

Bianca Dillard

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First off, how did you get involved with New Play Project?

James and I were in a dramaturgy class together. At the same time, he and Ari and Julie and Jennefer were all getting together and talking about producing plays, and I was thinking about getting a club or a group together to workshop plays and do stage readings. I was thinking smaller potatoes than James, but we were talking and I said, “Hey, I have this great idea—we should get writers and dramaturgs together and let them know that dramaturgy’s available and that it rocks.” He said, “Come to our meeting.” So I actually went to the first official New Play Project meeting and reading of some scripts. And it was a blessed union ever since.

How did the workshop program get started?

The workshop program is something I wanted to do from the beginning, but it got pushed aside for a little while because we were trying to do productions. But then I said, “Let’s do this. Let’s get people together reading plays and talking about plays.” Everyone said it was a really good idea and that we should do it. And so we did.

I think there have been a lot of successes. Adam Stallard is a good success story I always like to use. He called me and said, “I heard you guys were doing some workshop thing.” And I said, “Yeah, you should come.” So he showed up on my doorstep and came every week after that—he was a really faithful member—and then he started bringing in plays that he wrote, and they’ve been really good. A lot of people have benefited. People who weren’t planning on writing plays before have started to write plays, and they’ve been good, which I think is the point of workshop.

You’re on the script selection committee as well—what’s that like?

Script selection is fun and often sort of tedious. We get a lot of scripts, though at first we had a few scripts and it was mostly us—James, Ari and I would submit around eight plays, and then we’d say, “These are the okay ones, and these are the ones that’d be fun.” The script selection committee often meets late at night, and we’re often really tired. It started off with myself as the lead dramaturg, James as the artistic director, and Ari



as the playwright-in-residence, and then we would often invite someone else that we’d been working with—Katherine Gee was on one, and Mel has done one for us—so we can get some more feedback from various people and so it’s not just our say. There’s always a lot of conflict about which plays you like, which plays work, how they go together. I’m always pushing for good, solid messages and content. And I’m always saying, “No, this play doesn’t say anything. We’re not doing it.” The others say, “But it’s funny.” And I say, “I don’t care.” That’s my thing. Ari tends to like things that are fun and that would be cool to direct or act in. James is pretty balanced, and he’s always looking for new things that we could do. That’s our dynamic, I guess.

How do you see NPP affecting and influencing the Mormon arts world?

Oh my gosh, it’s a revolution! No, really, I hope it does, and I think that in small ways it has already done so. The reason we put this together is that we saw a lack in representation—there are all of these plays and movies that are crazy and horrible, and then it seems a lot of the Mormon art world is saying, “Yay, we’re going to tell a happy story and it’s going to be sappy and disgusting and not real, or we’re going to make fun of ourselves and parody things,” and that’s just not what I’m interested in—either of those things.

I think we found a big enough community of people who aren’t interested in those things. What they want is something that is interesting, thought-provoking, sometimes challenging, but also wholesome and of good report—content you can freely endorse. And also, to be able to use our religious views that so much influence our lives and have them influence our work and our art is really, really important. Hopefully people will see that it can be done, that you can say interesting, good, and poignant things without sap or sex. ■