

# Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow! Interview with Maria Alexandria Beech

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*[Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow!](#) is a podcast series featuring some of the most exciting women artists working in the theatre today. Anne Hamilton is the producer and host. You may listen to the podcasts and read the transcripts at <http://hamiltondramaturgystheatrenow.com>*



Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow!  
Interview with Maria Alexandria Beech, Playwright, Bookwriter and Lyricist  
(Season 3, Episode 4, Recorded July 10, 2012)

## Part 1

**Anne Hamilton:** Welcome to Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow! This is a podcast series featuring some of the most exciting female artists working in the theatre today. I'm your host, Anne Hamilton. Today our guest is Maria Alexandria Beech.

Maria Alexandria Beech is a playwright and librettist living in New York. She has written over fifteen full-length plays, several as a member of the Dorothy Strelsin New American Writers Group at Primary Stages Theatre, which co-produced her play *LITTLE MONSTERS* at Brandeis Theatre Company. Her full-length musical titled *CLASS*, with Karl Michael Johnson, was presented in a reading in May, 2012 at NYU. Welcome, Alex.

**Maria Alexandria Beech:** Thanks, Anne.

AH: Alex, tell us about your latest degree. You've just gotten another MFA, this time from NYU.

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MB: It's an MFA in musical theatre writing. It was a true honor. It's an opportunity that I had a couple of years ago, to go and learn how to write musicals there. It was a really huge honor and an effort to learn how to write musicals. One would think that writing a musical and writing a play are similar processes but in fact they're not. They each require their own craft and their own knowledge base. So yeah, I just spent the last two years. I have an MFA in Playwriting from Columbia and I now have this MFA from NYU.

AH: That's wonderful. Can you tell us what CLASS is about?

MB: CLASS is based on a play that I wrote in the writers group at Primary Stages, and it's about a girl who is struggling with alcoholism and she signs up for a summer school class. She's had to drop ethics, and she signs up for a summer school class at a university in New Orleans in 1987. And as are many classes in New Orleans in the summer, the class is comprised of both overachievers and underachievers; wealthy kids who are there because one of them needs the credits to graduate and another one is about to be kicked out of her sorority. And, and then the class also has a couple of minority kids that are A students, and they're there to get ahead. One of them is applying for Fulbright.

MB: And so this girl walks into the situation, and the professor has recently learned that she doesn't have much longer to live. And I actually think, Anne, that you're familiar with the play because we worked dramaturgically together on it a few years ago. But the professor doesn't have much longer to live and then this girl has to navigate between these students, [and figure out] how to sort of not only get into some sort of recovery for her alcoholism - which the professor ends up helping her to do - but also how to deal with this nefarious spirit that sets in once the kids who are not doing well figure out that the professor is very sick and [figure out] how they can use her illness to try to get an A out of the situation.

MB: It was a real challenge to adapt as a musical, in the sense that it is very much a play as it exists. But it's an ideas play and an academic play and one of the things that I had always fantasized about with this play was how it could exist without the information, the academic stuff, and more as an exploration of the dynamics of all of these different classes and all these different ethnicities. And to that end, I'm really excited because it was an homage not only to a professor that I had, who was dying of cancer and who had to face students who wanted to use her illness against her, but it was an homage to professors and teachers I had had growing up who had dedicated their lives to education at a time when Americans and the US still believed that if you wanted to make a difference in the world, you should go into education and become teachers.

MB: I believe the ethos now is more of a mentality of going into and working at NGO's and whatnot. But there was still a time when really, really, great, great people chose education as a path. And of course, many still do, but there was a mentality that if you went and you taught at a university, you could really make a difference. And, I was highly influenced by that, by true heroes growing up and, the people who had given their lives over to teach kids. And so these two professors come in from the Boston area and they come in to New Orleans to teach this class and, and the, and then a lot of stuff happens.

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AH: What is the "I Want" song?

MB: Oh, gosh! That is so funny, because I come from a school that sort of discourages that formulaic kind of musical theatre writing. But I would say that the "I Want" song is when the professor sings a song reminding her husband that you can change the world if you change one person's mind. And it's about going into the trenches of a southern school that has a lot of wealth and figuring out how to change one kid so that he or she views the world through a different lens. And so I would say that that's the "I Want" song that professor reminds her husband [about]. Obviously, he doesn't want her to teach that summer class because he wants them to enjoy her last few months together. And she says, "I really want to do this as my last act, you know, it's her Swan Song. So her "I Want" song is 'I want to do this last very important thing before I go.'"

AH: Sounds wonderful.

MB: Thank you.

AH: So Alex, when you were growing up, what type of activities did you take part in, artistically?

MB: That's such a funny question and having grown up as a biracial kid - my mother's Venezuelan and my father is North American from Alabama - Having grown up in a biracial community in Venezuela, in a little town, it was a little oil town in Venezuela -- it's interesting, the sort of artistic little activities that my mom signed me up for. I mean, I did the whole ballet thing and I was thinking this morning about children and their bodies and how when my mother signed me up for ballet, I was this chubby kid, and so I was, at a very, very, very early age, very uncomfortable in my body.

And so I think that that disjunction, sort of prepared me for looking at the world a little bit differently, particularly art, how to approach art. Not only because I was bullied and teased. And obviously, I guess as many chubby kids are and heavy kids are, I would later become much heavier, but, but also because you're constantly... You're uncomfortable. Your existence is uncomfortable and so that means that you think a lot. I mean certainly, when kids were outside playing, I was often inside thinking or reading, and so ballet did not work out for me. [Chuckle] MB: And I didn't like the tediousness of piano practice. The instrument I was interested in as a kid was a guitar because I liked the portability of it. I mean if I had the money to do this or the wherewithal to do it, I would love to distribute guitars across every public school in the US, you know, and anywhere else where they could reach. Because kids fall in love with the guitar very easily, it's an easy instrument to learn, there's a humongous, humongous, repertory of guitar music that's really fun and so I really liked that instrument growing up.

My father had a rodeo when he was young, here in the US, and then he also worked for a while in the circus. And so, we kind of grew up with this kind of magical notion of, of performance and of looking at the world through a non-traditional lens. Certainly, even going to a Catholic mass when you're seven years old in this starched little dress in this little town,

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is kind of an artistic experience in a way. So, I would say my father had a huge influence on me and then, as a child traveling to Mexico and seeing a performance at El Palacio de Bellas Artes...you know, Mexico, their folklore, their arts, is both traditionally fascinating and also its contemporary work is mind-blowing and [it's] also one of my passions, more on the scholarly level, but also as a translator.

And then I would spend my summers in Texas and I remember seeing ANNIE GET YOUR GUN as a kid and being kind of floored by the possibilities of theatre even then. I think that when you grow up in a small South American town where there's so much, magical realism, very much as just a part of life, that you just learn to think differently about life. When you have a mother who's saying, you know, "Go and pray to Saint So-and-so," and clearly, Saint So-and-so was not Aunt So-and-so and you can't see this being that you're being sent to pray to, it sets up your imagination in this kind of wonderful way. And so, really early on, I was interested in anthropomorphizing animals, in writing things down, different things, in looking at the world in a funny way or in a tragic way, but um, but also always trying to understand the framework. And then I kept little notebooks. When I was 10 or 11, I read this kind of little autobiographical story, I think by Joan Didion, and she talked about how she kept notebooks and so at a really early age, I went out and bought little notebooks and started writing everything down as a way of preparing myself to be a writer, which was pretty funny.

AH: When did you decide you'd like to be a writer?

MB: I think really early on, and I thought I would be writing books. I don't know if I was 10 yet, but my father became very, very sick. He had an illness. He had heart disease which would eventually kill him when I was a girl. But at the time, I remember walking around with these tiny little notebooks and writing everything down because I wanted to be a writer. You know, I was raised by a mother who doesn't speak English. I certainly grew up in a bilingual community, but I wrote everything down in English. It was almost my secret little language that I could keep on my own and certainly slang which I spoke with my father who was my best friend. It was something, my relationship to paper was always very important to me.

The first school I went to was in Louisiana and I didn't always relate entirely to everyone around me. When you have a parent dying at home, it's difficult to sort of communicate to the world what that's about or how that feels. So, in some ways, writing helped me organize my inner world, helped me organize my thoughts, and it also helped me organize my imagination. As a kid I always fantasized that I would own a bike that I would be able to fold up and put in my pocket and carry it around in my pocket. And one of the greatest kind of moments was when I was able to write that down and put that in a framework of a short story and turn it into a teacher that I had a very contentious relationship with. He was my AP English teacher. And I remember I was in boarding school in Massachusetts at the time and he walked over to my dorm and he said, "Once in a while when I really like something, I ask permission of the student if I can file it away and keep it forever, and this one is one that I want to keep forever." And, you know, it was really beautiful because I think it was the first time that I thought that my imagination or what I had to write had any sort of value or anything that had any meaning for anybody else, and what I had considered very much a part of my inner life, which is this little bicycle that I would one day own, which by the way I,

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right now, I own a fold-up red bike that doesn't fit in my pocket, but it fits in this tiny little space in my apartment, which is very cool. But it was the first time that some strange little thought I had could actually translate into something that would mean something to someone. That was pretty special and amazing.

Also, my father had the world record for a time. I don't know if anyone's ever broken it, but he put up the world's tallest Christmas tree in 1954 and he was in Guinness and in Ripley's Believe It or Not. And so I think that [I had] this narrative at home of someone who sort of did his own thing and was able to carry forth and execute a lot of ideas that other people wouldn't have even thought of. I don't think that I ever imagined, or conceived that I'd have to march to the same beat as everyone else or that I would have to take the same path as everyone else because certainly my father hadn't.

AH: And how did your artistic process develop from all the thoughts you were having?

MB: Well, I'm a big believer in writing with a group, in a group process. When I was a teenager, I edited this kind of fairly large newspaper. I co-edited it in Massachusetts. [It was] the newspaper that my school published. But it had, it had many, many, many readers and I had to go once a week to Amherst and Northampton to sort of set it up. That's when I first learned to write for a public. And then from there, like I said, I had this kind of very problematic relationship with my body, with food, with exercise. From a really early age, I started using food as a sort of survival mechanism for a bunch of stuff that was happening around me. So by the time that I started getting better from that, I was around 17.

And I think some artists have this, where you look at your life and you say, "If I choose path B, which will please my parents and it will please the neighbors, I will likely have to kill myself to achieve this. If I choose path A, it will feel normal and I'll be able to take care of myself in the process". And for me, the primary thing I wanted to do at that point was write. And so I chose to do the one thing I could do and know that I wasn't going to relapse into my eating disorder. And so, I did that, even though, through doing it, I would later often relapse. To me, it's almost like akin to breathing, it's almost akin to the basics, that, that, writing is something that I absolutely have to do.

And I started by writing a short story fiction, and then I started to write a book. And then, I met Cristina Garcia's parents in North Carolina and told them that I wanted to be a novelist and so then they forced me to reapply to Columbia. I had applied to NYU and Columbia earlier in my life, gotten in, and just in my recovery process, I couldn't make the leap up to New York. So, I ended up in, I ended up in New York and then Columbia knew I had this relationship with them and eventually I ended up at a workshop in Taxco, Mexico with Irene Fornés, Cristina Garcia, and a whole bunch of other writers. It was a Latin American and Mexican writers' exchange. And everyone was kind of scared of Irene Fornés a little bit because she was such a big playwright and I had no idea who she was, and her bedroom was next to mine in our hotel.

So, people treated her with a lot of reverence. Certainly, Tanya Saracho was there, and I think Tanya might remember that her professor at Northeastern had said that she would get an A in

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her class if she was able to have one conversation with [Irene Fornés]. I didn't know who [Irene] was so I went drinking with her every night. We just drank tequila and had a great time, and so by the time that the workshop started, Irene said, "I think you should forget your fiction workshop with Cristina and take my playwriting workshop." And being an impulsive person, sometimes for the wiser and sometimes not, I said "Okay". And it turned out to be a really beautiful, beautiful experience actually because it was the first time that I understood what playwriting meant and, what the approach to dialogue and to writing a scene meant.

And before, I had always written from the outside in, and certainly, with Irene, I learned how to become the character and how to join the other characters in the present tense in the context that I set up. So, after that, I don't think I ever stopped being a playwright because I just got it. I got what I was supposed to do. And so, when I came back to New York I came for orientation, I changed my whole, sort of, life project and I continued writing plays. A lot of bad stuff, initially because I was still kind of writing with that other part of your brain that you initially write with. And then, slowly, I started to go deeper, and deeper, and deeper into understanding more and more and more what the process entails.

You know, that's why I always say two things. One is, if you feel like you have a play in you, write it. If you feel like you have playwriting in you, do it because you probably do and it takes a very, very, very long time to really master the craft of it. There are so many people along the way that will say, "This isn't good, this isn't good, this isn't good..." And they're probably right but eventually, what will happen - I think that it certainly happened with me - is that, once you truly become possessed by your characters and you let them inhabit you and you are writing as those people, something very magical will happen.

And my process is very similar to a process I recently heard Edward Albee describe which is that, he sits around and waits. He kind of develops a notion of what people inside him, what these different characters, have to say to each other and then he just kind of writes it down and that has to be there, and that is certainly the case for me. You know, you can't tell me, "Well, go and write a story about Joe and Bob at the store" if I don't figure out what Joe and Bob have to say to each other. And then I start writing it down. What they have to say to each other feels very removed from anything that I could devise or invent that they should say to each other, so I'd say cognitively, it feels like a very different process than fiction writing or any other form of writing.

AH: It sounds like you use your intuition quite a lot.

MB: You mean, when it comes to writing. I like to wait, first of all, for a spark. I always say I have this runway in my head of plays that are just sitting there, waiting to be written, but each one has this, this kind of excitement that I know just needs to be there. It's almost like when you're describing a restaurant to someone, and you're shaking because you can't wait for them to try the whatever at this place.

That sort of excitement needs to be there where I can't wait to see what these people say to each other, but I know that they have something very important to say to each other, and I can feel it. Or I could feel that I need to write this story, and so far, with everything I've written



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it's kind of just turned out that way where I get the spark, I get very interested and then I sit down and do it. And what I started to say [is] about really trusting the group process. I write better when I have a little bit of a deadline and I also write better when I know that someone's going to read it, whomever it is. And the other thing is that, if you hang in there as a playwright, eventually, there will be people who will want to read what you write.

Right now, I'm writing this commission for Primary Stages and one of the exciting things is this notion, that I have somewhere to go and workshop the work. Even if all you're doing is submitting to theatres, I think it's really important to sort of keep in mind that it is a shared work and that it's not something that's just going to sit in your computer idling while someone decides that you're a playwright. Again, the minute you decide you're a playwright, it is a shared experience. I personally, I'm someone who does kind of love to sit around with other writers and, and hear work, and read work and, and develop work. Usually by the time something's in production, the production part stresses me out, but the process I find very, very exciting and I adore being in rehearsal with actors, that's one of my favorite.

My most surreal moment in my life was my 22-minute interview with Fidel Castro and my favorite moment in my life is any moment when I'm in rehearsal with a director I really like and respect, and actors, because then anything happens. And I love hearing how people interpret the work and I value and just love the choices that actors make that I don't expect. And I love the dramaturgical process, too. I mean, certainly it's true that a play or a musical is never done, and then as I say that, I realize that it's also untrue because I think one of the reasons that so many emerging writers are having a tough time getting produced is because there's also that notion that something's never done, gets translated into, years and years and years of developing works that should be up.

What I learned most about my play LITTLE MONSTERS, I learned during the rehearsal and production process at Brandeis last spring. At some point, I think producers should just say, "Hey, let's put it up." I think they're more gentle about this in England is what I've read, but at some point, producers should just say, "Hey let's put it up and then we'll see what works and what doesn't." And the critics should also be more gentle about that process because otherwise, we're waiting for some level of perfection that ends up feeling almost pathological to me.

**AH:** You have been listening to [Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow!](#) This is the end of Part 1 of our interview with Maria Alexandria Beech, a playwright and librettist living in New York. You may read more about her on Facebook under the name Alex Beech. You may read a transcript of this interview and download this podcast on our website, which is [www.hamiltondramaturgystheatrenow.com](http://www.hamiltondramaturgystheatrenow.com). The series is also available on Soundcloud. Our theme was composed by Nancy Ford. Otto Bost is the sound designer. Cate Cammarata and Walter Byongsok Chon are the UK Program Assistants. Natalie Pandya is the UK Program Assistant. Helaine Gawlica is our Digital Archivist. I am Anne Hamilton, your Producer and Host. Thank you for listening.

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## Part 2

**Anne Hamilton:** Welcome to Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow! This is a podcast series featuring some of the most exciting female artists working in the theatre today. I'm your host, Anne Hamilton. Today our guest is Maria Alexandria Beech, and we are continuing with Part 2 of the interview.

Maria Alexandria Beech is a playwright and librettist living in New York. She has written over fifteen full-length plays, several as a member of the Dorothy Strelsin New American Writers Group at Primary Stages Theatre, which co-produced her play LITTLE MONSTERS at Brandeis Theatre Company. Her full-length musical titled CLASS, with Karl Michael Johnson, was presented in a reading in May, 2012 at NYU.

**Anne Hamilton:** What is your artistic process when developing a play?

**Maria Alexandria Beech:** Once the play is in a developmental process, then I learn some more. I often work with Michelle Bossy, who's this wonderful director, and she lets me do line cuts in the rehearsal process. So I cut whatever line needs to be cut. Recently also I worked with Jerry Dixon on the reading of my musical CLASS, the musical I wrote with Karl Johnson. And Jerry was amazing about saying, "What about this moment? You know, what about this idea and what about that idea?"

And that was kind of a neat thing because I had not been used to working with someone that would kind of throw out suggestions that way. And as scary as it was, I do think that that was also valuable for me and for the musical to sort of, get ideas from someone else, rather than, ah, my finding them own my own. That's why I think the director-writer relationship is so important - I love directors that also help you find your way and ask a lot of questions which both Michelle and Jerry do. One of my favorite moments of my production at Brandeis was that at the end, the audience filled out response cards.

People picked up on stuff. We had been in a rehearsal for almost a month. Certainly, there was a joke about how many drafts of the play that I had sent in. I had written the play in a group process at Primary Stages, I mean, a lot of people had walked with me on the journey of writing that play and yet, there were audience members that had amazing, amazing questions or they caught things like, "Well, you know, she says, 'I'll text you'. At what point did he get her cell phone number," I mean stuff that's like tiny, [but it's] kind of amazing.

I loved, loved, loved getting audiences responses. And if sometimes [with] the response, you know, you got six to seven or ten or there was a pattern, it's just something that made me really think, dramaturgically. It made me think about certain moments in the play. That exchange was pretty darn wonderful, I have to say. I would not have gone through that if it hadn't gone in front of an audience. And so, I'm a huge believer. And I mean [I had] full on



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gorgeous set design, beautiful sound design - I needed all of that to really see what I had written. You just are not going to get that from a reading, no matter how many readings you do over a play [or a musical]. At some point, it just has to go up.

Anne Hamilton: You had a reading of CLASS at NYU, how did that go?

It was great. Karl and I wrote CLASS very quickly, very quickly. We wrote it in the Spring. Originally we started writing an adaptation of THE CANTERBURY TALES titled LAREDO STORIES. And basically what happens in that musical is that the Virgin Mary appears to this undocumented worker at the Walmart in Laredo [Texas]. And so this Republican Governor of Minnesota and his family join a pilgrimage group, led by this priest to go down to Laredo to see this apparition.

And so what Mary is saying is that, an asteroid is heading towards the earth and will destroy it if we keep building the wall between Mexico and the US. And I have to say, it was hilarious and we've never laughed so hard and it was fantastical. And we had a great time. We did the reading of the first act of it. And then because we needed to have the second act written by May, I felt that the whole project was so very ambitious, because it was... It was taking place in this fantastical kind of world. So I said, "Why don't we wait and write that when we have much, much more time. There's a play of mine I'd love to adapt." And he said yes and so we wrote that very quickly.

We learned so much in that reading. One of the things that I learned is that musical theatre is still very much about that well-made musical, that traditional structure of the well-made musical and the opening number and the closing number. And one of my goals is to still honor that tradition, but kind of also do other things and explore more. [I'd like to] not look at the book or the dialogue just as a bridge between the songs. I think the songs could be little kind of poems that stand alone. So we explored all of that in this musical and I'm thrilled, I'm really thrilled by how it came out. And so now, we recorded the demo and we are looking for the next process and development for it. I mean, it needs development because it was written quickly.

But we're both thrilled with where it is today. And it was fun, you know, to have people like Donna Vivino, who was our professor [in the process]. We had a fantastic cast, [including] Joe Cassidy, and to see these amazing, amazing actors just belt out these songs that we wrote - I always am comparing having summited Everest to have written a musical. You know, I walk around the city holding the score and, on the day of my reading, I just couldn't believe that Karl and I had written this thing that has a beginning, middle, and end, and 17 songs. And I just feel so proud of it. I walk around the city listening to our songs and I sit in the train smiling thinking, "I'm sitting here listening to something I co-wrote," I'm just so thrilled with it and so thankful that I was able to have the opportunity to do that.

I can't even tell you how beautiful it is and how it's a craft that needs to be learned, and practiced. You know, you hire a lyricist, you hire a playwright, you hire a composer, you throw the three together and then you hope something comes of it. I think that's disrespectful to the craft of musical theatre writing because it takes knowing what leads to a song moment,

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and what the song moment is in a way that is practiced, and that is learned and that is honored in a way that I just didn't envisage before. I used to think, "Well, a playwright can do this."

It just takes a lot of learning to understand the complexity of a musical, particularly because music is so mysterious as a language, and it's able to carry an incredible amount of subtexts and of power, and to push forward a moment in a way that a monologue can't. And so, I've fallen in love with it, and that I love. I don't understand a lot of musicals that exist out there and that are famous, but at the same time, I don't know, it's a repertory, it's a pantheon I hope to contribute to in some way.

AH: That is wonderful. I'm sure you will.

MB: Thank you.

AH: You mentioned the interview with Fidel Castro. Can you tell us more about that?

MB: Yeah. I was a financial news journalist at [Televisa's] Expansion Financiera. It was a network owned by a Spanish media company and the largest Spanish language broadcasting company in the world, which is Televisa. And so, I went down to Venezuela to cover Chavez's inauguration in 1999. You know, I was interviewing all these different people and then I was told that Fidel was speaking at an investor conference and I went and I tried to get in to interview him and they wouldn't let me. And then, what happened is that my mother was watching him speak at the University that evening and she kept saying, "Listen, hang in there. Just keep asking and keep asking." And the Cubans said no, no, no. No. They wouldn't let my camera crew and me into the space, the conference room where they were expecting him.

And what happened, curiously enough, is that so many hours passed that the media thought that he wasn't going to show up and, you know, my mother, who's South American and who, I guess, just knows Fidel's patterns, she kept saying, "You know, he's still at the University and I bet he's going finish at the University and he's going show up." So, around midnight I was going to call it quits and, you know, my cameraman and his assistant - and I had a protocol assistant - everyone was just kind of falling asleep in the lobby and sure enough, the Cubans came and found us and said that we could go in because every single journalist had left. The entire media box was empty because by then like five or six hours had passed and everyone just assumed that by midnight he just wasn't going to come.

So they checked our camera, they made us take off our boots and belts. I mean, it was intense. And then they let us in and so I was standing in the media box with a camera from Cuba's TV. That was the only camera that was there. It was Cuban television. And I wanted to just ask one question. And I was standing at the back of this room with 180-200 sort of investors and political leaders, and I just wanted to ask him if he was opening his market to foreign investment and he kept teasing me and saying, "I can't hear you, I can't hear you," until I was standing up on stage on the podium with him. And then we had this kind of crazy 22 minute interview. It was insane.

I want to make theatre with it because I asked him about poverty and recession in Cuba and

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he was really angry that I had asked him that question. And so, I think he was contemplating having me thrown out of the conference, but, suddenly he said, "You're going to criticize my government when you have Alan Greenspan and the Federal Reserve, the US Federal Reserve, bailing Long-term Capital Management out?" And I don't know if you remember, Anne, Long-term Capital Management was this fund that had been created with two Nobel [Prize winners] and it was a very fancy effort that only millionaires could invest in. And at one point, all of their models failed and they lost a bunch of money until the Federal Reserve came in and bailed them out.

And I was walking around at the time furious that all these millionaires had basically been rescued. I just didn't understand it, and at the time they were saying that it would have destabilized the market so much for that much money. And it all felt like BS to me. And Fidel Castro looked in my face and he said the one thing that I agreed with him on, which is, you know, why is the US government bailing millionaires out because they made a stupid investment? And so, I looked at him and literally it was like two seventh grade girls agreeing that some lipstick at the mall is like the greatest thing ever. I just looked to him and I was like, "Huh! Right? Right? I totally agree with you, President. I mean, ridiculous, right?" And he started laughing.

MB: And then from there, we talked for another 20 minutes and had a really great conversation. Many years later, actually, I have a relationship with the dissidents of Cuba because I don't agree with his regime. I think any time there's no freedom, you know, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought, freedom of expression in a country, and when you can go to jail for disagreeing with the government, to me, you've lost legitimacy as a government. I fundamentally don't agree with what his government is, but I have to say that I have interviewed Presidents in my lifetime. I have interviewed Ministers of Finance. I have interviewed very many important people and there are not a lot of Presidents out there that could speak in detail about either economic issues or finance issues.

And it's always impressive when you run into somebody that can talk to you about the elements that drive their economic growth. And I know this sounds very simplistic, what I'm saying, and obviously this is an interview about theatre but you'd be surprised how, when you get to the top of a ministry or when you get to the top of a government, there's not always the bank of information there that the people one or two people below them have. And so it was impressive to see this sort of wealth of information in this person and clearly, that's why he's been in power for as long as he has is. And it's also the reason Chavez is there.

You know, [about] Chavez - I remember when people in the opposition would go on about how stupid and uneducated he was and you know, not only did I meet with him, but I met with his Economics Minister at the time, who told me that Chavez stayed up all night long asking him questions and studying and reading books. And very early on, I started saying, "This man, maybe he doesn't have the college degrees that you have but this is a really, kind of a, somebody who's going learn very fast and who is doing push-ups while you guys are sitting around bitching." And in fact, that's what happened. He sort of outsmarted very, very, very smart educated people. So, you know, there's always a correlation between the intelligence of a leader and the amount of power that he's able to have in his own country or

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her own country.

AH: That's fascinating, Alex. I think you live on a world stage and I think your world is getting bigger.

MB: Thanks Anne.

AH: I appreciate what you said about craft and content and inspiration, and I wish you all the best in your future, in all your plans.

MB: Thank you, Anne. Bless you. Thank you so much. You know, I'm in it for the long haul. I'm looking for paid work, the day to day [work]. I need benefits. I need insurance benefits. And I'm looking for gigs. And so somebody recently took me to lunch and asked me if I would be interested in a team that may be advising Greece on their debt restructuring. And you know, I went back to the career counselor that I'm working with and I said, "I can only take this if it supports my artistic career." Because all I want to do is that I want to write theatre. I don't want to get sort of sucked into doing anything else because I feel like my writing - it is what I was born to do.

MB: And I do think that a play or a musical that has something interesting to say can have as much effect on a nation as a policy. And I know that sounds ridiculous and yes, there's theatre that's entertainment, and hurray for theatre that's just plain pure entertainment. And then also there's theatre that I think can be transformative. And my ambition -- which I don't know if I am there yet by a long shot -- but my ambition is to write theatre that makes us think about politics and life and relationships just a little bit differently in some way. If I'm able to ever write something that does that, I know that I will have accomplished what I was born to do.

AH: That's wonderful. I'm sure you will.

AH: You have been listening to [Hamilton Dramaturgy's TheatreNow!](#) We have been speaking today with Maria Alexandria Beech. You may read more about her on Facebook under the name Alex Beech. You may read a transcript of this interview and download this podcast on our website, which is [www.hamiltondramaturgystheatrenow.com](http://www.hamiltondramaturgystheatrenow.com). The series is also available on Soundcloud. Our theme was composed by Nancy Ford. Otto Bost is the sound designer. Cate Cammarata and Walter Byongsok Chon are the UK Program Assistants. Natalie Pandya is the UK Program Assistant. Helaine Gawlica is our Digital Archivist. I am Anne Hamilton, your Producer and Host. Thank you for listening.

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Episode 4 - Maria Alexandria Beech, Playwright, Bookwriter and Lyricist

Episode 5 - Murielle Borst Tarrant, Playwright, Director and Producer

Episode 6 - Judith Malina, Co-Founder, The Living Theatre

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