

SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2012

## Interview with Miriam Kulick of "Open Hearts"

*By Byrne Harrison*

Miriam Kulick, an actor, playwright, director and teacher, first performed "Open Hearts" at the 2011 Washington D.C. Fringe Festival where it was named Pick of The Fringe by DC Theatre Scene. Prior to that she co-founded Miami's Square Peg Productions whose first production, "Three Angels Dancing on A Needle" received the 2007 New Times Best of Miami award for Best Ensemble Production and for which she was named Best Actress. "Three Angels" was also performed in New York at the Brick Theater. Her solo show "Full Circle" was performed at Ensemble Studio Theatre's Octoberfest. She has appeared in numerous productions in both Florida and New York City, where she hails from. On television she's been featured in America's Most Wanted and in the Doris Wishman Documentary on HBO. She's a member of Actor's Equity, SAG and AFTRA. She can be found at [miriamkulick.com](http://miriamkulick.com).

**The main character in "Open Hearts," your one-woman show opening on April 19th, is 90-year-old Sadie Nussbaum. She sounds like she's a lot of fun to play. How did you create her?**

She is an inspiration from a still living 95-year-old woman who lives in NY and has been a life-long friend of my family. It is not directly based on her life, but snippets and attitudes about getting older and having a feisty spirit do come from her. Also, years ago I was a licensed massage therapist and I use to give massages to a pair of 90 year old twin sisters who lived together after their husbands died and actually threw a small ball back and forth to each other to try and keep limber as well as

limbering their minds. I use a ball in my show.

**Sadie's daughter Deborah is a lesbian involved with a woman who is still coming to terms with her lesbianism. Deborah also sounds like a bit of an activist (she's planning to go to Darfur to help the refugees). Which is harder for Sadie to deal with, having a lesbian daughter or having a daughter that's planning to head to a war zone?**

For Sadie, I think it's both- if she had to choose, I would say Darfur- there is the potential of real danger there and the possibility of not coming home alive, and mainly being far away from home when one gets old, who knows when their last day might be or they might fall down and break a hip?

**What else can people expect from "Open Hearts"?**

To realize that no matter who you are, your age, temperament, or sexual orientation, we all struggle with striving towards that proverbial happiness, in wanting more authentic and fulfilling lives and having the courage to go after where our heart really lies.

**I felt like a complete slacker after reading your biography. Actor, dancer, writer, teacher, world-traveler, wife, mom, commuter (between NYC and Miami), and that is probably just the tip of the iceberg. But what caught my eye was your work with Pridelines Youth Services in Miami. How did that come about?**

First off, thank you for acknowledging all that I have done. As a person working on feeling OK about not falling into the habitual zone, of "nah, I've really not amounted to too much of anything", I will, as the new me, say, "geez thanks." Pridelines Youth came about from a good friend of mine who ran a gay-lesbian themed based theatre company in Miami.

They received a grant to work with at-risk youth that had to deal with, "Coming Out - Staying In" stories. We had an 8 week workshop which culminated in an informal presentation of their work, mainly writing and putting it together in a theatre production format. I was a former teacher of his and he knew my teaching style and thought I would be great for this type of project.

**The stories the kids shared dealt with the coming out process, an emotionally fraught topic. What was it like working with them?**

At first when I started out I worked just with the girls, and then they had me work with the boys as well and we became one group. When we began many were wary of trusting me, a middle-aged white married straight woman, who on the surface to them, seemed not to be able to connect or understand them, as well as the general fear of opening up about their own lives, to just even talk, some just sat there. There were a few, as in any type of teaching situation, who were so excited to begin and explore. Some dropped out, but most stayed, and when we actually performed it they were all so into it and felt so good about themselves, that people actually came to see them, to hear what they had to say, to hear their own personal stories and be touched by what they shared. It was truly confidence building for them and many audience members in the older gay community were moved to tears, as they shared that they never had the opportunity for self-expression, to be heard, when they were their age.

**Do you have any plans to do similar workshops in the future?**

I am always up for it, I love the idea of theme-based workshops, be it within the gay community as what I did or my latest idea is working with anyone 45 or older, actually any age, and calling it the 3 L's: love, loss, and longing- I incorporate writing, acting, drawing, music.

**What else will you be working on this year?**

My primary focus is on touring this show in the college circuit and other theatre venues that will produce me. I plan to move back to NY and work as an actor in other areas, to get an agent or manager to represent me and to teach acting.

**And one completely random question. If you could do a two-person show with any actor, living or dead, who would you perform with, and what would the show be about?**

Oh, I'd have to think long and hard on that one - Meryl Streep, if she would have me, but everyone would just focus on her, or Jon Hamm because who wouldn't want to work next to him? Why not the 3 L's: love, loss, and longing.

**Open Hearts begins at the Studio Theatre at Theatre Row (412 W. 42nd Street between 9th and 10th Avenues) on Thursday, April 19th. Performances are Thursday, April 19th, Friday April 20th, Friday, April 27th and Saturday April 28th at 7:30PM. For tickets go to <http://www.telecharge.com/> or call (212) 239-6200. For more information go to [www.theatrerow.org](http://www.theatrerow.org).**