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Rachel Nelson, class of 2007, is a talented Hollins undergraduate playwright. Her new play, *Paper Cup Ocean*, was mounted as a full student production this year on the Little Theatre main stage as part of Rachel’s senior project. This energetic undergraduate wrote, directed, designed, and acted in the production, which was so successful the Theatre Department remounted the play with the original cast as part of the first-ever Roanoke Arts Festival in October. This time, the play was performed on the Waldron Stage at Mill Mountain Theatre under the direction of Mary Best Bova. *Paper Cup Ocean* earned Rachel an Irene Ryan nomination and was one of five finalists in the regional Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF). Rachel’s play will be showcased in a third incarnation during regional competition at Clemson University in February 2008. "Very few original student works make it to this level, and we are honored to be in this group," said Department Chair Ernest Zulia.

"The faculty and staff at Hollins are unbelievably supportive and nurturing," says Rachel. "They are constantly working one-on-one with you to become the best theatre artist you can be, whatever your specific interests happen to be. In addition to many acting opportunities, I had firsthand experience with technical theatre, lighting, and scene design, and I was able to write two shows that were fully produced and funded by the theatre department. This program has given me a deep appreciation for the legacy of theatre, as well as a strong sense of what my place is in the modern world of professional theatre. Hollins is an amazing place to study theatre because it’s a place that is always focused on self-discovery and exploration.”

Rachel double majored in theatre and English, and plans to attend graduate school to pursue an MFA playwriting. Any program would be lucky to have her as a student, and we’re hoping that we’ll be the program she chooses!

**Student Spotlight: Toby Thelin**

Toby Ring Thelin, is a member of the first MFA playwriting cohort, and he acted in all the incarnations of Rachel Nelson’s *Paper Cup Ocean*. Toby has been working in and around theatre for the past two decades as a performer, writer, stage manager, designer, and technical crewmember. He’s worked in some of the finest theatres in the country (including Manhattan Theatre Club, Theatre for the New City, and SoHo Rep) and is an associate artist with several exciting theatre companies. Toby’s undergraduate work was done at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. He attended Playwright’s Horizons and was the Theatre Specialist for the City of Savannah for four years before teaching theatre for the Savannah Arts Academy, a distinguished performing arts high school.

Toby told us, “My goal for the immediate future is to use the energy of my New York based theatre company (Flight of Ravens) to produce entertaining and exciting new work.”
Campus Highlight: Wyndham Robertson Library

The Wyndham Robertson Library at Hollins University opened on March 30, 1999 after a five-year fundraising campaign and three years of construction as cornerstone of the university’s capital campaign. Julian Robertson and his wife Josie made a generous gift of $3 million to name the new library for his sister, Wyndham (Class of ’58).

In April of that same year, as part of the formal dedication of the new library, Friends of Libraries U.S.A. (FOLUSA) and the Virginia Center for the Book, which is located at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, recognized the historical influence on American literature of Hollins University by designating the Wyndham Robertson Library as a National Literary Landmark.

The Wyndham Robertson Library’s mission is to “enrich the intellectual life of the University through the integration of resources and services to foster the discovery and effective use of information.” In other words: “information-is-us”! The collections, professional librarians and staff are all available to help you find what you need for your research and writing.

The library’s web site, www.hollins.edu/library, provides access to search our 125,000 books and films, as well as our magazines, academic journals and newspapers (1,000 titles in print, and 40,000 titles online!) Library users can search over 80 databases for articles, primary sources and more.

But perhaps the best feature of the library is its people. Many don’t know that in order to become a librarian, a person needs a Master’s Degree in Information Science. Five librarians at Hollins each specialize in a particular subject area, and these experts in research enjoy nothing more than to help the students and faculty find what they need.

Library Communications Coordinator and Public Services Assistant Maryke Barber told us, “Summer is actually our favorite time, because graduate students ask such interesting questions!”

So whether you need a fact, background information, or are just curious what might be out there on a specific topic, ask a librarian! They can be reached by phone, email—even by instant message—for a quick question or to make a personal research appointment.

Our playwrights will be glad to find a good number of historical sources at the library including reviews from the New York Times, New Yorker, New York Theatre Critics and other sources. The general book collections feature a wide range of historical and contemporary plays, critical works, primary sources and scholarly materials. Scripts can also be found in such databases as Black Drama and Asian American Drama. In our film collection, you will also find productions of classics and more recent plays and musicals; recently, we added to this collection with the popular Theatre in Video database. (see sidebar)

Finally, the library shares a collection with nearby Roanoke College. While searching the joint online catalog, if you locate a book you’d like to borrow from Roanoke College, one click will ensure that the book is delivered to Hollins by courier the very next weekday. Materials not available from either of our libraries can be requested, free of charge, via inter-library loan. Given enough notice, we will borrow materials for you from libraries anywhere in the U.S.

The library may look quiet to you, but is a busy place: during the school year it is open 94 hours in a typical week (82 in Summer), and during finals they stay open 24 hours (except during Summer Session). Over a year, students and faculty check out 45,000 items over the course of 80,000 visits. Our acquisitions and cataloging departments handle 2,000-3,000 new items each year (not counting gifts) and our librarians teach research instruction to 60-80 classes!

The library provides ample study seating, group study rooms, and a number of comfortable reading spaces. Computers for public use are located throughout the building, and all are connected to networked printers. While at the library, students may also use their own laptop and plug into the campus network, or hop onto the wireless network: academic work is supported from start to finish.

Students can take advantage of the outdoor reading porch, next to the library’s Coffee Commons, where busy researchers will find coffee, beverage, and snack machines.

The Hollins Room is a magnificent space that showcases the many published works by and about Hollins alumni/i and faculty authors. The room provides an excellent location for the lectures, workshops, and readings that are frequently hosted there. Guests of the program who have given readings or workshops in the library include Naomi Wallace, Mac Wellman, and Morgan Jenness.

Theatre in Video Collection Database contains more than 450 video resources

Theatre in Video contains more than 250 full-length plays and 200 video documentaries and interviews in streaming video. Plays included are the most important productions of the 20th century starting in 1930: works ranging from Shakespeare to Saroyan, from Moliere to the Wooster Group, from Ibsen to A.R. Gurney.

You can search this database in a variety of ways including genre, date, and producing company; you can also create playlists and bookmark your favorite scenes.
Faculty Profile: Ernie Zulia

Ernest Zulia has worked as a professional theatre artist for over twenty-five years before coming to Hollins in 2004.

He has directed over 100 productions of plays, musicals, operas, and world premieres in regional theatres throughout the United States and internationally including Cincinnati Playhouse In The Park, Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, The Asolo, The Tiffany in LA, and Carnegie Hall in NY.

His stage adaption of Robert Fulghum’s international best-selling book, All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, has received thousands of productions around the world.

Zulia also created and directed the musical revue of the songs of Academy Award winning composer Stephen Schwartz (Wicked), titled Magic To Do, which he directed at Ford’s Theatre in Washington DC. This led to further collaborations with Mr. Schwartz, including Zulia’s direction of the American premiere of Children of Eden.

Ernie is the founding director of The International Theatre Laboratory of Crete which had its inaugural season in 2001 when artists from five countries assembled to explore a global theatre language for the 21st century.

He served as Associate Artistic Director at Mill Mountain Theatre and serves on the artistic board at Chicago’s Apple Tree Theatre where he frequently directs and was nominated for Chicago’s prestigious Joseph Jefferson Award as best director.

He is currently Associate Professor and Chair of the Theatre Department at Hollins.

A member of SSDC (Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers) and the Dramatists Guild, Zulia holds an MFA in directing from Northwestern University, and a BA from SUNY Geneseo.

http://www.hollins.edu/undergrad/theatre/theatre.htm

Area Highlight: Miniature Graceland

Mini-Graceland (or, as it is sometimes called, Elvis City) was a labor of love constructed by Roanoker Don Epperly and his wife Kim sometime in the 1980’s. The shrine to Elvis is in the yard of their home in a residential neighborhood at the base of Mill Mountain, under the neon glow of the famous star.

Listed in Roadside America and Strange Virginia, the site has been a cult tourist stop for two decades. Many pilgrims to the real Graceland feel compelled to stop here on the way. When Mini-Graceland was in its heyday, busloads of tourists would come to the stop, which featured a newly designed building each year with hand-crafted adornments, even lights, the swimming pool and the Meditation Garden. The Roanoke Civic Center is included, because if Elvis hadn’t died he’d have performed there only days later. The imagined concert was depicted with adoring Barbie fans.

Buildings also include the Car Museum, Meditation Garden, and the Tupelo birthplace of The King.

In the late 1980’s, Don’s health fell into decline and new construction stopped. A storm brought a tree down in Elvis City causing a lot of damage and blocking access in 2003.

Since 2006, Don’s son Mike has been restoring Mini-Graceland with the help of his own son David, other family members and some of their friends. They rely entirely on what they can spare from their own family budgets and donations from visitors.

“Back in the 80’s my Mother & Father created this miniature tribute to Elvis Presley, then my father became unable to maintain it. He became sick with M.S. and is now in a wheel chair.” Mike explains on his website.

When visiting Roanoke, please be sure to stop at Mini-Graceland, and leave a nice donation for the repair and maintenance of this unusual and dearly loved Roanoke oddity.

Mini-Graceland/Mike Epperly 605 Riverland Rd. S.E. Roanoke, Va. 24014

http://www.hollins.edu/undergrad/theatre/theatre.htm

http://miniaturegraceland.com/
In addition to my role as Program Director, I’m also the Literary Associate at a professional theatre. This means I read (and reject) a lot of plays. For the next few issues, I’ll be presenting tips to take some mystery and agony out of the submission process.

**Be selective in your submissions.**

Not every play is right for every theatre, nor is every theatre right for every play.

Because the relationship you build with a theatre interested in doing your work is so important, and because you hope that the relationship is both reciprocal and long lasting, it isn’t entirely inappropriate to think the process of finding a theatre willing to produce your play as analogous to the way dating can either lead to something more substantial or end in disaster.

I know nothing is more dangerous than an overextended metaphor, but bear with me.

If you asked every person you saw out on a date, eventually you’d get a date—but it’s unlikely either you or your date would find the experience satisfying. Also, everyone who turned you down would remember you for all the wrong reasons.

They’d remember you didn’t know anything about them, didn’t realize you were obviously wrong for each other, were attracted to their reputation, or thought they were the theatrical equivalent of “hot to trot” and would just produce any play that came along.

Before you submit, do a little research. Look at the kinds of plays your target theatre produces. If they mostly do plays like *Big River* and your play is a lot like *Bat Boy*, chances are they won’t do your play because it doesn’t reflect the needs and interests of their audience.

Read the theatre’s mission statement. If doing new plays isn’t part of their core mission, find a theatre that is passionate about new plays.

Finding a few theatres you’d like to go to as an audience member, that do plays you’d like to see, and reflect your personal philosophy will give you a better shot at building a long term relationship through your work than a blind submission to multiple theatres all at once.

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**Playwright’s Lab at Hollins University**

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**From the Director: Submission Tip #5**

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.

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**Check out our MySpace page!**

http://www.myspace.com/hollinsplaywrightslab

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**Todd Ristau, Director**

Playwright’s Lab at Hollins University