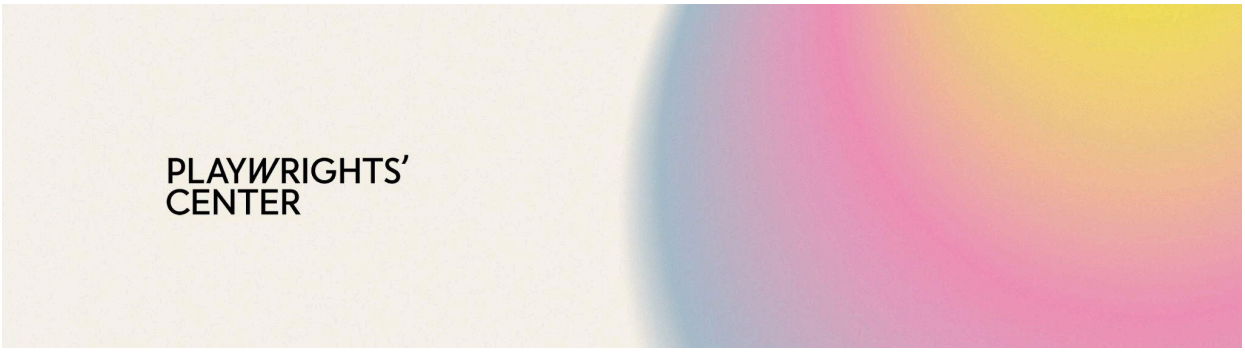

SEMINAR RECAP:

Playwriting with/for Neurodivergence and Digital Media

With Aravind Adyanthaya

[00:00:00.05]
(soft orchestral warm-up music)

[00:00:15.01]
My name is Aravind Enrique Adyanthaya,

[00:00:18.00]
and I'm an affiliated writer
to the Playwright Center.

[00:00:21.06]
And the title of my seminar is Playwriting

[00:00:25.08]
with/from Neurodivergence
and Digital Media.

[00:00:29.01]
It came at a moment in my life

[00:00:31.07]
when I felt that my
relationship to playwriting

[00:00:35.02]
and to theater in general was changing.

[00:00:38.04]
Before, I was focused on spectacle,

[00:00:42.06]
on presenting a story, characters,

[00:00:46.00]
the traditional things that we think about

[00:00:48.03]
when we think about playwriting.

[00:00:50.00]
And those things are still very valid

[00:00:52.02]
and very present in my work,

[00:00:53.08]
but I felt after two years ago,

[00:00:56.08]
that I suffered from a health crisis

[00:00:59.06]
that involved a brain tumor

[00:01:01.04]
and the conditions of neurodivergence

[00:01:04.08]
and disability that carried,

[00:01:08.07]
that I felt the need to use theater

[00:01:12.03]
as a means of communication,

[00:01:14.07]
of encounter, of being with people.

[00:01:17.09]
And the basis for theater creation

[00:01:21.08]
has always been playwriting for me.

[00:01:25.03]
So I began to conceive plays

[00:01:27.08]
as networks of communication
between the author

[00:01:33.00]

and obviously the stage and the audience.

[00:01:36.09]
I find it very useful to approach
the practice of playwright

[00:01:42.01]
as explorations on neurodiversity.

[00:01:47.06]
We're all neurodiverse.

[00:01:49.04]
We all relate to the
world through our brains

[00:01:52.05]
in different ways.

[00:01:53.08]
So that's another way of
approaching the topic.

[00:01:58.02]
The last point that I
wanted to get across is

[00:02:01.07]
that these topics of our neurodivergence

[00:02:05.07]
and digital media can
affect your playwriting,

[00:02:09.00]
not just in terms of content,
what you write about,

[00:02:12.04]
your themes, your innovations,

[00:02:14.06]
but also in terms of the shape,

[00:02:16.05]
of the style that the play takes.

[00:02:18.08]
And I gave examples of the
theater of the early 1970s,

[00:02:25.07]
Robert Wilson and Christopher Knowles,

[00:02:27.08]
that produced a whole new
different type of theater

[00:02:31.08]
and playwriting based on
thinking around neurodivergence,

[00:02:37.08]
and also by applying new
technologies in the theater.

[00:02:41.08]
In terms of resources,

[00:02:43.00]
I already mentioned the
plays of Robert Wilson

[00:02:47.07]
and Christopher Knowles from the '70s.

[00:02:50.02]
There's a great documentary
about "Einstein on the Beach,"

[00:02:53.06]
one of the iconic works of that era,

[00:02:57.04]
that's called "Einstein on the Beach:

[00:02:59.09]
The Changing Image of Opera,"

[00:03:02.06]
and it's available online.

[00:03:04.09]
Also the script of another of their works,

[00:03:07.07]
"A Letter for Queen Victoria,"

[00:03:09.08]

is available online at ubu.com.

[00:03:16.04]
I also talked a lot about Tim
Webb's book "Sensory Theater,"

[00:03:24.00]
and that's a very practical book

[00:03:26.03]
on how to do theater and write theater.

[00:03:30.04]
Tim Webb is a playwright and director

[00:03:33.00]
that has worked for over
20 years in England,

[00:03:37.02]
with mainly autistic

[00:03:39.03]
and people with learning
disabilities as an audience.

[00:03:47.08]
And it's very hands on,
it's very practical.

[00:03:50.05]
It gives you a different sense of how

[00:03:52.04]
to approach different types of audiences.

[00:03:57.05]
Also, just to mention,

[00:04:00.01]
for playwrights who want to take a look at

[00:04:03.07]
what other playwrights are writing about,

[00:04:06.04]
"At the Intersection of
Drama and Disability,"

[00:04:09.06]
is a new book from 2021,

[00:04:12.06]
that is an anthology of plays

[00:04:17.04]
by and about disabled individuals.

[00:04:20.03]
But at the same time,

[00:04:21.06]
it has a wonderful introductory essay

[00:04:24.03]
and personal and critical

essays before each script.

[00:04:30.04]
And finally, I want to
suggest an online resource,

[00:04:36.06]
culturehub.com.

[00:04:38.07]
Culture Hub is a place,

[00:04:42.08]
an organization that has headquarters

[00:04:46.04]
in New York, LA, and Seoul, Korea.

[00:04:49.09]
Seoul, Korea.

[00:04:51.04]
And it deals with theater,
arts, and technology.

[00:04:56.07]
And I have had wonderful
experiences with them.

[00:04:59.06]
They have activities going on in person

[00:05:03.01]

and online all the time,

[00:05:04.03]
and they also have residency programs

[00:05:06.02]
for those of you interested.

[00:05:08.05]
(soft orchestral warm-up music)

[00:05:11.06]