

INTERVIEW ISSUE 12

{ DRAMA }

Drama Editor John Sullivan with Steve Gold

*In **Women & Guns**, playwright Steve Gold grapples with a number of profound issues surrounding the dark art of warfare and the impossible / often split second choices forced on both combatants and civilians just to survive the carnage. Remembering former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's reflections on war – “ ... no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good [and] we will never learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children” – this play maps the arc of a single soldier's ultimately futile attempt to justify her instinctive actions under conditions of combat, and the wide reach of the emotional blowback from a horrible, but sadly inevitable, mistake. The scope of these “casualties of war” spans cultures and continents, and the issues Steve Gold raises are some of the most fundamental conundrums in our ongoing efforts to act with justice toward one another, to exercise moral judgment informed by reasonable ethical considerations and constraints.*

*Beyond the usual interest in a playwright's personal writing routines, experiences with theatrical workshops and production processes, and literary influences, our interview also unpacks some of the more specific questions stemming from the content and context of **Women & Guns**. Steve Gold's protagonist is a working class woman-warrior while her partner must live his life back home as a mechanic while anxiously awaiting her safe return. This, of course, inverts the traditional dynamic of who enlists and fights, and who stays and waits, and must hope for the best. Join us as he talks about his process and commitment to writing for the theatre, and discusses some of the character and structural choices, and the morally crucial issues posed in this ambitious and deeply affecting play.*

*JS: What were your major inspirations for this play? I'm particularly interested in how you created the woman-warrior lead in **Women & Guns**: why Tiffany instead of a more typical male Marine? What thoughts / ideas informed this choice? And the fact that she has a male partner*

waiting for her at home – this also turns the typical social dynamic in an unexpected direction? Is there anything else you'd like to say about the writing of Women & Guns?

SG: The main inspiration came from two sources: The memoir “*A Journal for Jordan*,” by Dana Canady; and the 1946 film “*The Best Year of Our Lives*.” The former is written by a former New York Times journalist and details her time with her companion, an Army sergeant who was later killed during the Iraq war. The latter, a tale of three WWII combat veterans returning to various physical and emotional problems. Based on these, I chose to write about a female soldier who experiences war and the man who remains safe at home waiting for her. The Iraq war was the first conflict in which this sort of thing occurred, although at the time women were technically prohibited from serving in combat. This of course is a reversal of the man-goes-off-to-war-and-woman-waits for him motif. I thought it would make for an interesting play.

JS: Could you talk about your writing process? How do you start writing a new play? Do you typically do extensive prior research or do you sketch out the basics and add facts and details as you discover them while working? What are the early stages of the process like? What do you do to jump-start the development of new characters, or add depth to characters you've been working with? Are you systematic about spinning your plot, or do you let the narrative unfold more intuitively? Anything more?

SG: If the subject matter requires some research, then I'll proceed to do so. But this is not always the case. I've written plays without prior research—off the top of my head. Basically, my philosophy of playwriting is to tell a compelling story with annoying the audience. I try to write the sort of plays that I myself would want to see. I don't begin writing a play until I know what the ending is. In this way, I have a goal to reach. The details arise spontaneously during the writing, but the endpoint is already known when I begin writing.

JS: Can you tell us about your experiences with the workshop & production process (your own work or something by another playwright)? What challenges have you encountered trying to get your work produced, or published? Have you been associated with writing groups? Have you had plays done as staged readings in a workshop process? Any full productions yet?

SG: Alas, work-shopping is a privilege I don't enjoy, as I'm buried alive in New Jersey with no connections whatsoever. The plays are written in a solitary manner, with no input from anyone else.

JS: What writers (playwrights, novelists, poets, non-fiction or other artists) have most informed your work? Do you have any models that influence the kinds of plays you write (or will write)?

SG: George Bernard Shaw and Eugene O'Neill are inspirations, as are the films of Preston Sturges.

JS: What impacts – socially or artistically - would you like to see from Women & Guns?

SG: My goal is modest: To tell a good story.

JS: *Thank you, Steve, for taking the time to speak with me. It's been a pleasure and all of us at FOTD are honoured by your presence.*