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The Lab Report
Playwriting News from the Playwright’s Lab at Hollins University
Volume 01, Issue 01 (June, 2007)

Summer 2007 Courses and Calendar of Events!

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.

THEA 505  The Collaborative Art of Theatre (4) Ristau
Introduction to theatre as a collaborative art and profession.

THEA 510  Playscript Analysis and Criticism (4) Ristau
Intensive critical analysis of the playscript as a blueprint for production covering representative texts from a range of theatre styles, genres, and periods.

THEA 520  Narrative Theory and Dramatic Structure (4) Sossaman
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.

Summer 2007 Courses and Calendar of Events!

June 18: Orientation and Opening Reception
June 20: Ruth Margraff and Café Antarsia Ensemble in Lab
June 22: No Shame Theatre
June 23: Big River at MMT
June 25: Todd Ristau, No Shame Theatre Overview with guest performers
June 27: Patrick Benton in Lab
July 2: Morgan Jenness in Lab
July 4: Student Reading in Lab
July 6: No Shame Theatre
July 8: Winter’s Tale at Blackfriar’s Theatre
July 9: Melanie Joseph in Lab
July 11: Student Reading
July 13-14: Overnight Sensations at Mill Mountain Theatre
July 16: Student Reading in Lab
July 18: Mac Wellman in Lab
July 19: Mac Wellman poetry reading at 8PM in Library
July 20-22: Mac Wellman writing workshop from 2-4PM
July 23: Reading of short pieces of student work
July 25: Student reading
July 27: End of summer cook out and No Shame
July 28: Checkout

Student Spotlight: Keith Bridges

Keith Bridges is the founder and Artistic Director of Charter Theatre, a professional theatre in the nation’s capital that is dedicated to developing and producing new plays.

His own plays include Monkeyboy (Charter), Finding Tony, (The National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts ART Company and co-authored with Chris Stezin and Richard Washer), Our Lady of Sandwich (NCDART and co-authored with Mario Baldessari), and Watching Left (Charter) which was nominated for a Helen Hayes Award in 2004.

In addition to being a prolific writer, Keith has directed a wealth of new plays at Charter including Peter Coy’s A House in the Country (winner of two Helen Hayes awards); Chris Stezin’s what dogs do (Helen Hayes award nominee); Allyson Currin’s Church of the Open Mind (Helen Hayes award nominee); Paul Donnelly’s The Taste of Fire (Helen Hayes Award for best actor); the critically acclaimed production of John Walsh’s Circumference of a Squirrel; Richard Washer’s Of a Sunday Morning and The Rule of Three, by Mario Baldessari.

We’re very glad to welcome Keith as one of our first students in the program.

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www.chartertheatre.org
NO SHAME Theatre

No Shame was established in the back of a pickup truck in 1986 by Iowa City playwrights Todd Ristau, Stan Ruth, and Jeff Goode. From those modest beginnings, this grass roots theatre revolution has spread across the United States, with branches in dozens of cities.

The No Shame at Mill Mountain Theatre was established in 2003 as the cornerstone of Underground Roanoke, MMT’s performance series for alternative, late-night performances and new works development. Since then, this incarnation of No Shame has become perhaps the most successful in the country and is the only No Shame to be fully incorporated into the programming season of a major professional theatre.

Some of today’s leading writers and performers have participated in No Shame Theatre, including Naomi Wallace, Mac Wellman, Rebecca Gilman, Camryn Manheim, John Leguizamo, Stuart Sherman, Ruth Margraff, Erin Quinn Purcell, Sean Clark, Shem Bitterman, Toby Huss, D.B. Woodside, Robert Caisley, Viggo Mortensen, and Ursula K. Le Guin. No Shame pieces have been published in anthologies and even been turned into successful plays.

There is nobody who reads your script and decides if it is worth doing, that risk is up to you.

Pieces should be self contained, meaning bring your own props and stuff, and rehearsed to your own satisfaction. Many pieces are cold readings with volunteer actors from the audience, but some are off-book with elaborate costumes and set pieces. It is entirely up to you.

There are only three rules. Pieces must be original, meaning you have to have written it or be asked to read by the person who wrote it. No Shakespeare, no copyright violations. The emphasis is on new work.

Pieces have to be short, five minutes or less. At five minutes the lights flicker, at 6 minutes they go out and you will be asked to leave the stage.

Lastly, you can’t break anything. Not the actors, not yourself, not the stage, and not the audience. You also can’t break any laws.

So, that’s it—original, short, safe & legal. Beyond that, you can do whatever you want.

At any given performance you might get a poem about stealing eyeballs in the rain, a dance piece about global warming, a puppet show about violence in the schools, or a moving drama illustrating some important truth—only to have it followed by a delightful ditty on a hand saw.

Above all, No Shame is a place where writers can get experiential learning in all aspects of their craft in front of a live audience, where you can learn to take risks, and where fear of failure is never an obstacle to attempting success.

www.noshame.org
Ruth Margraff, Guest Artist

Ruth Margraff has taught graduate playwriting at the Yale School of Drama, Brown University, UT Austin’s Michener Center for Writers, and the Iowa Playwrights’ Workshop, undergraduate playwriting at the University of Rochester, Fordham/Lincoln Center, among other places, and in Greece, India, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Serbia, and Slovenia. She recently accepted a full time teaching position with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Ruth is an alumna of New Dramatists, is a National McKnight commissioned playwright at the Playwrights’ Center, and has received many awards in playwriting from the Fulbright, Rockefeller, NEA, TCG, TMUNY, Jerome, and NYSCA foundations. Ruth’s plays are produced nationally and internationally and have been widely published.

Ruth and Lab director Todd Ristau met as members of the Iowa Playwright’s Workshop, and continued their creative collaborations in New York performing with the No Shame Theatre chapter hosted by Randy Rollison at the HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art.

Ruth was an advisor in the program design phase, and plans to be a regular guest speaker and frequent visiting faculty member.

“This is a really special program,” Ruth said of the Playwright’s Lab, “I’m so excited about it...I wish it had been around when I was looking for a program. I think Todd is an amazing resource, because first of all, he’s a brilliant playwright on his own, he’s also a brilliant performer, and also, he knows how to produce. I think that is something you can really learn from him that can help you out in the world, because if you know how to produce or to co-produce your play, you’re always going to have an advantage.”

In addition to her writing and teaching, Ruth is also a member of Café Antarsia Ensemble. The group considers themselves rebels from the modern opera playing of traditional folk, Greek blues, Balkan/American gypsy music.

The Café Antarsia Ensemble has toured the world to great acclaim. In addition to Ruth speaking on her life and work in the theatre, Café Antarsia will kick off the summer session with a concert as part of the opening session of the Playwright’s Lab on June 20th at 7:00PM in Talmadge Recital Hall. The event is free and open to the public.

www.ruthmargraff.com

Café Antarsia Ensemble

Patrick Benton, Guest Speaker

PatrIck BenToN is the Artistic Director of Mill Mountain Theatre in Jackson, MS.

He has directed plays by William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Richard Greenberg, Harvey Fierstein and many others.

He has taught acting, directing, and introductory theatre classes at Millsaps College and Indiana University, the latter of which also awarded him his MFA degree.

Benton has served as a guest director at the University of Southern Mississippi and as a panelist for the Mississippi Arts Commission. He is also a member of Actor’s Equity Association.

Since 1964, Mill Mountain Theatre has produced more than 300 plays, including dozens of new or original works. Plays premiered at Mill Mountain Theatre have gone on to be produced in California, New York, and Chicago. These include Tom Ziegler’s Grace and Glorie Off-Broadway, and All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, Ernie Zulia’s original adaptation of Robert Fulghum’s bestseller.

Mill Mountain Theatre has the distinction of being the first arts organization in the region to be recognized by the Virginia Commission for the Arts as a “major organization” and the first to receive direct funding from the NEA.

New works programming at MMT includes the CenterPieces Lunchtime Readings, Discovery Reading Series, One Night Stands, and the Norfolk Southern Festival of New Works.

www.millmountain.org
professional relationships with these important guests is an advantage over other programs.

Students can also take advantage of our creative relationship with Mill Mountain Theatre, Roanoke's professional playhouse, which provides reading, production, experiential learning, and networking opportunities.

Because the playwriting program is one of several summer graduate programs at Hollins, there are crossover opportunities with the students, visiting faculty, and guests in the related fields of screenwriting and children's literature.

Finally, the city of Roanoke and the beautiful Hollins campus, located against the backdrop of the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountains, provide a breathtaking scenic setting for one of the nation's most important centers of creative writing.