

Women theatre writers: writing differently, not in reverse

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Alina knows all the rules of theatre, and shares her knowledge. When she arrived in Cuba, she fell in love with the landscape of the Sierra Maestra, the sound of Santiago de Cuba, its warmth, the light of the Virgen del Cobre, and the many women who raise their voices -in writing, songs, colours- to express themselves.

She knew, that it was here, in Cuba, where the Festival ‘Writing Differently’ would be infinitely embraced.

The BiennialHistorically, internationally, playwrights have tended to be excluded from official theatre competitions. Since 1999, the competition ‘**Writing Differently**’ and the ‘**International Biennial of Theatre writing**’, have tried to change that. The project encourages female dramaturgy and artistic direction, the emergence of a network that brings together writers from different countries and promotes knowledge of the texts. The exchange between artists of different manifestations is also a deliberate intention of the event.

Writing Differently has taken place in several cities and over the last twenty years it has grown, adding authors, directors, women like the Italian Alina Narciso – artistic director of the competition – who prefer to spend the time living making art. It was held for the first time in Barcelona, in collaboration with the General Society of Authors and Publishers (SGAE). There were four editions in Italy (2000/2008 – Naples), and a fifth in Santiago de Cuba (2011).

The following year, the National Council of Performing Arts of Cuba decided that the event would be definitively transferred to Havana. The VI and VII editions in Havana (2013-2015) then took place.

“The Contest is divided into several phases: creation of the jury, launch of the call for submissions, selection of the winning works, translation and publication, and the assembly and exhibition of the staging by the theatrecompanies presented during the Festival, which concludes the project. The Biennial has become an event not only of dramaturgy, but of female direction. Works by young directors fill the programme during the festival “, underlines the Cuban actress Daisy Sánchez Lecano, national coordinator of the event in Cuba.

“The spirit of the Biennial is to create a collective movement composed of all the coordinators, winners, directors and all the creators who wish to try to make visible the work of women in the theatre. We intend to create a community of artists capable of collaborative structures, to promote the work of each one and to achieve artistic and intellectual exchanges, “she added.

Call for 2018: gender agenda

This year the event will be held in Havana 1-10 June. Liliam Ojeda Hernández, general organizer of the festival in Cuba, announced that this year “in addition to the usual presence of the organizing countries, Cuba and Italy, participants will arrive from Argentina, Spain, Ecuador. There will be a strong presence of the Caribbean area and from El Salvador and Guatemala. Also invited will be people from Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Chile and Venezuela. ”

Among the topics addressed by the competing works are valuations on the treatment of women’s bodies as merchandise, the participation of women in different cultural and political processes and the rescue of historical figures, explained Ojeda Hernández.

This year in addition to the presentation of the winning works, will be shown the projects of the Salvadoran Jennifer Quintanilla Valiente (last year’s winner) and Susana Nicolalde, important gender activist and National Coordinator of the ‘Writing Differently’ event in Ecuador. Among the Cuban participants are the actress, theatre director

and teacher, founder of the Vivarta Theatre Studio, Antonia Fernández, who has collaborated with all the events held in Havana; Irene Borges, director of Studio “Aldaba”, and Yersky Caballero, who each have two productions for the event.

“The program of the event will include theoretical sessions by the leading Cuban costume designer Nieves Laferté, by Raquel Carrió, professor of dramaturgy and advisor of the Buendía Theater since its foundation, by the critic and theatre researcher, Vivian Martínez Tabares and of the distinguished winner of the National Prize for Theatre 2017, Fátima Patterson, actress and Santiago de Cuba theatre director. Founder of the Afro-descendant Regional Articulation, Sandra Agüero Quesada, will be also participate.

As in each biennial there will also be an exhibition of visual arts. In this eighth edition, the invited artist is Liudmila López Domínguez, whose show will open at the Gallery of the Cuba Pavilion, “one of the main venues of the event, in addition to the Bertolt Brecht Cultural Centre, the Adolfo Llauradó room, Sala Tito Junco, and the theatre hall of the Plaza de 31 y 2 “, explained the producer of the festival ,Amaya Rodríguez.

The program of the event includes a film screening with works made with a gender focus. This section includes the exhibition of the documentary ‘Guamuhaya ‘¿without them ?’, by the filmmakers Marleidy Muñoz and Laura Roque. Through the life story of five women residing in rural communities, there is controversy over immigration, gender equity, women’s empowerment and some factors that contribute to the break up of families in the Cuban countryside. There will also be promotional videos conceived by the campaign by UNESCO against gender violence and short fiction produced by the Faculty of Audiovisual Media of the University of the Arts Havana (ISA). Norma Vasallo, Head of the Chair of Studies on Women at the Faculty of Psychology, of the University of Havana, will be one of the organizers of the debates. The young Cuban playwright Elaine Vilar-winner of the contest-also will have a literary gathering for the event.

“Various cultural institutions in Santiago de Cuba, the first venue for the festival in Cuba, provided important support this year in the organization and promotion of the festival. We wish to thank the Founda-

tion for Monumental and Applied Arts, Caguayo, presided by the renowned sculptor, painter and draftsman Alberto Lescay; the provincial headquarters of UNEAC and the Council of the Performing Arts in Santiago, “said Agüero Quesada.

Theatre: Writing differently for equality

The promotion of international female authorship and the visibility of their theatre worldwide is not the only aim of Alina Narciso. The outstanding activist of dramatic writing made by women and director of the company Metec Alegre Theatre, found in Cuba the ideal place to create bridges, generate debates among creators from all over the continent and find support for contemporary art. “Browse among the languages and the scenes along the routes of her travels, her research is developed around the proposal of a multi-ethnic theatre, in which traditions, languages and ritual are integrated, and the dialogue of cultures forms a new artistic sensitivity and civil commitment “, (Her website <http://www.alinanarciso.it/en/alina-narciso/cam-dello-spettacolo-compagnia-le-metec-alegre/>)

To write differently is about going against the current. It is having concerns about sharing, observing society with a critical eye, finding pretexts to defend equality, raising your voice, in a world where for centuries women were subdued and minimized. Once again art serves to untie ties, to offer wings.

[Link to original article and interview by AHS in Spanish](#)

