Artists Rep’s Fresh Eyes program brings ‘civilians’ into the rehearsal process. On selected productions each season, we invite writers from diverse backgrounds to join us for a few rehearsals, and then share their observations of the process and the play in the Fresh Eyes blog. We hope the distinctive perspectives of our guests will illuminate the inner workings of a production, and enrich the experience for our audiences and community at large.

To start the 2019/20 season, our first Fresh Eyes for La Ruta is Andrew Dawes, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Physics at Pacific University. Andrew teaches in both the physics and optometry programs. Although his research focus is photonics and quantum optics, he is much happier to talk about his wide-ranging hobbies which include robotics, electronics, music, and theatre.

Driven by the wind
by A.M.C. Dawes

Attending the table reading of La Ruta was a powerful experience, and there are many vivid scenes that linger in my mind. One scene in particular resonates with me for a variety of reasons. Though the stage direction was just read aloud, I could clearly picture the on-stage implementation of the scene. We hear the howling sound of wind blowing in the desert, and gradually a rhythm emerges that ultimately evolves into a song.

When I signed-on for Fresh Eyes, I assured ART that I would leave physics out of it. I lied.

The sound of howling wind is one we all know, and we are familiar with the noises it elicits when whipping around buildings, through narrow cracks in old walls, or past bending trees in the forest. We also know the sounds that come from blowing across the mouth of a bottle or jug. What determines the sound that is excited by the blowing wind? Does the wind itself decide if the sound will be pleasant? Musical? Annoying? Painful?

All sounds—the wind, a strum of a guitar, a woman’s scream—consist of vibrations, or oscillations of a specific frequency, that begin in a material and are carried through the air to our ears. The wind includes an enormous range of these oscillations which are each individually small but spread over a full spectrum of frequencies, from the highest squeal of a mosquito to the lowest rumble of thunder. Carrying all of these frequencies within it, the wind will inevitably match the natural oscillation of whatever object it blows past. If that object is an open jug, we hear the frequency of the jug; just as if we had blown on it ourselves.

Every object, based on its size, shape, and material, has specific frequencies that will resonate. You can find these frequencies for instruments by plucking a string, tapping a drum, blowing between two reeds or over the mouthpiece of a flute. The same is true for many objects: a wine glass will ring out when gently tapped. A guitar is meticulously designed to resonate at the frequencies (i.e., notes) that have been deemed musical by Western civilization. In the hands of a skilled musician, the instrument generates beautiful phrases or melodic ideas with vibration. While a guitar will still resonate when left out in the wind, it is now at the mercy of the wind. The open strings, not tuned to a particular chord, will all vibrate when driven by the wind and so the sound will fall somewhere between melodic and dissonant.

This is true for anything. The structures we leave out in the wind, intentionally designed or not, will be driven by the wind. They may resonate musically, or they may resonate with painful discord, sounding more evil than melodic.

In La Ruta, we hear the wind of capitalism as it blows across the border, a force applied indiscriminately around the world. Whether it excites harmony or discord as it passes is
determined by the structures—size, shape, material—that it blows past. The structure of human nature, when blown by strong winds, can resonate with either good or evil and the stronger the wind, the louder the sound. Striking broken systems, unpaved streets, dark corners, and corrupt officials, the wind stirs up the worst aspects of human nature. This is how we find the characters of La Ruta, struggling against the wind and buffeted by the constant fear it stirs.

Not all wind excites the sounds of evil, however. When blowing past the right combinations of strings, pipes, and tubes, beautiful music fills the air. It is therefore our responsibility to construct the musical structures of society, systems that are ready to be driven by the force of the wind, and excited toward good instead of evil. These empowered instruments are built through strong infrastructure: just courts, lawful police, well-lit streets, and clean water. They are also built with the right combination of social and political strength, and supported by the collective voices ready to speak out for one another.

La Ruta presents the story of many strong women, facing the powerful winds with little in the way of protective structure. Instead, they create their own, and use it to rise above the fear and grief that define their lives.

To read more of Andrew’s observations visit our Table Room Stage Fresh Eyes at http://www.artistsrep.org/table-room-stage/fresh-eyes/

How one woman is mapping femicides in Mexico: https://feminicidiosmx.crowdmap.com/

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ART’S RESOURCE SHARING AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING Initiative supporting Portland theatre makers, arts and education nonprofits, and community groups.

The mission of the ArtsHub is to create a cultural center by supporting Portland’s rich artistic ecosystem. Programs and services include: below market rates for rehearsal, performance, and meeting space; shared administrative work space for individuals and organizations; and production services such as set construction, scenic painting, and professional technical support from design through performance. Our goal is to help a diverse range of arts and community organizations thrive. We prioritize artists and organizations that support ART’s values of equity, diversity and inclusion, and seek to provide a home for artists and audiences to take creative risks. While the program’s origin six years ago was in response to an opportunity to share underutilized performance space, we have found that the most vital and lasting impact of the ArtsHub is the bustling community that has been formed, and the myriad ways it has led to the empowerment of local artists and the accelerated growth of participating organizations. On any given day, staff members and dozens of artists from multiple arts and community organizations are rehearsings, utilizing administrative support and meeting spaces, with chance encounters in shared spaces leading to increased communication and unanticipated future collaborations between organizations. In the 2018/19 Season alone, over 1,500 events were held in our building by 42 local nonprofits, including 11 resident companies — 380 ArtsHub public events, 462 rehearsals, 422 classes, and 306 ART events. Our new facility is being designed so that the ArtsHub can include even more organizations than it currently serves.