

365Days/365Plays

Hello Diary,

When we first received our copies of Week 3 of 365Days/365Plays we were intrigued and a bit intimidated....facing the task of doing 8 short plays by Suzan Lori Parks. And then the "Constants" were sent to us making our week even better but still even more of a challenge. We quickly decided to add two of the three Constants to our week -- the second and the third. By the way, we also got an additional play, "Pilgrims Progress", because in 2003 Thanksgiving fell in our week. The original script of the 3rd of the 3 Constants read "On stage are 365 things to do, that is, 365 tasks....Don't be shy about going all out. There isn't anything to hold out for. This is it. The Peace of the World depends on your success." During this time GGOT member, Fanny Brice, sent all GGOT's a quote from a paper delivered to the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace in 1990. This quote was the seed for the inspiration that led us to how we did the 3rd Constant. Here is that quote:

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetuates an injustice against one-half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family into the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

Guerrilla Girls On Tour always tries to involve the audience in our performances. We developed a style of audience interaction and participation as a way to break the barrier between us and the audience that our masks create. We decided that we would perform the 3rd Constant last and that we would involve the audience. We were very taken with the stage direction "The Peace of the world depends on it" and because all of our work involves activism and inspiring others to get involved in what we do this 3rd Constant seemed a perfect way to add our mission to the way we would interpret 365. Our first thoughts were to distribute this quote and let the audience join us in achieving equality for women and establishing world peace. But we weren't quite sure how to do this.

While on tour in September of 2006 GGOT members Gracie Allen, Anne Sexton, Aphra Behn and Josephine Baker were reading the plays aloud while driving to a performance in Baltimore. As they discussed the 3rd Constant, Aphra pulled out the quote and read it aloud and shared the idea of asking the audience to help us with our 365 tasks. Suddenly, the four of us knew that the tasks should be specific tasks that if accomplished, would help to end sexism.

All members of the group then were given the assignment to come up with 10-15 tasks to end sexism. We then printed all the tasks on postcards – enough to distribute to all who came to our performance as well as to the First Sunday at the Public (about 500 cards). The cards included an email address (365tasks@guerrillagirlsontour.com) so that people could tell us about their experiences in trying to complete their task.

Aphra Behn and director Hallie Flanagan then came up with the scenario for the 3rd Constant. The GGOT's have just come from a huge rally or protest march. We would enter carrying the protest signs we created for the 2004 March For Women's Lives in Washington DC. As we threw down our signs and congratulated each other on a great protest one GGOT would notice the stack of cards with tasks left to complete. The GGOT's would realize their work was not done and divide up the cards between them. As they each sat down to try to finish the tasks on the cards one GGOT would notice the audience. With gorilla grunts she would signal to the others that there may be some people in the house who might help us with our tasks. The GGOT's then would enthusiastically go into the house and distribute all the tasks to the audience, keeping one to complete themselves. After the tasks are given out to the audience the lights fade on all the GGOT's center stage working on their one remaining task.

This 3rd Constant got the biggest reaction from the audience. As they exited the theatre most people stopped to comment on the task they had been given and all promised to try to complete it. Several people even wanted another task. All seemed to be deep in discussion about the task they had received.

Because of this reaction, Guerrilla Girls On Tour has decided to distribute the cards with the 365 tasks on them at each performance they do through November of 2007. Already we gave out 100 cards at Franklin Pierce College in New Hampshire in December of 2006 and will give them out in London, Baton Rouge, New York State and Michigan to name a few of the places we will tour to in the upcoming months.

The other thing that was very rewarding about the 365 experience was that we got to use practically every mask in our mask collection. And the masks really seemed to be a great way to perform the plays, giving all characters a heightened awareness of who they were and what they were doing. What a fabulous and inspiring national theatre event. Thank you Suzan-Lori! Don't ever stop writing for the stage!

Love,
Aphra Behn
December 2006

Dear Diary

Participating in 365Days/365Plays was a tremendous experience. Suzan-Lori was sweet, enthusiastic and down-to-earth and meeting her really shed light not only onto her plays but also her desire to give those plays as a gift to the theater community. It truly did bring people together from all stages and backgrounds to essentially work together. Doubly, to play Abraham Lincoln has always been a secret desire of mine...

XOXO,
Anne

Hey there diary,

What a holiday treat! I'm speaking, of course, about performing in the world premier of one of the most brilliant contemporary playwrights in the GALAXY -- Suzan Lori-Parks! I felt like I was a part of the every day reflections of Parks while performing pieces she wrote for a consecutive week. We were the clownish manifestations of Parks' observations. Themes kept disappearing and reappearing in her year, and our own aesthetic themes did the same thing during our week. We Guerrilla Girls On Tour always perform our own work so it was really fascinating to see our concept and aesthetic come to life in some one else's words. A beautiful collaboration!

Love
Julia Child

Dear Diary,

Wow! I just performed in a Suzan Lori-Parks play! It wasn't just any play either, it was a national event! I truly felt a part of a community of brave and powerful artists that exist beyond Guerrilla Girls On Tour. It felt just as terrific to perform at the Gene Frankel theater for a small audience that were practically on stage with us, as performing at the Newman Theatre at the Public. For our First Sunday there were famous and non-famous, young, old, male and female and Suzan Lori herself in the audience, watching and waiting to see what we Guerrillas would do with the crazy, funny, confusing and sometimes even infuriating material. Even though we put it all together in a very short and slightly frantic amount of time, even with all of the rushing around backstage and the sometimes wrong lighting and sound cues, they laughed. The audiences loved it and "got" what we were doing with the material. I loved seeing so many of us together since touring usually means just two or three of us. I only wish we'd had more time together before the show. I never knew I could enjoy spending so much time and learn so much from a bunch of Gorilla/Guerrillas.

Love,
Ethel

Dear Diary,

365 Days/365 Plays day 1. Went to the dress rehearsal at the Public Theatre for launch Week 1. What a wonderful day. Susan Lori Parks met us in the Lobby and was just as excited to meet a Guerrilla Girl On Tour as we were excited to meet her. Being at the dress really put into focus how tremendous this project is and that being a part of it is a real honor.
365 Days/365 Plays day 2. Rehearsal went really well. Working on Week 3 is a lot of fun. Spent most of the time cracking each other up. All though there are also some serious moments that might surprise the audience. We will find out tomorrow 356 Days/ 365 Plays day 3. Performance at Groove Mama's space. 2 shows, 2 full audiences. The evening is like running a race, twice. Wow what a fun challenge. The audience loves it. The national team from the Public attends and they are all so warm and friendly. The last "Constant" is a big hit. When we give out the 365 tasks to end sexism we get a great reaction from the audience.

365 Days/365 Plays day 4. Performing at the Public Theatre with Week 1 and 2 done by The Public Theatre and the Foundry Theatre. Again, a great day. Susan Lori Parks really enjoyed what we did. A huge audience in attendance. The modern-day-fable quality to our week of plays really lends itself to our use of masks.

Diary, in conclusion, this project is outstanding and a wonderful way to bring the theatre community together. It is really the type of thing we should do more often. I am touched to be a part of it and as a feminist I am thrilled that it is a woman, Susan Lori Parks, who gave the inspiration and plays for this year of theatre!

Love,
Gracie

Dear Diary-

This week was a whirlwind of creativity! All of the girls met for rehearsal and we jumped into the Suzan-Lori Parks material with both feet first! We let loose and had a blast. Our shows were really inspirational and I was touched by how moved the audience was with our last Constant. We can only hope that the 365 tasks will be accomplished!

For me, I was so honored to meet Suzan-Lori and I was grateful to the Public for letting us be a part of such a historical event in theatre!

Lots and lots of bananas,
Hallie

Dearest Diary,

Being part of 365 was such an amazing experience. What made it even more special was the fact that it was my birthday! I have always dreamed about performing at The Public Theater and being able to do so on my birthday was an amazing treat. Suzan Lori Parks is such a wonderful person. She really seemed interested in meeting each of us individually, as people. It was fun to see her attempting to look into our masks, to try to catch a peak of the woman behind the mask. As a GGOT, I've noticed people doing that a lot. It's like we're super heroes, and people are attempting to figure out our true identities. I am really.....well can't tell you that!

Love,
Josephine Baker

Hello old Diary,

365 Days/365 Plays was an amazing experience that I would do again in a heartbeat. All of the other actors, stage managers, and tech people were welcoming and incredibly talented. I was thrilled with our week of plays and excited that we were able to pull it all together in such a short amount of time.

It was so inspiring to see the other weeks performed - so many different perspectives, and yet we were all speaking with a common voice. It was the kind of day that makes you proud to be working in theatre. Thanks Suzan-Lori and the national and NYC teams!

Love,
Laura Keene