

Scott Horstein Celebrates LMDA's Partnership with foolsFURY at FURY Factory 2014



LMDA Regional VP Scott Horstein encapsulates the success of the most recent partnership between LMDA and foolsFURY Theater in San Francisco. LMDA provided the festival match between five dramaturgs & fourteen ensemble companies for Raw Materials, the works-in-progress series of the FURY Factory festival, which performed at San Francisco's Project Artaud July 6-20, 2014. Each dramaturg created company profiles for their respective programs, which can be found here

on LMDA's Metro Bay Area Regional page, and at: <http://foolsfury.org/fury/raw-materials/>

DRAMATURGY 5 WAYS: LMDA DRAMATURGS AND ENSEMBLES AT FURY FACTORY 2014

By Scott Horstein



(Raw Materials Program 1 – Left: Antic in a Drain's The Greatest Monkey Show On Earth. Right: Dramaturg Dillon Slagle in discussion with solo performer Ross Travis.)

Dramaturgy is a strange word, even for those of us who work in the theater, due to its many and shifting definitions. Here's a definition for FURY Factory 2014: the dramaturg is an artist who spurs a theater piece to unity, clarifying its aesthetics and its meaning as a specific event. To do this, the dramaturg carefully deploys a combination of visual and text analysis, research, written interventions, and strategic conversation to tell the story of the theater event back to the artists and audience. Last summer's FURY Factory Festival of foolsFURY Theater Company in San Francisco was the third in what has become an ongoing series of LMDA-sponsored experiments in hiring

dramaturgs for ensemble-driven theater festivals, following the Network of Ensemble Theater (NET) Micro-Fests and Summit in 2010-2011 in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis; and foolsFURY's own Factory Parts festival in 2013.

For FURY Factory 2014, LMDA co-conspirator Nakissa Etemad and I worked in partnership with foolsFURY to bring five dramaturgs into the heart of Raw Materials, the program of FURY Factory devoted to ensemble-driven pieces in development. Five Dramaturgs engaged with fourteen companies by writing interview-based company profiles and watching rehearsals, culminating in each dramaturg moderating several short talkbacks between audience and artist immediately after the two or three pieces in development presented on a given evening. [*Check out their articles on LMDA's Metro



Bay Area page, or at the link in the intro above.] After months of planning and preparation, we all descended in a rush upon the festival venue, the Project Artaud warehouse complex in San Francisco's Mission District. As we entered the packed basement performance spaces, what would the dramaturgy of the festival look, sound, and feel like? What would the dramaturgs have wrought?

(LMDA & foolsFURY core partners – L to R: foolsFURY ensemble member, Nakissa Etemad, foolsFURY Assoc. Artistic Director Debórah Eliezer, Scott Horstein, foolsFURY Artistic Director Ben Yalom.)

Program 1 featured three ensemble-created solo performances from Antic in a Drain, Illuminated Theatre, and Estela Garcia. In the talkbacks, dramaturg Dillon Slagle gracefully helped translate the performers' goals and questions about their own work and moderated the audience's many responses. In reflecting on just one of these exchanges, Slagle explained, "The most interesting moment was hearing how the audience connected with the Spanish language section of Estela Garcia's piece. I had expected some audience members to have a disconnect with the language barrier.

Seeing that the artist had found a way to turn this into a strength for the piece was wonderful." Slagle also mentioned that in terms of his own connection to the different artists, "Working in an ensemble scenario... I notice that I engage with the performers and production team more directly and in the room."

Slagle continued his working conversation with a number of these artists after the festival, building further collaboration down the road.



(Program 1 Solo Artists – L to R: Ross Travis, Estela Garcia, Dillon Slagle, Jonathan Bender of Illuminated Theatre, with Debórah Eliezer & Nakissa Etemad.)

For Program 2, dramaturg Rem Myers straddled the line between two very different discussions. “I loved how packed the houses were for the shows AND for the talkbacks! ... It was cool to see how my two companies (fools FURY and Killing My Lobster-KML) each approached ensemble theater differently, dare I say, successfully.” In the talkback on foolsFURY’s *The Baden-Powell Wars*, Myers helped the artist and audience navigate the uncomfortable connections the piece made between race, power, and sexuality. In the KML talkback, he facilitated a joint and open celebration by the audience of the company’s raucous sketch comedy.



*(Program 2
Dramaturg Rem
Myers in Action –
Left: Talkback with
foolsFURY’s The
Baden-Powell
Wars.)*



*(Right: Rem with
Allison Page of
KML and FURY
Factory performer of The Submarine Show.)*

Program 3 switched spaces from Z Below to the even more intimate Theater of Yugen. With the front of the house built directly on the stage floor, and no orchestra space or front aisle, Yugen lent a particular coziness to the evening. Dramaturg Oona Hatton led the talkbacks on her feet, standing and interacting with audience members as the constant facilitator for the evening. As she explained later, “The ethos of ensemble-



(Program 3 Dramaturg Oona Hatton in Talkback – L: Opal Street, R: Theater Plastique.)

driven work helps to give the dramaturg some creative ownership over the process... I've worked on many ensemble-driven pieces, but not in the role of dramaturg. I would say that one thing it does is help to integrate the dramaturg into the creative team- when typically their relationship is limited to the director and/or playwright.” The program featured Hungry Bird Theater’ apocalyptic clown duo, Theater Plastique’s outer space explorations with Emily Dickinson poetry, and Opal Street Dance Improvisation Theater’s quiet reinterpretation of the live creative process through tableaux of commonplace, often meaningless items. “I... really enjoyed the talkbacks... the audience was deeply engaged and shared really thoughtful reflections about all three

pieces.” Hatton later brought Opal Street to San Jose State to perform for one of her classes, continuing the collaboration they began at FURY Factory. It’s also worth noting that beyond Hatton’s own engagement, Theater Plastique already had dramaturgs Elisabeth Brancik and Emma McFarland robustly involved in its process.

Program 4 dramaturg Christina Novakov-Ritchey used her interviews to delve deep into the widely varying work of Bad Unkl Sista, combining inspirations from Japanese Butoh dance to couture costuming; the real kim harmon, combining numerous performance forms in a deep exploration of the theme of fear; and Ragged Wing Ensemble’s exploration of numerous stories of femininity. With a particular interest in ritual, myth, and shamanism, Novakov-Ritchey guided the talkbacks for three very different performances that emphasized less performance as narrative and more the ritual act of performance.



(Program 4 Dramaturg Christina Novakov-Ritchey – L: with Anastazia Louise and Goyo Aranaga of Bad Unkl Sista. R: Talkback with Ragged Wing Ensemble.)

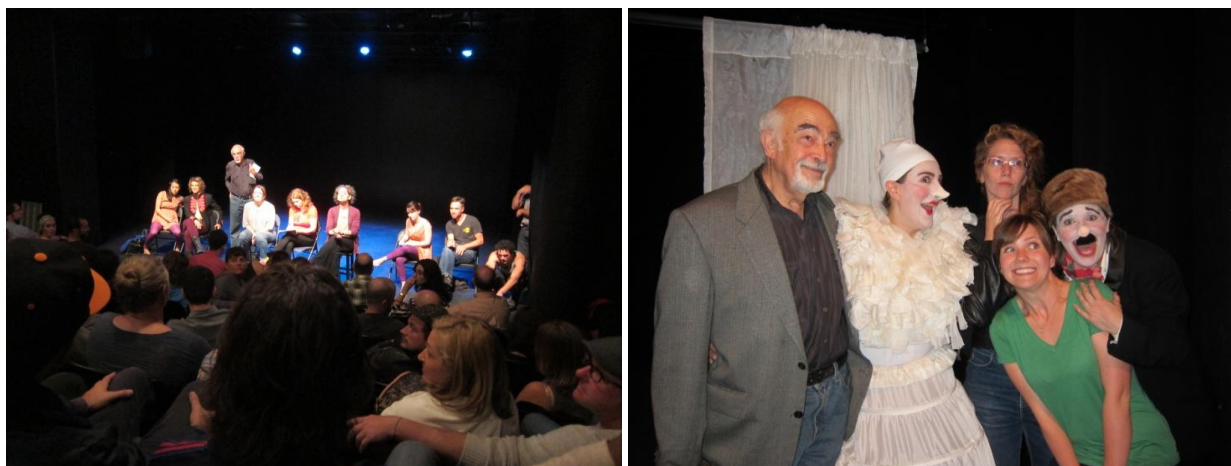
As our first event on the final day of the festival, LMDA organized a panel discussion to reflect on the intersection between dramaturgy and ensemble-driven theater: “Shaping Raw Materials: Dramaturgy and Ensemble Theater.” In this panel, which I moderated and where Nakissa Etemad was a panelist and shared some of her own dramaturgy experiences, we discussed how ensemble-driven theaters often practice the acts of



dramaturgy as part of the internal ensemble structure, without naming or hiring a specific dramaturg. foolsFURY dramaturg Lisa Drostova talked about how she was initially hired as a writer/dramaturg for foolsFURY’s *The Seeing Place*, but found that the need to perform in the piece was essential to her process. Panel attendees were able to see Drostova on stage later that night when *The Seeing Place* performed. LMDA member Virginia Reed, LMDA-sponsored dramaturg from the previous year’s collaboration with foolsFURY for *Factory Parts*, shared her own dramaturgy experience of “loving” the ensemble as a core working principle.

(L to R: Michael Moerman, Lisa Drostova, playwright Elizabeth Sreen, Scott Horstein.)

Onward to Program 5, where dramaturg Michael Moerman, like Oona Hatton in Program 3, directed the talkback on his feet, positioning himself as both colleague and fellow traveler with the artists but also the audience's point person for access to conversation. The evening featured an uproarious and unusual clown duo from The Defenestrators; harrowing solo and duo performances from Deborah Slater Dance Theater; and a frightening fantasia on Greek tragedy from foolsFURY. Each generated admiration for the virtuosity on display. Moerman ceded space for the audience and artist to love each other, but chose particular moments to ask key questions and spur reflection. At the end he buttoned the evening with the full-throated proclamation, "Thank you for coming to the festival!" which met with enthusiastic applause.



(Program 5 Dramaturg Michael Moerman – L: foolsFURY Talkback, R: with The Defenestrators and crew.)

Thanks to the successful partnership and collaboration between LMDA and foolsFURY, the FURY Factory 2014 displayed a range and variety of dramaturgs and dramaturgy. In the words of former NET Executive Director Mark Valdez, "There is a growing interest in ensemble work and practice throughout the field, which requires that we better understand the dramaturgy of collaboration. This new line of inquiry needs to understand the value of multiple voices, cultures, and expertise. The Theater of the 20th Century was marked by the auteur, where the vision and expertise resided with a sole actor, or playwright, or director. It seems to me that the 21st Century is about plurality and diversity. To better understand what this means to our work and forms, we need collaborations such as the one between LMDA and Fury Factory Festival."



(L to R: Scott, Oona, Nakissa, Ben, Debórah, Estela, Dillon, Michael & ensemble dancers with Deborah Slater)