

10th Women Playwrights International Conference Cape Town - South Africa 2015 | Newsletter #8



Next year in Cape Town!

It's getting close! Within a year we'll meet in South Africa!

WPIC 2015 in Cape Town 29 June - 2 July.

- The selection is finished and the workshops are chosen.
Read more further down.
- Our walk down memory lane has now reached Mumbai, India, and the 8th conference in 2009.
- Do you want to host the conference in 2018? Look at page 9.

Enjoy!

Mireille Bergenström

editor of WPI News Letter, senior advisor

- **NEXT NEWS LETTER** will be out in October 2014 with more info on how to register, which plays are selected, workshops aso.

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**

You can mail us on **wpic2015@gmail.com**

Feel free to spread this news letter among your colleagues!



Homepage for WPI, www.wpinternational.net

Words from our president:

Hello all!

It is less than a year to our next conference, and I really hope to see a lot of you people in Cape Town next year. You can read more about the practicalities on the next page. I have to stress what I pointed out in the last newsletter: The WPI conference is a fantastic place to network, be inspired and learn more about our global society for all who attend.

There has been a selection, and some of you have been notified that your play will be presented next year. Some have not. And some of you did not submit a play. All the same you are so welcome to be part of the conference and the WPI community. There will be plenty of possibilities for playwrights/theatremakers to present their work in more informal ways. And I am sure it will be a great experience to listen to readings of the selected plays.

Congratulations to all selected playwrights! I look forward to meet you, and to get a knowledge of your working situation and your artistic work. The WPIC2015 group in South Africa is doing such a good job. I am proud to be part of WPI!

In Norway a very hot summer is soon history. Children are back in school next week, and we are back to work after holidays. In one month we have autumn. At the moment I am working with the story of Medea as a director. This time in a version made by noted writer Sara Stridsberg from Sweden. I am also writing a new play with a deadline coming closer and closer. It is good to know that the WPI conference and Cape Town will happen afterwards; I just have to work on my funding applications.

What is so great about our triennial conferences is that we actually meet for real. These days we are connected via facebook, instagram, twitter etc., we skype and we communicate through email. It is great to be able to be in touch, to be able to work together in spite of distance, and to have a feeling of international understanding. But it is completely different to be able to see each others faces, touch an arm, dry away a tear or punch someone in the face!

From my point of view our conferences contribute to the strengthening of democratic values and ideas in our international society. We gather playwrights with strong voices in

their own countries and they meet for real. We meet for real. And we will have time to hear a whole argument or the long version of a story. We will have time for details. This is rare in our time, and it is a privilege to get this opportunity. We offer real compassion, real discussions, real meetings. Just as theatre, which is the artform where real people perform for real people who watch in real time.

Be there!

Lene Therese Teigen

WPI President

therteig@online.no



Dear Playwrights,

It's been busy in Cape Town as we lock-down preliminary preparations for the 2015 conference! Since we last spoke to you, there have been plenty of exciting developments. Thank you to all the writers who sent us their scripts - over 300 in the first open call. It was a difficult task, but we've narrowed it down to our selected plays. The plays were all evaluated blindly, with no names attached to the scripts, and were rated according to how they fit the themes, on their originality, theatricality and the general quality of the writing.

We're happy to have selected 86 international plays for the 2015 conference, which will be read at the conference from **29 June - 2 July 2015**. Those playwrights have been notified, and we're hard at work putting together the programme to share with you in the coming months.

We can also confirm that our host for the 2015 conference will be the **University of Cape Town**. The five days of the conference will take place at the historic Hiddingh Campus, located in the heart of Cape Town city, home to the drama and fine arts departments of the University. The beautiful premises overlooking Table Mountain includes 3 theatres (The Little Theatre, Arena Theatre and Bindery Lab Theatre) and flexible performance spaces and studios for our workshops, and is within walking distance of many of Cape Town's finest hotels, restaurants and nightlife.

Registration for the conference will open in October 2014, with early bird fees extending until December 2014. Be sure to register early to take advantage of the lower fee. If you're planning to attend the conference simply



as a delegate (i.e. your play is not being read and you are not presenting a workshop), drop us an email at wpic2015@gmail.com if you need a *letter of support to apply for funding*. Some of you will need to apply for a VISA - for info about that, please have a look at <http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/index.php/countries-exempt-from-sa-visas>.

That's all the news for now! Please don't hesitate to get in contact with us, we'll try our best to answer questions.

**Amy, Karen, Zara, Fatima,
Patricia, Sondos**
wpic2015@gmail.com

Fee and Registration for Cape Town 2015

Early bird rates until 30 December 2014

Tier 1 - €225

Tier 2 - €185

Ordinary rates until 30 May 2015

Tier 1 - €250

Tier 2 - €200

On site registration only from 1 June 2015

Tier 1 - €260

Tier 2 - €210

The registration fee includes:

- WPIC 2015 Conference pack
- Attendance to the opening cocktail
- Full daily lunch catering
- Daily tea break catering and coffee/tea
- Attendance to all keynote events and panels
- Attendance to all practical workshops
- Attendance to all play readings
- Tickets to all performances forming part of the conference
- Attendance to the closing night party
- Access to campus facilities

WPIC attendees resident in any of the countries listed below must pay the relevant 'TIER 1' rate.

Andorra	French Polynesia	Norway
Antigua and Barbud	Germany	Oman
Aruba	Greece	Poland
Australia	Greenland	Portugal
Austria	Guam	Puerto Rico
Bahamas	Hong Kong SAR, China	Qatar
Bahrain	Iceland	Russian Federation
Barbados	Ireland	San Marino
Belgium	Isle of Man	Saudi Arabia
Bermuda	Israel	Singapore
Brunei Darussalam	Italy	Sint Maarten
Canada	Japan	Slovak Republic
Cayman Islands	Korea	Slovenia
Channel Islands	Kuwait	Spain
Chile	Latvia	St. Kitts and Nevis
Croatia	Liechtenstein	St. Martin
Curaçao	Lithuania	Sweden
Cyprus	Luxembourg	Switzerland
Czech Republic	Macao SAR, China	Trinidad and Tobago
Denmark	Malta	Turks and Caicos Islands
Estonia	Monaco	United Arab Emirates
Equatorial Guinea	Netherlands	United Kingdom
Faeroe Islands	New Caledonia	United States
Finland	New Zealand	Uruguay
France	Northern Mariana Islands	Virgin Islands (U.S.)

Attendees resident in any country NOT listed above qualify for the 'TIER 2' rates.

Registration opens in October - more info will come!

THE 8th WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE

November 2009 in Mumbai, India

Women playwrights have carved a niche for themselves all over the world. It is however not a widely known fact that for the past 21 years have been meeting every three years under the umbrella of Womens Playwright International (WPI). WPI established in 1988, has played a pivotal role in reaching out to women playwrights internationally and building a platform for interaction.

With a history of convening seven festivals world wide, members of WPI came to Mumbai India for the eighth festival cohosted by Stree Mukti Sanghata and the Academy of theatre Arts – the Theatre Department of Mumbai University. And it was for the first time that a theatre festival was being hosted by an organization involved in women's movement in India.

Alongside the inaugural and closing programs, the seven day festival encompassed reading sessions of plays by women playwrights, performances, lectures and discussions. As preparations began underway, some refused to believe that India had as many women playwrights but the festival aimed at finding them and the search was fruitful as the festival could not accommodate the number that came up.

Liberty and Tolerance being the theme of the festival - with behaviour, culture and variety, non violence - the scripts were expected to be based on one or more of the above. 46 plays were read and 15 plays staged at the festival – with maximum plays dealing with sexual atrocities on women, rape, and prostitution. It was a numbing realization that fear of rape haunts women in every part

of the world irrespective of the fact that she is educated or rich.



The conference was attended by about 75 delegates from all over the world and 200 Indian participants working in the theater irrespective of race,

class, age, ethnicity, religion to endeavor, encourage and assist the development of their works and enrich the global culture. In addition to this, 100 volunteers of Stree Mukti Sanghata and 60 students of Academy of Theater Arts and its entire staff worked hard to make this event successful. Around 270 actors and back stage artistes participated and presented 16 performances.

On the second day of the week-long international Women Playwrights, key note speaker Ratna Sarumpaet from Indonesia issued a clarion call to women playwrights to ensure that women's voices were not silenced. She was critical of a globalised market oriented culture that was supported by the governments of Asian countries, but which reduced their people to poverty. Another threat to people was terrorism, she cautioned, hopeful that a play would emerge from this conference to remind the world that the madness of terrorism was also about injustice.

Several productions of plays by indian female playwrights were performed each night, among them "Luna", written and directed by Tripuri Sharma and "Akeli" by Manu Bhandari, dramatized by Himali Shivpuri who also performed. Jyoti Dogra presented 'The Doorway' which she also had written and directed. With minimum use of speech which is rare in a one act play, she conveyed her thoughts very effectively with her body movements and expression, the loneliness of an entrapped woman keeps us spellbound. Eight more indian productions showed the variety of indian female writers and theatremakers.





The Grand Finale of the conference was the Mono act “Miracle in Rwanda”, in which Leslie Lewis Sword from Rwanda ?, adapter, director and actor of the play, related the touching story of Immaculae Ilibagiza, a Rwandan genocide survivor in a magnificent performance in which she plays the role of the protagonist as well as six other characters. Sword showed the inner transformation of Immaculae, who hides from murderers in a small bathroom for three months, before she can escape to a refugee camp. In the climax, Immaculae finds it in her heart to forgive the person who has massacred her entire family. The play, with its strong message of peace, received a standing ovation.

There were several panel discussions, among these “Challenges of Modern Acting”, “Future Hopes in the Theater”, “Theater for Social change” and “Theater with difference”.

“Women in prostitution do not necessarily consider themselves victims, though the society views them so. These women do not need pity and charity, but empathy like any other marginalized human being,” asserted Bishakha Datta, an activist from the organization Point of View. Datta was sharing her experiences about making and staging a play by sex workers. Ratna Pushpakumari, a committed theater activist from Sri Lanka who has reached out to thousands of children in her country through children’s theater, said that theatre enhanced knowledge and skill among children and adolescents. Kanchan Sontakke of Natyashala Charity Trust, who has used theater as a medium for the development of underprivileged children, found theatre activity to have a therapeutic effect on troubled children. She also ascertained that it increased confidence and explored their residual

capacities. The panel discussion was chaired by Julie Holledge from Flinders University of Australia, and steering committee member of WPI.

At the panel discussion on “Future Hopes in Theater” the panelists also reviewed the shortfalls of the current theater scene - a bias towards commercially successful, though not necessarily meaningful drama, and the difficulties faced by women writers/directors while trying to make a mark in this male-dominated field.



Jyoti Mhapsekar and Anna Kay Frances.

“Non-availability of female actors is our greatest problem. We perform under difficult conditions, and are doubly oppressed – by feudal patriarchy, as well as by the Islamic dictatorship,” said Ma-deeha Gauhar, one of the few female directors doing theater in Pakistan. She was speaking at a panel discussion on ‘Pain and Pleasure of Women Directors’

Panel member Usha Ganguli (Indian director) expressed satisfaction that women in theater have had the fortitude to not compromise their voice and

values in the face of market forces. On the contrary, they have retained and expanded their space. Margareta Skantze (Sweden) added that it was not merely numbers of women that were important - a distinct female gaze also needed to be expressed. This means projecting female dignity, and not just their sufferings. Denise Walsh, a teacher turned playwright who has presented youth issues through her plays, was also on the panel, which was chaired by noted thinker Pushpa Bhawe.

The panel discussion “Theater for Social Change was perhaps one of the most pertinent sessions of the conference. Panel members were Mangai (India), Anju Utpal (India), Marili Fernandez (Philippines) and Malou Jacob (Phillipines). The discussion was chaired by Anjum Katiyar.

Theater has always been a forum to give powerful messages, said Katiyar, and we need a review of theater making to evaluate how theater could serve better as a medium to bring about change. We must also examine whether social theater is too strident, whether it is preaching to the converted, and whether aesthetics are being sidelined by an over-emphasis on the message, she said.

Mangai, a theater person as well as a respected social activist, increasingly felt that the plays which discussed social evils might actually have a limited impact on the ground. In such plays, she said, the performer-audience relationship should be well thought out – “Are we to be messiahs offering prescription, or are we catalysts”, she wondered. Regarding community theater, she found that it difficult to have the same group as the audience as well as the participants, as participants willing to perform for audiences outside the community were reluctant to do so for their own.





Anju Utpal, who works with “Media Matters”, has staged plays for social organizations that want to offer fixed, ‘only option’ kind of messages. She said the experience is more rewarding when one involves the audience, invites it to give feedback, goes back to the script and reworks the content to include their views. It was important, she said, to offer a choice of thoughts instead of doing prescriptive theater.

Malou Jacob of Phillipines ascertained that it was unreasonable to expect that everybody would have empathy for causes, but it is possible to create this empathy through one’s work. Marili, also from the Phillipines, raised the question: Are we looking for reform or revolution through social theater, and candidly opined that theater is not an adequate tool of social change, at least in the Phillipines.

Each day was filled with intrigue, introspection and reflection. The conference for some was a presentation of art and thought, for others it was a beginning of their quest for identity. There was wit, humor, passion, compassion, joy and sorrow. People returned enthused to explore new horizons, richer in thought and eagerly waiting to meet each other again at the next conference in 2012 in Stockholm.

Jyoti Mhapsekar

conference director WPIC 2009

Photo: Lene Therese Teigen



All the participants of WPIC 2009



Memories from Marcia Johnson

My first WPI Conference was Mumbai 2009. Actually, that's not quite true. My first Conference was in Toronto in 1989. How can I forget Toronto when I've lived here most of my life? Well, I wasn't a playwright yet. I was appearing as an actor in a skit from *The Working People's Picture Show* by Company of Sirens. It's where my playwriting career began as I subsequently contributed to other skits and plays created by that feminist theatre company; shows such as *Whenever I Feel Afraid* and *Shelter from Assault*. I had no idea that one day I would call myself a playwright and travel to the other side of the world because of it.

I was greeted at the airport in Mumbai by a smiling couple who were fresh and welcoming despite the late hour, delayed flight and incredible heat. They put me into a sanctioned taxi and I had our first wild Indian ride.

What I treasure the most about the Conference was the opportunity to meet other women playwrights from all over the world. I loved sharing my script with them and being an audience member for their readings.

Ironically, this trip to Mumbai was a conduit for getting to know my Canadian playwriting sisters better.

The Canadians initially bonded in a hotel room as we rehearsed our readings. We had cast each other in our plays via email (with some support from drama students at University of Mumbai whom we met later). After the first day of readings, we got snapped up by other playwrights to do their readings. Apparently our particular pronunciation of the English language had almost no accent to their ears.

The rest of the Conference was a blur of panel discussions, presentations, lively conversations at lunch and coffee breaks plus the odd takeover of the hotel bar.

If I were to pick my favourite memory, I would have to say that it was at the reading of *Harriet's House* by Toronto playwright Tara Goldstein. The play was about a lesbian who had adopted two girls from South America. (This is a timely reference since Toronto was this year's host for World Pride. For two weeks in June, scores of people from the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) inter-

national community visited upon the city for a joyous celebration to help promote inclusion, respect and civil rights for everyone everywhere.)

During the *Harriet's House* talkback, a woman who appeared to be in her forties asked several questions about the main character's sexual orientation. I started to get nervous; thinking that she might have disapproved of this element of the story. India has made advances in the area of gay rights but we had heard that there were still many difficulties for homosexuals. We thought that maybe this woman was going to criticize Tara for her piece. Then, to the surprise of everyone in the room, she confided that she was in a same sex relationship. The fact that she felt comfortable enough to share that with us was one of the most moving things I'd ever witnessed.

Throughout the rest of the conference, other Indian women came out to her. By attending a conference devoted to women telling their own stories, she found her community. Gay and straight, we were all in solidarity with her.

I look forward to more stories, surprises, collaborations and friendships in Cape Town.

Happy Writing. Happy Pride.
Marcia Johnson

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 1 NOVEMBER 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
Vanessa Adams	Secretary, USA
Helena Hoogenkamp	Treasurer, the Netherlands
Patricia Olwoch	Conference Convenor, Uganda
Sondos Shabayek	Conference Convenor, Egypt
Catherine Fitzgerald	Communications, Australia
Andrea Assaf	Communications, USA
Sally Campusano Torres	Latin-America region developer, Chile
Marili Fernandez-Ilagan	Asian region developer, the Philippines
Valantina Abu Oqsa	Arab region developer, Palestine

SENIOR ADVISORS

Anna Kay France, USA
Jyoti Mhapsekar, India
Lynn Hayes, USA
Linda Parris-Bailey, USA
Mireille Bergenström, Sweden
Julie Holledge, UK/Australia
MaLou Jacob, the Philippines
Ratna Sarumpaet, Indonesia
Margareta Skantze, Sweden
Meena Natarajan, USA/India
Sandra Shotlander, Australia

HOST COMMITTEE/SOUTH AFRICA 2015

Karen Jeynes
Amy Jephta
Zara Trafford, conference coordinator
e mail: wpic2015@gmail.com
twitter: [@womenplaywright](https://twitter.com/womenplaywright)