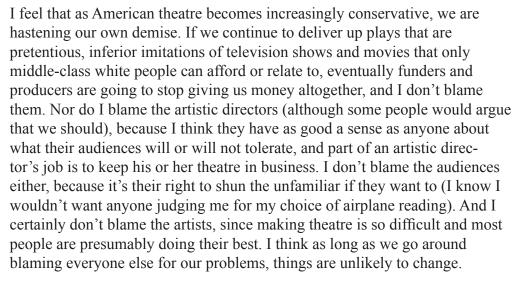# AMERICAN THEATRE

What do you imagine might happen in the American theatre over the course of the next quarter-century?

That's the question we asked 25 theatre artists (26, counting the team at the helm of Big Dance Theater) to address on the occasion of American Theatre's 25th-anniversary issue. Their answers, which wend their way through the following 16 pages, make for a lively, sometimes unsettling, frequently funny, persistently inspiring read.

Who are our commentators? They're richly accomplished folks-directors, performers, designers, writers, dramaturgs, producers and curators of new work. All have demonstrated something special in their approach to the art and craft of theatremaking that convinced us they have not only vision and foresight about the field they've chosen, but the tenacity and commitment it will take to realize their aspirations over time.

Our artistic future, we figure, belongs to people like these. Here's a chance to glimpse that future through their eyes.

Young Jean Lee, playwright, New York City

I feel that as American theatre becomes increasingly conservative, we are hastening our own demise. If we continue to deliver up plays that are pretentious, inferior imitations of television shows and movies that only middle-class white people can afford or relate to, eventually funders and producers are going to stop giving us money altogether, and I don't blame them. Nor do I blame the artistic directors (although some people would argue that we should), because I think they have as good a sense as anyone about what their audiences will or will not tolerate, and part of an artistic director's job is to keep his or her theatre in business. I don't blame the audiences either, because it's their right to shun the unfamiliar if they want to (I know I wouldn't want anyone judging me for my choice of airplane reading). And I certainly don't blame the artists, since making theatre is so difficult and most people are presumably doing their best. I think as long as we go around blaming everyone else for our problems, things are unlikely to change.

American theatre needs more funding, more adventurous new work, more diverse artists and audiences, and more affordable tickets. In the next 25 years, I'd like to see challenging new works for theatre playing for months on end in 300-seat theatres filled with diverse audiences of people who all paid $15, and I'd like to see everyone involved making a living and having health insurance. I'm not sure how to get there, but I do feel that if I want my work to get seen by more people, I need to work together with theatres and audiences to figure out how to make that happen. I can't expect American theatre to change around me while I stay the same, nor can I change things on my own. I also think it's a good idea to make an effort to support the next generation of theatre artists and producers, since they're going to have answers that we've never dreamed of.