

### **Christa's experience with the "Reading" of Renae Angeroth's "Palace of the Fields."**

*As GIC began exploring theater as a tool for intercultural growth and learning, I was reminded of how effectively Renae Angeroth had modeled that very usage of theater through her efforts to write and produce her original musical *Palace of the Fields*. When I first received Rena's e-mail inviting me to participate in the reading of her musical "Palace of the Fields", I was intrigued. I had performed in plays before and I had sung in concerts before, but I had never participated in the production of a musical. I was honored but nervous about whether I could live up to her expectations and perfect the music in the short time frame she was projecting for rehearsals. The theme for the musical was a powerful draw for me, though, because it was about the intercultural dynamics that resulted in the outbreak of war in Bosnia. This performance proved to be a powerful experience for me. Through the work on this musical, I came to appreciate this large scale human tragedy on another level than what I ever could have achieved simply reading a history book. There was one carefully choreographed scene in our performance of the musical that will forever remain with me. For the musical each of us were wearing scarves representing the diverse cultures of the region. For this particular scene we were instructed to move across the stage grabbing the scarves of others -- symbolic of taking away their vitality. As we moved through the motions, I was overtaken by tears and my intercultural being was deeply distressed by the violence of this simple act of grabbing a scarf which I was driven by the script to enact. To this day, I continue to both reflect and feel the gravity of what we all are capable of enacting if we do not work effectively through intercultural dissonance and allow ourselves to be driven by destructive scripts. This experience further sharpened my resolve to deepen skills for navigating dissonance. I'm now on the lookout for dramatic works that illustrate how we can work through intercultural dissonance and craft more constructive scripts.*

### **Renae's motivations in writing and producing the musical "Palace of the Fields"**

*I loved the reading that we did. It felt very powerful to me as well and convinced me it was worthy of future performance. Still, I'm not sure the characters were developed as well as they could be, and I'm also not convinced the plot is strong. I also have some real reservations about telling a story that doesn't belong to me. It's based on stories I read by others but who am I to tell it? I've thought about how I might "fix" some of those things but I haven't acted on them yet. I do want to fix it though because I keep seeing/reading/hearing examples of intolerance, nationalism, and fear in our political rhetoric. When I was writing *Palace*, I noticed a lot of words and phrases being expressed in the former Yugoslavia were the same ideas used in Nazi Germany. Then I heard very familiar things said right after 9/11. And now I'm hearing and reading the exact same words said today.*

*So what can I do about it? My goal would be to present *Palace* to high school students. I think they still have open minds and haven't finally decided what the world should look like. I was listening to a pod cast that referenced the work of George Mason University Assistant Professor Thailia Goldstein. <https://psychology.gmu.edu/people/tgoldste>, If I understand it correctly, she posits that young people, particularly children, will develop stronger empathy for characters they portray in plays. As an extension of this theory, it's my own belief that if characters we don't know in real life can become alive to us, either in theater, the cinema, or in a novel, we will make a connection to the "stranger" or the "foreigner" in a way we have not previously. Through this medium, we can at least expose our young people to the beauty, richness, and depth of intercultural relationships and living. Maybe they will be curious enough or at least not frightened to make those connections in their own lives.*