

Rogue Theater Festival is weeks away from presenting their virtual play festival of short new works. To celebrate, the creators of Rogue sat down with the Playwright of “Brian’s Poems” to discuss their inspiration, process, and experience working in the times of Covid. Take a minute to get to know them and their experience working with Rogue in these wild times.

Larry Rinkel, Playwright

Q: Where did you get the inspiration for writing your piece?

Literally, *Brian’s Poems* was written in response to a festival competition where the theme was “The Library.” But actually it was written in fond memory of Brian K., a high school classmate of mine who took an MA in creative writing from Stanford in 1972. Brian died in San Francisco during the mid-1980s, and the only copy of his MA thesis outside Stanford is held by the library of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, where my play takes place. I’ve seen only a few of Brian’s poems and they’re brilliant.

Q: What is your writing process? When inspiration strikes? One hour a day?

Everyone works differently. I write when I feel I need to, and I share Mark Rothko’s belief as articulated in John Logan’s *Red* that “Most of painting is thinking. . . . Ten percent is putting paint onto the canvas. The rest is waiting.” Even when I am not physically writing, I am always thinking about it.

Q: How did you first get involved with theater and becoming a playwright?

I have been interested in theater (musical and otherwise) for as long as I can remember, and I dabbled in playwriting off and on from my high school years in the mid 1960s. My first play ever was an adaptation of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera *Le Coq d’Or* for which I wrote the book and music when I was 15. It has fortunately never been produced. But I did not start writing seriously until I retired in 2014 and had much more time to devote to playwriting.

Q: What do you love about this piece and what will others love about it?

This play is a love story imbued with magic realism, an ultimately successful attempt by an old man to recover the last memento of the person he most loved when young. As one reviewer on New Play Exchange puts it, the play depicts “A last grasp to connect with the person you’ve loved most in your life well after they’ve been lost forever.” And another adds: “Those we lose when we’re young, or who we know never got to experience life beyond their own youth - they stay with us.”

Q: How important do you think it is for theatre festivals to offer opportunities for new or up and coming playwrights?

Extremely important. There are many unknown and talented voices out there, and while theatres understandably want to present familiar works that are more likely to draw larger audiences, theatre can remain alive only if new works are frequently presented for audiences willing to take a chance on playwrights they don't know.

Q: Have you participated in theater festivals before? What was that experience like? What has your experience with Rogue Theater Festival been?

This is my second year with Rogue, so I'm pleased to take part again. But otherwise I've taken part in numerous festivals all over the U.S., sometimes directing and producing my own work, other times with the help of others. The experience has varied widely, but I will take any opportunity to have my work shown and to establish as many professional relationships as I can during the process.

Q: How has the rehearsal and performance process differed now in Covid times vs. regular times?

Although I participated in the auditions and observed some of the rehearsals, I have always taken the attitude that I have final say on the script of my plays but the director has final say on the production. Within reason, of course, and that doesn't mean we can't argue back and forth about what the other is doing. My wonderful director Gregg Pica, whom I've worked with four times before, has been largely in charge of rehearsals and has prepared the final Zoom video-recording with his frequent collaborator Megan Grace Martinez. Not having face-to-face contact (Gregg is from Brooklyn, two of the actors as well as myself are on Long Island, our other actor is from New Mexico), Gregg rehearsed and recorded the play using Zoom, and then spliced together the footage to create the "performance," using background images and an exciting opening montage to create the feeling of a journey to a distant land.

Q: If you weren't a playwright, what would you be doing?

I have no idea. I suppose the question presumes that I am a playwright.

Q: Any advice for aspiring playwrights?

How much space do I have? To put it briefly: Learn your craft. See and read as much theatre as you can. Ask for advice on your work, but accept only whatever advice makes sense to you. Write short (10-minute or even 1-minute) plays as well as full-lengths. Submit to as many theatres, festivals, and competitions as you are eligible. Make friends with actors, directors, stage managers, other playwrights. Upload your work to newplayexchange.org, and write comments on other playwrights' work as a way of building relationships. Expect a lot of rejection but try not to let it get to you; it may not be a reflection on your work, but rather that there is so much competition for the available opportunities.

Q: What's up next for you?

My latest full-length play now in progress is about two identical twins both with artistic ambitions, their domineering mother, and the father who killed himself when his own dreams of becoming a painter were thwarted.