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Student Spotlight: David Schwingle

David Schwingle was born and raised in Upstate New York. A product of both home school and Christian school, David came to Bob Jones University in 1996. After receiving a bachelor and masters degree in Performance studies (formerly Interpretative Speech), he began working in the Division of Speech and Professional Writing Departments but has gradually become more and more active in the theatre program there. In fact, David was recently named Head of Dramatic Arts at BJU taking a strong leadership role in shaping curriculum and initiating novel projects with an emphasis on dramatic writing.

“Since its founding in 1927, Bob Jones University has provided a variety of opportunities to explore and grow in the theatrical arts with theatre taking many forms,” David said. “Artistically, the school has produced two Shakespeare plays and one Grand Opera every year since its founding.”

Originally, Dramatic Arts at BJU was a subset of the Speech-Communication division with an emphasis solo performances and oral interpretation. Directing was eventually added as a way to train students in the School of Education to equip majors to teach English, Speech and to direct high-school plays.

As a part of a national accreditation process with T.R.A.C.S., the Speech-Communication division at BJU underwent a much needed, comprehensive overhaul.

David explained, “Dramatic Arts is now one of several departments in the Division of Communication. Our mission is to educate students to tell stories that reflect God’s beauty and truth. We serve students as they pursue the disciplines of theater and performance to the Glory of God. As a department, we’re building on the historic foundation of classic play production while exploring the commonalities between story creation and the many collaborative partners necessary to theatre-making. My job is to oversee the core curriculum, support faculty growth and development, and come up with interesting and appropriate Junior and Senior student projects. I’m also helping to finalize plans for a new Masters in Dramatic Arts for the 2011-2012 school year.”

To accomplish these goals, David has been applying a lot of the training he’s had at Hollins to good effect. He initiated and oversaw a new 24-hour playwriting festival in the fall and will administer a one-act Playwriting Contest in January of next year. By the end of next month BJU Dramatic Arts will have premiered 6 new plays in the past two years, including a new adaptation of A Christmas Carol.

Two of David’s own one-act plays were presented to audiences at Bob Jones University last month as part of a faculty showcase.

Some Fell Among Thorns, directed by Erin Naler, was fully produced with A Roof of Slate, directed by Ron Pyle, presented as a staged reading.

“The production was an incredible experience for me,” David said. “Erin and I collaborated on several revisions, working through various ideas and changes in rehearsal. Coming fresh from my first summer of graduate work at Hollins, the reading was an incredible opportunity to mesh the history, theory, and creative work I’d experienced as a student with the real-world reaction of local theatre-goers in Greenville.”

David is married to April, who teaches Pottery and Art Appreciation (also at Bob Jones University). He enjoys reading, writing, playing the piano and guitar, and acting.

www.bju.edu/academics/faculty/facultymember.php?id=dschwing
Outreach, new writing, experiential learning, and breaking down traditional barriers between writers, audience and performers.

In fact, it was writing and performing at No Shame when it was on the Waldron Stage at Mill Mountain Theatre that first awakened Kenley Smith's interest in the theatre and led to his pursuit of an MFA in playwriting at Hollins. Had it not been for No Shame, it's unlikely that Studio Roanoke would have been conceived, let alone celebrating a year of ambitious and successful programming.

"Best of No Shame is a lot of fun, and always sells out," Ristau told us. "The weekly No Shame brings in around $500 a month, which is the entire monthly salary of one employee. Best of No Shame is an event we can count on to bring in $1000 twice a year, and when you operate on a budget as tight as ours, knowing we can count on more than $8000 in extra ticket sales each year makes No Shame a pretty important part of our season. It makes a lot of other things we do possible."

Because No Shame is normally performed at 11PM each Friday night, twice a year a showcase of some of the most popular pieces are performed at the more respectable hour of 8PM as a way of generating more interest in the regular venue.

25 pieces are selected from the previous six months and performed over two nights for double the normal ticket price.

This Best of No Shame's lineup included writers and performers from the Playwright's Lab as well as Hollins undergraduate students from the departments of English, Theatre and Dance. Pieces were also performed by students from the Hollins MFA Creative Writing program and, of course, writers, performers, musicians, dancers, magicians, singers, songwriters, and other artists from our local community.

No Shame Theatre was the first public performance when Studio Roanoke opened for business in the KW “Pete” Smith Theatre, owned and operated by MFA playwright Kenley Smith.

On April 3, 2009 a packed house was admitted to a big empty room and seated on rented folding chairs for the first installment of the quirky late-night venue for original performances in its new home. Exactly one year later, Studio Roanoke celebrated this anniversary with a birthday party (complete with orange cake emblazoned with their logo) for volunteers, donors, actors and members of the growing Studio Roanoke family. The event was catered by Good to Go Foods, a local company that has been a sponsor of the little theatre’s programming from the very beginning. A slideshow was projected above showing images that illustrated the journey from urban clothing store to a thriving storefront theatre that in only one year has produced and presented 8 full productions, 21 readings, 50 No Shames, 12 Poetry Lounges, 12 Acoustic Lounges, and more than half a dozen special events.

"It is perfect that we are celebrating a year’s worth of programming with Best of No Shame," Todd Ristau, who created the original No Shame in 1986, commented at the event. "No Shame is a reflection of everything we do here as part of our mission. It is community outreach, new writing, experiential learning, and breaking down traditional barriers between writers, audience and performers."

www.noshame.org
Samantha Macher took the First drafts course last summer, where students were required to write six new plays in six weeks. Work on each script had to be completed in only 72 hours. Each assignment covered a different genre and style and playwrights had to incorporate a long list of prompts provided by the instructor.

*Ich Liebe Dich* came from the assignment which required no less than 30 scenes to be played by no more than three actors. Each scene had to be no more than one page long and the story had to cover 150 to 200 years of time, showing events that occurred in multiple past lives of a single reincarnated character. One of those lives had to be the playwright. This play had to have a clear beginning and ending which conveyed some sort of moral lesson. Five of the scenes had to be stage directions only, and five scenes had to be a single monologue.

*Ich Liebe Dich* was performed as part of the Lunchbox Reading Series at Studio Roanoke this month, and directed by Todd Ristau. The reading also featured MFA playwright Chad Runyon as one of the actors.

Samantha's play tracks a German couple who are continually reincarnated and reunited over the course of three successive European wars, but make little progress in their relationship.

"This was the first time I'd written something that wasn't a traditional narrative," Sam said. "This was a really great play for me and I enjoyed the reading quite a bit."

Because so much of the text is communicated without words, Charlie Boswell read the stage directions on a raised platform to the side of the stage in a kind of "Alistair Cooke" style narration. Charlie's deep, resonate voice and years of radio experience made him the perfect choice.

"It was genius," Sam said of the casting and execution of the reading. "Charlie was great! It was just amazing, and it was really interesting to get the audience feedback, because I hadn't thought of it as an anti-war diatribe, but that was something I hadn't recognized in my own work but now I see that it is a recurring theme quite often in my work."

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Maura Campbell’s *Wild Geese* produced in Vermont and *Flower Duet* read in New York

Maura Campbell, one of the first cohort of MFA playwrights in the Lab, had her play *Wild Geese* produced this month by the Green Candle Theatre company of Burlington, VT.

"*Wild Geese* had already been produced by a little theatre in New York, but I knew that it needed a site specific production," Maura told us. "I walked into a hair salon in Burlington (VT) and it was all decorated circa 1980’s and I knew it was the perfect location for the production."

Campbell had worked with Green Candle in the past and they were eager to take on the unusual project which became something of a hybrid of film, theatre and reality TV.

"It was completely immersive," Maura said. "There were already mirrors in the salon, but we added more so the audience could see everything, including themselves. The I’ve never seen an audience so engaged. I think it was my most successful play. It really made me excited about site specific theatre."

Infinite Theatre is a new company established by Andy McGinn, who also studied playwriting with Maura at Hollins. Based in New York, Infinite Theatre is dedicated to the artist-in-development and exists to provide its members with opportunities to create theatrical events for themselves and other artists. On March 24th, Andy and his group inaugurated their new play reading series with the first draft of Maura’s newest play, *Flower Duet."

"I sent the play to Andy because I did something with it I’d never done before," Maura recounted. "I stopped using punctuation and stage directions and I needed an actor to read it to see if that worked. He called me up and wanted to do a full reading of it with his company. He got a director and a group of actors together and they did the reading at Manhattan Theatre Source for about 30 people. It was a terrific experience, and really important to the work I’m still doing to develop the play, which I’m directing in Vermont in September. The connections and opportunities stemming from my coming to Hollins are just incredible."
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From the Director: Aspiration or Ambition?

A very good friend of mine once remarked that he was the most famous playwright you’ve never heard of. He might even have been right. He’s won two Obie awards, had numerous fellowships and productions and is written about in the footnotes of important theatre history books.

But, alas, famous in the theatre isn’t the same as famous in TV or film. A lot more people have heard of playwright Wallace Shawn because he was in The Princess Bride than have ever heard of his play Aunt Dan and Lemon.

My friend, who is not Wally Shawn—remember, you’ve never heard of my friend because he hasn’t ever been on TV—does not earn his living in the theatre.

We were talking about the evils of corporatism over breakfast and he said to me, “Todd, you can say what you want about it, but corporate America has done more to feed my family and provide me with shelter than the theatre ever did.”

I couldn’t argue that point, but I wasn’t sure it was worth arguing about, either. A lot of people in the arts complain that the work they are most passionate about is often relegated to the status of hobby and not considered a real profession.

Even when I had a show running on the West End, my dad was still asking when I was going to get out of all this play acting stuff and find a real job.

I think an artist has to really wrestle with the question of whether to focus on aspiration or ambition.

To me, that means deciding whether what you get is more important to you than what you achieve.

There is nothing wrong with making money from your art, and I certainly hope we all do, but what you are paid is a lousy way to judge the value of what you’ve done. There are other measures of success and they shouldn’t be ignored simply because they don’t pay your rent. My friend might not be earning a living from his writing, but his work is brilliant and he’s made a tremendous impact on the theatre. That’s nothing to be ashamed of.