

Women Count!

The Call for Equal Representation

In the spirit of equal representation, we the undersigned - women theatre artists and their supporters - call upon all theatres in the United States to produce plays that reflect the diversity of our society, especially plays by women of all colors, and to hire more women directors, with the goal that an average of half the plays produced in any given season be written by women, half directed by women.

Background

The Call for Equal Representation was developed by Women Count, a group of theatre artists who gathered at New Dramatists in New York in response to a report on the status of women in theatre released in January 2002 by the New York State Council on the Arts. This document, *Report on The Status of Women: A Limited Engagement?* by Susan Jonas & Suzanne Bennett, showed that out of almost 2000 plays produced in U.S. non-profit theatres during 2001-02, **only 17%** were written by women, and **only 16%** were directed by women. Women of color wrote **only 2.5%** of plays produced and directed **fewer than 1%**.

The Call for Equal Representation is designed to draw attention to this under-representation of women in America's theatres, a situation that bars women from employment and denies audiences access to the richly varied imaginings of women playwrights and directors. By issuing this call and gathering signatures, the members of Women Count plan to demonstrate to theatre managers that there is widespread concern about this issue. Women Count will issue statements to the press as support for the call grows.

Sign the Call by Mail, Fax or Online!

The Fund for Women Artists, a non-profit arts service organization dedicated to women in theatre, film, and video, has agreed to collect the signatures for *The Call for Equal Representation*. You can sign the call by filling in the bottom of this form and mailing or faxing it. You can also sign the call online, by going to The Fund for Women Artists' home page at www.womenarts.org, and clicking on the menu item that says "Women Count - Sign the Call." You can obtain copies of this form by downloading it from the website or by contacting The Fund for Women Artists. Please be sure to fill in your city and state in addition to your name, so that Women Count can demonstrate that there is support for the call from all over the country. Please give your street or email address if you would like to receive updates from Women Count.

I Support The Call for Equal Representation!

Name (Required): _____
City, State (Required): _____
You may list me as a supporter of the call in press releases or on the web. Yes No
Street Address (Optional): _____
Email Address (Optional): _____
Comments (Optional): _____

Please Mail This Form To:

THE FUND FOR WOMEN ARTISTS, P.O. BOX 60637, FLORENCE, MA 01062
Phone: (413) 585-5968 Fax: (413) 586-1303 Email: info@womenarts.org
Website: www.womenarts.org

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why have you established a goal of 50% women playwrights and 50% women directors?

Since women are half of the population, they should have access to half the jobs in all the professions, including theatre. Activists in other fields have been working towards this goal for decades, and women in theatre are lagging behind women in law, business, medicine, and academe. Although we realize it will take time to achieve full equality, it is the only long-term goal that makes sense.

Also, if we are to understand the world around us, we need the arts to reflect all of human experience, including women's stories. As a society we urgently need to find ways to overcome barriers based on gender, race, class, and other factors, and artists can play a powerful role in that process. It is therefore more important than ever to ensure that all of our cultural institutions accurately reflect our diverse society.

2. Is there an audience for plays by women?

When given the opportunity to see women's work, audiences respond enthusiastically. We learned from the NYSCA Report that in the past three years Yasmina Reza's *Art*, Margaret Edson's *Wit*, and Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* have been among the most successful plays produced in U.S. regional theatres and Suzan-Lori Parks won the Pulitzer for *Top Dog/Underdog*. Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* is a phenomenal success worldwide. Since over 50% of those attending the theatre are women, there is a built-in audience for plays that reflect women's lives and perspectives.

3. Do women in theatre face more obstacles than men?

In difficult economic times, it is harder for any new playwright to get produced. But gender bias can make matters worse: As the NYSCA Report reminds us, stories about women may be seen as specific to women, rather than "universal." And, despite the great variety of plays written by women, people have assumptions about the quality, content, and form of these works. This bias is often unconscious rather than articulated, but the result is the same – women experience discrimination. There are preeminent organizations that are models for another approach: New Dramatists, where this initiative was launched, has a membership that is 50% women, selected through a competitive process. We are asking theatres to use excellence rather than gender bias when choosing plays. We are not calling for the establishment of quotas. Rather, we are asking for the elimination of gender bias so that the full spectrum of excellence can be enjoyed.

4. What can I do to help besides signing *The Call for Equal Representation*?

- **Contribute to Women Count by Check or Online:** You can help underwrite the publicity and staffing expenses of this effort by making a tax-deductible contribution through The Fund for Women Artists. To contribute by check, please make your check payable to **THE FUND FOR WOMEN ARTISTS**, write **Women Count** in the memo section, and mail your gift to the address below. You can make credit card donations online, by clicking on the **Contribute** button on any page of The Fund for Women Artists' website at www.womenarts.org.
- **Spread the Word:** Since we want to gather widespread support for *The Call for Equal Representation*, please tell your friends and colleagues about the call and encourage them to sign. Many who work outside the theatre have no idea that such under-representation exists and we need their support.
- **Support Theatres that Support Women Artists:** It is extremely important to encourage the theatre companies that are producing plays with women playwrights and directors. When you see those plays advertised, make it a point to buy tickets, write supportive letters to the theatre managers, and make financial contributions as generously as you can.

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Website: www.womenarts.org

Women Count Steering Committee: Sarah Browning (co-chair), Thea Douglas (co-chair), Mia Chung, Honour Kane, Maxine Kern, Todd London, Martha Richards, & Dominic Taylor.

Additional Women Count Founding Members: Marcy Arlin, Jessica Bauman, Christie Brown, Mallory Catlett, Cindy Cooper, Miriam Eusebio, Olga Humphrey, Zoya Kachadurian, Donna Kaz, Tricia McDermott, Mindy Pfeffer, & Robin Rothstein.