

Women's Caucus Annual Meeting

Harbourfront Centre Main Building, Main Loft

Thursday, 14 June 2018, 5:00 – 7:30 pm

Meeting Notes:

In Attendance: Joan Burrows, Rebecca Burton (staff), Anne Chislett, Rita Shelton Deverell, Catherine Frid, Alexandria Haber, Katherine Koller, Frances Koncan (Chair), Janet Munsil, Chibie Okoye, Alicia Payne (President), Elyne Quan, Robin Sokoloski (ED), Celeste Sansregret, Bettyjane Wylie, and Carolyn Zapf.

Rebecca started the meeting at 5:08 pm.

Frances presented a land acknowledgement address and welcomed everyone.

Elyne dedicated the meeting and our work to Shirley Barrie.

Approval of the meeting agenda: Janet moved; Carolyn seconded; agenda approved.

Approval of last year's meeting notes: Rita moved; Joan seconded; motion carried.

Then we heard a series of reports from various members:

Women's Caucus Newsletter Report:

-Elyne reported on her redesign of the newsletter.

-Most specifically, she's looking for new ways to generate more engagement.

-One of the new features she's introduced is "A Writer's Day." The idea is to ask a playwright what they do in a typical day when writing. Inspired by *The Guardian's* "Writing Life."

-Everyone commended Elyne on her work with and redesign of the Newsletter.

-Betty Jane asked about archiving. How do we save all our work and ensure longevity?

-Elyne shared that the archive for the newsletter needs a re-think (e.g. we've lost all past issues because we've gone to new website. All of the links are dead. And if we switch websites in the future, we lose all our *W.C. Newsletters* again. We should save them some way in their entirety.

Artistic Director Interviews:

-Frances updated us on the activity.

-She has 6 volunteers and 10 articles lined up.

-The *W.C. Newsletter* is taking the summer off, so people can do their interviewing over the summer, and then they'll be ready and good to go when we return in the fall.

The PLEDGE Project:

- Rebecca provided an overview of the PLEDGE project and its goal to bring more plays written by women to the mainstages of academic institutions (only at 18% right now).
- Pledge is an acronym for a Production Listing to Enhance Diversity and Gender Equity.
- A totally searchable and filterable database with more than 300 plays.
- The database launched officially on May 31, 2018 at CATR (pitched to 200+ academics).
- Two pledges from universities on the website thus far: UTSC and the University of Windsor.

- Everyone felt the initiative was an excellent idea.
- Rita asked that the English Departments be sent the information about PLEDGE as well (not just drama departments), and maybe History Departments as well.
- Rebecca has a volunteer who might create a blog and feature a play a month. Hopefully that will help attract more traffic too.
- Elyne asked about information that was missing. Rebecca noted that all links have been fixed now from the switching of PGC websites (so all should be well), and asked if anyone notices missing information or typos to let her know, so they can be fixed up.

The SureFire List:

- Rebecca provide an overview of the program: based on the American Kilroys model to create a list of un- or under-produced plays by women, non-binary, and trans folk for the stage today.
- The initiative asked 200 recommenders across the nation to send their top three passion picks.
- To date, 84 of the 200 have responded with a total of 274 play suggestions.
- 70% of the responses are from women and 30% from men. The deadline came and went, so Rebecca will follow up with the non-responsive recommenders with a fourth round of emails.
- In the end, we might create multiple lists: the overarching popularity contest, maybe regionally-specific lists, and perhaps lists for Indigenous and POC playwrights.
- The results will be posted on our website and sent out with a press release.

The CASA Award:

- Rebecca read Beverley Cooper's report, providing an overview of the Award's progress to date.
- A collaboration between African Women Playwrights Network & PGC's Women's Caucus.
- The first year has happened (three emerging writers instead of one mid-career were chosen, but that won't happen again going forward), it was successful, but tweaks will be made.
- Challenges included: finding writing space, the timing of the residencies (different than our schedule), community engagement of the writers, getting everyone on the same page, etc.
- Only one award winner and mentor going forward.
- Bev secured \$7000 from an anonymous donor for the next five years.
- The 2018 process has already started. The call for year two is out.
- The African selection committee will now be chaired by a Canadian, namely Marcia Johnson, but she won't have a vote. Plus three Africans (Amy Jepta, Sara Matchett, and Jennie Reznek).
- The Canadian committee shifted slightly. Hope McIntyre has stepped down, and Natalie Meisner and Deborah Williams have joined the group.
- The CASA Pen Pal program is currently under review as well. They matched 28 Canadians and South Africans to varying degrees of success.

- Joan thought it would be nice have a reading of the new work that results here in Canada. Or perhaps just excerpts of the work even (it could be a fundraising event too).
- Rita suggested it could be done in Africa even, by Skype or some other online platform for all to see. It could even be a work in progress kind of thing at different junctures.

The Women's Caucus Facebook Page:

- Elyne explained that the WC started a Facebook group online.
 - She discussed what type of group it should be and what its purpose is (public, closed, secret, etc.). We started off as a closed group, but others could see our posts, so now we've gone secret. That still needs to be made clear to the group as a whole.
 - Elyne shared the example of the "binders group," which operates in secrecy (and what happens when people violate their rules – they are blocked, banned, etc.).
 - Engagement is low on the WC FB page, and most postings are coming from Rebecca and WC Committee members. How to make this a truly member-driven space for conversation?
- BettyJane asked if anyone can join. Elyne said all members of the Women's Caucus, yes, with exceptions to be determined (and all PGC women are automatically included in the W.C.).
 - It was suggested we re-invite all WC members to join (send out a Mailchimp message?).
 - No consensus was reached about how we should proceed.
 - Keep it going and see how things shape up.
 - Repost a message in that space letting everyone know it is secret.

PGC's Annual Production Survey:

- Rebecca passed out a handout for the 2017/18 season and went over the stats and findings for last season. The survey included 294 companies of all shapes, sizes, and geographic regions, and they produced a combined total of 961 productions.
 - Table 1: All Productions - The first time women playwrights have hit the 30% marker since we've been doing these surveys! Perhaps some real progress is being made?
 - Table 2: Canadian work - We fair even better when we just look at Canadian work. We cracked and surpassed the 35% marker in this respect for the first time ever!
 - Table 3: All Productions by Province - YT is the real success story here, as well as AB, and NB. Manitoba is a disappointment (they did so well the previous two years – but that turned out to be an anomaly), while NS and PEI had absurdly high rates for male playwrights.
 - Table 4: Canadian Productions by Province - Again, YT, AB, and NB are the real success stories.
 - Table 5: Five Year Comparison - stagnation and regression at times. This year, a jump ahead (or up), but is it a trend, or just another one-off anomaly? Only time will tell. We shall see...
- Bettyjane asked if we had findings by house size. Rebecca said no, but that work could be done over the course of the summer, although we already know from past studies that the larger the house size and the budget, the worse the representation is for women.
 - Perhaps Leila could do the survey by house size?

Other Business:

- Beverley Cooper brought this to us ahead of time: What about a letter writing campaign to the Canada Council for the Arts to ensure that Women and LGBTQI2S are considered priorities alongside and in addition to the three communities prioritized by them at this juncture?
- Rita had mixed feelings about the letter because the groups that are currently prioritized are historically disfranchised and underrepresented, so they need that focus. Not more division.
- Celeste countered that while that is true, women are represented in each of those three communities as well, and women are at the bottom of the ladder in every group, so it is very important to remind the CCA of that.
- Rita looked at the suggested wording and agreed that it would be a good idea as long as we word the reminder appropriately: we aren't proposing that women and LGBTQI2S+ supplant the chosen three communities; rather, that women and LGBTQI2S+ are also taken into consideration alongside and in relation to those priorities.
- Bettyjane mentioned ageism, and said that's a significant factor to be addressed as well.
- Rita's suggested wording: "We applaud the decision of the CCA. Could you also please take into consideration women, LGBTQI2S+, and ageism..."
- Elyne suggested we provide points to hit and a template letter that people can adapt.
- Elyne also noted that having council addressing the exclusion is very important.
- Probably more effective to have members write single (multiple) letters on their own, rather than sending one letter with many names on it. Inundate them with letters.

Other Ideas:

- Have a CASA reading during the Women's Caucus meeting.
- Attract more members to our group and meetings with some kind of keynote.

The group took a quick health break.

Liberating Structures Exercise:

- Members reconvened for a discussion about the Bra d'Or Award Revamp.
- Rebecca explained what the Bra d'Or Award is, how it has been administered in the past, and what some of the weaknesses and areas in need of improvement are.
- Members did some "Impromptu Networking" together, and then riffed off of the "15% Solution" Liberating Structures Exercise to figure out ways to improve the Award.
- Some of the ideas offered up by the group were:
 - 1) Create greater visibility (with low or minimal cost) by featuring the winner(s) on the PGC website in a high profile manner.
 - 2) Find a way to attach some money to the award.
 - 3) But, the money shouldn't go directly into the recipient's pocket; rather, the winner (usually an AD) could be given money for the further development (a reading or a production) of a woman playwright's work.
 - 4) Approach Freya and/or Wonderbra (both Canadian companies!) to provide a cash prize, sponsorship, and/or "support." The money could come from them.
 - 5) We could also do play reading events to raise money for the Bra d'Or Award.
 - 6) Have a tangible prize to go along with the award (not just a paper certificate):

- a) Bettyjane talked about donating to a special needs program, and in return they sent her a handmade origami card by one of the community, and she absolutely loves. Not expensive to make, but very special!
 - b) Last year Elyne priced and sourced the casting of golden bra pins. Elyne's partner has a design that we could use (for free), and then we could get a bunch of pins made and ordered in bulk. Prices have come down (e.g. in China). Maybe only \$200 or so (if we don't go with an artisan). If we do this, then pins should be sent to all of the past recipients of the award (maybe there's a press event in that somehow!).
- 7) Additional ideas to increase visibility:
- a) Post the winners on the PGC website in a prominent fashion;
 - b) Promote the award and the winner better (press releases, send to ADs, etc.);
 - c) Announce the winner at the Tom Hendry Awards (have a video statement, etc., as we do for other awards if the recipient can't be there in person);
 - d) Have the actual "award ceremony" as part of the annual PACT conference (ADs seeing other ADs getting rewarded for equitable programming practices);
 - e) Tap into (tie it to) the #MeToo movement;
 - f) Launch the revamp of the Bra d'Or Award with much fanfare on March 8th – International Women's Day.

Elyne & Anne adjourned the meeting 7:15

Socializing ensued.