

Redefining the Way Theatre is Created and Performed: The Radical Inclusion of Suzan-Lori Parks's 365 Days/365 Plays.

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Redefining the Way Theatre is Created and Performed: The Radical Inclusion of Suzan-Lori Parks's *365 Days/365 Plays*

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Fall 2007 65 Redefining the Way Theatre is Created and Performed: The Radical Inclusion of Suzan-Lori Parks's 365 Days/365 Plays Philip C. Kolin Suzan-Lori Parks, the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama (*Topdog/Underdog* in 2002), has with *365 Days/365 Plays* challenged and redefined the way theatre is created, produced, performed, and even interpreted. Not fearing to enter dragon country, Parks decided a few years ago to write a play each day for an entire year. On 13 November 2002 she started and by 12 November 2003 she had finished her phenomenal journey. "It [was] about being present

and being committed to the artistic process every single day, regardless of 'weather.'"1 She further claimed, "You can't write a play a day for a whole year without practicing radical inclusion, where every idea that comes to the door of your creative mind is welcome. You can't have a bouncer at the door saying, 'You and you, but not you.'"2 Her ambitious and radical collection of 365 plays would boggle the mind's eye of any playwright, producer, director, or critic. But her indefatigable self-discipline was matched by an unstoppable resolve to have these plays staged nationwide. Enter Bonnie Metzgar, Parks's longtime friend, the Associate Artistic Director of Denver's Curious Theatre, and, for eight years, the Associate Producer of the Public Theater under George C. Wolfe. Parks had put the 365 plays away in a drawer for a few years, but in 2005 Metzgar convinced her that they needed to be performed, and on a scale so large it brooks no comparison in national theatre history, or world theatre annals for that matter. Parks and Metzgar created the 365 Days/365 Plays National Festival, a project divided into a network (or hub) of at first 7 and then 15 cities or regions across the United States, including the Northeast, New York, Atlanta, the Carolinas, Mississippi river towns, Minneapolis, Chicago, Austin, Greater Texas including San Antonio, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.. Each hub was coordinated by a satellite theatre or a council (seven coordinating theatres in Chicago) that then enlisted up to 52 theatres or performance groups in each hub to stage a week's worth of 365. Satellite theatres include the Alliance in Atlanta, the Guthrie in Minneapolis, and Center Theatre in Los Angeles. Between 16 November 2006 and 15 November 2007, Parks's marathon collection was simultaneously performed week by week (7 plays) by more than 800 groups, each according to its own interpretation and resources. As long as a theatre did a week in the order in which the plays were written, it could choose how the plays were done (read or staged in full costume or not), where, and when. For instance, a theatre Philip C. Kolin is a Professor of English at the University of Southern Mississippi. 66 Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism might stage its seven plays all on one night, or over two or three nights, or perform a play each night for a week, or could even repeat play(s) on the same day(s). As a theatre in each hub finished its week of plays, it then passed 365 along to the next theatre that staged the following week, amounting to an unprecedented Olympiad of Theatre. In fact, Parks's 365 has been rightfully termed the "largest American theatre collaboration ever."3 The result is a series of running cycles of the 365 plays as each hub, or network, completes an entire year. Every hub, of course, exists within the larger constellation of the nationwide 365 Festival. The popularity of 365 spread so fast and so far that, according to Metzgar, "We do not even know how many theatres are doing the 365 plays."4 As Damaso Reyes accurately put it, "For the first time, theatres across the continent will be working together to produce the work of one playwright, bringing together disparate parts of a far-flung and often disconnected artistic community."5 In all probability, Parks has surpassed any other playwright, including Tennessee Williams and possibly Shakespeare, in...

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