

9-2008

The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 04

Todd Ristau

Hollins University, tristau@hollins.edu

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Recommended Citation

Ristau, Todd, "The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 04" (2008). *Lab Reports*. 17.
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Playwright's Lab
at Hollins University

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The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 02, Issue 04 (September, 2008)

Guest Profile: Annaliese Moyer

Annaliese Moyer is a life-long photographer and performer who combines those passions into a very successful career as a professional performance photographer. Her artistic journey has included a first ballet class at age 5, her first camera at 8, film school at NYU, working in the music business, acting, traveling to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and photographing around the world.

While still enamored of (and still using her Hasselblad) she embraced digital photography and post production early and utilizes that technology in most of her work.

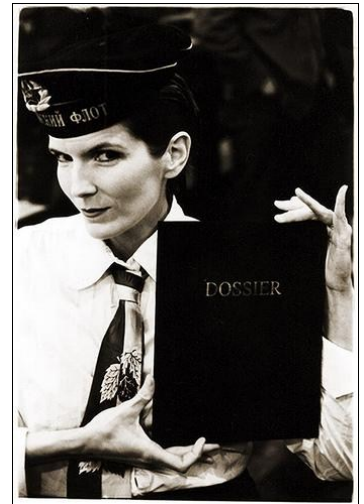
Sharing her Portland, Oregon home, studio, and life with her husband, illustrator Lee Moyer, Annaliese has found her work growing more illustrative in

recent years. She photographs music, theater, dance, and all performers in the studio, the theater, and on location for promotional, live, and conceptual images.

Annaliese is passionate about collaboration. She believes that respect and communication are the cornerstones of high quality results that meet each of her client's aesthetic and practical needs.

We were delighted to invite Annaliese to come to Hollins as a guest artist in both her artistic capacities. She spoke with our students about the value of working with a professional performance photographer in documenting and promoting their work as playwrights. She also participated as an actress in Mill Mountain Theatre's

Overnight Sensations, performing in *Cuppa Coffin* by MFA Playwright Krista Knutsen. While in residence, Annaliese took hundreds of photos of our students, campus and Lab events—which you'll be seeing in upcoming promotional materials!



www.stagerightphoto.com and www.annaliesemoyer.com

Student Spotlight: Jayne Benjulian



Jayne Benjulian is a playwright who started the MFA program at Hollins this past summer. Before she began to write plays, Jayne Benjulian wrote journalism, radio and television commercials and propaganda for some of the most famous companies in Silicon Valley. She was award winning chief speechwriter at Apple. Jayne was a Fulbright Lecturer

in Language and Literature at the Université Lyon III in France, and a Danforth teaching fellow at Emory University, where she earned an M.A. in English.

A member of the defense team at the King County Public Defender, she investigated criminal and civil charges filed against clients who could not afford private attorneys. One of her plays, *Shot in the Heart*, is the true story of that year. Her play about the end-of-life debate, *Locked In*, was a finalist for a Sloan Foundation Commission in science writing at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco. Next May, her new play, *In Poland*, will be read at the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis.

Jayne is Apprentice Dramaturg at the Magic Theater in San

Francisco and a member of the Magic's Literary Committee.

"When I saw the ad for the Hollins MFA program in playwriting in *The Dramatist*, I ran to my computer to apply," Jayne told us. "I've written all my life; however, attempts to focus exclusively on learning to write plays had time and again been interrupted...I now have my summers free to reclaim myself as a playwright, and I want to think about nothing else, do nothing else, with that time. What I want now is to work intensively with a community of mentors and theater artists that offers continuity for my work."

Jayne's needs as a writer perfectly match the mission of the Playwright's Lab. We're excited to have her join our program!

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/2/A87/3A9>

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Guest Spotlight: Lucy Thurber



Lucy Thurber is the author of seven plays: *Where We're Born*, *Ashville*, *Scarcity*, *Killers and Other Family*, *Stay*, *Bottom of The World* and *Monstrosity*. Her produced plays are published by Dramatists Play Service. Thurber is a member of New Dramatists, 13P, MCC Playwrights Coalition and Dorothy Strelsin New American Writers Group at Primary Stages.

While Lucy was on campus, our students had the opportunity to ask her some questions about her work. These are some of her answers.

How do you teach playwriting?

I usually start with a series of exercises. I do a couple that I made up, that are riffs on other ones. I usually do what I call the Best Friend Exercise. Which is, I ask students to close their eyes and imagine their best friend and that can be whoever it is, whether it's a family member or whoever and you imagine all the ways that person witnesses your existence, and makes your existence viable and vice versa, and you think about them and all the things that they want and all the things that they need and what it means to witness somebody in their life. And then you write your friend their greatest love scene as a gift.

And it's a great exercise because it automatically, especially for beginning writers, or even not for beginning writers, you automatically

invest, you automatically have emotion going into a scene. You also automatically, I think, treat that character with a lot more care than you would necessarily because you feel a sense of responsibility. Part of the lesson of it is that you should have that sense of responsibility to your characters always.

I do that one, I do a couple of other ones. And I sort of hear, from those scenes, I get to know who these people are. You know, you can tell a lot about who a writer is in a scene or two. Sort of what's functioning for them, what's important for them, and then out of that I continue doing exercises or if they are already working on something and they want help on it, I have them bring that in and I run the room as a writer's workshop and we read stuff out loud. They pass it out to the other writers and we hear it and we talk about it. I really believe in a lot of what Todd talks about, you know, collaboration. You know, and team work, and really creating an atmosphere in the room which is peer central. I believe that the only difference between me and you is that I have a little bit more experience than you, but otherwise, we're peers. And I also think that who you are now, who you're with now, your peers, those are the people who you have to depend on because you need loyalty. I mean, there is a little bit of a mob feel to theatre. You know, like, who are your people? Who do you belong to? Who are you

with? Who do you know? Who knows if that's good or not, it just is. But also, a level of appreciation.

Can you talk a little bit about the structure 13P?

Oh, sure! I believe in the writer's code. Which is, even if you don't like each other's stuff you appreciate that everybody sits down and everybody struggles and, you know, writer to writer. Out of something like that is 13P. It's collaborative, it's thirteen writers who just got together...Rob Handel, Madeleine George, and Anne Washburn—ahh, beautiful writers! They're all amazing. I get overwhelmed by how good I think they are. And they were like, we're sick of waiting around. Like the whole idea of development hell. That ultimately you need to see your stuff up, that the final stage of development for a new play is first production. Because it is in that that you figure all the stuff out. And they were like, let's just get together and we can be thirteen people and we're playwrights, and we'll just do plays until we're done and then we'll disband.

I mean, there was that, but there was also sort of a real desire to stick it to the man, so to speak. To actually create different versions, to create production models. And we came from a time where I think there was a lot of frustration all around, it's not just 13P, I mean, there are a lot of people from all different walks who are really struggling and great inroads are being made with the development stuff...all the way around. It's not just writers who are frustrated. You know, I think it's important to remember that theatres are frustrated, directors, everybody's frustrated. Like, it's the rare person who doesn't love theatre who doesn't

look at the way it's working right now and doesn't go, "Oh my God, make it stop!" Everybody's working on it.

And so, we at 13P got together sort of based on this idea and it's great. This is our fifth year and we have probably two or three more years and then we'll be done with everybody and we'll disband. And the great thing that's happening now, that I'm super excited with, is that we started talking about how we've gathered all of these helpers, you know, like fundraisers who have invested in us, like people come and work for us, volunteer and that's so awesome. You know, and did we want to just disband...sort of the beauty of the structure is that we do just disband because it creates this, again, sense of fluidity and freedom in theatre which I think is so important to hold onto rather than, "OK! We're successful, let's do some work!" You know, the idea that we do this and then we make room for others. So, do we just disband and let all of these people go or do we turn some of these things and these people who have been helping us over to somebody else?

How are you feeling about it all?

I am a corny optimist. I am, but it's good, you know? It's good to be alive, it's good to be happy. And I can say to you, I'm happy. I like my life. I like what I have. I'm looking forward to what's coming next. I feel lucky. I like the work I'm doing. For the most part I like the people I'm doing it with. Not every one, every day...

I think that art should be dangerous, and revolutionary, by the fact of it being honest, and true, and vulnerable. And you guys having the courage to say, "No, this is enough. This is enough. This is what I'm doing and it's enough."

Area Highlight: Barter Theatre



Barter Theatre was founded during the Depression by an enterprising young actor named Robert Porterfield. He and his fellow actors found themselves out of work and hungry in New York City. Porterfield contrasted that to the abundance of food, but

lack of live theatre, around his home region in Southwest Virginia. He returned to Washington County with an extraordinary proposition: bartering produce from the farms and gardens of the area to gain admission to see a play.

Barter Theatre opened its doors on June 10, 1933 proclaiming, "With vegetables you cannot sell, you can buy a good laugh." The price of admission was 35 cents or the equivalent in produce, the concept of trading "ham for Hamlet" caught on

quickly. At the end of the first season, the Barter Company cleared \$4.35 in cash, two barrels of jelly and enjoyed a collective weight gain of over 300 pounds. Playwrights including Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder accepted Virginia ham as payment for royalties. An exception was George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, who bartered the rights to his plays for spinach.

Barter is now the longest running professional Equity theatre in the nation and has three distinct venues: Barter Theatre, with over

500 seats, featuring traditional theatre in a luxurious setting. Stage II, with seating for 167 around a thrust stage in an intimate setting, is perfect for more adventurous productions. The Barter Players ensemble of actors produces plays for young audiences throughout the year.

Barter also hosts the Festival of Appalachian Plays and Playwrights annually.

<http://www.bartertheatre.com>

Playwright's Lab Goes Multi-Media

The Playwright's Lab has started working with different types of on-line media and resources to help get the word out about our unique program in playwriting.

On-line Newsletter Archive

We've gotten tremendous feedback on our newsletters—especially the interviews with our guest artists. In order to help make the material more accessible, Hollins University has created a special on-line archive of all of our past issues, which can now be downloaded in PDF form.

There you'll find a menu of past issues. Just click on the one you'd like to download.

Guest Artist Transcripts

In addition to the newsletter interviews, we also transcribe the talks our guest artists give during the summer session.

Rather than give a stuffy lecture, we simply ask our guests to tell us about their life in the arts and how they came to be who they are now. In many cases, this is the first time they've been asked to talk about themselves and the intimate glimpse into their personal stories is amazing.

We carefully annotate the transcript, providing links to

things and people mentioned in the talk that might not be familiar to a reader—sort of a dramaturgical aid. Then the whole thing is uploaded to our server and linked from the guest artist's bio. We hope to compile all of the guest artist transcripts into a single volume for publication.

Podcasts

Though not technically podcasts per se, we have started the practice of getting a short video interview with faculty, students and guest artists while they are in residence during the summer and then uploading those videos to YouTube.

It's an excellent way for a low residency program like ours to get the word out about the program and allow prospective students to "e-meet" the people involved who make our program happen.

Specific podcasts related to each guest artist and faculty member are linked from their bios on the guests and faculty pages of the main website.

MySpace

We told you about our MySpace page back on September, but it is worth mentioning again. In

addition to being a social networking site for individuals, MySpace is a great tool for organizations and educational programs to bring a lot of information together in a single place.

Our page has a regular blog with information on submission opportunities and other resources for playwrights. There is a production and event calendar as well as course listings. Our friends include other educational programs, lots of theatres that do new plays, and (of course) many of our students.

Whether you are enrolled in the program or not, our MySpace is a useful place to visit on a regular basis.

Hollins Radio Drama

When Jason Grote comes to campus this summer, he will be teaching a course in radio drama and we'll be working with the Hollins Music Dept. and their Midi Lab to create podcasts of student work that will go out on a MySpace page created just for that purpose.

Email list

We are working on compiling an email list so that we can email you our newsletter and other information.

If you'd like to get email updates and a PDF copy of the newsletter delivered to your inbox, just send an email to Todd Ristau, our program director, requesting that you be added to the list.

That email address is: tristau@hollins.edu.



http://www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting/lab_report.html
http://www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting/faculty_past.html
<http://www.youtube.com/playwrightslab>
<http://www.myspace.com/hollinsplaywrightslab>
<http://www.myspace.com/hollinsradiotheatre>

Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Todd Ristau, Director
Graduate Program in Playwriting
Hollins University
PO Box 9602
Roanoke, VA 24020-1602
Phone: 540.362.6386
Fax: 540.362.6465
E-mail: tristau@hollins.edu

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

Check out our MySpace page!

<http://www.myspace.com/hollinsplaywrightslab>

From the Director: Studio Roanoke Artistic Directorship

As we've mentioned in previous issues of the newsletter, Kenley Smith is one of our current MFA playwrights, and he bought a building in downtown Roanoke to start a theatre specializing in producing new plays.

Studio Roanoke's Board of Directors has asked me to take on the role of Artistic Director.

I'm honored, and very pleased to accept. I think that taking on this additional challenge will be a perfect extension of the work we're doing here at Hollins in the playwriting program.

One of the drawbacks of having a low-residency summer intensive program is the lack of production opportunities for the playwriting students.

I am absolutely a believer in the idea that there really is no substitute for experiential learning and all the "development" in the world is no substitute for what you can discover about your play by going into production.

I'd struggled over how, as the Program Director of the Playwright's Lab, I could provide that vital component as part of my students' education. Studio Roanoke solves that problem.

We will go into more detail in future issues of the newsletter, but the plan is to do about one student play a month in the new space and to pair that student playwright with a guest director who has experience working on new plays with playwrights in the room.

I've worked closely with Randy Rollison when he was the Artistic Director of HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art Off-Broadway in New York. Randy is enthusiastic about what we're doing at Studio Roanoke and has joined our Board of Advisors along with Morgan Jenness, Paul Meshejian, Bonnie Metzgar, Lucy Thurber and other supportive arts professionals eager to see this thing we're doing succeed.

I'm looking forward to working with them, with our students, and with you as we bring exciting new plays to new audiences.

Follow the progress at:
www.studioroanoke.org



Todd Ristau, Director