

Director's Note: A Queering of the Can(y)on

*Sticks and stones are from the earth and words were planted later.*

When I first read *Men On Boats* I was intrigued by the challenge of how to craft four boats onstage, full of adventurers careening down the waterfalls of the Colorado River. I considered how to create a world which exists entirely in nature and embodies the rugged strenuous existence of the 1869 Powell expedition, all for a contemporary blackbox theater.

We have staged this journey primarily with sticks and stones. Through a combination of improvisation and composition, performers create story and environment by working with objects, sound, and movement. This creative process is an invitation to the imagination of performer and audience.

*Men on Boats* lives in the historical context of post Civil War, Manifest Destiny Expansion, popular interest in newness and the unknown, and the compulsion to explore, and name, the frontier, even as it was already inhabited by Indigenous people. This play offers social commentary about these ideas, as well as an opportunity for ten actors to embody the challenges and camaraderie of adventure in the “American West.”

Consider the impact on both actors and audience. Is *Men On Boats* a queering of the canon? What does it mean for female/non-binary/trans actors to embody these historical male adventurers in the 1869 White American exploration of the Grand Canyon? Does this casting provide the audience with an expanded understanding of the identities of the actors, and does our understanding of history change through this casting? What role does humor play in the reinterpretation of history and the expansion of our human spirit? And, is this creative process, and the building of a world with sticks and stones, also a potential queering of theatrical tradition and audience expectation?

I would like to extend special thanks to Toby Vera Bercovici, all the designers and stage management, and the cast of this show for all their collaborative creativity.

—Eliza Ladd Schwarz