

Seattle Public Theater sets sail with ‘Titanish,’ partnership with Macha

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Kooper Campbell and Justine Stillwell in a scene from “Titanish,” a musical parody of “Titanic” from The Habit sketch comedy troupe, at Seattle Public Theater. (Truman Buffett)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

When Seattle Public Theater’s board members set out to hire a new producing artistic director, they probably weren’t expecting to bring aboard the entire feminist theater company Macha Theatre Works. But that’s what they got when they hired Amy Poisson.

“We were open to everything. We wanted to bring somebody in that had bold ideas. There are things we were missing, so it fills in a gap,” SPT board member Teal Sherer said.

“Titanish” will be SPT’s first production under Poisson, Seattle Public Theater’s new producing artistic director. Macha Theatre Works, where Poisson was producing artistic director for the past six years, will join SPT as company-in-residence. Seattle Public Theater will co-sponsor Macha’s shows as part of its own larger season.

Poisson will continue working with Macha as a volunteer artistic director. Maintaining separate boards and budgets, the companies will work closely to fulfill SPT’s public benefit contract with the city of Seattle.

Poisson’s only previous involvement with SPT was directing its 2017 production of Maggie Lee’s “[Flight Before Xmas](#).” But during the months-long hiring process, Poisson impressed the board with her leadership style.

“She leads in a way that is candid and transparent and that brings people together. She very much empowers the people around her,” said Sherer.

Poisson believes that Macha’s mission to present brave feminist theater dovetails with SPT’s mission to embrace underrepresented voices.

“Feminist theater doesn’t mean only female-identifying people. It means how we do business, which is leading with love and people first. Theater is awesome and

important, but we can be human beings and also make great art.”

Poisson proposed a partnership that plays to the strengths of each company. SPT has a secure, affordable performance space — a rarity in the Seattle arts world — with 15 years left on its lease of the [Bathhouse Theater building](#) at Green Lake, owned by the city of Seattle. The contract enables the company to pay a portion of rent in activities, such as education programs, that benefit the public. But SPT was lacking an education department, and it wanted to build up its new works program. [Macha Theatre Works](#) had robust new-works development and education programs, but its budget was eaten up by rent.

“It’s interesting how perfectly Seattle Public and Macha fit together. We’re kind of inventing a marriage, but we’re keeping separate bank accounts,” Poisson said. Following a co-sponsorship model that SPT often uses to produce shows with smaller companies, Macha’s plays will now appear on the SPT stage.

“We work with theaters when they come in to do a show. Instead of just renting them the space, we do a co-sponsorship and then we split the sales. So smaller theaters can come in and not have to pay upfront costs by renting the theater,” said Poisson. The details are different for each production, but generally SPT provides the space, box office and marketing, while partner theater companies obtain rights and hire actors and staff.

This season, Macha and SPT will co-sponsor the West Coast premiere of “Macbeth: A Rock Musical,” an all-female take on Shakespeare, with Poisson directing, and local punk band Atrocity Girl as the witches.

Including Macha’s three-show season, SPT will present seven shows and a new-works festival this year. The season starts with an SPT audience favorite.

“‘Titanish’ is a big, bawdy comedy making fun of the movie ‘Titanic.’ I think it will be a great season opener. Honestly, everybody could use a laugh right now,” said Poisson. “Titanish” and “A Very Die Hard Christmas” are co-produced with [Marxiano Productions](#).

Also part of the SPT season are co-productions “[The Forgotten History of Mastaneh](#)” with Seda Iranian Theatre Ensemble, and “Unrivaled” with feminist Asian American company [SIS Productions](#).

Rounding out the season, SPT’s former artistic director Annie Lareau will return to direct Jen Silverman’s “The Moors,” and Poisson will direct the world premiere of Maggie Lee’s “Once More, Just for You.” The latter was developed through Macha’s Distillery new-works program. Distillery new works and Macha’s Youth Voices education program will continue at SPT. In Youth Voices, mentors guide a cohort of teens to create personal stories, with a capstone opportunity to perform them at Seattle Rep’s [YouthFest](#).

“There’s a lot of momentum and excitement right now. I’m excited about the new-works program and being a place that people want to come to create,” said Sherer.

The SPT board has recently brought on four new members, and passed a balanced half-million-dollar budget that’s 30% lower than last year’s, even as SPT expands its programs. Poisson is already looking forward to the company’s next 10-year plan: “I’d love to start an endowment and the building could use an upgrade,” she said.

“Titanish”

By Jeff Schell and Ryan Dobosh. Aug. 10-Sep. 17; Seattle Public Theater, 7312 W. Green Lake Drive N., Seattle; \$10-\$100, sliding scale; to [reserve accessible seating](#), email boxoffice@seattlepublictheater.org or call 206-524-1300; seattlepublictheater.org

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