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The Lab Report, volume 12, issue 02

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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 12, Issue 02 (July, 2018)

Summer 2018 Comes to a Close

Our students often describe our unique summer graduate program as Brigadoon—it magically appears at the beginning of the third week of June and vanishes again at the close of the fourth week of July.

It really is nothing short of magical the way this cohesive collaborative community comes together to make so much art and learn so much about play making in such an incredibly short amount of time.

"We bond through shared adversity," program director Todd Ristau jokes. "And we are doing so much, so quickly, nobody has any time for the luxury of self-doubt."



There may be something to that. It seems like only yesterday the Playwright's Lab appeared in the Blue Ridge Mountains and welcomed our students and faculty, and

already we're all packing our bags and looking forward to getting together again... same time next year.

We can't wait!

Student Spotlight: Ally Thomas

Ally Thomas is an actor, stage manager, and teaching artist based in Tampa, FL. She has worked professionally with theaters such as Spanish Lyric Theatre, Tampa Rep, The Ritz, and Eight O' Clock Theatre. She joined the teaching staff of American Stage after serving as education & outreach apprentice during the 2016/2017 season. Thomas was also tour manager for American Stage's annual school tour production of *George's Marvelous Medicine* in 2016 and for *Rikki Tikki Tavi* in 2017.

In addition to performance and education, Thomas has also worked with non-profit arts organizations in the areas of administration, marketing, and development.

Thomas holds a BA in theatre from Samford University, and this summer began our Certificate in New Play Performance program.

"One of the things that appealed to me about this program is the way that actors,

writers, and directors collaborate to create new works together," Thomas told us. "I was really seeking performance training, but the way the actors work with other disciplines and the way the program is structured so we all get to try a little bit of everything is something that really appealed to me."

Thomas wasn't sure what to expect from the concentrated, compact six-week intensive schedule, but was pleased to discover that despite the rigorous schedule and workload, it was so enjoyable that it never felt overwhelming.

Students are exposed to a range of approaches to text in the classroom. Saffron Henke's scene study class uses a variety of classical approaches to contemporary plays. Then, by contrast, on alternating days the same students learn clowning, melodrama and commedia in John Bergman's advanced performance techniques course.



Outside of class she acted in Overnight Sensations, Playwrights Festival, Lab Readings, and No Shame Theatre.

"I would recommend this program for actors who have experience but want to dive in a little deeper," she told us. "Particularly if you are interested in new play development. It's a great bridge between undergrad and an MFA program. Anyone who wants to study in a collaborative and interdisciplinary environment should definitely look at Hollins."

allythomas.info

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Guest Profile: Erin Quinn Purcell and Jay Reiss



Theatre Company where she participated as an actor, writer, and director. With Greg Jackson Purcell, she wrote and produced such plays as *Duet! A Romantic Fable*, *The Fiona Apple Kwanzaa Explosion*, the musical *A Fish Story*, and the Russ Meyer inspired *Go-Go Kitty, Go!*

Jay Reiss is a playwright, producer, and actor who graduated from Julliard and is known for his contributions to the writing and first performances of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Reiss appeared in the original workshops, Off-

process. It is even more exciting when our students have a chance to work side by side with these professionals not only in a workshop, but in rehearsal and performance at Overnight Sensations."

"I went to the University of Iowa," Purcell said, opening the talk. "My story started there in 1986, which was the year that Todd started No Shame Theatre, performing short theatre pieces out of the back of a pickup truck in a parking lot, lit by motorcycle lights. That's where I got the notion that I could maybe write myself."



Guest artists are an incredibly important part of the education and training we provide our students at the Playwright's Lab, and each Monday night during the summer we present a talk by a prominent working professional theatre artist. These speakers include playwrights, actors, directors, designers, producers, dramaturgs, and administrators.

Erin Quinn Purcell and Jay Reiss are each established theatre artists, but also frequently work as a writing team even though Purcell is based in New York and Reiss now lives in Los Angeles.

Purcell has been a mainstay of New York's downtown theatre scene for over 25 years. She was one of the founding members of the critically acclaimed Adobe



Broadway cast, and Broadway cast of the popular musical as Vice Principal Douglas Panch.

At Hollins this summer, the pair led a workshop in writer/performer collaboration and participated in Overnight Sensations. Reiss wrote a new ten-minute play in 24 hours, and Purcell performing in another.

"It is critical that our students have the opportunity to interact with theatre professionals," program director Todd Ristau explained. "It is so helpful to our students to hear these folks talk about their own early careers. It really helps them to get excited about where they are now, and to see their own careers as in

She went on to describe how the people and experiences she had at No Shame and Iowa's focus on new work stayed with her as she put that training into action when she moved to New York.

Reiss, in turn, recounted his own start and how they came to create *Hooray for Iceboy* together for Adobe Theatre, which became their breakout 2001 hit.

Together they recounted their experiences in writing and producing, negotiating contracts, hiring actors, collaboration agreements, getting an agent, and how to navigate the process of taking a project from initial inspiration to workshop

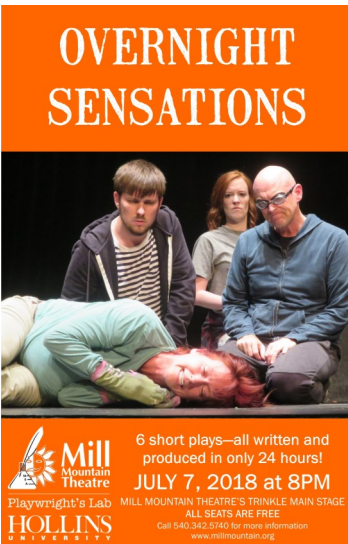
production to full production in a major commercial theatre.

"They have such interesting perspectives on what it means to be working writers and creators," MFA playwright Kimberly Patterson said afterward. "They shared both the successes and challenges of their experiences."

Asked for advice for navigating the profession, Reiss replied, "After a while you reach a place where you can choose to be bitter or choose to be grateful that you've even gotten this far. It takes a while to get to that place and maybe some people never do, but that's the battle. The constant battle between frustration and gratitude."

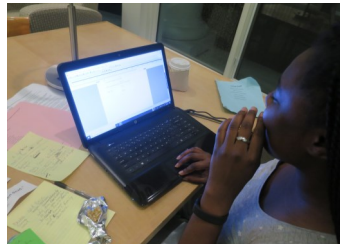


Overnight Sensations Fills Mill Mountain Theatre's Main Stage



Overnight Sensations was the brainchild of Todd Ristau when he was working as Mill Mountain Theatre's literary associate in 2006.

"They asked me to come up with a unique fundraising event that would function as community outreach, showcase the many talented people on staff and involve some stakeholders in ways that didn't overtly involve asking for money," Ristau said.



"And they told me I only had 24 hours to come up with that idea."

The time frame reminded him of the popular 24-Hour Plays that were happening in New York.

"I wanted something reflective of the new play development process," Ristau told us. "The other event is more devised work but ours is like a micro-brewed new play festival."

Ristau and the Playwright's Lab have collaborated with MMT to keep this an annual event.

On Friday night, at 8PM, six playwrights are randomly paired with six directors. Then the directors randomly draw from six casts of six performers. Each cast has a



blend of experienced actors, local celebrities, and stakeholders like donors and board members. Then writing prompts are randomly selected from a hat, including things like genre, theme, and location.

This year's prompts also included a famous line from plays running from ancient Greeks to modern classics. MMT also brings up a selection of props and costumes to add to the mix.

At 8:30PM the playwrights are whisked to the Wyndham Robertson Library to start their research and turn those prompts into a ten-minute play. At midnight-thirty they leave the library but can keep writing all night long. At 8AM the following morning, over coffee and doughnuts, the directors read the newly drafted plays and ask questions, suggest changes, and a



final draft is due at 10AM. For the next hour, while the scripts are printed, the writer and director teams have a production meeting.

Actors arrive at 11AM for a catered lunch and rehearsals run from Noon to 5PM. MMT's board of trustees provide pizzas while levels are set and a cue to cue rehearsal is conducted.

At 7:30PM the audience is allowed into the Trinkle Main Stage and whatever has been baked overnight is served up to the capacity crowd.

"Overnight Sensations is the perfect expression of the Hollins-Mill Mountain creative partnership," said Ginger Poole, producing artistic director for MMT. "It is so much fun to work on it together!"



Emma in Complexland by Emma Sala is July CenterPiece Reading

Emma Sala received her BA in theatre this year from the Hollins Theatre Institute. This summer she joined the Playwright's Lab as a member of the Certificate in New Play Performance.

Sala is a talented actor who has appeared in numerous productions by our playwrights, most notably in the leads of *An Initial Condition* by Taylor Gruenloh and *Coupler* by Meredith Dayna Levy.

It turns out, she is also a playwright. Sala's senior thesis project was to write and perform a one-woman show. The resulting script is an energetic self-examination titled *Emma in Complexland* or *How Not to Write a One-Woman Show*, directed by certificate director Lauren Brooke Ellis.

In the play, Sala compares and contrasts herself with Alice, from Lewis Carroll's novels,

with a special focus on the events and complexes which shaped them both over their adventures.

The play was very well received in its thesis performance and program director Todd Ristau asked Sala and Ellis to remount it at CenterPieces, a joint venture by Mill Mountain Theatre and the Playwright's Lab to bring new plays and new audiences together over lunch.



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Sean Abley Plays Opening in St. Louis and Kansas City



Sean Abley is finished with classes but was on campus this summer working on his thesis play. He also had one of his plays in our Playwrights Festival, directed another student's festival play, wrote for Overnight Sensations, and while all that was going on, two of his plays opened in two different festivals in two different cities. Abley, of course, made the trip to see them both without any negative impact on everything he was working on at Hollins.

"Such a gift to have two chances to see my work on stage at two different theaters in the same weekend," Abley told us.

"We're so proud of Sean and everything he's accomplished in just three short summers at Hollins," Todd Ristau, director of the Lab said. "He's not only a terrific playwright and diligent student, he's very professional in

the way he's been building a network of supportive contacts for his work."

Abley wrote *Absence Makes the Heart* in a class called First Drafts, taught by Ristau. The play was a national finalist for the John L. Cauble Short Play Award with KCACTF last year and produced as part of the Hollins-Mill Mountain Winter Festival of New Works in February this year. Ristau directed that production, which also earned a national commendation from KCACTF.

At KCACTF the script caught the attention of Dr. Julie Rae Mollenkamp, who teaches at the University of Central Missouri.

"We met last year at a reading of my play at KCACTF, and after the talkback she told me she wanted to mount a production at her school," Abley told us. "A year later she delivered with an all-student team. One of the joys of being an artist is expanding your tribe all over the world, and now I can circle Kansas City, MO on the map."

Mollenkamp's own company, Smashing Frames Productions which includes current students and alumni from UCM, brought the show to the Kansas City Fringe. Gabriel Livingston, also a UCM alum, directed.



Absence tracks the unexplained disappearance and death of a ballerina and is told in a series of monologues from the point of view of those affected by her absence from their lives. It is loosely based on *The Red Shoes* by Hans Christian Andersen.

Unabridged was written in Narrative Theory, also taught by Ristau, during Abley's first summer. It is an absurdist play set in a dystopian future where words are like drugs and those addicted to effective expression can purchase the best words from unsavory librarians and dictionary hoarders.

The one-act is getting a lot of attention. It is featured in our Festival here at Hollins, and was selected to be part of this year's St. Louis Actor's Studio Labute New Theatre Festival.

This marks the sixth edition of the popular festival which was launched by STLAS founder and producing director William Roth in 2013. Each year, Labute contributes a new play of his own to be produced as part of the month-long event.

Plays are selected from a nationwide open submission competition which focuses on theme and character development in the selection process.

Abley said, "I'm shocked and insanely flattered my play *Unabridged* chosen as one of only six one-acts to have their world premiere alongside Neil Labute's new play!"

Unabridged was directed by Ryan Foizey, one of St. Louis' most up and coming actors and directors, who is also the founder of Theatre Lab. He also assembled the cast of talented St. Louis actors.

"From page two, I was fully engaged with Sean's play," Foizey said. "Truly a blast and would jump at the shot to direct anything else by Sean."



seanabley.com



Decision Height at New River Stage



Meredith Dayna Levy, who graduated with her MFA this year, has had incredible success with her play *Decision Height*.

Levy's play is a fictional account of the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) program during World War II, which trained female pilots to take over flights that would free up male pilots for combat missions overseas.

This month, New River Stage produced the play in Blacksburg.

It was directed by Lincoln Sklar, who is also a pilot.

"I started learning to fly through the Civil Air Patrol when I was 12 years old," Sklar said. "Teaching these women about the joys of flying has been a trip down memory lane."

In her extensive research into the all-female training center in Sweetwater Texas, Levy saw parallels between these pilots and her own feelings about attending the all-female undergraduate program at Hollins University.

"What I like best about this script is that it reflects both my personal experience as a student at Hollins, but it has also brought such validation to other women that I've met," Levy said of her play and the responses to its productions.

"It was an amazing experience for the cast to portray such rich, full, female roles in a story where they're not just playing wives or mothers or girlfriends,"

Sklar told us. "It was unbelievably empowering for everyone."

With more than 40 productions and numerous awards, it is clear that this play strikes an important chord with audiences and theater makers alike.

The New River Stage production

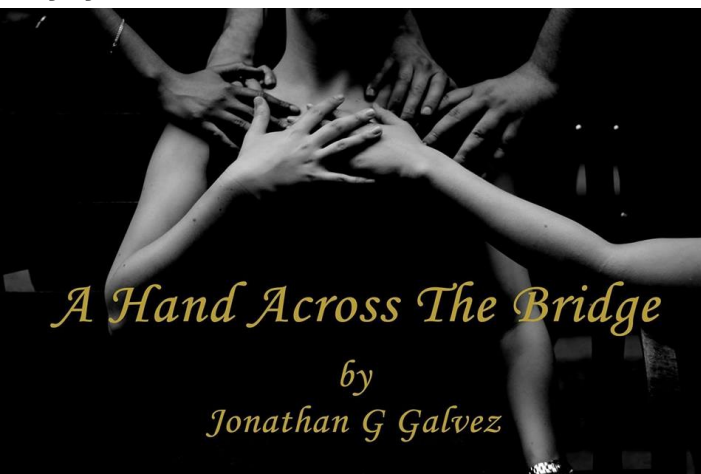
drew appreciative crowds, especially at the July 14th performance which was free to all veteran and active duty military personnel.

NRS is a vibrant community theatre established in 2007, and is dedicated bringing great plays and great people together.



newriverstage.org

Play by Jonathan G Galvez in Planet Connections Festivity 2018



The Bridge Series is a 16-play cycle written by Hollins playwright Jonathan G Galvez. The most recently produced play in this series is *A Hand Across The Bridge*. The play tackles issues of love, relationships,

trust, anxiety and also tackles issues such as alcoholism and sexual assault.

The play was produced by Theatrical Gems, a company Galvez founded, and was

directed by Kristen Keim. It was presented as part of The Planet Connections Festivity, a socially conscious arts festival in New York City.

Planet Connections artists use their work to shed light on causes that matter, while inspiring audiences to get involved. Festivity is designed to invoke the power of art in motivating philanthropy, community outreach, and social change.

Since its inception, Planet Connections has presented 233 full theatrical productions and 86 Staged Readings. 300 charities have benefited from Planet Connections artists, who all raise awareness for an organization/topic of their own selection.

Galvez chose as his charity the Cohen Esophageal Cancer Initiative, an organization dedicated to providing support and resources to those who have faced the cancer diagnosis. (For more info, visit cceci.org)

This organization was selected by the playwright to honor his late father, Felicisimo Galvez. They are pictured together below.



jonathangalvez.com

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Cabaret Workshop Led by Ruth Margraff

Ruth Margraff is an important voice in contemporary American theatre, whose work is often difficult to describe as it lies outside traditional ideas of playmaking and is often non-linear with influences drawn from opera, Eastern European folk traditions, and cabaret.

She wrote six critically acclaimed martial arts operas with the late composer Fred Ho, and her work has been performed in theatres and festivals across the United States and Europe. She has

toured with her Café Antarsia Ensemble all over the world to critical acclaim and garnered many awards. She is a member of Theatre without Borders, League of Professional Theatre women, Red Tape Theatre, The Playwright's Center, was a New Dramatist, and is an alumna of Chicago Dramatists. She is currently a tenured professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

This summer Margraff taught a course in non-linear playwriting

as part of the MFA summer program, and she conducted a workshop in cabaret as a performance model with discussion of how to incorporate those elements into scripted work.

"Ruth's Cabaret workshop interrupted my idea of what a play is and put what happens on the stage in a totally different context," MFA playwright Bev Parsons recounted. "I leaned forward to hear her low soft voice. I listened then opened."



ruthmargraff.com

Susie Young Joins *Spring Awakening* at Mill Mountain Theatre



Susie Young, who completed the Certificate in New Play Directing last summer, spent this summer on contract with Mill Mountain Theatre, Roanoke's professional playhouse and our creative partner. Young served as fight captain and performed a role in MMT's production of *Spring Awakening*, Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater's rock musical version of Frank Wedekind's controversial play dealing with teen sexuality and other aspects of adolescence.

In addition to Young, the cast included other guest artists, local actors, and members of Mill Mountain Theatre's Apprentice Company. The production was

directed by Travis Kendrick, Mill Mountain Theatre's education director and member of the Hollins Theatre Institute undergraduate teaching faculty.

"I think this is an important and timely story for Roanoke," said Kendrick. "Though set in 1890s Germany, the themes reflect aptly on hot-button issues still relevant today."

Kendrick's vision of the production was to use the tough subject matter as a springboard for a larger community conversation on related themes like **#metoo**, barriers between adults and young people in communication, inclusion,

bullying, compassion, sexual/gender identity, and suicide.

"Susie was invaluable in our process," Kendrick said of Young's contributions to fulfilling his directorial vision. "Her thoughtful, intelligent world view was often a connector to how this play reflects on our modern world. She was a great mentor for the younger student performers involved in the process. And an important voice in our community talk backs as well, because of her focus on bringing the notion of allyship into every conversation."

"The part that I loved the most was doing a show with the people that the show was supposed to be about," Young said of her experience. "And asking them why this was important to them."

"The acting and directing certificates are professional training programs," said Todd Ristau, program director for the Playwright's Lab. "The intention is to provide our students with the skills that will help them be highly competitive as they enter the profession. We're so proud of the work that Susie is doing and delighted to see her putting what she's learned into action on Mill Mountain's stage. It's

also a demonstration of the synergy between Hollins and MMT, a partnership that benefits both organizations, our students, and the community."

Spring Awakening was presented as part of Mill Mountain Theatre's Waldron Fringe Series of programming, now entering its second year. Its mission is to provide intimate, thought-provoking, and contemporary work in their 100-seat Waldron Stage.



millmountain.org

Dramaturgy Research Luncheon with Maryke Barber of the Wyndham Robertson Library



Maryke Barber is the public services and arts liaison librarian at Wyndham Robertson Library at Hollins University and has also been a professional dramaturg. She's been instrumental in helping us build an incredible information infrastructure to support our programs in new play development. Thanks in large part to Barber, the Wyndham

Robertson Library has in its permanent collection almost everything that has ever been published (including articles in theatre journals) by every guest artist, faculty member, and student who has ever visited our program. She also has sought out books, videos, and databases our faculty and guests have recommended be part of any first-rate program in

the creation and development of new work for the stage.

Barber has served as a thesis advisor and always makes herself available to assist when students seek additional support in their research. As part of that effort, she suggested that the dramaturgy students this summer might benefit from a meeting over lunch to dive a little deeper into library resources and research strategies.

"We did this two years ago, with unanimously positive feedback," Barber informed us. "We did this at lunch time, so people could attend regardless of which class they were in. They brought their own laptops and a bag lunch. Some of what we covered included specialty databases—Worldcat, Europeana, Dissertations Online, historical newspaper sources and more—as well as search methods to make thesauri and index terms work for you, how to search a full-text

database vs. best methods for citation-only, that sort of thing."

"This was excellent for my dramaturgy class," Art Borreca said. "It not only helped with their final projects, but also expanded their sense of how you can use library resources for theatrical research of all kinds."

"Maryke, being a dramaturg, herself, has a wealth of information about researching information and unearthing sources," MFA playwright Sarah Cosgrove remarked on her interactions with Barber. "I have attended two sessions with Maryke over my three years at Hollins, and these sessions were hands-down two of the best experiences of those summers. We are so fortunate to have her at Hollins University."

We're planning to make this a regular summer event.

libguides.hollins.edu/playwriting

Song of Bernadette Jones opens at Fresh Fruit Festival



Maura Campbell, a graduate of both our MFA program and our Certificate in New Play Directing, was featured in this year's Fresh Fruit Festival. The festival takes place in New York City and is a celebration of LGBTQ arts and culture.

The Song of Bernadette Jones is a lyrical tale of gender-fluid teen Carolyn Jones, whose beloved

sister Mary is obsessed with the martyred Saint Bernadette (possibly living in their Ouija board). Their supernatural experiments yield lessons on love—but is love more powerful than death? Burgeoning queer identity, memories of dazzling Alaskan snowscape, and a healthy dose of magical realism, loom large in this tale of salvation and forgiveness.

"I wrote the first draft of this play in 2007 as class exercise," Campbell reflected. "I never expected to spend the next eleven years rewriting it! There was always something in it that drew me back."

The play seems to also draw others in. It was one of the top ranked one-act plays of the 2017 KCACTF Region IV festival and also selected for a staged reading in the Hollins Playwrights Festival under the direction of Bonnie Metzgar (titled *OUIJA*). Those readings were followed by a fully produced version as part of the Hollins-Mill Mountain Theatre Partnership's Winter Festival of New Works last January under the direction of Bob Moss. Campbell's play has also been a semi-finalist for the Bay Area Playwrights Conference and at the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Center this year.

The Fresh Fruit Festival offering was directed by Liam Lonegan and produced by Egg & Spoon Theatre Collective.

"I set out to simply tell a story about my sister and me, and gender identity is part of that story. But, I think it also deals with the experience of isolation and almost anyone can identify with that," Campbell remarked on being included in this LGBTQ festival. "When I was growing up, there were no stories about gender and sexual identity. Now, these stories are not only needed, they are welcomed."


freshfruitfestival.com

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Kevin D. Ferguson wins \$5,000 Fellowship Grant

Kevin D. Ferguson graduated with his MFA in playwriting and a concentration in dramaturgy from Hollins University in 2015 and has been keeping busy ever since.

He's been teaching playwriting and dramaturgy at Coastal Carolina University in Myrtle Beach as well as serving as resident dramaturg and literary manager of Atlantic Stage where his duties include selecting the plays and producing their annual New Voices Playfest, a three-day event filled with readings and guest respondents.

Ferguson has also had several full productions of his own work, picked up national recognition from KCACTF and two of his plays were published by Next Stage Press. He served two years as chair of the Innovative Playwriting Instruction Award Committee for the Southeastern Theatre Conference, and since his graduation Ferguson has returned to Hollins each year as festival dramaturg or guest respondent.

Last month, this accomplished playwright, dramaturg, and theatre teacher was recognized

with one of four \$5,000 Individual Artist Fellowship from the South Carolina Arts Commission. The awards are given to South Carolina based artists who work in prose, poetry, theatre acting, and playwriting. The selection is made by out-of-state review panelists who make their decisions based solely on a review of anonymous work samples.

"The Playwriting Fellowship is highly competitive," Ferguson told us. "So, I was blown away when I was selected."



kevindferguson.com

Neeley Gossett Featured in Reading Series and at Dramatists Guild Conference



Neeley Gossett, who graduated from the Lab in May 2012, was a featured playwright in the University of West Georgia's Play West, new play festival that focuses on the work of Atlanta

area playwrights. Gossett's play *Indian Maeve* was selected to be part of a week of workshoping in collaboration with a faculty director and student actors, culminating in a public reading.

"Four playwrights are chosen each year," Gossett told us. "This was my third time participating. My goal was to develop the play into a full-length and this process was really useful in achieving that goal."

Part of the goal of the festival is to introduce the UWG students to best practices in new play development, how a director asks for and receives rewrites, and what it is like to have the playwright in the rehearsal room.

In addition to being recognized for her writing this month,

Gossett was also honored by having a workshop accepted as part of the Dramatists Guild Conference in New York City. The workshop was built around the work she does through Found Stages, a company she co-founded with Nichole Palmietto in July 2014. Their mission is to create new plays designed to be produced in non-traditional spaces—everywhere but in a theatre. They also push the boundaries of theatrical storytelling by merging art and technology to bring theatre to audiences wherever they might be via their cell phones.

The unique performances and support for a growing number of playwrights interested in this kind of artistic experimentation earned them a place at this year's Dramatists Guild



Conference in Chicago. Selection for these panels and workshops is highly competitive and it is an honor to be selected.

"We had a full house, about 70 people. We fielded questions about our work and conducted a workshop on how to implement our methods of doing work in strange places," Gossett said.

foundstages.org

Hollins Playwright Begins Teaching in Texas

Kate Lowry, one of our MFA playwrights, begins working this fall as a fourth grade specialist for Great Heart Academies in San Antonio, TX. She will be teaching history, science, and Lyceum.

"Lyceum is an enrichment period where I provide work in math or English language arts geared to

the student's personal levels," Lowry told us. "In some cases it helps bridge a learning gap, and in others it pushes more advanced students to excel."

Lowry credits her time in the Playwright's Lab as being beneficial to her work as a teacher.

"I think the structure of the Lab has helped me be able to set lofty but still realistic goals for myself," Lowry said. "And that's something I use every day in my classroom. The collaboration we learn at Hollins is also a vital skill because I have 77 tiny humans to collaborate with every day."



greatheartamerica.org

Advanced Performance Showcase



Advanced Performance Techniques is taught as part of the curriculum for the Certificate in New Play Performance, but can be taken as an elective by MFA playwrights. The class, taught by John Bergman, is designed to provide intense and

rapid training in a variety of performance techniques and styles with an emphasis on applications to new play development. Students are exposed to mask, clowning, commedia, melodrama, Grand Guignol, improvisation, and

other methods of performance with an emphasis on how to apply them to working on new plays. At the end of the summer session, as an act of sharing, the students presented examples of their work during the final week of classes.

"Can these ancient theatre techniques broaden the skills of an actor? And enhance the approach, performance, and rehearsal of text? That's what the class is designed to explore," Bergman explained. "If an actor has forgotten how to play as a child, they should not be an actor. That's really core. Have you forgotten how to play? The class exists to remind you."

Stephen Baltz, a certificate performer agreed, "This class was like being a kid again. We could be and do anything we could imagine."

"In Bergman's class we studied lots of genres and styles that I didn't have as much experience and training in," Ally Thomas, another certificate performer, said of the course. "What I loved about that class was that we could focus on process and it was a safe space to experiment without being afraid to try new things and make bold choices."



Directing and Scene Study Combined Showcase



Actors and Directors shared the results of their summer training in a combined showcase during the final week of classes. Scenes from both Directing the New Play (taught by Bob Moss) and Advanced Scene Study (taught by Saffron Henke) were not intended to be seen as polished performances, but rather an expression of the kind of work these students have been undertaking as they hone their craft within their disciplines.

"Taking a directing class with Bob Moss was an amazing experience," said Kevin Grant. "He's a legend. His knowledge, information, wisdom, and tools all combine to teach you how to

trust your own instincts and abilities."

Fellow directing student Amile Wilson told us, "You walk into class thinking that you've done something well and you present it to Bob and he is able to show you a dozen ways to make it even better."

Directors in the class worked with fellow students and local actors to put their best work forward in the showcase. The performance students did the same in scene work coordinated by instructor Saffron Henke.



character relationships and analyzing the text to find out what is happening between characters, what are they really saying to each other, and why are they saying it? And you learn the skills to connect with your scene partner and really engage in the deeper meaning behind the text."

"These actors, playwrights, and directors rocked the stage," MFA playwright Sarah Cosgrove said. "The material was engaging and challenging, the actors were heart-breaking and hilarious, and the directors pulled it all together like pros."

"In our scene study class, Saffron was teaching us practical tools to approach different texts," Ally Thomas said of her experience. "She talked a lot about beats and actions and breaking down the scene and to approach it using different acting styles."

"In scene study we focused on the more intimate aspects of acting," Stephen Baltz said. "The



The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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Playwright's Festival Debuts New Format



2018 Playwrights Festival

Readings of 8 new plays from the Playwright's Lab

All readings are FREE!

Friday July 20
7PM *Anna Karanina on the Acute Express*
Directed by Ben Jolivet
Directed by Bob Moss

Saturday July 21
11AM *The Love Code* by Kate Leslie
Directed by Saffron Henke
2PM *Mystery at Millington* by Scott Michael McCord
Directed by Amile Wilson
4PM *Waiting in Plain Sight* by Sarah Cosgrove
Directed by Kimberly Patterson
8PM *Welcome to Leiserville* by Kimberly Patterson
Directed by Kevin T. Grant

Sunday July 22
11AM *Pieces of the Spectrum* by Walter Dodd
Directed by William C. Kearney
2PM *Unabridged* by Sean Abley
Directed by Michael Mansfield
4PM *The Hills* by Meredith Dayna Levy
Directed by Lauren Brooke Ellis
8PM Panel Discussion with Guest Respondents

Guest Respondent Panelists:
Liz Duffy Adams, Becky Becker, Laura Esping, Kevin Ferguson, Heather Helinsky, Drea Lewis, Anne Morgan, Ginger Poole, Kim Shively, and Dwayne Yancey

Program Faculty:
John Borreca, Art Borreca, John Farman, George Gervin, Saffron Henke, Bob Mays, Bob Moss, Todd Ristau, Shannon Robert, Neil David Seibel, and Tina Zula

Mill Mountain Theatre
Playwright's Lab
HOLLINS

On the Waldron Stage of Mill Mountain Theatre 20 Church Ave SE

LIMITED SEATING! To reserve tickets for each show, visit the title at brownpapertickets.com

Playwrights Festival is in some ways the spine of our summer program. In a very structured way it represents every step in the new play development process. Work is solicited, recommended, and submitted. It goes through a season selection process. Writers and directors interview each other and agree to collaborate. Auditions are held and the plays are cast from that pool. In rehearsal, directors and playwrights work with a dramaturg to do rewrites and revisions. The plays are presented as staged readings for a general audience and invited guest respondents with feedback sessions that may lead to additional changes in the text. Frequently, from these readings two plays are selected to be fully produced in workshop productions in January as part of the Hollins-Mill Mountain Winter Festival of New Works.

"Transparency in the selection process is key," says Todd Ristau, who makes the final selections. "We want to foster a community



that is collaborative, not competitive. It is vital that nobody thinks of this as a contest. A lot goes into season planning at any theatre and this is a way for our students to understand how it all works on the other side of the table." Plays are selected based on readiness for public sharing, professionalism of the playwright, and to reflect the broadest range of approaches and style employed by our student playwrights.



Each year between 60 and 90 plays are considered. Ristau looks for plays that represent coursework from the previous summer, a mix of comedy and serious subjects, and which are closest to production ready.

The primary mission is not to get anyone discovered, it is to provide experiential learning opportunities for the students by getting their work up on its feet in rehearsal and then in front of an audience in performance.

"Everyone involved realizes that



with festival we're showcasing the entire program, with all its diversity of voices and interests, as well as the quality of instruction at Hollins, not individual plays or playwrights," Ristau emphasized.

"We started doing this festival at Studio Roanoke in 2009," Ristau continued. "We did ten staged readings spread out over a three-day weekend. Two the first night, then four each on Saturday and Sunday. We've



continued in that same format, even with several venue changes. Now, we have a permanent home for the festival at Mill Mountain Theatre and we're making a few changes to the festival structure."

Starting this summer, the Lab has shifted from ten staged readings to eight. This lessens the demand on resources, actors, and our guest respondents.

"We're doing one reading as the festival opener on Friday night,"



Ristau said. "That gives the guests and the students more time to get to know each other at the start of the festival. We've also eliminated the Sunday eight o'clock reading slot and replaced it with a panel of our guest respondents. They are all established theatre professionals and we've heard from the students that they never get the chance to hear the guests as a group respond to student work and place it in the context of descriptions of their own professional experiences."

This year's guest respondents included Liz Duffy Adams, Becky Becker, Laura Esping, Kevin D. Ferguson, Heather Helinsky, Drea Lewis, Julie Rae Mollenkamp, Anne G. Morgan, Ginger Poole, Kim Shively, and Dwayne Yancey.

Festival included new plays by Sarah Cosgrove, Walter Dodd, Sean Abley, Ben Jolivet, Kate Leslie, Meredith Dayna Levy, Sean Michael McCord, and Kimberly Patterson. Directors included certificate directors Kevin T. Grant and Amile Wilson; faculty members Bob Moss and Saffron Henke; MFA playwrights Sean Abley, Lauren Brooke Ellis, and Kimberly Patterson; and guest director Michael Mansfield.

Art Borreca served as Festival dramaturg.



Panel Discussion by Festival Guest Respondents

Todd Ristau, program director for the Playwright's Lab, changed the format for our Festival from ten staged readings to only eight this year, in part so the schedule could accommodate a panel discussion by our distinguished guest respondents. The discussion was an excellent way to bring the fast-paced weekend of new works to a thoughtful and reflective close.

"Every year people tell me that they wished there were a chance to get to know each of the respondents and hear what they thought of the festival as a whole, rather than only getting their thoughts during the fifteen minute talkbacks following each reading," Ristau explained. "This year we gave it a try and the results were so positive that we're going to stick with this format going forward."

This year's respondents, from left to right in the photo, were:

Dr. Becky Becker, chair of performing arts at Clemson University and chair of the New Play Project with KCACTF-IV.

Kevin D. Ferguson, a Hollins graduate, who teaches at Coastal Carolina University and



is literary manager for Atlantic Stage.

Anne G. Morgan, a new play dramaturg and literary manager for the American Shakespeare Center.

Laura Esping, a professional actor based in Minneapolis.

Ginger Poole, professional actor and producing artistic director for Mill Mountain Theatre. Poole is also adjunct faculty at the Hollins Theatre Institute.

Kim Shively, professional actor and performance faculty at Elon University.

Dwayne Yancey, playwright and editor for The Roanoke Times.

Julie Rae Mollenkamp, playwright, director, and actor. Mollenkamp is also a distinguished professor at the University of Central Missouri and was KCACTF NPP chair for Region V before being elected to the KCACTF National Board.

Liz Duffy Adams, playwright and teacher based in New York.

Drea Lewis, professional actor, playwright, producer, and engineer. She authored *The Mathematics of Acting*.

Topics discussed at the forum included general impressions of the Playwright's Lab, the community of Roanoke, the diversity of voices and quality of training displayed by the festival plays, and possible next steps students might take to continue

developing the plays and where to consider submitting.

"I was really moved by the supportive atmosphere," Esping commented.

"I also felt like the curation of the festival was taking care of us," said Morgan. "The choices of plays, and the way we were brought through them made me feel taken care of."

The panel also fielded questions from the audience on a number of topics such as professional memberships, building artistic relationships, negotiating contracts, finding agents, expectation management, and how to fund your projects.

Hollins Playwright Receives SETC Directing Scholarship



Shane Strawbridge is this year's recipient of the Leighton M. Ballew Directing Scholarship from SETC, the Southeastern

Theatre Conference. This award is given annually to a graduate student studying directing at an accredited university, recognizing excellence and potential for success in the profession. It comes with a \$3,000 scholarship. The award is named after Dr. Leighton M. Ballew who served as chair of the drama department (now theatre and film studies) at the University of Georgia for more than 40 years.

Strawbridge is a graduate of The Playwright's Lab at Hollins

University, and is currently a graduate part-time instructor at Texas Tech University where he is pursuing an interdisciplinary PhD in fine arts with a concentration in theatre and tracks in acting/directing and history/theory/criticism.

Strawbridge has spent the past decade working in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex as an actor, playwright, composer, lyricist, teacher, dramaturg, journalist, and curmudgeon. He has a Bachelor of Music degree from Howard Payne University and an MA in drama from Texas Woman's University.

As an actor, Strawbridge has won numerous accolades including being acknowledged for one of the best performances of the year by TheaterJones.com and being recognized as one of Dallas-Fort Worth's Best Actors by CBS. As a playwright, his work has won awards from the Kennedy Center, the Southwest Playwriting Competition, and the RedEye10s Festival. His work as a theatre journalist and arts advocate has been featured by Theater Jones and the Kennedy Center.

shanestrawbridge.com

Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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From the Director: Classes for Summer 2019



Believe it or not, I try to plan our courses, visiting faculty, and even some of our guest artists at least five years out.

This helps to create a continuity of study for our MFA candidates as well as ensuring that all of

the courses for each of the various concentrations in Plays with Music, Dramaturgy, Writing Plays for Young Audiences, Performance and Directing are able to be taken by anyone seeking to earn those concentrations within any given five year period.

In July of each summer session, I especially want to have confirmations on the courses offered next year so that end of summer advising sessions give me a strong indication of which students will be signing up to take which classes.

Vital when offering contracts of employment to visiting instructors so they know the courses we would like them to teach will “make” (meaning have at least five students enrolled in that course).

Next summer, I'll be teaching **Narrative Theory and Dramatic Structure** along with **Lab** and a

course called **Short Forms**, looking at plays ranging from one minute to ten, with a final exam being a 25-30 page play suitable for CenterPieces style submission opportunities. I'll also be teaching **Directors and Playwrights in Collaboration**.

Dominic Taylor, a popular guest speaker, returns next summer as the Bob Moss Resident Professional Teaching Artist, teaching **Playscript Analysis** and **Selected Dramatists: Contemporary Black Playwrights**. He will also be directing one of the eight Festival plays.

Neil David Seibel teaches **Ensembles in Collaboration**, **Viewpoints & Composition**, and also **Advanced Playwriting Tutorial**.

Shannon Robert will be teaching **Company Creation and Management** and **Design on a Dime**, two courses in the Certificate for New Play Directing program that are open to

playwrights as electives.

We are also excited to announce that our summer list of guests will include:

Carl Hancock Rux, who will do a workshop with playwrights on incorporating music and poetic language into their work.

Becky Becker will join us Overnight Sensations weekend as a playwright and will also conduct a workshop on scholarly writing and submitting to journals.

Also, **Kimberly Patterson** will return to Hollins next summer as resident dramaturg for our Playwrights Festival, providing dramaturgical assistance to all the writer/director teams.

2019 is going to be amazing!

Todd Ristau, Program Director