Guest Profile: Joe Gilford

Joe Gilford has worked in film, TV and theatre as a producer, writer and director for over 30 years. Joe has also served as story consultant and script doctor on numerous independent feature films. His accomplishments are too many and varied to include in the small space we have here. He is the son of Academy and Tony award nominated actor Jack Gilford.

We were very pleased to welcome Joe as a cross-over guest speaker in playwriting while he was in residence as visiting faculty in the MFA Screenwriting program.

As part of his talk, Joe presented a reading of his play Finks with three of our MFA playwrights as readers. The play is based on the struggles his parents faced during the anti-communist TV and radio blacklists of the 1950s. Some of the most colorful people in theatre and film history had cocktails and cigars in his parents’ home. Our playwriting students loved listening to Joe’s comic stories and childhood recollections of the real life characters and events Finks is based on.

Joe explained, "I was three years old when my mother testified. I do remember all of it, but I didn't really know what it meant. You know, my sister says Pop is blacklisted—what’s that? And my mother was still alive when I was writing Finks, so she was at the other end of the phone all the time. She knew everything, also she knew everybody, she introduced everybody, and she actually probably slept with everybody...I'm not ashamed of that, somehow. I loved my parents life and history, it was very colorful. I wouldn’t trade growing up in show business for anything.”

Joe summed up his summer by saying, “The Hollins experience is just very special to me...if you’re studying here, you’re in for a terrific experience.”

http://www.storyrescue.com/

Joe Gilford and MFA Playwrights reading from FINKS

Student Spotlight: Anna Gardner

Anna Gardner is a former drama teacher with National Board Certification. She holds a BA in Elementary Education and a M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from the University of South Carolina. She taught middle school drama and English for 25 years, created and directed the gifted and talented drama and creative writing programs in her district, served as an acting coach for the SC Middle School Speech and Communication Association, directed and performed in university and community productions, presented at state and regional conferences, and served as an adjunct faculty member in education and a teaching associate in art at USC.

Before entering the MFA playwriting program, Anna studied costume design, modern theatre, directing and playwriting, as a graduate student at the University of South Carolina.

Anna told us, “At my age, I've had many learning experiences, but my first year as a playwriting student at Hollins University was the most demanding, exhilarating and positive experience of my life. Honestly, I would need to take you out to lunch to be able to explain how much I learned about script analysis, narrative theory, adaptation, teaching strategies and collaboration.”
Up From the Lunar Surface by MFA Candidate Nicole B. Adkins

Nicole Blair Adkins (Nikki) is graduating this year from Hollins University with an MFA in Children’s Literature, but because she has taken courses in playwriting every summer for the past three years and is writing a play as her thesis—we consider her one of our own!

In 2007, Nikki was writing a play with a contemporary spin on the comedy of manners genre. She performed a scene from the work in progress at No Shame Theatre Roanoke to such positive audience response that it was nominated to be performed again for Best of No Shame the following October.

Todd Ristau, Playwright’s Lab Program Director and Artistic Director of Studio Roanoke, remembered the play when selecting the 2010-2011 season.

“It is delightful, witty, and very funny—exactly what I was looking for to open the new season. Whenever possible, I want to produce scripts from the Playwright’s Lab. One of the most important things we can do for our student writers is find legitimate production opportunities for their early work,” Ristau said.

In this surreal comedy, Susannah isn’t getting any younger, and her life appears to have capsized— but as long as the brie arrives on time, the peasants don’t frighten the guests with their potato-sack dresses, and no one drowns themselves in the punch bowl, everything is sure to turn out all right...

Nikki was thrilled to hear of the play’s selection, and very pleased with the experience. She told us, “Todd is such a devoted advocate for all his students. In addition to procuring the production, he also matched the perfect director to the piece.”

Jeff Goode is a professional playwright, producer and director from Los Angeles. He taught three playwriting courses as visiting faculty this past summer. Jeff’s own play, Yes Svetlana, There is a Grandfather Frost, was recently produced at Studio Roanoke and so he knew the community as and what the small theatre could accomplish in a short rehearsal period and with limited resources. All that, plus the success of his own comedy of manners, Love Loves a Pornographer, made Jeff the ideal choice to direct Nikki’s play.

“I was excited to direct the premiere of Up From the Lunar Surface at Studio Roanoke because they premiered one of my plays the previous season and it led directly to publication and then a production in Los Angeles that opens this winter,” Jeff said. “And I was amazed at how quickly the actors in the community—most of whom I’d never even met before the first day of rehearsals—came together and worked very hard to master dialects and a whole new acting style in just a matter of days. The technical staff was very professional and the design team pulled off some feats that I would not have thought possible in such a small time frame. I was kind of joking when I asked them to build a fly system so I could fly in a drop, but somehow that’s what happened. The dedication to the theatre and new plays in Roanoke is really second to none, and I wouldn’t pass up a chance to work with them again.”

Jeff worked closely with the playwright, knowing this was her first full production, and included her in every step of the process.

“Jeff is a comedy of manners veteran who thoroughly understood the genre. In rehearsal I was able to watch how the actors and theatre technicians interacted with my writing—what worked, and what didn’t,” Nikki said. “It was also quite inspiring to watch the team bring my vision to life. Studio Roanoke could not have been more welcoming. They even organized an interview with a professional dramaturg, and arranged talkback sessions that followed each performance.”

Nikki is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, Inc., Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights, and the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators.
MFA Student Monologues Performed at TheatreLab in New York City

We don’t usually encourage our MFA students to leave campus during our short six-week intensive summer session...but when three of them have their work being produced in New York City, how can we tell them they can’t go?

Leading Ladies is a showcase of monologues about the strong women in all our lives who are sources of love, strength, passion, creativity and inspiration. Writers were selected from all over the United States.

MFA playwrights Royal Shiree, David Schwingle, and Sean Engard all had monologues produced as part of the showcase at TheaterLab, located at 137 W 14th Street in Manhattan. The event was produced by Larissa Dzegar and directed by Samantha Wellen.

“This show, in so many ways is bold, brilliant and beautiful. It will make you laugh. It will challenge your view of what makes a girl strong. Of what makes a woman strong. Of what makes a human strong. As it should. It will show you sides of humanity and life that you are not familiar with, and I hope you will go on that journey, as we have, and you will not look back, because you will be a better person for it.”

—Samantha Wellen, Director

Theaterlab is a New York City performance space, presenting organization, and producer of original artistic works. It is a true laboratory where resident and visiting artists can engage in the research and development of new works, teach classes and workshops, and present the results of their research to a public audience.

Giselle Nix-Faunteroy, Kerri Campbell Evens and Portia Lee Rose performed in monologues by Royal Shiree

Two Plays by Hollins Playwrights featured in the Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights

Barter Theatre has been celebrating new plays with their annual festival since 2001. The Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights celebrates the richness of the Appalachian tradition by showcasing the stories of this region, both past and present, and the inspiration it provides the playwrights and writers who live here. The festival helps to share the rich Appalachian heritage with audiences across the nation.

The 2008 festival saw MFA playwright Kenley Smith take top honors for his play Devil Sedan and he returned this year as a finalist with his play The Shade of the Trees. This script was conceived at Hollins in the Writing for Young Audiences class taught by Jonathan Dorf.

Elvis Blossom, by Sunny da Silva took second place in the 2010 festival.

All three plays (Devil Sedan, Shade of the Trees, and Elvis Blossom) were written at Hollins and had their first full productions at Studio Roanoke.

“It’s gratifying to have two plays that premiered at Studio Roanoke in the 2010 AFPP. In addition, we’ll have a play by this year’s winner, Catherine Bush, up in December,” Kenley said.

The Playwright’s Lab continues to promote close relationships with theatres and festivals dedicated to new plays.


A Christmas Carol, adapted by Clinton Johnston, Read at the Hamner Theatre

Last month, MFA playwright Clinton Johnston’s new adaptation of A Christmas Carol was read as part of the 2010 summer conference. The reading was directed by Co-Artistic Director of the Hamner, Boomie Peterson and featured a cast of experienced local actors.

“The Carol’s Christmas Carol is an incredibly interesting piece but in need of cutting to make it feasible as a single evening’s entertainment,” Pedersen said of the script. “There was simply too much to take in. Really smart, really well-written but too rich with too many characters.”

Johnston attempted a modern American version that was still very faithful to the spirit of the Dickens classic novel.

“We’re grateful to have the Hamner nearby, as it is only through this kind of reading that a playwright can judge how successful an early draft is and how to proceed with rewrites.

http://www.theaterlabnyc.com

http://www.hamnertheater.com
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For application materials, please call (540) 362-6326 or visit on the web at www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting for more information.

Look for us on Facebook!

From the Director: We’re Building a Database of Actors and Directors

At Hollins, we know very well the most important part of new play development is hearing your work read out loud by actors or seeing the play on its feet in a workshop production directed by someone with experience working with a living writer.

One of the potential drawbacks of a playwriting summer intensive program is not having access to the large pool of student actors and directors a traditional MFA program can provide.

Playwrights in traditional MFA programs, it seems, can reach out and pluck actors from the trees whenever they need them.

I've worked hard to address this problem. Fortunately, Roanoke has an incredibly strong community of local actors and directors with a great deal of experience working at theatres like Studio Roanoke, Mill Mountain Theatre, Showtimers, Attic Productions, Star City Playhouse, Barter Theatre, and other venues. Actors of all skill levels perform at No Shame every Friday Night—an excellent training ground for cold readers.

To serve our MFA playwrights better we’ve been actively collecting headshots and resumes of these local performers into a searchable database. We’re also collecting resumes from area directors for the same reason.

Our playwrights look through the headshots, read the bios, and then contact the actors or directors they’d like to work with on their readings or productions. We also share that information with local theatres. Everybody wins!

We currently have over 100 actors of all ages and backgrounds, but we’re always looking for more.

If you are an actor or director who lives in the Roanoke area and would like to get involved in the development of new work for the stage, please send a photo (that actually looks like you), a resume, and a short bio indicating any special skills you have to:
tristau@hollins.edu

Be sure to indicate "Actor/Director Database" in the subject line.