

Learning for Life ladies,

Wow! For those of you who were able to join us for class on Wednesday you know that this was a week of passion, not easily summarized.

We were blessed with a panel of women at the forefront of theatre in our community: Heidi Stillman, artistic director of Lookingglass Theatre; Mary Zimmerman, professor of performance studies and renowned director across stages of plays, operas and musicals; and Ana Kuzmanic, associate professor and costume designer for the Lyric's Don Giovanni among other productions. They were led by the accomplished legal scholar Leigh Bienan who--it was clear--is quite a theatre expert in her own right.

There were so many stories, especially about how these esteemed women and interconnected as teachers, mentors, students, and collaborators, so I especially encourage you to listen to the audio recording, which may be found [here](#) (click Login, the password is women2019). Some nuggets from their conversation:

Heidi spoke about what the performance studies brought to her craft. Specifically she noted that, different than only theatre, it expanded the idea of what could be performed. She talked about nonfiction and poetry, as example, influences you can see today at Lookingglass.

She and Mary, both, spoke about their loves of books. Mary, in particular, talked about her unique process of writing an adaptation. She does not start with a script. Instead she has the text and a cast, and the writing really emerges from there, page-by-page often in the very early hours of the day. She explained the instead of the traditional approach of the writing preceding rehearsals, they are superimposed. Mary, at one point, explained the teaching of such an approach as "the study of literature through performance, and the study of performance through literature."

Ana opened the conversation to the visual aspects of the theatre. And as Mary spoke about literature and performance, Ana did of fashion. Ana, a trained fashion designer, explained that fashion was about the clothes, but theatre was about the character or the person. She noted that in the theatre, the costume designer must also think about distance, both in terms of the expanse of the stage, and the space between the audience and the actor. Ana referenced the "cumulative value of detail" in costumes, where in small spaces the audience sees this intricacy of design and in larger ones, they see texture, as an important technique in her arsenal.

For all the detail that we heard, it was also clear that these are women who deeply respect one another. Heidi, with a joke that she's the least powerful artistic director in the nation, observed that ensemble theatre is at its best and its worst about collaboration. There's a synergy and beauty when talented people are working towards a solution in their storytelling, but there are frustrations that come when that chemistry is not there.

There was clearly chemistry in the room among these women! I hope you enjoyed it!

Together in learning, rdm

RACHEL DAVIS MERSEY, PhD (she|her|hers)
PROFESSOR | NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
ASSOCIATE DEAN for RESEARCH | Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing
Communications
FACULTY FELLOW | Institute for Policy Research
twitter. @rdmersey | *phone.* 847.491.2196
office. McCormick Foundation Center (MFC), 4-138
address. 1870 Campus Drive, 3rd Floor, Evanston, IL 60208