

Interview with Playwrights

ANDY BAYIATES AND GENEVRA GALLO-BAYIATES



Husband-and-wife team Andy Bayiates and Genevra Bayiates are neither new to MRT nor new to the area. Andy was born in Lowell at St. Joseph's Hospital and grew up next door in Billerica. Genevra attended Boston University. The pair were part of the writing team behind our 2016 production of *45 Plays for 45 Presidents*. Andy returned to MRT in 2018 to co-write, with Aaron Muñoz, *Last Laughs: The Slapstick Tragedy of Fatty Arbuckle*.

What inspired you to create a play about Lowell's "Mill Girls?"

GENEVRA: Andy came home from a trip to Lowell while working on "Fatty" and was excitedly telling me all about the National Park and Mill Girls museum exhibits and this idea he had for a show based on their stories. He was focusing on their life and identity as artists. I was struck by how he was leaving out what was, to me, the most significant part of their story: their identity as women in a patriarchal society set up to see them confined to very specific roles . . . and how they so clearly yearned for so much more..

Describe Harriet and Sarah.

GENEVRA: Harriet is a woman of words and intellect who yearns for recognition, respect, and freedom. Not just for herself, but for all women. Sarah is a woman of action with a gift for inspiring others to action. She yearns for equality, justice, and safety - for all women.

Where they diverge is that Harriet believes in changing the system from within, whereas Sarah wants to change it from without. Harriet believes in moderation, and Sarah believes in all or nothing. Harriet wants equilibrium. Sarah wants revolution.

Do you see specific parallels to the politics of today?

GENEVRA: We're at this critical point in our cultural evolution where more and more people are waking up to the injustices experienced by marginalized populations. And for those who want to see more inclusion . . . there is disagreement - even within that group of like-minded folks - as to how to best achieve those goals. Some people feel a moderate, steady pace that seeks to bring along as many people as possible is the right answer. Some people feel change will only occur by asking for immediate,

revolutionary shifts - and anything less is too little, too late.

And sometimes we tear ourselves up fighting with each other about the best way to achieve what is ultimately a shared goal and very clear collective vision. We all have the same endpoint in mind - but very different ideas of how to get there . . . and we can get very volatile in our arguments in ways that perhaps thwart our progress at times.

ANDY: I might frame the debate slightly differently. I would argue that a moderate does believe in making change happen as fast as possible. It's just that moderates and revolutionaries ultimately disagree over what's possible in the near term. Moderates are probably poorly named, because "moderation" gives the impression that they believe in slowing everything down for the sake of it. It's fair to say that they want solutions that don't involve tearing things down, and I think it's fair to criticize that approach sometimes. (Moderation didn't work very well prior to the Revolution or the Civil War.)

What is the legacy of these women?

GENEVRA: As is the case with so many amazing women throughout history, these two women are largely lost to the general population. We, as a society, continually underestimate the capacity of women - and women are taught a narrative through society that undervalues them and discourages their creativity. I think Harriet, Sarah, Curtis, Betsey, and all of the women we could not include teach us that we are capable of great things - and *we should work as hard as we can to secure freedom for ourselves and others.*

What was it like collaborating?

ANDY: The collaboration has been pretty seamless, successful and really fun. It turns out writing something together isn't nearly as challenging as buying and running a home together or raising a kid together. We've done a lot of historical writing between the two of us. You have to immerse yourself in the history until a story emerges. And from there, you're constantly battling between honoring historical fact and the needs of your story.

What do you most want to communicate to LO audiences?

GENEVRA: Just as the original *Lowell Offering* magazine was meant as a gift to the city, we definitely created this play for Lowell. We hope it has resonance across the U.S., of course, but our original intention was always to celebrate Lowell and give Lowellians a chance to celebrate their shared history.

ANDY: This play is like a love letter to Lowell. I'm endlessly fascinated with this city and I'm not done writing about it. So first and foremost, I want to communicate raw enthusiasm for the place that Lowell occupies in our country's history, and I hope audiences can feel that.

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