

3-2009

The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 10

Todd Ristau

Hollins University, tristau@hollins.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/labreports>



Part of the [Playwriting Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ristau, Todd, "The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 10" (2009). *Lab Reports*. 23.
<https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/labreports/23>

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the Playwright's Lab at Hollins Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Lab Reports by an authorized administrator of Hollins Digital Commons. For more information, please contact lvilelle@hollins.edu, millerjc@hollins.edu.



Playwright's Lab
at Hollins University

Inside this issue:

Dreamtime by Maura Campbell Opens in Vermont 2

SETC 2009 3

Sunny da Silva Interns at Studio Roanoke as 3

From the Director: What Kind of Writing Samples Do We Want? 4

Next Month:

- **Course Listings for Summer 2009**
- **Studio Roanoke Opens Ambitious First Season!**
- **Visiting Faculty Profile: Jason Grote and Bonnie Metzgar**
- **Lie with Me by Keith Bridges in Los Angeles**
- **From the Director: Letter of Interest**

All contents © Playwright's Lab at Hollins University, 2009. All rights reserved.



The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 02, Issue 10 (March, 2009)

Resource: Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights (ALAP)



The Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights (ALAP) is a service and support organization dedicated to protecting the rights and addressing the professional needs of the Los Angeles playwriting community.

Founded in 1992, ALAP has a large and diverse membership, ranging from beginning writers to established professionals.

Among the events and programs ALAP sponsors are the Annual Reading Festival and the Playwrights Expo, which brings together playwrights and representatives of dozens of local and national theatres. Other

events like Dramapalooza, Dramageddon, and Dramapocalypto feature a Director/Dramatist Exchange, a Monologue Slam, and various workshops and professional panels. ALAP also presents the In Our Own Voices series, in which member playwrights read from and share their work with other writers and theatre professionals in conjunction with symposiums and panel discussions. The organization also provides playwrights with networking and social events such as the Annual Meeting and 12th Nite Party, the Spring Cocktail Party, and the Summer Picnic.

The bimonthly New Works Lab, in which a local theatre company does a non-public table reading followed by moderated discussion, in order to help members develop their

plays in a safe environment, while at the same time introducing them to groups with an interest in new writing.

A new program, Live @ The Libe, administered by Los Angeles Public Library staff, presents rehearsed readings of member plays to audiences at various Library branches.

See ALAP's website for additional features and resources as well as membership fees.

Visiting Faculty member Jonathan Dorf is Co-Chair of the organization which includes among its membership several of our students who live or work in the Los Angeles area.

ALAP is all-volunteer, and is a project of Community Partners, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

www.laplaywrights.org

Worth in Numbers by Neeley Gossett in Walking the Wire Festival



monologues at riverside : FOOD

Riverside Theatre was founded by Ron Clark, Jody Hovland and Bruce Wheaton in 1981. The company has been presenting high-quality live theatre in Iowa City ever since. Ten years ago, they started a festival featuring contest winning monologues written on a single theme.

The festival name is derived from the solitary experience of an actor delivering a monologue, and that feeling of being out there, exposed, with no one and no net to save you if you fall.

This year's festival theme was food, and from the roughly 100

submitted monologues one of the twelve selected pieces was *Worth in Numbers*, written by our own Neeley Gossett.

"I wrote *Worth in Numbers* during my first summer at Hollins and then performed it at No Shame. It sprang from a conversation I had with another student about how I calculate numbers in my head all of the time: my weight, my GRE scores, and my GPA," Neeley told us. "So, I put it in a monologue that night. It's the only truly autobiographical piece I've ever written."

It is one of the strengths of the program that even short pieces, whether the result of an exercise or purposefully written to be performed at No Shame, often have a life beyond the classroom."

Our students are encouraged to consider everything they write to be something that might find a stage and an audience. We also work very hard to find and suggest venues for that work because we know that we have limited production opportunities during the summer session. Festivals like Walking the Wire gain experiential learning opportunities for them and also create professional connections for our students before they graduate.

www.riversidetheatre.org

The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Page 2

Dreamtime by Maura Campbell Opens in Vermont



Maura Campbell is the author of more than thirty plays and one of the first cohort of graduate students in the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University. Recent productions include *Rosalee Was Here* (NY International Fringe Festival '08) and *Wild Geese* (Manhattan Repertory Theatre November '07).

Campbell's play, *Dreamtime*, was inspired by real life events. In January 2001, the country was shocked by the murders of Dartmouth professors Half and Suzanne Zantop and the subsequent arrests and convictions of two boys from a small Vermont town. *Dreamtime* is a fantastic exploration of the minds and motivations of the killers and a celebration of these professors who had mentored and influenced countless young people in the course of their marriage and professional lives.

Campbell, a Vermont native, knew the actual boys and their families, and like everyone else in the community was shocked by the murders. She processed her responses as an artist, through her work.

"I wrote the play not to exploit the murders, but to examine them," the playwright said.

Dreamtime was first read as an

early draft in the Lab, and after revisions the script was selected for full production as part of Mill Mountain Theatre's 2008 Norfolk Southern Festival of New Works. Todd Ristau, Program Director of the Playwright's Lab, directed the festival production.

When the playwright was given the opportunity to stage another production of the play, this time at the Main Street Landing Performing Arts Center in Burlington, Vermont, she asked Ristau if he'd be willing to direct the show again.

"The Mill Mountain production was an inspired staging. The one here in Vermont will be very different but I knew Todd's touch would make it just as memorable and meaningful," Maura said of her choice.

Ristau responded. "I find Maura to be funny, spiritual, thoughtful, passionate and very generous. That's also exactly how I find her work. I couldn't wait to take another crack at this amazing play."

The upcoming production, opening on April 2nd, is not a revival. Instead the writer and director worked together to build on the foundation laid by that first production and several revised drafts lay between last

year's version of the play and this one.

"Nothing reveals a play's bones like a full production, and what we're doing this time in many ways is entirely new as a result of the improvements in the text that the earlier production provided. I love the play more with each new draft Maura has written. With a new cast, new designers, and a lot of new writing this has been an opportunity to completely re-imagine the play. It has been a tremendous effort on the part of the entire company, but well worth doing. We're all very proud of what we've created."

Dreamtime is difficult, to be sure. It has a non-traditional structure with scenes that overlap through time and space, simultaneous action, Brechtian touches, mask work, and a set composed of scaffolding actors must clamber over at dizzying heights.

The play is based on actual events but is not a docudrama. We see the world through the eyes of a character we know is a

killer, which makes it hard to empathize, especially when we know we are only miles from where the real murders took place.

Ristau said of the theme of the play, "I don't see this as a simple re-telling of a gruesome and tragic story, but a way for audiences to examine how we all frame our own choices and then must live with the consequences of our actions. What we believe is real can be as ephemeral as a dream and vice versa."

This thought is echoed in a line spoken by one of the characters in the play:

"You see? A sudden insight. And the world is different. You know what is frightening? I have made my own world. Yes, yes, I have. Some of it with incorrect information."

Dreamtime is produced by MARABO Productions, founded by Mary Scripps, and her husband Bob Carmody. Scripps also performs in the play as one of the murdered professors.



www.mauracampbellplaywright.com

Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) 2009

The Southeastern Theatre Conference is the largest and most active regional theatre organization in the country. SETC was founded in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in March, 1949 and incorporated under the laws of the State of Florida in 1962.

Recognizing that the theatre arts are a necessary and expressive means by which the human community may come to understand and celebrate itself, and that the southeastern United States has a rich cultural diversity and legacy, SETC has as its purpose to provide services and educational programs for those individuals and organizations engaged in theatre in the southeast. Member states include: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia.

Each year the organization hosts a conference in a major theatre city in the region. Over 4,000 theatre artists and students attend the nearly week-long event which includes hundreds of panels and workshops, keynote addresses by major figures in American theatre, auditions for professional theatres and academic programs, a Job Fair, commercial exhibits, design competitions, performances, master classes, Ed Expo with representatives from the theatre programs of every major college and university in the region and non-stop opportunities to network with personal and professional contacts at social events and activities.

This year's convention was held in Birmingham, Alabama. A large group of Hollins theatre faculty, staff, undergraduate students and graduate playwright Kenley Smith

attended the conference and eagerly attended committee meetings, panels on playwriting, new theatre construction, lighting equipment, auditions, legal issues in the theatre, and many other sessions.

Gary Garrison of the Dramatists Guild led a panel on the Dramatist's Bill of Rights and the panel of publishers of plays was also extremely informative and relevant. Ken Dingledine, of Dramatists Play Service, accepted an invitation to come to Hollins in the summer of 2010.

Program Director Todd Ristau served as Chair of the SETC High School Playwriting Contest and directed the reading of the winning play, *Gavriilo* by Jonathan Van Gils.

Todd Ristau headed a panel on the value of pursuing an MFA in playwriting. Additional panelists included Kenley Smith (current grad student), Doug Grissom (UVA),



and Mark Charney (Cleimson).

Ristau was also asked to run a workshop on Essential Playwriting techniques giving a series of timed exercises.

Keynote speakers for the conference included Eugene Lee (Tony® Award Winning Set Designer), Beth Leavel (Tony® Award Winning Actress), Mark Redanty & David Shaul (Bauman, Redanty & Shaul Talent Agency).

www.setc.org

Sunny da Silva Interns at Studio Roanoke as Literary Associate



Sunny da Silva will be taking on some practical, real world experience as the Literary Associate and Resident Dramaturg at Studio Roanoke, the new black box opening next month.

Her work for the theatre will be as an intern for the Spring semester, and will include reading and evaluating scripts submitted to the theatre,

making recommendations for reading and production slots and sending response letters to playwrights who have submitted their work for consideration.

As Resident Dramaturg, Sunny will be attending rehearsals of all productions to provide information and ask questions based on her dramaturgical research. She'll also be interviewing playwrights and coordinating information concerning the production for the website, publicity and programs.

Sunny was among the first cohort of playwrights to come to the MFA program in playwriting at Hollins in 2007.

"Hollins has such a great reputation that I was excited to see it had a playwriting

program, and the wonderful schedule—six weeks in the summer—fit in with my schedule of teaching and being a mother," Sunny said of her decision to apply.

Because she lives in the area, the commute to the theatre won't be difficult, and it presents a meaningful opportunity to put into practice what she's learned in the classroom. All of the analytical skills she has been honing, as well as the intensive introduction to dramaturgy this past summer with Lenora Inez Brown, will be very important to her work with Studio Roanoke.

The theatre officially opens next month, but a large stack of unsolicited manuscripts have been accumulating in the Literary Associate's mailbox and Sunny has already started reading, sorting, and making recommendations.

Artistic Director Todd Ristau will supervise the internship. He was once in Sunny's shoes himself when interned under Randy Rollison at HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art in New York in 1990.

"I count my time working in HOME's literary office, reading 5-10 plays a night and writing up reader responses for Randy as one of the most beneficial learning experiences of my own MFA training," Ristau said. "I'm looking forward to helping Sunny get a glimpse behind the scenes as to how and why decisions about productions and readings are made. There's more to it than the quality of the work. Also, I'm confident that evaluating the mistakes other writers are making will help Sunny intuitively avoid making them herself."

www.studioroanoke.org

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

**Just what you need.
More Drama.**



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 for more information.

Friend us on Facebook!

From the Director: What Kind of Writing Samples Do We Want?

How important is your writing sample as a part of your application package? Well, I'd be lying to you if I said it wasn't the single most important part of the application.

That being said, we're not looking for a writing sample that proves you don't need instruction. We're looking for evidence that you can write well, write coherently, craft characters who are interesting, and that you have potential to become an even better writer after working with us. Your writing samples remain a part of your permanent file so they are a kind of time capsule by which we can measure your progress after you've started the program

We're also curious to see if you're able to be selective in

what you send, which is why a lot of programs set limits rather than minimums on number of pages or items allowed to be submitted as part of the application. Quality is always better than quantity. Proof that you can knock out 5 pounds of pages won't impress us more than proving you can write 5 interesting pages.

I get asked all the time whether I want only full length plays or several one acts or do ten minute plays qualify or can other kinds of writing work if there aren't any plays the applicant feels comfortable submitting.

The most important thing we're looking for is that the writing sample reflect who you are as a writer now, and demonstrates what it is you're interested in

writing about now. Sending your perfectly formatted full length play from five years ago is not as good a sample as the first draft of the one act you wrote last week. Or even something that isn't a play...yet. If that means sending a poem instead of a play, fine. But, tell us why you want to be a playwright and not a poet in your letter of interest.

Send the work you feel best introduces you as the writer you are and that will be perfect.

Then, in your letter of intent, let me know about the writer you hope to become and I'll have a better idea of how to help you get from here to there.



Todd Ristau, Director