

## Five Questions for Maria Striar

Posted on **June 4, 2009** by Andy



Maria Striar (photo by Carl Skutsch)

**Name:** Maria Striar

**Title/Occupation:** Producing

**Artistic Director**

**Organization/Company:** Clubbed Thumb

**1. Where did you grow up and how did you end up where you are now?**

I grew up in Boston. I went to Brown University, where I got the new play bug. After grad school (for acting) at UCSD, I came to New York. I needed to come back to the Northeast—Southern California, while an interesting change of pace, was not a good match for me. I remember stepping out of the truck in Brooklyn at three in the morning, and feeling like I had solid ground beneath me for the first time in years.

**2. Which performance, song, play, movie, painting or other work of art had the biggest influence on you and why?**

Above the living room sofa in my grandparents' home, there hung a colored etching by my grandfather's uncle, an accomplished painter and etcher of the Juddskill school. Against the background of a brick wall, a cross is being erected—it's halfway there, so it looks like the letter T. A cluster of armored soldiers are gathered around a naked, haloed woman, pulling her long red hair, ropes around her torso, her gowns draped about her feet. The ground is floored with black and white tiles, and hovering in the background are decorative medallions, typical of this movement. I found it quite frightening, very beautiful, mysterious and weird. On the flipside, as a family we used to watch super 8s — Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and Disney (mostly Donald Duck and Goofy). We laughed til we cried.

**3. What skill, talent or attribute do you most wish you had and why?**

Professionally, I wish I were more of a Macher, but I'm just not put together that way. Personally, I wish I had physical grace. I'm uncoordinated. I imagine this fluid, harmonious relationship with the physical world, and that I'd be filled with serenity and acceptance as a result. Oh well.

**4. What do you do to make a living? Describe a normal day.**

I make my living running Clubbed Thumb. We have a full-time staff of two, so there is no normal day. Depending on where we are in our calendar, the priorities are totally different and the tasks vary wildly. It's all about tech, or it's all about casting, or grants, reading plays, making budgets, or database maintenance. Most often, we are juggling many of these things, reordering the priority list as the day goes along, trying to get to the point where we can actually cross things off. I used to tease my father about his lists. Now I can't do without them.

**5. Have you ever had to make a choice between work and art? What did you choose, why, and what was the outcome?**

In the early days of Clubbed Thumb, I directed a few of our plays. A few years in, when we had grown a bit as an organization, I came to feel that the company's profile had surpassed my directing skill and experience level. I decided that henceforward, I would take myself out of that pool. About 4 years later, I was in one of our plays, and on stage in every scene. Because of my participation in the production, I had to forgo conversations about the script's development and dramaturgical questions about the production, and I did not feel good about that. After that experience, I decided that while I hoped to keep performing, I didn't want to do so in Clubbed Thumb plays, unless it was one scene as great-aunt Murgatroyd or if I had a very comfortable relationship with all the primary artists involved, and could move fluidly between my various responsibilities.

Running a theater company—being the person who chooses what to produce, who to hire and cast, etc.—has eclipsed my identity as an actress. It's hard for people to see you in those very different ways. It's hard to make time for the projects when they are offered, and it's hard to find the headspace when you are actually doing them. I hope that opportunities still arise and that I can fully embrace them when they do. But I'm at peace with whatever plays out. Each time it came up, I chose the theater company and the more oblique artistic satisfaction it offers over my personal artistic goals.

\*\*\*

Every summer Clubbed Thumb present Summerworks, their annual festival of new plays. Over the course of four weeks they produce an opening night of short pieces and three fully rehearsed, fully produced new plays. This year Summerworks is June 7 – June 27 at the Ohio and features new work from Greg Moss, Madeleine George and Kristin Newdom.