

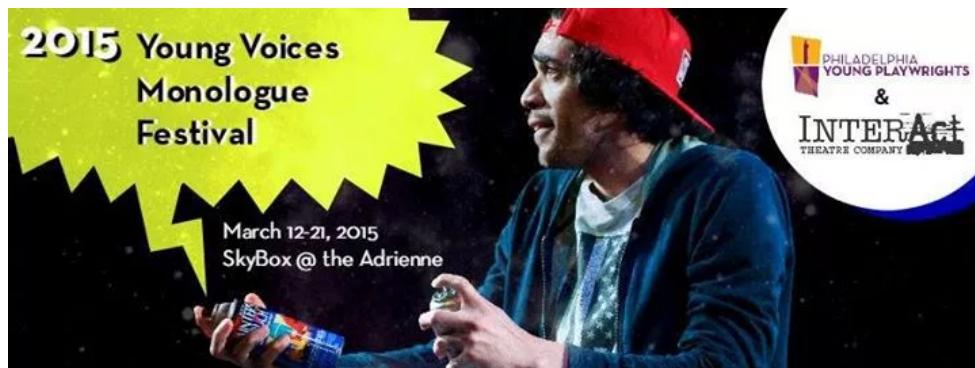


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YOUNG VOICES MONOLOGUE FESTIVAL 2015 (InterAct): The maturity of Millennials

March 23, 2015 - Allison Rickert



Baby Boomers are certain that Millennials ("The Me Me Me Generation", according to *Time*) are nothing but lazy, uncultured slackers who don't want to get a job and keep their noses pressed to the screens of their cell phones at all times. A pervasive, harmful idea exists within the minds of many of their elders: Millennials are so focused on updating their social media profiles and taking selfies that they aren't aware of anything that happens in the world around them.

The YOUNG VOICES MONOLOGUE FESTIVAL 2015 at Interact Theatre blasts that idea into smithereens.

TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS

Featuring 17 high school playwrights from the Philadelphia area, Young Voices is living, breathing proof that not only do the arts live on, but Millennials have important, incisive things to say about the world, and it's worth the time to take a listen.

The show begins as in-your-face and controversial as it can get with a monologue about the current racial strife in America. In *Little House on the Side of the Road* by Murphy Aplin, Jr., actor Aaron Lofton presents an angry high school student who refuses to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. With allusions to slavery and citing evidence of real deadly violence against black men, including Michael Brown and Eric Garner, the piece blazes with youthful outrage and piercing insight.

And that's only the beginning. Throughout the show, the audience is taken through intimate observations of domestic violence, mental illness, discrimination, terminal illness, and the questioning of identity. Each character is given flesh and life by a cast of six young professional actors, who provide the timing and finesse to either incite quiet gasps or bouts of laughter.

With three different Philadelphia directors—Jay Gilman, Christina May, and David O'Connor, as well as Emma Goidel and Kate McGrath as dramaturgs—the promising young playwrights had the perfect platform for reaching every corner of the Skybox at the Adrienne.

Samira Dawan's *Love-Trouble* features a Muslim character struggling with the choice of choosing love over her religion, performed powerfully by Becca Khalil, showing a type of self-awareness and diversity that is not often associated with young people. In the end, the young woman makes a hard choice.

Director David O'Connor addressed some of these issues in the program: "These writers all have something important to say that needs to be heard right now. In many cases they have taken a risk to say the hard

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thing."

Saying the hard thing, indeed. In *Payback* by Adrian Vega, a mother (the energetic Ife Foy) pleads with her angry younger son, begging him to stay away from the violent gang life that had already killed his older brother. Giving a voice to the kind of pain that is so rarely heard, many of these pieces carry a gravity that can hush rooms.

Throughout the entire show, the audience gets whipped through a wide spectrum of experiences and emotions. Some pieces feature a typical American high school experience, like *Fish* by Victor Ginsburg, where Terrell Green plays a character attempting to coach his best friend in how to approach a crush in the school cafeteria, while also tactfully suggesting a fresh coat of deodorant.

EMPATHY AND AUTHORITY

Other pieces take the narrating voice far from the halls of high school and into the perspectives of mothers, grandfathers, and young children, exhibiting an empathy and authority that hits hard. In *The Greatest Heist of the Century*, playwright Nadia Porter masterfully depicts the complex rage of an elderly black man (Terrell Green) who lost his shining dreams of playing baseball at 16 when his malicious white teammates irreparably injured his arm. A child (Sarah Stearns) speaks fondly of her late sister lost to cancer in *A Better Tomorrow*, written by Rachael Rosenthal, as she sits at the memorial service in itchy stockings and a dress.

Despite these radically different themes, it was easy to delve from one scene to the next. The playwrights' words and the actors' engaging performances drew the audiences in, supported by the precisely timed and executed elements of the stage that aided in creating the world around them.

The directors and artistic team took special care in framing each piece with sound and visuals—a musician scraping his bow along the strings of a cello (Patrick Lamborn), flickering screens in the background, and the remaining cast slipping into various poses and personas, all painted vivid canvases for each monologue.

For example, while an impatient student tries to avoid glancing at the clock in her painfully dull math class (*Tick Tock* by Emma Miller, whimsically performed by Sarah Stearns), the rest of the cast dashes energetically around the stage to illustrate her musings. As a remorseful former bully gives a talk to a school about his younger brother's suicide due to cruel harassment (*One Dreaded Saturday*, written by Pat Doudican and played movingly by Andrew Carroll), a mournful silhouette appears on the screen behind him to represent his brother's absence.

What these monologues convey is that not only are young people listening to the world, they have bold thoughts that they can channel into art. The promising playwrights mentioned above, plus Michael Buzzard, Samira Dawn, Ella Donesky, Carina Flaherty, Cleo Hoey, Sharnea Jenkins, Ming Jiang, Kaleahia Lynch, Darius Purnell, and Duwan Thompkins—are all taking strides in their own ways to be heard.

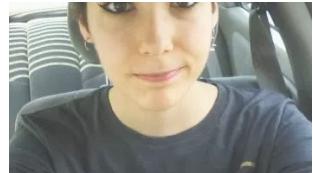
If there is anything to take away from YOUNG VOICES, it's that 17 Philadelphia-area Millennials are not ignorant to suffering, to pain, or to what might bring joy, and they're not afraid to speak out about it. As a fellow Millennial, I was proud to see my generation breaking stereotypes left, right, and center stage.

[Skybox @ the Adrienne Theatre, 2030 Sansom Street] **March 12-21, 2015; interacttheatre.org.**

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About the author



Alison Rickert

Allison Rickert graduated from Millersville University with a degree in English and an eye on joining the publishing industry as an editor. When she's not reading (while sitting on the floor) in bookstores, she's scribbling in notebooks and exploring bizarre music genres.

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