the new harmony project®

where writers' spirits soar

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THE NEW HARMONY PROJECT CELEBRATES ITS 25-YEAR HISTORY WITH NEW PLAYS AND SCREEN-SCRIPTS

The whirring sirens, warning of possible tornados in the area, did nothing to dampen spirits at the 25th annual conference of The New Harmony Project, which convened this year from May 23 to June 5. They only added to the excitement as writers, actors, directors, dramaturgs, interns, and conference staff gathered to hear the projects chosen for development at this year's conference. These included new plays by Alex Lewin, Dan O'Brien, Theresa Rebeck, and John Walch chosen from over 180 submissions. Additional writers in residence included Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Robert Schenkkan, playwright and Emmy-award winning television writer Meredith Stiehm, filmmaker Paola Mendoza, and playwrights Andrea Stolowitz and Lina Patel. It was a busy two weeks, full of hard work and a lot of joy that ended with a gala celebration of the Project's 25-year history.

David McFadzean and Colette Irwin-Knott

Since 1986, The New Harmony Project has gathered each spring in historic New Harmony, Indiana, to workshop a handful of plays, musicals, and film scripts selected through an open submissions process from writers across the country. Over the past 25 years, The Project has developed nearly 200 scripts by both established and emerging writers, many of which have gone on to productions in major theaters. "Here at The New Harmony Project, we believe that writers are to be cherished and nurtured. They remind us of where we are, where we have been, and point to where we are headed, and they do so with daring, determination, and dedication," NHP artistic director Paul Walsh said. "These two weeks of rehearsals, readings, discussions, and quiet conversation remind us that great writing grows out of a deep sense of community and a commitment to the resiliency of the human spirit. Each of these writers and each of these projects speak in a distinctive voice about who we are as individuals and as a society." As writer-in-residence Paola Mendoza observed, The New Harmony Project provides a place "where writers can explore the

stories that keep them up at night. A place where writers can try, fail, and succeed amongst people that will support them either way."

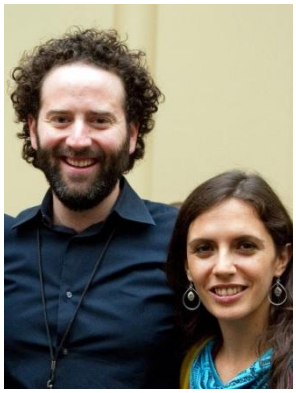
The first play developed at this year's conference was Alex Lewin's play *Alexandria*, which takes place in Alexandria, Egypt in 2005, as the country is faced by a contentious presidential election. On the Corniche, the boulevard that stretches along the Mediterranean, the Qasim family has operated a modest coffee house for generations. When an American businessman shows up and offers to buy the place and turn it into a Starbucks, the family finds itself uncertain of its future — much like the country they live in.

Owiso Odera, Alex Lewin and Risa Brianin

At The New Harmony Project, Lewin worked with San Francisco-based director Jessica Heidt, dramaturg Bruce Sevy, who is Associate Artistic Director and Director of New Play Development at the Denver Center Theatre Company, and a cast that included Amir Arison, Minita Gandhi, Susan Greenhill, Stephen Barker Turner, Gary Bayer, and Albert Rubio.

"I've learned that
I work, live, breathe,
function better
when I'm with people,
literally and emotionally.
I'll remember NHP as
a time in my life
when that happened.
I place high value on
such times."

Alex Lewin



Dan O'Brien and Paola Mendoza

Playwright Dan O'Brien returned to The New Harmony Project with his autobiographical docu-play *The Body of an American*, which traces the odyssey of a playwright named Dan and a photojournalist named Paul in their pursuit of truths deeper than facts. In 1993, while photographing the desecration of a dead American soldier in the streets of Mogadishu, photo-journalist Paul Watson heard the voice of the solider speak to him: "If you do this, I will own you forever." O'Brien's play searches for the meaning of this haunting refrain as playwright and photographer confront their own demons on a journey that takes them from Africa to the Arctic. This workshop was directed by New York-based director Josh Hecht with Pier Carlo Talenti, resident dramaturgy and literary manager at Center Theater Group in Los Angeles, as dramaturg. It featured actors Bill Heck and William Salyers.

When Jack returns home to Cincinnati in Theresa Rebeck's play *Dead Accounts*, his family wonders if he's coming home or running away from his New York City banking job. He seems to be obsessed with Graeter's ice cream, Skyline chili, and La Rosa's pizza. But life proves more complicated than that when Jack's estranged wife arrives, and this mid-west comedy dives headlong into questions about big city opportunities and Midwest morals. Bruce Sevy served as dramaturg for

the workshop and the cast included Stephen Barker Turner, Susan Greenhill, Maggie Lacy, and Amir Aronson.

Rebeck was the fourth recipient of the Walter Wangerin, Jr. Fellowship, honoring New Harmony Project founding board member Walt Wangerin, Jr. *Dead Accounts* will premiere in January 2012 as part of the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park's 2011-2012 season.

John Walsh, Willy Holtzman and Robert Schenkkan

John Walch's *In the Book of …* offers a moving reimagining of the Book of Ruth set in contemporary America amidst the fervor of an anti-immigration campaign. When Naomi, a U.S. Army Lieutenant stationed near Kabul, is discharged from the army, her Afghan translator Anisah, fearing for her own safety, unexpectedly asks Naomi to let her come along. This simple leap of faith brings Anisah to the economically struggling town of Broxton, Mississippi, where she is greeted with suspicion by the citizens and with open hostility by Naomi's sister-in-law, Gail — who is running for mayor on a staunch anti-immigration platform. By turns both funny and moving, *In the Book of* **…** contemplates the redemptive possibility in embracing the other.

Walch is playwright-in-residence at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, which has scheduled *In the Book of* **…** for production as part of its 2011-12 season. The New Harmony Project workshop of *In the Book of …* was directed by Risa Brainin with Pier Carlo Talenti as dramaturg and a cast that included Nicole Lewis, Minita Gandhi, Deirdre Lovejoy, William Salyers, Ryan Wesen, and Bill Heck.

Besides readings of the four projects in full development, this year's conference also included readings of new plays by writers-in-residence Meredith Stiehm (*Stoner and Spaz* based on the book by Ron Koertge), Andrea Stolowitz (*Antarkikos*), Lina Patel (*The Disappearance of Luck*), and Robert Schenkkan (*Docent*), and a screening of Paola Mendoza's award-winning film *Entre Nos*.

Founding Board Members: Gary Bayer, David McFadzean, Walter Wangerin, John David Lutz and Jeff Sparks

This year's conference culminated with a gala celebration of The New Harmony Project's 25 year history, hosted by founding board member David McFadzean, that featured songs and scenes from some of the many projects developed over the past

"I expected time to write, which I got. What caught me off-guard was the availability and enthusiasm of everyone from company members, to board members, to people I met in the community of New Harmony."

Lina Patel

"We've sent pieces to Broadway, to off-Broadway, to regional theatres, to college and university theatres across the country, and we've sent scripts to Hollywood, but I suppose the biggest mark of our success is that here we are 25 years later, and we're still here—I'm proud to be a founding member."

David McFadzean

25 years. A copy of the video-montage created by Board Member Scott Willy, of three-sixty group and paid for by Board Member Beth Cisco of St. Vincent Health, may be viewed on the website.

The New Harmony Project 2011 Company

Information on The New Harmony Project's open submission policy and deadlines for next year's conference are available online by August 1, 2011.

The New Harmony Project is already planning for next year's conference. It takes a year to raise the funds necessary to convene a successful conference, and we count on your donations to help us provide a place "where writers' spirits soar." We welcome your contribution on-line anytime.

More information may be found at www.newharmonyproject.org.

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