



DJ Howard

Independent Press Report

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NoPassport Press

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## History

NoPassport was founded by playwright Caridad Svich in 2003, as an unincorporated theatre alliance devoted to cross-cultural, Pan-American performance, theory, action, advocacy, and most recently, publication. NoPassport exists as a virtual and live forum for the exchange of work and dreams, a network between theatres and the academy, and a mobile band of playwrights, directors, actors, producers and musicians. The mentoring of younger artists is also a key component of NOPE's mission.

## Focus

NoPassport Press aims to bring new, challenging play scripts, translations, essays and theatre criticism to the field.

## Activity

20 to 30 books of plays, criticism, theory, essays, and translations per year. They have published over 115 titles since 2007. All publications are P.O.D.

## Submissions:

NoPassport usually curates the publications. They have an editorial board and an advisory board. But they do accept proposals unsolicited. Email [NopassportPress@aol.com](mailto:NopassportPress@aol.com). Their [blog](#) is a great resource for finding new ways to collaborate with writers and are often looking for contributors on smaller projects.

While schooled in prose, if anyone asked me what kind of writer I was, I would tell them that I am playwright. Then I'd pause, there'd be an awkward sort of silence. Maybe they'd ask, "Oh, really, which plays of yours have been produced?" And I'd stumble, "Well, actually, they haven't...yet, but I have a collection of plays I could email you, if you want to read them." If the person still stuck around, they'd be likely to laugh in my face, "Read a play?" Their eyes would squint as if there was language barrier between us, and they'd gesture all grandiose, "Who reads plays anymore?"

I've had this conversation more than once, and it's got me thinking, what ever happened to plays as literature? Sure, schools teach us Shakespeare as teenagers, but what about the others? Lorca's string of impossible plays that will never be produced, the literary plays of Tennessee Williams, Beckett's poetic stream of consciousness, contemporary masters Sarah Ruhl, and Lynn Nottage?

With the rise of realism, I believe we have forgotten that literature first emerged from the Greeks as a ritual homage to their gods.

After discussing this with my mentor, Lisa Schelsinger, she introduced me to NoPassport. A press devoted to promoting new plays that honor a particular part of American culture. When I discovered that they publish plays still waiting for production, I almost cried. Finally, someone who understands!

Their plays are bold in language, ambitious in production, and most times avant-garde in form. Whether spiritual, cultural, or political, each of their plays circle back to that Grecian theme of ritual. NoPassport Press challenges the way we look at theatre.

DJ Howard: In plays, we generally follow a character's journey through the end. Can you talk about your own journey in playwriting and editing? How did you get to be where you are today?

Caridad Svich: Well, I think I still am on a journey. Tracing it is always difficult. But I was always writing little stories as a child, and those stories led to writing little songs and then poems and one day my English lit teacher in junior high said I should try my hand at plays. I'd never even thought about it before, but I was interested in acting and singing, and I thought it might be interesting to try to write a play. So, I did. And I realized that the process of making a play—even on the page—was really fascinating as an intellectual and emotional journey of art-making. I was hooked! And haven't stopped since.

As for editing, that side of my writing life came later, much later, sometime around 2000 when I co-edited *Conducting a Life: Reflections on Maria Irene Fornes* (Smith & Kraus) and *Out of the Fringe: Contemporary Latina/o Theatre and Performance* (TCG). Both volumes initiated by a desire to exercise a different side of my creative energy and voice for advocacy of other artists and research as well. I enjoyed the editing process so much that I kept it up!

DH: How did *NoPassport* begin?

CS: *NoPassport* began in 2003 as a band of artists who wanted to explore the intersection of words and music. It then expanded to become an alliance of about 500 plus artists nationally and internationally who make work that is expressive of cultural and aesthetic diversity and difference. In 2007 I founded *NoPassport Press* as an imprint of *NoPassport* to publish plays, essay collections, translations and prose from within and outside of the alliance. Sort of like an indie record label. We staged three theatre conferences in a row at Martin E Segal Theatre Center/CUNY Grad Center. By the third conference in 2009, I reached out to Fractured Atlas to become a fiscally sponsored project, and was accepted. Fractured Atlas serves as a fiscal sponsor to independent artists and companies without a 5013C.

DJ: Can you talk about what sparked you to make this move to publishing? Did you have any hesitation?

CS: No hesitation. I had edited by then two play anthologies (for TCG and Backstage Books) and three essay collections (two for Manchester University Press and one for Smith & Kraus), and had also my first collection of Lorca translations published (Smith & Kraus). I had a commitment already to the printed word and the publication of theatre works. In many ways, founding *NoPassport Press* was a natural outlet. I see so many worthy works go unpublished. Even by major artists—part of the impetus to publish collections from John Jesurun and David Greenspan, for example! I believe in publication as legacy for next generation of theatre-makers, students, educators, scholars, etc. In other countries plays are published quite regularly whereas in this country they are not as much unless they are produced at "visible" venues already connected to the economic machine of theatre. I wanted to start *NoPassport Press* to help in our own little way add to the living archive of theatre works in print.

CS: I am quite a prolific writer. Have written over forty plays and thirty translations! At some point I realized that rather than merely donating my works to archives, that I wanted to make the work available readily. So, I have set up a division of *NoPassport Press* called *Santa Catalina Editions* (like a sub label of the indie label) expressly for my works. Basically, I am focused on releasing what has only previously been available to someone who may have access to my archive, and instead, putting the catalogue out there. In some ways I think it may help some people be able to know how to contextualize my work.

As for balancing editing and activism: there are never enough hours in a day. But I am a big believer in the power of trying to make things happen, stir things up, and collective action. So, I do try to consistently make it a part of my creative life and life as an artist-citizen.

DH: Have you published emerging playwrights? Can you name a few?

CS: Indeed, we have. Among them are Alejandro Morales, Kara Corthron, Marco Rodriguez, Kara Hartzler, and Christopher Oscar Pena.

DH: When you decide to publish a play, how involved is the playwright? What are your expectations of them?

CS: The process is very hands-on. We work directly with the authors about the formatting, selection of the cover and the content of the books. My expectations are that the author will be willing to work with us from the inception of the book to its final realization.

DH: Out of the three plays in Matthew Maguire's collection only one, *The Tower*, has received a full production. What's the motivation behind publishing an un-produced play? Is the process handled differently than publishing a play that has received a full production?

CS: Matthew and I spoke about what to include in the collection. Usually the conversation with authors has to do with themed collections or representative collections. I am contributing editor of *TheatreForum International Journal* and his play *Luscious Music* had been published there. However, Matthew rewrote the play considerably afterwards and I had been following the play's development, and when it came time to put our collection together, it was one of the first plays to come up. He also wanted to pair it thematically with *The Desert*. The feeling at the time was that even though *Luscious Music* and *The Desert* had not received full productions the plays would benefit from reaching a different audience on the page and perhaps lead to and/or encourage productions of them.

DH: There's a heated debate in the literary world going on right now, where critics are viewing, according to the Guardian, "[plays as the problem children of literature, and perhaps really not literature at all.](#)" What would you say to those who support this claim?

CS: Well. I think plays have always been the "bastard children" in the world of arts and letters.

Williams and Arthur Miller and more—with rare exceptions—Edward Albee, August Wilson, Tony Kushner—have dramatists been invited to the arts and letters table readily. There is a certain distrust. Misapprehension? About what it is that dramatists do. We make scores for performance. But we also treat the page as a stage for performance. Drama is a poetic form. It is not merely writing instructions for performance. A text for live performance demands of the reader a different level of engagement. Thinking about text as spatial, architectural, sculptural and musical (all of which drama does) is essential and not merely a "problem."

DH: Do you have any final advice for emerging playwrights?

CS: Write. Rewrite. Write. Don't put all of your "eggs in one basket." That is to say, a lot of people feel that have to write that ONE PLAY that will change their life, but actually you never know when that is going to happen. All you can do is make the work and keep making, keep exploring the form! You learn something every day.

Matthew Maguire's book of Three Plays is a spirited collection, and always poetic, "The Tower," "Luscious Music" and "The Desert," radiate a sense of nostalgia. Maguire, a multi-disciplinary theatre artist, has won an OBIE award for acting (2008) and an OBIE award for direction (2007). His plays are as ambitious in form and style as they are in language and poetics. His potent lyricism, weaves the mundane with the arcane, the present with the past, and simultaneously moves each story forward. Here, Maguire has crafted his own stark rendition of origin stories, stories that are timeless, and lift and transcend the culture of our kind.

In "The Tower," Maguire tackles his own avant-garde interpretation of the Tower of Babel story. The curtain opens with urgency when the audience sees Ruth lying on an operating table as surgeons and nurses dance stiffly around her to prepare for a "dangerous emergency surgery" on her mouth. Jacob, Ruth's husband, informs the head surgeon, Dr. Rafel that she has been having nightmares of prison cells, which he believes are the cause of her illness. Dr. Rafel interprets this as "psycho-babble," and informs Jacob that, "it's a surgical matter" and that she will die if they don't begin the operation immediately.

Here, Maguire has instantly raised the stakes. The audience suspects that this play is going to be about this woman's journey for life. He confirms this by then segueing into a flash back where the stage is morphed into a nightmare version of Jacob and Ruth's bedroom as a prison cell. While the couple are sleeping, prison guards enter, each singing in a different language. They carry with them a prison suit, which they thrust upon Ruth, until she wakes up.

The next scene is inside Ruth and Jacob's house. Here, Jacob learns of Ruth's fascination with The Tower of Babble. After she tells him, "now here's the original story, 'Now the whole earth had one language,'" Jacob chases her around the house until two bedouins enter and perform an ancient tribal dance.

As the story moves forward it follows this basic structure, weaving between the operating table, the prison cell and the house. Various forms of dance, and news reports function as transition elements between each scene. The news is read by the prisoners, who also chant various verses of The Babel text in Gaelic. Sometimes, we see them attempt to break from the shackles that bind them, sometimes we hear them sing, we always see Ruth's reaction to their pain; they are, after all, her nightmares.

As the play progresses, Maguire's language functions almost as a character itself. Later on in the house, Ruth claims that "words can't get lost" to which Jacob responds "old 'words' never die, they just mutate." This proves true, during a scene on the operating table, where the point-of-view shifts into Ruth's perspective, as she claims, "I am dreaming." The scene becomes a weaving choral chaos as each of the characters repeat each other at various times. The musicality of this scene, allows the audience to sympathize with Ruth as she struggles to comprehend what's going on around her.

When Ruth finds bricks in her oven, it is revealed that she wants to build her own tower of Babble. When Jacob confronts her, she reluctantly tells him, "If I let this idea out of my own mind there'll be leaks." Jacob consoles her saying, "I can keep a secret." To which she replies, "I know you can't. It's iust. slinnage." Ruth's own language continues to falter as she begins



This is all during the flash backs mind you. In “real” time, Ruth is on the operating table, and during the moment when the doctors begin to take over her language, a ladder falls from the sky, as Ruth climbs it her body begins to die. Once in heaven, Ruth delivers a stunning monologue about how she wrestles with God. “Like an ancient Fred Astaire he glided across the threshold and clasped me in a full nelson.” Ruth then “assumes the position”, and declares how she “got down on all fours and looking back between my legs I watched Him approach. Longest shlong I ever saw, the prime patriarchal part, a real biblical number.” After she had been initiated, she saw beyond the endless desert, and she could see all suffering in the world.

Not to give away the ending, I’ll simply state, this is a bold play. Ambitious in structure and form as it is in language and content. With *The Tower*, and each play in this book, Maguire has crafted a poetic and experimental journey that should be read by anyone who has a love for language and non-traditional story telling, a prime example of why plays should be read on the page. While “*The Tower*” has received a full production, the two gems, “*Luscious Music*” and “*The Desert*” are still waiting to be produced, and now that it’s available in print, perhaps a moved reader could elevate the magic Maguire has written on the page and find a home for it on stage? I’m sure Matthew would be delighted.