AUSTIN REGAN  MARIA WIRRIES

Broadway Guest Artists and Collaborators for MOVING FORWARD

Interviewed by Ambra Acosta, Maverick Theatre Company Student Dramaturg

INTERVIEWER: You have taught at the Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU and the Boston Conservatory and much more. What is one piece of advice that you could give to students pursuing a career in the arts?—Especially during times like these when there is a Broadway shut down.

AUSTIN: I think the most important thing for a young person pursuing a career in the theater is to develop a sense of yourself as an artist. Be curious about everything and learn as much as you can. Be open to new ideas and learn new skills whenever you can. Be a citizen of the world—learn about and get involved in politics. Read books. And don’t get stuck in a “Broadway or bust” mentality—there are a lot of ways to have a career in the arts, and just because you started as a performer doesn’t mean you’re not going to discover you have an even greater passion for design, arts administration, teaching, stage managing, or in my case—directing.

INTERVIEWER: When working on MOVING FORWARD, were there any obstacles that you had to overcome in order to move forward with this project?

AUSTIN: Working on MOVING FORWARD presented some big challenges. Most of all, when I create devised or original work with a company, it’s usually necessary to be in the same room! So much of devising is instinctual and physical, and because the entire show was created on Zoom, we were forced to take a different approach. With our team, we developed a lot of collaborative writing and spent time having serious conversations and sharing in order to explore what directions the show might go. It was very gratifying that our company was willing and able to jump in and go on this crazy journey with us!

INTERVIEWER: What is something that you look for in a piece of work that makes you want to tell a story?

AUSTIN: It’s hard for me to determine one particular thing that makes me want to be a part of a project. If there was one major thing, I would say I look for projects that make me ask a question. I try not to approach my work with preconceived ideas about what I want to “say” with it or what the end product will be. Instead, I try to follow what Peter Brook called a “formless hunch” — the spark of a question that makes me think that a certain project or artistic endeavor is relevant and important to me in this particular moment. I love work that is new and different. As an artist, I want to contribute something of value to the human conversation about who we are, how we should live, and what we do with this brief time we are alive. This is something that we will never have THE ANSWER for. Instead, I think as artists, our job is to keep asking questions of our society and to demand empathy and love for all humans, from the noblest to the worst.

INTERVIEWER: As a singer, actress, dancer, musician and composer, you know the struggles of trying to make it in this industry, what advice would you give fellow artists who want to start getting involved?

MARIA: In terms of finding auditions, castings, etc, the artist’s experience is never the same. That’s what makes it so beautiful and special. Everyone is coming from a different background and path so you can be sure there’s no one way to “make it.” But I will say that allowing yourself to grow as an artist is vital. That doesn’t per se have to happen solely in the classroom. Becoming a well-rounded citizen of earth is what allows you to connect to a broader audience. Stay focused and hone your craft, but also allow yourself to explore and learn who you are as an artist.

INTERVIEWER: What are some things that people can take away from devised theatre, when watching it?

MARIA: I hope people can see the strength and vulnerability it takes to create a piece like this. We had a lot of conversations and all opened up about how we were feeling during these trying times. The students were ready for the challenge and took a leap of faith with us. Devised theatre is one of my favorite ways to create. It always feels raw and right now!

INTERVIEWER: During times like these, like the Broadway shut down, has this fueled your love for theatre even more? Do you think that we took performing for granted?

MARIA: It has reminded me of the simple passion I had to perform. We can get caught up in the business side of things and trying to live ten steps ahead all the time. It’s really important to go back to the root of why you love what you do. It has forced me to be more resourceful when creating and collaborating which is never a bad thing. To see that art persists even in the darkest of times shows just how integral it is to our society as a whole.

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