

10 QUESTIONS

Take Ten: Ali Oliver-Krueger

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Ali Oliver-Krueger would love to travel back to Ancient Greece for a classic “three-playwright showdown at the City Dionysia.” In the meantime, she’s brightening the lives of children and adults through her work with [InterAct Story Theatre](#). Check out this week’s [Take Ten](#), and catch [One Gold Coin](#) through September 18.

1) What was the first show you ever saw, and what impact did it have?

I was a kid living on a military base in Japan, and the community theatre group on base did a production of *Oliver!* Honestly, most of the play went over my head—I was about six or seven, I think—but I was blown away by all the kids on stage acting, singing, and dancing. I had to get in on that!

2) What was your first involvement in a theatrical production?

It was directed actually by one of the lead actors of that production of *Oliver!* I was a little bit star-struck and intimidated. It was a really silly adaptation of “Little Red Riding Hood” set in Japan, called *Small Crimson Parasol*, and I was cast as the Little Red Riding Hood character, named Sukoshi (“little” in Japanese...which probably tells you as much as you need to know about the play, except that there was also inexplicably a tiger named Zin Zin instead of a wolf). I suspect I was cast because I was a short little Japanese-American kid who already had her own kimono and geta.



Ali Oliver-Krueger



3) What’s your favorite play or musical, and why do you like it so much?

Pentecost by David Edgar. It’s a 1994 play that’s a swirling cauldron of art, politics, language, culture, and religion wrapped in a blanket of geopolitical angst and an art history mystery. There’s a scene where this mass of characters who all hail from different cultures engage in a rapid-fire round robin of multilingual storytelling, and it all comes together in this amazing moment of communal discovery that I found really inspiring when I first saw it. That’s stayed with me, since so much of my work is steeped in collecting and sharing stories from around the world, and fostering storytelling, playmaking, and composition out of kids.

4) What’s the worst day job you ever took?

I had a job in college waiting tables during the graveyard shift at a rundown little pancake house in Texas. The newest girl had to wear the uniform with the iron burn on the back until someone quit and you got her uniform. I’d stagger out the door around sunrise, after an 8 – 10 hour shift. I would pretty much sleepwalk my way home and flop down for fifteen minutes of shut-eye before getting cleaned up for class. It was pretty awful, but I came out of it with a lot of great stories, a repertoire of tips and tricks for handling drunks, and a real appreciation for how peaceful the 4 a.m. hour can be.

5) What is your most embarrassing moment in the theatre?

I was in a production of *Oklahoma!* In my freshman year of college. I was in the chorus, and as part of the run we did some runouts to area schools. We were onstage at a school, and in the middle of a dance number, something happened and SNAP! My waistband ripped open and my skirt started sliding down, down, down! Luckily for me, my dance partner caught what was happening...and solved the problem by grabbing my skirt in the back and sort of mashing me to his body as we polkaed around the stage and off into the wings, at which point we pretty much fell over giggling while everyone backstage looked at us like we lost our minds.

6) What are you enjoying most about working on *ONE GOLD COIN - una moneda de oro*?

One Gold Coin is such a soulful, funny play, and the cast has really embraced it wholeheartedly. At InterAct, we tend to alternate new plays with plays we think of as “InterAct Classics”, treasured pieces in our repertory. Written by our founder Lenore Blank Kelner, it was revived in 2003-2004. It’s been a real joy to come back to it now that I’m the director of the company, because it feels like coming back home and honoring our roots, while also looking at this beautiful play with fresh eyes. This production is a bilingual adaptation of the original play, with a score arranged by Latin American musical duo *Cantaré*. Everyone has really thrown themselves into creating this fresh take on the play, and it shows!

Like all of our plays, *One Gold Coin* is interactive—the audience becomes part of the play right from where we sit—and there have been days where I could swear the adults in the audience are even louder than the kids. It’s so much fun to see adults and kids alike coming out of the theatre elated by this theatrical romp they’ve just gone

on.

7) Other than your significant other, who's your dream date (living or dead) and why?

Just celebrated my 10th wedding anniversary with my dream date, so that's going to really require me to stretch my imagination! I'm a big foodie, and I love to travel, so I think it would be a lot of fun to tag along with Anthony Bourdain on one of his adventures, visiting a region I don't know, getting to immerse myself in a culture completely different from mine, and hang out with the locals while trying new different foods. That sounds like it would be a lot of fun.

8) What is your dream role/job?

I've got my dream job right now! I'm one of the lucky ones. I get to spend most of my time either doing what I love or growing our company so I can do even more of what I love. I get to spend my days 1) making theatre with people I love and admire; 2) helping kids learn, grow, and thrive through the arts; and 3) cooking up kooky ideas for the next fun project (next it's a western tall tale about anger management, and then a play about a kangaroo who's afraid of riding a bike). I'm always busy, and sometimes a little stressed about the next big leap, but I'm never, ever bored, and every day I learn something new. Who could ask for anything more?

9) If you could travel back in time, what famous production or performance would you choose to see?

I would love to go back in time to 5th Century BCE Athens to check out the three-playwright throwdown at the City Dionysia or maybe see one of the lost comedies of Aristophanes.

10) What advice would you give to an 8-year-old smitten by theatre / for a graduating MFA student?

To the 8 year old: Go for it! Try everything, and be curious about everything. Don't worry about being right, or being perfect--don't be afraid to get messy, struggle, and fail. Struggle is good. It's okay if you're struggling as you're learning and making art--struggling at something doesn't mean you're bad at it, it just means you're figuring out how to get good at it!

To a graduating MFA student: One of the best things I did out of graduate school was sign on to do some educational outreach—and I'm not just saying that because I'm an educational theatre director now. Getting up early to drive out to a school, unload, perform, strike, and do it all again the next day helped me not only build great work habits, it helped me develop resilience and consistency as a performer, it helped keep me grounded and it helped me build a sense of perspective. It was also a great way for me to see other parts of the country and earn a paycheck. I happened to love educational theatre and teaching artistry so much that I stuck with it, but even if it's not what you ultimately do in life, I think all of us artists can benefit from learning to teach or mentor others.

ALI OLIVER-KRUEGER is a teaching artist, director, actor, classical singer and writer/composer. As a teaching artist and arts education professional, Ali has worked with schools, opera companies, and arts organizations throughout the country, and is a residency artist with The Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts and the John F. Kennedy Center Education Department's DC Partnership Schools Initiative Community Program. Ali's work as a teaching artist is rooted in creative drama and in creative opera, an emerging form of creative drama in which music and drama are fused together to tell stories and express thoughts, ideas and feelings. She is a frequent presenter at conferences on arts education and arts integration, and conducts professional development workshops and residencies on linking drama and music with content curricula. Ali is a proud member of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, and is co-chair of the organization's Professional Theatre Network.