

**Giovanna Sardelli**  
(left) rehearsing with  
Anna Kull + Andrea  
Hiebler at the Lark Play  
Development Center  
for the Russia/US  
Exchange 2015

PHOTO  
Gillian Heitman



## IN YOUR WORDS

What I Learned...

Why I Cast *That Actor*

Backstage

+

20 Questions



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# WHAT I LEARNED...

BY GIOVANNA SARDELLI CURATED BY SERET SCOTT

I grew up in Las Vegas, where the only professional straight play I had ever seen was one the Acting Company presented during a tour (thank you, Acting Company), and yet I knew I wanted to move to New York someday and be part of the theatre. My first audition in my life was for the Graduate Acting Program at NYU, and Ron Van Lieu, the master acting teacher, kindly assigned monologues for me to use for the callback, since I didn't know any plays. **Zelda Fichandler**, then head of the program, had to encourage me to actually face her and not the wall during the audition. Somehow, these two icons of the American theatre were able to see through my nerves and general confusion. They said yes to me and changed my life.

Years later, when I wanted to transition from acting into directing, Zelda again said yes and invited me to attend the Director's Lab she had started with **Paul Weidner**.

From these master teachers I've learned the profound impact a dedicated teacher and mentor can have on your life. I've learned to take a risk on young talent and always try to see the "long shots" when I'm auditioning, and I rejoice every time I give someone their Equity card. I've learned to say yes to the crazy choice in the rehearsal room and design meetings, if for no other reason than to celebrate someone's imagination and bravery—but, more often than not, something magical transpires in those unexpected moments.

If you say yes to the artists around you, they will surprise you, delight, and challenge you. If you create an atmosphere of "yes," people will go to extraordinary lengths and exhibit a breathtaking willingness to embarrass themselves in the pursuit of human connection. And it is from that raw and willing place that the best stories get made.

**GIOVANNA SARDELLI** is an award-winning director who has worked on world premieres of plays by Rajiv Joseph, Matthew Lopez, Theresa Rebeck, Lynn Rosen, Joe Gilford, Jeff Augustine, Lauren Yee, and Zoe Kazan among others. She has worked Off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre, Second Stage, Vineyard Theatre, Playwrights Realm, The Women's Project, Ensemble Studio Theatre, and Roundabout Theatre Company. She has directed numerous productions for Dorset Theatre Festival, where she is the Resident Director, Barrington Stage Company, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, The Old Globe, Hartford Stage Company, Cleveland Play House, Cincinnati Playhouse, CTG, Hudson Stage Company, San Francisco Playhouse, and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley among others. Giovanna spent over a decade on the faculty of the Dance Department and five years on the faculty of the Graduate Acting Program of NYU, the program from which she received her MFA. She is also a graduate of their Director's Lab. Though based in NYC, she is the Director of New Works for TheatreWorks Silicon Valley.