

Kate Mueth Channels Change and Love Through Her Plays  
By Isabella Petrecca

From the edge of the room—which actually resembles a carpeted courtroom with light blue padded benches on either side—I can see four students standing together in long black skirts. They move their hands about in erratic ways while a man in a flat brim hat faces them from a few feet away, motioning smoothly and yelling in a language that rings like German.

Slowly roaming around the actors, Kate Mueth circles the scene, observing and nodding along until the chanting suddenly stops. I've been observing the rehearsal of *Hysteria*, a Neo-Political Cowgirl production, for about 20 minutes now, slightly hiding as I was afraid to disrupt the magic. However, Mueth notices me silently sitting on the edge and immediately makes a bee-line.

She greets me with a warm apology for not noticing me sooner—an unnecessary gesture so sweet that it gives the sensation of a cavity—and follows it up right after with an even warmer hug. As the writer and director of the play rehearsal I just disrupted, Mueth surprises me with her friendly and welcoming aura. She brings me to sit directly in the middle of the action, which at this point feels almost sacrilegious, but her comforting energy coaxes me to comply. I settle into the cushion as if I am part of the crew.

The room, decorated in paintings of powerful-looking men, lies dormant as the energy of the female-centric play fills every crevice—right up to the painted noses in the frames.

Lifting the voices of women is the main theme and mission of Mueth's theater company, Neo-Political Cowgirl.

“I made my company so that I could tell the stories I want to tell” says Mueth, “and I wanted to be able to make work for other women in the theater.”

As Mueth was studying and working as an actress in New York, the lack of inspired roles for women became abundantly clear to her.

“For me, it was a realization of; if I kept going in the industry like this, I would feel very unsatisfied,” she says. “ Even if you're getting the jobs.”

Kate Mueth wanted more out of her love affair with the arts. This passion for creating the spaces she desired to see and share traces back to when she was just a little girl.

“She would make dances for her friends in the neighborhood in her basement,” says her husband, Josh Gladstone, “She's had this in her her whole life.”

Having fun in her basement grew into a life mission when she was studying and acting in New York.

“Even back in drama school at Circle in the Square Theater, Kate had a special thought that she wanted to make work by and for women,” says Gladstone.

Gladstone reminisces fondly about their time in drama school. He remembers discovering that Kate was spearheading an all-female project on the side during her time there. Once they got married and moved to East Hampton, Mueth became a dedicated mother to their son, August. However, as he grew up and the duties of motherhood toned down, the desire to act and perform meaningful work resurfaced.

“I knew if I stayed in that, I wouldn't be feeling happy,” she says, “I had a child who needed to see that I was happy, if I wanted *him* to be happy.”

She realized what she needed to do—make room for herself outside of the regular, cold world of acting. And she did just that.

“I knew I had to take myself out of that paradigm and do my part to change that paradigm,” she said, “Even if it was a blip on the map of change.”

She created Neo-Political Cowgirl, a theater production company, to carve a space for women to have impactful, meaningful roles in their acting careers.

Female empowerment and strength center Mueth's life and, more specifically, her theater company.

“[Our first piece] was a piece called Wody Girtch Mama and it stands for woman lady girl bitch mama,” she says smiling. “ And it was just 17 dances about the full spectrum of being a woman.”

Mueth writes and directs all the productions of Neo-Political Cowgirl. Her pieces tend to stem from a yearning to combat the status quo and stereotypes within the industry and the world. They center on voices of women and usually exist as metaphors for bigger picture ideas about society, power, and injustice. She speaks with love about her curations, and goes on to explain to me how she uses folklore, history, and various cultures to create moving shows weaved with movement and language.

“I just think that when we hold spaces for stories to bravely be human we perhaps as audiences and as a society are moved to better understand ourselves,” she says. “And when we better understand ourselves, we have more compassion for others.”

Hysteria, the show that they are currently rehearsing, is a woven-together story of four real life women who were diagnosed with hysteria. This old medical diagnosis was an umbrella term for an array of ‘symptoms’ such as anxiety, insomnia, and fainting as well as some as ordinary as sexual desire, big appetite, or irritability. The women diagnosed were often treated as mentally ill, locked away, silenced, gaslit and in most cases driven to madness. Hysteria is no longer recognized as an illness, but the women affected in the past as well as the lasting effects within our culture take center stage in this play.

“It’s dependent on us as women in this world to work together in collaboration in order to end the virus that is society,” she says seriously.

Her passion for evoking change and love within the world rings loudly through her work and directing. Her use of art, emotion, and rhythm can be felt through her speaking voice. She translates this creative soul into shows that help, soothe, and educate.

“It’s very much a core mission for me to engage as deeply and richly as I can with [...] the people who need it—marginalized people who need to feel that energy of possibility for themselves,” said Mueth, “because I’m not doing anything that anyone else couldn’t.”

Mueth sings aloud for a group of actors to take five. In the meantime, she’s giving tips and talking out scenes with those who remain.

“You can’t take part in the thing that you want to change” she notes.

Kate calls for a last talk to close up the rehearsal. It’s 10:30pm and, as it’s only two days until showtime, most of the crew have been working since noon. Everyone cuddles up and lounges in a circle on the floor, Mueth among them.

She thanks the crew for not only their efforts, but also their respect. The latter is endearing, and it becomes abundantly clear through Mueth’s sincerity and affability that all of this—the play, the crew, Neo-Political Cowgirl—are all extensions of herself and her will to make an impact.

“This isn’t the Kate Mueth show, this is our show,” she says, ensuring that she looks each and every actor and crew member in the eye.

Kate Meuth is only getting started. Her shows are beginning to travel to places like Finland, Berlin, Long Island and, in this case, Boston.

Her pigtail braids flick as she looks around the room of the buzzing cast and crew reverently. “I feel like I need 12 more lifetimes before I make a difference,” she says.