

Stage the Change: Theatre as a Social Voice

By Elise May

“What you are doing here today is deep and good. This is a movement!” Jeanine Tesori emphatically shared during the opening of her presentation for the 4th annual Stage the Change: Theatre as a Social Voice conference. The extraordinarily talented Broadway composer of Fun Home, Shrek, Thoroughly Modern Millie, and Violet spoke to the captivated crowd of nearly 600 high school students about being the author of your own life. Her experiential presentation culminated in a spontaneous performance by a student who asked a question and ended up singing and sharing the stage with Ms. Tesori. Magic!



Jeanine Tesori, Broadway composer and honored guest speaker at this year's conference, making magic and giving insight to the importance of staging a change!



Ruthie Pincus, Executive Director and Founder of Stage the Change, Inc.

Founded by Ruthie Pincus, a Hauppauge High School theatre teacher, Stage the Change, Inc.'s mission is to help students become global citizens through creativity and performance and provide communities with inspirational original performances which can serve as a catalyst for change.

STC has a one-day annual conference, co-sponsored by Tilles Center for the Performing Arts' Department of Arts Education, filled with panel discussions, interactive workshops and student performances. High school and college students can submit original performances which are juried. Several are chosen to be featured at the conference which also consists of a plethora of experiential workshops and a keynote speaker (past years have included Anna Deavere Smith, Sheryl Kaller & Tom Kirdahy, and Joe Norton.)

This year's conference started with incredibly moving performances by Success Academy Charter Schools, Bronx 2 (Alternative Names for Black Boys), Walt Whitman HS Dance Program (While Everyone Walks By), Hauppauge HS IB Theatre (The Feminist Club) and Long Island HS for the Arts (More To Do With Beauty).

A partial list of the inspiring workshop presenters included Epic Theatre Ensemble, Tectonic Theatre Company, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Teatro Yerbabruja, Nilaja Sun, New York Theatre Workshop and The Moth. In these workshops and others students had a wide variety of experiences including “Exploring Diaspora: Community in Motion”, “Prevention Through the Arts”, “Using Boal's Image Theatre Techniques to Map a Theory of Social Change”, “Writing an Original Play or Musical with a Social Voice” and more.



Success Academy's performance of "Alternative Names for Black Boys"

In “A Conversation with Nilaja Sun,” Howard Sherman, director of the Arts Integrity Initiative at The New School College of Performing Arts and interim director of the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts, and former Executive Director of the American Theatre Wing, sat with Nilaja Sun, an award winning writer and performer on stage and screen who was featured in the first issue of TAG Quarterly.

“So much of who we are is how we treat each other and how we treat our neighbors” shared Ms. Sun. Using her experiences during Hurricane Sandy as inspiration for her newest work, “Pike St.” which will be in DC (at the Woolly Mammoth Theatre) in April '17 and Minneapolis (at the Pillsbury House Theatre) in May, Ms. Sun reflected on the importance of remembering to take care of those who need help during a catastrophe; the elderly, people of any age with medical issues and those who are alone.

While social activism in the arts isn’t new to me, I never had anything like STC in high school. Young people everywhere NEED this now. Too often the adult world is not making sense and the next generation is the one which has the chance to make this world a better place. Ruthie shares, “This conference is motivating students to become artistic global citizens who create the world that they would like to live in.” I want to live there, too.

Check out Stage the Change at www.stagethechange.org and join us at next year’s conference. I’ll be there!

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzrb-Ag_kcSIIm7W_ECvVWHw

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/stagethechange>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stagethechange>

Website: <http://www.stagethechange.org>

Elise May, a Stage the Change board member, focuses on Community Outreach and Sponsorship. She is also a socially conscious, entrepreneurial Teaching Artist who uses theater to enhance vocal empowerment and communication skills through her educational programs for mainstream, Special Education and ESL students of all ages. www.expressive-elocution.com



Nilaja Sun sharing wisdom and creativity with Howard Sherman and an audience of educators.

