Kennedy Center, they coming up on a big celebration...and they did. So then we moved into Alternate View. At the same time, we're working with the Playwrights Network with AATE, the unpublished play project. So they agreed to do the unpublished playwrights project at Alternate View, on top of which they made a financial contribution to the Bonderman so that we would be taking new scripts and then we would send them. The second year went pretty well? And the third year, Very Special Arts wanted to partner with us...So a third year happened. And pretty soon it just sort of became constitute.

Dorothy: At that time, my assistant in the department was a man named Mark Crocoo, who had also been a student at one time with concert-level organizing. And when I was struggling so with just managing the third Bonderman...and Very Special Arts and I was doing everything from stuffing the packets...to scanning the programs – everything was on my back. And Mark volunteered to come in and help me...at the end of it he wrote me a proposal to become my conference manager.

Dorothy, thank you so much for all you have done with children's theatre and for the Bonderman. Thank you for this interview.

Interview of Christian Parker by Kristin Leahey
Associate Artistic Director the Atlantic Theatre

Can you talk a little bit about your collaboration with the production of *Spring Awakening*?

Christian: Sure, I mean you know the nuts and bolts of it and that we had looked over this piece a couple of times over the years. We felt that it was a really interesting original take on the original play but the pieces of the play were not fully put together well. There was a point at which Paul, who had really been shepherding the play as the producer and something of a dramaturg, brought it back to us and said "hey, would you take another look at it. And, by the way we're doing this workshop of it through the American Songbook Series at Lincoln Center and we hope you'll come see it." And we did that and we saw at that point that the music was serving the story incredibly well and was great and a joy. And Michael Mayer, the director, had a very clear vision of how it could work visually on stage and how the story and song would be clear and some of the direction where we felt the script needed to move in order to have traction. And so we came to produce it here and we're partnered always with Tom Hulce . But it shows a good sort of alignment of the sensibility of the piece, the ensemble nature of the piece, the rock and roll music, that subverting of a lot of the engrained expectations of the way musical theatre needs to work. We'd never done a musical before, partially because of those reasons. Not that there's anything wrong with the great American musical or American musical comedy but there wasn't precisely sort of the organization. Although, this time it felt like a good alignment aesthetically and in terms of our collaborators. We've worked with Tom before and wanted him on board. So from then forward I really got involved on a dramaturgical level and got into conversation with Michael and Tom about what we could do to the music to make the story

clearer, to take the idea that Steven Slater and Duncan Sheik had developed on the original play and fully explore that. They were very concerned that they were faithful stylistically to the Wedekind in certain ways and to what they perceived the spirit of the original impulse behind that play to be. They weren't as concerned with the plot points and they had a certain modern take on what resonance that story might have now for adolescents—not just adolescents but about adolescence and so we were all working in that direction. We just talked about script and about the production here in LA and Michael Mayer had such a strong vision for how he thought it could work. We also felt that he really made all the elements of that piece come together and bringing in Bill T. Jones to do the choreography was a stroke of genius because he had a vocabulary that was very good stylistically in line with what they were trying to do with the music. It was one of those situations where a happy alchemy of collaborators were put together and working in the same direction. And Neil and I were the people who just nudged that forward and made sure it was moving in the right direction and asked the right dramaturgical questions along the way as they were scouring the script for what songs made sense and what songs didn't make sense, how to create a sense of linearity out of a script that is largely nonlinear because of the line of the story that they wanted to tell that was a more linear story. That was the basic principles of our involvement and then once they took it forward it was more their production. I mean it was our production because it originated here, but once it moved abroad we weighed in a little bit on some of the stuff they were doing to move it on to a bigger audience, to juice it up a little bit for Broadway but mainly we worked on in primarily while it was down here.

In terms of the audience, did the team want to focus on targeting younger audiences as well with the piece?

Christian: Yes and no. Yes we knew this would appeal to younger audiences for sure but we knew that that wasn't necessarily the audience we were going to get right out of the gate. You

know, we are a mainstream theatre doing risky work and stuff but our average ticket buyer is certainly not a teenager or even someone in their early 20s. We knew it would take time for it to catch fire, but interestingly the traditional audiences who tended to be a little bit older…we attracted a youngish audience in terms of our audiences initially. It was interesting to see how many people who saw it in its earliest week here were recommending it to younger people that they knew or bringing their kids back to it or sending their kids to it. It really was an older generation who started to spread the word on the play and passed it down to a younger group who then "claimed" it as their own event and then spread the word themselves. Many of those actors ended up developing this crazy cult following among young audience who went to go see it on Broadway time and time again. John Gallagher Jr. goes by a pseudonym online and Face book now because of his following. They really caught on. But it really was initially just a standard off-Broadway audience. One of the things that is true about that show is that it's about adolescence but it wasn't built just to attract a younger audience. I mean everyone's been through adolescence. It would express something everyone would relate to in retrospect but also have resonance with young people. In some ways the play is built as a look back on adolescence more than it is before people who are teenagers—although, obviously that audience did grasp onto it. I think people of all different age groups found different resonances in it. It really started with the older crowd.

In terms of questions like "why this piece" and "why now," what was some of the dramaturgical choices that you made to adapt the piece for an American contemporary audience while at the same time remaining true to the source text?

Christian: I think one of the concerns I had when I first read it was that actually there wasn't a one-to-one correlation between the pressures that were faced in the late 19th century in

Germany and now. The particular social pressures were unique to a culture and time to an extent that don't necessarily translate. And I think one of the things that was very successful about the production was that the decision to make most of the music and the expression of the music be essentially interior monologue so that it's not happening in real time. And it's just jumping out and communicating in a more contemporary vernacular allowed the audience to juxtapose the two things or draw their own conclusions about what was still resonant and what was not still resonant, whether there is a correlation between a particular social illness portrayed in the musical and the frustration that we have now. Obviously backroom abortions among young white girls is not necessarily the most current thing, but the social pressures around her behavior and around shame and around sex are still relevant for kids. I think there are things that still differ to me from that world but clearly the rather harsh juxtaposition between a sort of historicized themes and the costumes and everything being generally located in history and then breaking out of it into a contemporary musical sensibility allowed people to associate without being told that they should understand the musical in a certain way, which was good and allowed the older play to exist on its own within that frame work but also take on a certain shape.

Did you feel like there was a lot of reconstruction with the character of Wendla?

Christian: Yes, in terms of the choices she's making she seemed to have more agency and that it was their inspiration for her was to have more agency. I think that was a really conscious choice because they felt like the gender sensibility of the 19th century has changed a bit and that girls do have more agency now when facing certain pressures. They wanted to portray two main characters that had different kinds of agency but were equally balanced and that Wendla was not just a victim of circumstance. The Frank Wedekind privileges the stories of the boys. The writers wanted to see what they could do with the female characters.

In terms of the marketing of the show and the grassroots spread. What was your consciousness of that in terms of the work you were doing or in terms of the theatre's response to that?

Christian: A lot of that…we certainly had a marketing strategy in that we were trying to brand the show as young and hip and exciting but we didn't know how that was going to work. It really was a word of mouth that just caught on steam. Sometimes you know we have big marketing budgets but we're certainly not pouring tons of money into that kind of outreach. When we were doing that show all that Face book and Twitter and social networking stuff was still just emerging. It wasn't nearly what it is now. It really took on its own life. We were happy to have it happen but I remember going into the process thinking, "Wow I hope we catch this audience, this audience that we want" and wondering how we should go about doing it and working hard on the look and image we were going to use for the poster and trying to make sure the play had the right kind of look on the stage and wanting to have it feel like a very immediate experience for people. The seats were cheaper—they were $20—so we were able to sell a lot of seats to young people who got a very close look at the action so they felt like they were getting the best seats in the house for the cheapest price. That helped a lot to move tickets.

Were there any age restrictions for those seats?

Christian: Nope. Anyone could buy a ticket. We didn't want to be restrictive in that way. If you want them you can have them, which was fascinating because we had a good mix of people sitting up there together and some people were very uncomfortable because they felt they were too close to the action. But that choice to put them that close to the stage was aesthetically important to their concept of the times and acceptance and openness and inclusiveness and while it was not a fruitful experience for all of them. We knew when people heard the music and when

kids heard the music they would respond to it. Although Duncan is a great writer he wasn't particularly a popular rock star or anything. It wasn't like he was going to sell it.

I have been reading so much about the collaboration. Was there anything atypical in terms of development process or workshop or integration of a new play or the temperament of the discussion?

Christian: Not really. The show that had developed in the first summer…there have been a lot of incarnations but Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik and Michael Mayer had really been together on it for a while. And Tom Hulce had been championing it for a while so there was a long conversation and process by the time we entered the conversation. There wasn't anything particularly atypical about it. It's a little unusual to bring in…the most unusual element of it was that…I spoke to Bill T. Jones and he had not worked on a musical before so he had not worked collaboratively in this way before. And orienting him to that process and where the choreography functions in the process and how to work with people who are not trained to the way he is used to. He is incredibly intuitive and brilliant so he also knew that going into this and created a movement vocabulary that looked really impressive. So that was interesting, to have someone who's got another person involved who's that much of a luminary serving as a choreographer only on a production like that. It was pretty smooth. The design team he's worked with quite a lot. It was pretty relaxing.

Were there any major changes that you recall during the preview process that came as a result of the audience's reaction to the show?

Christian: There weren't any huge changes that were in any way plot related or fundamentally due to the audience reaction. I would say no. Prior to the preview process before we went into

rehearsal we had done a long workshop of it a few months before rehearsal for production. The biggest thing that was changed from that workshop to the actual production was the cutting of the masked man who appears in the Wedekind who had been a character in the musical who appears toward the end of the musical and serves as a deux ex machina kind of guy who comes in and explains the play. It didn't have a whole lot of traction in the musical; it felt kind of dated dramaturgical tool that didn't hold weight. The decision to cut that was a huge thing because it took away a frame around the story that left the teens figuring out how do we get out of this story and make the decisions. Melchior in the cemetery…how do we deal with the end of this play? That was the largest part of the conversation. Where does it end, where do we cut it off, and what is the final message? That conversation happened before the rehearsal period started for the actual production. There were some subbing in for different songs that he felt accomplished the same idea and worked better but there was nothing structurally that changed in any major way.

Was this the first musical that you produced?

Christian: Yeah.

I think that from my experience working in institutional theatre and coming from previous experience at Woolly Mammoth theatre—that definitely the thought of making that jump to doing musicals—was a challenging decision, taking on something in a different genre, in many ways. Do you concur with my thoughts?

Christian: It was a big deal because we had to figure out how we were going to deal with the question of amplification. All the things that you deal with routinely in a musical that were dealt with were pretty big questions. Obviously the expense of doing it was far higher than we originally budgeted for which is why having commercial partners who were looking to move in and enhance it. Therefore if we hadn't had that we wouldn't have been able to do it because the

financial burden would have been too great. So yeah it was a big deal but it's also true that Atlantic had never done a musical before but Neil is very musical and has a background as a musician and gets music and how it functions in storytelling. I had worked at Theatre Club where we did musicals before I came here so it wasn't dramaturgically any big difference. It's just a bigger deal with that many collaborators, when there are that many cooks in the kitchen, where the best idea comes from and who defers to who. It's a heightened process. It's funny. After we did that show suddenly everyone wanted to do that in their musical. It's something that we'd like to do more of and a few years later we collaborated with Michael Mayer again on a piece called *Ten Million Miles of Patty Griffith's music.* It was a much simpler - four character show but now it's complicated. We do want to do more of them and play with music and have fun with it but it was too simple. It didn't totally change the paradigm of what we produce here necessarily but it did open us up to the possibility of doing more.

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts. Thank you.

Interview with Betsy Quinn by Kristin Leahey
Drama Consultant

What was your role in *The Blue House*?

Betsy: Officially I was the creative drama consultant through the Children's Humanity Special. That's what they hired me as.

When did you become involved with the project?

Betsy: Well, actually the main time it really started cooking was at the Bonderman; although, Jose had told me about the idea about a year before that in Arizona. We only had a month together and we talked about a vision we had for the play. I said "Don't you ever want to put it on with a bunch of kids? If that's one of your ideas, let me know." And next year at the Bonderman, he very seriously told me about this vision that he had a real stark vision of the play. And then I said, "Well, if you want to come in, we have a gifted drama program that's a combination between Northwestern University and the Evanston School District 65 Gifted Drama Students (4th-6th grade). It meets for three Saturdays and will have about 140 or so kids and about 18 college students that will be their teachers. We could put through a whole new process drama around your ideas for *The Blue House* and do that for the kids." And Jose Cruz asked to know more about it, what things we would do. And I started rattling off the top of my head some ideas that could possibly work. And he said that sounds great. And I asked if we could bring him in. And they said that'd be great. And he stayed at my house. And we hatched it out.

When did you have the first meeting? You had the planning done with Jose and I assume with Tom Arvetis. When did that take place?

Betsy: Actually…because Tom…I started working on it I think it's not a question about when because I'm not really sure when the sequence of when everyone came together. I know that I had talked with Jose about it that same year at the Bonderman. So that was in February of '07. So then really quickly we decided to base Theatre's favorite drama Saturday gifted program on that.

How where the students selected who participated? What grade level were they?

Betsy: There were really three different experiences that I was involved with. The primary one that I was involved was Evanston schools for the Gifted Drama Program which is 4th through 6th grade. These were students that were chosen by their drama teachers all throughout the district to come those three Saturdays. But we did this and then you guys did this.

Did you develop your own lesson plans?

Betsy: Yes. I think that Rieves Collins was still even teaching the last couple years that you were teaching it—or maybe it was just the last one. We started developing a class system and that would go over—I think it was only I who did that. But anyway it was only three weeks. We had three different grade levels and three classes of each grade level about 12-15 kids. The drama would begin on the first Saturday and then we would evaluate where the kids were taking to it. So, pretty much all nine classes started in the same place with some modifications day by day. But by the end they all had different stories. For example, the sixth grade one year we built and designed this drama about how all the crops from the famous fairy tales came up missing.

And the kids were from the Secret Society of Library Detectives that were trying to investigate what happened. So Jack is stuck up on the clouds because his stalk was missing. Little Red Riding Hood's cape was missing. The Big Bad Wolf didn't have his inhaler so he couldn't huff and puff. So all sorts of different things were happening. Each of the kids had their own partnered subgroup, but we would all put it together and I would lead as the head of the Secret Society. Then the college kids would have their process and do some stuff so we could put them together as groups and then take them out. So all the sixth—and they were all sorted by grade level so there would be three groups put together and then spread apart—and that was important for *The Blue House* because of how we designed it.

How did you—I know you did multiple processes -outline who was in charge? Who was there taking notes and actively participating?

Betsy: We had 21 requesting undergrads taking the test. The limit is really 15 but so many students wanted to work with them that we let them. Then I had another senior whose name is Ross North who's now getting his masters in teaching in Texas and he was the assistant. He was taking extensive notes and doing research for us. He was doing full time internship with the school and Kids Drama for the entire quarter. Ross was taking notes for both, his research and our work.

So he was taking dramaturgical notes as well as how the lesson plans were going?

Betsy: As well as research. He did some research because he's from the south side of Chicago. He did a lot of research about one aspect of it which was the middle class African American family at the turn of the century. So he did a lot of research for us about that. So when I talk about Ross I'm not talking about the rest of the students that worked with us. He did a different

thing. But these students also worked with three mentor teachers. I was one of them. Jamie Corchugroza and Laurel Cermak from the Evanston schools. And Jamie, Laurel, and I would take one grade level to supervise. So Jamie does 4th, Laurel does 5th, and I do 6th grade. So each group and grade level has their mentor teacher from the school district. So all those people are involved. So we started out knowing there was a little girl who encountered this blue house on an empty lot in Chicago. We didn't know it was in Pilsen. And that it was a ghost story for middle school and older elementary. That's all we knew. So we started brainstorming in these drama classes knowing we would teach one Saturday lesson and then Jose would be there for the middle Saturday and then brought it to close at the end. So as we looked at the three Saturdays. We introduced the drama with the kids and we were trying to figure out who the kids were in the story and how to bring them into the story of T*he Blue House.* So we went through a lot of different problems with the mentor teachers and the students and Ross - just our little drama class. Each classroom of kids was a different block in the neighborhood. Sort of like the Elm Street block and stuff. And they would all get together to play on this empty lot. And we have four classrooms so when we set it up we used one classroom as the empty lot every time. So they'd all come out of their rooms, play in the empty lot, and then come back. Or have some encounter in the lot. So what were the major conflicts in this drama because we couldn't really figure out what the drama was about? I think I suggested what if there's a real estate agent trying to sell the lot. So the character of Miss Nora Kate came from the drama. Jose wasn't even involved in it. Nobody else was. The idea that this empty lot was going to be sold for a development of condos came straight from us. So of course I led the role as her. All three of us from the different grade levels led as that character. And that took us to this place where every

time we walked by the kids would literally scream bloody murder; they were so terrified of us. So that was the first week. We figured out that there was a skeleton key.

So we've further established what our protagonist is all about, our antagonist, and our main token or object, the key. We also had the homeless person who was wandering around the property. A lot of the basics of the story came from that storm lesson.

Do you have any of those lesson plans? I would love to take a look at them.

Betsy: Of course, sure. We have most of them. I probably have more from the sixth graders, the Sharks—that was my group—but I'm sure we have more. But we had a whole thing of water in ours. Water's involved. Sometimes when you see a reflection you can see the blue house but sometimes you can't. And how do we do that. So then the second week they came in and we just observed. In that one, we got the kids into the house. There were objects that talked "Don't look behind me" and that kind of stuff. And then by the end of the drama—the music box was from our drama too—it ended up being that the kids gave me a birthday card. The ghost inside the house is actually my mother. And she wanted to give me this music box as my present and that was why I was so mean because I never got the gift. That's how the kids figured it out. But what a person would say at the last performances we saw was that that character cannot be stale to the grounds because she could easily be fatal. And the thing is that the kids were terrified of her at the beginning in a funny way and then absolutely terrible I think to make the story authentic. Because those kids were like—we actually have a baby picture of me, a little girl picture and it was somehow in the house and they figured it out. So that was the sixth grade story. The fourth and fifth graders had a very different ending. We started with the lessons; you can see those. I'm trying to think of what happened during the second week. We had the parachutes with us in our

dramas. That's how we got the idea of the parachute. They had little parachutes. And then we went into the third session where no one was observing that.

Did your group do subsequent readings with the kids? Were there other times when the students were working with Jose?

Betsy: There were other kids actually.

What do you think about the population that you were working with changing? Did the drama change too?

Betsy: No, from my other kids. You're thinking…so we developed the piece with another group of students in another way…: We never developed the lesson plan after that group - that specific one. We had a different one.

Was that the main development process?

Betsy: Then that same week Jose spent a day with me and the kids. And I said "what questions do you want to know?" So I did some narrative pantomiming with the kids, letting them walk through the house. So Jose could actually—and I think he was jamming on it too with me—we were totally improvising. At the time I had a narrative because we needed it in that moment. There were bunch of actors watching and they couldn't believe—because they write out their humor, you know. And they couldn't believe we were improvising the whole thing. And they just watched the kids to see where they wanted to go. That was they could actually see the kids inside the house. They were on their feet acting as if they were alone, typical to pantomime. Also I said "okay what else do you want to know?" I said to my kids "you know we have this phenomenal playwright here one of the top writers of the country here to answer some questions. Would you mind helping him with that?" They said they'd love to. Each classroom did different

things. One was too scared to do much another was interviewing him a little bit. "What are you afraid of?" One thing that stuck in the play in a big way was one scene that was developed like that. He said, "I want to know how the little girl and the ghost communicate with each other." We tried a few different ways and this was literally circle of chairs. Everyone there was just sitting in a circle. And I asked if anyone wanted to be the little girl. And this girl volunteered. And I asked who wanted to be the ghost. And one of my college students volunteered to be the ghost. So a lot of different things happened before that, but in this moment the little girl started with "the ghost is writing in my diary." And I think she had a candle and the girl blew out the candle. And then the ghost looked around trying to figure out who blew out the candle. And then the girl took up the pen and started writing in the diary. And then the ghost started writing back "Can you see me?" That's a scene from the play. That was totally improvised by the kids.

You were talking about the questions Jose had when he went into the drama on that day. One of the questions was "how would the children behave in the house or how the ghost would live in the house?"

Betsy: Before I go into that question I have to back up. I forgot to tell you the most important thing. Jose sent us questions before we started the drama.

Do you have those questions?

Betsy: I do. So he sent me a whole list of things he wanted to know from the drama that I would work on. That went into discussion in the three Saturdays.

And Michael Mayer did the same thing this year with another piece just a different story. The day was really pretty slowly. Jose and I work extremely well together so it was really like he came with some things he wanted to know for the play but the next group would come in and he

would be just "Nope; I want to know this now." And the kids had drama so they get it. And I'm not saying it was perfect; there were issues. But I have some kids that are my really advanced kids. They became so big to *The Blue House.* They really formed it. Any time I would get a draft. I mean I remember one day when I got a draft of *The Blue House* and I walked in and they started screaming at the top of their lungs hugging each other. That was pretty much that in the spring of 2007. Then they were going to do some workshops in the neighborhoods closer to the theatre in the summer. And Jose really insisted that they bring me in as a specialist so they did.

Where did you go and how did that work?

Betsy: Mary Kate arranged it. It was a district center; I don't remember exactly where it was - somewhere between Halsted and something. It was in the summer though; I brought one of my summer students with me. So the first day I don't know what they did exactly but I know it was okay. The room was horrible. It was so big and really distracting and the kids were—it was a park trip for them. When I walked in I saw the kids running around and sitting on the floor. And I started chatting with them and I saw a bunch of tables and chairs on the other end. This place was huge. It was like bigger than that and all the way down that way down to the next pillar. Herb said, "What we usually do is we stand in a circle and get them warmed up, do a few games." And I said no. And I said to Jose, "Do you want me to just take it?" So I told the kids to grab a chair and sit in a circle. We had a physical boundary. And I asked if anyone would do something for me to help solve a mystery. They were spellbound. We didn't have a lesson plan but we did like ten things. Ultimately we wanted to know what they feared so we did a bunch of activities with that. I remember there were a lot of things that happened there that were real to these kids. Like Leya Rema was very real to these kids.

Where a lot of the participants ESL (English and a second language) kids?

Betsy: These kids were just like most kids a diverse group.

From that reading that was done did Jose ask a series of questions?

Betsy: The kids were so engaged…the only problem with that was he did have the whole play written so the kids didn't know the ending. They were clamoring for it.

Did that clear up some of the resolution questions for Jose and would the questions go into the play as well?

Betsy: You know it's interesting I don't know exactly about that because I didn't have a lot of contact with Jose that time because he wasn't staying at my house and I was with kids trying to get them home.

Betsy: We were at Haven. I had to make sure they were picked up. I'm sure there were other things going on. It was so long ago. And then they did readings.

What were the students' reactions to the play?

Betsy: The kids loved seeing the show and knowing what was going on. The thing that was so cool was that they could see the show and say "That was my part; I thought of that." Now one of my girls that went dropped out the week before production. We did have to present it with the fact that death is one of the major themes. And I actually told exactly how it came about and most of the kids knew about that because they had worked on it. Just meeting Jose and seeing someone who was so phenomenal and talented and articulate and compassionate. I don't let just anybody work with my kids. They have to have the right spirit. And he cared about what they had to say. That was great. The other thing that I think was really shocking to them is when I

started to holding up draft 12 and draft 13. They saw how many rewrites. They didn't know they had to rewrite at all. And when they saw someone they admired rewriting so many times they realized that plays do take time and effort and drafts and it's a process.

What were some of the points the kids recognized that they had done?

Betsy: For sure the writing with the ghost. The little girl who did that had lost her mother so the girl talking to the ghost was very beautiful and touching. Certainly when the real estate agent came up because Jose told them it was named after me. They all were like whoa! The key, the music box, the Northwestern kids did the same thing. They came with me to chaperone to the field trip and they were excited too. "That was us!" They did the same thing, really. That's pretty much the big things. The fortress, when that came up. We did those.

Having had this experience, would you want to do this again? Possibly with Jose?

Betsy: Oh totally, with the right person. Oh, of course with Jose.

Do you feel like it could be used at any part of the development process or even the post-development?

Betsy: Definitely. You know, it really depends on what the person does and the playwright and the director of the company are looking for. That's the main thing.

Thank you so much for sharing Betsy.

Interview with Lydia Diamond by Kristin Leahey
Playwright – *Harriet Jacobs*

Are you related to Harriet Jacobs?

Lydia: I'm not related to Harriet Jacobs, but I wrote the play *In Harriet Jacobs*.

Why did you decide to adapt the novel *Harriet Jacobs* into a play?

Lydia: I discovered the novel shortly after high school and rediscovered it during college. When I first read it, I didn't think of myself as a playwright. And then I thought this is something that should be a play. But I didn't think I had the tools. I didn't know how to even begin. And so I didn't think of it much more. And when Hallie approached me to work with her again at Steppenwolf at the Theatre for Young Adults venue, it seemed like a good thing to do.

How did you decide to work on this together?

Lydia: I made the suggestion because she's the producer and head of the program—because they let us do it and then I write the play and then she steps in as a producer and we took it to musicians and voices so we were able to…I brought in someone who I wanted to be a choral advisor/director. We took him—McKinley Johnson—to the New Visions /New Voices Festival. And for the doing of the actual play, we cast together. I had had another workshop opportunity in the UK at the Old Vic. And so I was able to develop the script and we cast for a reading workshop process. We had a week and a half of workshop which was great because we knew more about who we wanted to work with and what we needed from actors. I was actually not in town when they cast the final cast of the play but I had input previously and Erica Daniels, the

casting director, and Hallie stayed in touch with me and I was okay with the cast. Because Hallie and I have worked together before and have had so many talks about casting that's sort of a no-brainer. I trust her with that.

Tell me a little bit about the process of New Visions/ New Voices starting at its fruition of the play?

Lydia: I can't talk a lot about that. I don't remember a lot. It was a long time ago. I remember writing out a statement of purpose—what I intended to do, what I wanted to get out of it, the standard fare for that kind of application. Then Steppenwolf had to write a lot of things about me. I think I remember Martha writing a very flattering letter on my behalf. And then being able to talk about the successful work on *The Bluest Eyes*. And then we arrived. They give you all these great actors and a certain amount of rehearsal hours a day. We worked on the script. I would make changes and bring it back. We did a reading. We spent most of the time working out what the vocabulary of the play would be in terms of the placement of music and how the music was in the play and rhythm and then before and after rehearsal we would spend a lot of time talking and working through structure. Not the structure of the play as much but mostly the world of the play—how it would look and feel.

Did you incorporate dramaturgy during this process in terms of collaborating?

Lydia: I did not initially. Ed Sobel helped us tremendously dramaturgically. Hallie is very good with new texts. It was inspiring. At some point Jocelyn Cremps came on board; but she helped us also dramaturgically.

And with New Visions /New Voices, you mentioned finding new voices for the play with working on the music. Was there a new audience that you wanted to reach?

Lydia: No, I just wanted to—I know that in any process you have great actors you're inspired. You hear the voices of the actors. Just being in a room with actors helps relating those words helps find where the holes in the story are. I hoped that's what would happen and that's what happened. It was a good developmental process. I don't write in a way that I can go in with a goal. But I think for us we needed to understand the music. We knew the music was an important element, but we knew we didn't want it to be a musical. So that was the most difficult part of the process: how to incorporate the music. And for the final production we had a choreographer. So we had not a lot of rehearsal time and lots of elements to incorporate. It was difficult - successful ultimately, but very difficult.

At the end of the New Visions/New Voices reading, there's a response from the audience. What did you find from that?

Lydia: That people were ridiculously enthusiastic about the play. I felt naked because it was new and not ready. Even if you know emotionally to be okay with that, you as a playwright are never okay with that. It was scary and awful. But the response from the audience—there were tears and people were inspired. It was lovely feedback. The constructive and mostly encouraging feedback was great.

From your own notes and from New Visions/New Voices, what did you take away from this experience?

Lydia: You know, I'm remembering now that when applying for New Visions/New Voices, I made this choice to have all of the actors be African American. We also used that process that this could work. We learned that it worked beautifully. Nobody had any sort of "I don't know who they are" or "are they white or are they black" sort of thing. There wasn't any of that actually. And the reasons why I did it seemed to have really blended the way I wanted them to.

And what were the reasons behind this choice?

Lydia: A huge part of the writing process was to make sure that I was not living in archetypes and stereotypes and images that were slightly callous to what slavery is and was. That I was telling Harriet's story, not the story of slavery. That I was honoring it, that it should exist for a reason. I have an issue with the American theatre's comfort around the showing of African Americans in a historical context. We seem to be more comfortable with that. And to be contributing to that genre was frightening for me. And to be adding to that genre for young people without really earning it and telling a story that was different somehow, that contributed some way. It was difficult to write a play from a place where I didn't want it to be. There were years when I knew better what I didn't want it to be than what I wanted it to be. It's a difficult place to write from. But a huge part of that was knowing that I needed to not have images of white people standing over black people, domineering. Not to see a black woman hit by a white man. I also think that for audiences these images are moving. If I'm black, I protect myself. I don't want to see that. I shut down. Or I go into a place of questioning whether I actually need to watch this which then takes me out of the experience of the play. If I'm white, I think—what I've noticed, since I'm not white—is that there's a tendency to feel defensive and attacked and criticized—which is also removing—because I didn't do this. My relatives didn't even do this. This is done. We remove ourselves from the moment because it hurts. When I took this away, it

was more about what the institution was about which is power and sex and those dynamics which are so much more important and which I think allowed everyone to enter it and see and feel the story in a human way. Not in a "oh, slavery, I know all about that" kind of defensive way. And it worked.

Did you ever think about playing with the gender?

Lydia: I've been asked that before. No. And I think because the gender dynamic is very specific and important in a way I think the race dynamic wasn't. And so I'm sure it could be done but I wasn't interested in doing that.

I'd love to ask you about the incorporation of the slave narrative. Could you talk more about the idea behind that decision?

Lydia: I spent a lot of time online at the Library of Congress listening to those old slave narratives and reading them and wanting very much for the story to be in the mouths of the people to whom it happened. I had thought that I could use the narratives that existed but I wasn't. That's such an important part of our history. I go back and forth as to whether I would call it an adaptation just because my adaptation of *The Bluest Eye* is such an adaptation that this feels more like a story about the life of Harriet Jacobs based on this book but also her life. And not even her whole life, which is another issue.

(Tape problem) Sorry. So we were talking about the slave narrative…

Lydia: I sort of got off topic because I was talking about the idea of adaptation. But I only say that because the book itself is a narrative once removed. And it becomes a play. It's not as much anymore. And that element was important to happen. Those were totally fictionalized.

Oh, really?

Lydia: I wrote those.

How did you decide the placement of those narratives?

Lydia: A lot of that comes out organically while writing. And then you find it during rehearsal and workshops. During the first reading after the workshop at Steppenwolf, I was devastated. I thought it was the most morose and depressing…it was not doing what I wanted it to do, the play itself. It had to do with the placement of narratives. I reversed it and made the narratives get longer and longer and longer and when they got long I made them shorter and shorter and shorter. I took out a couple narratives; I rearranged things - all just for the feel and flow of the story. I did sacrifice quite a few narratives for the sake of the play.

Talking about that second workshop, what did you end up with at the Steppenwolf workshop?

Lydia: A first draft that was considerably shorter than the final first draft but was a solid first draft that had a lot of work to go.

And in that point of time, were you concentrating on the slave narratives?

Lydia: No, no. I was concentrating on making a good play. And that included the slave narratives but it also included things like humor and storyline and making it all work out. History and everything included too.

Did you feel like, by the end of that process, you were able to like the play?

Lydia: No, not by the end of that process. By the end of that process I heard the reading and I knew what wasn't working. And that process let me re-tool.

So during this time you were trying to lighten it, add humor and cut some of the narratives. Hallie told me that you worked extensively on music too during that session. Could you share what happened?

Lydia: Oh yeah. We found out then that we were having a hard time speaking the same language artistically about the music which remained the most difficult and unfortunate part of it, even during the production. We had this inherent aesthetic misunderstanding with a very talented man who wrote music for the piece and what the choral director. I think he probably felt—and to some degree he was in a way that I regret—trivialized in the process. It was very difficult. And so we spent a lot of the workshop on the music. We would be in a really bad place and it would get away from us in the rehearsal process. So that was something we discovered, but it was difficult and challenging.

What was the difference between wanting to incorporate the music more or less?

Lydia: More. And differently, also a wonderful new dramaturgical sense of plot and times. There wasn't time to fully explore this during this process. It needs another process. So this process kept getting pushed back. And it was a process that would have been completely frustrating for anyone, so I think he was pretty gracious but frustrated.

Was he trying to create a composition score? It doesn't have a composition score to it now.

Lydia: It has two songs that were scored and arranged.

So from that experience, since you were there, how much time was there during the rehearsal process's beginning?

Lydia: I don't remember. I got to be there a lot, more than I normally would have and teach some classes to educators who would then teach the book…workshops and things.

What were some of the themes addressed during those meetings?

Lydia: Well one of the biggest things was figuring out how to plan the curriculum for the students who would be coming to the show. They're very good at this at Steppenwolf and have a really strong philosophy, which I'm sure Hallie's already talked about. But it was important to me that we made it not alienating historical. It's about the play. But it still was important for me that it would be contextualized the reality of the play and what happens in the play because I don't think the directions hold, which is what we heard from the students. We didn't know. So we spent a lot of time talking about that and working on that. I believe we were successful.

Did you take a few moments to discuss the idea of freedom? I believe that was one of the major themes…

Lydia: Yes, yes.

Did the workshops that you had with teachers and students influence your playwriting process at all?

Lydia: Working with the Steppenwolf Theatre audiences has been so important to my writing process so much…if not the process just the level of investment. It's made me…it makes me work harder to be specific...in a way that all playwrights do. But in this venue you do not have the luxury of not being specific. And it has to be good. The play has to be engaging and entertaining or you'll lose them. And I think there is no one like a young audience to tell you the caliber of your writing and work. If it's working for them, it's working. I will forever be indebted

to Hallie's program for giving me an opportunity to have to excel that way. Also there's a condition of 90 minutes which I think is incredibly useful in terms of distilling what matters. In terms of Harriet Jacobs, we have realized that we're only telling half the story. So I'll probably go back and finish the story which means I'll shorten the play that you saw and make it the first act and write a second act. I have to tell the rest of the story. Because most of the audiences even though they love it and were very touched were like "okay but what happens?" It's incomplete.

Were you able to get students' feedback during the development process but before the production?

Lydia: No. But that was okay. I think that actually they have a board of young people and they get to come in and give comments after that first reading. I think but not alot. The previews I get to see what the kids say and that's helpful.

Did you get to alter things according to the child's responses?

Lydia: Yeah, yeah actually

That's what my dissertation is about - that child response.

Lydia: Yeah, and I'm sorry I didn't get more of it, but it's helpful because this is just the first production, so I got a lot of that response and again much like my experience with the Old Vic which was very young, it gave me a sense of it's important. That the kids were connecting and identifying and being moved by it and being angered by it and being intrigued with it and active in it. It told me that it matters. I always have these issues with am I just contributing to a genre that is dead and is it appropriate to be writing a play in 2009 that is about slavery. You have to remember that these kids were born after *Roots*. So they didn't get it. And startlingly they don't even play *Roots* during Black History Month. They play *Barbershop* and *The Diary of Miss Jane*

Pittman, but you never see *Roots* played anymore. I think I'm just now realizing that in my mind. We've gotten…we had Jubilee; we had *Roots*. And we didn't even play it that often then.

I noticed in the workshop how the kids were shocked by the narrative. And a lot of the kids did role play with them playing the more sadistic characters. It was very shocking. … In terms of feedback from the production, watching with audiences, what were things you wanted to work on?

Lydia: I just want to finish the story.

You also had some interesting design elements with structure. Gorgeous! Did you and Hallie decide on those together?

Lydia: That was really more Hallie and our brilliant designer. I saw the designs and said, "Yes, brilliant," but I can't take any credit for that. I thought it was brilliant on so many levels.

How was this process different from working on *The Bluest Eye* with Hallie?

Lydia: Some of my concerns about the population of students that would see the play and what it meant in terms of the images I was putting out and the images that I was saying before— I think the American theatre has too much of a comfort zone with—were also prevalent in my decision to do *The Bluest Eye*. Both of these plays are for me tricky because of these concerns. And doing them for younger people for me made these concerns even greater. With *The Bluest Eye*, we had and took a lot of…the script was closer to done when we started. It was very special and we knew it. We had our first reading and we were sobbing and we knew it was something special. We made the time to really do a lot of psychological work with the cast on the front end to make it comfortable and safe. With this, because of *Harriet Jacobs*, because of the ambition of the project, the elements of that huge and beautiful cumbersome set, the choreography, music and a very short rehearsal period but a little more pressure because we had our own space and it looked like a show show—we didn't take in half the time. We just logistically didn't have the time to do

that kind of work. But also I think—because I had developed such a comfortable zone with Hallie—I also think that we didn't take into account what it meant to be replicating the power dynamic of slavery with a group of black actors. We got emotionally that it was frightening and challenging and horrible. But I didn't get that other part because I had already done that mourning part on that part with another cast. So I did not as aggressively do that, Hallie did not as aggressively do that, and we didn't have time to do that. So the rehearsal process was hell. It was so hard. There was institutional skepticism from the actors. It was legitimately so, not just because of the stuff involved but because of the political climate of Chicago theatre over the years. It's the big Chicago theatres—what that meant. And then the heat went out during the coldest time of the year so to add insult to injury we were playing plays and freezing our asses off and it was just really hard. It was the first time professionally that I had felt doubted sometimes by a cast. You felt in the precarious position of having put them in a precarious position. It was really hard.

Were you doing rewrites throughout the whole time?

Lydia: Mmhmm, which is hard anyway. But I never feel apologetic for rewrites ever. But yes that's hard to. So in addition to the pressure there was yes the added pressure of "you're giving us more pages and its thirty degrees in the room and we're being slaves and you've obviously lost your mind if you're writing a play for the Steppenwolf venue". It was all of that and very difficult.

Thematically, a thing that interests me very much about the play is the idea of sexualized bodies, meaning the black body performing as well as the white body performing. That seems to be very important to her story as well as the stories of the past. I would love any elaboration…

Lydia: No, no. I think that Hallie was always better at articulating this dynamic than I am, but they are absolutely there. They are the fabric of the institution. And it was very important to me that the mistress be victimized in her own way even while she is being someone who also has a good deal of power but in certain contexts she doesn't and in sexuality she doesn't. And that she's pregnant through the whole play. She's pregnant through her whole life, which is insane. And the psychological dynamic of knowing that you're living under the roof of someone your husband wants to sleep with is sleeping with and living in an institution that condones this idea of your husband's children running around being a part of the fabric of your everyday life and existence and how would that not make someone a monster and a victim and all of it. And then the ownership of body for a person who doesn't own their own body, never mind the sexual ownership of body—of all of it. So yes, it's huge. It's huge.

From the shows that you saw, did the kids respond to that?

Lydia: Oh, absolutely. But, also because of Hallie bringing that out as a discussion point in a way that I probably wouldn't have or wouldn't have known. I wouldn't have thought to or possibly even wouldn't have thought of as important as a thing that touched me in an immediate way. My ancestors were slaves. So it's harder for me if I'm putting a continuum of sexual dynamics of ownership of self and body over just ownership of self and body. My priorities are that, tragic as that is, it's not as important to me. It's just a part of the whole dynamic. It's a nice way that Hallie and I are a team. I think it's really important way that we are able to challenge each other and make the work better and resonate with so many different levels

Thank you so much, Lydia. Your comments will be very helpful to my dissertation research. Thank you.

Interview of Kim Peter Kovac by Kristin Leahey

New Vision/New Voices

<u>Could you please state your name and your affiliation with the New Vision/New Voices festival?</u>

Kim: I am co-founder, co-director of New Vision/New Voices and director of Theatre for Young Audiences at the Kennedy Center.

<u>What was the inspiration for the NV/NV festival?</u>

Kim: The inspiration goes back to around 1990 with very different structure and management. My colleague Deirdre Kelly Laurakas and I were both working in education—what was then called Programs for Children and Youth, former name of the program—and we both directed shows for the program. There were always a lot of scripts, interesting and more daring plays, that we didn't know what to do with them. All these plays would come to us. One of them was Susan Austin's *Medea's Children* and another one—I forget who wrote it—called *Hitler's Childhood*. And so some of the European stuff was coming our way and we didn't know what to do with it so it evolved in a place to workshop some of these plays. It was an evolutionary thing. It just happened. I think it was interesting. I'm not sure if it was because of the Bob Durbin or not, but we hit upon that these were theartre-driven projects, not playwright-driven. It may have been my former boss, Karen Huggin Sullivan, was a person with a large personality who Susan Zeder knew back in the day when she was still working here. She was let go in 1992. She was a person with a large personality who thought herself as being very important. So it may or may not have occurred to her that the Bonderman was doing a similar thing. She may have totally ignored the Bonderman. A side bar to this: in '91, '93, and '95, NV was the same year as the Bonderman.

And we luckily starting in ’93 tried to convince —I’ve had some issues with Dorothy Webb—and then luckily…for Dorothy it was a matter of raising enough money to do the festival and she couldn’t do it back to back years. Because someone would have to get off the cycle to change the cycle. So in 1995 I was able to convince the boss (Deidre then was working in production so it was more me convincing the head of education) that we should do a special NV for the 25th anniversary of the Kennedy Center in ’96. So we did one in 95 and 96 specifically in order to get off the cycle with the Bonderman. As a more koom-by-ya for the field. With alternate years so it would be different because most people couldn’t do both in a year. So we would do ’96 and Bonderman worked ’97, we did ’98, and so on. As opposed to both the same year, because people couldn’t go to both. Susan was a playwright by the way if she didn’t tell you back in the day. It sort of stumbled in a sense. We didn’t know what we were doing. One of the things that was interesting and different than other things is that plays can be submitted at various different levels of completion, including a treatment. That grew out of the fact that we wanted to involve the *Yellow Boat* that wasn’t even started at the time. So I remember the story—I remember seeing David Sarts on conference somewhere and he said something about this festival and I said “Well, you have to come; you’re in the brochure.” And he had written *Not Word One*. And he was working with Suzan Zeder and she had him write a short story version of it and they came here (Carol and David North) came here and asked for five actors who could improvise and a pianist and they started the play here. They began here.

Kim, I’ve seen the layout and huge breakdown they had in terms of the drawings and such at ASU.

Kim: So the success of that led us to say let’s do plays at different levels because that would make it more interesting for the audience. You’ll see plays that are ready to produce almost—I

mean at that first one was Wendy Kesselman's, *Tale of Two Cities* that was ready to go into production the next day. And then we had *Yellow Boat* which was a series of improvised scenes that they had noodled together in the last two days but it was very important groundwork for it. So to have those plays at different levels was very interesting for the artists and the audience. We recently—the discussions are also part of the public conversation in the field. We look at them as helpful to the artist but at the same time as well as the public conversation in the field as a whole.

What is the mission and what are the goals of New Visions/New Voices and how have they evolved over the years?

Kim: To develop new work and to be supportive to theatres. To use our position in the best way and our resources in the best way. There are players that you met—the head of education yesterday who has been here three or four years. He actually has a different philosophy than the previous boss which Deidre and I like better which is that we don't do our own plays here. For years we did our own plays as part of it and it was more going up to him and saying "We're going to put up one of our own plays." And actually one year somebody got upset because they thought we had adjudicated it and picked our own play and the next year we put in the guidelines "We might pick our own play." So nobody would assume—it's our party and we can invite ourselves but if it's in the service of the field we probably shouldn't be doing that is what Deidre and I think and Darryl has agreed with. That it should be inviting other people. We have the resources to workshop a play that, for instance, Adventure Theatre of Chicago might not have especially perhaps with this level of actor. Space and time and time away so it's a service to the field. We consider it as contributing to the literature of the field trying to move it forward. Some of the philosophical stuff will be right there in your program book.

What is the selection process for the pieces?

Kim: There are two different levels. The selection process is the plays are read by outside people in the field - outside of the Kennedy Center. Various people of the field with various knowledge who read them.

How many readers are there?

Kim: Usually two. And they usually read them all and—this year we had 60 US submissions by the way so your play was one of 60. So they read them and rank them. They do a little report ranking them 1-10 and they make comments and they are smart enough in their field to say "Oh this is like every other play" or "do we really need a new version of *The Little Mermaid*" or whatever. And then an in-house committee which consists of myself, Deidre, Darryl, and Gregg Henry who runs the College Theatre Festival. So we are the committee who picks them. What's interesting about it is our different points of views and philosophies. So some of the strength of it comes from our disagreement. We try to pick interesting projects—projects that will profit by being here. Sometimes they are too movement based or whatever. We try to pick a diversity of everything—age, ethnicity, geographic diversity, age range of the play. And try to make for an interesting festival. We have never pretended that these are the seven best plays. We have pretended though that these are interesting plays that we want to help a theatre develop. The other nice thing about it is there isn't a lot of shopping because it's vetted by a theatre and its Tom's play so it's not a backer's audition. This is a play that belongs to somebody else so we're not soliciting to other theatres, there's not a sense of people coming here to buy new product. It's a sense of people coming here to be part of the experience and see the readings and be part of the conversation. Now two years ago we started with international. It had always been US and we

started international. It was partly the Kennedy Center's mission—it has become more international recently because I've been on the International Executive Committee for five or six years and have a lot of contacts. It was partly I think because there's more interest in that kind of collaboration and a few years ago. It's a little more exotic.

Why do you think that's the case?

Kim: I think English is becoming a language more people are using. For us it was partly because we wanted to kick start the festival. It's been going the same way for a while but how do we make it more interesting? Let's bring some international stuff. So we got in bed—have been in bed a couple of times with the Australian Council for the Arts who help the Australian Project that we pick the one. They don't pick; they give us several to pick from. And we have several other international projects. And this year we happen to really like Canadian piece so we picked it. And it's really not so far away. It's not that exotic. We had 12 submissions from overseas, including one from Russia and one from Cameroon. And all in English. English language scripts from any country.

Have you had any bilingual plays?

Kim: No. Not to date. We may have had some bad ones but we don't want to talk about those ones.

How has the structure of the Festival changed over time? Or has it not?

Kim: Not a lot. We tend to keep things the same, certain Equity rules we have to follow, guidelines. Musicals get a little more rehearsal than straight plays. We like morning and afternoon shifts because we like to give people time to think about it. We've talked to other

artists and things like that. That hasn't changed. One thing that has changed is that we really discourage any kind of staging. We—I don't know if Deidre told this story of the director spending an entire day of rehearsal writing light cues one year. So the next year we cut light cues because that's not what it's about. It's not a production; it's a presentation. I think we're better at keeping things relaxed and not competitive and we always were. The discussions have changed a bit, how they're done, the post show discussions.

What were the trends in the past and what are they now? Or does it change every other year?

Kim: It just evolves because we've never been quite happy with how it works all the time. At one time we had panelists who were the experts up there. And I think it was John Kline who was here with *Bunnicula* who said "You've got fifty people who know what they're doing in the audience. Why do you need a panel? Why don't you have a facilitated discussion?" Some of the more interesting ones were when we had the theatre training program here that Deidre ran. We'd get some of the kids from the program to comment. But it's evolved recently. You know Todd London from New Dramatists has read a lot of them and he's really good at it. Jeff Church did it a few years ago and Laurie's here this year doing similar kinds of things but they're basically facilitators and they meet up with the teams and try to structure it appropriately. We've had a few ugly ones, so we tend to opt for nicer and less insightful and not run the risk of it getting ugly.

Kristin: Especially since the plays are at such different development stages.

Kim: Correct and you can see just the writers here are different ages. And who has what kind of shell? You know, Kevin Dyers says "I want to hear it. I want to hear what they say and tell them they can come and get me. They can say whatever they want." And other people will not want to.

Are any of the feedback questions…are you given a sort of form? No.

Kim: We have an evaluation you can write.

What are some of the major trends you've noticed in terms of collaboration and types of plays?

Kim: Well there's certainly more work for high school. This is going back over the 17 years. There's certainly longer plays. It used to be we limited to 60 minutes period no matter how long your plays was. Mostly because we were in the theatre lab which shares its space with the comedy part of mystery *Sheer Madness* so we had a very limited amount of time. Now we tend to let people…let people be a little looser about it. It depends on how long the play is. The *Dani Girls* were wanting to do the whole play but we suggested that they only do part of it because they can't learn all the music. Up to a point well tell them to do whatever they want; it's their nickel. However sometime we help guide people, like the *Dani Girls* or the tricky thing with Katrina was how to do the jazz band. And I don't think that Tom had any ideas other than someone making jazz noises, which wasn't quite the best idea. So Deidre and I came up with the idea of a jazz singer and the pianist and the noodler. It seemed they couldn't do the play without it. Without the music element. So how do we capture it in some way? Would it be playing tapes or what?

There's a degree of vocal recognition you can play with but you also have to have an instrumental in some fashion.

Kim: So that's we hit upon that. And the same thing was true with the show from Unicorn in London. The boys had never done an opera before. So we—Deidre and I—also used to direct a

chamber opera so we also sort of helped them figure some things about. How to structure what it was. Or what they did, how they looked at operas. Because opera singers tend to be "park and bark," as they say. Whereas American opera singers tend to be more actors, so they were taking this opera called *Le Enfante Les Surtelecious* and they wanted to make it a children's opera because it had a child protagonist. It's not a children's opera. It was a huge experiment. How do you write the libretto? How do you find and reproduce a score in a way the computer could cut and paste the libretto? And then we found them some musical theatre and opera singers. George Folger Meanieshipcar from Danny Girl is a really superb music director. And actually Josh was second pianist. They actually had two pianists because it was so complicated. How much could they learn in 20 hours in order to get a good sense of this? They learned a whole bunch. That's when it works the best, when people learn things and figure stuff out.

Have you found that there are more musicals and operas coming in?

Kim: Depends on the year.

Can you talk about some of the diversity and variety of years?

Kim: There was a year when we had five or six musicals out of eight. It partly depends who's on the committee for better or worse and partly depends on what comes in, what's interesting. One of the reasons we like Patch Theatre's proposals is they specialize—we had other proposals from other Australian theatres that were very strong, but they were for high school plays. Patch specializes in ages 4-8 years old that isn't done much in this country. So we also feel that, as well as being an interesting play, it would be interesting for our audience as part of the public conversation to see that. What do we want to see? I feel like it's great to give a shout out to regional theatres that are doing children's theatre.

What is the Festival's role in connection with the productions or the workshop as they go into production as a theatre?

Kim: None. We hope they let us know; we hope they credit us for having helped. But we didn't want to get into a situation where anyone was beholden to us beyond crediting. It's your play. You don't have to look over your back to see if we're going to swoop in and take it over.

Very autonomous. That's great.

What is the educational component of the Festival in terms of students coming from different universities?

Kim: That's actually fairly new. We had a student rate for the first time this year. Some of it is perhaps…certainly this year a lot of people from ASU and a lot of people from Texas are coming probably because you're all here. You know Rebecca Mishop is finishing up at University of Central Florida this year and some of them are coming too. They have a great MFA program there.

Are there some international writers also coming?

Kim: Nina Tersman from Sweden is coming. She actually wants to start something like this in Sweden. We had hoped to have an international observer—this playwright from the Cameroon—but there were visa issues. But Sweden's about as far away as anyone's come from to see the Festival.

What is the role of the Festival dramaturgs?

Kim: There are two dramaturgs. Depending on if you believe in dramaturgy. What's the role? Okay. I grew up in an era where there really weren't dramaturgs. I went to school and graduated in 1975. Dramaturgy was a bunch of Germans. It's very European. It was more literary manager and research stuff. So I learned it without dramaturgs. And I think dramaturgy, from my limited perspective, goes through changes. I think dramaturgs are much less self-important than six or eight years ago because, again, you don't even need the director. Get some actors and a playwright and that's all you need. That being said, we didn't have dramaturgs the first festival but that boss got fired. We've had dramaturgs ever since. We've thought of them—as opposed to the Bonderman, where you're given a dramaturg. You know, I think it's a very personal thing. So whatever the skill level is I don't know if certain plays—with all due respect to Dorothy—you get a dramaturg whether you want one or not , or whether you need one or not. And they have to feel useful with a dramaturg and an assistant dramaturg or whatever. For us, we think of them as resources for the teams. Depending on the year, sometimes we have one, sometimes we have two. People can choose to use them or not. They're there as resources. We think it's important to have them. Lenore Brown has been a turg a lot, Laurie was a 'turg one year. This year these two are very fascinating people -very different. Chris is more traditional trained dramaturgy and literary person and Zachary is more of a playwright. So it's different flavors. With *Danni Girls* Karen has written a lot of musicals. Chris has not worked on musicals. They wanted somebody a lot. So Deidre and I got to chatting about it and I talked to Zachary who said, "Yes, I write musicals, but I only write them with Debbie." So it's sort of quirky. I'm not sure how much I know about that stuff. They were happy with Chris because they have some structural questions they have that are not so much with musicals or not but is the story being

told. So they're happy with him being a by-the-book structuralist dramaturg. So it's a matter of the right person in the right position.

Kristin: I've always found that between the dramaturg and the playwright, it takes time to develop too. That's great that they resonate.

Kim: And figure out what you're resonating with?

What is the Festival's relationship with the DC community, specifically the theatre community?

Kim: We have lovely actors who like to come back. This is one of their favorite projects.

Do a lot of the companies from DC also check out the Festival?

Kim: Not so much. Imagination Stage normally comes. Thackery's has come before, although, as an unaffiliated person. Not a lot of them because it's busy. Though, interestingly enough Woolly Mammoth premiered two shows that have come out of NV/NV.

Kim: The play called *Tommy J and Sally* that Mark Medoff wrote for us that evolved into a high school play and we weren't doing high school so we said "Sell it with our blessing." And it turned out to be Woolly Mammoth who actually cast the actor who did it here, an actor named Craig Wallace. So they premiered a couple of them.

How would you like artistic teams to take optimal advantage of the week at the Festival?

Kim: Other than coming on time to rehearsal? Oops. It's interesting that we want people to do whatever it is they want to do. We don't want them to just sort of stage it and put it up on its feet unless they don't know what it is. We don't want them to feel pressure to rewrite or any pressure

to do anything. Some of them do just mostly sit here and get it out. Some years back when Naomi Hazuka's was here, they just sort of staged it because Peter said "I don't know what this is so I'm going to try to get a sense of it on stage, what the play is." So they didn't do any writing, they just wanted to see what it was. It was a sprawling sort of thing. What the hell does this mean?

How quickly did that go into production after the festival?

Kim: I think the next season.

Wow! That must have been pretty early in the season, too, if they are at the point that they can stage some things.

Kim: They weren't staging; they were trying to understand the script and what it means. So I think it's that. Some people have been, have not used it well for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they stage things too much. I don't think it's about that. I think that's about the director, not about the script. Sometimes—and again we don't tell them they can't stage it—we just encourage them and sometimes they listen to us and sometimes they don't. You know, some people are really hungry and want to learn something about their play. That's what's best. Everyone has different methods. The *Danni Girl* production was perfectly happy and their director wasn't there the first two days. So other people have different feelings. Tom was happy with Jason not being in rehearsal today because Jason was off writing. It's that kind of relationship. Sometimes people meet here. I know Linda Hertzel met Joe Sutton when they met on the first day of rehearsal. They commissioned the piece but had never actually met until they came here.

I think Alice Gregory and David Saar had a similar pairing.

Kim: Sometimes they meet here. So it's working that out too. And as much as we can do to help people not feel pressure. And to work things out. It's more about are they going to learn something about their play. Hopefully they will learn something.

Are children ever involved in the development process?

Kim: We've never had luck with that probably because it works on Friday/Saturday/Sunday schedule and in May when school's out. And they're not here during the week like the Bonderman. And since they've broken the quota on that we'll let them do that. We don't want to force something on somebody. It's a director/writer team already here. We don't want to force children on them.

Have teams ever requested that?

Kim: No. They never have. They've been scared off. I don't know.

Could you talk about one of the shows that have come here that have had an interesting development process? And you have talked about a lot of them but any other memorable ones?

Kim: There are a lot of memorable ones. But one of my favorite ones was a couple of years ago ('04 or '06) was York's, *Nothing Is The Same* a play that she had developed with a lot of people in Hawaii. The set is Honolulu December 8, 1941 right after the invasion. About 4 multi-ethnic kids and their relationships after the invasion. We were able to bring some actors from Hawaii because it is all about dialect—it's written in pidgin—and we found some actors who could learn dialect quickly. It always seemed to us that they thought it was an Hawaiian play because of the dialect and the situation. The most fascinating thing that happened when they came here was that, after three sentences of the performance, you understand perfectly and forgot where you were. It was a hugely universal piece. This could have been about four kids in Brooklyn right

after 9/11. It ended up playing in Seattle for months or lots of weeks. I've been in the business for a few years and I was surprised. It's great to be surprised. That's one particular play that was really surprising. It wasn't what we thought it was.

I haven't read the piece but I've heard a lot of it. I'm a huge fan of *Black Butterfly*.

Kim: That was a big old mess at the beginning. They submitted a bunch of poetry from Latino street poets. That's what they gave us. Stacks and stacks of poetry. They're all women and asked for a DJ. We found one who had been a youngish actor with the festival before. They came in and just kind of worked on it. Back then Luis Alfar was more the dramaturg father and it became his play somehow. I'm not sure how that happened. But it was fascinating. You hope to read these things and find that spark. How did we find a spark in all this poetry? How could we possibly think this could be a play? It's a great play and somehow we were right in capturing that kind of stuff.

Did Luis come with the project as well?

Kim: Yes. And it was part of a big part of a festival. In 2000 NV/NV was combined with the One Theatre World festival and *Black Butterfly* was a part of that. It came as a full production. It had been there two or three years previously and it came. Wrestling came to the writing festival after having been a reading as well.

Was Jeff the director on that again?

Kim: Oh yeah, yeah. And actually I encouraged them to work together. I might have suggested that Jeff would be better than some of her previous directors. And they started dating.

What impact has the Festival made on theatre?

Kim: Well, you know the interesting thing because we happened upon this idea of theatre-driven pieces, most of these plays have been done - which is a good thing. There's a certain cache in coming here; they can use that in future fundraising. Oregon Children's Theatre came here a few years ago and just did a beautiful piece on Sacagawea with our picture. They could fundraise off that. We love that. We think it's had a lot of impact partly because the plays were done and it was not just the writer but the theatre that you're getting. You're not only getting Lori Brooks but you're also getting the Coterie and Jeff Church. It's is all part of this sort of weight that it takes. I'm sure you've seen the article in TYH about NV? For example, at one point it listed all of the artists that were involved in that. It's a pretty impressive group. I think there are these plays that have been done and the fact that there's an impact on the field as a whole by the funding from the National Performing Arts Center saying that children's theatre is important. Maybe it is. Debbie Leplum has a beautiful quote that I use internationally: "When the Kennedy Center says this works, you do your best." You want to bring your best to the table. Mark said something about "There's a great pressure knowing that your well-respected peers are doing a show next door." These days there are seven plays. It has had some impact on the field in terms of respecting writers.

And not just in the field but in terms of theatre in general, because there are not only international theatres but also major regional theatres and regional children's theatre.

Kim: Yeah, Steppenwolf came a few years ago and hopefully it helped their program—a cache for them. We like to think it's had some impact. We like to think of it still as "at home." Deidre and I were talking about it a bit ago and she and I were directors at the first festival and we

modeled it after ourselves. What we would want to do as directors. Leave me alone and let me work. Give me space and actors and great resources. It's fabulous. We hope it continues. We hope they continue to fund it because we love it—one of our favorite things to do.

What is the Kennedy Center's relationship with this project? It falls under the education department, but there's politics in the building. Is it collaboration? Does it works to a great degree?

Kim: The building certainly supports it. Three or four years ago they built us a new theatre downstairs, The Family Theatre for the program -for performances for children and young people. They are very supportive. They weren't years ago. We were using the Theatre Lab, the cross-eyed stepchild for a while. We were sharing the space with Sheer Madness for a while 18 years. Everything had to strike every day in 10 minutes. Now it's good news and bad news—we're more visible. The new regime is about Michael Kaiser. Regime isn't the polite word, but he's much more about "Do what you think is good. Don't just book something to fill seats. Do something of quality and hire quality people." And next year we're doing a version of E.B. White's *Trumpet of the Swan* for actors and orchestra with a script by Marsha Norman and music by Jason Robert Brown. It's gonna run five performances hopefully with some well known actors sitting on a stool like Peter and the Wolf, but E.B. White with a 35-piece orchestra on stage - a piece for actors and orchestra.

It's amazing how these collaborations between disciplines in the arts is growing and growing. Thank you so much for your time.

Note: I did my best to be clear without being overly verbose. If you need more, let me know. Also, the theatre program goes by the name Adventure Stage Chicago or ASC. You may need to make that correction elsewhere.

Thanks,

Tom Arvetis
Producing Artistic Director
Adventure Stage Chicago
Northwestern Settlement

Opening Doors of Opportunity

Here we go:

AST often creates work for young audiences with young audiences, such as with the BLUE HOUSE. Can you describe this immersion, what was useful about integrating children?

I wouldn't say we do it often. Then again, we've only produced five world premieres in the eight years we've been around. Of those, three included a feedback component that allowed young people to respond to the piece as a work-in-progress. Only THE BLUE HOUSE incorporated an "immersion" component. For THE BLUE HOUSE, Los Angeles-based playwright José Cruz Gonzáles came to Chicago twice during the script development process to work with two different populations of youth. The first was a weekend-long drama workshop organized by the District 65 (Evanston/Skokie) Theatre Faculty which took place at King Lab School. José's concept for THE BLUE HOUSE became the inspiration for a variety of creative drama exercises happening simultaneously in multiple rooms. The goal was to provide José with potential scenarios, characters, plot devices and objects, all generated spontaneously by elementary school students from prompts and exercises being given and led by Northwestern University drama education students. The second group was an after-school program at a park district in Chicago's Back-of-the-Yards neighborhood which met twice to participate in creative drama workshops led by master teacher Betsy Quinn. Here, again, students were led through a variety of exercises intended to generate material that José had the choice of using in his work as playwright for THE BLUE HOUSE. Was it useful? Yes. Why? Because, in each of these cases, the young people

involved were simply asked to play. And it was the free association of images, words, characters and places that emerged through playful activity that fed José's process as a playwright. Keep in mind that José was intent upon the story of THE BLUE HOUSE revealing itself to him. He was starting with only an image: a young girl running through an empty blue house at night under the light of a moon. He wanted to create the possibility for the story to emerge from improvisations, from the active imagination of youth.

What was challenging about the process?

I feel like I can only answer that from my perspective as the director in this process. I'd prefer José respond to the challenges of writing the piece. For me, the incorporation of young people as idea generators was intriguing, at times astonishing. Their honesty and capacity for creativity inspired and rejuvenated me. Still, we needed an expert creative drama specialist in the room. This was not work that either José or I could have managed alone. We also didn't always know what we were looking for or have the ability to ask the children directly for information. We became spectators to their imaginative creations and may or may not find the results usable.

How did it affect the play?

We ended up hearing the children tell some ghost stories, the details of which made it in to the final production. For example, the Mexican folk story of La Llorona inspired José to include a homeless character who is mistaken for La Llorona. Additionally, a pivotal plot device in the final production – the discovery of a key – came directly from a creative drama improvisation by a group of kids who "wandered through a dark attic" and mimed the finding of a key hidden in an old chest.

What do you think the children took away from it?

It was evident that the kids were deeply empowered by the process. Once they understood that their activity was directly helping the playwright, they took their roles very seriously even though the work itself was based in play. They had little trouble inhabiting their chosen roles and improvising with sincerity.

Is getting children's feedback in the development process inherent in the way the company develops work?

THE BLUE HOUSE was, by far, the most elaborate immersion of youth into our development process. The other two world premieres that included input from young people (500 CLOWN TRAPPED and WALK TWO MOONS) did so under very different circumstances. In both cases, the piece was shared with a public audience as a "work-in-progress" and the audience was solicited for its impressions and responses to certain questions on which the playwrights were interested in getting feedback. Neither of these processes made young people a collaborator in the making of story on the same level as THE BLUE HOUSE.

What subsequent and previous projects have you used children's feedback for?

See above.

Why do you think this practice is relevant?

There is considerable relevance to all of the practices mentioned. Anytime a playwright has the opportunity to get feedback and input from his audience (especially in the development stage) he

stands a better chance of producing a resonant script. These are practices that remind the playwright who their audience is and why they have embarked on this kind of journey in the first place. The practice of incorporating the effort of young people into the writing of a play like THE BLUE HOUSE serves multiple advantageous purposes. First and foremost, it validates young people as contributors to their community. As I've seen with a company like Barrel of Monkeys who take stories written by kids and turn them into professionally performed plays, a child is forever changed by the experience of contributing to something that is shared with their community. This practice also encourages collaboration and investment in the self as an agent of history and ritual. And I think, in terms of process, it can be an incredibly valuable reference point for other adult practitioners on the creative team (i.e. designers, dramaturgs, who don't have the opportunity to engage with young people on a regular basis. The scenic designer on THE BLUE HOUSE enjoyed her role as an observer during the park district sessions and I would say that her design incorporated a more playful because of it.

Do you think this practice is only relevant to children's theatre?

I do not this practice is only relevant to children's theatre. It seems to me that any theatre interested in engaging a particular audience could find this kind of work useful. The key ingredient is play.

Is developing work with students' theatre education or community based theatre?

This is a great question. I'm not sure I have an easy answer. For me, "community-based" theatre is as much about the place where it is created as it is about the people whose stories are being explored. Indeed, it's the stories that emerge from the people and the place that are guiding the

playwright. In the sense that young people were sharing stories from their own imaginations and the playwright was given permission to incorporate those stories into his process, THE BLUE HOUSE was a community-based piece. More so than it was theatre education. This latter term, to me, implies skill building in the basic building blocks of drama. To be theatre education, THE BLUE HOUSE process would have to have been making kids aware of the dramatic tools at work and drawing their attention to their roles as performers. At no point in our process did we instruct the kids. We invited them to play in a structured setting; we transcribed the content generated and we incorporated the elements that worked best with the playwright's story overall.

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