



All the Lights On: Reimagining Theater with Ten Thousand Things

Michelle Hensley

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Michelle Hensley, founder of Ten Thousand Things Theater in Minneapolis, shares more than twenty years of her company's nationally unique work bringing professional theater to those in prisons, homeless shelters, adult education centers, and rural areas, as well as the general public. More than a chronological history, *All the Lights On* is also about the radiant power of theater.

In this articulate and compelling book, Hensley distills what nontraditional audiences, along with the conditions her artists must perform under to reach them, have taught her about Brecht, the Greeks, Shakespeare, musicals, and the essence of what is necessary to make vibrant and essential theater. Her experiences lead her to conclude that theater artists become better and the art form itself much richer when everyone is included in the audience. In *Ten Thousand Things* productions, people from very different economic classes sit next to each other in the round and often experience unexpected connections with each other. Hensley writes in the introduction, "Not only do we have a chance to experience the multiple viewpoints of many characters in the play, but with all the lights on, we are able to consider the differing viewpoints of the other audience members seated around the circle. It all serves to increase, just a little, the radiance of our world."

"Michelle Hensley's radiant vision has already converted thousands (including me), and this book will swell that number. One of the very few books that should—no, must—be read by anyone who cares about making an American theater that matters." **Oskar Eustis**, Artistic Director, The Public Theater "A call to arms for our field. Like the seminal works of Grotowski and Brook, Hensley's book in its quiet way could redefine and revolutionize theater for generations to come." **Bill Rauch**, Artistic Director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival and co-founder, Cornerstone Theater Company

Michelle Hensley is founder and artistic director of Ten Thousand Things in Minneapolis, where she has brought over fifty tours of award-winning drama to nontraditional audiences in prisons, shelters, and housing projects, as well as the general public.

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