

**Inside the Artist -
Kim Ward
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As the Founding President of the Vermont Playwrights Circle, your organization has just closed another successful year of TenFest, (year 5), an annual festival of new 10-minute plays by Vermont writers, at the Odds Fellow Hall in Waitsfield, VT. Tell us more about the Vermont Playwrights Circle and what's in its future.

Vermont Playwrights Circle is a network of artists dedicated to promoting the staging of original theater works by Vermonters. The first thing we did in the beginning was to do open readings. Give us your play if you want to have it read, we don't care what level it's at, and we will read it, we will cast it, we will give you feedback. Over the years we have also given workshops, readings, and produced TenFest. One of the things we focus on is doing theater through existing organizations. We are not trying to be yet another theater company, but to be a network of artists who write, who want their work done, and do what we can to work with other organizations. We have worked with Lost Nation Theater, Valley Players, MOXIE Productions...anyone who wants to work with us.



Coming up is PlayCon2015, our playwriting conference at Saint Michael's College coming up on September 26, was founded to create a network where playwrights--or potential playwrights--

could learn from the Vermont theater community, talk about theater, about their work and how to make new works happen—an Algonquin table.

PlayCon 2015 is featuring established playwrights from VT as presenters: Dana Yeaton is the keynote speaker, who teaches at Middlebury College, as taught at UVM, was the resident playwright at Vermont Stage and has headed up the Young Playwrights program for years; Maura Campbell who has been produced her own work and been produced by others successfully for years, here and in New York City; Jeanne Beckwith, a member of the Vermont Playwrights Circle who has had many plays produced in Vermont, New England and NYC, as well as in Turkey, where a play was translated into Turkish for the Turkish National Theater; and Luc Ried, who is an amazing writer on many levels who writes in many formats from journalism to drama, and is a terrific teacher; and Jim Lantz who has written, produced and directed his own work in Vermont and NYC, sold his Prius to get theater on stage and is now also working in film. That's a huge collection of great artists in one place with a panel of people who put theater up in Vermont--directors, producers, actors...And all these people are very approachable and we want everyone to feel welcome.

What has been your artist journey and how did that lead you to playwriting?

Particularly right now I'm working on musicals, which is something I wanted to do for a long time. I started out writing poetry. Then when I got my Master's degree, I started writing poetry for the stage because I had seen it performed as a background to dance. So now that I have moved through all the media that I wanted to learn, I'm now doing musicals. Working with the Vermont Playwrights Circle, I'm fostering other people's work and doing workshops.

I went to Johnson State College and majored in writing and minored in dance, and spent the rest of my time in the theater. I even went to London for a semester and took some really cool dance classes, continuing to do an "a la carte" thing of experiencing everything I could. Somewhere between undergrad and graduate school I had a small dance troupe that did dance poetry for a while and I wanted to continue that. After undergraduate school I eventually got my masters in Performance Poetry from Goddard, because I had seen people dancing to poetry and I said, "Oh my gosh, dance can be done to

music, it can be done to words, John Cage, whatever. You can do it to anything." So I wrote this full piece about several generations of women in my family, called "Angels in the Fire." After that, I said that I wanted to do more playwriting, but I'm an extrovert so I want to work with people (writing can be such a solitary activity).



At a VATTA (Vermont Association of Theater and Theater Artists) conference, "Angels In The Fire" was showcased. But because they didn't have anyone to run that part of the program the next year they discontinued it. So I launched the Vermont Playwrights Circle and started doing readings in 2000, June through August, to give a service for other artists and writers to talk about their craft. Through Jeanne Beckwith, I heard that MOXIE Productions was doing readings at the Grange in Waterbury Center at the same time (but Sept-May), called "Thursdays@7" and it was a great way to add to what we were doing. Our readings with MOXIE had more staging, which was the next step, because we were just doing readings on our own. I remember doing a reading of Jeanne Beckwith's "Broken Circle" there with Kim Bent and Margie Cain. It was really another level of getting artists together and getting up and on their feet. It was great too, for the actors and great for the playwright. It was a deeper experience of it for everyone. And then we were able to go even deeper into it that summer in MOXIE's Vermont Contemporary Playwrights Forum program, which was huge. That was really fun and a really great project and partnership.

In 2007 we officially became an organization doing workshops,

and started TenFest, which was Jeanne Beckwith's brainchild to do a ten-minute play festival at the Valley Players Theater in the Mad River Arts Festival.

And somewhere I also started doing visual arts again in which some of my ink & watercolor work was exhibited last year.

Is there anything that specifically inspires your work or any event in your life that has influenced your evolution as an artist?

I'm very dedicated to having workshops and artists' experiences that they can afford, and that are not just for privileged people because that's important to me. I grew up very poor and there were times I had free chances to advance more as an artist. If hadn't had those I wouldn't be who I am. When I had the chance to go to the Vermont Governor's Institute on the Arts (the first year they did it in 1984), that experience opened a whole new world to me. I was in the drama department in high school and I was very focused on my English classes. People knew I was into the arts and several teachers nominated me. I went as a dance major and a writing minor, but I found out there that really I was a writing major who was a dance minor--that I was a writer first because I didn't have a dancer's mind. I couldn't sit there and talk for 40 minutes about plies and how I did my turn, but I could talk forever about writing. So there was this clear experience that I didn't have to be elite, going to ballet classes every week because your mother could afford that, but I could do something for a full week, through the school, through the government program, that helps identify my focus as an artist, and at a very young age.



So I've always wanted to do things that are for the community, people of any level can do it, enjoy it and feel like they have the artistic spark. Because I don't think just some people can have it. Anyone can dance, can write, can sing. That's what art is about: Transforming people's experiences and making them richer.

What are you reading right now?

I'm actually running a science fiction book club at Bear Pond Books. So right now I'm reading Jo Walton, "Real Children."

For more information, visit The Vermont Playwrights Circle at www.vermontplaywrightscircle.org and for PlayCon2015 at www.vermontplaywrightscircle.org/PlayCon.html