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Media Contact:
Kari Zavolta
kari@webbricolage.org
412.334.2351

Jeffrey Carpenter
jeff@webbricolage.org
412.519.5538

Bricolage’s In the Raw: (R)evolution kicks off in spectacular fashion
Artists and audience come together at a Town Hall to inspire two new plays

PITTSBURGH—Much like Bricolage itself, the company’s In the Raw Festival is changing to reflect the ever-shifting landscape of theatre. Although still an incubator for new playwright’s work, the (R)evolution brings the audience to the forefront and makes them a part of the process.

On Monday, July 21st, Bricolage hosted 50+ people in a Town Hall meeting designed to engage the audience at every level. Artists and audience worked together through improv games to develop the material that will become the source and inspiration for the two playwrights who watched all the action closely. In one of the more poignant moments of the night, prompted by a fragment from the day’s newspaper, six virtual strangers spent 10 minutes composing a monologue, all with no talking allowed. Each member of the group took turns writing one sentence at a time. After the 10 minutes expired, one member of the group read the monologue aloud. The results were mesmerizing. Stories ranged from a teacher finding the inspiration to go through his first day at Homewood High School, to a young man on the night before he goes to prison, to one woman’s ill-fated encounter with a perky little squirrel.

“Bringing artists and audience together in one space to begin this journey was, in a word, magical”, says Tami Dixon, producing artistic director at Bricolage. “I know our patrons are engaged, but this was engagement at a whole new level. They used their voices, bodies, minds and souls – giving all of themselves to us for three hours. Inspired doesn’t even begin to describe how we feel. The actors were so generous with the audience. The audience took incredible risks because of that generosity. The results were thrilling.”

The participants felt equally inspired. Feedback has already been pouring in on Facebook, Twitter and email. “Acting exercises are like yoga for the soul, and @BricolagePGH is my yoga teacher”, says Bevin Baker, a participant in the Town Hall. Others are describing the night at uplifting, invigorating, lively, and unexpected.

This shift to audience-forward, devised work is highlighted in the book Counting New Beans by Rebecca Novick.
Imagine for a moment a theatre where conversation back and forth with the performers was allowed and expected, a theatre where you could move freely around the space and decide what angle to watch from, a theatre that perhaps you paid nothing to attend. Imagine that you or some people you knew had been part of story circles that generated the material for the performance, and that you were invited to share stories from your life that connected to the play after you watched.

This is the new world of theatre that Bricolage is exploring. A space so new, that the vocabulary to describe the work is still being developed.

**Up Next**

To capitalize on the momentum of the Town Hall, Bricolage created two hashtags for use on Twitter and Facebook so that the engagement can continue throughout the process. For the next four weeks, each playwright and their teams (directors, actors, and dramaturg) will follow a hashtag created just for them – either #TeamBlastFurnace or #TeamIncline. “We will use social media as the primary communication method between the teams and the Pittsburgh community”, says Jeffrey Carpenter, artistic director at Bricolage. “Our hope is that we will receive input from not only the Town Hall attendees, but the entire city. Each person that contributes will become an ‘artistic witness’, someone with a deeper connection to the completed work.”

The hashtags are already at work, with Town Hall participant Cameron Knight tweeting a link to a blog post on isolation, one of the key terms used during the exercises. Rick Sebak has also joined in the conversation on Twitter, answering a question posed by #TeamIncline about the bridge to nowhere (featured in one of his documentaries).

**The Teams**

**#TeamBlastFurnace**
Playwright: Connor Pickett  
Director: Risher Reddick  
Cast: Lauren Bethea, Chris Josephs, Connor McCanlus, Missy Moreno, Kelly Trumbull

**#TeamIncline**
Playwright: Maureen McGranaghan  
Director: Cynthia Croot  
Cast: Jill Keating, Lara Miller, Joel Richardson, Bria Walker, Andrew Wind

Dramaturg – Annie DiMario  
Assistant Dramaturg - Tyler Crumrine

The two new plays will debut at the end of August. For ticket information and show dates, please visit our website at [http://www.bricolagepgh.org/events/raw](http://www.bricolagepgh.org/events/raw).

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