

50/50 in 2020 – Parity for Women Theater Artists

– a panel and working event sponsored by the League of Professional Theatre Women, New Perspectives Theatre Company, and Women’s Project held at the Julia Miles theatre, New York City, USA – 25 August 2009

The following notes were taken at the event by ICWP Member Elana Gartner, assisted by director, actor and playwright Lorraine Goodman.

Welcome and Introduction - Melody Brooks (founder and artistic director of New Perspectives Theatre Company)

- It’s important to move research to action. That is the purpose of today’s event.

Panel Presentation:

1. Providing the Framework:

Susan Jonas (Princeton U)

- Conducted research study in 2002 to report on the status of women in theater
- Create a ten-year plan culminating in 2020 (100 anniversary of women’s vote)
- Action for women in Theater – written in 1976
 - 30 years of reports – many commissioned by Women’s Project
 - all studies concretely demonstrate discrimination against women in theater
 - written in the hope that things would change – hah!
- Susan Jonas’ study (will be available by request through Susan Jonas):
 - They were surprised at how underrepresented women were
 - In 2007, 4% of the writers on Broadway were women
- Historically, women create their own companies out of frustration and then do not affect the mainstream
- Quote “We can’t stand on the shoulders of giants if we don’t know who they are.”
- Actual progress vs perception
- Theaters w/ highest budgets hired the fewest women – even when women were in charge -- greatest at theaters w/ least resources
- Women in theater were among the most influential in politics
- Regarding the Emily Sands study, 2 false rationales given:
 - women discriminate against women. The questions that artistic directors and literary managers were asked was whether they thought the script would be successful in the theater community. Women tended to answer more negatively. This was perceived as females keeping females down.
 - widely circulated but not fact: ‘women don’t write enough good plays’
 - actual number of submissions ~ 30 – 40%
- women constitute more than ½ of Yale students, etc....
- NOT b/c talent pool is too small...
- Women are fully human – 100% equal to men – part of the story
- Research raises awareness but action is needed
- If theater matters, than it matters whose stories are being told and by whom

- See NY Times Magazine article from Sunday, August 23 about women
- Women are not a minority in the population and should be 50/50

Producing Realities:

Julie Crosby – Artistic Director of Women’s Project

- Women’s Project is increasing their mainstage productions
- There is no scarcity of women’s work. This year, she received unsolicited 324 scripts that were not in their lab.
- To cultivate their season, she attends 500 readings a year but most of their work gets developed out of their lab.
- Connection, connections, connections
 - Networking
 - League of Professional Women
 - Alumni groups
 - Conferences
 - More informally: Angus McIndoe bar, St. Malachy’s church
 - Facebook
 - Mentorship – must ask for it! They need to be able to tell you the truth when you don’t want to hear it
 - Cherry Lane mentorship program
 - Women’s Project mentorship program
 - Mentorship doesn’t have to be career specific, but someone who can help you navigate business for connections
 - Giving away information doesn’t diminish power
 - Make connections by attending the theater
 - Attend productions at theaters you’re interested in!
 - Don’t pitch without attending their theater
 - Know their aesthetic
 - Understand that power structure so that you can change it. If they don’t do certain types of work, understanding the power structure will allow you to tell them why they should do something different.
 - Support the theaters that are producing the work you believe in
 - Nothing would make her happier than to have the mission of Women’s Project be obsolete

Elizabeth Van Dyke – Director & Actress, & Producing Artistic Director of ‘Going to the River’ at EST

- Going to the River, founded at Ensemble Studio Theater in 1999
- Had readings, panels because they had so little funding
- Not producing work themselves
- Revelation that Going to the River must become a producing company
- Starting by doing short plays by African American women

The Critical Response

Linda Winer – critic

- Came from Chicago where there was a tradition of strong women voices to NYC and was stunned by lack of strong female voices in NYC
- In 1980, all of her colleagues were men. She was the only first string critic for magazines and newspapers in the Drama Critics Circle
- USA Today and NY Post recently hired women
- One of five in NYC @ major papers
- Men don't "get" plays by women – 'men sitting around talking seems to be fascinating to other men. Women sitting around talking drive men crazy.'
- World of life that is not expressed onstage when we only produce plays by white men.
- Linda wrote trend stories about women playwrights: Marsha Norman, etc. who turned around and told her not to write them because being considered a "woman playwright" would hurt them.
- ACTION ITEM: Write the NY Times and tell them to hire women critics.
- How do we use the web to our advantage for reviews
- Reviews on the web could be anything. Internet is taking over reviewing. Be careful who to trust.

Getting it in Print

Alexis Greene

- 'Plays by Early American Women' anthology, lists 75 pages of plays written by women before 1900 – that are no longer available
- Can't find scripts of these women, ground-breaking women in the 1960's, all too easy to forget women's work.
- Poses possibility we have actually regressed....
- Why is it important to publish women's plays: publishing validates it and makes it permanent and puts work into the canon of plays
- Way for script to get to other producers
- How else are teachers to teach plays so they become known to a future generation of producers, etc.
- Women's plays of 1900-1930
- What is wrong with getting published?
- Traditional publishing industry is struggling, not interested unless something has won awards, does anthologies...and it's a long process.
- What are alternatives for publishing plays?
 - Vanity press (get over it!)
 - Use the tools, become entrepreneurs
 - Become small press publishers
 - www.lulu.com to explore other models

Why History Matters

Milly Barranger

- History matters
- When women's voices are missing from history
- Attention has been paid to women in politics and culture in the past 40 years
- Women's movement in the 70s
- Chief theater historians – all men – have, by passively ignoring women writers, have erased women's voices from the theater
- Higher institutes of learning have endorsed and supported investigations into status of women & minorities, but with economic situation, these funds have dried up.
- New introductions to textbooks give parity to male and female playwrights
- University Press has addressed gender
- Need for contemporary historical records.

Taking Action

Natatia Griffith – Commissioner of NYC's Women's Issues

- Biggest enemies of humanity: **denial, silence & apathy**
- If you do not to anything, than you add to the problem.
- 3 Ls to affect changes:
 - Lead by example – ex: women seeking their own funding, seeking their own publications, seeking their own reviewing
 - Lawsuits: Hit them where it hurts – wallets
 - Legislation
- Coalition. She was the president of the 100 Black Women.

(she got caught off because we were running late on time)

Q&A Notes

- Know your medium for social networking
- Conference on new media in Saratoga Springs, NY in September
- Linda Winer gets 400 words for Broadway reviews, 150 for Off-Broadway.
- Foundation Center did research about NY funders for women. Arts funding was not included as a line item. **Arts funding is .8% given by women to women.**
- Propose National Women in Theater Day of Absence. Women in theater don't go to work that day, don't attend shows.
- How do we get into schools and teach? Look at the NYC Dpt. of Education
- Writing campaign to women funders
- www.theaterwomen.org

Breakout group reports-brainstorm sessions for action

- Day of Absence
- Representative in each state for 50/50
- Micro-philanthropy in theater
- Creating website for 50/50
- Create session on self-publishing
- webinars online for self-publishing sessions

- Website that sends out emails about what women's work is already out there that people can see on a weekly basis.
- Like moveon.org, people go to see women's theater together
- National Chapters of Women in Theater
- National Day of Presence (SWANN...which people didn't know a lot about)
- think of yourself as an entrepreneur, invent yourself, do your own website
- www.criticometer.com to decide who is a "worthy" critic
- www.broadwaystars.com
- Internet limits potential for new theater members. With a newspaper, you turn the pages and find information that you didn't know about. With the Internet, you have to do a specific search to find what you're looking for.
- Training playwrights how to make a pitch
- Opportunities through new media
- Tonight's event needs to be publicized
- Report card for theater