

A Different Kind of Heart Surgery
By Nina Lee Aquino

Wen peepel ask mi why mi du weh mi du, di ansa mi always gi is dis: fi mek di worl' a betta place. Dat a because mi fundamentally believe theatre can change di worl'. Maybe dat belief is - to sum peepel - too facile, even fool-fool or cliched. But dis is di marathon mi a run; di long distance race mi ask all artist, mi link miself wid, fi run beside mi.

Fi mi, it really simple as dat.

Theatre has survive and thrive despite all dat would threaten it existence or relevance. Fram radio, cinema and televeshun, to sportin events and di ubiquity of streamin technology. It a di only art form dat, by nature, absolutely need a audience. It need everybodi togedda, fi watch di event happen in di space. An' wen yuh tink bout it, only a miracle can describe it. Wi put sup'm pon di stage and peepel cum. Cul' be sum frens on a nite out, cul' be fambily membas weh waan si luv ones perform, cul' be outta obligashun...it nuh matta. Wen di lites guh to half an' den out, dey rise again on a united community, linked by di story bout fi unfold.

On fi wi stages (tradishunal or non-tradishunal) di audience a nuh jus witness, but active participants fi:

Stories weh show us di wounds
Stories weh show us di medicine
Stories weh allow wi fi figat bout di worl' out deh
Stories weh memba wi dat there is a outside
Stories weh punch wi in di gut
Stories weh mek wi insides go fuzzy
Stories weh teach wi sup'm
Stories weh mek wi un-learn evryting
Stories weh throw wi back to di past, fi memba wi how far wi ave cum
Stories weh catapult wi into di future and mek wi imagine

All a dem vitally important; fram seat-fillin crowd-pleasahs to theatre bout hard truths - fram theatre weh comfaat to theatre weh disturb.

Mi ave seen mi fair share a producshuns - big houses, small houses, nuh houses - an' for all mi theatrical adventures, mi know dis much fi be true: mi walk in one person and walk out smaddy diffrent. Every. Single. Damn. Time. A dat theatre do; it open up sup'm inside a wi or re-confirm sup'm essenshal wi figat bout wiself or oddas or di worl'. Wedda wi notice or not, wi cum out a a change, transform, re-arranged. It breathtaking, if yuh tink bout it. Wi hol' suh much powah fi change di worl'.

Maybe dis mek it easier fi understand wah mek it suh important fi rally fi a more inclusive an' diverse theatre ecology....why sum a wi ave dedicated our entire career fi dis cause. Di belief

guh beyond a hashtag or quotas or gettin more fundin fram guhvament bodies. It guh beyond di standad reply of "...reflectin di city and country wi live in..." Diverse stories present diverse solushuns; imaginative ways to tellin stories unlock ansas fi seemingly impossible questians, can lead to innovative ways fi solve problems, infinite new perspective an' a renewed capacity fi dream bigga dan wi ave before.

Dat is, afta all, di job dat is tasked to wi as theatre artists: fi ask wi peepel, wi community, wi citizenship, fi experience sup'm togedda, sup'm immediate an' visceral an' necessary. Wi memba peepel how big an' important an' complicated of a ting it is fi jus be human. An' while wi sumtimes beset by di trappins a ticket sale an' review an' awards, wi trade in sup'm much more valuable. A different kind a heart surgery dat.

Di wuk weh wi do on or backa di stage; wi are communicatin sup'm, expressin sup'm important. Wi can memba or help figat. Wi can rally, call peepel to action. Wi can influence an' illuminate. Wi can provoke or calm. Theatre has, historically, played a big role in a wi civic life. It can play a even bigga role if wi can all collectively agree fi allow it to. If we ascribe dat value to it.

In di face a current struggles which wi all are very much aware, mi maintain a steadfast belief in di powah a mi professhun; in di powah a theatre an' its vitality to all a wi humans. It clear dat wi job as theatre artists is nuhwhere dun.

Wedda a audience of 10 or 100 or 10, 000 ... wi can, an' wi will, change di worl'.