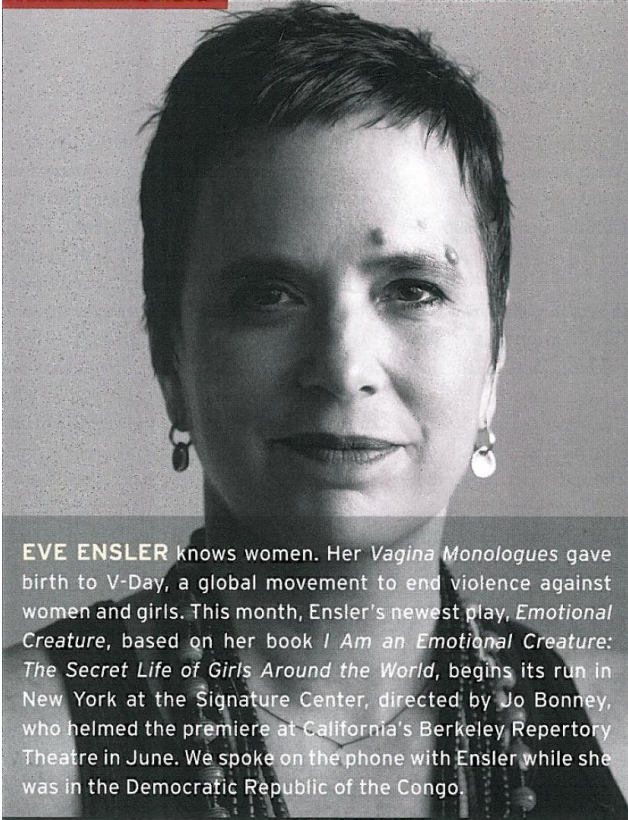


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20 QUESTIONS



**EVE ENSLER** knows women. Her *Vagina Monologues* gave birth to V-Day, a global movement to end violence against women and girls. This month, Ensler's newest play, *Emotional Creature*, based on her book *I Am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls Around the World*, begins its run in New York at the Signature Center, directed by Jo Bonney, who helmed the premiere at California's Berkeley Repertory Theatre in June. We spoke on the phone with Ensler while she was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

BRIGITTE LACONNE

How are you doing over in Africa?

It's very intense, very incredible and disturbing at the same time.

Tell me about the work you're doing in Congo.

There's been a war going on here for the past 15 years, and women have been raped and tortured. So what V-Day started doing in 2007 was a campaign on the ground to stop the rape and break the silence. We opened a clinic called the City of Joy; it's an amazing place run by the Congolese that V-Day supports. They invite survivors of violence to come every six months and those women are healed and empowered. They have seen the worst atrocities in the world and they become some of greatest leaders, speakers and performers.

I spend a lot of time there because I am deeply committed to the City of Joy and to the women of Congo. The war continues and the country is incredibly poor and there's no real government—it's complete anarchy. So we've created this lotus in the middle of a kind of hell.

Whose decision was it to turn *Emotional Creature* the book into a play?

I always thought it would be a play. A lot of it is based on my experience over the past 15 years traveling around the world and being a part of all kinds of communities and cultures. I wanted to get the stories down first and then after turn it into a theatrical experience.

I'm very glad I did that because it allowed me to really find the story, to find the characters, to find the poetry. I didn't want to do a typical play—I wanted to create an event

and an experience, something different that can rally us and shake us up. I had the very fortunate opportunity to work with Jo and [musical director and composer] Charl-Johan Lingenfelder. We wanted to create a piece to liberate girls and really honor their power and passion. That girl could be one girl and also the girl inside everyone.

Are you hoping that *Emotional Creature* will have the same global impact that *The Vagina Monologues* had?

The book launched something called V-Girls, which is a coalition of young girls around the world. We've seen the play done now in South Africa and we've seen an amazing V-Girl movement there—they're marching and organizing all these events. I'm hoping that Berkeley will be the core that will branch out the way *The Vagina Monologues* did, and have this girl-power movement around the world.

What can theatre do for activism that other mediums can't?

Theatre is the one place we have left where it actually happens when we're in the room, in the present tense, together. It's inherently creative because you create together with the audience and it's something different every night. So it is public assembly, it is public creation—and that in itself is a political thing. It's dangerous! I think all theatre needs to have an element of disruption and danger and possibility.

Speaking of activism, there has been so much legislation this past year with regards to women's health. What do you think that's indicative of?

I think we're at a tumultuous turning point. Women have made incredible steps forward, and there is a political backlash happening right now because those guys in power are terrified. They're doing everything in their power right now to push us back. What we all have to do is be very bold and very passionate, to not be afraid, to not back down. And we have to—through our art, politics, writing, singing, dancing—make sure that women are in charge of their own health.

What's been your favorite theatrical experience?

Oh dear, I hate these kinds of questions! [*Laughs.*] Years ago, I saw a play by John Guare called *Landscape of the Body* at the Public Theater [in New York City]. It was one of those moments in my life where a play entered me so deeply...I cried for two hours. I didn't know why I was crying. It was so powerful, so majestic. Everything was just on the ground floor of emotion.

What three things would you take to a desert island?

I'd take a pen. I'd take paper. I'd take lotion. I think the lotion has to do with self-healing. There's something about dry skin that really terrifies me. And every place I've been to in the world, the thing that people want, no matter how poor or rich they are, is lotion. ☑