

TheatreNow! – A New Podcast Series on Women Artists

By Anne Hamilton

Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow! is an oral history series of the contemporary practice and artistic development of women theatre artists. I created it to offer the public information on significant women theatre artists so that they can take their rightful place as experts in their fields. As host and producer of the podcast series, I record interviews and offer them free to the public to create an equal presence of female experts that can be used for any journalist, historian, or documentarian in films, in print, and online.

My ultimate goal is to provide information so that anyone wishing to consult or interview a theatrical expert can find qualified women and include them in their projects. I would like to be able to look at a documentary or a news show someday and see at least as many female experts being consulted as male. This is a huge goal, but I think that it can be achieved with some deliberate effort. The series can be accessed through my blog at <http://theatrenow.wordpress.com>. The subscription option allows you to follow news about the podcast series.

The root impulse for my action was indignation. Indignation at qualified women being ignored and undervalued by the mainstream media. The logical thought upon which I base all my action is this: Even with the inequality that still exists in the workplace, it is impossible that qualified female experts do not exist. On the contrary, I thought think that they must necessarily exist. They are out there and I have to find them and bring them to the attention of the public. I can do that. And I can urge others to do that as well, in their own fields and in their own way. And together we can create an equal presence.

I first began to compare the representation of women artists in published documents and other media when I was an English literature undergraduate at Drew University. My advisor, Janet Burstein, pointed out that only about 10% of the entries in standard literature anthologies were written by women. She expressed a hope that the number would continue to increase as time passed. I was intrigued by this notion of representation of women in private and published sources, and I began back then to count the numbers of men and women listed on credits in books, on TV programs, in Playbills, faculty lists, and any other sources I can find. Over three decades, I've watched and compared the numbers. In some fields, there is barely a woman's name listed. But my field is theatre, and I am going to do as much as I can to change the numbers in my field.

Thankfully, it seems that women's pieces in anthologies have increased. I have found that the numbers are almost equal in literary magazines, which publish current writing, of course.

However, the anthologies still lag behind in including literature written by women, which means that history is not remembering or recording their accomplishment. .

In 2009, I began the oral history series by recording my inaugural interview with Quiara Alegria Hudes, funding it myself. I wanted to interview a woman as a man interviews a man – with the focus on artistic content, with no mention of marriages or children. I also knew that biographical information is readily available on the internet, so I did not want to cover that information in the interviews.

I felt that I could get to the essence of the artist's life with two simple questions: What were your early artistic influences, and what is your artistic process? I think hearing answers to those questions allows the audience to gain insights into the woman's core artistry. And of course, hearing the artist speak in a free-flowing way is always instructive.

I specifically curate the series to include artists who are doing interesting work and are rising in their fields. I use my instincts to choose the artists whom I want to interview, and the results have been quite interesting and informative. My original idea was to do a second round of interviews five years after the first one, to discover how the artist has grown. One of my jobs as a dramaturg is to find talent and champion it. This is what I have set out to do with TheatreNow!

With an eye toward presenting theatre artists in every discipline, I then interviewed Claire Lautier, a leading actress at Canada's Stratford Shakespeare Festival, then Ruth Margraff, who is a musician, composer and playwright now based in Chicago. Season One rounded out with Kristin Marting, the Artistic Director at Here in NYC; Catherine Filloux, a playwright who writes about human rights; Valentina Fratti, A director and producer; and Yvette Heyliger and Yvonne Farrow (Twinbiz), who are masters of artists in several disciplines.

The scope is international; Beside Claire Lautier, who is based in Canada, and Paule, who works mostly in London, I will soon interview Liesl Tommy, a director from South Africa who has had much success in the US and internationally.

Season Two started off with an interview with Kamilah Forbes, who is the Artistic Director of the Hip Hop Theatre Festival. I followed that with the Emmy-winner Laura Maria Censabella, a playwright based in New York. Episode Three features a fascinating discussion of Paule Constable's design process for WAR HORSE, which will soon embark on a world tour. Upcoming interviews include Playwright and Educator Fran Tarr, who created the film **brooklyn to bethlehem & back**, and the lighting designer and MacArthur Fellow Jennifer Tipton.

I plan to continue the series, and over the years, to build up a library of interviews, and distribute them to all interested parties.

Please inquire about **TheatreNow!** by emailing hamiltonlit@hotmail.com.

Anne Hamilton is the Founder of Hamilton Dramaturgy, an international script consultancy based on the New York City professional world, and is the Host and Producer of TheatreNow!