



WORLD THEATRE DAY
INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE
U.S. CENTER OF ITI
OLGA GARAY-ENGLISH

Recently, Teresa Eyring, Executive Director of Theatre Communications Group, emailed that Helen Mirren would be penning the World Theatre Day Address for ITI worldwide. Later that same day, I watched Dael Orlandersmith and Neel Keller speak as part of TCG Books' First Friday Series about her latest published play – *Until the Flood*. I knew the minute I heard Dael's powerful story that I had found the core of this essay connecting seemingly unrelated events with a celebration of World Theatre Day.

You see, last year we lost two great people of the theater barely two weeks apart: my best friend, Diane Rodriguez, and my beloved husband, Dr. Kerry English.

Diane got her start at El Teatro Campesino in the early 70s, and through that formative experience, she traveled the world. She also met and befriended Helen. A couple of times a year, Diane would say, "Oh, I am meeting Helen for lunch this weekend" – so joyous and so real that she made breaking bread with Dame Helen Mirren sound like the most natural thing in the world. Upon Diane's death, Ms. Mirren wrote, "My brilliant friend, Diane Rodriguez. Funny, vibrant and so talented. A great leader and a passionate advocate. And also the best girlfriend to laugh and chat with. She was respected and very loved by many and will be terribly missed. She was better than most of us."

By day, my husband, Dr. Kerry English, was director of the pediatric division at Martin Luther King Hospital in Watts, Los Angeles, working with abused and foster kids. But at night, as his obituary in the L.A. Times chronicled, "He was the ultimate theater fan, a cultural omnivore who sometimes took in more than five shows in a week. He was a devoted audience member who became a reliable board member at theaters including [Rogue Machine](#), [Cornerstone Theater Company](#), [Ojai Playwrights Conference](#), and [24th Street Theater](#)."

His family comes from St. Louis, and that is where the connection to Dael's haunting piece fell into place.

Dael's *Until the Flood* examines community members' reactions after the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, St. Louis County, Missouri. Originally commissioned by the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, the play came to the Kirk Douglas Theatre in L.A. early in 2020. By that time, Kerry had already been diagnosed with ALS, yet he was present. He took his 21-year old grandson, Pharoah, to see Dael's work. Since he was a small child, Kerry would take Pharoah and his little friends to see theater wishing to impart the same kind of devotion to the artform that he cherished so much. Kerry came home that

night keen to talk about Dael's work and the relentless pain caused by racial injustice. You see, he not only cared about the theater but about redressing injustices; he practiced this commitment every day he went to work.

As a refugee to this country, having fled the Cuban revolution in 1961, I have come to believe in the absolute power of the arts to build community between often disparate peoples. Artists can create human connection and understanding in a way that politicians cannot. This revelation has made international cultural exchange and engagement a through-line in my long career. As a presenter, former funder, and tireless champion of international collaborations, I have been fortunate to have traveled the world to see theater - often inviting companies back to my community to share their work.

As Founding Program Director for the Arts at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, I had the privilege to collaborate with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to launch a theater initiative, which awarded more than \$40 million during the five-year effort and resulted in the creation of the acclaimed Under the Radar Festival in NYC. TCG housed part of the Duke/Mellon multi-pronged initiative as well.

Every other year, we would invite our Leading National Theatres grantees to a convening held during an international theater festival. This gave us access to festival leaders and artists who would meet with us during the day while offering us the opportunity to see their productions at night. It also messaged loud and clear that the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation prized international exchange and collaboration, antidotes to individual and cultural isolation.

In that spirit, I recently established the Dr. Kerry English International Arts Fund at TCG. But that gift pales next to the extraordinary rewards I received by being in the shadows of Kerry and Diane throughout the years when we were fortunate to have these two exceptional individuals on earth.

In 2014, Diane authored this very essay in celebration of World Theater Day. She wrote, "ACTivating a moment in a play is akin to ACTivating a moment in the struggle that is our life. There are victories and there are setbacks, and when the setbacks happen you are filled as a creator with ideas that take the setback and set it right."

During one of the most challenging years in memory, both for our global society and individual human beings, I invite you to be filled with ideas that take this unprecedented setback and set it right.



The **Global Theater Initiative (GTI)** was launched in February 2016 by Theatre Communications Group and the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics (the Lab), based in Washington, DC at Georgetown University. By combining the unique reach of TCG's international programming with the Lab's distinctive experience in humanizing global politics through the power of performance, GTI strengthens, nurtures, and promotes global citizenship and international collaboration in the U.S. professional and educational theatre field. It also honors and intersects with the work so many theatre colleagues have invested in cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Through the alignment of programming and resources, the GTI partners serve as a hub of global exchange with three core areas of focus: connecting practitioners with resources, knowledge, and partnerships to strengthen their work; promoting cultural collaboration as essential for international peace and mutual understanding; and innovating new strategies to maximize the global theatre field's opportunities and impact. GTI also serves as the collaborative leadership of the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI/U.S.).



International Theatre Institute (ITI) was formed in 1948, when the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) joined with world-renowned theatre experts to form an international non-governmental organization in the field of the performing arts. The mission of ITI is to "promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts in order to consolidate peace and friendship between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding and to increase creative cooperation between all people in the theatre arts." Today, ITI consists of approximately 90 Centers worldwide. An ITI Center is made up of professionals active in the theatre life of a country and representative of all branches of the performing arts. For more information, visit www.iti-worldwide.org.

• • • LABORATORY • • •
• • • FOR GLOBAL • • •
• • • PERFORMANCE & • • •
POLITICS • • •

The Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics harnesses the power of performance to humanize global politics. Since 2012, we have created and presented innovative, high-quality work from around the world that is at the intersection of politics and performance. The Lab's signature approach raises voices rarely heard in Washington, DC through compelling, authentic narratives, and engages policymakers, artists, and wider audiences in forums that cast critical issues in a new light. As a signature joint-initiative between the School of Foreign Service and the Georgetown College, The Lab is passionate about helping to train the next generation of innovators to use their artistry and voices to shape new understandings and to humanize others in pursuit of a better, more just world. In Spring 2019, The Lab launched CrossCurrents, a DC-wide biennial festival, that will feature dynamic, socially-engaged performances from around the world and will catalyze conversations around critical topics like the global refugee crisis, climate change, and the rise of hate and polarization. For more information, please visit: GlobalLab.Georgetown.edu or @TheLabGU.



Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for theatre, leads for a just and thriving theatre ecology. Since its founding in 1961, TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to over 700 Member Theatres and affiliate organizations and over 7,000 Individual Members. Through its programs and services, TCG reaches over one million students, audience members, and theatre professionals each year. TCG offers networking and knowledge-building opportunities through research, communications, and events, including the annual TCG National Conference, one of the largest nationwide gatherings of theatre people; awards grants and scholarships to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and through the Global Theater Initiative, TCG's partnership with the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute. TCG is North America's largest independent trade publisher of dramatic literature, with 18 Pulitzer Prizes for Drama on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning *American Theatre* magazine and *ARTSEARCH*®, the essential source for a career in the arts. TCG believes its vision of "a better world for theatre, and a better world because of theatre" can be achieved through individual and collective action, adaptive and responsive leadership, and equitable representation in all areas of practice. TCG is led by executive director and CEO Teresa Eyring and deputy director and COO Adrian Budhu. www.tcg.org.