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## The Lab Report, volume 04, issue 08

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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 04, Issue 08 (January, 2011)

## New No Shame in San Luis Obispo



**No Shame Theatre** was established in 1986 by Todd Ristau, Stan Ruth and Jeff Goode when they organized a performance in the cargo bed of a pickup truck in the parking lot of the theatre at the University of Iowa. In the last 24 years, No Shame has exploded across the nation. At any given time there are a dozen or so functioning No Shames, all following the same rules (bring a self-contained, original script that is no longer than five minutes and doesn't break anything—including the law). All the venues are loosely connected through one central

## Student Spotlight: Wendy-Marie Foerster

**Wendy-Marie Foerster** returned to the U.S. in 2007 after almost ten years creating, directing and producing theater in Germany. Her short play, *The New Wife*, originally produced in the Sydney Short & Sweet Festival 2007, had its New York debut at the 78th Theater Lab in December 2008. *The New Wife* was also published in the *Stage This! Too* collection.

Wendy-Marie's black-comedy, *An Almost Perfect Murder*, won best original script at the F.E.A.T.S. Festival 2007 in Holland and played to sold-out houses in Stuttgart, Germany. She was also short-listed for

website, but each reflects the needs and interests of their own communities.

The newest No Shame opened last month in San Luis Obispo, CA. It will be hosted by the San Luis Obispo Little Theatre and was organized by our own MFA playwright Wendy-Marie Foerster along with Katie Mack-Montenegro, and Kevin Harris, SLOLT's Managing Artistic Director.

Wendy-Marie's first exposure to No Shame was during the summer program at Hollins during her first summer in the program.

"I had a script written, rehearsed and ready to go and sat back to experience the audience's delight," She remembers. "But it didn't happen. My actors were fabulous and I thought I had created a decent script.... but it wasn't until I got to see it up there and hear it that I realized what was wrong with it. It was probably the most educational five minutes of my playwriting

life up to that point. I went back to my room and used what I had learned to re-write and tighten the script. And it finaled in the Magnolia Center for the Arts playwriting contest last month."

Wendy-Marie currently serves as the Development Director at SLOLT and has championed No Shame there as an excellent way to increase community involvement, train readers, get experience for actors, serve local writers and fill seats that would otherwise be empty during the hours when the theatre was usually dark. No Shame at SLOLT is the last Friday of every month at 11:30pm.



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

field, a very generous group of people and Todd has created a very supportive environment."

the Emerging Artists Theater's Spring Eatfest 2008 and the Melbourne Short & Sweet 2007.

Wendy-Marie served for a year as Executive Director of the SLO Little Theatre and then moved into the position of Membership Director at the Clark Center for the Performing Arts before returning to SLOLT as Development Director, the position she holds today.

"I don't think there is a better program out there than the one at Hollins," Foerster told us. "I think it's amazing. An amazing mix of top professionals in our



[wendymariefoster.com](http://wendymariefoster.com)

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## Guest Profile: David Gothard, Producing Artistic Director



David Gothard previously came to Hollins in 2007, when he was directing the first ever production of *The Fever Chart*, written by Naomi Wallace, as part of the Norfolk Southern Festival of New Works at Mill Mountain Theatre. During that visit, David generously brought the entire cast (and the internationally known playwright) to campus for an open rehearsal with our undergraduate students. David also came to Todd Ristau's undergraduate *Writer as Performer* class and gave feedback to students on their work. He also sat in on Ristau's MALS playwriting class, taking questions and responding to student writing.

Gothard began his long and highly respected career in professional theatre working with Broadway director Mike Ockrent at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was then invited to Poland to work with Tadeusz Kantor during early rehearsals for *The Dead Class*. After that play's legendary success, it transferred to open an empty Riverside Studios along the River Thames. Riverside would become London's pioneering, international theatre where the likes of Dario Fo, Samuel Beckett, and the American avant-garde worked side by side with British talent.

Gothard became Artistic Director of Riverside Studios following the departure of Peter Gill to the National Theatre of Great Britain, and was Artistic Director at the Leicester Haymarket Theatre from 1987 to 1990. American writers premiered during that time include David Hwang, Jean Claude van Itallie, Emily Mann, Sam Shepard and Todd Ristau.

David has created writing workshops in Derry, Northern Ireland and repeatedly been invited to adjudicate and teach at the Iowa Playwright's Workshop, where began his pioneer work with Naomi Wallace, W. David Hancock, and other important writers. After resurrecting the National Theatre of Kosovo immediately after the war, his *Hamlet* toured devastated cities and opened the arts program of the World Aids Conference in South Africa. His portable, suitcase version of *Hamlet* (with Joseph Fiennes) toured Muslim China and Tibet, and held the first ever workshops in Lhasa University.

Most recently, Gothard has been working as Artistic Associate for the world famous Abbey Theatre in Dublin, directing projects with the likes of Harold Pinter and Vaclav Havel.

David returned to Roanoke as a guest responder during the Festival of Student Readings this past summer session of the Playwright's Lab. As before, David was extraordinarily generous in the time he spent with writers individually and surgically precise in his feedback to the student plays he heard of the course of the festival weekend.

### How did you enjoy this visit to Hollins?

Hollins turned out to be an absolute joy. I already knew of the beauty of the place, its radical heritage and even its rare association with another Brit, William Golding, the author of *Lord of the Flies*. Beyond that, I discovered a sense of individualism in this community of writers that I found to be exhilarating.

### What is your impression of our playwrights?

Each had the youthful maturity of a real life from which I could also learn. The writers in Hollins covered a spectrum comparable to this list of writers and I felt privileged to get to know them. The job then becomes to place them as writers wherever the seed can be sown. In other words, Hollins fits strongly into the perpetual journey of a good writer seeking an audience and how it is done. That is the great adventure that I enjoy as a director and catalyst.

### You've been to a lot of similar festivals, is there anything that makes Hollins stand out?

I loved the frequency of performances and readings underlining a comfortable efficiency with this brilliant planning of a writers' program. It seemed to give it that extra edge with the broad spectrum that is American society. Yet the use of theatres integral to it all

kept us flying, not just talking. It was brilliant that Naomi Wallace was there and loudly supportive of the work at Hollins.

### You've worked with a lot of important writers early in their careers, haven't you?

I am associated with new writing from the Royal Court theatre, Riverside Studios and the Abbey Theatre where I have been associate artist for the last five years. Also, I've been a regular professional visitor to the Iowa Playwright's Workshop. All this gives me a perspective on American writing and its production through relationships with, for example, Naomi Wallace, David Hancock, Todd Ristau, Rebecca Gilman and others. Sam Shepard has been my colleague in Dublin. Jean-Claude Van Itallie and Emily Mann are my long term colleagues from Riverside.

### What are your hopes for a continued relationship with Hollins?

My point is to be in touch and then to stay in touch, through generations. An imperfect masterpiece that confuses from Eugene O'Neil has continuity with the structured art, sometimes with chaos, that presented itself gloriously in the Hollins summer program. I am being sent scripts now, and already I'm looking forward to a return trip sometime soon.





## Fast & Loose Features Hollins Playwright and Faculty Member

**Sacred Fools Theater Company** is dedicated to creating and fostering a dynamic, empowered artistic community in Los Angeles. The company is run solely by the ensemble of artists, who have an ongoing commitment to the development of new plays and projects which challenge traditional expectations of the theatrical experience with the stated goal being to produce work which invigorates, enlightens, and entertains.

One of the ways they remind people that theater is a popular and vital art form which inspires and transforms its audience and its members, the company produces what they call a micro festival of short works called *Fast and Loose* several times every year.

The rules sometimes vary, but

essentially a large group of writers are given random variables like subject, props, setting as well as a noun and an adjective for the title. Writers are also given a cast breakdown to write for and twelve hours to complete a 10-minute play incorporating all of the above.

The next morning, each director randomly selects a completed script and then blindly chooses from the pool of actors. Each play gets rehearsed to the extent that time available allows, with only 45 minutes on the actual stage and 15 minutes to set sound and light cues. At 8PM, the show starts, ready or not.

*Fast & Loose* #37 (the 12th to take place on New Year's Eve) was produced by David LM McIntyre and Brian Wallis, who asked Hollins playwriting faculty member Jeff Goode to

participate. MFA playwright Samantha Macher was in Los Angeles that weekend and Jeff encouraged her inclusion in the lineup as one of the new resident playwrights at SkyPilot Theatre.

"The nouns were euphemisms for genitalia and the adjectives were words seen commonly in advertising," Macher explained. "My title, for example, was

*Improved Bush* and Jeff's was *Sexy Junk*. He wrote his piece about an Asian junk boat/brothel, and I wrote my very first political piece about the Bush family doing yard work. I got to close the show because of all the blood."

In all, the event included eight writers and directors with over thirty actors.



[www.sacredfools.org/misc/fastandloose](http://www.sacredfools.org/misc/fastandloose)

## Nicole B. Adkins Published and Named Children's Programming Director at SkyPilot Theatre



YouthPLAYS has published a new play for middle school audiences by MFA playwright Nicole B. Adkins. *Herby Alice Counts Down to Yesterday*, was originally developed as part of a class in writing drama for young audiences taught by playwright and YouthPLAYS co-founder Jonathan Dorf in the summer of 2009. This marks the second published play by Adkins with YouthPLAYS, the first being *The Story Club*.

Adkins is officially a member of the graduate program in Children's Literature at Hollins University, but she has always had an emphasis in playwriting.

Dorf will serve as the First Reader for Nikki's thesis, which will be a collection of plays written to be performed for children.

Nicole was recently named Children's Programming Director at

SkyPilot Theatre, where she is a resident playwright. Jeff Goode, one of our regular visiting faculty, oversees the resident playwright program at SkyPilot and has worked with Nikki in the classroom as well as directing the full production of her play *Up From the Lunar Surface* at Studio Roanoke last year.

"Nikki Adkins will be heading up our outreach program to local schools developing Theatre for Young Audiences with the SkyPilot playwrights," Goode said of the new position. "This should mesh well with her own independent projects."

"I'm very grateful to the Hollins graduate programs for offering practical opportunities to learn from and network with industry professionals," Adkins told us.

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

## 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](http://www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting) for more information.

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### From the Director: Remembering Ellen Stewart (1919-2011)

Originally, this column was going to be about the need to re-invent and re-imagine Off-off Broadway in tiny theatre spaces all over the country. Then, I heard about the passing of Ellen Stewart, a woman who embodied exactly the entrepreneurial spirit I'd hoped to inspire in my comments about getting out there, getting your hands dirty, and getting the work done without worrying about how that was going to happen.

Ellen was a writer and director who became world famous for creating and helping to create a staggering amount of work with artists from around the world at La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, which she founded in 1961. A theatre she ran until her death this month,

consistently focused on the same mission of promoting new work.

Ellen had no formal training in theatre, but learned and grew by *doing* theatre and by dedicating her life to helping others to do it too.

Ellen also knew how important it was for writers to be able to take risks without those risks being life threatening or career ending, that new works shouldn't be judged by the same standards as experienced ones or they'd soon be denied opportunities for getting that experience. That's what La Mama ETC was there to provide. A place to grow and learn.

I never met Ellen Stewart, but I've been reading a lot about her

lately as we put together notes on a class offered this summer on the history of the Off-off Broadway movement.

I'd even started to put out feelers through people I know who were friends with Stewart in hopes that we might be able to entice her to Hollins as a guest speaker this summer.

Sadly, that is no longer an option. My hope is that she'll be here in spirit and that we'll do a good job of teaching our students about the work that she did, the plays she made possible and the ways in which her legacy of support for new plays will live on for generations to come.



Todd Ristau, Director