

THE NEW YORK THEATER REVIEW

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Playwright Kate E. Ryan kicks off Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks with DOT.

NYTR: Congratulations on having a play in Summer Works! What can you tell us about DOT and this production?

KR: Thanks! *DOT* is the story of a widowed elderly woman named Dorothy Cruthers who figures out a satisfying way to live out the remaining years of her life. As the play starts, we see her in a typically comfortable Florida

retirement home, unhappy and alone. Through the course of the play, we get glimpses of the artificiality of her environment, and we start to understand her deep dissatisfaction with this quintessential Florida retirement life.

I began writing the play in the Machiqq Ladies' Auxiliary Playwriting Group way back in 2006. Machiqq is a casual little group based in Brooklyn - - and it's a great environment in which to try things out, as our members (all ladies) are really enthusiastic about and supportive of each others' work.

Clubbed Thumb produced a reading of the first draft in late 2006, directed by Ken Rus

Schmoll (with Marylouise Burke as Dot). Soho Rep produced a workshop in 2007, directed by Anne Kauffman (with Mary Shultz as Dot). The Vineyard Theatre produced another workshop in 2008, also directed by Anne (with Sybil Kempson as Dot). These development opportunities allowed me to hone the script and collaborate with Anne on design and casting possibilities. During the two workshops, I also worked with composer/performer Mike Iveson, Jr. to create the 5 songs in the play.

I'm hugely grateful to Ken, Anne, Mike, Maria Striar, Sarah Benson and Sarah Stern for their ongoing support of this project. I used to say to

Anne that it was a project that just wouldn't die -- opportunities kept coming, and when they wouldn't, we would just try and make them. We're really excited to get it on its feet with Clubbed Thumb!

NYTR: *How do you begin writing?*

KR: I often start with something in our culture that is charged for me - to which I have a strong personal response. In *DOT*, I'm exploring the comfort and discomfort of typical retirement life. Is "easy living" satisfying? This past year, I wrote a sequel to *DOT* called *SCIENCE IS CLOSE* (it just had a reading at Soho Rep through the Writer/Director Lab program, which I Co-Chair). In that play, Dot has moved to New York City and is approached by someone who tries to

get her to sign up for cryonics. A fantastic This American Life segment on the early days of cryonics and a New Yorker article on the subject got me interested in the cryonics movement and its followers. Around the same time, my husband



Mike Iveson and Lynne McCollough

was reading Ray Kurzweil -- about the possibility of life extension through nanobots entering our bodies and repairing damaged cells. I remember thinking, 'Do I want to live to be 150? I'm not so sure'. I'm interested in Dot's dilemma in *SCIENCE IS CLOSE*: is more life a

good thing? Is a 'normal' life span packed with enough experience to add up to a satisfying existence? Do I value my own life enough to take action to get more of it?

NYTR: *What type(s) of stories attract you?*

KR: I like stories through which you get the sense that the writer has listened to an inner sense of narrative -- that feel organic and true to the characters' interactions with their world. I love Werner Herzog's film *Stroszek*, the narrative of which feels completely natural and totally crazy, like real life. I think Herzog wrote that movie in four days. Mac Wellman, with whom I studied at Brooklyn College, often says (to paraphrase), 'a story goes and goes until it stops.' Endings don't need to be recognizable as endings. At the same

time, I love working within established forms -- such as structures in greek tragedies, Noh plays. I want to do more of that. Above all, I like stories that are told through a use of language and visuals that is rigorous and surprising -- even alarming.

NYTR: People you'd like to work with alive, dead or fictional:

KR: I freeze up at these kinds of questions. 'Who are the guests at your ideal dinner party?' I'm totally open to working with lots of people, from Samuel Beckett to Ricky Gervais to Maria Irene Fornes to the SNL writing team to Anton Chekhov to Franz Xaver Kroetz to David Simon. I'm not sure what's actually possible, but a kid can dream.

Here are people or groups I've been lucky enough to work with in the past -- and I'd die happy if I were to work with them many times over: 13P, Maria Striar & Diana Konopka/Clubbed Thumb, Mike Iveson Jr., Anne Kauffman, Young Jean Lee, all the Machiqq ladies (originally, Erin Courtney, Karinne Keithley, Kristen Kosmas, Heidi Schreck and Sybil Kempson), Richard Maxwell/New York City Players, Ken Rus Schmoll, Sarah Benson & Rob Marcato/Soho Rep, David Herskovitz/Target Margin, Mac Wellman... (and I'm sure I'll think of more of these people in the next day or so and I won't be able to believe I left them off this list... ah well).

NYTR: Favorite place(s) below 14th Street:

KR: Manhattan: Barnyard cheese shop on Avenue C, PS 122 on 1st Ave., Kafana (Serbian restaurant) on Avenue C, The Ohio Theatre, The Ontological Theatre, Soho Rep/Walkerspace.

Park Slope, Brooklyn: Geido on Flatbush, Trois Pommes on 5th Ave., and this anomalous little area in Prospect Park where I take my 2-year-old son: a craggy plateau filled with tree trunks and huge sticks, spread with woodchips. I don't know what it's doing there, but we always have fun there, and it reminds me of New Hampshire, where I'm from.

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Playwright Samuel D. Hunter sits down with NYTR to talk about his play *Five Genocides* premiering in Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks at the Ohio Theatre.

NYTR: Congratulations on having a play in Summer Works! What can you tell us about the story and this production?

SH: I started writing this play last summer with Page 73 at their Yale Residency, and then subsequently at New York Stage and Film with the Lark. It centers around a young woman—a very pregnant Fashion Bug employee in northern Idaho—whose husband has just committed suicide. Desperately trying to understand why he killed himself, she desperately tries to piece together a book he had been working on about five major genocides of the twentieth century with the help of a fellow employee. It's heavy subject matter, but the tone is actually fairly comic. Really! Davis McCallum, the director, has been with me on the play ever since I wrote the first 50 pages of it last summer, and we've been developing it all through the Spring with Clubbed Thumb.

NYTR: How do you begin writing?

SH: I think all of my plays begin with a question that I have—something that I see in myself or in society that I don't understand—and the play is a 100 page answer to that question. I try not to write plays that I completely understand before I've actually written it—it's much more fun and more valuable to try and tackle something huge and unwieldy, and then try to wrestle it into submission through copious drafts.

NYTR: What type(s) of stories attract you?

SH: I'm from a small town in Idaho, and my writing definitely centers around the rural/suburban experience, what Sarah Palin would call "real America". The types of stories that seem to constantly occupy my writing are protagonists that are victims of their own idiosyncratic worldviews, people

who are desperately trying to reconcile their belief system or lifestyle with the world at large.

NYTR: People you'd like to work with alive, dead or fictional:

SH: I've never co-written a play in my life, but if I could do it with anyone, I'd want to do it with David Sedaris. His sense of humor coupled with genuine insight makes

him one of my favorite writers around today. And I'd love to get a glimpse of his writing process.

NYTR: Favorite place(s) below 14th Street:

SH: I'm a big craft beer fan, so the Blind Tiger is one of my favorite places—some of the best taps in New York City. Also, I think I could live at Momofuku Milk Bar.



(L-R): Charlotte Booker (Dorothy), Crystal Finn (Katie), and Edward James Hyland (Hugh) photo by Heather Phelps-Lipton

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Playwright Anne Washburn talks about her play *The Small*, part of Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks at the Ohio Theatre.

NYTR: *Congratulations on having a play in Summer Works! What can you tell us about The Small and this production?*

AW: It's the story of a piece of a few lives in a small town in New Mexico. It's about worlds opening up and closing in and turning inside out and shifting.

NYTR: *How do you begin writing?*

AW: All sorts of ways. I began this play in an Erik Ehn silent retreat where I was responsible for more pages than I'm normally comfortable producing in a day so I started from scratch in this dust cloud of panicked flurry.

NYTR: *What type(s) of stories attract you?*

AW: Drastic ones, I think -- stories where people come up against the boundaries of their own experience or capacity. But also very ordinary ones.

NYTR: *People you'd like to work with alive, dead or fictional:*

AW: I've been very lucky and have worked with a bunch of delicious collaborators; but there are lots of actors I'd love to work with, a handful or directors, and a chunk

of designers, musicians, I don't know who else, people I run into on the street; there's something about the 3-d nature of theater which makes you feel like it'd pay to rope in all kinds of people.



photo by Heather Phelps-Lipton. Maria Dizzia (Leah) and Matthew Maher (Duncan).

NYTR: *Favorite place(s) below 14th Street:*

AW: Places that are gone. I like that frisson you get when you pass a Ghost Location of which you were formerly fond, and it makes me feel connected to the city, and to my own particular history with it.