Krum Fits In, by Darlene Fedele

“I was surprised when they approached me about writing an R-rated puppet show,” Darlene told us. “In my eleven years of puppetry I had never done anything like this before, I saw it as a challenge.”

Darlene decided to incorporate some of what she’d learned in working with Jeff Goode this past summer and wrote the play as a musical. She also played against the expectation associating puppets with children’s programs. In Krum, the main character is kicked off a kids’ TV show for using profanity. Then he joins a rock band, where he can be as profane as he wants.

“Friends wanted to know if there would be naked puppets, and if they would be anatomically correct. I decided I didn’t want to have to make any new puppets and that anatomically correct human puppets would look silly. It’s funnier to use animals,” Fedele said.

Many of the puppets used in the play were “recycled” from her contributions to previous productions (like Donnie and the Monsters by Robert Gibbs) at Studio Roanoke as well as her No Shame pieces.

“Puppets are Darlene’s passion, and I think that’s why “Krum” shines – as a playwright, she’s tapping into a medium that she loves,” said Kenley Smith, Artistic Director of Studio Roanoke. The play was performed with Cate Leonard, who played Bossy the Cow and Dee Dee the skunk.

Darlene’s Puppet Plays for Pun and Profit is published by Eldridge Plays and Musicals.

Student Spotlight: Scott Ramsburg

Scott Ramsburg is a published composer and musical arranger and his pursuing his MFA in playwriting while working as the marketing manager for Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

“A life-long student of the arts it has always been my dream to combine my passions for musical and stage performance in a meaningful way,” Scott told us in his application. “In my experience, no forms of communication are as powerful and personal as music and theater.”

Scott has spent a great deal of his professional career working in the fields of mass media, (television, radio, magazine production) and has always felt his creative work has a greater impact when presented in a more intimate setting.

Scott writes commercial television projects, arranges and sells charts exclusively for Caribbean-style steel drum bands and hopes to craft a musical theatre piece featuring steel drums and vocals. He also performs as a member of the Big Lick Conspiracy improv company.

“I’ve been very impressed by the quality and diversity of visiting faculty and lecturers, who are some of the biggest names and brightest rising stars in the field today! At Hollins you get to interact with professionals one-on-one in a fully immersive summer experience. As someone who came with a narrow experience in music production, I feel like my horizons have been broadened by the wide range of literary genres and real-world expertise I have been exposed to. These guests have been approachable and have treated me with respect as a future colleague in the industry,” Scott said.

www.biglickconspiracy.com
Guest Profile: Jonathan Price

Jonathan Price is a professional composer and musician with a long history of working closely with playwrights on the development of new plays that include music, musical theatre and opera. He holds two degrees from the University of Iowa and has won numerous awards for his work as a composer for theatre, film and television. He also helped found the Unusual Cabaret in Bar Harbor, Maine. Jonathan is currently a resident playwright at SkyPilot Theatre in Los Angeles. Full bio and credits can be found at his website.

Price came to Hollins this summer as a guest speaker, but extended his stay for an entire week to work closely with students enrolled in the Writing Plays With Music class taught by visiting faculty member Jeff Goode. Over the course of that week he helped score eight original pieces, each with lyrics written by student playwrights.

Jonathan was extremely generous with his time, giving lengthy and detailed feedback to each student in the workshop.

MFA playwright and composer Scott Ramsburg said, “Jonathan gave great, great advice and all given in helpful and encouraging ways. He went above and beyond for everyone in the classroom.”

At his public presentation on his life and work, Jonathan also took questions from the audience about his early career.

How does someone become a composer?

I was inspired from an early age. My parents took me to the Broadway touring shows in the Quad Cities. When I was four or five I saw Hair and Jesus Christ Superstar. Maybe that’s stuff you shouldn’t take a four year old to, but it inspired me. I wanted to learn to write for musical theatre and wrote plays for my jazz band, band, different ensembles and choir in high school. I couldn’t decide if I wanted to do playwriting or composition, I kind of wanted to do both, but when I got to the University of Iowa they told me I had to pick one. And, I ended up choosing playwriting because I wanted to be involved in productions and I knew that in the music department it would only be writing for people to listen to and I wanted the story involved. So I chose playwriting and kept my minor in music and continued to study music theory. That was a great decision because I got to meet people like Todd Ristau and Jeff Goode and also got to meet some of the graduate playwrights. And my freshman year I was asked to score a play about Walt Whitman in the Iowa Playwrights Festival. I went on to win an ACTF Meritorious Achievement Award for it. It reinforced for me the idea that you can do anything… you just have to try.

How has No Shame helped you?

My sophomore year Todd started No Shame and Jeff Goode and I decided we would try writing a scene for No Shame. I had approached him about writing a musical and he liked the idea and wanted to see what we could come up with. He had an idea about two dogs griping about what they could and couldn’t do, so he wrote lyrics for a song about what a dog can’t do when the master is around. We set that to music and it was our first piece.

And that led to you working together regularly?

A friend of ours was opening a dinner theatre there and asked us if we could write a musical. And we agreed to do that in a month. We put together a musical about germ warfare and performed that to tourists and they loved it! It played all summer and they asked us to write three more musicals. One of them, Rumplesliitkskin, ended up getting published by Baker’s Plays. It was a good experience, we were working in front of an audience and coming up with stuff that worked in front of an audience. And, we’ve continued to work together over the years.

What about film scoring?

I got the idea that maybe film scoring was where I needed to be. It’s similar to underscoring drama but different techniques and accompaniment. I needed to learn more about orchestration in order to tackle it. I had scored Walt for piano, French horn and a snare drum, but the full orchestra was beyond me. I needed to go back to school and get a BM in music composition, which I needed to fulfill my dream of studying with film composers at USC.

As a composer, what can you do in theatre you can’t do in film?

The main thing is respond in live time. Film is set in stone, but in theatre you have the chance every single evening to create a new performance.

www.jonathanprice.com

Am I Black Enough Yet? by Clinton Johnston

Am I Black Enough Yet? is MFA playwright Clinton Johnston’s exploration of blackness in America. The show opened this month in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland under the direction of Scot Reese as part of the 2010-2011 main stage season.

AIBEY was originally conceived as a series of No Shame pieces and later developed into a full-length play which premiered at Charter Theatre in Washington DC in 2008 after a regional tour produced in cooperation with The Hamner Theatre and Mill Mountain Theatre.

Johnston is currently on faculty in the theatre department at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, VA.
Resident Playwright Program at SkyPilot Theatre Features Hollins Playwrights and Faculty

Jeff Goode is a successful playwright currently based in Los Angeles. He taught Adaptation, Writing Plays with Music and Advanced Workshop for us this past summer. Upon his return to LA, the critically acclaimed SkyPilot Theatre tapped him to be their first Playwright-In-Residence and to spearhead their transition from a company that primarily produced classic plays to their new mission of only producing new plays and West Coast premieres.

Jeff saw this as an opportunity to go beyond simply advising on script selection for a season of new plays that already included three of his own (Yes, Svetlana, There is a Grandfather Frost, The Emancipation of Alabaster McGill, and a new adaptation of Salome.)

"I'm making it my goal to turn SkyPilot into the ideal playwrights' theatre," Goode told us. "I want to help them become a company dedicated to fostering new plays at every stage from conception through development into production."

To that end, Jeff became a kind of Senior Playwright-In-Residence and set about recruiting a team of eight playwrights who will script the company's entire 2011-12 season.

“'I'm planning to draw on some of my favorite experiences as a playwright,” Jeff said. “Things like No Shame and the Unusual Cabaret in Bar Harbor, where they gave you production slot and then did whatever it took to get it up, rather than the cycle of submission and rejection. I knew it was going to be scary to make that leap of faith and that's why it is important to start out with writers that I already know and trust.”

Teaching at Hollins helped a lot in finding those writers, which will include three of our students. Pictured above, left to right, they are Nicole B. Adkins, Adam Hahn and Samantha Macher. Adkins, who has her MFA in Children's Literature from Hollins with an emphasis on playwriting, has been named SkyPilot's Children's Program Coordinator. Her new play, Herby Alice Counts Down to Yesterday, was published by YouthPlays this earlier this month.

"I'm impressed by the students at Hollins,” Jeff said. “You have a higher percentage of people who are going to continue to work in the theatre, and make a real impact on the profession than most MFA programs I'm familiar with."

The playwrights in the program will be helping to organize a monthly reading series, a late night series of short plays, and a possible collaborative adaptation with all eight writers participating.

Because the playwrights are writing for the members of the company, SkyPilot is uniquely invested in the plays and playwrights they support.

Kong: A Goddamn Thirty-Foot Gorilla by Adam Hahn

SkyPilot Theatre launched its new reading series with Adam Hahn's play KONG: A Goddamn Thirty-Foot Gorilla this month. KONG was written as part of the adaptation course taught by Jeff Goode this past summer.

Hahn said, "One of themes of this program is to take risks and it will pay off. I wasn't sure that a stage adaptation about making a movie about a giant gorilla would work, but I feel really strongly about where it got in the class and where it's going. Jeff was very good at teaching us to adapt material and to view it as a collaboration with the original artist.”

The reading is an excellent example of how even classroom assignments written by our students are frequently given professional readings, fully produced and even published.
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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.

Friend us on Facebook!

From the Director: National Playwriting Month (http://www.naplwrimo.org/)

Naplwrimo (National Playwriting Month) is designed to encourage and nurture playwrights while fostering community and the creation of new theatrical works on a global level...in a hurry.

Each November playwrights pledge to write a new play in 30 days and, share tips, and celebrate the accomplishment—which is the only reward.

Dorothy Lemoult started the ball rolling in 2006, and in four years the event has gone from 20 participants to hundreds of playwrights pushing themselves to finish that draft before the deadline.

An incoming student in the program, Toni Wilson, was a moderator for the NaPIWriMo online forum this year and asked me to write a few words of encouragement for the blog. I don’t have room to reprint everything I said there, but here it is in a nutshell:

The biggest enemy a playwright faces is rewriting before you finish a draft. We read a partial draft and want to fix it before moving on. Big mistake. It is a draft, not yet a play.

If you worry about getting done rather than doing something good, chances are it will be a lot more good because good isn’t the goal, good is a plus. The more finished plays you write, I promise, the more good plays you will end up with.

The more plays you finish, the more you will be able to confidently say, “I am a playwright...who finishes plays!”

As a result, you’ll be less afraid if you get a writing job and they say, “we need that by Monday morning.”

Your play might need a lot of rewriting, but there are not a lot of first drafts that don’t—even when written by your big name playwriting hero.

So, that’s my inspirational message...This isn’t about proving you are a playwright. It is about proving you can finish a play.

If you missed NaPIWriMo this year, they are already letting people sign up for 2011.