

Bill Rauch Margo Jones Acceptance Speech- 10/24/09

The individual human mind. In a child's power to master the multiplication table there is more sanctity than in all your shouted "Amen's!", "Holy, Holies!" and "Hosannahs!" An idea is a greater monument than a cathedral. And the advance of man's knowledge is more of a miracle than any sticks turned to snakes, or the parting of waters!... Darwin moved us forward to a hilltop, where we could look back and see the way from which we came. But for this view, this insight, this knowledge, we must abandon our faith in the pleasant poetry of Genesis.

Those wonderfully dynamic words are of course from *Inherit the Wind* by major American playwrights Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, the founders of the Margo Jones Medal.

In thinking about what words I might share when faced with the extraordinary honor of this award, I made a pact with myself: that at least half the words that I would speak tonight would be written by playwrights.

Playwrights: those intrepid artists whose peculiar, mysterious, and transcendent gift is to wrap our ears in words, words that always go to our heads, sometimes straight to our hearts, and if we're really lucky that make our toes tingle or our stomachs ache, words that reshape our understanding of what it means to be a human being, words that make us feel less alone and more connected to one another, across the room right now and across continents and millennia, to people long since gone and to people not yet born.

Playwrights: the artists whose lifework I've made it my lifework to interpret as a director and to produce as an artistic leader.

Playwright Alison Carey and I co-founded Cornerstone Theater Company. We took the words of long-dead playwrights and we adapted them, we translated them, often in collaboration with rural and urban people who enriched our translations with the vivid language of their life experiences. I've had the special joy of directing more plays by Alison Carey than any other living playwright. Ten years ago, Alison wrote a play inspired by the Greek tragedy *Prometheus Bound*. Produced in an abandoned iron foundry in the former Bethlehem Steel plant with dozens of laid-off steel workers, here is *Prometheus* from *Steelbound*.

*It hurts to talk, it hurts not to,
Just like always.
And to tell the truth,
The story changes depending on who you ask.
Maybe it's something I did.
Maybe it's something I didn't do.
But I know what happened to me is what happened to this mill,
All these acres of brick and work and metal and hope.
See, the mill couldn't rule economies,*

*Or move great lakes south,
Or change its own layout,
Or give fair wages to foreign workers,
Or subsidize industries,
Or determine past practices,
Or improve technology,
Or decide what people buy,
Or inspire board rooms.
And neither could I,
Or at least I didn't.
I'll tell you one thing, though.
What did I do? I had a job.
Used to be, you asked people around here, "What do you do?"
They answered "I'm building America."
What did I do to end up like this?*

There's at least one other playwright in this room tonight, whose work I've had the privilege of directing in two world premieres—and I dare to hope, there will be more to come. Lisa Loomer is a writer whose work was produced at Cornerstone Theater Company in 1999, here at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2007, and who has been working on a brave new play that we've commissioned. As a language-based theater, OSF has a distinguished history of commissioning and producing new work. As a relatively new artistic director, I have been able to work with my team to expand on these long-term efforts. We have no shortage of ideas, energy and programs: American Revolutions, the United States History Cycle, our largest commissioning effort, led by Alison Carey; Nexthetics, ventures in hip hop and spoken word work led by Claudia Alick; and the actor-centered development program called the Black Swan Lab for New Work, led by Lue Douthit and Jacob Padron. And on top of all that, we have world premiere productions like *Equivocation* that some of you will see tonight, and new play commissions that are not grouped by a particular theme or program, like Lisa's new play that I mentioned earlier.

From my friend Lisa Loomer's THE WAITING ROOM.

Once upon a time there were three sisters. All of them stupid. One thought her feet were too big, one thought her waist was too big, and the really stupid one thought her tits weren't big enough. So they went to a Magician and said, "Make us perfect." And the sisters gave him a pile of gold, and the Magician worked his magic ... and built a new tennis court with their money. But, after a few years, the magic started to ... go bad. And the sisters went back to the Magician and he said, "Hey, I said I'd make you perfect. I didn't say you'd be perfect forever. Check out the shingle. It says 'Magician' not 'God'." And the sisters were really pissed off. So what did they do? First, they took all the mirrors in the kingdom and smashed 'em... and recycled the glass. Then they told all their girlfriends and daughters, "Next time you want to look in a mirror, don't go to the Magician, come to us." And when the women came to check out their thighs and their noses and all their

other problems, they had to look in the sisters' eyes. And the sisters would say, "Oh, gimme a break, you look fine." At first the women didn't believe 'em, 'cause who believes you when you tell 'em they look good, right? But the sisters kept saying, "You're beautiful." And eventually the women started to buy it. Everybody got kissed, and the women who felt like it got married. And the ones who didn't got good jobs in the kingdom. And some got both! And everybody lived a whole lot happier ever after.

Last week a local reporter asked me if I felt that, as with our President's Nobel Prize, I had to earn the Margo Jones Award after the fact with my future actions. And to tell the truth, as I look at the list of former Margo Jones Awardees, I am humbled, even daunted. It's pretty cool but also pretty surreal to join a roster of names that includes people that I studied as a student, luminaries of our field that I never would have dared to dream to join on any list.

So I thank, from deep in my heart, those of you on the Medal Committee for entrusting me with this honor, and to those of you here representing Mr. Lawrence's and Mr. Lee's families. I pledge to you that I will always strive to create safe spaces for new plays to grow, to support living writers in a way that Margo Jones would smile on. It takes such courage to face a blank page, or more often these days, a blank Microsoft word or Final Draft document, and to write a play. We must all do whatever we can to support living playwrights, to continue the improbable and achingly beautiful tradition of putting words into new and surprising arrangements that shed some gentle or some blinding light on who and why we are. Because let's face it, if lightning strikes, some of those arrangements of words might even get repeated four centuries years later at a theater that bears that playwright's name.

Special kudos to OSF Artistic Assistant Susan Whitmore for making this event happen tonight. And finally, thanks to all of you, my family—Chris, Liam and Xavo-- and my friends, for your love and support which get me through the tough days as well as the buoyant ones.

My last word needs of course to come from a playwright, once again from my long-term collaborator Alison Carey. Appropriately enough for the end of a too-long speech, these particular words were spoken as the epilogue to Alison's contemporary adaptation of Shakespeare's AS YOU LIKE IT, our final project together at Cornerstone Theater Company.

It is not the fashion these days for a play to have an epilogue; but it is not the fashion either these days to have a play, and yet here we all are. So an epilogue you shall have, and I shall deliver it. If I were a woman, I might know what to say to the women, and wonder what to say to the men, but as I am actually a man, I wonder what actually to say to both of you. So to all the same: like as much of this play as you can, dislike as much as you must, and remember to thank the ushers on your way out and the cleaning crew if you should ever meet them. We hope each of you has all the love you want forever, and, if not, we hope you will

make the memory of tonight good company until you need it no more. For those of you who are lucky enough to have love now, feel free to call upon us at any time in the future, although we hope deeply you will never have to. I have been blessed with a man I love to spend my life with, children who enchant me, as happy and large a family and wealth of friends as any soul could want, and for all this I give thanks unto eternity. I want nothing more than to respect my blessings and extend them for the generosity you have shown us here tonight. So as all good love is a gift so true, I take all love and I regift it to you.