

Susan Payne O'Brien is deeply influenced by the rich theatrical landscape of the Chicagoland area where she works and resides. She trained as a director and performer under Byrne and Joyce Piven at the famed Piven Theater Workshop. Drawing upon her twenty-year tenure as a teacher, performer and director at Piven and upon her years as an actress and opera singer Susan creates inventive work for the theater and opera stage.

She is the founder and Artistic Director of Forte Chicago, an all-female operatic company that devises new work pushing the boundaries of the female voice. Since Forte's launch in 2015 it has premiered original devised shows exposing fresh audiences to the possibilities and delight of opera. Susan is passionate about bringing theatrical devising process to opera classrooms and has served on the directing and opera faculties of Roosevelt University, DePaul University and North Park University. She has directed, written and devised shows for The Piven Theater Lab, Black Cat Theater, 2nd Story, Links Hall, The Santa Fe Opera, The El Paso Opera, Artemesia, Chicago Fringe Opera, The International Puppetry Festival and the CUBE Ensemble. She is an ensemble member with The Persephone Project, an artistic collective that uses pageantry to bring awareness to issues of climate change.