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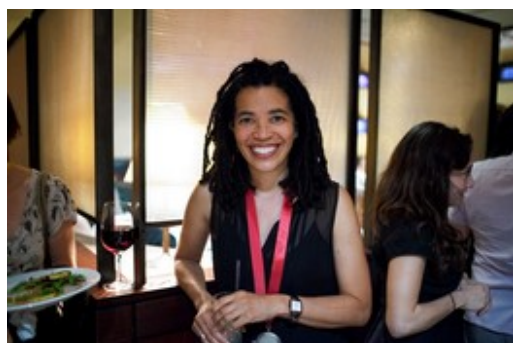
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Blooming in Late Spring

The Lillys Recognize the Work of Extraordinary Women in New York Theater

By MARSHALL HEYMAN

Four years ago, the playwrights Julia Jordan, Marsha Norman and Theresa Rebeck noticed that there were a lot of extraordinary women doing extraordinary things in the New York theater, yet many of them weren't being recognized by the organizations who give out awards around this time of year.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal
Actress and playwright Tanya Barfield.

"We got so angry," said Ms. Norman the other night. "And in the process of all these long, angry emails flurrying between us, we just said, 'We'll start our own awards.'"

So now, in the week leading up to the Tonys, Ms. Jordan, Ms. Norman and Ms. Rebeck give out what they call the Lillys, in honor of the playwright Lillian Hellman (1905-1984)

The choice of Hellman was a little random. "It could have been Claire Booth Luce," said Ms. Norman, the author of "Night Mother." But she had done an interview with Hellman years ago in which the author of "The Little Foxes" and "The Children's Hour" said, "You need to write like the devil and act like one when necessary."



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal
Actress Lois Smith

It seemed like an apt underlying message for the Lillys. So each year, the ladies gather onstage at the Playwrights Horizons theater on 42nd Street to bestow the awards. It is a casual affair—on Monday night there were a few babies softly wailing in the audience, and the attire was mostly flowy cotton dresses for the summertime—but one taken seriously, with, of course, an dash of humor.

"The tone has to be funny," said Ms. Rebeck, who serves as the evening's master of ceremonies.

The awards, which are determined "mysteriously, under the veil of secrecy," said Ms. Norman, are given relatively humorous names. This year, Jill DuBoff, a sound designer for such recent plays as the revival of "Picnic" at the Roundabout and

"Disgraced" at LCT3, received the "First Lilly Award Ever In Seriously Stunning Sound Design." Ms. DuBoff also happens to have a cat named after Dashiell Hammett, "so now Jill has a Dash and a Lilly," explained Ms. Rebeck.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal

Architect Denise Scott Brown with playwright Theresa Rebeck.

The "Welcome to the World Award in Playwriting" went to Laura Marks, the author of "Bethany," which went through 14 developmental readings before finally being produced, with the actress America Ferrera, this season at the Women's Project. "I wanted to write ever since I saw Snoopy at a typewriter," said Ms. Marks.

Tanya Barfield, the writer of this season's "The Call" received the "It's the Middle of Your Career, We Need More of Your Plays Award," not to mention a surprise commission of \$25,000 from the theater producer Stacey Mindich. There were, naturally, lots of tears at this one.

Jessica Hecht, an actress appearing in "The Assembled Parties" at the Manhattan Theater Club, received the "Lucille Ball/Greta Garbo Award in Acting." Ms. Hecht recalled that years ago Lynne Meadow, the artistic director of that theater, told her "I want to get you a great part." "Then three years went by, and I didn't hear anything," Ms. Hecht. "And you realize people don't always have control. But they don't say things in vain, they say things because they want things to happen."



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal

Marsha Norman presents playwright Laura Marks with an award at the annual Lilly Awards on Monday night.

There was a lot of talk like this among the honorees, who also included the actress Lois Smith, the philanthropist Mimi Kilgore (who founded the Blackburn Prize) and the playwright Paula Vogel—about being patient, about making constant revisions, about keeping the door open for other women to walk through. As in years past, the Lillys honored one man: Gary Garrison, the executive director for creative affairs of the Dramatists Guild. Much to his surprise, he was given a sash, some flowers and a tiara. And for the first time, they honored someone outside of the theater field: Denise Scott Brown, an architect who was refused the ability to share the Pritzker Prize awarded to her husband, Robert Venturi, even though

they did all of their work together.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal

Gary Garrison, executive director for creative

"The spirit is just marvelous here," said Ms. Scott Brown.

Creating that energy was part of the point of the Lillys, explained Ms. Jordan, as she headed over to the West Bank Café for the reception. "It's just so full of love and wonderful and joyous. I don't think there's anything like it."

"We needed three women to pull this together," explained Ms. Rebeck. "We needed to be like the three

affairs of the Dramatists Guild, holds his award.

witches from Macbeth. Julia is brainy. Marsha is the wise woman, and I'm the one who says, 'Somebody

hand me a light saber.'"

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