

# 10th Women Playwrights International Conference

## Cape Town - South Africa 2015 | Newsletter #7



### 15 month to go!

In this news letter you get the latest news from South Africa. The selections are almost done! But there is a long way to go yet.

Also, we take another walk down memory lane, this time looking at the 7th conference in Indonesia in 2006.

Monirah from Afghanistan presented her new play in Sweden and WPI support Margaretta D'Arcy, imprisoned in Ireland.

Do you wish to host WPIC 2018? Read further down.

**Enjoy!**

**Mireille Bergenström**

*editor of WPI News Letter, senior advisor*

**WPIC** is an opportunity to meet, to build networks, to create genuine, lasting contacts between women playwrights and theatre professionals. Our aim is to have a supporting impact on cooperations and to build bridges between people from different parts of the world.

**WPI** was founded in 1988 and held its first conference in Buffalo, New York, USA. Two hundred women from over 30 countries were in attendance. Since then, women playwrights have gathered in Canada, Ireland, Greece, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia, India and Sweden. The 10th conference will be held 2015 on Cape Town, South Africa.

You can follow us on twitter [@womenplaywright](https://twitter.com/womenplaywright)

You can mail us on [wpic2015@gmail.com](mailto:wpic2015@gmail.com)

**Feel free to spread this news letter among your colleagues!**



Homepage for WPI, [www.wpinternational.net](http://www.wpinternational.net)

## Words from our president:



### **Hello all!**

We are waiting! Fortunately we soon will have the answer from WPIC2015 concerning who will get shortlisted and get the chance to submit her real text – the real thing. Some will be happy and some will be sad. I want to say what I guess a lot of people are thinking: It is not actually possible to judge a play from a synopsis, so it means that if you are not elected you just had bad luck, you are not a bad writer! But I know what amount of work the election process is, and some times hard decisions have to be made, so this

first round just has to be like this. Hopefully you will consider to come to Cape Town even if you will not be presented as a playwright. Our conferences are very including and down to earth – and you will be taken seriously as an artist and be able to do lifechanging discoveries all the same.

Last weekend I went to Stockholm/Sweden to attend the annual "Theatre Days" which is a two-day festival organized by The Swedish National Touring Company – "our" hosts for the Stockholm WPI Conference in 2012. At the "Theatre Days" I attended Monirah Hashemis powerful performance "Sitaraha, the stars", written and performed by herself. In this newsletter you can learn more about Monirah and her story. Hopefully a lot of people will be able to see her performance in the time to come – I recommend it.

Kerensa Dewantoro has written the next part of our WPI-history – the story about WPIC2006 in Indonesia. She has met and interviewed the conference director Ratna Sarumpaet who is active both as a writer/

director for stage and film, and as a human rights activist. She is a great reminder on how important it is to be true to your ideas about society, and also to use art as a way of changing the world. And as the world is always changing, and not always for the good, it is quite a challenge to do so. Ratna is one of my heroes.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the case of Margareta D'Arcy who you also can read about in this newsletter. Thank you to our vice president Marcia Johnston who has been in contact with the Irish authorities concerning Margarettas case, on behalf of WPI.

All the best to all of you, and a special hello to our host country South Africa and our very competent WPI-group there - with Amy Jephta and Karen Jaynes up front!

**For now -  
work well, live well, fight and breathe.**

**Lene Therese Teigen**

*WPI President*

therteig@online.no

## Hello from Cape Town!

### Thank you all for your patience!

Our team is nearly finished reading through all the applications, and ***we will announce our shortlist by 16 April.***

Our reading committee is standing by to take on the second phase of readings immediately, so remember, ***if you are shortlisted, you'll need to get your full script to us by the end of the month.***

Our final script selections will be announced in July, giving you a year to plan.

We are also busy going through the workshop proposals - the response has been immense, and it's going to be a tough job selecting. We really appreciate the variety of responses and the enthusiasm from you all. We hope to give as

many workshops as possible space to present and have a wide representation of countries and themes appearing on the programme. Please note that we are not accepting proposals for full productions or performances at this time.

We're also moving full speed ahead with the conference planning, as well as exploring exciting partnerships to expand the scope of the conference, and offer more exposure and opportunities to all our members.

More info shortly,

***Amy, Karen, Zara, Fatima,  
Patricia, Sondos***

**[wpic2015@gmail.com](mailto:wpic2015@gmail.com)**



# THE 7th WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE

## 19-26 November 2006 in Indonesia

*An interview with Ratna Sarumpaet  
by Kerensa Dewantoro.*

Three and half hours. The traffic was bad. I had texted to say I was running late and later again (one hour later) to ask whether we should cancel. Just as I turned into her street, I received a text message suggesting we reschedule. Traffic raises blood pressure and canceling just as one arrives, even more so. But we pushed on. Eventually I got to meet Ratna Sarumpaet. I'm telling you this to highlight how on even a daily level even the simplest of things (let only the level that Ratna works at) are difficult in Indonesia. Having lived here for over fifteen years, it is easy to understand the immense effort at pulling off The Seventh Women Playwrights International Conference in November 19 - November 26, 2006.



Ratna Sarumpaet

The conference was entitled *Cultural Liberty in a Diverse World - Affirmation and Diversity through Women Playwrights*. There were 186 participants from around the world and 112 participants from 33 cities in 25 provinces from Indonesia. (Again, the fact that women from 25 provinces in Indonesia is testimony to the effort that Ratna Sarumpaet and her steering committee made.) Ratna says:

*- This conference would not have been possible without the steering committee who worked tirelessly to make this happen.*

The steering committee was made up of Felia Salim, Riris K.Toha Sarumapet, Debra Yatim, Ines Somellera, Liang, Ratna Sarumpaet, Arsendy Narustion, Nur Zen Hae.

In her opening forward in the WPI 1994 program Ratna states: *Since the last one year, Indonesian women (that are generally marginalized) have been haunted by a big fear of the emergence of religious based political movements that have systematically, and at times brutally and violently attempted to force the acknowledgement of Islam as the basis for the state of Indonesia, transforming the nation into a mono-cultural Islamic identity. This constitutes a true threat to the women of Indonesia, who if they make no effort to resist, will sooner or later find themselves locked irreversibly in the chains of discrimination, while the rich diversity of the character of the Indonesian people is eradicated.*

Ratna's efforts to tackle both the marginalization of women and address the diversity of the Indonesian people is evident in her programming for WPI's seventh conference. In the lead up to the

conference, she lobbied a range of people and non-government organization to see the conference come to fruition. With the help of several women's activists groups, she organized a series of playwriting workshops in five different areas of Indonesia to encourage women to participate in creativity and express themselves through playwriting. The participants ranged from women working in theater (various capacities), university students, housewives and activists. Simultaneously, she was also the head of the Dewan Kesenian (Jakarta Arts Council) in 2003 and then was thus in a good position to lobby the Jakarta Arts Council as well as the Governor of Jakarta at that time, Bapak Sutiyoso, to support and hold the conference. The Governor Sutiyoso's vision at that time was to have Jakarta seen as the cultural gate to Indonesia, a country with immense diversity in arts and culture. Ratna saw an opportunity to get the governor on board and the City of Jakarta generously supported the WPI conference by sending three representatives from WPI Indonesia 2003 to the Manila conference to take the proposal for the upcoming WPI Indonesia.

A smorgasbord of Indonesian culture was provided with performances from South Sumatra, West Kalimantan and West Java in their ethnic nights program which also featured cuisine of these areas. The program itself differed greatly to the program that I experienced in Sweden in 2012 which featured almost a hundred dramatic readings. There were few dramatic readings (around 20 which shows just how much WPI has grown thanks to







the efforts of women all over the world) and presentations of performances either written or directed by women and series of workshops led by both men and women.

The workshops covered a range of activities including performance of topeng (mask performance); script writing Alisson Lyssa (Australia) and Nia Dinaat (Indonesia); Yoga and Pencak Silat workshops with Ines Somerllera (Mexico) and Hartati (Indonesia) that aimed to awaken sensitivity in the body to build sensitivity in the theater and thus in the act of playwrighting; Betawi Dance (Jakarta); Kecak which is the choral monkey chant from Bali; and Wayang Kulit (Shadow Puppetry from Central Java) and Wayang Golek (Sundanese stick puppets). One may wonder why so much workshops on performative elements of theater but the question becomes clearer when one understands that in the context of Indonesia - the narrative tradition, the stories have generally been oral traditions (as opposed to written in play format) and also form Ratna's personal desire *to not just experience a playwrights festival but also to see and truly experience as much of Indonesia as possible. For many participants from overseas it would not be possible to travel to so many areas in such a short time.*

Possibly Ratna was protesting. In this case a protest of the homogenization the one size fits all conference and an idea of globalization. She also believes that the best way to develop and maintain quality relations among existing peoples and nations is to take a cultural approach. The performances selected seemed to affirm Cultural Liberty in a Diverse world. The conference reflected diversity in culture but also in theatrical languages and discourse.

The keynote speeches dug deep into a range of issues like *Identity, Community and the Role of Diversity; Language, Culture and Structure; Dramatic Performance Text, Cultural Context and Intertextual Practises; and Stage, State and Ideology.* One



Nawal El Sadaawi

of the highlights for Ratna was Nawal El Saadawi's key note speech, *Cultural Liberty in a Diverse World - Affirmation and Diversity through Women Playwrights.* The conference closed in Bali with about 65% of the participants continuing onto there.

This overview of the conference needs to be un-

derstood within the context of women's roles in Indonesian theater. As Ratna herself said, she had heard of one woman playwright prior to herself and actually couldn't remember her name, reflective of the fact that like many countries in the world the role women play in theater is rarely acknowledged. Despite being in theatre as one of the few female playwrights, directors and actor since 1974, she was not formally acknowledged until 1991. References to Ratna in the annals of Indonesian theatrical history are minimalist compared to her male counterparts. Her involvement began with WPI Adelaide in 1994 where she presented *Antigone* in a Batak version ( North Sumatran version). Just prior to that time she had become concerned, even obsessed with the case of Marsinah, a worker who asked for salary increase and was consequently raped, tortured and murdered. The government had wanted to close the investigation on the case. "The story of Marsinah became an obsession. I wrote the play not because I wanted to be a playwright but because of the issue. Marsinah was the one who pushed me to become an activist and use theater as my medium. Books can be written but one play can explain everything and Marsinah Mengugat/Marsinah Accuses is proof of the power of the play to give voice."

The power and the threat of her work towards those 'accused' was evident due to the forced closure and cancellation of performances but also the huge audience attendance. When she attended the WPI Adelaide, there had already been unrest in Indonesia concerning the play. Four years later Ratna was incarcerated for 70 days in prison and in part due to the efforts of WPI and their ability motivate forces and PEN International Or-





ganization, where women (and men) from all over the world wrote letters to the President of Indonesia, Soeharto via their embassies as well as simultaneous play readings around the world, were among the elements that led to her release. Ratna Sarumpaet's role in theater in Indonesian theater is unusual even to this day. "The woman's role in the household is to traditionally to serve, and this role to serve transfers over to the world of theater where women generally hold roles as make-up, food consumption, costume construction, producer or actress. Rarely as a creator."

In part due to the Women Playwrights along with work of activists and support from funding organizations such as Kelola to actively encourage women to become active participants in their own creative destinies, there has been an increase in women playwrights (along with other theater creators) however, for a country of 250 million there are still way too few. Ratna and myself tried to bring to mind at least 10 active female playwrights that

we had heard of in Indonesia and we couldn't. (It doesn't mean they don't exist but it does mean that they are under-acknowledged and their work under-produced).

Ratna sees herself as an older sister to some of those women who presented their early works at WPI Indonesia such as Fazia Mardzoeki and Tya Setiawati or providing a nurturing support to some of these younger playwrights. She is still an activist and still a playwright and director of theater and films. In her forward in the WPI program in 1996, she pleaded with WPI to not only be a meeting place for creativity but also a place for activism that has real impact rather than just talk. Since that conference, her life has been focused on merging those two elements. Her most recent play, "Titik-Terang - Sidang Rakyat Dimulai" was performed last year and currently in video production, is a play that screams to Indonesia now which in many ways has worsened since Ratna wrote her forward in 1994 - the traffic, the money politics, the polarization of Islam, the degradation of culture and diversity, ethnic clashes. WPI Indonesia in 2006 was the largest playwrights conference held ever in Indonesia and to this day. Riris Toha who was one of the organizers of the search for Indonesian women Playwrights said, "To watch performances, observe talks and follow the train of thought of colleagues much earlier involved in drama and theater and proving themselves to be members of the international community through drama and theater is not something easy and cheap today, especially for women in Indonesia. This is a golden opportunity."

Waves were made when WPI was held in Jakarta

and though there is still long way to go to go, the ripples are still felt in a very wide cross section of the community and not just those in art.

"Globalization and the impact of technology that has overrun national borders world wide should make each of us realize as citizens of the world, that we are all facing the limits and limitations of existence defined by national boundaries, religion and race. As women and professional playwrights, we must significantly leverage the situations and the opportunities emerging through globalization into order to show the world the role we play defending human rights and the humane. We must prove that we perceive all inhabitants of the world we live in as sisters and brothers, no matter what their race, skin color, language or religion, so that the problems of discrimination in Asia, the wars in Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine and Iraq, the poverty in Africa and South America are fully embraced as our own personal problems and the problems WPI as a whole.

*Interview took place on 7th April 20014 in Kampung Meleju Jakarta.*

Written by **Kerensa Dewantoro**

*Writer, Performer and Artistic Director DarahRouge*

*For more photos from the conference you can look at Ratna Sarumpaet's website. The website also features links to some of her latest work.*

<http://www.ratnasarumpaet.com/index.php>

*News article on the conference:*

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2006/12/03/cultural-liberty-under-spot-light-women-playwrights.html>



## Free Margaretta D'Arcy!

Playwright Margaretta D'Arcy has been imprisoned for making a peaceful protest at Shannon airport. Ms D'Arcy made a huge impact at WPI in Dublin. The WPI Management Committee sent a letter (below) to the President of Ireland last month. Since then, we have received word from the President's office saying that he could not intervene in the matter.

Please take moment to sign a petition addressed to Irish Minister for Justice, Alan Shatter:  
[http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/Irish\\_minister\\_for\\_Justice\\_Alان\\_Shatter\\_Free\\_Margaretta\\_DArcy/?copy](http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/Irish_minister_for_Justice_Alان_Shatter_Free_Margaretta_DArcy/?copy)

If you'd like to send Margaretta a personal letter of support, you can mail it to:

Margaretta D'Arcy  
Dochas Centre  
Mountjoy Jail  
North Circular Road  
Dublin 7  
Ireland

Hopefully, she will be released soon,

**Marcia Johnson**

vice president of WPI

March 10, 2014

*His Excellency  
Michael D. Higgins  
President of Ireland  
Aras an Uachtarain  
Phoenix Park  
Dublin 8  
info@president.ie*

**Dear Mr. Higgins:**

We at Women Playwrights International (WPI) write this letter to protest the imprisonment of Margaretta D'Arcy. We are strongly opposed to this harsh sentence for her non-violent actions.

It was made clear to those of us who met Ms. D'Arcy at the 1997 WPI Conference in Galway that she is not only a multi-talented artist but also a passionate advocate for justice and peace. Ireland should be proud to claim her. She has proven how strong her convictions are by refusing to sign a document stating that she would stay away from Shannon airport; thus turning her suspended sentence into a prison term. If this was a bluff on the part of authorities, she has called them on it. To do this at her age and while battling illnesses shows the utmost courage.

Please intercede and allow Margaretta D'Arcy to be freed. It is the right thing to do.

*Sincerely,*

**Women Playwrights International**

*Lene Therese Teigen, President – Norway  
Marcia Johnson, Vice President – Canada  
Anna Kay France, Co-Founder – United States  
Margaretta Skanze – Sweden  
Sandra Shotlander - Australia  
Margaret Hollingsworth – Canada  
Kathleen Betsko – United States  
Penelope Prentice – United States  
MaLou Jacob – Philippines  
Patrizia Monaco – Italy  
Karen Jeynes – South Africa  
Ratna Sarumpaet – Indonesia  
Mireille Bergenstrom – Sweden  
Lynn Hayes – United States  
Linda Parris-Bailey – United States  
Alison Lyssa - Australia*



## Monirah Hashemi from Afghanistan:

# “WPIC was the window for me to find my self-confidence!”

Did you attend the WPIC in Stockholm 2012? Then you most certain remember the young girls from Afghanistan that presented a touching performance, called *Afghan Voices*. Since then the oldest of the Hashemi sisters (four of them were sisters, the youngest just 15 then) has moved to Sweden. Monirah has had her opening of a new play called *Sitaraha - The Stars* at the Riksteatern festival *Teaterdagarna*. A very strong play about three women in Afghanistan from three different times. They fight against oppression, war, old traditions and religion, violence. Monirah says that telling their stories is vital, to make them visible, not forgotten.

*Their fight against darkness is a shine and a flame for us to see and find our way.*

Monirah played the roles herself, including dancing and singing, in both Dari and English.

The performance was well recieved by the audience and the critics. And for me it felt fantastic to experience this artistic result of a WPI conference.

### Mireille Bergenström

*project manager of WPIC 2012 in Stockholm*



*Sitaraha - The Stars. Photo: Mustafa Hashemi.*

“The conference in Stockholm 2012 was my first participating in WPIC. I met so many playwrights and it gave me a wonderful feeling and made me believe in the power of women writing and storytelling. To see the joint interest and common concern in women issue.

Actually WPIC meant a lot for me. It was the window that helped me find confidence and belief in myself as a storyteller, being someone who had just started writing and wanting to be a playwright.

Beside this, to feel the great energies of the women who made this conference happen. They are a role model for me. Also to meet the kind hearts and faces of the women, using this opportunity to bring humans together. Cultural meetings, bringing different societies to speak, removing the inequalities in different societies. I saw that age is never important and no barrier for working, writing and be active.

I do believe WPIC will make a history for women all over the world, through our stories and plays.”

### Monirah Hashemi

*playwright, director, actor*





## CALL FOR PROPOSALS - WPI CONFERENCE 2018

We are proud to announce the call for proposals for the 11th International Conference which is going to take place in 2018.

Do you want to host the 2018 WPI Conference?

Send your proposal no later than nov 1st (therteig@online.no) who will coordinate the election process.

The announcement of choice will happen february 1st 2015.

The proposal must include:

- A short introduction to your country/region and the theatre work which is being done there.
- Information about
  - o When (during 2018) and where you will organize the conference
  - o Organizations/institutions you intend to collaborate with

- o A theme for the conference

- o A brief outline on how the conference will be organized

- o Ideas on how to accommodate the participants

The chosen host country must give a presentation (based on the proposal) at the WPIC 2015 in Cape Town, South Africa in july 2015.

Please feel free to take contact if you have questions.

DEADLINE NOVEMBER 1st 2014

**Lene Therese Teigen**

*WPI President*

therteig@online.no

# WPI elected for 2012-2015



Sondos, Lene, Andrea, Marcia, Valentina, Vanessa, Patricia, Helena & Sally.  
Missing: Catherine & Marili

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Lene Therese Teigen	President, Norway
Marcia Johnson	Vice-president, Canada
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Sondos Shabayek	Conference Convenor, Egypt
Catherine Fitzgerald	Communications, Australia
Andrea Assaf	Communications, USA
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Marili Fernandez-Ilagan	Asian region developer, the Philippines
Valantina Abu Oqsa	Arab region developer, Palestine

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Ratna Sarumpaet, Indonesia  
Margareta Skantze, Sweden  
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## HOST COMMITTEE/SOUTH AFRICA 2015

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