

**Keynote Address for an Illustrious Gala**

a detailed history

by Kev Berry

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Draft 2.6: May 24, 2018

KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR AN ILLUSTRIOUS GALA was commissioned and first produced by The Tank (Meghan Finn + Rosalind Grush, Co-Artistic Directors) as a part of their annual Spring Gala at The Tank in New York City in May 2018. It was directed by Alex Tobey. It was performed by Kev Berry.

**Who**

*Bette Millder* a very serious and very famous artist of great renown  
a true crossover between gallery performance art pretension  
and commercial masturbation  
formerly an intern

**When**

Gala season

**Where**

A mid-sized off-off-Broadway theatre's spring gala

**What It Looks Like**

Bette is in a floor-length floral gown from Banana Republic  
Her shoes are glittery gold fuck-me pumps from Brash by Wild Diva  
There is a podium with a microphone  
And a festive party atmosphere

**Notice**

This play was written to be performed at The Tank Gala in 2018  
This play can be slightly tweaked to make it work for your gala and for your event  
Whenever Bette says The Trunk you can switch in a slight parody of your own theatre  
References that seem specific to The Tank can be switched out for your own  
And most importantly  
The names of your theatre's artistic directors must be the celebrities  
With the closest names possible to the artistic director's real names

And

This play does not strive for realism  
Nor does it strive to transport the audience to anywhere besides the theatre they're in  
Do not get bent out of shape attempting to make this thing realistic  
Invest in the story while also allowing the audience to see the performer having fun  
The goal is to remind them of a shared humanity  
Improvisation here and there is encouraged but premeditated rewrites are not  
Stick to the text but if something goes awry or comes to the performer in the moment  
It must not be ignored

This play is for Meghan and Rosalind  
Please don't hate me

- kb

“My mother is a big believer in being responsible for your own happiness. She always talked about finding joy in small moments and insisted that we stop and take in the beauty of an ordinary day. When I stop the car to make my kids really see a sunset, I hear my mother’s voice and smile.”

Jennifer Garner

Before the show  
A party  
It is fun and it is nice  
Bette mingles with the guests

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Bette is introduced  
The crowd applauds  
The crowd laughs  
Bette commands silence with her presence  
My God a star is present  
She leans into the mic

BETTE

Gators

She leans back pleased with herself

That was a little joke for the old crowd

Leans back into the mic

Gators

Gators gators

A disgusting and robust cackle-laugh

Ladies gentlemen those within and without the gender binary  
Distinguished guests  
Esteemed colleagues  
Local business owners  
Respected school teachers  
Wall Street Occupiers  
Software technicians  
Illiterate pharmacists  
Beloved actuaries  
Nervous morticians  
Wonky chefs  
Cheffy wonks  
Anarchist automobile salesmen  
Christian bakers  
Praise-worthy librarians  
Anthropomorphized school supplies  
Blind vintners  
Pilots who become television personalities in the wake of incredible acts of bravery

Reincarnated feudal serfs

Amateur drag queens

Disgraced priests

Subway buskers

Flappers

Psychic mediums

And artists

Welcome to this illustrious gala

I am thrilled and honored to have finally been asked to give this year's keynote address

My name is Bette Millder

A little bit of background for those of you who somehow have never heard of me

I had my humble beginnings here back in

And while a lady doth not revealeth her age

This will age me

I had my oh so humble beginnings here back in 1942

During the height of the first revival of The Great War

And after years of unfathomable success

It is always so great to return home to

#### Checks notes

The Trunk

To show you how far I've come

And to give you the false hope that one day you'll be as much of a household name as I

Of course as you should all know I've had meteoric success

And as one of the rare crossovers between art gallery performative pretension

And the masturbatory commercial spectacle of New York's Broadway

London's West End

And Reno

I felt that returning home to

The Trunk

To speak to you younger souls

Yes younger

Believe it or not my hair is not naturally blonde

Without Jessica down at La Bella Vita hair salon on 28th and Lex

My hair is grayer than the color scale of The Miracle Worker starring Patty Duke

I felt it would be a treat for all of you upon my return home

To impart on you some wisdom

Some tips for a successful career in the theatre

Across my time as a wildly famous chanteuse and actress

I have found that success boils down to six simple letters

A R T I S and T  
A R T I S T  
Do you get it  
It spells fuckin artist

In the months before I moved to New York  
I was feeling unsettled in my home life  
We lived deep in the countryside of upstate New York  
A quaint upstate summer town  
Where I had weeks previous watched my sister die of whooping cough  
I was in the garden tending to my haricot verts feeling stuck  
I went into the sitting room where my mother indeed was sitting  
And where my father was playing a funeral dirge on the piano  
I sat down and began to weep and cry  
Telling them  
Monologue style  
About how stuck I felt in our little town  
About how I know there's a war on but I just gotta get outta this town Momma  
About how don't you know I have dreams Poppa  
About how there must be more than this provincial life  
And I got on the floor and dirtied my frock and banged my fists and sobbed for hours  
And my father said you oughta be an actress  
And my mother said you oughta be a star  
We packed my things  
And they took me down to our tiny country town's railroad station  
And I said goodbye to White Plains for forever

Which brings me to the first letter  
A  
It stands for Amaze Your Parents  
Give your parents some histrionics to let them know you have a dream  
And maybe they'll buy you a one-way off-peak ticket from Westchester to Manhattan  
They won't give you any money to make it once you're there  
But they'll believe in you from afar  
And when they're down at the general store getting their war rations  
They'll say  
Oh our Bette's down in Manhattan she's an actress she's gonna be on Broad Way

And when I got here it was tough  
I had a dirty little room in a dirty little boarding house  
Where I lived in constant fear of being human trafficked  
But hey look on the bright side  
I wasn't  
And one day I was going around to all of the theatres asking for work  
And I found this place  
I found The Trunk

Of course not here no not this extravagant space God no  
This is too much this two theatre complex  
We in the theatre have enough complexes  
Why do we need one with two theatres in which to air them  
Back then we were down below the Bowery  
Operating exclusively out of Booth 43 down the hall to the right  
At a coin operated all male peep show  
Yes a peep show for the homosexual  
We had very little back then but we made due and we made theatre  
Since they had just started they were looking for unpaid interns  
So I said  
17 hour days steaming costumes and moving heavy set pieces for no pay  
Sign me up  
Now you must remember that  
In their first season they  
Or should I say we  
Had our first big hit in Booth 43

Who could forget that wonderful musical  
The Hunky-Dory Hunk of Chattahoochee Way  
The story of one cowboy's quest to save the Old West for the broad he loves  
Since the show was being performed in a coin operated booth  
The audience would clamor and crowd around the booth door  
Much to the chagrin of Horny Michael the owner of the peep show  
And the audience would put a nickel in the slot and the curtain would rise  
For thirty seconds so we would do the show for thirty seconds  
And then the curtain would rise again and we'd do the next thirty seconds  
And so on so forth until the audience ran out of nickels  
We never did reach the end of the show  
Not once  
But it was theatre and it was an escape from the war and it was magical

Over the next few years  
I saved up money from my side job as a waitress at a gentlemen's club  
Not a strip club as it were today  
This was more of a league of extraordinary men  
Who would come to the lodge on the northeast corner of 50th and 9th  
And smoke cigars and drink gimlets and talk about their successes on their latest hunt  
I served the gimlets and lit the cigars for the men and made enough money to get by

I saved up for theatre school and auditioned and was accepted in 1951  
I was still an intern at the time so I was able to get school credit  
My teacher said that my Ophelia in Hamlet was the most riveting thing he'd ever seen  
And encouraged me to audition for Broadway shows

Which brings me to the letter R in the anagram of success

A R

R stands for Really Do Well In Theatre School

I wasn't quite sure if I wanted to Broadway at that point in my life  
I wasn't a follies girl I wasn't a dancer  
I was Bette Millder and I had bigger more profound things to say  
By this point The Trunk had a new home on FDR Drive in a large empty warehouse  
Years later that same warehouse would be the home of an enormous drug bust  
Illustrious

And in that enormous warehouse was where I convinced the artistic producer  
At the time a fellow named Eugene O'Heill  
He was a very serious theatre artist to whom I owe much of my career  
He let me perform my first solo performance art piece there  
It was called Optimism and Mercy  
And the audience surrounded me as I lay there on the floor in a gown I constructed  
From ticker tape  
And one by one they would come up and tickle me until I vomited  
And that would be the end of the show  
Sometimes I laughed so hard that the show was over in three minutes  
But other nights I wouldn't vomit for hours  
It was thrilling  
As some of you may remember this performance piece was the focus  
Of my MoMA retrospective a few years back The Artist is Straight-Faced  
Eugene encouraged me to find people to fund my work  
He really saw potential for me in the world  
So I started applying for fellowships and foundational funding

A R T

T stands for Time To Write Some Grants

And I did  
And as the money started rolling in and as I became comfortable in my stature  
As a rising famous artist  
So did the press  
And it wasn't all good  
But it wasn't all bad either  
Famously the National Endowment for the Arts rescinded their payment to me in 1964  
When they found out my performance piece Make Me A Mommy  
Was just me laying on a bed in The Trunk's new home on Central Park West  
In an abandoned apartment building infested with termites in which we were technically  
Squatting  
And the audience would surround me and one by one the audience members  
Would come up and try to impregnate me  
Symbolically or literally  
The NEA was not happy with me  
That was my last collaboration with Eugene O'Heill

Who sadly passed away onstage when he drank too much wine  
And went into cardiac arrest  
During the climactic picnic scene  
In our devised masterpiece George Menendez and the Great Train Robbery  
We were so dangerous back then  
Now you drink Welch's when you need wine  
And that's why you have no taste  
Back then if we were drinking wine onstage we were really doing it  
We were really knocking back a lot of Beaujolais  
This isn't one of the letters in the anagram  
But here's a tip  
Alcoholics make better theatre

After the Make Me A Mommy scandal I was performing in my friend Jeff's reading  
Playing an abused housewife in his play Hours By Hours By Day By Day  
Which we were performing at The Trunk's fourth home  
A basement cabaret space directly across the street from Caffè Cino  
And a man in a leisure suit approached me after the reading  
And he offered me an audition for a Broadway show  
It was the 1970s at this point and the world was changing  
So I said  
Why the hell not  
And I went in there  
And I sang the roof off of the studio with my rendition of Danny Boy  
And I had the director and playwright sitting there behind the table maws agape  
After I finished my monologue  
About how stuck I felt in our little town  
About how I know there's a war on but I just gotta get outta this town Momma  
About how don't you know I have dreams Poppa  
About how there must be more than this provincial life  
And I got on the floor and dirtied my frock and banged my fists and sobbed for hours  
  
And I got cast in the workshop of A Chorus Line

A R T I

I stands for Interesting Bring Her In For An Audition  
If you're interesting you'll make it like me  
If you're not interesting  
Go screw go be a librarian  
Which isn't a dig at any of the praise-worthy librarians in attendance  
You are worth praise for a reason but you are boring

After I left the workshop for A Chorus Line  
I signed off on the material I provided the show's creators during that process  
For those of you familiar with the show  
There's a section during the Goodbye 12 Hello 13 montage

Where one of the dancers is concerned he has gonorrhea  
And that is the Bette Midler story that remains in the show to this day  
Little known fact  
After I left the workshop  
I had a few more gallery shows  
Including one where I just ate loaves of bread endlessly for days  
It was called Marathon Prep and it was the worst thing I've ever done  
I couldn't fit into any of my dresses or pants  
It took three years to work all of the weight off  
But it showed casting directors I had range  
I could play a bigger girl or a littler girl  
And I was doing plays on Broadway regularly  
I played the titular night in the Broadway premiere of 'night Mother  
I played a drag queen in a play about Stonewall called Wall of Stones Be Strong  
I played a Mormon in controversial play called Latter-Day Satans  
I played King Kong in Censored Scenes from King Kong  
And so Hollywood started calling  
And I shot to stardom

The next letter in the anagram for success as an artist is

S

A R T I S

And S stands for Shoot to Stardom  
Get cast in a leading role in a major Hollywood film  
And win an Academy Award like I did  
And you too could find success and eat at fancy restaurants regularly  
I was once like you  
Worrying and wondering that if I didn't eat all day I could afford a one dollar box  
Of mac and cheese and eat the entire thing myself in one sitting and still be healthy

Over the course of my career I have performed many roles I loved doing

And many I have hated doing

It balances out

To do one three year long project you adore

Sometimes you have to play an aging whore with a heart of gold

Which brings me to my final letter

A R T I S T

And T stands for Titties We've All Gotta Shake Em Sometimes

Being an artist in this day and age is hard

I had to play that hooker in cut scenes from Showgirls

Because that money would give me the cushion to let me do

A two-hander play about lesbian clowns here at The Trunk in our 1990s home

Which was seven shipping containers welded together over by the Intrepid

The play was called I'm Laughing So Hard Because I Love Your Rack

And it was a critical hit and to this day one of my favorite projects I've ever done

So sometimes you have to do projects your heart isn't entirely set on  
But then you'll find a project that if you don't do it you'll perish immediately  
It all balances out  
Checks and balances

So that's the anagram for success  
Follow this path  
Yes starting back in World War II and maybe by today you'll be as successful as I

Before I step off the dais  
I just want to thank the artistic directors of this extravagant new space  
Rosamund Pike and Meghan Markle for inviting me back to speak  
And to the tech crew here Collin Firth-Hanks and Anthony Bennett for graciously  
Putting up with my harrowing tech process this afternoon

And finally  
I know I'm not supposed to say it yet  
But Rosamund can I say it  
Rosamund  
Duchess Meghan is shaking her head at me  
Oh come on I'm too excited I can't sit on this any longer  
I'm gonna say it

I have an exciting announcement  
About this organization's future

We are moving again

The Trunk is ecstatic now that all the paperwork has been signed  
And we are thrilled to announce that we have acquired  
As our new home  
The Theater at Madison Square Garden  
And that it will be renamed  
The H&R Block Rania Jumaily Memorial Theatre  
A New York City Home for Emerging Artists  
And that the inaugural production  
Will be a production of Mame  
Directed by Alex Timbers  
With new orchestrations by Reggie Watts  
And an updated book by Mike Daisey in collaboration with Amy Herzog  
Starring me  
Bette Midler six performances a week  
With Judy Kuhn stepping in on Tuesdays

A toast  
A toast to the next step on this theatre's journey

Thank you  
Good night  
Let's get drunk

Bette tosses her drink back

**End of Play**