



Table of Contents

Synopsis	2
Characters	3
About the Playwright	3
Namechecking	4-5
Interview with Laura Eason	6-10
Further Activities	10
Sources	10

PORTLANDCENTERSTAGE

The Guide

A Theatergoer's Resource

Sex With Strangers

By Laura Eason

Education & Community Programs Staff

Kelsey Tyler
Education & Community Programs Director

Clara-Liis Hillier
Education Programs Coordinator

RJ Hodde
Community Programs Coordinator

Matthew B. Zrebski
Resident Teaching Artist

Resource Guide Contributors

Benjamin Fainstein
Literary Manager

Mary Blair
Production Dramaturg & Literary Associate

Claudia Jean Fisher
Public Relations and Publications Manager

Mikey Mann
Graphic Designer

PCS's 2015-16 Education & Community Programs are
generously supported by:



PCS's education programs are supported in part by a grant from the
Oregon Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

with additional support from

Craig & Y. Lynne Johnston

Holzman Foundation

Mentor Graphics Foundation

Autzen Foundation

and other generous donors.

Characters

OLIVIA – 39, Novelist, Smart, sexy, outwardly strong but covering some fragility.

ETHAN – 28 Blogger, Very charismatic, sexy, a fast talker, used to being the center of attention.

Playwright Laura Eason

Laura was born and raised in Evanston, IL and now lives in Brooklyn, NY. She is an Ensemble Member and the former Artistic Director of Lookingglass Theatre, Chicago, winner of the 2011 Regional Tony Award. She is also a member of Rising Phoenix Rep, an Affiliated Artist of New Georges and an alumna of the Women's Project Playwright's Lab and America-in-Play, all in New York. Laura has received multiple Chicago Jeff Award nominations for writing and directing and has received two Jeffs for original work and adaptation. She is a proud graduate of the Performance Studies Department of Northwestern University where she studied with Frank Galati, Dwight Conquergood, Martha Lavey, Lee Roloff and long-time collaborator, Mary Zimmerman.

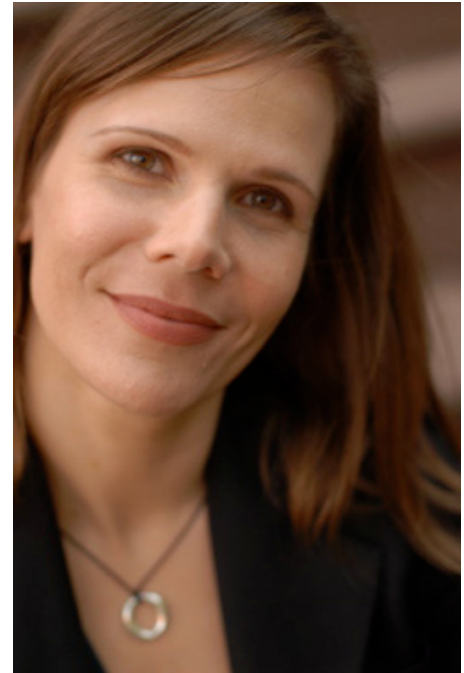
She is the author of more than twenty full-length plays, both original works and adaptations, and a musical book writer. Produced full-length plays include: *Sex With Strangers* (Second Stage, NYC; Sydney Theatre, Australia; Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Hartford Stage, CT: Actors Theatre, KY; Denver Center, People's Light, PA; St. Louis Rep), *Around the World in 80 Days* (New Vic, UK; Lookingglass, Chicago; Baltimore Centerstage; Kansas City Rep; Lamb's Players, CA). *Ethan Frome* (also director, Lookingglass, Chicago), *Rewind* (Side Project, Chicago), *When the Messenger is Hot* (59E59, NYC; Steppenwolf, Theatre Schmeater, Seattle), *Area of Rescue* (Andhow Theatre, NYC), *A Tale of Two Cities* (Steppenwolf), *Huck Finn* (Steppenwolf), *The Ghost's Bargain* (Two River Theater, NJ), *The Coast of Chicago* (Walkabout Theatre, Chicago), *Our Secret Life* (Middlesex School), *40 Days* (UW-Stevens Point); *In The Eye of the Beholder* (Lookingglass; Touchstone Theatre, PA) and *28* (Lookingglass).

As a screenwriter, she was a staff writer on season two and a story editor on season three of the Netflix drama, "House of Cards." Sole writing credits include Chapter 17 and Chapter 30.

Her plays have been developed in New York at Rising Phoenix Rep, Rattlestick, MCC, NY Theatre Workshop, Women's Project, Andhow and New Georges. She has received commissions from HartfordStage, Steppenwolf Theatre, Denver Center, Arden Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Writers Theatre, Two River Theatre, and Middlesex School.

Most recently, Laura directed a workshop of *Unknown Soldier* by Danny Goldstein and Michael Friedman at the O'Neill Musical Theatre Conference. She has directed several of her plays at Lookingglass Theatre, including *Ethan Frome*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *In the Eye of the Beholder* and *28*. Also for Lookingglass, she directed *Dreaming Lucia*, *Lookingglass Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *FEDRA: Queen of Haiti*, fellow ensemble member J. Nicole Brook's adaptation of Racine's *Phaedra*.

As an associate artist with Sojourn Theatre in Portland, OR, her co-writing and co-direction collaborations with Artistic Director Michael Rohd include *Look Away*, *Smashed and Hidden: Hate and Complicity in Present-Day Portland*, which is published in *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre* by Altamira Press and was seen by 45,000 students in the American NW.



Namechecking



MARGUERITE DURAS -

French novelist, playwright and filmmaker, 1914-1996. Her highly fictionalized autobiography, *L'Amant*, translated in English as *The Lover*, won the prestigious Prix Goncourt in 1984. *The Lover* recounts an affair between the narrator (the daughter of a bankrupt French widow, lured to French Indochina by a government campaign encouraging Frenchmen to work in the colony) and an older, wealthy Chinese businessman.



DAVE EGGERS - American writer, editor and publisher, born 1970. The founder of McSweeney's Publishing House, and of the literacy project, 826 Valencia, he is best known for his memoir, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, and the novels *You Shall Know Our Velocity* and *Your Fathers, Where Are They? And the Prophets, Do They Live Forever?*

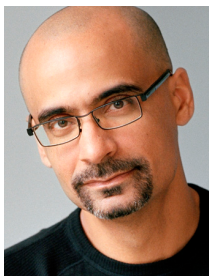


JONATHAN FRANZEN - American novelist and essayist, born 1959. Best known for his 2002 collection of essays, *How To Be Alone*, and his 2001 novel, *The Corrections*, winner of the National Book Award. *The Corrections* was also the subject of a media controversy, when Franzen publicly aired his

misgivings about the book being chosen for Oprah's Book Club. Oprah Winfrey subsequently withdrew her invitation to Franzen and moved on to another book.



ZADIE SMITH - Prize-winning British novelist and essayist, born 1975. Best known for her novels *White Teeth* (2000), *The Autograph Man* (2002), and *On Beauty* (2005). Smith was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2002.



JUNOT DIAZ - Dominican-American writer, editor and teacher, born 1968. Best known for his much-acclaimed, Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 2007. Currently teaches creative writing at MIT.



PEVEAR AND VOLOKHONSKY

- Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, acclaimed modern translators of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, and other Russian authors. Their translation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is widely viewed as definitive, and their translation

of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* won a PEN/BOMC Translation Prize.



JONATHAN LETHEM - American novelist, essayist and short story writer. His first novel, *Gun, with Occasional Music*, a genre work that mixed elements of science fiction and detective fiction, was published in 1994. It was followed by three more science fiction novels. In 1999, Lethem

published *Motherless Brooklyn*, a National Book Critics Circle Award-winning novel that achieved mainstream success. In 2003, he published *The Fortress of Solitude*, which became a *New York Times* Best Seller. In 2005, he received a MacArthur Fellowship.

FSG, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

- Publishing award-winning fiction, nonfiction and poetry since 1946. The firm is renowned for its international list of literary fiction, nonfiction, poetry and children's books. Farrar, Straus and Giroux authors have won extraordinary acclaim over the years, including numerous National Book Awards, Pulitzer Prizes, and twenty-two Nobel Prizes in literature.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

- She studied writing at the University of Iowa and published *The Geranium*, her first short story, in 1946. She died of lupus in 1964 after fighting it for more than 10 years. Her work was informed by her experiences growing up as a Catholic in the South. O'Connor was best-known, however, for her short stories, which appeared in several collections, including *A Good Man Is Hard To Find and Other Stories* (1955) and *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965).





ROBERTO BOLAÑO - For most of his early adulthood, Bolaño was a vagabond, living at one time or another in Chile, Mexico, El Salvador, France and Spain. He started with poetry, before shifting to fiction in his early forties. He only began to produce substantial works of fiction in the 1990s.

He almost immediately became a highly regarded figure in Spanish and Latin American letters. In rapid succession, he published a series of critically acclaimed works, the most important of which are the novel *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*), the novella *Nocturno de Chile* (*By Night In Chile*), and was posthumously awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction the novel 2666. His two collections of short stories *Llamadas telefónicas* and *Putas asesinas* were awarded literary prizes.



MARILYNN ROBINSON -

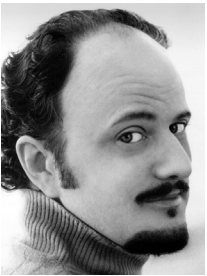
Marilynne Robinson is the author of the bestselling novels *Lila*, *Home* (winner of the Orange Prize), *Gilead* (winner of the Pulitzer Prize, 2005) and *Housekeeping* (winner of the PEN/Hemingway Award). She has also written four books of nonfiction, *When I Was a*

Child I Read Books, *Absence of Mind*, *Mother Country* and *The Death of Adam*. She teaches at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. She received a 2012 National Humanities Medal for "grace and intelligence in writing".



JAMAICA KINCAID - A significant voice in contemporary literature, Jamaica Kincaid (born 1949) is widely praised for her works of short fiction, novels, and essays in which she explores the tenuous relationship between mother and daughter as well as themes of anti-colonialism. A native of

the island of Antigua, Kincaid is considered one of the most important women Caribbean writers. Her first published work, *When I Was Seventeen*, was an interview with Gloria Steinem about the notable feminist's own teenage years. Beginning in 1976, Kincaid contributed regularly to *The New Yorker* magazine as a staff writer under Shawn's mentorship. In 1978, she published her first work of fiction, the short story *Girl*, in *The New Yorker*.



JEFFREY EUGENIDES - Jeffrey Kent Eugenides is an American Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and short story writer. His 1993 novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, gained mainstream interest with the 1999 film adaptation directed by Sofia Coppola. In the fall of 2007, Eugenides joined the faculty of

Princeton University's Program in Creative Writing. His 2002 novel, *Middlesex*, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the Ambassador Book Award. *The Marriage Plot*, in October 2011 was a finalist of the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction. Eugenides is the editor of the collection of short stories titled *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead*. The proceeds of the collection go to the writing center 826 Chicago, established to encourage young people's writing.

Interview with Laura Eason:

<http://the-interval.com/ints/le/>

THE INTERVAL: THE SMART GIRLS' GUIDE TO THEATRICALITY

by Victoria Myers

WRITER. DIRECTOR. MOTHER. INSOMNIAC.

In Laura Eason's play, *Sex with Strangers*, the protagonist, Olivia, who is a novelist, makes an acerbic remark about female writers not getting the same treatment as male writers. It's a funny and witty line (we didn't want to try paraphrasing), and also very true. After seeing *Sex with Strangers* this summer, we googled Laura to find out more about her because we had a suspicion she was someone we should talk to. And we were right. We love people who do lots of things, and Laura definitely does a lot of things. In addition to writing, she also has directed and performed with Lookingglass Theatre Company in Chicago where she was also, oh yeah, artistic director. She's also a story editor for *House of Cards*, and this spring you can catch her play, *The Undeniable Sound of Right Now*, as a co-production between Women's Project Theater and Rattlestick Playwrights Theater. Needless to say, her wide-ranging career in the arts gives her a fascinating perspective, especially on how women are viewed both on and off stage, and we're really excited to share her interview with people.

I. Present

You're bookending this year with two plays in NYC; *Sex with Strangers* this past summer and you have *The Undeniable Sound of Right Now* in the spring. Do you see any themes between them? It seems like they both touch on how different genders and generations approach and consume art.

Yes, there's a similar thematic exploration in terms of different generation. I'd also say there's some thematic crossover in terms of selling out or marketability of art, and how much one thinks about one's art as being a commodity or not. They're realism; they're straight-ahead character pieces. There's not a huge level of abstraction to them or heightened theatricality. It's really people you're coming to know and watching them on their journey. So I'd say there's a stylistic similarity.

One of the things that we thought was great about *Sex with Strangers* was that you had a female protagonist creating art and that was part of her story and journey in the play. We think it's important to have that depicted. Would you mind telling us about that?

A lot of what Olivia is struggling with in the play—which I think is an understandable struggle for women artists—is,

“Will my voice be heard?” or “I had a chance for my voice to be heard and it didn't go that well. Am I going to get another chance?” Because women don't often have the opportunity to fail up the way I feel like men do. If you're a female playwright and if you have a production in New York and it doesn't go well, the chances of getting another production in New York are really challenging. So I think that struggle of women making work and the questions then of: how do I get it out there, how do I get it seen, how well does it have to do, how well does it have to do to get another chance are very interesting to me and something I think about myself a lot. The show did very well this summer in New York and I'm very grateful for that because there's the potential for another chance, whereas if you get killed in the reviews it's very hard to feel like more opportunities will follow.

II. Reception

We've been talking a lot about critical reception to women's work. Do you feel that work by women is spoken about by critics the same way that men's work is?

I really think there's a significant gender bias in the way women playwrights are evaluated by male critics and some female critics. I feel like they bring a set of tropes and stereotypes to the lens through which they view the show, and it makes it really hard to view the work. I think it's tricky in terms of reception, but I also think it's tricky in terms of construction. It was very important to me in *Sex with Strangers* to have the character of Olivia have this distinction: she's very confident in her abilities—she knows she's a really good writer—but she feels she's been misunderstood and misrepresented in terms of the packaging of her book. She's not insecure and she's not weak. She's actually very confident with a lot of ambition, and trying to make peace with the opportunities not yielding the results that she had hoped. And it was so interesting to me that in previous productions, even though it's counter to a lot of what's in the text, critics would say, “She's insecure and weak” because they are bringing that lens to that character. So I continued to work on the text to make sure the volume was up on that quality of hers, so there was no way it was going to be misinterpreted as insecurity, but I still feel that is really hard for people. I did an adaptation of a short story by Elizabeth Crane called *When the Messenger is Hot*, and it's an amazing story of her dealing with the loss and very complicated relationship with her mother who died of cancer, and her falling into relationships as a little bit of a means of escape from her grief. What I loved about [the short story] was that it really captured one's inner dialog. Instead of making it all a very realistic thing, I thought how great to use our theatrical tools to capture that sense of inner dialog. The character's name was Josie and so I created three Josies. Well, the show did great in Chicago, so we took it for a short run in New York. Now I'm not arguing people's taste—people can like something

or not like something—but the thing that was difficult and frustrating for me is I feel like a lot of the critics came and saw three women—although it was the same character—who during the course of the show go on some dates and, even though it was really about the relationship with her mother, a lot of the reviews were like, *Sex and the City*. Because it's three women and they go on some dates. Now if there was one paradigm of a man coming of age and it was like, "We've seen that" so much of literature would be eliminated. It's like, "Dickens already did that, so we're done with that story." And that's not what the story was. So the fact that there are very few of these female stories, and then that's the lens that's brought to this project and that it's unable to have its own voice heard was incredibly frustrating to me. I think there's a lot of coded gender language and a lot of coded racial language. Someone did an analysis of Latino and Latina writers and the words that are used to describe their work, which ends up feeling very coded and very racially specific. And the hardest thing about it is there's no recourse. There's no forum to respond that doesn't just feel like sour grapes.

We've noticed that women's work is taken much more literally; people don't see the metaphor and heightened theatricality, and instead just see the plot. Or they assume it's autobiographical.

I get that a lot. In *Sex with Strangers*, for example, people would be like, "You're Olivia, right?" And I'd be like, "I wrote the whole other character and actually there's as much of me in him and maybe even a little more than in her." And that's hilarious to me. I wrote the whole play—I didn't just write her. I don't know what they think—that we don't have the imagination to make things up? I think it's so hard. Because we're caught a little bit in this dynamic of wanting it to be a level playing field and don't differentiate between us [and men]—make it about the work—but I do think some female playwrights are interested in exploring work that's less linear, more metaphoric, more atmospheric, that's more about idea as opposed to plot, and that the show accumulates in a different way. I think there is some difference in women's work that is beautiful and should be celebrated and more room needs to be made for it. I think work that doesn't fit the more mainstream perspective isn't getting produced, and I think women are writing more of those plays; I think how we make more room for those plays is a really important question.

III. Process

What is your process as a writer like?

I think for a long time before I actually sit down and write. I read a lot and I keep a giant folder on my computer of articles and ideas that are interesting to me. And then a big idea for a play starts to gather, often out of that a character will show up, then a situation

will show up, and then dynamics and scenes. I'll start to write in my head, and I'll often write in my head for about a year. Once I have enough of it in my head, I sit down and either write a 25 page outline of the play or I'll write a first draft—like a 60 page first draft—in four or five days. Unlike a lot of writers who write 150 page first drafts, my first draft is this very essentialized 60 pages; the themes and ideas are a little too forward, the dialog is too on-the-nose, it's all very clear. Then the next part of my process is fleshing it out, throwing some dirt on it, and kind of making it have more breath and space in it that's more about the characters and less about the big ideas. I rewrite a lot. I'm open to a lot of rewriting in rehearsal and production. I feel like you actually become a playwright when you're in rehearsal and you watch a scene that doesn't work and you have to rewrite that scene or write a brand new scene in 24 hours, and the quality of the work you turn around in 24 hours has to match the quality of work you've had three or four years to develop. When you're finally able to turn something around that quickly, in the pressure of production, then you're a playwright. It takes a long time and a lot of productions to get the confidence to stay clear headed under that pressure. It's a muscle and you only develop it when you have a chance to do it. There's no replacement for the heat of production. That's why I think these development programs that actually give you a workshop production—where the actors aren't at music stands but it feels more realized—are the greatest gift you can give to an early career playwright because you have to learn to rework your play in space, in real time.

IV. Development

It seems like new play development is really geared towards readings and readings that aren't leading to anything. How do you think that's affecting the writing?

Yeah, it's really different to write to a reading than to write towards a show moving in three-dimensional space. If you want to have a big movement sequence, how are you going to do that in a reading? How are you going to show that part of what you're using is how these actors relate to each other in space, and it's not in the text, but it is a really important part of the story? In the theatre the story doesn't just live in the words, it also lives in the physical relationships between the characters. I have a new play that I've developed a lot and done a lot of readings of, and there's a character who is sort of haunting our protagonist in her mind. That character becomes literalized on stage; the actor who is playing the character that she meets and is haunting her in her imagination is physically in the room. You can't get the impact of that in a reading and how powerful that could be in a scene where she's having a conversation with her husband but actually kissing this other man. When you talk about it you

don't get the same visceral response, and it's one of the most important parts of the show. That's why I think, after awhile, time behind the music stands begins to be diminishing returns.

When you're writing, how much do you think about the visuals and the staging?

Well, I do original work and I do adaptations and I do books of musicals. My theatre company in Chicago [Lookingglass] is a very physical and visual company. We often tell stories where the physical life is speaking the story as much as the words are. Often in my adaptations, more than my original work, the physical life of the play carries a lot of the story and is extremely important. I'll write scenes in my adaptations that are all stage directions. This is another big topic—people ignoring or disregarding stage directions. Of course there's room for interpretation, but because it's a play and not a book, what the playwright is trying to tell you in terms of the story, that the movement and action is trying to carry, is often embedded in the stage directions. For me, I think to not allow ourselves to create sequences that are physical and not just living in the words is limiting the tools we're using and it's problematic. But it's tricky. I was once told by a director I was doing a workshop with, "You need to stop directing the play when you write it" and that was really upsetting to me. I feel like, as a generator of work, I'm allowed to write a sequence that is wordless but carries story. Directors can choose how they're going to execute it—they don't have to execute it exactly like I have it in the script—but I have to give them a version of it so they can understand the story points. I was really distressed to have a director basically say to me, "You stick to the words and I'll handle the visuals" because we're creating something that lives. I'm not a novelist. I'm allowed to create and ask to have a certain physical thing happen in space.

V. Scope

We wanted to talk to you about adaptation. We found an interview where you said that you thought adaptations were misunderstood in New York.

I think there is a very preconceived notion of what a story is and how you're supposed to do it. There isn't this idea of: this is this person's take. There's this expectation of what is important and what is not important, and if you say you're doing an adaptation of a novel I feel like you don't always have a lot of freedom. I think people don't always understand how much the voice of the writer is in the adaptation—in terms of the choices we made, how it was executed, and what was added. We're not writing an adaptation that is neutral or separate from us—it's completely from our point of view—and I think there's an expectation that it's supposed to be neutral.

You've been working on *House of Cards*. We're always interested in the dialog between mediums. We were wondering if working on a TV show has affected your idea of theatre and how we tell stories?

I think they're different mediums and I think you approach them differently. What I think about a lot is the reach—how many people you reach—and how even with a very successful play the number of people you reach is so much smaller. And the opportunities, even with a show like *House of Cards* that I think people find very entertaining. The episode I did was in season two where Claire admits to having an abortion in an interview on national television and then she twists it in a, hopefully, interesting way. Then one of her causes for the year, which comes out of this very personal place, is sexual assault in the military. Now that wasn't paramount to the series, but the amount of attention we were able to shine on sexual assault in the military... And it was all part of the plot. We don't have an agenda to do good at *House of Cards*, but there's something very gratifying about being able to shine a light, and get it out to that many people, about things that are important. I think that's very exciting. I can feel sometimes that the reach of theatre can feel so limited, and that can be hard when you work so hard and feel like so few people hear what you're trying to put out into the world.

VI. Audiences

You were artistic director of Lookingglass Theatre in Chicago. One of the ideas we've been toying with is that the infrastructure for producing theatre is antiquated and maybe there are ways to change it to make it more conducive to producing more diverse voices. What do you think about that?

I have some thoughts. I think institutions get so entrenched in their own institutional history, how it's gone, and the subscriber model that the thought of turning everything upside down seems really scary. The next generation needs to say, "You guys, seriously, this is how it can be different." I think one of the ways to try and get more exciting, innovative, interesting work is to create a company structure that isn't beholden to one space. Having a company that is project driven, instead of season driven, allows less room for panic because it's less about, "We have to fill these slots and they have to tick off certain boxes to get our subscribers to come." If the art is the center and everything is emanating out, than it's like, "Look we want to do this piece and we know it's a challenge, so we'll do it downtown and these are the other companies we're going to target since we know there's a crossover. We're going to do it in a timeframe where this actor who we really want to work with but is busy doing other stuff is going to have a window." There are ways of constructing it all so you're responding to the reality that there is a bottom line, but you're not in the hamster wheel of season planning. As someone who has been in the hamster wheel of season planning, it's very hard—even from my company, which is very adventurous—the bottom line of having a space and a big staff is that it's hard to take risks. There's the possibility

of failure. So I think letting the art lead as opposed to the facility and the staff lead is helpful, but that's very antithetical to the way most regional theatres work.

We've noticed that there are a lot of people who are interested in other areas of culture—they go to art openings, film festivals, read the “in” novels—but they don't seem to go to theatre. Why do you think that is and what do you think can be done about it?

Do you think it's ticket price?

For some people yes, but it seems like it's used a lot as an easy excuse. We both know a lot of people who complain about ticket prices but then go out to eat and spend the price of a ticket on a meal or going out to bars on weekends. That's how they're prioritizing how and where they spend their money. And then for the people who have a lot of disposable income, it seems supporting theatre doesn't have the same cool factor as supporting MoMA or NYCB.

We talk a lot about this at my theatre company in Chicago because you look at how much people will spend for super shitty seats at a baseball game that they could watch on television and see better. That blows my mind. I think part of it is the event of it; it feels really fun to go to a baseball stadium. And, if you like the theatre, going to the theatre can feel like an event and can feel exciting. But I also think part of the reason people love sporting events so much is that they had exposure to them growing up; they played baseball growing up, even if it was just in the street with friends. There's a connection to it in a very essential, primal way. I went to theatre all the time as a kid and I studied theatre as a kid. There's some statistic that's like, “If you don't get someone into a theatre before the age of eighteen, the odds of getting them to a theatre after the age of eighteen are almost zero.” People will do stuff that's not cool if they really are interested in it. I think there is something that is particularly harrowing about a bad experience at the theatre. At a baseball game you can step out and get a hotdog, at the ballet at least the music is beautiful, at a movie you can leave and no one cares, but going and seeing bad theatre is just particularly excruciating, and you have to have a certain level of commitment to get through the bad stuff and go again. You have to believe in the endeavor in a larger way. Someone could go to a super shitty baseball game, and they're not going to stop watching baseball, but there is something with theatre where it's like, “I tried that, it was terrible, and I'm never going again.” There's something about trying to get them invested in a bigger sense that's important. My friend, Michael Rohd, does huge exploration of civic engagement and what it really means to engage with an audience, and he thinks the bare minimum is post-show conversations. Trying to

have more conversations with the audience and show that we care and that they're not just there to give us money and leave, I think is valuable too.

VII. Past

What is the first piece of storytelling that had a major impact on you?

There are two things that come immediately to mind. The Piven Theatre did story theatre and I took class there, and when I was eleven I saw their Young People's Company perform a collection of short stories including an adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, which was incredible. Then I saw a production when I was twelve or thirteen of *A Streetcar Named Desire* that was life changing.

When did you first feel like a grown up?

I feel like the bar is ever raising. Like you think you're a grown-up like, “I have a job and I have an apartment and I'm paying for my whole life” and that felt very much like a grown-up moment to me. But then more milestones happen and it's like, “I thought I was a grownup but I was so not a grown-up.” It's an ever evolving process.

VIII. Multifaceted

You've done a lot of things in theatre. We've noticed that there seems to be a resistance in theatre to people doing more than one thing. Did you experience that? Do you think it's different in Chicago?

At my theatre company in Chicago, we all have done multiple things; we act, we write, we direct, some people design. Everyone does a lot of things and it's much more fluid. I was given the advice that New York is so competitive and it's so hard to move ahead, that you have to pick a line here because that's how you're going to move forward. And so I did. So I'm a writer here. Even though in Chicago I'll direct and I'll act, which I think makes me a better writer and feeds into my writing. I think it is getting a little better in New York. I think there are some people coming forward who write and direct. **Heidi Schreck** is an amazing example of an actor and writer. So I think it's shifting, but it's a really competitive place. And all of those things—writing, acting, directing—those are all real skills that you really need to nurture and develop. It's easy to feel like, “I'm not directing all the time so am I really bringing enough to the table?” But I think doing multiple things that all complement each other compensates. I really do. Even if you're not directing all the time, what you learn about directing when you're acting, or what you learn about writing when you're directing, really helps flesh out your abilities. So I do think there is this professional evaluation of who is

more qualified and that the person who is doing one thing more is more qualified, but I'd push people to be open to the idea that the person who is also doing other things might be just as good.

You were also part of a band. What are your top five favorite albums?

1. *Hounds of Love*- Kate Bush
2. *Funeral*- Arcade Fire
3. *Bee Thousand*- Guided by Voices
4. *Dry*- PJ Harvey
5. *Darkness on the Edge of Town*- Bruce Springsteen
- 5 (again). The first album by The Specials

IX. Representation

We talk a lot with directors about if they feel or ever felt pressure to present themselves a certain way. Is that something you've experienced?

I'm a very girly-girl. I wear dresses all the time. It's just what I like. I definitely feel like it comes up in certain contexts like how to speak to be heard in certain rehearsal rooms. I'm being very frank, but I'd say I notice a difference in men over 45 or 50 and their ability to hear me, and men who are younger. I think there's a generational awareness of women as leaders, speaking in a broad way, younger men are cooler being like, "You're the director" and with older men it's not as much in their consciousness. I don't change what I wear or who I am, but I'm definitely aware in those situations of how to construct what I'm saying so I'm able to be heard, and I feel like I'm not always able to be as direct or frank as I wish I could be. I feel like, as a woman, I have to tap-dance a little bit, and that can be a double-edged sword because I feel like I'm undermining my own authority to be pleasing so people can hear me. It's complicated and hard to navigate.

Does that idea of "a woman can't say this the way a man would" come up in writing?

I feel that way sometimes as a writer in my construction of character. I really enjoy writing men because you don't have to worry so much about your delivery system. A male character can be anything—he can be ugly, he can be challenging, he can be sexy, he can be old—and people will go on that journey. But with female characters, there's so much that people bring to the table that I feel like is in-between them and the female character that you have to wade through. I'm navigating some of what I feel like is in the cultural consciousness, and it can feel like it begins to be more constructed and less organic because I feel like I have to be so aware of the delivery system and how it's going to sound and come across, in a way that can be really frustrating.

X. Future

What's something you think people can do to improve gender parity in theatre?

I feel like if you're talking about theatres with subscription audiences, the best thing would be for audience members, subscribers, to call and write the artistic directors and say, "We want more plays by women." If subscribers are calling them, the money talks in those situations. I feel like the more calls those artistic directors get that lead them to believe that programming female playwrights isn't a risk the more they'll hire female playwrights and directors. And then I think it's important that we keep talking about it. I think there's been a switch in tone to acknowledging the absurdity of the situation, and then giving a positive action [people can take]. I think **The Kilroy's** example is fantastic. I know there was backlash from people who felt hurt or excluded, but as a writer who knows all of those people and was also not on the list, I feel like them very positively offering up forty really good plays, it's really pushing to the positive.

Further Activities

Ebooks vs. books:

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/ebooks>

<http://www.cnet.com/how-to/how-to-self-publish-an-ebook/>

Blog links:

Booty Call featured here at Portland Center Stage:
<http://www.pcs.org/blog/item/booty-call-a-night-of-outrageous-and-funny-stories/>

PCS Props Blog link: <http://proplandia.tumblr.com/>

<http://blog.nathanbransford.com/2013/12/self-publishing-was-way-easier-than-i.html>

Sources:

<http://the-interval.com/ints/le/> The Interval: The Smart Girls' Guide to Theatricality