



A Letter from Tony Kushner

Friday, April 9, 2010

“Heaven is a city much like San Francisco:
house upon house depended from hillside,
from Crest down to dockside -
the green mirroring bay...”

Angels In America, A Gay Fantasia On National Themes, was commissioned in 1987 by Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone, at that time co- artistic directors of the late, great Eureka Theatre Company. The first half of the play, *Millennium Approaches*, premiered 20 years ago in the Eureka’s home, that remarkable blue-green converted garage on 16th and Mission, on whose stage so much wonderful, politically engaged theater had been presented. A few years later ACT produced both parts at the Marines Memorial Theatre, magnificently staged by Mark Wing-Davey.

By the time *Angels* was playing before audiences, Sigrid Wurschmidt, the splendid San Francisco actress for whom I wrote the part of the Angel, had died of breast cancer. But Sig had participated and performed in the play’s many workshops, the most important of which were in San Francisco, and it was Sigrid who, after the first-ever reading of *Millennium*, in the Eureka’s green room, whispered to me that I shouldn’t worry about the play’s already alarming length: “make it two evenings long,” she told me, “if that’s what it needs to be.”

Angels In America changed my life. Though the play’s set almost entirely in New York, I’ve always been intensely aware of how much of its origins and spirit it owes to the miraculous city of San Francisco: to its people, its proud, exuberant cultures and electric cultural life, its exemplary adherence to community and civil society, its unapologetic pioneering and championing of the kind of pluralist democracy that ought to be, and may yet become, an inspiration for our country’s renewal. I’ve always considered the Bay Area a kind of second home.

For this reason I was amazed, of course honored and delighted when the Museum of Performance & Design contacted me to ask about mounting their upcoming exhibit, *More Life: Angels in America @ 20*.

I never imagined that a play, certainly not a play of mine, could be the subject of a museum exhibition. Theater’s evanescence is its very soul; its impermanence seems to me antithetical to the preservational mission of museums, to the quiet contemplation of art or artifacts. But Brad Rosenstein and the marvelous staff of the museum have convinced me that I’m wrong. They’re assembling costumes, manuscripts, video clips,



photos, designs, and other rare memorabilia from key productions around the world. They may even include the red formica kitchen table I found on the streets of Brooklyn in the mid-80s and schlepped four flights up to my little Carroll Gardens apartment, on which the play was written! They've conducted searching audio and video interviews with many of the play's original creators and participating artists, who've spoken about the play in ways none of us have before.

Twenty years old is old for a play – not as old as *Seven Against Thebes* (2,477 years old) – but still, a lot can happen, and has happened, in twenty years. More than anything else, I'm excited by the Museum of Performance & Design's ambition for the exhibit, which it seems to me has little to do with nostalgia. Curators and participants alike hope that visitors will encounter a vivid exploration of the issues *Angels* attempts to address: the early years of the AIDS epidemic, the dawning of Reaganism, the strength of community and its attendant difficulties, the power of identity, of love, of the courage to pursue justice and enfranchisement, and the personal and political complexities of change.

I'm writing this letter in the hope that I can encourage you to assist the Museum in this undertaking. If the play's meant something to you, or even if you're simply curious about this wonderful experiment in merging the theatrical and the curatorial, please consider supporting the Museum of Performance & Design in whatever capacity you are able, whether through volunteering your time or through donating financially. I promise if you do I'll ask the angels to watch your back, and though I can't promise that they'll listen to me, or even that they exist, in a world like this, what can it hurt?!

All best! MORE LIFE!

Tony Kushner