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## The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 07

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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 07 (December, 2008)

## WordBRIDGE Playwright's Laboratory



**WordBRIDGE** is a professional laboratory that has been working to develop the work of pre-professional playwrights since 1994.

Alumni of **WordBRIDGE** have been produced in theatres on Broadway, Off-Broadway, in regional theatres, community theatres and university theatres around the country. Scripts developed there have been performed across the United States and around the world.

**WordBRIDGE** provides the next generation of playwrights with a home for their work, compelling and compassionate professionals to collaborate with, and a world-class laboratory in which to test their ideas and visions.

Playwrights challenge themselves and their craft during two weeks of rehearsals with professional artists in a generous, interdisciplinary environment and playwright centric process. Free of production pressures, playwrights are free to experiment in bringing an early draft to production readiness.

Guest professionals include directors, actors, dramaturgs, playwrights, behavioral scientists, storytellers, musicians, movement and improvisation artists.

**WordBRIDGE** nominations are solicited from around the country. Writers send scripts that best capture their voices and visions, but that are in need of revision. A panel of theatre professionals read and recommend projects based on originality, vision and voice.

Once the pool of nominations has been narrowed down, finalists are interviewed to determine good matches for **WordBRIDGE**.

By the time a script and playwright have been selected for **WordBRIDGE**, the script has been read at least three times and the jury have gotten to know the playwright and their plan for their time at the Lab.

Then the focused, dramaturgical development process begins. The approach to each selected play should be as unique as the script it hopes to serve.

Each playwright is matched with a production team consisting of a director, dramaturg, actors, and other related resource artists. Working intimately with the playwright, each production team explores different perspectives and experiments with new ideas for the playwright. The workshop includes daily rehearsals, readings, improvisations, script analyses and if applicable, sessions with related dance, music and scenic design artists. The playwright rewrites and reworks the script following these daily sessions.

Each play is read for the assembled company at the beginning of the process and reactions may be solicited from the company in a variety of ways—from direct questioning to more tactile or poetic

approaches. Always the goal is inspiring the playwright toward the work ahead.

At the end of the workshop period, each playwright is presented with the opportunity to have another reading for, and gather reactions from, the assembled **WordBRIDGE** company.

This is not a "final" reading, nor are rehearsals working toward this reading as a production. The second reading is more like a check-in where it is understood the play is still in process and all feedback given is intended to lead the playwright into the potential rewrites or towards possible production after the Lab.

**WordBRIDGE** does not consider its work with a play finished after the Lab has concluded, however.

**WordBRIDGE** remains committed to promoting these works, when ready, through their professional theatre partners and an online database of scripts.

The Labs are usually held for two weeks in June, and selected playwrights are provided with housing, food, and travel assistance.

Pre-professional playwrights are welcome to apply (Pre-professional playwrights include undergraduate and graduate playwrights, and playwrights who have not received a professional production of their work.)

**WordBRIDGE** accepts works of all lengths and genres, including solo performance projects. We fully support the work of this amazing organization and encourage our students to apply.

[www.wordbridge.org](http://www.wordbridge.org)

# The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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## Guest Spotlight: Michael Kerry Williams and Young Audiences of Virginia



**Michael Kerry Williams**, Artistic Director for Young Audiences of Virginia, came to campus this past summer to talk to our students about the possibilities of using their skills in the area of arts education as a means of professional development and potential employment.

Young Audiences - Arts for Learning - Virginia is the leading provider of quality arts-in-education programming in Virginia. As the Artistic Director Michael manages over 100 artists, auditions new programs and artists to send into schools around the state, and provides artistic and educational feedback and goals for artists programs. He oversees all aspects of YAV programming and insures quality and creativity is maintained.

Michael holds a BM in Performance and Composition with a minor in Drama from Westminster Choir College at Princeton and continued

Masters Degree work in Musical Theatre at New York University. He has performed in opera houses across the country and Europe, including several Broadway and off-Broadway productions. In addition, Michael has published 2 volumes of poetry and produced numerous scripts for young actors.

Young Audiences is dedicated to bringing innovation and imagination to education through the arts. The organization is committed to the belief that creativity and critical thinking are essential aspects of childhood development and that failing to develop every child's creative capacity diminishes all of us.

"When the arts are integrated into the educational lives of our children, their diverse intelligences and learning styles are valued and enhanced and they learn more effectively," Michael told our students.

Among the innovative programming offered by Young Audiences are Arts-Integration School Performances, where professional artists of all disciplines go directly into the schools; Literacy ; Early Childhood Arts; Art-Centered After-School Care; and Workforce Readiness through Arts instruction. YAV has provided over a thousand hours



of arts-integration programming and reached nearly a quarter of a million children in Virginia.

Many artists come to YAV for the strong reputation they have with educators and school systems. YAV offers many services deemed valuable to artists.

YAV handles all communications for artists. YAV actively promotes them and takes care of scheduling. YAV is the largest arts-in-education organization in the state and has a powerful national network and resources at the artist's disposal. Fees are negotiated per artist or ensemble based on geographical location and ensemble size. Compensation for all artists may include mileage, meal per diem and hotel when on tour with Young Audiences of Virginia, Inc.

Michael talked about how important it is to get talented, trained professionals from all the arts fields into our public schools in order to spark interest in the arts among our nation's young people so that new generations of artists and audiences can be cultivated.

As part of his work with our program at Hollins, Michael asked our students to envision some of the possible workshops and residencies they might be able to offer through YAV or a similar organization in their own home states, then walked them

through a sample program as though they were the child participants. A detailed examination of the process followed with discussion and questions for Michael as an expert in the field of applying arts training to primary and secondary education.

"What I focused on was how to create performance programs for scripts for students K-12," Michael said. "And also how to design residency concepts including the use of tableau or story telling and theatre to connect to the school's curriculum and how to get those ideas across to the children. The hope is to create scripts that can then be tested in the field with young audiences and opportunities for artists to perform those scripts and for students to receive an introduction to the arts and theatre through that performance. I think there are plenty of opportunities to commission scripts or to test them in the field and then send them out with one of the troupes to reach those children that so desperately need it for personal growth as well as educational connections. We've worked frequently with Todd Ristau and the No Shame Players. He's one of our favorite artists. We are very open to new ideas and to working with children. We're looking forward to working with Lab playwrights in the future."



## Area Highlight: The Jefferson Center



The Jefferson Center is a non-profit organization that enriches and educates diverse Western Virginia communities by producing high quality performing and visual arts programs.

Originally constructed in 1922, Jefferson High School served as Roanoke's largest high school for half a century.

The auditorium - now Shaftman Performance Hall - modeled after a popular 17th century "shoe box" English opera house design, showcased solid wood paneling, an impressive balcony, classic appointments and outstanding acoustics. Because the city had no civic center, the auditorium was built larger with the intent of

using it for community events and concerts, and in fact hosted such greats as Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra conductor Leonard Bernstein and operatic tenor Enrico Caruso.

The school was closed in 1974 but operated as Jefferson Hall under Patrick Henry High School until 1975.

By the late 1970's the once majestic Jefferson High School was a decaying skeleton of its former self and, despite its glorious past, the structure was nearly demolished.

In 1985, Roanoke City Council appointed a citizen's committee, mostly of Jefferson High graduates, to determine the future of the iconic building.

After two years of extensive research the committee recommended that the building become a center to house non-profit organizations involved in the performing arts, education and social services.

In 1989 the Jefferson Center Foundation was established and fund raising efforts began.

The original estimate of \$5 million for the auditorium increased to \$9 million as construction problems and equipment costs increased dramatically. Throughout the \$9 million renovation project Jefferson Center Foundation remained steadfast in its commitment to preserving the architectural authenticity of the hall, named in honor of Rosalie and Sydney Shaftman.



Consistent with the goal to be a first class performance facility, Jefferson Center boasts elegant finishes and decorations. Existing marble, wood-panel, and cast-plaster finishes were completely

refurbished. The auditorium chairs are now luxurious seats of cherry wood with plush velvet cushions. Loges and chandeliers recall the spirit of an old-world opera house.

Technical components brought Shaftman Performance Hall into the 21st century and include an orchestra lift, expanded stage area and a sound system that can be customized to acoustically profile the performer's needs. Dozens of strategically placed speakers disperse audio around the room to ensure symmetry of sound no matter where the seat. At considerable expense the roof was raised 22-feet to create a 65-foot tower that houses impressive stage rigging.

With the May 2001 opening of Shaftman Performance Hall, Jefferson Center became the significant cultural asset envisioned by many to create something special from the once abandoned, yet historically important, Jefferson High School.

For the complete history and full list of the far-sighted donors and supporters who made this remarkable dream a reality, please visit the Jefferson Center website.

[www.jeffcenter.org](http://www.jeffcenter.org)

## Resource: InSight for Playwrights



InSight for Playwrights is a monthly marketing newsletter and resource which delivers via emailed PDF the latest submission information for theatres, playwriting contests, workshops, residencies, and other development programs for dramatic writers.

InSIGHT offers 16 pages each month of important submission information. The staff scour the trades and the internet for playwriting opportunities, compiles the information and sends it out each month to subscribing writers, so that they can concentrate on their writing rather than market research.

In addition to being an invaluable up-to-the-month submission calendar, the

newsletter profiles theaters that produce new plays and provides subscribers to send in their own reports when they get readings and productions. A "Success Stories" page appears at the end of each issue.

At the top of each issue, Editor Sandra Hosking (a successful playwright herself) provides an editorial on issues relevant to emerging writers or an interesting interview and profile of an established playwright, such as

Beth Henley, Horton and Daisy Foote, Steven Dietz, Jeffrey Sweet, and others.

A year-long subscription is \$35 for delivery via email, \$45 for the print version sent via snail mail.

InSight's website also allows subscribers access to additional resources and will post a link directly to their own websites.

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

## Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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**Just what you need.  
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Learn the craft of writing dramatic works and study the collaborative art of theatre during our six-week intensive schedule—and earn an M.F.A. in playwriting in just a few summers. You'll work closely with such guest artists as Ruth Margraff, Naomi Wallace, and Mac Wellman and form professional relationships that can lead to reading and production opportunities before graduation—a potent formula few other programs offer.

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: Your Application Package

If you're thinking about graduate school, chances are you're worrying about all sorts of things—finding the right program, finding the money, and finding out how to get in.

Probably the most worried over thing I'm asked about is the application package.

Every MFA program is different. Every program is looking for different things from the applicant pool. Even though there are often similar expectations for what is needed in order to make a decision about whether or not to accept you as a student, don't presume.

Most schools won't begin to review an application until all the requirements are in place

and in the prospective student's file. Find out exactly what you need to provide and by what deadline.

The earlier your application package is completed, the earlier a decision can be made. Lots of people wait until the last possible minute. It stands to reason, then, that if you complete your file early the people reviewing it will have more time to examine the materials, call you with questions, contact your references, and discuss all the options available. That allows you and the school to make a better decision.

At Hollins, we need your completed application forms, your application fee, three letters of reference, relevant

resume indicating background and experience, all official transcripts, writing samples and a letter of interest which tells us where you've been, where you hope to go, and how you think we can help you get there.

I'll go into each of those components in a little more detail in coming months, but the main thing I want to get across is that your application package is an introduction, not a sales pitch. Getting into grad school is too expensive and too much work to consider it a prize or a lottery. It is more like a partnership, and your application package is how we meet. So, be honest, be complete, and be on time.



**Todd Ristau, Director**