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The Lab Report, volume 03, issue 12

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Playwright's Lab
at Hollins University

Inside this issue:

**2010 Course Listings and
New Faculty 2**

***Breadcrumb Sins* by
Neeley Gossett 3**

***Under a Banner of
Shadow* by Todd Ristau 3**

**From the Director: *Leaving*
Studio Roanoke 4**

Next Month:

- **Feedback Loop by
Adam Hahn**
- **No Shame returns to
Mill Mountain Theatre**
- **New Submission
Opportunities at Studio
Roanoke**
- ***Devil Sedan* by Kenley
Smith**
- **Welcoming the 2010
Summer Session
Students**

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The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 03, Issue 12 (May, 2010)

2010 Guest Speaker Series



David Mickenberg is Executive Director of Roanoke's Taubman Museum of Art. Since his appointment in 2009, he has worked to build creative relationships with other arts organizations, meeting with artists, arts leaders, and arts faculty from area universities to find ways to share resources and increase appreciation of the visual and performing arts.

"Museums are homes for all forms of art, for discourse on current ideas, and a place for artists to have a public voice for their thoughts, investigations and practice. The theater at the museum was developed for just such a purpose," Mickenberg says of his vision for the Taubman.

The Taubman is already home to Roanoke Children's Theatre and regularly hosts a variety of dynamic guest speakers ranging from multi-media artist DJ Spooky to playwright Anna Deavere Smith.

The Playwright's Lab also looks for ways to bring audiences and writers together for unique discussions, and so we came to David with the idea of having our guests of the program give their talks at the Taubman.

We're very excited to announce that in collaboration with the

Taubman Museum of Art our Guest Speaker Series will be held Each Monday from June 28 through July 26 at 7:30 in the Taubman Theatre at 110 Salem Ave SE in Downtown Roanoke. All the talks are FREE and open to the public and will be followed by a lively Q&A.

Monday, June 28th: Joe Gilford
Playwright and Screenwriter

Joe has worked in film, TV and theatre, as a producer, writer and director for over 30 years.

Monday, July 5th: Performers
Exchange Project (PEP) *Theatre
Company*

PEP is a collective of Central Virginia theatre artists who develop and perform original works and also host like-minded performers from around the U.S. and the world for residencies of performance, workshops, and exchange.

Monday, July 12th: Tanya
Saracho *Playwright and Artistic
Director*

Tanya is a resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists and Teatro Vista. As Founding Artistic Director of Teatro Luna: Chicago's All-Latina Theater Ensemble. Her writing has been featured in most of Teatro Luna's ensemble-built works.

Monday, July 19th: Jonathan
Price *Composer and Musician*

Jonathan has written music for new plays performed in theatres from Bar Harbor to Singapore and his opera *The Lion and the Wood Nymph* was a winner of New Opera Works' OIAM competition. Jonathan's music for television has been heard on major networks and he has scored music for both independent films and major motion pictures.

Monday, July 26th: Naomi
Wallace *Playwright, Novelist,
Poet, Screenwriter*

Naomi's work is widely produced in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the US. Her plays include *One Flea Spare, In the Heart of America, Slaughter City, The Inland Sea, and The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*. Her work has received the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, and an Obie. She is also a recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship. Her award-winning film *Lawn Dogs* is available on DVD.

David summed up his hopes for this new relationship by saying, "Collaborating with Hollins in the presentation of the Playwright's Lab guest speakers is something we welcome for years to come."



www.taubmanmuseum.org

The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Page 2

2010 Summer Session Course Listings

THEA 501 Playwright's Lab (4) Ristau

All students, faculty, staff, and guests meet regularly for readings of student work, guest presentations, exercises and discussion. Students submit an example of their best work for available public reading slots. Students whose work is selected for readings are responsible for arranging, rehearsing, and presenting them. Moderated discussion follows each reading. Class meets MW at 7:30 PM. Monday sessions will be guest speakers who are working professionals in a field related to new work development. Wednesday sessions are readings of selected students work which is still in an early stage of development, not yet ready for a public reading. Each reading is followed by a Liz Lerman style discussion for all students in the playwriting program, followed by a closer critical analysis with less formal structure which is open only to students enrolled in the course. Grades are primarily based on attendance and energetic participation with clear, perceptive, and informed analysis in discussion. **Course must be repeated three consecutive summers.**

ANALYTICAL COURSES

THEA 505 The Collaborative Art of Theatre (4) Ristau

Introduction to theatre as a collaborative art and profession. Required for those without prior theatre training or undergraduate theatre degree.

THEA 510 Playscript Analysis and Criticism (4) Bredeson

Intensive critical analysis of the playscript as a blueprint for production covering representative texts from a range of theatre styles, genres, and periods. Plays are considered in both their original historical/

cultural circumstances and implications for contemporary audiences. Course covers major approaches to dramatic criticism and the tools used in theatre research. **Required for first year students.**

THEA 514 Theatre and Society: Banned Plays (4) Ristau

Plays deemed unsuitable for public consumption are examined in their original context and in light of current contemporary considerations. Special attention will be paid to current trends in censorship in the field of drama and its impact on the creation of new work. As a final project students will write a controversial play and a position paper explaining why it should be banned.

THEA 514: Dramaturgy (4) Bredeson

An introduction of theoretical and practical approaches dramaturgy for writers, designed to help playwrights to assist dramaturges in production as well as to prepare the writer to see their work objectively from the viewpoints of other collaborators who will be working to bring the text to life on stage. Historical research, criticism, analysis, conceptualization, cutting, adaptation, advocacy for new writers, development of new plays, and publicity models, as well as the possibility of dramaturgy as a career path are all touched upon in this overview of the role of the dramaturge.

CREATIVE COURSES

THEA 520: Narrative Theory and Dramatic Structure (4) Ristau

Introduction to the basics of storytelling and the creation of dramatic texts using both organic and formulaic models with an emphasis on the one act play. Students will learn to

observe the world for meaning, build characters, place characters in settings, write monologues, create dialogue between characters, and lay the groundwork for longer, more substantive work. **Required for first year students.**

THEA 550 Special Topics in Playwriting: Adaptation (4) Goode

Explores the process of transferring the written word from another medium into a playscript intended for live performance on the stage.

THEA 550 Special Topics in Playwriting: Writing Plays with Music (4) Goode

Writers are given guided instruction in creating stage plays which incorporate music. Students will be given some historical background in American Musical Theatre, Revues, and straight plays which incorporate original compositions. Students will have an opportunity to meet with and possibly work with a composer on short pieces which use music to help tell the story.

ADVANCED COURSES

THEA 575: Advanced Playwriting Tutorial (4) Bredeson or Goode

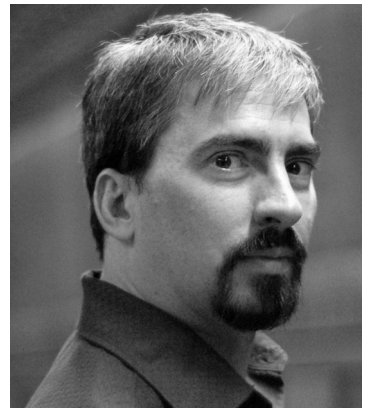
Writers are given guided instruction in creating a full-length play, which is polished, complete, ready for production, and suitable for submission. Taught as either formal class or independent study (based on enrollment). **Independent studies require permission of instructor.**

THEA 599: Thesis (4, 4)

Developed in consultation with the student's thesis advisor and required for graduation. **See course catalog for full description.**



Dr. Kate Bredeson teaches Theatre at Reed College, and works as a freelance dramaturg with theatres such as the Guthrie, Yale Repertory Theatre, and the Yale Cabaret. She was Resident Dramaturg for the Court Theatre in Chicago and is currently working with Hand2Mouth Theatre in Portland. Kate holds an MFA and a doctorate in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from the Yale School of Drama, regularly presents at international conferences, and is widely published. Her awards include a Fulbright in Paris, a residency at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France, and fellowships from the Killam Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and the Institut Français de Washington.



Jeff Goode is a director, producer, screenwriter and author of over 50 plays and musicals including *The Eight: Reindeer Monologues*, the award-winning *Love Loves a Pornographer*, the cult hit *Poona the Fuckdog* and other plays for children. His work has been produced in all 50 states and around the world.

Breadcrumb Sins by Neeley Gossett

Neeley Gossett has been attracting a lot of well deserved attention lately. Her latest play, *Breadcrumb Sins*, is set in the depression-era of southern Georgia and deals a WPA photographer, Iris, arrives to document a Baptist camp meeting and also develops a romantic relationship with the pastor's wife, Ruth.

Of the origin of the play, Neeley explains, "Last summer, we were talking about what subjects can you tell that no one else can? What is the story I have that I may be able to tell better than somebody from another part of the country? The preacher's wife faces a dilemma—I stay in the world I know, that is safe—or do I take

an adventure and go with something I don't know?"

That she has deftly taken this universal question and woven it into a compelling drama about difficult choices is demonstrated by the play's success.

Breadcrumb Sins was one of three plays selected from over 300 submitted scripts from all over the world for inclusion as a full production in the 2010 Coastal Empire New Play Festival. The play was also selected for a staged reading slot at next month's Great Plains Theatre Conference in Nebraska and will be produced as part of the Fall Playfest 2010 at the Manhattan Repertory Theatre in September. Local audiences will hear it read in this summer's

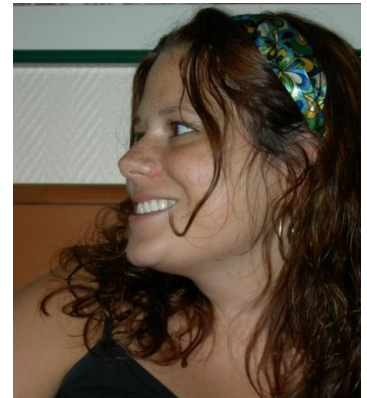
Festival of Student Readings at Studio Roanoke in July.

This month, Neeley's play *Outsourced* received an honorable mention in Synchronicity Theatre's SheWRITES competition, a national search for new plays by women playwrights conducted in partnership with the LARK Play Development Center.

Gossett is also an accomplished dramaturg who interned last year with Celise Kalke at The Alliance Theater in Atlanta. She read submissions, was Research Assistant on *26 Miles* and conducted research and was Dramaturg for *Class of 3000* (both world premiers).

Neeley is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America. Her

works have been performed and at Big Dawg Theater in Wilmington, North Carolina, Marymount Manhattan College, Hollins University, Mill Mountain Theater in Roanoke, Virginia, and Riverside Theatre in Iowa City. Neeley teaches English at Georgia Perimeter College.



www.neeleygossett.com

Under a Banner of Shadow by Todd Ristau



Todd Ristau, Program Director of the Playwright's Lab, originally wrote his provocative play about Adolf Hitler's final hours when he was a student in the Iowa Playwright's Workshop.

"I was in a docudrama class with Lavonne Mueller who encouraged us to do some exploratory monologues by historical figures. I did

imagining an embittered Hitler between the wars. She suggested writing a one-person show, which I did for an experimental playwriting class for Shelley Berc," Ristau recounted.

The original production was written by Ristau in only four weeks time, with actor James Thorn rehearsing as new pages were added each day. When it opened it was very well received and invited to be performed as part of the 1991 Edinburgh Fringe Festival in the prestigious Assembly Rooms Theatre. The Scotsman called the play "brilliantly repellent" and "all too accurate."

Studio Roanoke revived the production as part of its 2009-2010 season, in part to recognize the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, but also because of the increasingly heated rhetoric passing for

political debate at the moment.

"What frightens me is listening to talk radio and thinking that if you replaced the word Jew with Muslim and Communist with Liberal, you almost can't tell the difference between what is being said after September 11th and what they were saying after the Reichstag fire in Germany. When Americans don't think comparing a sitting president to Hitler is hyperbolic, we've got a problem," Ristau lamented.

The play is a series of fever dream flashbacks where Hitler confronts the lies he has woven into his own myth of racial superiority. During the course of the play the actor as Hitler speaks directly to the audience as though they were in the Bunker with him during the Battle of Berlin. He also argues with important figures in his life, with one actor playing all the parts.

A big difference between this production and the original is that Ristau himself played the ruthless

dictator. MFA playwright Clinton Johnston, who also has an MFA in directing from the University of Virginia, consulted on the direction.

Ristau said, "If nothing else, I hope the play makes people think about the horrific power of propaganda to convince people that doing evil is virtuous."



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.

[http://www.hollins.edu/grad/
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From the Director: Leaving Studio Roanoke

This month I was forced to make a very difficult decision. Well, actually, it is probably more accurate to say that I was forced to accept a difficult truth.

Since 2007 I've been Program Director for the Playwright's Lab, and the program is growing faster than anyone hoped for with our largest group of students yet coming for the 2010 summer session.

Since before Studio Roanoke opened its doors in 2008, I've been Artistic Director of that plucky little theatre dedicated to new play development. And it has also grown faster than anyone expected. 8 full productions, 21 readings, 50 No Shames, 12 live music events, 12 poetry events, and dozens of special events each year meant

I didn't leave the theatre much.

In short, there was no way to continue as the person at the helm of both of these very successful enterprises and have them continue to be successful.

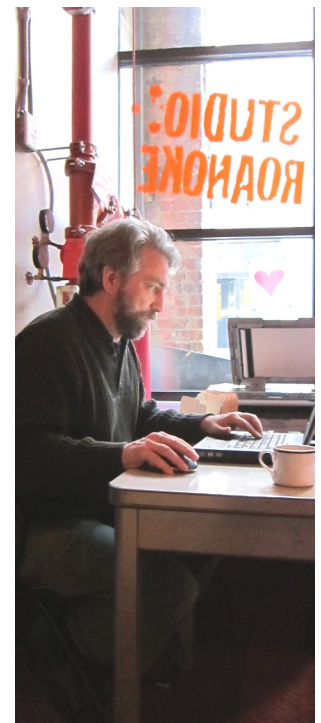
I've stepped down as Artistic Director, but will continue to work with Studio Roanoke to develop new work by writers from around the country as well as our student playwrights from the Lab. An MFA playwriting program and a theatre dedicated to new plays are natural partners. It will stay that way.

Kenley Smith, the first graduate of our program and the founder of Studio Roanoke, will be taking over the reigns as Interim Artistic Director. Chad Runyon,

who has been Studio Roanoke's General Manager this year, is also leaving so that he can concentrate on his studies when he joins our graduate playwriting program next month.

Anyone who doubts I'll still be involved need only look at the upcoming season—they are producing one of my plays and I'll be directing two shows in the Spring. I'm looking forward to my contributions being artistic rather than administrative.

Change is hard, and accepting you can't do everything you want to is even harder. I'm very proud of what I helped accomplish at Studio Roanoke, but this is the right choice.



Todd Ristau, Director