

James Lane

The Stage Is Set: New Playwrights Get A Place To Hear Their Words

by JAMES LANE POST



James Lubetkin served in Vietnam. Dick Bruce got tired of what he was seeing on television. And Shelby Raebeck taught high school. All had stories to tell, so instead of complaining to friends at the bar, or sounding off on social media, they wrote plays.

And those three plays might be gathering “writer’s dust” in a drawer somewhere if it weren’t for a new series on LTV in East Hampton. “New Plays New Playwrights” is an on-the-nose title for an opportunity to turn printed pages into living, breathing table read productions. Actors reading the parts with lights, cameras, and action.

“LTV is a creative ‘black box’ for almost anything you can think of,” explained executive director Michael Clark. “The table read program is an excellent example of that.”

Would-be Edward Albees and Arthur Millers cast the roles, suggest wardrobe, rehearse all on their own. They come to the Industrial Avenue, Wainscott, “black box” ready to roll.

“LTV is a first rate studio,” said Bruce, a retired Wall Streeter living in Bridgehampton. “They have all the equipment and an extremely competent and friendly crew.” His two-act drama “Sometime Child” deals with racial tension and an inner-city savior.



“Sometime Child”

And get this. He used his LTV production and another at Guild Hall to convince golfing buddies to bankroll an off-Broadway run last March. “Taping a performance will give a playwright more than just a script to show supporters and venues. It lets you take the next step to live performances,” he said.

Lubetkin agrees. “Recording my play for broadcast proved extremely valuable,” the former PR guru from Amagansett said. His play “Long Binh” is a drama set in Vietnam during the late ’60s. It’s an experience he lived. Lubetkin’s character is communicating with a fiancée back home through cassette tape recordings and a 10-day time lag between missives. All before cellphones and email. His advice is write what you know. And like it. “Trust in yourself,” he said.



“Long Binh”

Ross School teacher Shelby Raebeck had also known colleagues like the protagonist in his one-man show “Freemont’s Farewell.” It deals with the meltdown of a private school professor who’s fired with two weeks’ notice and lets his students have it.

When asked if the precocious students are based on any he knows he smiles and says, “All of them.” His play was workshopped in a few other venues before landing at LTV. “It was about a three-year process to get here,” Raebeck revealed. And because it was a little further along in development, LTV was able to do a fully staged production — albeit in a simple classroom with a map, fern, and lectern. He even had a small audience, prior to pandemic shutdowns. Like Bruce and Lubetkin, he’s ready for the big time.

“It would be great to find an A-List actor who likes the play and do it as a fundraiser in the Hamptons.” He’s being modest. “Freemont’s Farewell” could easily go to Broadway with one of those A-Listers. Among the small audience at its LTV taping were a few show business executives who were impressed. In addition to airing on LTV in the East Hampton, links to the table reads can be used to market the scripts, and even posted on sites like YouTube.

All three “new playwrights” agree there’s nothing like seeing the printed page on stage. Clark says that’s what his facility is all about. “My job is to remove all the roadblocks and let everyone use this place.” Lubetkin admits the process exposes a play’s weakness as well as its strengths. But he’s upbeat. “‘Long Binh’ is still a work in progress, but if you’ve gotten this far, and you’re willing to acknowledge that you’ve still got work ahead of you, don’t give up. You’ll get there.”

Hey, the play’s the thing. And now there’s a place to stage it. What’s in your drawer?