

Why THE REVOLUTIONISTS?

by David Ceccarini

There's no doubt, I'm a Lauren Gunderson fan. We've produced four of her plays recently: *THE TAMING* in 2016 (remember when the beauty queen candidate won the White House?), *SILENT SKY* (Henrietta Leavitt measures the universe), *I AND YOU* (two teens bond for one lifetime), and now *THE REVOLUTIONISTS* (a dream-fugue take on an all-female French Revolution). So, what's with the Gunderson?

Lauren Gunderson's heroes are women. I think this, above all other reasons, is why I'm a fan and why I picked this play. Interestingly, in the script's cast list, Lauren initially describes each of the four women as "badass." She's serious about her heroes! Without knowing anything about Olympe DeGouges, the reluctant playwright-activist at the center of Gunderson's revolutionary romp, I was readily drawn into her artistic and societal struggles, empathizing with her doubts and fears and at last, celebrating her triumphs as an artist and proud member of the world's sisterhood.



Photo: Ross Zentner

Bree Beelow in *THE TAMING*

I also like Olympe because she's a stand-in for playwright Gunderson herself. There's an unmistakable similarity of voice, bright mind and inquisitiveness in Olympe's character which I recognize from Lauren's other plays and her appearance at the Madison Public Library I had the pleasure of attending a few years back. At that gathering, she took the opportunity to read a selection from her very recent script, *THE BOOK OF WILL* (seen as a reading at Next Act in 2018), where two of Shakespeare's actors are contemplating the meaning of theatre, sitting on the well-worn boards of the empty and dark Globe stage.

John: Why do we bother with any of it?

Henry: To feel again.

John: I feel enough [says the man who has just lost his dear wife to sudden illness].

Henry: I said to feel again. The faeries aren't real, but the feeling is. We play love's

first look and life's last, here, every day. And you will see yourself in it, or your fear, or your future before the play's end. And you will test your heart against trouble and joy, and every time you'll feel a flicker or a fountain of feeling that reminds you that, yes, you are yet living.

I've heard many explanations for the purpose of theatre, and tried to formulate some of my own, but Henry's meditation brings up goose bumps.

What was a tangential inquiry in *THE BOOK OF WILL* has taken center stage in *THE REVOLUTIONISTS*. Gunderson puts Olympe through an arduous obstacle course of challenges, creative frustration, fear, inspiration and revelation as she wrestles with the meaning and value of art - specifically, theatre. Responding early on to accusations that theatre is nothing but fiction, and of no help to anyone in need, she says:

It might be fiction, but it's not fake.

The beating hearts in front of you are real.

The gathering of people is real.

The time we spend together, this time, is real.

The story is real when it starts.

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Photo: Ross Zentner

Deborah Staples in *SILENT SKY*

THE REVOLUTIONISTS is generously sponsored by Larry & Patty Compton and Dr. David Paris Dentistry

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I've written before that the actor's art is often equated with lying. The comparison is in itself, a lie, clearly an opinion held by those who are as yet innocent of the power of the ancient art of storytelling which emanates from actors, on wooden planks, in a darkened room, to a gathering of inquisitive minds and open hearts. Under those exquisite conditions, the actors' deep-seated grasp of character and circumstance intertwines with the willingness of humans to imagine and believe, and miraculously, truth appears. It's the nature, the power of theatre. Fiction, not fake.

Another admirable Gunderson trademark, very much present in THE REVOLUTIONISTS, is her deft touch when it comes to touchy subjects. Her characters draw you in with their ebullient presence and smart repartee, and then suddenly one of them will emit the flash of an idea, a flip-sting comment, or a profound and challenging truth which hangs in the air, impossible to miss or avoid. But then, onward; Gunderson propels you forward, and as you stay alert to the journey, the energy of her editori-



THE REVOLUTIONISTS by Lauren Gunderson						
SEPTEMBER 26 - OCTOBER 20, 2019						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				26 Preview 7:30	27 Opening 7:30	28 4:30 8:00 P
29 2:00 T			2 1:30 7:30 P	3 7:30 T	4 7:30	5 4:30 8:00
6 2:00 P,T			9 1:30 7:30	10 7:30 P,T	11 7:30	12 4:30 8:00
13 2:00 P,T	14 7:30 \$		16 7:30	17 7:30 T	18 7:30 P	19 4:30 8:00
20 2:00 P	Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain)					
	T Talkback		\$ Pay What You Can			

als is storing up, to be released and processed as the play is freshly remembered. Here are a couple of tidbits:

... a good deed needs a good story or else it might vanish like nothing. ever. happened.

...let us laugh, and laugh too loudly and too often, and call out the hypocrites of our age until they are the butt of the joke.

I mean, you can't kill the writers – that's Democracy 101!

As she writes in her script notes, "The play is based on real women, real transcripts and real executions. But remember it's a comedy." And under Gunderson's masterful supervision, that comedy is realized along with a deeply-felt exploration – no, celebration – of the strength, resilience and generosity of the better half of this planet's population.

Vive les femmes!



In Tandem With You!

by Jane Flieller, Development Director

I promised myself I was going to sleep through the month of July and then rest in August. But my alarm clock went off early when David called to say that Next Act was in need of a Development Director.

For the past 21 years, along with my husband, Chris, I was co-founder and Producing Director of In Tandem Theatre. This past spring, we made the decision to cease operations and leave our venue, the Tenth Street Theatre on Milwaukee's near west side. While it was a difficult decision, it is one with which we are happy. We believe we did the right thing at the right time for the organization and for ourselves. In Tandem will live on as we continue with projects outside of our programming, such as training and providing actors to do role-playing exercises for students of social work through the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare and other small events. Who knows, perhaps we'll put on a show somewhere, some day [I hear Next Act rents their theatre...]. Artistically, I do hope to direct again in the future.

Once Chris and I made our decision, it was time to decide what direction to take, career-wise. I began to think about all the things I did administratively with In Tandem and of the myriad of hats I wore, what I would miss the most. The answer kept coming back to development. I enjoy researching and

writing grants, hosting fundraising events, and getting to know patrons and donors. All of these things will be part of what I'll do for Next Act. So while it may have been a little earlier than I had planned, I eagerly took the job at Next Act this past July.



My history with Next Act goes back a long way. Prior to In Tandem, I worked as a freelance stage manager, working with Theatre Tesseract, Next Generation Theatre and then for Next Act when the two aforementioned companies merged. My dear friend, Charles Kakuk, was my mentor when we began In Tandem – teaching me the ins and outs of arts administration. The transition has been quite easy, as I have the benefit of using the same processes and techniques that Charles instituted for Next Act and that he passed along to me. I also have known David, the Next Act staff, most of their actors and designers, as well as many of their patrons and donors for years. It all feels very familiar and comfortable.

I look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones as we launch Next Act's 30th anniversary season together.

Renaissance is Moving to Next Act

Over the summer, Renaissance Theaterworks (RTW), announced they would be moving to a new artistic home at the Next Act Theatre building at the beginning of its 2020-21 production season. "We've grown beyond the capacity of the 99-seat Studio Theatre at the Broadway Theatre Center," shares Managing Director Lisa Rasmussen, "and we are excited to seize this moment and embrace the demand for more opportunities for the community to experience RTW. This bold move will allow us to continue on a positive trajectory for many years to come."

The move to Next Act Theatre is not the first time the two companies have shared a space. Next Act Theatre Producing Artistic Director David Ceccasini shares, "We've been successful housemates before," noting RTW and Next Act's collaborative history dating back to 1997 for a co-production of KINDERTRANSPORT by Diane Samuels staged at the Stiemke Theater in the Milwaukee Repertory Theater complex, which was Next Act's production base at the time.

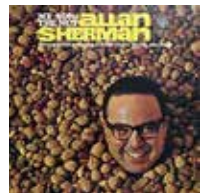
RTW then joined Next Act Theatre for "a couple of fun seasons in the early 2000s" when Next Act Theatre established its first home, The Off-Broadway at St. Paul and Water Street. "We look forward to hosting RTW's productions once again, and even though there is significant crossover between our audiences, we anticipate the added benefit of introducing even more people to more good theatre."



Renaissance Theaterworks' Artistic Director, Suzan Fete and Managing Director, Lisa Rasmussen

I was introduced to the French Revolution

at about 10 years old. I remember well our basement rec room on W. Courtland Avenue in Brookfield, Wisconsin, where our Sears Silvertone portable record player stood ready to aurally entertain. The album cover depicted the head of a funny-looking guy with black framed glasses smiling at me amidst an ocean of nuts. Indeed, the record was called *My Son The Nut*, featuring song parodies by comedian Allan Sherman. He sang about automation to the tune of "Fascination." He told his catchy summer camp story, *Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah* [*here I am at Camp Granada...*]. And he summarized the monarchy's part in the French Revolution with his bluesy, Peter Gunn bass line shuffle, "You Went The Wrong Way Ol' King Louie." More than 50 years later I can still hear that indelible line, cheerfully anticipating the French monarchy's impending demise, "We're gonna take you and the Queen, down to the guillotine, and shorten you a little bit."



Then, a few years later, I'm sure we touched upon La Révolution at some point in world history. And during Madame Bertazinni's French II class, I recall attempting to plow through Victor Hugo's epic novel *Les Misérables*, in the original French! Honestly, once Jean Valjean was arrested with the kindly priest's silver chandeliers [candlesticks] in his possession, my recollection falls apart. Or was that my French grammar?



BACK TO SCHOOL

OK, so now with Gunderson's *THE REVOLUTIONISTS* coming to our stage, it's time to catch up – it's the theatre's way of insuring that I finish my formal education.

As with any significant political and cultural happening, its causes are complex and many; the characters and events numerous and entwined. However, one thing seems common to most revolts of the people: those people have had enough. Or perhaps, in France's case: had not enough.



Life conditions for the common people – peasants, feudal system farmers, laborers – were pretty tough in the years before the first revolt, July 14, 1789 [the real storming of the Bastille]. There was much bad weather and then, poor harvests. Like other European powers, France was draining a lot of treasure to establish and secure colonies in far-flung places like Haiti, for instance. And she had recently helped out a fledgling country with a revolutionary war of its own, starting in 1776. [Any chance to poke the British in the eye was always of interest.] There was a tax system, but ineffective, and a heavier burden fell upon the poor; somehow, the well-off nobility could get around the laws and the clergy were exempt.



On the cultural side, Europe was at the zenith of its Age of Enlightenment, when science, reason and philosophy became more widespread and began to encourage questioning of the status quo, in particular, the power of the Roman Catholic Church and the rights of nobility and monarchy.



THE STORMING

From his massive and beautiful country palace at Versailles, King Louis XVI was aware of the tough times. In fact, in 1789 he made attempts to re-tune the tax system to spread the burden more fairly, but was voted down by 2 of the 3 Estates. The nobility(1), the clergy(2) and the common people(3) formed France's representative body, with one vote per Estate. The common people pushed for one man-one vote, but the other guys were in the numerical minority, and didn't want to lose their grip on power, so, no go. Well, the commoners – sensing there was strength in numbers – began meeting amongst themselves and the talk was of democracy and fair taxation – certainly threatening to

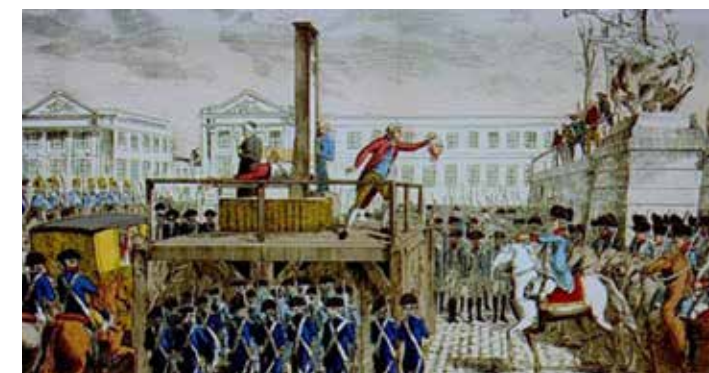
any reigning king. Louis tried to stop the meetings, but as they went on, even some higher ups began to sympathize with the new ideas. Eventually the King sent in the army and the people pushed back to defend themselves. They needed weapons and ammunition, and the Bastille was a great big storehouse of such things. In they went on July 14th.

Now, from here, there are loads of events that I've been assured won't be on the test. We'll touch on the highlights.

LIBERTÉ - EGALITÉ - FRATERNITÉ

Political representatives set out to write a French constitution – the Declaration of Rights of Men and Citizens – certainly inspired by Thomas Jefferson's American efforts. Large assemblies of women began to appear, protesting the continued hard economic conditions and bread shortages, and also to remind their ad hoc leaders that women and slaves might just need rights too. In general, the anti-nobility and anti-monarchy feelings kept growing – there were peasant revolts against feudal landlords, and the people even came to Versailles, demanding that the King and his Queen, Marie Antoinette, move to Paris, where they could be better-controlled.

The new French government kicked out the Roman Catholic Church and took all the land, which did not please the Holy Roman Empire to the east. It looked as if the choice was leaning toward constitutional monarchy like they had in Britain, but the King and Queen grew doubtful of their future and beat feet toward Austria, under disguise. But being famous with faces on coins and such, they were recognized near the Austrian border and brought back to Paris.



THE TEETERING CROWN

All this chaos and class-leveling was weakening army discipline and effectiveness, and other countries began to attack on Louis XVI's behalf [they still believed in monarchies]. This exacerbated conditions at home, the army revolted and arrested the King, and the Jacobins party, lead by Maximilien Robespierre, gained power. The King was tried for treason – conspiring with enemies of France – and

executed on January 21, 1793. Marie Antoinette was to follow her husband's fate nine months later, on October 16th.

Jacobins remedies to problems became more reactionary and brutal, carried out under the auspices of the Committee of Public Safety. What followed has become known as The Reign of Terror, during which the paranoia over counterrevolution or support for monarchy resulted in nearly 16,000 trials leading to executions; thousands more perished without such legal formalities. Eventually, in 1794, actual counter-revolutionaries arose, and pushed Robespierre out and into the arms of that same terrorizing guillotine he had used to secure his ideal republic of the people.

NEW DUDE IN TOWN

The final chapter tells of continuing wars and the rise of a short but brilliant French army general who was successfully fighting off France's challengers, known as the First Coalition. Europe tried again with its Second Coalition, but our man Napoléon again beat them away with his big, Bonaparte stick. He then overthrew France's government, The Directorate, and established his own, naming himself First Consul in the bargain. Although the title signifies the highest elected office holder in the land, it seems that Napoléon was thinking more in terms of empire. After all, that was to be the going political trend in the new century.

All that work to kick out the one guy with all the power just to get another guy with all the power. History is pretty crazy sometimes.

On a side note, I am struck by the similarity of pre-Revolution conditions back in 1789, and those of our own time. For your consideration:

- Lopsided control of wealth
- Tax relief for the rich
- Economic peril in lower classes
- Ineffectual leadership
- Heavy spending on military and colonial excursions
- Active resistance to representative political power
- Ignoring existential threats to people and country
- Rise of reactionary policies and violence
- Tabloids and pamphlets spreading misinformation

Next On Tap... returns for a third season, and we're happy to welcome four new breweries this year.

A free beer tasting is included with the ticket purchase for the second Saturday of each production. A representative from the brewery is on hand to sample three to four of their beers, ranging from their tried and true favorites to new releases. In addition, each production will have a featured beer on sale at our bar from that month's participating brewery.

Check out the breweries we're partnering with below. Stay tuned to social media and email for additional details!

Third Space Brewing
Production: THE REVOLUTIONISTS
Saturday, October 5, 2019 • 7PM

Third Space Brewing is a production brewery, tap room and beer garden that opened in Milwaukee's historic Menomonee River Valley in September 2016. Their name comes from the concept that people need a "third space" in their lives after home and work. According to Ray Oldenburg, who initially coined the term, a third space is "a public place where people can gather, put aside concerns of home and work and hang out simply for the pleasures of good company and lively conversation."



Melms Brewing Company
Production: LAUGHTER ON THE 23RD FLOOR
Saturday, November 30, 2019 • 7PM

Melms Brewing Company is the rebirth of one of Milwaukee's original brewing powerhouses, transformed into a small craft brewery with a taproom in Hartland. Founded in 1854, the original brewery was on Virginia Street in Walker's Point. By 1860, Melms had become the largest brewery in Milwaukee and C.T. Melms is widely considered to be the first Milwaukee "beer baron." It was sold to Pabst in 1869, but after a four year fundraising campaign, Melms reopened in March 2018.



Black Husky Brewing
Production: A SMALL FIRE
Date: Saturday, February 8, 2020 • 7PM

Black Husky Brewing began in 2010 in a small log cabin in the woods of Pembine, WI. Inspired by the dogs in their son's sled dog kennel, co-founders Tim and Toni Eichinger named the brewery after their beloved husky, Howler. Each of their beers' names is associated with the dogs from the kennel. In 2016, Black Husky moved its brewery operations to the Riverwest neighborhood where they currently operate a taproom and produce their beers.



Lost Valley Cider Co.
Production: 9 CIRCLES
Saturday, April 11, 2020 • 7PM

Lost Valley Cider Co. is built on the ardent belief that life is an adventure worth exploring. They've found their Lost Valley: it's a state of mind. An openness to the vast potential of the universe. The feeling you get through shared new experiences. Their taproom and bottleshop in Walker's Point opened in 2016. Along with their very own house ciders, Lost Valley features over 20 taps dedicated solely to cider.



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From the time of El Greco, contemporary visual artists have often been revolutionists, challenging the powers that be and confronting their audiences with different perspectives and hidden, or not-so-hidden, truths. They have also played the role of revolutionist in more intimate ways, exploring and exposing our inner lives and the social dynamics of which we are all a part. Our guest artists, Peggy Thurston Farrell and Pacia Sallomi represent both.

Peggy's FoxConn Series of silkscreen collages was inspired by the consequences of "progress" as defined by the massive project underway in Racine County where, as she observes, "In order to build this hub, hundreds of acres of beautiful farmland in Mount Pleasant were sold and bulldozed. Natural habitats were destroyed, wetlands filled in, and 100-year-old oak trees cut down. Once beautiful farms were now deserts of flattened dirt." Through layers of images and symbols, Peggy expresses her concerns about the negative impact of loosening environmental standards and the greed that often plays a major role in corporate decisions.



L-R: Birds on a Wire, Conversation III, Night Tango with Red Interval

Pacia's paintings are her "way of exploring the spiritual qualities of lived life" and are the result of "an intuitive process that is informed by experience, research and journaling." However, her artwork not only tells us something about how she sees the world, it invites us to join her in that vision; to explore new perspectives; to consider deeper meanings and connections that are not always immediately evident.

Pacia Sallomi and Peggy Thurston Farrell, both nationally recognized for their art, are long-time members of the art faculty at Carroll University in Waukesha. I am honored to share their work with the Next Act Theatre community and commend them for their years of dedication to their students as artist/art educators. You can learn more about them by visiting their websites: peggythurstonfarrell.com and paciasallomi.com.

Jim Toth is a retired art educator, now in his fifth season as Next Act's volunteer gallery curator.

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The Her-story of the Fempire - Trivia of the Ladies of THE REVOLUTIONISTS

Charlotte Corday Guillotined July 17, 1793

- Gained access to the room where she killed radical revolutionary, Jean Paul Marat (who was in a medicinal bath due to a skin condition) by promising to give him names from the more moderate political party he opposed (which she supported)
- Given the nickname "The Angel of Assassination" by writer Alphonse de Lamartine in 1847



Marie Antoinette Guillotined October 16, 1793

- "Let them eat cake" is the most famous quote attributed to Marie Antoinette. However, there is no historical evidence that she ever said it. It is thought that the revolutionaries spread it as propaganda.
- Initially buried in Madeleine Cemetery, one of four cemeteries used to dispose of guillotine victims during the Reign of Terror (including Charlotte, Olympe, and Marie's husband Louis XVI); later exhumed with Louis and moved to the Basilica of St. Denis



Olympe de Gouges Guillotined November 3, 1793

- Wrote "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman," a response to the "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" written by the Marquis de Lafayette with input from Thomas Jefferson. The dedication was addressed to Marie Antoinette
- Included Marie Antoinette as a character in her unfinished last play, *FRANCE PRESERVED OR THE TYRANT DETHRONED*, the manuscript of which was used as condemning evidence in Olympe's trial



Marianne Angelle *Not an historical person*

- Has the same name as La Marianne, the national symbol of the French Republic, which emerged during the French Revolution
- Based on the women lost to history who were a part of the slave rebellion in Saint Domingue, Haiti, which started in 1791 and was the first successful slave revolt in the world