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Playwrights of New England

Learn all about the Boston Theater Marathon:
the playwrights involved, their advice and experiences,
how the Marathon compares to historical theatre, and
how you can help support local artists and theaters!

by [Julia Haldeman](#), May 23rd, 2018



The Boston Theater Marathon, an all day festival made up of fifty ten minute plays, celebrated its 20th run on Sunday May 6th, 2018 at the Stanford Calderwood Pavilion at the Boston Center for the Arts. The Boston Theater Marathon (BTM) was founded in 1999 by Kate Snodgrass, the Artistic Director of the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, and Bill Lattanzi, a New England Playwright. "I was frustrated there wasn't a lot of press attention given to the local Boston theatre," says Lattanzi. "There wasn't a lot of respect for original Boston writing... and we knew that it was good... I wanted a festival that would bring attention to the work that was being done." Fifty talented playwrights from all across New England are selected to participate in the BTM each year. This year, many of the shows contained vital messages about current political issues; guns in schools, healthcare bills, the future of technology, miscarriages, cancer, death, bullying, suicide, divorce, teen depression, gender wages, the expense of education, blindness, dementia, Parkinson's Disease, African American rights, and much more. The Marathon is a chance for playwrights from all across New England to show their talents. Hortense Gerardo, a Marathon playwright, explains, "[The Boston Theater Marathon is] a celebration of the Boston theater community, and it's a very supportive and validating experience."

The theatre presented at the Marathon was comparative to the theatre of the Grecian, Roman, and Shakespearean eras. Historical theatre's purpose was entertainment and to celebrate the gods, like Dionysus, the god of theater. The plays were often dramatic and greater than life, however, no high-tech staging, lighting, or sound was used (Henderson). Some of the plays in the modern marathon were presented purely for entertainment, similar to historical theatre. *The Mutton Bandit* Molloy, for example, was a comedy presented at the Marathon about mishearing the phrase "walking in his sleep," with "choking sheep." The plays were simple in their form, like most historical plays: minimal props, only two to four actors, little to no music, and no extravagant lighting or costuming. The plays did not compare in extravagance to a Broadway musical, for example; it wasn't necessary. "The dynamic of people believing, people involving themselves in a story and being moved by it is the same [between the simple or complex physical structure of a play]," says Andrea Clardy, another Marathon playwright. However, many of the other plays had meanings unlike historical theatre. The plays depicted real life scenarios at a slightly more complex level. As Bill Lattanzi says, "theater is this place that is slightly bigger than the real world." The way in which Patrick Gabridge, a Marathon playwright, described his plays' themes perfectly summed up the overall theme of the Marathon as well: "I'm especially interested in human connection. But there are some goofy comedies, too," he says.

The Marathon is a very inviting experience for all ages, however teens are not exposed to enough of it. According to the Boston Globe, "at plays, the average age for audiences was 53." One of the many reasons for this lack of exposure comes from expensive ticket prices. "Theater's need to subsidize ticket prices for people under thirty. Period!" says Melinda Lopez, another Marathon playwright. Hortense Gerardo responds similarly saying, "Making theatre affordable is one way to get young people into the theater." Another reason for lack of teen exposure to theatre is the amount of technology present in our current society. Hortense Gerardo has an interesting solution to this dilemma. "Another way [to make theatre more accessible to young people] is for theatre artists to embrace the use of technology in storytelling," she says. Gerardo's play for this year's marathon, *Virtuous Reality*, is about two chat room friends who inevitably meet in "3D." This play contains

humor, drama, and most importantly relatability to a teenage audience, which is an example of how we can get teenagers to want to experience theatre. Andrea Clardy takes on a different perspective. In addition to adjusting the topic of the play to fit the audience, you also need to bring the play to them, explains Clardy. "Taking theatre to the kids, rather than the kids to the theater. You've got to take it to them." Patrick Gabridge explains that if lively plays are written, depicting what is currently happening in our lives, young people will want to see it. "[T]heater isn't going anywhere, and is actually a powerful antidote to the alienation that can accompany some of our technology," says Gabridge. "Our screens and social media are creating a high value for true interactive experiences-theatre provides this critical interpersonal connection."

Experienced playwrights are eager to give their advice to young playwrights. Experience is the main message: read, write, and watch. When asked what advice she had for young playwrights, Hortense Gerardo said, "write about the things you would like to read and see on the stage. The best way to improve your writing is to keep practicing it, the way you would a sport, or a musical instrument." Melinda Lopez agrees, adding that you should sit in a quiet place and turn off your phone. "It's impossible to write with distractions," she says. Patrick Gabridge says in order to be a better playwright you need to understand the whole process of a production, so get involved in one! Bill Lattanzi recalled a metaphor that can be incredibly helpful when constructing dialogue, as both a beginner and experienced playwright: "Dialogue is an iceberg...this is what they're doing, but what are they saying under the surface?" Lattanzi also advises learning story structure, as long as it aligns with your vision. All the playwrights mentioned encourage bouncing your ideas off of other people and reading them aloud with friends, family, or even a group of actors. Lattanzi also suggests that in order to create life-like dialogue you can try writing down the conversation of the people around you.

The Marathon playwrights have all had an immense amount of experience in the world wide theater community, and have met many people along the way who have grown into life-changing mentors. As Andrea Clardy suggests, "the difference between critiques and mentors is not very great." Criticism, both negative and positive is incredibly helpful for playwrights, and most playwrights agree that the best types of mentors are the ones who give honest criticism. Patrick Gabridge recounts his experience with mentors saying, "I tended to have groups of peers who shaped my writing." The more experience that you have the more mentors you will gain.

Playwright Festivals, including the Boston Theater Marathon, are perfect examples of what theatre should be; inclusive, accepting, and thought provoking. Take advantage of the many Playwright Festivals coming to the New England area, including New Noises, the Massachusetts Young Playwrights' Project Festival at Boston University, consisting of 10-minute plays written by Massachusetts high school students, and The Maine Playwrights Festival at the Studio Theater at Portland Stage coming next April.

The Boston Theater Marathon is funded in part by the Boston University Humanities Foundation and individual donations. All net proceeds are gifted to the Theater Community Benevolent Fund (TCBF), a non-profit organization which aids local theater companies and artists in crisis (Boston Playwrights' Theatre).

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For more information:

<https://www.bu.edu/bpt/our-programs/boston-theatre-marathon/>

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INTERVIEW WITH BILL LATTANZI!

[Full Interview With Bill](#)



INTERVIEW WITH LAURA NEILL!

[Full Interview With Laura](#)

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