Theatre as a Catalyst for Change

Does theatre have the power to effect societal change? American playwright Tony Kushner once answered that question this way: “Theater has a power, but it’s very indirect.”

Do you agree or disagree? Listen as theatre practitioners share experiences from their own work in which they have witnessed or experienced the transformational power of theater. Then join the conversation with theatre artists Derek Goldman, Caleen Sinnette Jennings, Leslie Jacobson, Jodi Kanter, and linguist Deborah Tannen, moderated by the Director of GW’s Global Women’s Institute, Mary Ellsberg. Add your questions and comments to the proceedings!

When: Saturday, March 30th, from 2 to 4 p.m.

Where: George Washington University’s Marvin Center
800 21st Street NW
Washington, DC 20052
3rd Floor Amphitheatre

Admission: Free

About the panelists:
Derek Goldman is Professor of Theater and Performance Studies at Georgetown University and co-Founding Director of the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, based in the School of Foreign Service, which he co-founded with Ambassador Cynthia Schneider in 2012 with a mission “to harness the power of performance to humanize global politics” (www.globallab.georgetown.edu). In 2015 he was honored to receive the prestigious President’s Award for Distinguished Scholar-Teachers. He is an award-winning stage director, playwright, producer, adapter, developer of new work, teacher, and published scholar, whose artistic work has been seen around the country, Off-Broadway and at numerous major regional theaters, as well as internationally. He has brought his work in recent years to more than 20 countries, and into collaborations with artists from Iraq, Pakistan, Belarus, Israel, Afghanistan, Palestine, the Congo, Czechoslovakia, India, Serbia, Sweden, Germany, the Philippines, Uganda, among other places.

Leslie Jacobson has spent over 40 years producing, writing, directing, and teaching theatre committed to addressing societal challenges and to giving voice to people often marginalized by the dominant culture. At Horizons Theatre, as Founding Artistic Director from 1977 to 2007, she introduced Washington audiences to over 60 new plays and playwrights through fully staged productions, and another 50 through public staged readings. She has been nominated for three Helen Hayes awards in the category of Outstanding Director. Jacobson has been a Professor of Theatre at The George Washington University since 1977, serving as Department Chair for 13 years. Jacobson has created theatre projects with women incarcerated
in a medium security prison; with middle and high school students in the DC public school system, through For Love of Children (FLOC); with members of the homeless community at Street Sense Media; and internationally, in South Africa, Morocco, and Australia.

Caleen Sinnette Jennings is Professor of Theatre at American University. Since joining the faculty in 1989, she has directed for the main stage season and taught thirteen different courses in the theatre and general education programs. In 2003 she received American University’s Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award. She is a faculty member of the Folger Shakespeare Library’s Teaching Shakespeare Institute. Dramatic Publishing Company has published her plays: Elsewhere in Elsinore: The Unseen Women of Hamlet, Inns & Outs, Playing Juliet/Casting Othello, Free Like Br’er Rabbit, Sunday Dinner, Chem Mystery, A Lunch Line, and Same But Different. She received a $10,000 grant from Kennedy Center’s Fund for New American Plays and the Heideman Award from the Actor’s Theatre of Louisville. She is a two-time Helen Hayes Award nominee, and founding member of The Welders, a D.C. based playwrights’ collaborative.

Jodi Kanter is the Head of the Theatre & Dance Program at George Washington University’s Corcoran School of the Arts & Design. As a scholar, she has been trained to apply the theoretical lens of performance to everyday practices and so, while her methodology is consistent, the subjects of her work vary wildly—from, for example, end of life health care to contemporary dramatic literature to the American Presidency. As an artist, her focus is on strengthening communities through theatrical improvisation, oral history collection, writing and performance. To this end, over the last twenty-five years, she has created dozens of workshops and performances in a wide variety of settings, including prisons, hospices, libraries and community centers. She is a trained facilitator of Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed.

Deborah Tannen has been a member of the linguistics department faculty at Georgetown since 1979; she is one of six in the College of Arts and Sciences who hold the distinguished rank of University Professor. In addition to her seventeen academic books and over one hundred scholarly articles, she has written eight books for general audiences. The best known of these is You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, which was on the New York Times best seller list for nearly four years, including eight months as No. 1, and has been translated into 31 languages. This is the book that brought gender differences in communication style to the forefront of public awareness. You’re The Only One I Can Tell: Inside the Language of Women’s Friendships, her 25th book, was published in May 2017. Deborah Tannen is a frequent guest on television and radio news and information shows, and has been featured in and written for most major newspapers and magazines.
Mary Ellsberg, founding director of the Global Women’s Institute at George Washington University, was named among the 100 Most Influential People in Gender Policy in the inaugural list compiled by Apolitical last May. Dr. Ellsberg has more than 30 years of experience in international research and programs on gender and development. Before joining the University in August 2012, Dr. Ellsberg served as vice president for research and programs at the International Center for Research on Women. Dr. Ellsberg’s deep connection to global gender issues stems not only from her academic work but also from living in Nicaragua for nearly 20 years leading public health and women’s rights advocacy. She was a member of the core research team of the World Health Organization’s Multi-Country Study on Domestic Violence and Women’s Health, and she has authored more than 40 books and articles on violence against women and girls.