

Transformative Theater

An Interview with
Daryl Roth, Daryl Roth Productions



Daryl Roth

EDITORS' NOTE Daryl Roth is a theatrical producer working in New York who is proud to hold the singular distinction of producing seven Pulitzer Prize-winning plays: *Anna in the Tropics*; *August: Osage County* (2008 Tony); *Clybourne Park* (2012 Tony); *Paula Vogel's How I Learned to Drive*; *Proof* (2001 Tony); *Edward Albee's Three Tall Women*; and *Wit*. The proud recipient of 10 Tony Awards and London's Olivier Award, her over 100 award-winning productions both on and off Broadway include: *The Tony and Olivier Award winning Kinky Boots* (Broadway, U.S. Tour, London, Toronto, Australia, Korea, Japan); *Bea Arthur on Broadway*; *Buyer & Cellar*; *A Catered Affair*; *Caroline, or Change*; *Closer Than Ever*; *Curtains*; *A Delicate Balance*;

Edward Albee's The Goat or Who is Sylvia (2002 Tony); *The Humans* (2016 Tony); *It Shoulda Been You*; *Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron's Love, Loss, and What I Wore*; *The Normal Heart* (2011 Tony); *A Raisin in the Sun* (2014 Tony Award); *Shuffle Along*; *Sylvia*; *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*; *Twilight*: Los Angeles, 1992; *A View from the Bridge* (2016 Tony); *War Horse* (2011 Tony); *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; *Wiesenthal*; and *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Roth is an Honorary Trustee of Lincoln Center Theatre and was twice included in Crain's "100 Most Influential Women in Business." Recent honors include, *New York Living Landmarks*; *Order of the Golden Sphinx from Harvard Hasty Pudding*; *Albert Einstein College of Medicine Humanitarian Award*; *Broadway Association Visionary Leader Award*; *Family Equality Council Award*; *Live Out Loud Humanitarian Award*; and the *Lucille Lortel Lifetime Achievement Award*. Upcoming shows for Spring 2017 include *Groundhog Day*; *Hello, Dolly*; *Indecent*; *Present Laughter*; and *Sunset Boulevard*.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Daryl Roth Productions (darylrothproductions.com; DRP) has produced more than 100 Broadway and off-Broadway plays and musicals since its first production in 1988. The Daryl Roth Theatre, which opened in 1996 in the landmarked former Union Square Savings Bank, is home to the 299-seat main stage; the DR2, an intimate 99-seat theater that welcomes new plays as well as programming for young audiences; and the D-Lounge, an intimate cabaret space.

How strong is Broadway today?

I've been producing for almost 30 years. I feel there is happily much more diversity now on Broadway and off-Broadway stages. As a producer, I try to represent the real world. I've been mindful of the fact that our audience is incredibly diverse in terms of gender, race, religion, age, and sexual orientation, and I hope the work I present reflects that variety and diversity.

Do the smaller shows get the respect they deserve?

Smaller shows have the respect of the community in the sense that really fine work is being done and acknowledged, both in the nonprofit theaters as well as in commercial theaters.

Where smaller shows have a bigger hurdle to cross is in attracting tourists to see something playing off-Broadway. It's understandable that they come to New York with Broadway in mind, but off-Broadway offers a more local gift, although they are both great experiences. Sometimes, one finds the small show that runs long enough and gets the press and word of mouth to make it more visible, and then we do get a larger audience. Often the best venue for viewing a more intimate story is Off-Broadway or in the not-for-profit theatres.

Is theater about more than entertaining in that it touches on life's issues?

Completely, and I'm a producer who does look for plays with messages and meaning that can inspire people to open their minds. *Kinky Boots* is the perfect example. Like the song says, "You change the world when you change your mind."

I am privileged to be in a position to be putting shows out into the world that I believe are valuable in how we hold a mirror up to society, and hope that the audiences agree.

I try to choose works that speak deeply to me and may resonate for others – plays and musicals that have a story that one can think about intellectually, yet feel emotionally. Hopefully, a person walks into the theater in one frame of mind and leaves in another. That is the beauty of theater – it's transformative. It can also activate people to do something about an issue that may have been raised in a play they experienced. I witnessed that with my production of *The Normal Heart*, which inspired a younger generation first learning of the history and legacy of the AIDS crisis to get involved in efforts to help.

What interested you about *Indecent* and what are your hopes for what the show will do?

Indecent is a play that is about the passion people have to create art. It's based on a Yiddish play called *God of Vengeance*, which was done all over Europe to great acclaim. Playwright Paula Vogel and Director Rebecca Taichman together developed *Indecent* based on the journey of *God of Vengeance*.

In the words of Rebecca, "Via the passage of one play through the decades, *Indecent* at its heart is a celebration of the power of theatre and art making. I hope people find in *Indecent* a story about very pure love that struggles to survive in a corrupt and dangerous world. Ultimately, the play wants to say that love survives and can triumph, but must be fought for and held sacred."

I saw the play when it was done at the Vineyard Theatre, and I knew it had to have a larger life and a way for more people to see it, and I wanted to make that happen.

It speaks to all of the things that it takes to make art: tenacity, dedication, passion, truthfulness, and love. This play is dedicated to all those people who feel strongly about what they do.

How do you define the market for the play?

For *Indecent*, it's the regular playgoer, as well as a Jewish audience interested in this beautiful piece of history, and anyone who yearns for a good, well-told story.

Kinky Boots, for example, was appealing to those who love a big beautiful musical with a lot of heart and glitter and glam. What we were pleasantly surprised to find is that parents were seeing the show and wanted to bring their children or their parents, and it became a cross-generational experience. It's a message about accepting one's self and accepting others, which young people need to hear.

Is Broadway truly where a lot of stars hone their craft?

Many stars that come to Broadway from TV and movies started their careers in theater, and often come back to the stage because it is their first love, and they are most welcome.

Indeed, our love of theatre is what brings us together as a community to enable us to have creative conversations, and with the stories we choose to tell, entertain, educate, move us, and hopefully help make a better world. ●