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# **Ewing Reviewing 2018**



**Jan Ewing**

**Major Works Off- & Off-Off-Broadway in New York City  
as Reviewed on HI! DRAMA**

**DUP'S BOOKS • NEW YORK CITY**

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# Introduction

The year 2018 marks the beginning of a new career for me. For the first half of my life, I worked in music and theater. During that time I directed over thirty straight plays, musicals and operas in regional theater, became the director of the **Village Light Opera Group** in Manhattan, and joined the original company of *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* at the **Astor Place Theater**. Then, the world changed. I was seduced by the magic of computer programming and had a second epiphany. Suddenly, we had a tool for the mind, available to anyone for a reasonable price. I borrowed money from the **Actors' Federal Credit Union**, bought one, morphed from performing into fine arts, started my own business and eventually worked for every major publisher in New York City.

I thought it would last forever. I mean, *Publishing* for god's sake. But, in 2012, American publishing collapsed. Tax advantages and technology suddenly made it cheaper to send local projects to India. Uncounted graphic artists, designers, and production editors lost their livelihoods, many after decades of working for some publishing behemoth that suddenly just said, "Vacate your office by the end of the day." I was self-employed, but retired before I expected it. To be honest, it seemed time. I was old enough by then. I'd be able to finish my great American novel, *The Red-Headed Kid* (still in progress).

But, we *are* living in a new age, already reprogrammed to an extravagant degree by that "tool for the mind" mentioned above. Somehow, it never occurred to me to retire. Nor, admittedly, to start something *new*. But, we live longer now, and sanity requires effort. So it was, last April, when I was almost accidentally reintroduced to something *old*—Independent Theater, my first passion, alive and more vital than ever, demanding attention in hundreds of oddly shaped theatrical venues all over NYC. Almost immediately, I was knee deep in an intense, delightfully incestuous theatrical subculture, awash in brilliant, innovative performing art. Now, my own

play, *Nursery Rhymes*, will be opening at the **Hudson Guild Theater** as part of the **NYWinterFest 2019** in January. Obviously, I ran amok.

One of my friends noted my lifelong interest in Gilbert & Sullivan. One of his contacts, Eva Heinemann, a member of the Outer Critics Circle and founder of **HI! DRAMA**, needed someone to review the **New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players (NYGASP)**. He knew I was a writer with some knowledge of theater, retired and looking for something to do, so he asked me to give it a shot. My first thought, a free ticket, sold me (**NYGASP** being a definite plus). I admit, that review is too long (see p. 1), but it was my first, and it came with an invitation to write more. I had no idea when I said *YES* that it would lead to a new career exploring intelligent, mind-bending concepts, with performances by some of the most skilled talent in the world. There are literally hundreds of remarkable plays being presented as I write this. They all need to be recorded, enjoyed and remembered.

## **HI! DRAMA**

Eva Heinemann is an absolute wonder when it comes to live theater. For twenty-eight years, since discovering public access in 1992, she has followed her dream, playing with and tweaking her answer to *Siskel & Ebert* (see below), all the while reviewing a panoply of plays and coming into contact with virtually everyone in the theatrical industry. With her fine colleagues—presently including Mark Savitt, Bina Sharif, Jake Goldbas, William Cataldi, Jordan Alexander, Leslie DiLeo, Sasha Clarke, and me—she has spearheaded the interest in Independent Theater, helping over many years to bring Off- and Off-Off-Broadway into the mainstream. In her own words:

*HI! DRAMA has gone through many co-hosts and technical changes but one thing remains constant from all of us. A deep love of the theater and wanting to cover as much as possible. It's gratifying to see some of our favorite companies like **The Debate Society** and **Peculiar Works** become successful. Also, some of our past reviewers like Glory Kadigan who is now running the very important **Planet Connection Festival**. I'm very proud of **HI! DRAMA** and all that it has accomplished through the decades.*

Not to suggest that we don't review Broadway, but **HI! DRAMA** consistently covers more new, experimental plays and musicals than anyone else in the city, something most of us consider more important. To take a look at our almost daily postings, check out **Facebook.com/hidramas** or watch the TV show on alternate Saturdays at 1:30pm EST on Spectrum Ch. 56, RCN Ch. 83, Fios Ch. 34, or streamed live on **www.mnn.org** (click on **MNN#2**).

A word about the "FACES" placed at the end of every review. This is a long-standing tradition that sums up the opinion. The best is **HAPPY FACE PLUS**, the worst is **UNHAPPY FACE MINUS**. The "FACES" in between are self-explanatory.

## UNION ASSOCIATION

*Actors' Equity Association (AEA), founded in 1913, represents more than 50,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with the FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. — Actors' Equity Policy Statement*



On Broadway, cast and crew members *must* belong to an appropriate union. In this book, Broadway productions are identified and union membership is assumed. For Off- and Off-Off-Broadway, Equity members can appear only if an **AEA** waiver has been obtained by the producer. An asterisk (\*) indicates the name of each **AEA** member appearing under this waiver having received “Permission in an Equity Approved Showcase.”

Similarly, this symbol (°) appears next to the names of members of the **Stage Directors and Choreographers Society**. Other professional organizations are credited when they appear in individual reviews. This information has been provided by the producer or the press representative.

## EWING REVIEWING 2018

This book is the first of a series to be published yearly, providing exposure for, and historical information on, a cross-section of Independent Theater performances, drawn from the previous calendar year in New York City.

The *Index* (p. 161) is a reference index, not a subject index. It provides an easy guide for connecting companies and individuals to their productions. It is designed to access a participant *once* in each event. In other words, if a name has three page numbers listed, that person is involved in three *different* plays, not listed three times in *one* play. Note, if their specialty is noted, assistants are listed under that specialty (*i.e.*, “Assistant Directors” will appear under **DIRECTORS**). **ASSISTANTS & INTERNS** is for volunteers with no listed specialty. Finally, *everyone* who appears onstage is listed under **ACTORS**. This information is taken from the production’s original program.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank Eva Heinemann for bringing me into the loop in the most important theatrical venue in the world. It’s more energetic and inclusive now than ever before. Best of all, it’s sheer fun, more than I ever expected to have at this point in my life. So, don’t despair. You have no idea what might be waiting out there if you look.

In addition to my **HI! DRAMA** colleagues (listed above), I also want to thank all the wonderful artists who have gifted us in so many different ways with their

talents over the past year—many (most) working at other jobs to survive. It takes great heart to perform in New York City, and it's no secret that the acting trades are not well paid. A common quip when you hear an actor *is* getting paid is “they'd do it for nothing.” Unfortunately, it's not a joke. It sometimes leads to unspeakable exploitation, but that's another story. God bless all of you wonderful young people for creating so much incredible art.

Finally, my sincere thanks to Mr. Jay Michaels for his support and invaluable advice, and to my beloved partner and colleague, William J. Cataldi, AKA pup, who keeps me writing.

—Jan Ewing, NYC (2019)