PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER

SEMINAR RECAP:

Playwriting with/for Neurodivergence and Digital Media

With Aravind Adyanthaya

ARAVIND ADYANTHAYA

My name is Aravind Enrique Adyanthaya, and I'm an affiliated writer to the Playwright Center. And the title of my seminar is Playwriting with/from Neurodivergence and Digital Media. It came at a moment in my life when I felt that my relationship to playwriting and to theater in general was changing. Before, I was focused on spectacle, on presenting a story, characters, the traditional things that we think about when we think about playwriting. And those things are still very valid and very present in my work, but I felt after two years ago, that I suffered from a health crisis that involved a brain tumor and the conditions of neurodivergence and disability that carried, that I felt the need to use theater as a means of communication, of encounter, of being with people. And the basis for theater creation has always been playwriting for me. So I began to conceive plays as networks of communication between the author and obviously the stage and the audience.

I find it very useful to approach the practice of playwright as explorations on neurodiversity. We're all neurodiverse. We all relate to the world through our brains in different ways. So that's another way of approaching the topic.

The last point that I wanted to get across is that these topics of our neurodivergence and digital media can affect your playwriting, not just in terms of content, what you write about, your themes, your innovations, but also in terms of the shape, of the style that the play takes. And I gave examples of the theater of the early 1970s, Robert Wilson and Christopher Knowles, that produced a whole new different type of theater and playwriting based on thinking around neurodivergence, and also by applying new technologies in the theater.

In terms of resources, I already mentioned the plays of Robert Wilson and Christopher Knowles from the '70s. There's a great documentary about "Einstein on the Beach," one of the iconic works of that era, that's called "Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera," and it's available online. Also the script of another of their works, "A Letter for Queen Victoria," is available online at ubu.com. I also talked a lot about Tim Webb's book "Sensory Theater," and that's a very practical book on how to do theater and write theater. Tim Webb is a playwright and director that has worked for over 20 years in England, with mainly autistic and people with learning disabilities as an audience. And it's very hands on, it's very practical. It gives you a different sense of how to approach different types of audiences.

Also, just to mention, for playwrights who want to take a look at what other playwrights are writing about,

(HUMAN enters stage left, grabs mug)

ARAVIND ADYANTHAYA (Cont'd)

"At the Intersection of Drama and Disability," is a new book from 2021–

(HUMAN exits with mug)

ARAVIND ADYANTHAYA (Cont'd)

–that is an anthology of plays by and about disabled individuals. But at the same time, it has a wonderful introductory essay and personal and critical essays before each script. And finally, I want to suggest an online resource, culturehub.com. Culture Hub is a place, an organization that has headquarters in New York, LA, and Seoul, Korea. Seoul, Korea. And it deals with theater, arts, and technology. And I have had wonderful experiences

with them. They have activities going on in person and online all the time, and they also have residency programs for those of you interested.

(Light)

END OF VIDEO