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## The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 03

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Playwright's Lab  
at Hollins University

#### Inside this issue:

Guest Profile: Randy 2  
Rollison

Keith Bridges has reading 3  
in Los Angeles

Kenley Smith has 3  
readings at Barter  
and in Roanoke

From the Director: If you 4  
write plays, go see plays

#### Next Month:

- Guest profile:  
Annaliese Moyer
- Student Profile: Jayne  
Benjulan
- Guest Profile: Lucy  
Thurber
- Area Highlight: Barter  
Theatre
- Playwright's Lab goes  
Multi-Media!
- From the Director:  
Studio Roanoke  
Artistic Directorship

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# The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 02, Issue 03 (August, 2008)

## Rosalee Was Here by Maura Campbell in New York International Fringe Festival

*Rosalee Was Here* is the latest in a string of readings and productions by award winning MFA playwright Maura Campbell. The play was completed between the summer of 2007 and the start of this summer term and read for the Lab in June.

This month *Rosalee Was Here* was given its world premier as part of the prestigious New York International Fringe Festival.

The New York International Fringe Festival (FringeNYC) is the largest multi-arts festival in North America, with more than 200 companies from all over the world performing for 16 days in more than 20 venues



### Student Spotlight: Andrew McGinn



Andrew McGinn began his formal theatre training at Interlochen Arts Academy his senior year of high school; continued through his graduation from The Juilliard School, where he was awarded



for a total of more than 1,300 performances!

Based on a true events, *Rosalee Was Here* is the story of a young Hispanic girl convicted of sexual crimes who is placed on 24/7 surveillance. Enter Molly, a teacher's aide with her own family problems, who tries to help Rosalee as she struggles with issues of personal identity and freedom. A third character, Ms. Holiday, the middle school principal, must enforce the rules and restrictions imposed on

Rosalee by the educational and juvenile justice system.

The play is a moving, often funny commentary on the insanity of any system that does not account for its own flaws and imperfections.

The Equity Approved Showcase was produced by Winterstet Productions and directed by MFA playwright Toby Ring Thelin. It featured Rosie Mattia, Leigh Ann Cobb, and Monica Callan (member of AEA).

by Jack O'Brien. He has also performed on New York's Delacorte stage in 5 productions with The Public Theater.

Andrew is also a constant collaborator with writers and small companies, and his experimental experiences have ranged from private readings and workshops, to performances in the famed Blue Man Group.

Now negotiating a bi-coastal lifestyle, Andrew joins the MFA Playwriting Program at Hollins University while continuing to further his unique career as an actor and teacher throughout the rest of the year.

[www.andrewmcginn.com](http://www.andrewmcginn.com)

# The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Page 2

## Guest Spotlight: Randy Rollison



Randy Rollison spoke to the MFA playwriting students in what will become the Studio Roanoke space downtown on June 28th, 2008, as part of the Lab guest speaker series.

Studio Roanoke is an undertaking by one of our MFA playwrights, Kenley Smith, who purchased the building at 30 Campbell Avenue with the intention of converting it to a storefront theatre space dedicated to new works programming coming out of the Playwright's Lab.

Rollison began his career as an actor in 1970 and is a graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Acting Program. In the 1980's, like many actors in New York's East Village, he began generating his own work and this eventually led to his becoming co-artistic director of Limbo Theatre. Subsequently, he was co-founder and served as producing artistic director of HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art, as well as co-founder and co-director of HERE Arts Center.

Providing opportunities for many artist generated projects, and he presented the world premieres

of many one-person shows including, Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, John Leguizamo's *Mambo Mouth*, Camryn Manheim's *Wake Up, I'm Fat*, James Lecesne's *Word of Mouth*, and Deb Margolin's *Carthieves! Joyrides!*, which he also directed.

Randy is a co-recipient of an Obie for founding HERE, and recently returned to his career as an actor, appearing at Portland Center Stage and Geva Theatre. He now resides in San Francisco.

### **What do you think of a project like Studio Roanoke?**

I love it, it's something after my own heart. I've created storefront spaces before. And I think its really great for the local arts community in Roanoke. Anything to help fill out the cultural picture is really critical to a city that's kind of booming.

### **Can a storefront theatre work in Roanoke?**

It comes down to marketing and how you're branding what you're doing. If you're clear in your intent about what you're bringing to the public. I think there is room for it. I also think there is room for it to work in the same city as the larger theatre, and I don't think that siphons off anything. I think it just creates more vibrant community. I don't know what the funding sources are around here to help sustain it, but I think it can work.

### **How would you brand it?**

One of the things we started doing in Cleveland was, people will go to independent film, so we started calling it independent theatre, and branding it that way. So you know you're not getting *Glass Menagerie*, you're

getting Caridad Svich's *Fugitive Pieces*. And you're going to like it. I think it works, because a lot of people don't know what this is when you say "new plays." Yet, when they go, they like it. You have to dispel certain things for them. It's like when you go to a modern art museum. A lot of people won't go because they're afraid they're going to look stupid, and you're going to challenge them too much, or you're going to do the play backwards and take out all the verbs. And I think, as artists, we have to look at what we're doing. Can we afford anymore to do just what we want to do without any acknowledgement of the people we want to come and do it with us?

### **How can you help get them in the theatre?**

You have to remove as many barriers as possible. And that's everything from the parking situation, the access, whether its perceived that this area is dangerous—all those things play into their decision making before they walk in your door. And then the information you provide that helps them learn more, like a website.



### **What's the value of an MFA in Playwriting?**

I think it's really critical, because we have to keep re-seeding the American theatre. Programs like this are great because they not only teach the writers how to write, but they help create those important networks for them. This particular program is great because of it being just in the summer so they can fill out their lives in other ways, write during the year and come back. I'm really impressed with the structure of it, with the writing I saw, and I'm very encouraged by it. And, I'd encourage other professionals to come down and be part of the program.



Randy conducts a seminar on store front theatre in the building that will soon become Studio Roanoke. ([www.studioroanoke.org](http://www.studioroanoke.org))



## Newly commissioned play by Keith Bridges read in Los Angeles



*Lie With Me* is an original play by MFA playwright Keith Bridges that explores one sophisticated family's belief that their emotional needs outweigh the social and political mores of our society.

Mutineer Theatre Company of LA commissioned Bridges to write an original play based on a collaborative approach with members of the MTC company.

The mission of MTC is to create, develop, and produce diverse original material through an

explorative and experimental collaborative effort. They are committed to working in a manner that places reverence on the voice of the artist, in whatever medium, to celebrate the work in a unified vision, discipline, and regard.

The first draft underwent a four day workshop process with MTC and culminated in a free staged reading with a post-performance discussion and feedback session moderated by James Utt.

The piece was performed by Jon Cohn, Jennifer Douglas-Craig, Amy

Farrington, Luke Goldstein, Marty Lodge, and Amy Schloerb.



[www.mutineertheatre.com](http://www.mutineertheatre.com)

## Kenley Smith has readings at the Barter Theatre and in Roanoke



Kenley Smith's *Devil Sedan*, an intriguing thriller that deals with questions of faith and duty, took top honors at the Eighth Annual Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights (AFPP) that was held at the Barter Theatre July 28 – August 9 during the Virginia Highlands Festival. Barter plans to give the winning play a full production in the coming season.

Barter's Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights provides not only an avenue for Barter to develop shows for its upcoming season, but also a platform for new plays and playwrights to receive the recognition they deserve.

Perhaps the most successful and recognizable shows to emerge from Barter's AFPP are *Keep on the Sunny Side: the Songs and Story of the Original*

*Carter Family and Man of Constant Sorrow*, the show that pays tribute to the careers of the Stanley brothers. Both were written by local physician Douglas Pote, toured nationally and were produced at theatres around the country. Barter's original cast recordings, which have been distributed internationally, have brought the attention of these works to countless others.

Barter's AFPP is an annual event at Barter Theatre held concurrently with the Virginia Highlands Festival during the first two weeks in August.

For more information on submitting plays, please visit their website at [www.bartertheatre.com/festival](http://www.bartertheatre.com/festival).

*Shade of the Trees*, was written by Smith as part of this summer's Writing for Young Audiences course taught by Jonathan Dorf. The play is set in the time of the Civil War and deals with hardships of that destructive conflict.

Provocative theatre pieces serve as a catalyst for discussion at Greene Memorial United Methodist Church Dinner Theatre, where *Shade*



was given a staged reading on August 27th. The play was selected by Debbie Brown, the Director of Age Level Ministries at GMUMC, who was looking for something that would spark interesting conversations. She contacted the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University.

"Ken's new play was the first thing that came to mind," Todd said of the conversation. "Ken had written this great new play for youth and needed a workshop to fine tune it before submitting the script for publication."

"*Shade of the Trees* has moments of being rip-roaringly funny, and yet at the same time, it's a profoundly moving and skillful examination of the human cost of a turbulent time in American history," Jonathan Dorf agreed.

The play was directed by Pat Wilhelms, former Education Director at Mill Mountain Theatre, and featured local actors.

GREENE MEMORIAL  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
**SUMMER  
DINNER THEATRE**  
Presents  
**SHADE  
OF THE TREES**  
BY  
KENLEY SMITH, HOLLINS UNIVERSITY

*The play is set in the time of the Civil War and is about the hardships of the war on the south, friendships and family.*

**Wednesday, August 27, 2008**  
The tickets go on sale August 6th

6:00pm Catered Dinner 7:00pm Program  
\$12.00 per person

Reservations are required. Seating is limited to 80 people.  
Childcare is available with advance reservations.  
Reservations available by calling the church office, 344-6225.

Proceeds benefit RAM House.

GREENE MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
402 Second Street at Church Avenue  
Downtown Roanoke

## Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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For application materials, please call (540) 362-6326 or visit on the web at [www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting](http://www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting) for more information.

Check out our MySpace page!  
<http://www.myspace.com/hollinsplaywrightslab>

### From the Director: If you aren't going to see plays, why are you writing them?

When I was in high school, I took my first creative writing class with an amazing teacher named Michael Sheridan. He was what a lot of people might have called a bad influence; an old school Irish poet from the University of Iowa Poetry Workshop. He played Warren Zevon records for us and told inappropriate stories from his youth. He did writing exercises that really stretched not only our earliest attempts at some kind of craft, but our ability to begin to observe the world for some kind of meaning and reflect that meaning back.

I will never forget his irreverent and unorthodox teaching methods. Or the times he would bring in his poet friends to do readings of their work for us that I know the PTA would have had

a panic over, especially that one about the guy in Alaska who made himself a woman out of oatmeal.

I wish I could say Mr. Sheridan's story had a happy ending. I don't even know for sure he's still alive. If he is and you know where he's curled up, ask him to get in touch, would you? I lost track of him after I got into college. I tried to walk in some of his footsteps in those legendary Iowa City haunts of his early days the way some people do with Dylan Thomas in New York.

Personally, I think Mike Sheridan was one of the best influences I had as I fumbled my way toward being an artist. I always tell my students something Mike told us:

*"If you don't buy poetry, don't write poetry. If you write it but you don't buy it, you're just ripping the rest of us off."*

I think the same is true about theatre. If you're writing plays, then go see plays. Not just because you will get better at writing them, because that is true, but also because every time you buy a ticket to see a play, you're casting a vote for plays to keep being done.

And anyway, why would you want to write for a medium you have no interest in attending yourself?

**Buying a ticket to a play is one of the best ways to support new work. Do it.**



Todd Ristau, Director