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RICH AMADA

IF, LIKE ME, YOU'VE SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS PONDERING that great, eternal question—What's a public reading worth?—well, wonder no more. Thanks to the good folks at Merit Theatre and Film Group, that question has been answered. It's \$525.

Yep. Minds far superior to my own puny intellect have done the calculations and arrived at that sum, which I dutifully noted as I read the email announcing the organization's annual playwriting contest. First prize was \$300 plus a reading, which was spelled out in the announcement as having a total value of \$825.

Oh, it was also noted in the prize calculations that the reading comes with Q&A. It didn't break down how much the Q&A alone contributed toward the total dollar figure, and I have to admit I don't really know what Q&A is worth on the open market. T&A maybe. Q&A no.

Anyway, as I sit here stewing over all the occasions I didn't get \$525 for a reading of one of my plays, I can't help but think admiringly of fellow dramatists who choose to be part of Washington's two big summertime theatre events, the Source Festival and the Capital Fringe Festival. Playwrights who produce their own works as part of these two annual events probably aren't going to get \$525 for their efforts. In fact, people who've

participated in the past usually report that it ends up costing them money. But that doesn't seem to dampen the willingness of people to premiere new plays at these festivals. Evidence of Guild member activity became apparent when an emailed query about the possibility of having a picnic for members returned a number of responses along the lines of, "I'd love to, but I have a play in the festival that night." Okay, picnics are nice, but no one's going to ask a playwright to trade seeing his play's performance for a hot dog and a soda. Go forth and premiere, my colleagues.

Meanwhile, on the regional theatre front, Guild Council member David Ives scored a success with his new comedy, *The Liar*, which premiered at D.C.'s Shakespeare Theatre Company, and which I had the pleasure of attending a performance. The reviews I read were good. So I can say the production was a critical success. The play's financial success for Mr. Ives is something I know nothing about. But, since it wasn't a reading, I assume he got more than \$525...with or without Q&A.

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Los Angeles

BY LARRY DEAN HARRIS

AT A RECENT FRIDAY NIGHT FOOTLIGHTS, I was treated to a new work that met two crucial cri-

teria: the language was delicious, and the story made me seethingly envious.

With an arsenal of characters, cleverness and a worldly wisdom that defies her youth, Tiffany Antone spoke to me. First from the stage via her work-in-development *From the Rubble* and then in a casual Q&A.

How old are you? A lady never tells. Actually, I was about to say how happy I was to finally turn 30 this year (whew, finally free of those confusing 20s) and just realized I'm actually 31! Apparently a lady never "remembers."

Where did you grow up? I was born and raised in Prescott, Arizona. I moved to LA eleven years ago to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I wanted to see what the whole acting business was like. I soon realized it wasn't for me, went to UCLA and that's where I took my first Playwriting class. I was instantly smitten (Tiffany now has in MFA in playwriting).

What made you realize you wanted to be a playwright? It was this rush of conviction that washed over me when I began writing my first play. I just knew how to do it, and it felt like everything inside me was singing. I think even in my past life as an actor, I had an inherent understanding of how a play works. I wasn't coming at it from a literary background— even now I trip over punctuation and I like to make up my own words. But the structure, the storytelling, and the people within? That all felt natural, and right to me that I would spend my

Tiffany Antone



life here. It felt like less a choice than it did a revelation of my make-up.

Tell me about your first play. *This Girl Burning*, about a brother and sister who had been adopted after their mother died in a much publicized apartment fire. They grow up away from the city and their past, but the brother remembers what really happened, and the sister only remembers the press. The play came easily and was so much fun to work on, I think I just learned that I was in love with words. Really, most of the lessons I've learned about writing have come after that "honeymoon" play - when the plays don't just ribbon out of you like magic and you have to work and work and work to get them right.

Career milestones? After my first year of grad school, my play *In The Com-*

pany Of Jane Doe won a New Plays on Campus workshop at the Playwrights' Center. I had been laboring on this play for so long and seriously doubting myself. It's a highly theatrical, fantastical play and was only my second full-length. When I got the email inviting me to the Center, it felt incredibly validating at just the right moment. Then *The Good Book* won the Samuel French Festival and got published, which opened a door to the Hawthornden Fellowship in 2008. Traveling to the Kennedy Center last year with my play *Ana and the Closet* was another highlight. Then *Jane Doe* had a run at the Powerhouse Theatre in Santa Monica this past January. My director, Mary Jo DuPrey, is just brilliant, and I still love the play. Considering how many times I've seen it at this point, I think that's

a good sign. With all the uncertainty that accompanies a life in the theatre, each of these milestones remind me that I'm on the right track.

What's next? I'm working on an uber creepy play about familial guilt called *Twigs and Bones*. It's been kicking my butt, because it's such a hurricane of a play! The final scene we literally see the roof come off the house, but getting the words right and the action satisfying while trying to avoid too much melodrama, even though the play is a gothic melodrama... it's been a challenge.

You're a literary manager (for Playwrights Arena). What do YOU look for in a good play? Plays that jump out as fresh. Pieces that make you sit back with a "Wow!" Sometimes playwrights forget that they are writing not just for an audience, but for directors, designers and actors as well. When I find a play that has something for everyone to sink their teeth into, I know I've found something special. Last year I saw *Bengal Tiger At The Baghdad Zoo*, and it was so visually and metaphorically exciting to me that I walked out of the theatre wishing I could afford to see it again. That's the kind of theatre that I want to be nearer to... I love Sarah Ruhl and Yasmina Reza, strong women playwrights who write with poetry and vision, and writers like Martin McDonagh and David Lindsay-Abaire who create these wildly impressive worlds.

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