

JANICE GOLDBERG, DIRECTOR & PLAYWRIGHT
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Janice Goldberg has directed plays from Alaska to New York, University to Off-Broadway. She is the recipient of The Kennedy Center Gold Medallion Award for her work with new plays. Janice is the co-author of 12 plays with Susan Bigelow, most notably *Rose Colored Glass* published by Samuel French, which premiered Off-Broadway and has had productions across the U.S. and Europe. She serves as Producing Artistic Co-Director of AND Theatre Company in NYC and has overseen the production and development of over 100 new plays and is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Dramatists Guild. Opening Off-Broadway in the fall of 2017 is *I Of The Storm*.



Janice teaches the intensive workshop “Writing and Performing the Solo Show” and runs the AND Solo Writers’ Retreat. She wrote and directed an industrial for M&M*MARS and is a founding member of the First Look Theatre Company for New York University’s Dramatic Writing Program, a member of New Circle Theatre Company (Circle Rep), SDC, and the Dramatist’s Guild.

Janice studied under the legendary Leland Starnes and Stanley Harrison from Yale University. She leads her *Nail-the-Job* workshops in “Cold Readings and Auditions” for students all over the country. She coaches trial attorneys and she speaks to folks from all over the world about New York City.

To learn more about Janice Goldberg and her work as a director, playwright, coach, her workshops and more go to: <http://www.janicegoldberg.com/>

I first met Janice at the Okoboji Summer Theatre (in NW Iowa) during the summer of 2016 when she was guest directing and I was a guest actor in another show. Her energy and enthusiasm are infectious - whether it’s chatting on a cabin porch or having lunch. I can only imagine how much fun rehearsals must be. On a beautiful spring day in NYC we met at the Amsterdam Ale House for lunch and conversation. She was kind enough to sign the script of *Rose Colored Glass* for me and to share her thoughts regarding directing and the theatre industry. (ST)

Steve Taft: You’ve been in NYC for over thirty years and working as a director and a playwright. Was that always your goal?

Janice Goldberg: It’s interesting. I started as an actor. Everyone starts as an actor. Nobody says, “Oh boy, I want to be a stage manager.”

ST: As a director, are there certain types of scripts or topics that interest you?

JG: I’d say, “No.” I have a wide variety of interests. I also want to be taught. I want to learn something in the process. I did a short play years ago about Jackson Pollack. I didn’t know anything about Jackson

Pollack, but that's how I learned all about him and I love that aspect of it. I used to tell Sue Bigelow (my playwriting partner), "Oh good, we have to do research for it." I've always had to do research. But to your point, I like scripts that I can latch onto. It could be intellectually, emotionally, sensory . . . something that says to me, "That's really cool." I like socially relevant drama. I consider what I'm going to do with the play. What's the point of doing the play? Who's my audience for the play? Who's going to come? Is it going to affect anybody? And my point is most of the work I do is realistic. It doesn't have to be told realistically, but I look for a real story. I want a beginning, middle and end.

ST: Let's say you have a play coming up that you're directing. What's the audition process here in NYC?

JG: I just did this the other day. It depends upon the level in which you're working, and the Equity contract you're working under. By and large the audition notice goes out, it's put in *Backstage*, it goes out to agents, wherever it's going and with the character breakdown.

ST: So the actor can select a monologue appropriate for the audition.

JG: Yes, so it reflects who the actor is and who the character is a little bit, because if I'm casting a comedy, don't come in with a tragic monologue.

ST: What's the time limit?

JG: Two minutes usually, a two-minute monologue. Let's be real, a director knows the minute you walk in and open your mouth twenty seconds in, and I sit there for a one minute and fifty before, "Very nice. Thank you." You can't stop them, but you know. If I call the actor back I give them sides. Once they're at a certain level the actor wants to read the script. So, I'll make the script or portions of it available. I'll give adjustments and I improvise. Sometimes I'll sit down and just talk to people.

ST: You obviously respect the actor.

JG: Totally.

ST: So, you've cast the show. What's your process in terms of developing a concept?

JG: Regarding concept it depends upon who you are working with. I sometimes am working for myself and am a Producing Artistic Director. Most of the work I'm doing I sit down with the set designer first. Eventually everybody is going to talk together. If I sit down with the set designer I may say, "This is kind of what I'm looking at. It'd be kind of cool if we had this and what if we had this? Could we put the river onstage?" and various possibilities. Sometimes the set designer will say, "I want to build the river" and I'll say, "Oh my god, you can build the river? Build the river. That's great!" Then it's how detailed do we want it? Do we want it realistic or suggestions of . . .? I have to listen to the designer. That's why I hired them . . . to come up with stuff. It becomes a conversation / collaboration. If it's a new play, then the playwright is in on those conversations if they're available. Sometimes the playwright will say, "You do it." I talk to the playwright and say, "What about this or this? Let's do the cabin. Let's do the river. The audience is going to be sitting three feet away, we need real fish. Can't use plastic fish, it'll look stupid." Or the prop master will say, "You gotta use real fish otherwise it won't look right." And I say, "Yes, great. Let's do that." I, as a director am open to everybody offering ideas.

ST: What's your rehearsal process in terms of staging? Some directors are organically inclined in terms of movement, some prefer to block the play.

JG: The older I get, I'm more organically inclined. Having said that, for me personally, I studied under somebody that staged everything and his work was beautiful. That's how I learned and that's what I've done. That's what I do at Boji. I stage it all before I leave my house, before I get on the airplane. I have

to. I do it for few reasons. If I block it, line by line, piece by piece, it makes me go over the script in detail. I'm marking every beat, every section . . . everything, and I know that script inside and out. Now, in rehearsal I may say, "Why don't we try this?" Now, if we have four weeks and eight hours-a-day I may work more organically. If we have two weeks, five-hours-a-day (like at Boji) it's "You have to go here, you have to go there and you have to go here." I always say, "This is our road map." Here's really what I do: I tell you where your feet are going to go, but how your feet get there and what you do with the rest of your body, that's your job.

ST: Some college programs have relatively long rehearsal periods, six, eight and even ten weeks of rehearsals depending on the show, whereas the Stephens College students know how to work quickly, particularly because of their experiences at the Okoboji Summer Theatre.

JG: Yes, it's a huge gift for the Stephens kids. You know, it is a collaborative art. Don't forget I work on new plays and sometimes someone will say, "Can I say this instead of that?" I say, "Yeah, go ahead, do that." Sometimes I throw scripts down and improvise scripts in rehearsal. The end of this play [pointing to *Rose Colored Glass*] was an improvised ending. It wasn't working, wasn't working, wasn't working. So, I got up with the woman who was playing "Lady O'Riley" (she knew how to improvise), and I improvised that final scene with her and that's how we got the ending.

ST: In the textbook I've been using in recent years for an Introduction to Theatre class the authors make a distinction between the "Creative Director" and the "Interpretive Director". I take a bit of an exception to their terminology because I would be classified as an Interpretive Director. I love playwrights and have great respect for the work they do and I believe it's my job to tell their story (to interpret it) in the most creative way possible. Just because I may not deconstruct a script or put my own stamp on it doesn't mean I'm not creative.

JG: Yes. So often the director that puts their "stamp" on the play it's all about them, the director's work. Like, Ivo van Hove who did a deconstruction of *A View From the Bridge* on a blank stage [in NYC 2015-16]. I saw it. But when you see it, that's his hand all over it and for me, sometimes it gets in the way because it gets in the way of the storytelling. I saw him do the Shakespeare tragedies at BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music], eight hours, and it was fabulous. But it was his show.

ST: Regarding the theatre industry here in NYC, what's changed over the years?

JG: The cost. It's killed Off-Broadway. It's not viable. Everything is too expensive. If you had moved to the city in the late 50's or early 60's you could make a living as an actor. It goes to living in the city, the rent. You could sell pajamas at Saks one-day-a-week or two, act the rest of the week and make enough money to live. The city wasn't inundated with actors. I think there are more and more actors coming into NYC thinking they're going to have careers because the theatre programs at universities have grown so much. You're coming with so many other people and that's changed the face of it.

ST: And that new graduate doesn't always realize that the parts they may have played in college they're not going to play in the city because there are age appropriate actors for the roles already here.

JG: That's true. And I also think the young actors have to be more prepared. When I first moved to the city I didn't know the trade magazines, what *Backstage* or *Showbiz* was. I knew what an audition was and stuff like that, but there was so much I didn't know that I had to learn on my own that kids today need to know to survive. I mean universities . . . it's a cash cow . . . all these MFA's . . .

ST: Students pursue MFA's because of the competition, to get a leg up . . .

JG: Yes, but not everybody's going to make it.

ST: You often are a guest artist and workshop presenter at colleges and the American College Theatre Festival. Tell me a bit about workshops that you present.

JG: I do a cold-reading workshop. It takes the kids from walking into the room to getting a job (hopefully) and everything in between. I have handouts for them and I do it different ways depending on the students. I try to have warm-ups that are fun for them and also for myself. I've done workshops for as many as eighty students (at KCACTF). Typically, I do these the first day before the opening ceremonies. The kids arrive and there's absolutely nothing for them to do and so they come to me. When I did it in Cleveland two years ago I was fortunate to have a massive room because I had eighty kids in each workshop. I did two. We have an exercise whereby they're at their high school reunion, running into everybody . . . we do it like speed-dating. Every thirty seconds they have to change to another person . . . and I give them certain things they have to ask. I task it so they have something to do, then BOOM, onto the next person. You have to teach them to think on their feet quickly and concretely in the moment, so you can make a decision and make a choice that is honest. They don't have to make the right choice, they just have to make a committed choice, a bold choice, because nobody's gets cast from a cold reading. All you want from a cold reading is a call-back. Then I do pre-arranged scenes or sometimes I give them post-cards from the MET and they create a scene. The idea is to create on your feet in a very short amount of time. And I do some things that lead up to it within the workshop. And we do a talk back. I did a couple of four hour workshops at SUNY-Brockport. One was for cold readings, auditioning and stuff and Part 2 was a monologue workshop where the students brought in prepared material and we're all going to view and work it and then approach it as a call-back and dealing with that. They're both audition workshops, but they run the gamut . . . how to mark a script for example, text analysis and a deeper exploration of acting.

I watched forty monologues the other night and I can't tell you how many people just stood there and said their monologue or people who just stood and sang. If you're singing a ballad I get that you may want to be still. But one of the best auditions I ever saw was Eddie Korbich, when he auditioned for *Chess*, it was being remounted off-Broadway . . . I was company manager which was fabulous. Tim Rice came in and all that. All these big people came in to audition. Eddie Korbich didn't get cast because he wasn't right for the role, but oh my God his audition was mind-blowing, just beautiful. And I said, "That's why he gets work. Holly Hannah!" He did everything in two-and-a-half minutes. These workshops I do are really acting workshops couched around the topic of auditioning. I should never have to say, "Speak up" or as Gary Austin always said, "Share your voice."

ST: An actor has to be heard and understood.

JG: Exactly.

ST: As we wrap up, what advice do you have for students that are still in college and for those about to pursue a career as an actor?

JG: If you're capable, learn as many skills as possible. Not everyone is an actor and a dancer and a singer, and a this and that. Another thing is if you work in the scene shop for example, (because you have to do time in the scene shop), and you enjoy the scene shop and the work, realize that there is no shame in being a scenic designer or a carpenter and that you have an opportunity while you're in school to try different things. Don't pigeon hole yourself and just say, "I'm an actor." Because the odds are, you're not . . . really . . . not to make someone feel bad, but the odds are you're just not going to be a professional actor because there just aren't that many roles. The other thing I would say is the actor needs to learn how to create their own work. Create your own work with your friends. The people who are successful . . . Circle Rep started with friends. The Manhattan Theatre Club, a powerhouse! Work

with your friends and create your own work. If you're not getting cast, create your own work. You are completely capable of finding your own space and developing your own work. Do it and do it often.

It's also important to learn the business of the business. If a student does it in college they'll save a lot of heartache. If you learn theatre management you'll always have a job. The more tools a student has in their tool kit, the more they'll work. Janice has acting skills. Janice has production skills. Janice has directing skills. Janice has writing skills. Janice has marketing skills and Janice has really good people skills which helps tremendously.

The other thing I'll say is . . . this is for anyone really, but actors have to work on themselves as a whole human being. An actor has to live in the world. He/She has to be an educated person. A dumb actor doesn't work. A smart actor and a brave actor work. If I'm directing you, I need you to bring something to the table. Don't come to me looking for everything. It's your job. That means you have to be well read and you have to keep up with current events. You have to be physically fit and you have to be aware of what's going in the world locally and globally. You have to be able to talk about things and draw upon things. You have to have a well from which to draw.

To learn more about the AND Theatre Company go to: <https://andtheatrecompany.org/>

To read an insightful article regarding *Rose Colored Glass* in "SF Breaking Character Magazine" go to: <https://www.breakingcharactermagazine.com/looking-back-creation-rose-colored-glass/>