

On Theatre for Youth and *Texting the Sun*...

by Matthew B. Zrebski

As a theatre practitioner, I am devout in my determination to balance my time between professional "adult" and youth/educational theatre. When a colleague asks me, "Wouldn't it be great if you could stop these teaching gigs?" ...or, "Don't you hate writing a play and directing for young audiences?"...my response is always a firm, "Not at all!" I will always seek out opportunities to work with young people. It is a sacred part of my personal mission. *Sacred.*

Arts education and exposure is critical to the development of a thoughtful society, and it is often through the arts that young people develop their most valuable standards of conduct as well as a nuanced view of the world around them. And as theatre often provides a large tent where under people of various stripes may commune - the theatre arts often serve to save young outcasts from a downward spiral. The number of kids I have seen find their voice - find their esteem - find their passion through theatre...well, they number too many to count. But I'm not speaking only of those who actively participate in theatre...but also of those who simply learn to love being in the audience. That young people have the opportunity to be touched by theatre in some way along their journey is everything. And this fills me with great purpose.

As a playwright, staying in touch with the "young voice" is thrilling. It forces me to observe with the most thoughtful eyes and ears the world of the younger generations. And if I can capture that world - capture the concerns, conflicts, desires, and love of youth through a play - and in turn help expose audiences to that world - I have really accomplished something. I can't think of anything more exciting...and maybe more important.

Being asked to write *Texting the Sun* has been a huge responsibility - and a perfect example of this. In paying close attention to what thirteen and fourteen year olds are writing and talking about...in interviewing teachers and counselors of adolescents...in studying the many facets of efforts to make people more media literate...I hope to have accomplished a theatrical work that never preaches, never patronizes, but always begs us to take a closer look at what is happening around us. This new century is full of new complexities and chaos - and young and old alike must learn to navigate through the storm...