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The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 05

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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 05 (October, 2008)

Building Databases of Actors and Directors

CASTING CALLS

When the summer session is underway, our student playwrights come to Roanoke from all over the country. As a result, new arrivals and even the students who've been here previously often don't have connections with the many fine local actors and directors who might be available to work on their readings.

To facilitate those connections and to provide opportunities for local performers and directors to connect with our students we are working with Studio Roanoke to create a searchable database of actors and directors in the Roanoke area who are interested in participating in readings and productions of new work.

The partnership is natural, as Studio Roanoke is in constant

need of actors, directors, designers, and other theatre artists willing to work mostly for the sake of learning more about what they do and the reward of contributing to something amazing.

Once the database is constructed, playwrights looking for actors to read during the summer can search by various key words and then cross reference likely candidates with the library of headshots and bios. Directors, too, will be listed and then contacted by writers who would like to work with a director on their readings and developmental productions.

Likewise, Studio Roanoke will find the database invaluable as they send out casting calls for each of the monthly productions mounted in the new theatre

space downtown.

Actors and directors who'd like to be entered into our database should email their headshot, and resume in digital form to info@studioroanoke.org.

(jpeg and .rtf, no PDFs please)

Include area of specific interest (acting or directing) and a short (250 word) professional bio as it might appear in a program or a press release.



www.studioroanoke.org/castingcalls.html

Student Spotlight: Peter Sapienza



Peter Sapienza started his life in the theatre as an actor performing on stage and in film. He graduated with honors from the University of Michigan and earned an MA in Theatre from Eastern Michigan University where he wrote his

first full-length play, *Absolute Value*. The play was selected for production at Wayne State University and won second prize in the Louise Heck-Rabi Scholarship Playwriting Competition in 2006.

"I want to tell stories that will make an audience laugh and cry while learning from the experience," Peter told us. "I want to learn more about the art of storytelling. I cannot imagine a better environment to continue learning the art of playwriting than the one at Hollins University."

Peter has taught English, Speech and Drama for the past 14 years. During that time he has directed award-winning productions in High School competitions.

"Peter is a perfect example of

what this program was created to provide...a training program for people with a passion for theatre and a real desire to learn the craft of playwriting from the ground up," Todd Ristau, Program Director said of Peter's first summer. "Here you have a guy who has been a professional actor, has worked in the theatre his whole life, and he wants to learn how to tell a story *better*. He is already working as a teacher, so the motivation isn't to get work. The motivation is to put his summers to work, to build on his skills and make the kinds of personal and professional connections that will take what he can already do to the next level."

Peter's irrepressible good humor, and generosity endeared him to everyone. And his talent as an actor came in very handy in readings, *No Shame* and *Overnight Sensations!*

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Guest Spotlight: Celise Kalke



Celise Kalke is Artistic Associate and Dramaturg at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta where she manages New Play Development, the Kendeda Graduate Playwright Competition, and is an award winning production dramaturg. Her full professional bio is available on our website.

This summer, Celise came to Hollins to reinforce instruction given in our Dramaturgy class by talking about dramaturgy as a profession and her own life in the arts. She spoke formally to the Lab on how playwrights and dramaturgs can work together more effectively and also met with students individually and in small groups at the Wyndham Robertson Library.

These are some of her answers to our questions:

How do you feel about MFA programs in playwriting?

I'm very excited about MFA programs in general, and I feel very privileged to spend a lot of my life emailing and networking with the people who are running the MFA programs. I think that, unfortunately, due to the financial realities of bringing forth playwrights but fortunately for MFA programs and for training, a number of accomplished and produced people who are deeply committed to careers in the American theatre are running MFA programs and they are

bringing the wisdom of their own experiences working in a wide swath of different theatres to their programs. And there are more and more really good development opportunities out there, opportunities to work with actors...MFA programs that are really training playwrights to be fully functioning members of the artistic community.

What is your impression of the program at Hollins?

I think that a program where one doesn't have to both turn out a play and learn if you don't want to is incredible....I think that people who have the opportunity to be in the world, whatever that means—whether working or teaching or writing—and then come for a very intense time during the summer is a really unusual model, but I think a very fertile model. I'm really interested to read the plays coming out of Hollins because I wonder if their writing about the world will be more expansive than some other programs because of only being in school for six weeks in the summer and having the entire rest of the year to be living as a global citizen. Also, it's beautiful here. Really gorgeous!

Is it a good time to be a playwright?

I think it's a wonderful time to be a playwright. I don't think it is a wonderful time to be a playwright financially. You know, that's another thing, but aesthetically and artistically, it's a *fantastic* time. I think there's an explosion of American letters. I think that the people I knew as emerging artists in the early '90's have really exploded what it means to be an American playwright. I think that theatres are getting a little braver about producing plays that are not realistic or naturalistic and they're talking

to their audiences about taking risks. And also, I think it's a great time to be a playwright because TV is so good. Which makes me sad, because we lose a lot of writers to TV, but TV is really exploding, the internet is exploding, and there is a real fever for content right now. A fever for creative people who will make that content. Then it's a question of when you get that movie contract, will you take some time off and write for the stage? Well, then, theatre has to be competitive in an aesthetic issue, and not a money issue. That said, I think that we are in a very wonderful aesthetic time that has no vocabulary. Which is why I spend my free time writing manifestos and thinking about ethics and things. Because, after the word "post-modern" we're in the "What?" Right? The What. And then critics flounder around and say post-post-modern. But, what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. But the work, the work that is being produced and the work that I get excited about means so much and is so full of content!

Is it New York or Nothing?

The regional theatres around the country who hung in there and didn't downsize their literary departments are getting really activist about world premieres.

And Sarah Ruhl and Tracy Letts, the most visible examples, have shown that you do not have to have a New York career to be a national writer, that gets produced all over the country. And I think that is incredibly exciting. Sarah Ruhl got her start at Madison Rep because of some work of Lenora's. (*Ed. Note: Lenora Inez Brown, who taught dramaturgy at Hollins this past summer.*)

There are artistic directors and dramaturgs and literary managers and playwrights all over the country who are training audiences—here in Roanoke! Right? With what you guys are doing. Madison, Wisconsin. Atlanta, Georgia. Chicago, which is just an amazing, amazing place to be a playwright. Berkeley in California. There are all these wonderful people who have been working to make their audiences excited about world premieres and it is no longer true that you have to have a world premiere in New York to have a career as a playwright.

Any advice to playwrights in production?

Know that when you are in the room, you are working too and not simply waiting for what you imagined in your head to appear on the stage.



Deal by Neeley Gossett performed at Mill Mountain Theatre



Neeley Gossett, one of our MFA playwrights, had a reading at Mill Mountain Theatre this month as part of their CenterPieces lunchtime reading series.

"One of the things that is so great about the Playwright's Lab," Program Director Todd Ristau said after the reading, "are the opportunities for creative synergies with the rest

of the area's arts community."

The reading, which Ristau also directed, featured Susanna Young and Heidi Hostetler, two actors from the Hollins University undergraduate theatre program, and Austin Alderman, a regular writer/performer from Mill Mountain's No Shame Theatre.

Deal, a 35 minute play about doctoral students flirting with giving up their dissertations in favor of becoming professional gamblers in Las Vegas, was submitted simultaneously by Gossett to Mill Mountain Theatre and as a writing sample when she applied to the playwriting program at Hollins.

CenterPieces submissions must be 25-35 pages and suitable for a general audience. Playwrights are paid \$50 and given a DVD of the reading as well as the moderated post-reading discussion. Actors are paid \$25 each. Preference is given to pieces that have small casts and minimal production needs.

In addition to a legitimate resume credit, the CenterPieces readings provide student playwrights with an opportunity to see how their work stands or falls in front of a live audience outside of the classroom setting.

Neeley has really been doing outstanding work since she came

to the program this past summer. Her monologue, *Worth in Numbers*, was selected for production as part of Riverside Theatre's Walking the Wire Festival in Iowa City, IA. In addition, Gossett was invited by Celise Kalke to take part in a dramaturgy internship at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, GA in the Spring.



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaSji58c0_g

NaPIWriMo (National PlayWriting Month)



Naplwrmo's mission is to encourage and nurture playwrights while fostering community and the creation of new theatrical works on a global level. The name is short for National Playwriting Month, and is pronounced "Napplereemo."

From their official website: The first edition of Naplwrmo, in 2006, had 20 participants. Everyone had a blast and 13 won.

In 2007, twice as many people showed up online on November 1st. Alas, the site crashed on that day leading to much confusion for the participants and much sleep deprivation for

Dorothy, its fearless leader whose rudimentary web skills only went so far. NaPIWriMo 2007 did end up running successfully even though its grassroots web ways tried everyone's patience.

Shortly after that, NaPIWriMo became a partner artist project of The Shunpike. The Shunpike provided a 501c3 umbrella for NaPIWriMo, which, in plain English, means that money could be raised and donations tax deductible.

On October 15th 2008, NaPIWriMo launched its new website, on a much improved platform : Drupal. Thanks to many kind donors and a fabulous web designer, NaPIWriMo will kick off its 3rd edition in style.

THE SEVEN RULES OF THE RHINO

1. Start writing at 12:00am on November 1st. *Not* before.
2. Stop writing by November 30th at 11:59pm at the latest.

3. Your play must be a brand new play (no screenplay); ie: you can not work on a previously started draft. (yes, we changed it this year, sorry)

4. Your draft has to be at least 75 pages. (we're talking a standard script page such as this one, offered by The Playwriting Seminars site or something close enough to that, with a font no larger than 12pt courier). 75 pages is what we consider good length for a full length play these days. You can write more of course but consider the life of your play after you've written it and consider that 75 page plays get produced a lot more frequently than 90 page plays or 5 act tragedies.

5. You gotta write it all by yourself (in the future, perhaps we'll have teams, but for now, just little you - I know, we're mean, I know).

6. You must report weekly (by Sunday of each week) on the forums page. We can't force you to do this of course but we firmly believe that those who report to their community have more

chances of finishing and of staying in the challenge.

7. You must upload your play to the site by 12:30 am, December 1st if you want to be considered a winner.

Yes these are the rules.

Yes, we made them up.

No we can't make you follow them.

Yes, your integrity will be intact if you do.

Again, no screenplays. Sorry.

Musicals are okay. (but *are* they really ?)

Oh and the 8th unofficial rule which is that your fingers must feel sore come November 30th and your zygomatic bone must hurt from all the fun you had.

Participation is FREE!

<http://www.naplwrmo.org>
<http://www.shunpike.org/>

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 for more information.

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

From the Director: Vote for the Arts in 2008!

It would be pretty hard to ignore that this is a presidential election year...and one which is historic in many different ways.

There are a lot of very important issues facing all the candidates—from those running for President to those running for your local school board.

While I would never use my position as the head of an academic program to advocate for one specific party or any specific candidate, I think it is entirely appropriate to advocate that every voter make the most informed choices they can.

You wouldn't be reading this newsletter if you weren't interested in the performing arts and arts education. As a voter, please make the effort to find

which candidates care as much as you do about those two important issues and then vote accordingly.

There are a lot of ways to find out this information. Go to a speech and ask in person. Call the campaign office to ask where a candidate stands on arts funding, art censorship, public art, art education, as well as funding for theatres, performance halls, museums, and other cultural institutions.

Asking those questions informs you on the stands politicians will take and also informs your politicians that those issues are important to their constituents.

Another way to find out where candidates stand is to seek out arts advocacy organizations and

get information or even volunteer to help promote their causes.

Supporting the arts should go beyond labels like liberal and conservative. Artists contribute not only to our culture and understanding of social issues, but they also have a tremendous impact on local economies. Arts funding usually goes immediately into buying materials to create art, which means lumber, paint, tools, and so forth...as well as contributing to the tax base through payroll, admission, and sales taxes.

Does your candidate have an arts policy? If not, why not? You won't know unless you ask.



Todd Ristau, Director