

July 30, 2009

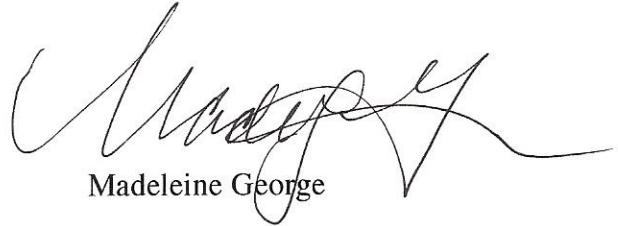
I was lucky enough to have Clubbed Thumb produce my play *Precious Little* as part of their 2009 Summerworks series, a much-loved annual platform for new plays in New York City. But my relationship with the company predated Summerworks by almost a year, and is, I think, exemplary of the kind of sustained, evolving relationship Maria Striar and her company seek to establish with writers they're interested in.

Maria first contacted me about my play, which was still in embryonic form--formless and ending-less--after having heard about it through the new plays grapevine. When she offered me a chance to bring the play in for a Boot Camp workshop in December 2008, I was thrilled; first of all, I had loved every Clubbed Thumb play I'd ever seen, and second of all I knew other writers who had been incredibly well served by the unique format of Boot Camp ("everything but the production," as Maria described it to me at one point), and my play was at just the right stage in its evolution to benefit from this kind of project. At every phase of the process, from deliberating about collaborators to scheduling to dramaturgical consultation to bringing in a warm house of listeners to witness the week's work, Maria struck the delicate balance between guiding me and turning me loose to make my own decisions--it's this balance that a playwright, particularly one relatively fresh to the production process, most values in a producer, and Maria and Clubbed Thumb were consistently gorgeous at making me feel both autonomous and supported as I thrashed my way through a second draft of my play.

As great as my Boot Camp experience was, though, mounting the play as part of Summerworks was a thousand times more fulfilling. The resources that Clubbed Thumb brought to bear on my play, from a director and actors of the highest caliber to a ravishing physical world for the piece to inhabit, were astonishing to me, especially given the production's short time frame and somewhat limited budget. Producing *Precious Little* felt to me personally like a risky undertaking, both in terms of the play's content and because it was to be the first full production of one of my plays in New York in a long, long time. But I felt throughout the entire process that the company was not only tolerant of the play's riskier elements, but in fact charged and animated by them--from the interns through the board ops through the designers and producing staff, the entire team of people who made Summerworks possible seemed to be engaged with the text itself, asking astute questions during tech, talking over the play's ethical dilemmas on smoke breaks, working unseemly hours to bring the thing to life. This sense of communal buy-in came straight from the top of the company, I know, and made me feel, again, that heady mixture of freedom and back-up that is the first condition for successful collaborative art to be made.

There are a lot of theater companies in New York, but Clubbed Thumb is perhaps the most beloved by playwrights. A Clubbed Thumb stage is always slightly canted, slightly torqued, slightly--or greatly--heightened, such that the sliver of our world reflected on it is both shrunk and magnified, dialed up or down by the writer to reflect her own inimitable antic, or skewed, or rowdy, or perverse, or wistful, or curmudgeonly way of

seeing. But this is the only thing all Clubbed Thumb plays have in common--other than that the plays the Thumb produces are as different from one another as their writers, because the producing structure of the company is so utterly, generously, in service of the texts the producers choose. Through first the Boot Camp workshop and then the Summerworks production of *Precious Little* I didn't just refine my play, I *found* it. I was tremendously lucky to have entered into a relationship with Clubbed Thumb when I did; every playwright with a funny, strange, or provocative play on her hands should be so lucky.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Madeleine George', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Madeleine George