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Peyton Kennedy

*James Madison University*

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Female Leaders Navigate the Arts, Post ‘Me Too’

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An Honors College Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of  
James Madison University

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by Peyton Kennedy

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Accepted by the faculty of the School of Theatre and Dance, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

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Reader: \_\_\_\_\_  
Jessica Del Vecchio, School of Theatre & Dance

Reader: \_\_\_\_\_  
Shaun Wright, School of Media Arts & Design

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## Acknowledgements

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Thank you to Anne Morgan, Cara Rawlings and Seema Sueko for taking time out of your busy schedules to sit down with me. Thank you for believing in this project and for being so willing to share your stories.

Thank you to the Dean's Advisory of the College of Visual and Performing Arts for providing me with a research grant, so that I may travel across Virginia and Washington D.C. to interview these women.

Thank you to John Hodges for transferring my video files from the JMU server to my personal laptop. You saved the day when our world became virtual due to COVID-19 and I could no longer be on-campus to access editing equipment.

Finally, thank you to the James Madison University Honors College and my honors adviser, Jared Diener, for your support over the past four years and for providing me with the opportunity to create this ambitious, creative thesis.

## **Abstract**

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As the lights dim and the curtain rises on a theatrical production, there are roles to fill onstage and off. Perhaps the most important roles in modern theatre are those of leadership. Leaders in the arts have the power to influence company communication, shape the culture of the rehearsal room and navigate through a crisis. However, leadership and power can be manipulated, as the world witnessed through the ‘me too’ movement. As allegations rose against prominent leaders, the push for change strengthened. We are now three years past Hollywood’s ignition of the ‘me too’ movement, which prompts the question: have the protocols and standards of leadership improved in the artistic workplace?

In an effort to understand the current practices of leadership in theatre, operate productively as a young woman in the arts and inspire like-minded theatre individuals, I created an interview-style documentary. This 30 minute piece follows intimacy and fight director Cara Rawlings (Virginia Tech), literary manager and dramaturg Anne Morgan (American Shakespeare Center), and deputy artistic director Seema Sueko (Arena Stage). They share pivotal stories of their careers and offer advice for aspiring theatre artists as they enter the post ‘me too’ theatre community.

## Introduction

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As a young woman with an unwavering passion for the performing arts, I have spent my life studying and practicing acting. As I reflect upon my first experience with performance, I realize that the smallest role (to be specific, a mouse in a children's production of *Cinderella*) sparked my greatest passion. From that moment on, I fell in love with storytelling and became hungry for more opportunities. To fulfill my craving, I continued performing with community theatres in New Jersey, studied at regional theatres such as Paper Mill Playhouse and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, led my high school's drama club as president, and collaborated on JMU's mainstage and studio theatre productions. To date, my arts studies culminate in a B.A. Theatre degree with a concentration in Performance from JMU.

During my years of education, a message of unity against harassment was being spread worldwide. This message rang out through the words 'me too'. In an effort to band together women with sexual assault experiences, Tarana Burke coined the term 'me too' in 2006. She led the 'me too' movement in an effort to remind women they are not alone in their stories. In 2017, women in the entertainment industry reignited the movement on Twitter, encouraging each other to come forward and share their stories with the hashtag "#MeToo". The outpouring of #MeToo tweets showcased the scope of women who had been victims of sexual assault and encouraged the push for legislative justice.

'Me too' allegations, court cases and interviews were not only broadcast heavily on social media, but they also became the epicenter of news reports. As a double major in journalism, I was exposed to these reports and therefore became acquainted with the events surrounding the

‘me too’ movement. My curiosity was immediately sparked and I began investigating the relationship between gender and leadership.

To kickstart this investigation, I added an emphasis in “leadership studies” to my Honors Interdisciplinary Studies minor. With this area of emphasis, I had access to a course specifically highlighting the holistic relationship between gender and leadership. I additionally completed an “Honors Option” through a Video Journalism course in the spring of 2019 to gain specificity in my research. The process included researching the broadcast industry and conducting phone interviews with female identifying news directors and multimedia journalists at local Virginia stations. The findings culminated in a research paper which addressed any shifts the journalists noticed as a direct effect of the ‘me too’ movement. Hearing the journalists personal accounts prompted my curiosity for how the movement has affected the theatre community. A community that I have been fortunate enough to relate to a safe and comfortable home.

The topic of my honors thesis was informed by my passions for leadership and the arts, and the corresponding age of the ‘me too’ movement. At this point in my career, I am extremely fortunate to have not experienced environments of harassment, assault or pressure. However, my future is in the arts and I strive to be prepared and proactive as I enter this field professionally. Additionally, I aspire to be an advocate for myself and others. Therefore, I decided to utilize this project as an opportunity to connect with professional female theatre artists, conduct interviews on their most meaningful experiences in the arts and distribute this research through a 30 minute documentary. Utilizing the medium of a documentary is the culmination of my academic and practical studies: researching the interview subjects, crafting impactful interview questions, filming with professional equipment, editing video, and producing / marketing content.

The documentary highlights women who have held positions of theatrical leadership through the age of the ‘me too’ movement. Specifically, women who had something to say... women who were passionate about sharing their stories on this platform, and aspired to educate like-minded artists. I was struck by how the professional world turned after this movement and am intrigued to learn if and how it has affected these women. For example, how has it changed office protocol or co-worker communication? Additionally, I’m curious to learn if the women have not noticed a shift in the operations of their workplace. Have their theatre companies consistently motioned for equality, or, are they fighting for a voice? How will they proceed in the next five years? My hope is that sharing stories and messages from these influential women will inspire other theatre artists to welcome inclusivity in their creative spaces.



## Process

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After finalizing my creative capstone to be an interview style documentary, I met with my adviser and readers to pinpoint the scope of these interviews. Initially, we discussed meeting with women in Virginia (the state where I attend college), New Jersey (the state where I live) and New York City (close proximity to my home and the country's largest theatre hub). As this documentary will primarily be presented to college students in Virginia, it was decided to narrow down the prospective theatres to this area. Focusing on solely Virginia theatres gives these viewers a deeper look into the artistic community they are a part of. Following this decision, I began my search for women who may have a story to tell. This included, for example, women who are in male-dominated positions, women who are the first to hold a specific position within their company, or women who are leading initiatives within their companies. Based on this criteria, I ultimately spoke with a director of intimacy, a literary dramaturg, and a deputy artistic director. The variety of professions allows viewers to hear about the cultures surrounding performance, research, and administration, as well as how they correlate. Once the framework was solidified, I researched potential interview subjects and selected eight women to reach out to with the goal of interviewing four.

In collaboration with my project adviser, an email invitation was crafted. It included my educational background, my research and reasoning behind the project, my goals for the project and how I hoped to collaborate with them.

During this time, I also crafted interview questions based on my research. There were ten questions total, divided into four sections: introduction, gender and leadership, the 'me too'

movement, and moving forward. The “gender and leadership” and “‘me too’ movement” sections were intended to foster a conversation surrounding theatrical practices and current events, and they were bookended by a personal approach. Providing background information through the “introduction” questions not only adds compelling human-interest, but also adds to their credibility in the “moving forward” advice section. To test the effectiveness of these questions, I conducted a mock interview with one of my readers, Dr. Jessica Del Vecchio. After the interview, we discussed strengths and weaknesses of the questions, to which I revised my work.

Graciously, I received a “yes” to interview five women. In response, I forwarded them the list of my interview questions. Once the women approved the questions, we scheduled a date to meet in person. Due to the ever-evolving schedules of this profession, only three interviews came to fruition.

Thanks to a grant from the dean’s advisory in the JMU College of Visual and Performing Arts, I travelled to the American Shakespeare Center to speak with literary manager and dramaturg Anne Morgan, Virginia Tech to speak with professor, fight choreographer, and intimacy director Cara Rawlings, and Arena Stage to speak with deputy artistic director Seema Sueko.

The extent of process with each woman varied. First, I went to the offices of the American Shakespeare Center and interviewed Anne Morgan. Following the interview, I was able to film a brief portion of her work day. At Virginia Tech, I had the opportunity to film a class Cara Rawlings was instructing, “Foundations of Movement and Voice”, and then we sat for

the interview. At Arena Stage, Seema Sueko and I sat down for an interview and I obtained secondary video footage from online archives.

Upon completing the filming process of these interviews, I began post-production. A majority of my contextual research came from watching broadcast news accounts... stories that highlighted the history, testimonies and trials surrounding the 'me too' movement. To give the documentary viewers a brief, yet inclusive understanding of the 'me too' movement, I edited an assortment of these media accounts to serve as a timeline and opener to the creative piece. Then, I cut each woman's interview from about 45 minutes of footage to a ten minute highlight. I added b-roll video, text and audio overlays to finish off the piece.

Citing my journal of progress, research, and completed documentary, I wrote a reflective essay discussing my ultimate findings. Due to an online semester and the restriction of public gatherings, the documentary will be posted to YouTube and shared with classes and organizations within the JMU Arts community. This written documentation and reflective essay will be made available on the JMU Scholarly Commons.

## Virginia Theatre Research

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After researching the scope of Virginia and D.C. theatres, the following are the companies and women I contacted for interviews.

### **American Shakespeare Center**

Staunton, VA

Mission: “American Shakespeare Center illuminates the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, classic and new, refreshing the individual, fostering civil discourse, and creating community in the Blackfriars Playhouse and beyond. The American Shakespeare Center is Shakespeare’s American Home – a beacon for all to feel more alive through the experience of Shakespeare, changing lives one encounter at a time. There are three legs of the American Shakespeare Center that help support our mission. Each one reaches out to different communities to bring the joy of Shakespeare through performance, education, and the tour.”

Film, Radio & Interview Requests: The ASC welcomes requests from members of the press and is happy to facilitate and provide complimentary tickets.

- ❖ Contact: Sky Wilson (Digital Marketing and Public Relations Manager)
  - [sky.wilson@americanshakespearecenter.com](mailto:sky.wilson@americanshakespearecenter.com)
  - 540.885.5588 ext. 13

Department of Development and Marketing:

- ❖ Amy Wratchford: Managing Director
- ❖ Kelly Burdick: Director of Development
- ❖ Cathy Bagwell Marsh: Director of Marketing

Links:

- ❖ Website: <https://americanshakespearecenter.com/>
- ❖ Staff: <https://americanshakespearecenter.com/>

**Anne Morgan:** Literary Manager & Dramaturg

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

“Anne received the 2019 Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy for her work on Shakespeare’s New Contemporaries, ASC’s groundbreaking initiative to discover, develop, and produce new plays inspired by and in conversation with Shakespeare’s work. At ASC, she dramaturged the world premieres of *16 Winters, or The Bear’s Tale* by Mary Elizabeth Hamilton; *Anne Page Hates Fun* by Amy E. Witting; and *Emma* by Emma Whipday. She also provides additional dramaturgical support for other ASC productions. Prior to joining ASC,

Anne was the Literary Manager & Dramaturg at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. Other dramaturgy credits include work with the Great Plains Theatre Conference, New York Theatre Workshop, the Kennedy Center NNPN/MFA Playwrights' Workshop, Company One Theatre, and more. She serves on the executive board of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas."

**Nancy Anderson:** Actor/Choreographer/Director

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

"Nancy is an actress, vocalist, and choreographer. Her theater credits include Broadway productions such as *A Class Act* (Mona), *Wonderful Town* (Helen and Eileen), *Sunset Boulevard* (u/s Glenn Close) as well as the West End production of *Kiss Me Kate* (Lois/ Bianca). Her work Off-Broadway includes *The Pen*, *Yank!*, *Jolson & Co.*, and *Fanny Hill*. Regional theater credits include *Titania* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis), *Mrs. Wilkinson* in *Billy Elliot* (Signature Theater), *Gladys* in *Pajama Game* (Arena Stage), *Adelaide* in *Guys and Dolls* and *Oolie/Donna* in *City of Angels* (Goodspeed), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* (dir. by Ethan McSweeney at The Shakespeare Theater, DC), *Peter Pan* in *Peter Pan* and *Gloria* in *Damn Yankees* (Papermill Playhouse), *Miriam* in *The Women* (Old Globe). She received a nomination for an Olivier Award (*Kiss Me Kate*), 3 Drama Desk Nominations (*The Pen*, *Fanny Hill*, *Jolson & Co.*), 4 Helen Hayes Nominations (*Kiss Me Kate*, *Side By Side* by Sondheim, *The Pajama Game*, *Billy Elliot*), and is the Winner of the 2011 Noel Coward Cabaret Award. She attended the Tufts/NEC double-degree program majoring in Geological Sciences and Classical Voice."

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## **Arena Stage**

Washington, D.C.

Mission: "Arena Stage is alive as a center for American theater. The Artistic Development Department operationalizes the artistic vision and mission of Arena by stewarding the current season and imagining and building a robust pipeline for a bright artistic future for the company and field. Guided by the vision of Artistic Director Molly Smith, and funded in part by Arlene and Robert Kogod, our American Voices programs and initiatives focus on advancing artists and audiences."

**Molly Smith:** Artistic Director

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

"Molly has served as Artistic Director since 1998. Her more than 30 directing credits at Arena Stage include *Carousel*, *Oliver!*, *The Originalist*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Camp David*, *Mother*

*Courage and Her Children, Oklahoma!, A Moon for the Misbegotten, My Fair Lady, The Great White Hope, The Music Man, Orpheus Descending, Legacy of Light, The Women of Brewster Place, Cabaret, South Pacific, Agamemnon and His Daughters, All My Sons and How I Learned to Drive.* She most recently directed *Our Town* at Canada's Shaw Festival. Her directorial work has also been seen at The Old Globe, Asolo Repertory, Berkeley Repertory, Trinity Repertory, Toronto's Tarragon Theatre, Montreal's Centaur Theatre and Perseverance Theater in Juneau, Alaska, which she founded and ran from 1979-1998. Molly has been a leader in new play development for over 30 years. She is a great believer in first, second and third productions of new work and has championed projects including *How I Learned to Drive*; *Passion Play, a cycle*; *Next to Normal*; and *Dear Evan Hansen*. She has worked alongside playwrights Sarah Ruhl, Paula Vogel, Wendy Wasserstein, Lawrence Wright, Karen Zacarias, John Murrell, Eric Coble, Charles Randolph-Wright and many others. She led the re-invention of Arena Stage, focusing on the architecture and creation of the Mead Center for American Theater and positioning Arena Stage as a national center for American artists. During her time with the company, Arena Stage has workshopped more than 100 productions, produced 39 world premieres, staged numerous second and third productions and been an important part of nurturing nine projects that went on to have a life on Broadway. In 2014, Molly made her Broadway debut directing *The Velocity of Autumn*, following its critically acclaimed run at Arena Stage. She has been awarded honorary doctorates from American University and Towson University."

**Seema Sueko:** Deputy Artistic Director

"Seema Sueko joined the Arena Stage staff in July 2016 as deputy artistic director and has since directed *The Heiress, The Price* and *Smart People* at Arena. She previously served as associate artistic director at The Pasadena Playhouse and executive artistic director of Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company, a theater company in San Diego she co-founded. Her directing and acting credits include Denver Center, The Pasadena Playhouse, People's Light, The Old Globe, San Diego Repertory, Yale Repertory, 5th Avenue Theatre and Native Voices, among others. As a playwright, she received commissions from Mixed Blood Theatre and Center Stage. Her work has been recognized by the California State Assembly, NAACP San Diego, Chicago Jeff Awards, American Theatre Wing and *American Theatre* magazine. Seema developed the Consensus Organizing for Theater methodology, has done research on the neuroscience of acting, created the Green Theater Choices Toolkit and serves on the Diversity Committee of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society."

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**Ford's Theatre**

Washington, D.C.

Mission: “The site of Lincoln’s assassination, Ford’s Theatre offers museum exhibits, live theatre and immersive learning.”

**Katie Ciszek:** Assistant Director (Ford’s Theatre), Dramaturgy Apprentice (Olney Theatre Center), JMU B.A. Theatre Class of 2018

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

“Most immediately, I am building a dramaturgy website for *Once*, our next musical after *Elf the Musical*. I am also in communication with Carlyn Aquiline, our dramaturg for *Oil*, to get started on some materials for the actors. I’m finishing up a couple things for *Elf the Musical* and doing a bit of preparatory work for *Mary Stuart*. The great thing about my job is that I can research Irish buskers, 16th century queens, and global holiday traditions in a single day.

two capstones in the works. Because our production of *Mary Stuart* will be an original adaptation of the German text, I have the opportunity to serve as a literary dramaturg (as well as a production dramaturg). In addition to providing research, I’ll be working more closely with Jason Loewith to track the script’s evolution and assist him with the development process. My supervisor, Jason King Jones, has been amazing about helping me make the most of my time at OTC. I told him I am also interested in directing, and he has helped me find an opportunity to assist one of the directors in the spring.”

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**Virginia Commonwealth University**

Richmond, Virginia

Collegiate Program

Mission: “The mission of the Department of Theatre is to educate and train theatre students as theatre professionals and/or academicians in the field of performance, design, technology, or theatre pedagogy.”

**Sharon Ott:** Department Chair

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

“Sharon Ott received her B.A. from Bennington College with a triple major in theater, anthropology, and music. During her years at Bennington, she received a fellowship from the National Science Foundation to work with a team of anthropologists from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and the University of Arizona on an archaeological site in northern Arizona. She also spent one non-resident work term at the Field Museum and one summer with the Seri tribe in northern Mexico. She was accepted into the MFA acting program at California Institute of the Arts under the direction of Dr. Herbert Blau. When Dr. Blau left Cal Arts, his students followed him to Oberlin College, forming the ensemble Kraken under his leadership.

This group of young actors included Julie Taymor (director of *The Lion King*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Frida*,) and noted clown and actor, Bill Irwin.

After two years with Kraken, Ms. Ott joined the ensemble Camera Obscura. Camera Obscura was a resident company at La Mama Experimental Theater Company in New York, and the Mickery Theater in Amsterdam, Holland. Their work was presented at both La Mama and The Mickery as well as in theaters throughout Germany, Belgium, and Holland.

Ms. Ott left Europe to return to the United States where she formed her own theater company, Aleph. Aleph produced work in Los Angeles before being hired as the company in residence at the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee. At UWM, Ms. Ott directed the Aleph productions, as well as teaching undergraduate acting.

While in Milwaukee, Ms. Ott developed an interest in the work of Theatre X, eventually joined the company, and became an Associate Artistic Director. She directed several productions for Theatre X including *The Wreck: A Romance* based on the poems of Adrienne Rich, and *A Fierce Longing* based on the life and work of Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima. *The Wreck: A Romance* was presented at theater festivals in the US and Holland, and the company received an Obie award for *A Fierce Longing* after its run at The Performing Garage in New York. Ms. Ott was able to travel to Japan under the auspices of the Japan Society to do research for the project, and this trip started a career long interest in Japanese theater and culture.

Ms. Ott became Resident Director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 1980. During her association with the Milwaukee Rep, she was able to travel three more times to Japan; once to work with Japanese director, Tadashi Suzuki, and, twice with productions she directed. She also directed the world premiere of Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story* at the Milwaukee Rep, which won an Obie award after its New York run.

In 1984, she became Artistic Director of the Berkeley Repertory Theater, in Berkeley, California. During her 13 years as Artistic Director, she increased the company's budget from \$1.5 million to over \$5 million, built the audience to 15,000 subscribers, and developed the company's reputation for innovative programming that resulted in the Tony Award for Excellence of a Regional Theater in 1997. Sharon had the privilege to work with several artists who have gone on to national and international prominence during her years at Berkeley Rep. She nurtured the work of author Phillip Kan Gotanda, directing world premieres of *Yankee Dawg You Die*, and *The Ballad of Yachiyo*, as well as a production of *The Wash* in New York and Los Angeles. Ms. Ott also directed an adaptation of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* that premiered at Berkeley Rep before moving on to productions in Boston and Los Angeles. She directed the national tour of Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles* which started in San Francisco before touring to Boston, Houston, Seattle, New Haven, and Washington, DC where it was



performed at the Ford's Theatre with then President Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore in attendance.

She left Berkeley in 1997 to become the Artistic Director of the Seattle Repertory Theatre. Under her leadership, a successful \$15 million endowment campaign was initiated and completed. She maintained a subscription audience of 14,000 and grew the overall audience for the Rep from 140,400 in the year prior to her arrival to a high of 185,000. She re-introduced the classics to the Seattle Rep audiences, directing Shakespeare and Shaw herself, and producing the work of Stephen Wadsworth, Mary Zimmerman, and Tina Landau. She maintained the Rep's long term association with August Wilson producing the world premiere of Mr. Wilson's King Hedley II and How I Learned What I Learned, Mr. Wilson's autobiographical solo performance work, and brought the world premiere work of several major new artists to the Rep, such as Ping Chong, Phillip Kan Gotanda, and Nilo Cruz.

Ms. Ott has been a guest director at such theaters as the Arena Stage, the New York Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, the Mark Taper Forum, South Coast Repertory Theatre, the Huntington Theater, the Alliance Theater, Ford's Theatre, Roundhouse Theatre, Missouri Repertory Theatre, Arizona Theater Company, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Cleveland Playhouse, Playwrights' Horizons, and the Manhattan Theater Club. She has also directed several operas; La Boheme, and The Conquistador at San Diego Opera, Vanessa and Salome at Seattle Opera, and Don Giovanni at Opera Colorado.

She is a member of the Executive Board of SDC, and serves as the Regional Representative for the Southeast. She is also a past board member of Theater Communications Group and the National Theater Conference. She is the Chair of the Regional Presence Committee for SDC, and a member of the union's Finance Committee. She was the Chair of the Stavis Award Committee for NTC for two years, and has also served on several NEA panels, as well as California and the Georgia Council of the Arts."

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## **Virginia Repertory Theater**

Richmond, VA

Mission: "Virginia Repertory Theatre is a nonprofit, professional theatre company and the result of the 2012 merger of Barksdale Theatre and Theatre IV. With a budget of \$5.6 million, four distinct venues, an educational touring arm, and an annual audience over 530,000, Virginia Rep is the largest professional theatre and one of the largest performing arts organizations in Central Virginia. We are dedicated to the development and production of new plays, and we seek outside

producing collaboration to ensure the play has a life beyond its development and production at Virginia Rep.”

October/November 2019 production → “13 the Musical”

❖ Anna Senechal Johnson: Director

Links:

- ❖ <http://va-rep.org/>
- ❖ <https://va-rep.org/staff.html>

**Anna Senechal Johnson:** Director

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

“Anna Johnson is Artistic and Managing Director for Cadence Theatre Company. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and The British American Drama Academy, she is a Company Artist for Company of Fools in Hailey, Idaho and served for nine years as Artistic Director of a theatre arts and education program in Sun Valley, Idaho called St. Thomas Playhouse.”

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## **Virginia Tech**

Blacksburg, Virginia

Collegiate Program

Mission: “Our program in Theatre reaches beyond the conventional, producing contemporary works alongside new takes on classic plays. We believe in learning by doing: in the classroom and in production.”

**Cara Rawlings:** Associate Professor of Movement and Performance, Intimacy Director, Fight Choreographer

*CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

- Certified Stage Combat Instructor with The Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD)
- Member of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE)
- Member of the Association of Theatre Movement Educators (ATME)
- Serves on the boards of Virginia Theatre Association (VTA) and Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC)

## **Woolly Mammoth**

Washington, D.C.

Mission: “Woolly Mammoth, a national innovator in the development and production of new plays, is one of the best known mid-sized theatres in the country and “the hottest theater company in town” (*Washington Post*). For almost four decades, Woolly has held a unique position at the leading edge of the American theatre, earning a reputation for staying “uniquely plugged in to the mad temper of the times” (*New York Times*). We’ve garnered that reputation by holding fast to our unique mission and our core values.”

**Maria Manuela Goyanes:** Artistic Director, [maria.goyanes@woollymammoth.net](mailto:maria.goyanes@woollymammoth.net)

### *CONTACTED FOR INTERVIEW*

“Maria is the newly-selected Artistic Director of Woolly Mammoth Theater Company, is currently serving as the Director of Producing and Artistic Planning at The Public Theater. In her current position she oversees the day-to-day execution of a full slate of plays and musicals at the Public’s five-theater venue at Astor Place and the Delacorte Theater for Shakespeare in the Park. In addition, she spearheads the season planning process as well as the planning and integration of The Public’s many artistic programs, including the Under the Radar Festival, Public Works, and special offerings in Joe’s Pub, among others.

For six years before she assumed her current position, she worked as an Associate Producer, managing some of The Public’s most celebrated productions, including *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Josephine & I* by Cush Jumbo, *Straight White Men* by Young Jean Lee, *Barbecue* by Robert O’Hara, and *Here Lies Love* by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim, among others, as well as The Public Works’ productions of *The Tempest*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *The Odyssey*, and *Twelfth Night*.

Earlier in her career at The Public, where she started as a staff member in 2004, she produced The Public Lab productions of work by Roger Guenever Smith, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, The Civilians, Naomi Wallace, Tracey Scott Wilson, and Adrienne Kennedy. She also worked closely with Suzan-Lori Parks and Bonnie Metzgar on the yearlong 365 Plays/365 Days Festival.

In addition to her work for The Public, Maria holds a position on the adjunct faculty of Juilliard, where she co-teaches a producing course, and she curates the junior year curriculum of Playwrights Downtown, the Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU. She has guest lectured throughout her career at Bard College, Barnard College, Brown University, Columbia University, Juilliard, Marymount Manhattan College, the National Theater Institute at The Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, NYU, Pace University, UCSD, the University of Texas-Austin, and Yale University. Since 2015, Maria has also served as a member of the board of the National

Alliance for Musical Theatre. From 2006 to 2008, she co-chaired the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab with Jason Grote.

From 2004 to 2012, Maria was the Executive Producer of 13P, an award-winning, innovative theater company that produced new plays by 13 emerging and mid-career writers: Anne Washburn, Winter Miller, Rob Handel, Gary Winter, Kate Ryan, Ann Marie Healy, Sheila Callaghan, Julia Jarcho, Lucy Thurber, Madeleine George, Young Jean Lee, Erin Courtney, and Sarah Ruhl. By the time the company completed its mission, 13P had won three Obie Awards for its productions, along with a Special Citation Obie Grant for the company as a whole, and published an anthology of the collective's plays.

Maria is a first-generation Latinx-American, born to parents who emigrated from the Dominican Republic and Spain. She was raised in Jamaica, Queens, and has a collection of hoop earrings to prove it. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in 2001 from Brown University, where she received a Susan Steinfeld Award. After graduation, she served as the Associate Producer at Trinity Repertory Company, establishing a family programming series and acting as a liaison to the Latinx community of Providence. Later, in 2007, she received the Josephine Abady Award from the League of Professional Theatre Women."

## Invitation

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The following is the email template I sent to the women I invited to be a part of this process. Each email was altered slightly to highlight their specific roles and accomplishments.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope this email finds you well! My name is Peyton Kennedy and I am presently a senior at the James Madison University Honors College studying Theatre Performance & Broadcast Journalism with minors in Business Entrepreneurship & Leadership Studies. I am contacting you to invite you to be part of a project I am working on for my Honors Capstone.

As a young woman in the arts, I am seeking role models who embody the leadership qualities I aspire to emulate. That is why I'm contacting you! As I embark on my own career, women like yourself have so much knowledge to offer me about real-world experiences in the profession.

This year, I will be completing an honors capstone project. I've decided to utilize this project as an opportunity to connect with professional female artists, conduct interviews on their most meaningful experiences in the arts, and distribute this research through a documentary. I've chosen the medium of a documentary because it's the culmination of my academic & practical studies: researching arts & leadership history, crafting impactful interview questions, filming with professional equipment, editing video, and producing / marketing content.

The documentary will highlight women in arts leadership during the age of the 'me too' movement. I was struck by how the world turned after this movement and am intrigued to learn if it has affected you. How has it changed professionalism, protocol, bylaws, communication, co-worker relationships... or even surface-level aspects such as dress code? I'm also curious to learn if you have NOT experienced a shift, for that is telling information as well. Finally, I'm interested in your projections on how the theatre community should proceed. According to Backstage, in the 2018 Broadway season, women only accounted for 17% of behind-the-scenes talent (Mink, 2018). However, there are also many emerging organizations with a mission to promote women in theater, such as The Kilroys (plays by woman, trans, and non-binary playwrights) and Works by Women (an organization empowering female theatrical work). I'd be curious to learn your thoughts on these statistics. I will be working with a team of advisors who will review my questions which address these topics.

Last semester, I completed a small-scale honors research project addressing these same themes but in female broadcast journalists. I similarly conducted research and interviews with a

group of women and addressed any shifts they noticed as an effect of the ‘me too’ movement. It was an encouraging experience to hear their personal stories and it prompted my curiosity for how the movement has affected the familial theatre community.

This email is an invitation for you to be a part of this project. What an honor it would be to sit down with you and ask some questions. I am very interested in your work as the \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. I’m also aware of \_\_\_\_\_ and am inspired by your accomplishments and drive. I’d look forward to hearing your wisdom on these topics and learning from your practical experience.

If we move forward, prior to the interview, I will:

- Send my interview questions
- Arrange a time to meet
- Video record our interview session with your permission

In total, I am looking for five women to be interviewed in this process.

My goal is to share what I’ve learned from you with other aspiring female theatre artists and encourage them to work through obstacles to achieve their goals.

If you are willing to be a part of this project, and/or want more information, please respond to this email and we can set up an initial phone call. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to hearing from you!

Best,  
Peyton Kennedy

peytonkennedy98@gmail.com  
201-615-4471

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More About Me: (resume attached)

Growing up in Hoboken, NJ, my love for theatre performance blossomed. Frequent trips to Manhattan gave me exposure to professional theatre and working in community theatre taught me a foundation of the industry.

I’m now a James Madison University senior, double majoring in Theatre Performance and Broadcast Journalism with minors in Honors Leadership Studies and Business Entrepreneurship. I am passionate about creating opportunities for others to share stories and impact their communities. Working in these artistic areas has awakened a curiosity in me to gather and document the journeys of others.

Also on JMU's campus, I work for NBC Universal, anchor and report for the student newscast "Breeze TV", and am the Senator for the College of Visual & Performing Arts in the Student Gov. Assoc. I lived in Los Angeles this summer with the JMU in LA program and had the opportunity to work three entertainment industry internships.

Currently, I'm in rehearsals for JMU's production of "Vinegar Tom"!



Work Cited:

Mink, Casey. "How Broadway Has Changed for Women-and the Work That Still Needs to Be Done." *Backstage*, 23 May 2018,  
[www.backstage.com/magazine/article/broadway-changed-women-work-still-needs-done-1039/](http://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/broadway-changed-women-work-still-needs-done-1039/).

## Interview Questions

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The following are the interview questions I asked Anne Morgan, Cara Rawlings and Seema Sueko. In developing these questions, I strived to include opportunities for the women to discuss their personal leadership experiences as well as their opinions and advice on becoming a leader in the post - 'me too' world.

### Introduction

1. How would you describe your job position? Can you walk me through your daily schedule?
2. Who or what inspired you to pursue a career in the arts? Can you recall a specific moment or influence?

### Gender & Leadership

3. According to Backstage, in the 2018 Broadway season, women only accounted for 17% of behind-the-scenes talent. By nature, theatre is competitive and for women it can be even more selective. With this in mind, how did you market yourself to gain this position?
4. How would your professional colleagues describe you as a leader?
5. When you reflect on your career in the arts, what was your most memorable moment (positive and/or negative) as a leader?
6. Can you describe a time where you felt your voice was heard in the workplace? Can you describe a time where your voice felt stifled? What factors contributed to this?

### 'Me Too' Movement

7. Actress Alyssa Milano reignited Tarana Burke's 'me too' movement with her accusations against Harvey Weinstein in October 2017. Since that year, have you noticed a shift in power dynamics based on gender? Has there been a shift in company protocol (dress, communication, etc.)?

### Moving Forward

8. If you could project the next five years, what would you like to witness shift in the theater community in terms of gender equality?
9. What advice would you give to aspiring female theatre artists?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?



## Gender & Leadership in Theatre: Research

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The following is an annotated bibliography of the research I conducted regarding gender and leadership in the theatrical arts and the ‘me too’ movement.

Chinoy, Helen Krich, and Linda Walsh Jenkins. *Women in American Theatre*. Theatre Communications Group, 2006.

This book covers a large breadth of topics in three categories: “interrogating the past, or women in theatre - then and now”, “theatre, activism, and personal change”, and “art versus business: the challenge of women in american theatre.” Within these categories, topics covered include: the actress, women playwrights, feminist theatre, staging diversity, directing, and designing. Since such a variety of topics are covered, this book will serve as an overview to the topics, rather than an in-depth analysis. The forward notes, “As women with new self-awareness and enthusiasm try to use theatre to explore what it means to be a woman, they also look back in the hope of locating themselves in some female tradition that will help them understand their problems in the present as well as plan for the future” (xxvii). This quote mirrors one goal of my capstone project, which is to inform female theatre artists of how they’ve progressed and where they can continue to grow.

Clement, Olivia. “5 Female Directors On Why the Theatre Industry Struggles With Gender Equality.” *Playbill*, PLAYBILL INC., 8 Feb. 2018.

“‘There’s a feeling of scarcity in this business,” she continued. “That there aren’t enough resources, enough space, or enough playwrights, and so you see institutions and producers unwilling to take a chance on something they can’t trust—which can often mean a woman or a person of color”” (Clement). This *Playbill* article interviews three female directors on the struggles within gender and leadership. Statistically, women in Broadway and off-Broadway theatres hold less positions than men and are paid less as well. The interview is filmed and will diversify opinions gathered on the solution to the inequality. One director suggested the answer is simply for directors, artistic directors, and producers to hire more women. Whitney White says, “I feel my head hitting up against something and I want to say: ‘Take this chance on me as a black female director” (Clement).

Erkut, Sumru, and Ineke Ceder. "Women's Leadership in Resident Theaters." *Wellesley Centers for Women*, 2018.

The Wellesley Centers for Women partnered with American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) to study gender equity in leadership opportunities in the nonprofit American theater. The study examines why so few women hold leadership positions in theatre and what can be done to increase their prominence and opportunities. According to their findings, "Women's representation in leadership of member-theaters of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) has hovered around 25% for years" (Erkut). The authors note six key reasons as to why there are not more women in theatrical leadership: familiarity & trust, work-life balance, culture fit, mentorship/sponsorship, and affordability. Reading into these six reasons will provide context to the glass ceiling within the arts. Additionally, there is a video attached to the research for further depth and explanation. The information comes from interviews with women, just as my capstone will do.

Fliotsos, Anne, and Wendy Vierow. *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*. University of Illinois Press, 2008.

This book outlines the history of women directing in theatre. The concept of a "...theatrical director is a modern phenomenon that most historians trace to the mid-nineteenth century and the work of Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen" (4). In the past, actors, managers, and playwrights have performed the functions of a director, with specific roles depending on cultural outlines. 18th & 19th century European women such as Carolina Neuber, Marguerite Brunet (aka La Montansier), and Madame Vestris paved the way for women managers and directors to follow. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, "...women directed approximately 16 percent of productions in the Theatre Communications Group theaters, which include nonprofit theaters in New York City and regional theaters across the country (Jonas and Bennett, 2002, 3)" (1). At the end of the twentieth century, "...the percentage of women directors on Broadway remained at approximately 8 percent, while the percentage of women directors Off Broadway increased to approximately 20 percent (Jonas 1998, 2, 11)" (1). This book will aid in my historical understanding of female directors in theatre and inform how the roles of leadership have changed over time. Additionally, the book includes an interview with Sharon Ott of Virginia Commonwealth University, who I will be interviewing for my capstone.

Gilman, Rebecca. "Men Still Dominate Top Theater Jobs. Here's How That Hurts Women." *Chicagotribune.com*, Chicago Tribune, 31 May 2019.

“50/50 in 2020” is the decade-long campaign led by the League of Professional Theatre Women calling for female playwrights, directors and designers to achieve parity in the theater by 2020. The article notes the progress made toward gender parity; for example, “according to ‘The Count 2.0,’ a report recently released by The Lilly Awards Foundation and The Dramatists Guild of America, more female playwrights are seeing their work produced in not-for-profit theaters in the U.S. than ever before” (Gilman). However, plays written by women only account for 29% of all plays produced. Another example of progress, but still trouble: productions by women of color doubled in the last three years, but still only account for 6% of productions nationwide. The statistics for directors and designers are more encouraging, as they receive 37% of off-Broadway opportunities. The article claims representation is important because “...playwrights, directors, designers and actors shape the stories we tell in the theater and the stories we tell become the world we live in” (Gilman). (A fun side note, this article is written by Rebecca Gilman, a playwright who wrote one of my favorite audition monologues.)

Johnson, Christen A. “#MeToo: A Timeline of Events.” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 Mar. 2019, [www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmlstory.html](http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmlstory.html).

The #MeToo movement within gender and leadership is the focus point of my capstone research. Therefore, it is imperative that I understand the timeline of events which sparked the movement. In 2006, Tanara Burke coined the phrase ‘me too’. As a survivor of sexual assault, Burke “...wanted to do something to help women and girls of color who had also survived sexual violence” (Johnson). Then in October of 2017, actress Ashley Judd accuses Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault. A few days after Judd spoke out, actress Alyssa Milano reignited the ‘me too’ movement with the tweet “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” In that same month, reports against Roy Price, Lawrence G. Nassar, and Kevin Spacey surfaced. This timeline also includes the allegations to follow, the start of the Times Up anti-harassment coalition, and Time’s Person of the Year for “Silence Breakers”.

Mink, Casey. “How Broadway Has Changed for Women-and the Work That Still Needs to Be Done.” *Backstage*, 23 May 2018, [www.backstage.com/magazine/article/broadway-changed-women-work-still-needs-done-1039/](http://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/broadway-changed-women-work-still-needs-done-1039/).

According to the *Backstage* article, “...in the 2018 Broadway season, women only accounted for 17% of behind-the-scenes talent” (Mink). The statistics of women in Broadway are highlighted in this article. It poses the question, “The theater is an industry that prides itself on the progressiveness of its content and creators. But how accurate—or earned—that pride is is a

question without a clear answer when it comes to the inclusion or empowerment of women” (Mink). To answer this question and more of its kind, *Backstage* interviewed three women: one Tony-nominated score writer, a Tony-winning actress, and a Tony-nominated director. The questions asked hold similarities to the questions I am asking women in my capstone. Additionally, I will be interviewing women in a variety of theatrical professions, just as the article did. However, *Backstage* is focused on the Broadway level while I will be interviewing on the regional and educational level. The article will diversify my research and accumulation of professional opinions.

Paulson, Michael. “Doors Open for Women and People of Color at Top Ranks of American Theater.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 19 Mar. 2019.

“When I was coming up, there were very few women in leadership positions, and very few women of color,” Ms. Garrett said. “The tide has to move for the future of the theater in America” (Paulson). This *New York Times* article follows director Nataki Garrett to highlight transformations within American theatre. One of the transformations is as follows: “Across the country, scores of artistic directors, most of them white men who have served as community tastemakers for years, are leaving their jobs via retirements, ousters, and an industry wide round of musical chairs. As their successors are appointed, a shift is underway: according to a national survey conducted by two Bay Area directors, women have been named to 41 percent of the 85 jobs filled since 2015, and people of color have been named to 26 percent” (Paulson). Within the article, there is an interview with Maria Manuela Goyanes, the artistic director at Woolly Mammoth theatre in Washington, D.C. I reached out to Ms. Goyanes to be interviewed for my capstone, and her inclusion in this article confirms her interest on the topic of gender and leadership. Additionally, the article notes that although men are leaving the industry, “a handful of those departing are going unwillingly, pushed out over allegations of sexual misconduct and problematic workplace behavior” (Paulson). This online newspaper article will inform my capstone through research and interviews with artistic directors.

Paulson, Michael. “Who Calls the Shots on Broadway? She Does.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 14 Aug. 2019.

Female producers are finding success on Broadway: “Even though women remain a minority among lead producers — those in charge of the commercial life of a show — their power is clearly growing, not only on artistically adventurous projects but also on big dollar ventures” (Paulson). This article breaks down the female producers working on current

Broadway shows. At the 2019 Tony Awards, three female producers won the top awards and were the ones accepting the statuettes on stage. As leaders in the Broadway world, “...they are bringing their own life experiences to bear on the shows they oversee, particularly attentive to how women and girls are portrayed, and whether women are employed on their creative teams” (Paulson). This article will inform my capstone on the growth of female representation in theatrical leadership and the successes thus far.

Sharon Ott. “Building Brave Spaces: Leading Theatre Programs Today.” *SDC Journal*, 2019.

This journal article is a discussion between three theatre administrators at the university level, moderated by Sharon Ott, chair of the department of theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University. A discussion with theatre administrators holds importance because “in an ever-evolving cultural conversation, it is the students, faculty, and chairs of our theatre programs who often lead the way in addressing issues and practices that will affect our industry in the years to come” (Ott). The guidance and education given to aspiring theatre professionals will shape the way they enter the community. If we want to see more representation within theatre, we must teach the importance of representation. Some questions in the discussion include mention of the #MeToo movement, to which Yale and Julliard director Evan Yionoulis responds, “At Julliard -- and at Yale, where I taught previously -- we have developed very clear protocols about rehearsing material with sexual content, in the classroom and in the rehearsal hall -- what happens when you have a director or professor in the room, what happens when you don’t. These protocols (which I’m certain are being instituted nationwide) mirror what is happening, or needs to happen, in the professional world” (Ott). These quotes will inform my capstone, as I am asking administrative women what their protocols are in the rehearsal and performance space.

## Documentary Link

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOLNbuNamG0>

## **Transcribed Documentary**

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**00:00 [SOT via Tarana Burke]**

Hi, my name's Tarana Burke and I'm the founder of the 'me too' movement.

**[SOT via TODAY]**

We're joined now by Tarana Burke, the creator of the 'me too' movement and Alyssa Milano, one of the actresses who helped that hashtag go viral. Both of you starting a movement. Ladies, good morning.

**[SOT via Good Morning America]**

The 'me too' movement, it is growing this morning. Remember Alyssa Milano started it all, inspiring millions of women to share their personal stories of sexual harassment.

**[SOT via Good Morning America]**

The movement started by actress Alyssa Milano, asking her Twitter followers to reply "'me to' and share their stories. "If all the women who had been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote me to as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem," she writes.

**[SOT via Entertainment Tonight]**

Reese Witherspoon emotionally recalls being sexually assaulted at 16 years old. "I have my own experiences that have come back to me very vividly, and I really hard to sleep , hard to think, hard to communicate... true disgust at the director who assaulted me when I was 16 years old."

**[SOT via ABC News]**

Now with more on Harvey Weinstein, convicted on two counts of sexual assault, now facing up to 29 years in prison. The verdict a victory for the 'me too' movement.

**[SOT via ABC News]**

The accusations against Weinstein propelling the 'me too' movement and prompting the creation of Time's Up: women in Hollywood banding together, to stand up to sexual misconduct.

**01:42 [SOT: Seema Sueko]**

My name is Seema Sueko, and I serve as deputy artistic director at Arena Stage.

**[SOT: Anne Morgan]**

Anne Morgan, I'm the literary manager and dramaturg at the American Shakespeare Center.

**[SOT: Cara Rawlings]**

Cara Rawlings and I am associate professor of movement and acting at Virginia Tech.

**[Nat Sound: Cara Rawlings]**

All I'm doing is, I'm actually opening up all sides of my body.

**02:16 [SOT: Cara Rawlings]**



Professionally, I'm a flight director and intimacy director as well. And so, most of my days are, are spent teaching a class, preparing for a class. And right now, I'm directing and choreographing *Pippin*, our production coming up.

I started my undergraduate life as a BFA musical theatre student. From there, I decided that I needed to get, I needed to do something that was more practical. So, I have a degree in public relations.

I had left theatre for a little while... and at that point, I thought, I'll audition... there was an audition for *Oklahoma!* coming up. And so I was like, I haven't done theater in, you know, five, six years so I'll just go audition again, 'what the hell'. And I auditioned and I got a role. And then after that it was kind of a snowball it was just like, I kept getting cast, and then somebody said, "Hey do you choreograph?" and I was like, "Yeah", because I started as a dancer, my life started as a dancer.

I realized at that point that I wanted to teach, I wanted to coach movement.

Thankfully, I found a program at Virginia Commonwealth University, that at the time was a really strong program in movement pedagogy. When I started, I knew it was movement pedagogy, I talked to David Leon, who was the head of the program at the time. And I told him what I wanted to do at the time and he said, "You don't want to act," he said "You want to coach movement, you want to direct movement." And I said, "Yeah, but I don't know how I get there." And he said, "Well, through this program." And he said, "But you're gonna have to learn how to

fight.” And I said, “Okay, it's like dancing. Right?” And he was like, “Yeah, it is, it's dancing with swords, it's a dance with swords.”

I trained for 10 years in order to become a certified teacher with the SAFD. And I'm one of the few women in the SAFD. It's mostly a boys club. So, there are now, I think, about 23 of us out of about 150. You really had to be one of the boys, like you had to be really tough... in this really kind of machismo kind of way. I pursued training to that end so I could match the boys, is what I kind of, how I kind of thought of it. I no longer think of it that way. Thankfully. Because K. Jenny Jones, who's the first female master...

**[SOT via CreativeMornings HQ]**

I am Jenny Jones. K. Jenny, professionally. And Jones, to my oldest and dearest friends just alone. I am a certified fight director and master teacher in stage combat.

**[SOT: Cara Rawlings]**

K. Jenny saw me fight. And when I got... when I talked to her afterward, she said, “Women fight from a different place. Women fight from an emotional place that doesn't have a lot of logic, that doesn't have a lot of that, that, that doesn't have preparation.” And, you know, which is true when you see two women actually fight... they go after each other, there is, it's all... it's from the gut and it is to kill. And I understood, I understood what she was saying because I was like, and I, I realized, oh, I have not been honoring who I am in this work. I've been trying to be somebody

else. That's been my kind of concern and investigation, but it came from the place of feeling like I needed to be a guy. And that was a real, a really dissonant place to live for a very long time.

There's a moment that I had in a rehearsal, once, that a director... I was the, I was the movement director, I was the fight, flight director on the show. And I went into the rehearsal and I started moving some people around and then I said, "Is this what is this what you're asking for, is this what you're looking for?" And he, and he shouted at me and said, like in the space with all the actors and everything he said, he said, "Yeah", he said, "Yeah, I just need you to do this to make it better. And you know if you can't do it, I'll do it. Fine." And it was so combative. I just stopped. And I looked at the actors and the actors were all like, "I'm sorry", cause they knew what it was going on. And so I was like, "Okay, so we're just gonna do this and then I'm going to go. Okay." And so I left, and the next day I went in to talk to that director because I left there and I was so angry. And I, and I went in to talk to him and I said, "I need to let you know that you cannot talk to me like that. I am, I'm there to help you." I said, "But you, you may not speak to me like that, in front of other people or not, or privately." And he said, "Well, I can talk to you any way I want to, I'm the director." He actually said that. And I said, "Okay. No, you can't." And I said, and he goes, "Well. Fine. What do you want then? What do you want, cause, I'll just..." he was like, "I just won't be in the room. I just won't be in the room when you're working." I said, "Well, that's not what I was hoping, I was hoping to do something that was collaborative, and so I'm saying you can't talk to me like that, but you can talk to me about what you are looking for specifically, and without any condemnation, or judgment."

I was really proud of myself for standing up for myself. At the same time, it was not ideal. I hope that I do a little bit better in the moment of dealing with things now. I've just never, I've never experienced anything like that, I've never experienced anything like that sense.

But I've also on the other side of it, I've experienced people like Jon Jory, who's a very famous, Tony Award winning playwright and theatre practitioner. He started Actors Theatre of Louisville. And being in the room with him... when at one point he came over and he just said, "Your presence in this room is so lovely." I just, he said, "Thank you for just being present and available."

We can all honor who each other is, you know, it's not a competition and it's not this, it's not this ridiculous hierarchy, we're all headed toward the same thing. In that, we all have to examine how we have contributed to that. We have to be a little more forgiving.

So, as we call people out, as things... what I see sometimes in like a rehearsal is that, you know, a scene between male and female, an intimate scene... Well the male is terrified... terrified... of doing it the wrong way. The fact is that we're going to do, we're going to say things that aren't the correct thing to say. And we need to have humility and go, "Oh, sorry." And I think that in a rehearsal room we have to allow for that. I haven't always been in like in the last three years I've been in rehearsal rooms where it's been like, "Okay, everybody we're gonna all adhere to this one, to this intimacy, you know, codes of intimacy or whatever this is. And so, nobody screw up." Instead of saying, "Here's some ideas. And here's some things we're going to put into

practice. And if you mess up: Notice it, say I'm sorry, make a change, right there, and move on, move forward.”

And I would say for women: own what you know. So not only do you need to know, like do all the research, do all the work. You need to own what you know. It needs to be a conscious choice to have a voice in every single room.

**12:06 [SOT: Anne Morgan]**

I started out thinking I wanted to be an actor, which I think is the way that a lot of people find their way into the arts, and I was really bad at it, but I really liked it... I knew there was something about the collaborative environment.

I remember very very clearly the first time I heard the word ‘dramaturg’. It's a pretty weird word. It's not thrown around a lot. But, it was about halfway through my junior year of high school, the school had just gotten a new director of the theatre program. He was talking about the various roles in which one can play a part in the making of theater that aren't acting. And he described this person who was integral to the rehearsal process but not performing, who was researching a lot, and using critical thinking skills to support the narrative, and the text. And I was like, that sounds like fun.

So, one of the things that I love about my job is that there is no typical day for me. But, the bulk of my job responsibilities include reading a lot of plays, both new plays by living writers that

have not been produced that we're considering for our Shakespeare's New Contemporaries program as well as Shakespeare plays that we have either in rehearsal, or coming up. I also spend a fair amount of my time talking to playwrights about the Shakespeare's New Contemporaries project that I lead here. It's pretty unique. As far as playwriting competitions go, so I spend a lot of time making sure I'm clear about what it is that we're looking for and what it is that we're not looking for. And then I also spend a good deal of my time in the rehearsal room, and that's mostly sort of providing contextual research, serving almost as a advocate for the audience, the future audience of play, but with the new plays I work very closely with the writer on rewrites and script changes to help make sure that the text is getting closer and closer and closer to what the play is that they want to be doing.

I think, not everyone at ASC has a full understanding of what it is that I do. And I don't say that to be shady to any of them. I have great colleagues, but dramaturgy is a very sort of niche position. And it's not a position that ASC has ever had prior to my arrival, I'm the first staff literary manager and dramaturg.

One of the things that's exciting and neat about dramaturgy is that it's not very old. Really, dramaturgy in the United States started maybe 60 years ago, maybe 70, depending on where you're counting, but definitely not prior to the middle of the 20th century. And because of that, it's a very, very small field. And it's very, very easy to sort of see the legacy and mentorship is really important in the field. And I think that's a really sort of special thing.

Dramaturgy is a very heavily female field, or female leaning field. And I think that has to do a lot of... with the way that people think of the work of dramaturgy. You frequently hear dramaturgy and the dramaturgical act described as being a midwife to a playwright. I don't care for that metaphor. It's not how I think of my work and I don't think playwrights are literally giving birth to their plays. I think there's a fair amount of emotional labor involved in dramaturgy, and all of those things are skills and that's what I bring to the table. And I've sort of stopped trying to shy away from that.

One of my early mentors was a man and I learned pretty quickly that the way in which he moved through his career was not going to ever feel confident, like that was never going to feel like a good fit for me. And, yeah, so I try to lead sort of very open, very heart forward.

Dramaturgy as an act encourages a multiplicity of voices and nuance and asking questions, rather than knowing answers. And being able to see from multiple points of view.. being good listeners and being able to sort of translate from an actor note to a playwright note. All of these sorts of descriptors or understandings of the dramaturgical act tend to be sort of subconsciously gendered.

Shakespeare's New Contemporaries has an open application process which means anybody in the world who wants to can send us a play, as long as it meets our criteria. And those plays are evaluated anonymously. The people reading the plays have no idea who wrote them, the gender or any other demographic information about the playwright. And I don't think it's an accident

that the first five playwrights we've selected are female identified. I think there is a real hunger for strong female centered stories. And that women who have historically been excluded from the work of Shakespeare are wanting to engage and those are the plays that are rising to the top of this very, very competitive process.

And we know that women are the majority ticket buyers. And I would like to see us move towards more of, not, not just more women but certainly more women... more women writers, more trans or non binary writers, more writers of color, more disabled writers. I think that's really important. If theatre wants to last beyond the next five years, I think we need to really take a long hard look at ourselves and think, think about who we're inviting into our space, and how we are doing that. Are we only tying women's stories during Women's History Month? Are we only doing... I was gonna say place but African American writers, but usually it's like, you're doing August Wilson plays in February... and February is a great time to do plays but writers of color and August Wilson is a great playwright, but they can't be the only time that you're doing that kind of work.

The playwrights are job creators. Playwrights say, "Here's how many characters are in my play and here are the kinds of people that I want to play them." And it all sort of all ripples out from there.

**20:06 [SOT: Seema Sueko]**



You know there's probably two pivotal moments. One was when I was 12, and my sister was 16 years old, and she, my sister was very, very shy. We were both born in Pakistan and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. And but I was 10 months old when we moved to Hawaii. She was already four. So, for her her life changed drastically when she was four and left her home country and came to Hawaii. And as a result, she became very, very introverted and very shy, but she was playing the lead, the star, in *Little Mary Sunshine*. She has a beautiful voice. And I remember watching her, I watched every performance and I thought to myself, gosh. First of all, the show was great. And then secondly, how transformative tha she... this very shy, young woman... night after night just came out and exuded confidence and radiated beauty and talent. And I thought, ah-ha I want to do that too.

I went to grad school at University of Chicago, got my master's degree in international relations with a focus on Middle East politics, and I'd always done theatre prior to that, and in grad school, there's no time for anything other than what you're studying. So, it was at that point that I recognized that theatre and performance was where I felt like I could make a bigger impact, impact rather than academia and decided to just shift gears and finish my master's and then just started acting in the Chicago theatre scene right after that.

So, I had founded a theatre company in San Diego, called Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company, in 2004. It was a small equity theatre company, socially conscious, community focused equity theatre company. We started getting a lot of national attention when we created the 'Green Theater Choices' toolkit, and also created the 'Consensus Organizing for Theater' methodology.

Both of these things became things that were ambassadors for us that, like I said, got a lot of national attention, won national grants.

So, future looking a big part of my job is driving the season planning process. We produce 10 shows each season. So driving that process alongside Molly Smith, our artistic director, our lit manager, our casting director, our senior artistic advisor and our leadership office manager.

Also future looking is driving our powerplay commissioning process... we've got this big initiative where we've commissioned 25, or are in process of commissioning 25 minutes plays or musicals that deal with people, moments or ideas have shaped who we are as Americans. So, driving those commissions forward is a big part of the position. And then as far as the present looking parts of my position that includes: overseeing casting and literary management are in my department... overseeing programs like our resident artists program... playwright's arena... our mid-career director award... other special projects and initiatives that come up... and then I also direct one of the 10 shows each season. There's HR, there's administrative, there's fundraising and marketing and other elements as well, that pepper through all the aspects of my job as well.

You know, I'm really excited about... this past fall we produced this event called the 'Power Play' summit where we gathered some of our commissioned writers through their Power Play initiative and connected them with some major D.C. thinkers. Folks like, former Ambassador Susan Rice, Chase Rynd of the National Building Museum. And the goal of the summit was simply to connect people across sectors, grapple with really major big questions that are facing us as a nation, and a ignite cross sector collaboration.

I feel really fortunate... I have... I've never felt not heard in the workplace. But keep in mind, I went from founding my own theatre company, to associate artistic director position, to a deputy artistic director position. So, I was privileged, have been privileged in each of these positions. You know, I think the only time that I felt like my voice wasn't heard would be when I didn't quite know what my voice was. So, maybe the early days of my career as an actor in my 20s, just trying to figure out what is it I want to say? When really all I wanted was to get booked, you know, to get into a show, right? But those are the formative years to observe, absorb. But I think I didn't, I was, I didn't quite know what I wanted to say, in those early years.

You know, we have had, prior to the 'me too' movement, this culture of the rehearsal hall. And, in fact, if you probably go into one of our rehearsal rooms, and other places here, you'll find the posters with the culture of the rehearsal hall. And that's been a major pillar of how we operate here at Arena Stage, but I would say, post 'me too' movement, you know, side-by-side with the 'me too' movement was a 'not in our house' movement, it came out of theaters in Chicago that were grappling with some abuse that had happened in their theaters. They formed this 'not in our house' movement, created some protocols that some folks in the Washington D.C. theatre community invited those folks from Chicago down to also share that with folks in D.C.

So, I would post-that, we've been more intentional here at Arena, to really ensure that everybody understands the culture of the rehearsal hall. We very deliberately meet with each of the directors of our productions prior to rehearsals beginning to go over that with them. We also meet with the

stage manager, we then, during the first week of rehearsal, take some time with the full company to again reiterate those processes. So, that's a change I think the... we are using intimacy coordinators and consultants more and more, which is terrific.

Last season, I brought an intimacy consultant to Arena to lead workshops, not just for directors, but also for actors. The idea being that you might be in a production that doesn't have an intimacy consultant, but you, yourself can be empowered in the rehearsal room.

We also had senior staff and other members on the administrative staff do a workshop with the intimacy consultant. The idea being that, you know, in everyday life in the office you're offering ideas or making requests of one another, and how can we do that in a way that is respectful, normalize, “No, however”, empower folks to actually be real about what it is they can and cannot achieve under a certain deadline, and essentially create the space for really good communication.

Just stay on your path of what it is that feels honest, authentic and true to you. Don't try to be somebody else, you be you and people will see that.

## Reflective Essay

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As opportunities for women continue to fluctuate in theatre, how should one prepare for the career they are pursuing? Is there a roadmap for potential challenges or successes? As I embarked on this creative thesis project, I held hope that the combination of researching the history of theatrical leadership, connecting with current events and conducting personal interviews would curate an outline for what women in the arts can expect to face during their careers. However, after speaking with women who are leaders in a variety of theatrical disciplines, it became clear that each experience is unique. We can learn from the stories of these women, but it is impossible to predict the obstacles we may face. All three women I interviewed noted that what we can do is stay educated and hold high standards for ourselves and others. Understanding the historical journey of women in the arts can inform our personal and professional standards. They shared that standing up for your needs and goals sets the precedent for those around you and crafts a constructive work environment. As noted in *Women in American Theatre*, “As women with new self-awareness and enthusiasm try to use theatre to explore what it means to be a woman, they also look back in the hope of locating themselves in some female tradition that will help them understand their problems in the present as well as plan for the future” (Chinoy xxvii).

When working on a theatre production today, collaborators most often turn to the director for guidance. The concept of a theatrical director, however, is a “modern phenomenon that most historians trace to the mid-nineteenth century and the work of Georg II, Duke of

Saxe-Meiningen” (Fliotsos & Vierow 4). Previously, actors, managers and playwrights performed the functions of a director such as casting and working with actors to interpret the script. In 18th & 19th century Europe, Carolina Neuber, Marguerite Brunet (La Montansier) and Madame Vestris paved the way for female managers and directors to follow. These women formed acting troupes, owned theatre houses and implemented new rehearsal techniques. Jumping ahead, at the end of the 20th century, “...the percentage of women directors on Broadway remained at approximately 8 percent, while the percentage of women directors Off-Broadway increased to approximately 20 percent” (Fliotsos & Vietrow 1). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, “...women directed approximately 16 percent of productions in the Theatre Communications Group theaters, which include nonprofit theaters in New York City and regional theaters across the country” (Fliotsos & Vierow 1). As women pushed for equality and more job offers, another story was unfolding behind closed doors. The story of the Me Too movement.

The phrase ‘me too’ was coined by Tarana Burke in 2006. While working at a summer camp, Burke was approached by a 13-year-old girl who confessed she had been a victim of sexual assault. Burke admits that at the time she did not know how to help this girl, who she calls “Heaven”, and sent her to find a solution elsewhere. Heaven never returned to summer camp. Consumed by her guilt, Burke asked herself, “Why couldn't you just say ‘me too?’” (Ohlheiser). From that moment, Burke was inspired to be a voice of guidance. As a sexual assault victim herself, she notes, "When I started putting the pieces together of what helped me, it was having other survivors empathize with me” (Ohlheiser). When Burke published a MySpace page to connect women with similar experiences, the ‘me too’ movement began.

Over ten years later in October of 2017, actress Ashley Judd accused Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault. A few days after Judd spoke out, actress Alyssa Milano reignited the ‘me too’ movement with the tweet: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” In that same month, reports against Roy Price, Lawrence G. Nassar, and Kevin Spacey surfaced. As more women came forward with their stories, the abuse of power became clear. Soon following, the Times Up anti-harassment coalition formed, calling for “safe, fair and dignified work for women of all kinds” ([timesupnow.org](http://timesupnow.org)) and TIME Magazine deemed “Silence Breakers” their 2017 people of the year. In March of 2020, Harvey Weinstein was ultimately deemed guilty and was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

After researching these turning point moments for women in the arts, I approached my upcoming interviews as a conversation with the overarching question: had these women noticed a change in company protocol or communication since the ignition of the ‘me too’ movement?

First, I spoke with Anne Morgan, the literary manager and dramaturg for the American Shakespeare Center (ASC) in Staunton, Virginia. Morgan is the first person to hold this position at ASC and she noted, “I think, not everyone at ASC has a full understanding of what it is that I do... / dramaturgy is a very niche position.” In this role, Morgan thoroughly researches the plays ASC is producing, presents her findings to the creatives in an accessible medium, works with playwrights of new works to revise scripting, offers contextual suggestions to directorial staff, and communicates with playwrights who have submitted work to the company. She expressed, “Dramaturgy is a very heavily female field, or female leaning field, and I think that has to do a lot with the way that people think of the work of dramaturgy.” In fact, she has even heard dramaturgs related to the role of a midwife - which she disagrees with, but admits, “I think

there's a fair amount of emotional labor involved in dramaturgy.” Therefore, Morgan strives to work collaboratively with her “heart-forward.”

According to “The Count 2.0”, a report released by The Lilly Awards Foundation and The Dramatists Guild of America, “...more female playwrights are seeing their work produced in not-for-profit theaters in the U.S. than ever before” (Gilman). Morgan echoes this finding when she noted ASC’s initiative, Shakespeare’s New Contemporaries. New Contemporaries is a playwriting competition where a board of readers select plays inspired by or in conversation with Shakespeare’s work. When selecting the plays, the readers are blind to the gender, race and age of the writer. Morgan revealed, “I don’t think it’s an accident that the first five playwrights we’ve selected are female-identified. I think there’s a real hunger for strong female centered stories and that women who have historically been excluded from the work of Shakespeare are wanting to engage and those are the plays that are rising to the top of this very, very competitive process.” Furthermore, she believes the future of theatre lies in the hands of the playwright. She said, “Playwrights are job creators. Playwrights say, ‘Here’s how many characters are in my play, and here are the kinds of people that I want to play them,’ and it sort of all ripples out from there.”

Once these diverse plays are written, the next step is to produce them. This is where deputy artistic director for Washington D.C.’s Arena Stage, Seema Sueko, steps in. Sueko drives the season planning process alongside Arena’s artistic director, literary manager, casting director, artistic advisor and leadership advisor. Here, the decision is made to showcase inclusive work.

For Sueko, the etiquette of a rehearsal room is where company culture is shaped. In fact, the rehearsal spaces of Arena Stage have posters which outline the expectations of leadership and



collaboration in the room. She says, “We very deliberately meet with each of the directors of our productions, prior to rehearsals beginning, to go over that with them. We also meet with the stage manager. We then, during the first week of rehearsal, take some time with the full company, to again reiterate those processes.” Additionally, Arena’s directors, senior staff, administration and actors complete workshops with intimacy directors. She says, “You can be empowered in the rehearsal room, if you have a scene that calls for intimacy, to be able to actually work with your scene partner and talk through protocol together.” Sueko expands to say the goal of working with an intimacy director is to create a space for productive and confident communication.

As an intimacy director herself, Cara Rawlings is a frequent leader of these rehearsal room discussions. Currently, Rawlings is an associate professor of movement and performance at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. She is also a trained fight choreographer with the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD). She notes, however, “It’s mostly a boy’s club.” Today, there are about 23 women in the SAFD out of 150 members. During training, she recalls, “You had to be really tough, in this really kind of machismo kind of way. I pursued training to that end so I could match the boys.” Today, she says she no longer thinks of it that way. Women fight from a place of emotion, according to Rawlings, and as a woman herself she says she needed to honor that identity.

Working professionally as a choreographer under male direction, Rawlings recalls moments of conflict and moments of collaboration. While moments of collaboration reminded her that the “majority of people are good”, the moments of conflict were an opportunity to learn. Here, she found her voice and stood up for her professional expectations and boundaries. Moving

forward, Rawling encourages theatre artists to honor each other: “It’s not a competition and it’s not this ridiculous hierarchy. We’re all headed to the same thing. We have to be a little more forgiving.” An understanding of boundaries in line with the willingness to explore and forgive, establishes a healthy and productive company protocol.

While each woman’s experience as a leader in the arts was unique, they informed each other. Anne Morgan works with playwrights to produce inclusive plays. Seema Sueko works with literary managers, like Morgan, to select a theatre company’s season. Sueko then hires intimacy directors, like Cara Rawlings, to workshop the expected codes of conduct and encourage a safe, yet daring rehearsal room. All three women expressed their excitement for the future of the arts and encouraged aspiring female artists to use their voice productively and unapologetically.

I am incredibly grateful that I had the opportunity to speak with these women. From this opportunity, not only could I practice my journalism skills and prepare for a career in the arts, but I could also compile this content to be shared with other aspiring artists. My greatest takeaway from this project was understanding the importance of finding and using your voice. For some of the women I interviewed, understanding the value of their opinions unfortunately came from first hand experiences with domineering leadership, so I’m fortunate to have learned these lessons from their advice and stories. I hope sharing the collection of their stories in this documentary sparks conversation among theatre communities, challenges the norm and inspires continued efforts to reach equality in leadership.

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