

Lightning Rod at 7th Annual Trans Equity Summit

Monday, 9/14/2020

Presentation “script” composed by Yoni Tamang, Kat Purcell & Marcela Michelle

Title: Queer Creativity in Urgent Spaces

- **0:00 - 0:05** - Waiting Room
 - Music
 - Title Page
 - Question - What does queer/trans theatre in the time of COVID-19 and the fight for police abolition look like to you?
 - lightningrodproducers@gmail.com
 - Givern link

- **0:05 - 0:07** - Intros
 - We will say our names and roles
 - Please mute your audio unless speaking. Turn your video on if you are able. We would love to see people’s faces, since this is an opportunity to provide some relief to the isolation many of us are experiencing. However, if you are unable to keep your video on, or if keeping your video turned off enables you to access this event more fully and enjoyably, we want to be sure that you know that you have permission to keep your video off.
 - Please address any previously unnamed access needs to ----- via the group chat. Private chatting is an option.
 - Please put any questions you may have in response to the workshop in the group chat, we will respond to questions at various points in the workshop.

- **0:07 - 0:20** - Who we are, what we do
 - Mission,
 - The mission of Lightning Rod is to show community how we already possess the skills and embodied knowledge to create meaningful, timely, quality performance art relevant to ourselves.
 - Vision,
 - Lightning Rod envisions a local queer theater community that thrives, not just survives. Our vision of queer theater is one in which artists are driven toward mastery and rigour on their own terms. As Lightning Rod develops as an organization we envision ourselves maintaining fidelity to our values while creating an idiosyncratic style and process.
 - Values
 - **Possibility**
 - Belief in everything, Question everything
 - Expression, Big voice, bold choice
 - Flash real-time responsive performance
 - Play, Catharsis

- The future, the present options that are presented to you and restricted by the known universe.
- Anything could happen, anything is possible, safety is paramount

■ Emergence

- In both process and structure
- Spherical thinking
- Experiment
- Discourse
- Collaboration
- Intentional
- Green buds, open flames
- Ash and waste become the fruit

■ Access

- Lower barriers
- Break walls
- OK not to be OK
- Margin becomes center
- Community engagement
- Compassion and care
- The counter proposal to an ableist society
- Lighting Rod seeks to provide care and relief to every body living through a society that disables and judges our bodies on a productivity scale.

■ Queer

- Spectrums, Not binaries, All the kinds
- Anti-imperialist
- Time isn't real
- Non-uniformity
- Politicization
- Self identifiable
- A commitment to blooming new forms of knowing relationship to one's own body (and thus the bodies of others)
- A gulp of salt water you accidentally take while crashing your child-body into the waves of the gulf
- Might be a subversion to systems of oppression and control
- Rejects the options that are offered to us through cis-hetero-normativity
- Wants to be hit a little and morph and change as much as humanly possible
- An organic experience of knowing the world is grander than you might be able to perceive

■ Collaboration

- Build connections
- Ritual, science, ancestry, subtle energies
- Responsiveness
- Solidarity
- Catalyst for creativity
- We work together (often), we create together (whenever the situation calls for it), we discover and need one another (siempre).

■ Professional development (Artist development?)

- Rigor, mastery
- A commitment to skill/knowledge sharing that can help us survive within capitalism AS WELL AS providing opportunities for artists at all levels to deepen their work.

■ Y1 -

- Who: Patrick's Cabaret, Scott Artley, Kat Purcell, cohort of 36 artists
- What: Artistic Executive Director Scott Artley commissioned Kat Purcell to design and produce new programming for Patrick's Cabaret. Needed new audience & artists. "Flash Theatre" expanded. Needed urgent response to 2016 election
- Where/When: Intermedia Arts, March 2017, just five months after 2016 election

■ Y2+Toolkit, MTASTC - Kat and Marcela.

- Who: Marcela Michelle, Kat Purcell, Patrick's Cabaret, cohort of 37 artists
- What: Rotating leadership was important to bust hierarchies. Marcela had directed in the 2017 cohort, and was a natural fit to be artistic co-producer. She took artistic leadership alongside Kat. Produced by Patrick's Cabaret
- Where/When: Phoenix Theatre, April 2018, just two months before Patrick's Cabaret sunsetted.
- Toolkit: composed by Kat, Marcela & Scott commissioned by Springboard for the Arts. To download the Lightning Rod Toolkit follow this link:
<https://springboardexchange.org/lightning-rod-toolkit/>
- Kat and Marcela were invited to present a plenary session about Lightning Rod at the Minnesota Theatre Alliance Statewide Theatre Conference. We shared a brief presentation about what

we do and were able to network with theatre makers across the state.

- Y3+bf - Marcela and Yoni.
 - BFB
 - Who: Lisa Brimmer, Keila Anali, Taja Will, Pedro Pablo (Dona Pepa), Yoni, Kat, Marcela, and our production manager Winona Honey.
 - What: body fail body was a one night only full length, ensemble devised work, free and open to the public, featuring an all trans and nonbinary cast. We assembled an ensemble of iconoclastic local artists from a variety of disciplines to make work for each other to perform, celebrating community, intersectional theatre making, and the body as an expansive site of success.
 - Where/When: The Dowling Studio @ The Guthrie, February 2019
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 - Y3
 - Who: Marcela and Yoni as co-artistic producers, Kat as production manager, our artist Cohort, our intern Camille Mitchel.
 - What: The anti-structure, one large collaboration with fluid artist roles.
 - Where/when: PHT, August 2019
- Y4 -
 - Who: Marcela, Kat, Yoni as artistic co-producers, our production assistant Suzanne Victoria Cross, a cohort of 24 artists.
 - What: Outdoor theater and a return to structure and well defined groups and roles.
 - Where/when: PHT, August 2020
- Advisory Committee
 - Who - Lisa Brimmer, Lelis Brito, Ricardo Beaird, Keila Anali, Chava Kokhleffel, Yoni Tamang, Kat Purcell, Marcela Michelle
 - What - As Lightning Rod evolved beyond a yearly event, and into an organization: we started gathering resources & funding, and needed support and oversight (since we laid claims to being a community-arts-driven project). The Advisory Committee is composed of past LR artists who 1. Expressed strong enthusiasm for the work of Lightning Rod and 2. Have experience as artistic leaders in the Twin Cities.
 - Leah Cooper - in 2019 we were awarded a consulting grant from springboard for the arts to hire a consultant to help us strategize and

vision for the future. We hired Leah Cooper, current Artistic Director of Wonderlust Productions and an accomplished director, producer, and consultant. Leah guided us and our advisory council through a multi-session process in which we visioned and dreamed in queer and expansive ways about how we wanted to function as an organization

- Access Committee

- Who - Teighlor McGee, Chava Kokhleffel, D. Allen, and producer liaison Yoni.
- What - a group of independent contractors convened to evaluate the accessibility of LR's programming, recommend modifications, and develop a queer accessibility framework to aid other arts organizations in the Twin Cities.

- 0:25 - 0:30 - Response round one

- 0:30 - 0:45 - How we prepped/When things changed/Architecture

- Prepped: Started planning in February 2020
- Decided that all three: Marcela Michelle, Yoni Tamang & Kat Purcell should lead Lightning Rod 2020, instead of rotating leadership and adding new cooks to the kitchen. We would have powerful collective knowledge based off lessons from previous years
- We planned an arts intensive that would emphasize an environment of care, including but not limited to: a Community Meal, more specialized training & workshops, and additional production support.
- By the time we applied for grant money, COVID-19 had already shut down some parts of the country, but lack of information led us to believe that we would be "normal" again by the production dates in August 2020.
- When Things changed
 - State of emergency declared in March 2020 due to COVID-19.
 - We briefly froze preparatory tasks to address crisis in our community during a statewide lockdown. We resumed remote meetings in April.
 - George Floyd Murdered May 25, 2020
 - We briefly froze preparatory tasks again to address crisis in our community. We resumed preparations in June.
 - June/July
 - An artist statement was made and we began obtaining applicants after we obtained the green light from PHT to continue with the event.
- Architecture
 - Site specificity should be specific. Site specificity can exist beyond plays about hospitals being performed in hospitals. All work is site specific

because all art takes place somewhere. That somewhere has a history. Everywhere has a history. Architecture is more than just the bricks, the pipes, the shape and colors. Architecture is the city, the land, the politics of a “nation”. Architecture is context.

- Two of us lived at the time just a few blocks from George Floyd Square. One of us lived across from the precinct. Each night as we were planning this program our air was thick with smoke, gas, burning plastic and earth, sirens blared, chants rang through the air.
- The architecture is undeniable. 35th and Chicago, Minneapolis, Mni Sota, Sacred Dakota Land, occupied, fortified by slavery, rich with native, black, brown, queer, and trans lives. Pillsbury House + Theatre, a community resource now as ever, three blocks from the site of George Floyd’s state sanctioned murder. We live here, this is our neighborhood. This is the neighborhood to our left, to our right. This is a thousand neighborhoods across the country. Here is the place we can speak to. Now is the time we can speak to. We do not yet know what theatre looks like in this new world. We do not know what limitations of body/space/time/touch may be upon us. What we do know is that our community is swollen with grief/rage/desire/power/regret/defiance/hope/love/magic, and we recommit to our belief, a belief historically embedded in to the beauty of Powderhorn, that art is a catalyst, a potion, a spell, a catharsis, a response, a bleeding, a healing, an offering. Art allows us to show up to our work as full, fierce, holy human beings. Creativity allows us to be flexible to the moment and needs at hand. Art is a technology that triggers us to remain motivated, loving and present.

- **0:45 - 0:55 - Moving forward**

- Expanded Programming

- Dramaturgy, Education program, more below.
- Continuing Annual Event
- Ongoing workshops
- Annual performance presented by core ensemble
- Q-Stage New Works Series
 - Q-Stage is a new work incubator for emerging queer and trans artists living and working in Minnesota created by Claire Avitabile and produced since inception by 20% Theatre Company. Previous Q-Stage artists have included Pedro Pablo (Dona Pepa), Judy Holo Lu Choy, Tor Chavarria, A.P. Looze Andrea Jenkins, Gender Tender, Harrison David Rivers, and Marcela Michelle. The year after Marcela’s Q-Stage work Demons In America was presented, she was invited to work the following year as a coproducer. This year as Artistic Director of 20% Marcela is overseeing the final

iteration of Q-Stage at 20% and is so grateful to be able to carry on the legacy of the program and the company by continuing of present Q-Stage into the future with Lightning Rod.

○ Organizational Development, Ensemble

- Organizational Development project = Yoni, Kat & Marcela formulating organizational structures and investing time & thought into the sustainability & growth of Lightning Rod
- We are building a permanent ensemble of queer/trans artists
- Our specific arts & culture inform our organizational structure & practices. The ensemble will be key, not only in creating new works and participating in LR programming. The work of the ensemble will also inform how we run our organization---what shape it takes.
 - Example: what people, practices & materials do we need to open a gathering for Lightning Rod? Only Lightning Rod artists can tell us this!

○ Health, Wellness, and Education

- Pilot a dramaturgy workshop & articulate queer methodologies in arts & culture-making.
- Continue to develop our archive, obtain literature, and create bibliographies of texts key to LR's methods.
- Implement accessibility council recommendations and other modifications (mutual aid coordination, doulas, community outreach) to support our care model of theater making.

Gratitude - Scott Artley, Patrick's Cabaret, Intermedia Arts, Leah Cooper, Meena and Dipankar at Pangea World Theatre, Pillsbury, Phoenix, MRAC, Springboard, Jenny Zander, Carl Atiya Swanson, Andy Sturdevant, Zarawaar Mistry, Luz Cruz, Suzanne Victoria Cross-Kulzer, Mikey Pearlman, Lisa Brimmer, Taja Will, Keila Anali, Winona Honey, Pedro Pablo (Doña Pepa), Calvin Friedman, Johanna Keller Flores, Tierra Anderson, Lelis Brito, Chava Kokhleffel, Ricardo Beard

- **0:50 - 1:00** - Response round two