

WORKS BY WOMEN – A New Theatre-Going Advocacy Group in New York City

By Ludovica Villar-Hauser

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About two years ago I became a very active member of the League of Professional Theatre Women. I became Chair of the International Committee and recently was elected the Vice President of Programming.

In August 2009, I attended the first meeting of **50/50 in 2020**, hosted at the Julia Miles Theatre, home of The Women's Project. **50/50 in 2020** was founded by: Melody Brooks, Artistic Director of New Perspectives Theatre Company; Julie Crosby, Producing Artistic Director of The Women's Project; and Susan Jonas (Co-author with Suzanne Bennett of "The 2002 New York State Council on the Arts Report on the Status of Women in Theatre"), who is on the faculty at Ithaca College.

50/50 in 2020's mission is: To work proactively for parity for professional women theater artists.

You can check out and join the Facebook page at: <http://www.facebook.com/5050in2020?ref=ts> and visit our new blog at <http://worksbywomen.wordpress.com/>

I was very impressed with Julie Crosby's very clear call to action, to "put your money where your mouth is" (i.e. support women's work). It's simple.

I decided to make my contribution to the **50/50 in 2020** campaign by creating a theatre-going group, first on Facebook and then on MeetUp.com, to see the work of women theatre artists. Our mission is to see as many productions written, directed and/or designed by women theatre artists as possible. To date we have 268 Theater Goers which we hope to grow to 1,000 members by this time next year. The group has seen 35 shows - with May being our best month yet – we saw seven shows! At least 50% of our productions are by League of Professional Theatre Women members (sometimes more). That is, however, not a criteria - simply a happy accident!

We ask producers, artistic directors, theatre owners, etc. to fill out a form (provided by us) with their production's details, from which we create the posting for the "MeetUp". We ask for a minimum of four weeks' notice so that we can schedule efficiently. To date the group has been run by myself, producer/publicist Lanie Zipoy and actress Helen Stern. The productions which fit the criteria best are selected. They must be written, directed and/or designed by one or preferably more than one female theatre artist! You'd be surprised by how few Broadway shows, for example, hire women in these three categories.

We have been featured on Martin Denton's site: [nytheatre.com](http://www.nytheatre.com) (http://www.nytheatre.com/nytheatre/poy_current.php) and In The Know ([http://web.mac.com/melmaxnyc/melissamaxwell.com/In The Know/Entries/2010/4/25 Theatre by Women.html](http://web.mac.com/melmaxnyc/melissamaxwell.com/In_The_Know/Entries/2010/4/25_Theatre_by_Women.html))

It is important to note that Martin Denton has dedicated an entire section on his site to works written by women and has pledged to review of them as many of them as humanly possible this year. Check out the site and you'll see how well nytheatre.com is doing!

Something to think about:

According to Ellen Donkin's book **GETTING INTO THE ACT**, in one season in the late 17th century, a full third of plays in London were by women or based on works by them. In London's 1788-89 and 89-90 seasons, fewer than 10% were by women. In 1989 and 1990 slightly fewer than and slightly more than 10% in London were by women, while in the US, slightly fewer than 10% appeared in regional theatres and fewer than 5% appeared on Broadway. "After the initial decline in the early eighteenth century," Donkin writes, "the numbers have leveled out at seven to ten percent for the past two hundred years, as if an unofficial quota had been imposed."

Once we become a theatre-going group attending ten or more productions a month - serving 1,000 plus members (or more) - I feel it will be time to go to Phase Two of the initiative. This will be to encourage women across the country to start their own **Works by Women** theatre-going groups. Phase Three is to encourage the group to exist internationally outside the USA.

Check out and join **Works by Women** on MeetUp.com: <http://www.meetup.com/WorksbyWomen/>

SEE YOU AT THE THEATRE!

Ludovica Villar-Hauser is a director/dramaturg who has lived and worked in NYC for the past 25 years. She is originally from London and in a past life owned and operated the Greenwich Street Theatre, where she produced as well as directed. She very much enjoys focusing on the creative aspects of theatre and loves directing more than almost anything.

“Our mission is to see as many productions written, directed and/or designed by women theatre artists as possible.”

– Ludovica Villar-Hauser

Want to See Work by Women?

Join **Works by Women**: <http://www.meetup.com/WorksbyWomen/>

Advocate through **50/50 in 2020**: <http://www.facebook.com/5050in2020?ref=ts>

Follow **Plays by Women** at: <http://nytheatre.com/nytheatre/bywomen.php>