Creative Collaboration-turned-Subscriber Series Production, Woyzeck Project, is moving to Southern Theatre’s professional stage. more inside »
A Year of Enormous Changes

Message from Carl Flink, Chair of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance

by Carl Flink, Chair, Theatre Arts & Dance

De spite the difficulties caused by the current recession, and the budget crisis it has caused for the University of Minnesota, I would like to welcome you all — stu- dents, faculty, and alumni of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance — to a new aca- demic year. Like the presidential election of last November, this promises to be a year filled with changes, some that we actively sought, some that we anticipated, and some that took us completely by surprise.

Let me be frank: last year’s mandate from the College of Liberal Arts to model budget cuts of 5.7% presented us with an extraordinary challenge at a time when we were focused on how best to implement the suggestions by the previous year’s NAST accreditation review, which complemented us on our “inspired vision,” even as it point- ed out something we all know only too well — that we lack sufficient facilities, equip- ment and staff to fully realize this vision in practice. So just as we were beginning to think about how to correct these infrastructural problems, we were forced to consider even further reductions.

Then, beginning last summer and continuing into the fall, we learned unexpectedly that several key long-term staff members would be leaving us for new positions and new opportunities. This includes Pam Minman, our Department Administrator; Sherry Wagner-Henry, University Theatre’s Managing Director; Mickey Henry, our Techni- cal Director; and Collin Shertaden, the Technical Coordinator of the Barker Center for Dance. We wish these staff members — who have all contributed so much to the department over many years — every success in their new endeavors. It is always a challenge to absorb multiple staff changes, but it also represents a concrete opportunity to rethink and reform this department to tackle the current economic challenges and move forward towards a dynamic vision that takes advantage of the current faculty, staff and vision we have in place.

Fortunately, we have been able to take some very proactive measures to turn these challenges into the beginnings of a very positive, far-sighted plan for our future. We survived the first year of budget cuts by judicious and frugal spending cuts that actually left us with a small but useful surplus. The permanent 12-month staff of the department and the department’s faculty leadership have really stepped up to the plate to fill in the gaps until we can replace the staff members who left. And, even with the partial hiring freeze, we have received permission from the Provost’s Office to create two new technical positions — a department-wide Lighting Supervisor and an Audio-visual/ Media Supervisor.

Perhaps the best news is that our response to the budgetary and staff challenges was to think “big,” that is, to think strategically as well as tactically. We decided not to let the partial hiring freeze, we have received permission from the Provost’s Office to create two new technical positions — a department-wide Lighting Supervisor and an Audio-visual/ Media Supervisor.

The original Creative Collaboration class that first developed the Woyzeck Project focused on an exploration of how the two disciplines of dance and theater could interact with each other using a text that allowed for a liberal physical interpretation. Once we decided to re-mount a version of Woyzeck as part of the Subscriber Series, finding the right space was of paramount importance. Since the space actually left us with a small but useful surplus. The permanent 12-month staff of the department and the department’s faculty leadership have really stepped up to the plate to fill in the gaps until we can replace the staff members who left. And, even with the partial hiring freeze, we have received permission from the Provost’s Office to create two new technical positions — a department-wide Lighting Supervisor and an Audio-visual/ Media Supervisor.

Perhaps the best news is that our response to the budgetary and staff challenges was to think “big,” that is, to think strategically as well as tactically. We decided not to let the economic crisis force our thinking into “crisis mode.” We have found creative ways to contain expenses and keep the department functioning smoothly during this period of change and we began to address two long-standing issues that I feel are critical to the future and sustained success of this wonderful organization.

First, we are in the process of redefining the place and importance that dance and theatre production has in our department, particularly in view of the declining resource base we have been able to dedicate to production over the past 15 years. To this end, we have initiated RICAP (Reimagining Community Arts Partnerships), a series of conversa- tions among ourselves and with the Twin Cities community about ways we can jointly — and in mutually beneficial ways — educate the next generation of theatre artists, tech- nicians and managers by offering our students hands-on production opportunities with community partners, both on and off campus. In addition, we are working aggressively and collaboratively with the College of Liberal Arts and University administrations to

The Woyzeck Project: From an Old Gym to the Southern Theatre’s Professional Stage

by David Bernstein and Luverne Seifert

Georg Büchner’s fragmented and unfinished play, Woyzeck, presents enormous challenges for the University of Minnesota. It seems to lend itself to imaginative interpretations and stag- ing. Based on the true story of a jealous soldier’s murder of his mistress, the play appeals to both theater naturalists for its hero’s “everyman,” working class qualities and to experimentalists for the possibilities inherent in its raw, fractured structure. This is a major reason why faculty members Luverne Seifert and Michael Sommers decided to develop a performance based on the play in a Creative Collaboration class involving dance and theater students in the Spring semester of 2008.

At the end of the semester, the class did a workshop produc- tion in Norris Hall gymnasium of the Woyzeck they had devel- oped. The following fall, department chair and dance professor Carl Flink joined Luverne and Michael, and they worked with students to create a second original piece called The Woyzeck Proj- ect, based on the Woyzeck developed the previous Spring. This second version was performed in the Norris Hall field house as part of our 2008-09 Subscriber (Mainstage) Series. And in the Fall of 2010, a third version of The Woyzeck Project will be per- formed at a professional venue — the Southern Theatre — with a cast of professional and student actors and dancers.

The original Creative Collaboration class that first developed Woyzeck focused on an exploration of how the two disciplines of dance and theater could interact with each other using a text that allowed for a liberal physical interpretation. Once we decided to re-mount a version of Woyzeck as part of the Subscriber Series, finding the right space was of paramount importance. Since the space would dictate the event, something that is true of all per- formances. Thus although we used the same text and ideas, what occurred in the Norris field house in October of 2008 was quite different from the workshop production that audiences saw in the Norris gym.

This year Carl had the idea of bringing the piece to the next level by using his dance company, Black Label Movement (BLM), to collaborate with Luverne and other professional actors from the community, and with our students. So the Southern Theatre production, scheduled to run from mid-October to Halloween of 2010, will feature dancers from BLM, professional actors from the community, and student performers (dancers and actors) from our department. We will cast the show in the Spring semes- ter of 2010. Rehearsals will start at the end of August with the professional actors rehearsing separately from the BLM dancers at first so that Luverne and Carl can observe each other’s creative process, something that we hope will set the stage for a true col- laboration between actors and dancers at the full cast, including students, begin in early September.

The Woyzeck production at the Southern Theatre will be the first time that a work originally developed in a Creative Collaboration class is performed on a professional stage. It will build upon the previous ones. We know what was successful in the first two explorations, and we will build on those themes and concepts. For example, as before, we will have multiple Woyzeck’s and Marias; and a set of “installations” that audiences can visit prominent-style, each representing a scene from the original Büchner text. The final scene will take place outdoors and the dancers will be at the center of the action in a cage-like structure. But for the new version, we want to identify and explore in more depth the social and political issues in Büchner’s text.

Professional actors will play the multiple “primary” Woyzecks and Marias, while student actors will create and perform in the in- stallations. BLM dancers will be joined by student dancers in the
Reimagining Community Arts Partnerships

by David Bernstein

How important is the production to the Department of Theater Arts and Dance? What should our production program look like when we know that the future of the arts is changing? What should we change about our teaching methods? What should we do with our student production budgets? What should we do in the way of outreach? It has become a major issue for us as a department to find new ways of thinking about the arts.

As we were looking at the changing economic climate, we realized that the future of the arts is changing. We then asked ourselves, what should we change about our teaching methods? What should we do with our student production budgets? What should we do in the way of outreach?

We all agreed that this model needed to be refined and fleshed out, and that this would take time – perhaps as long as a year. In the meantime, we will be seeking new ways of partnering with community arts organizations. We believe that this is not only desirable but crucial, we need only look at our Subscribers Series, which has shrunk from a high of nine fully-produced shows in 1995 to the current season of four shows.

The arts community of the Twin Cities is so vibrant and diverse, it can offer our students a much wider and more diverse set of opportunities for performance, design and technical work than we can offer at present – or have ever been able to offer, for that matter.

...new partnerships with this community would give our students unprecedented access to production experiences that we simply cannot provide in-house.
We are quite excited to announce that this year the BA Performance Program has introduced a new mentoring system which will provide guidance and rigor to students who are committed to creating original performance using a collaborative model. The centerpiece of the mentoring system is a series of weekly workshops, lectures and films to spur innovation and ignite the imagination of BA students. In addition to the BA faculty, instructors in the series will include local, national and international artists that specialize in performance practice, performance theory, dance, directing, playwriting and design.

Continuing the new focus of the BA Performance Program on creative collaboration, we featured or will feature four classes this year in which department faculty members and/or community performing artists will collaborate with our students to develop original works. Michael Sommers and Laverne Seifert led students through a process-driven performance of TENT, based on historical Chautauqua performances, which took place in October under a tent behind the Barker Center for Dance in the West Bank Arts Quarter.

In the five-week Workshop Leading up to the perfor- mance, students explored and created the personas of entertainers, speakers, musicians, teachers, storytellers, freaks and preachers around such themes as loss, redemption, desire, folly and patriotism.

Kym Longhi and Karla Grotting will be doing the workshop this year. "In the past few years, these creative collaborations have become the cornerstone of BA performance."

Faculty members and students in our program continue to be recognized locally and nationally for their outstanding achievements and contributions to the community. Michael Sommers, an assistant professor in the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance and in the Interdisciplinary Program in Collaborative Arts, has been awarded a 2009 Enduring Vision Award from the Bush Foundation. This unique award is given annually up to three artists in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota who have at least 25 years of experience as working artists. Program director Laverne Seifert was named one of the City Pages' Artist's Choice Award for the year and also won an Ivey Award for his performance as Phillip K. Dick in Robert Littau's Collective's production of Victoria Stewart's 800 Words: The Tourism of Hollywood's K. Dick. Affiliate faculty member, Sonja Parks, received an Ivey for her solo role as a high-school teacher in Nijlaja Sun's No Child, which was produced at Pillsbury House Theatre.

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UM/Guthrie BFA Actor Training Program

The BFA program is now ten years old! Program director Judy Bard will like to commemorate this landmark anniversary with the following message:

"Having been a part of the program since its creation in 1999, I have witnessed with the Guthrie was signed, I am grateful for 10 inspiring years – and for our recent 10-year agreement. We have now graduated six classes of students and we feel that we have reached a place of stability. The wonderfully committed faculty members have been consistent and remain passionate about their work with our young artists. Despite the consistency in our curriculum, we have been able to retain the flexibility necessary to address the individual needs of our students in a changing world envir- onments that have been in existence many more years than we have."

Our BFA alumni continue to perform at the Guthrie and in venues throughout the nation. Recent Guthrie performances by BFA alumni include Sam Beebe ('06), (Class of '08) and Jonas Goudow ('95) as Valentine and Proteus in Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona (2008-09 Season). That production also featured Valerie Mudge ('07) as Silvia, while the Guthrie's recent production of The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde was directed by Jeffery Skelly ('97) as Algernon. Nationally, Matthew Amendt ('04), Will Sturdivant ('06) and Sam Taylor ('06) all performed in the Acting Company's 2008-09 Season production of Shakespeare's Henry V, while Hugh Kennedy ('07), Elizabeth Stahlman ('07) and Christie Wilson ('07) all performed in the Acting Company's production of Julius during that distinguished company's 2009-10 Season. Aya Cash ('04) appeared as Irina in Chekhov's Three Sisters at the 2006 World Festival of Children's Theatre. Fantino Fontana ('04) was Stanley Jerome in the recent Broadway revival of Neil Simon's Brighton Beach Memoir.

Our current BFA students perform on campus, at the Guthrie, and at other Twin Cities venues. Some, like Senior Bob Galligan, also manage to find time in their extremely busy schedules to serve the department and the University. Bob is currently serving as one of two peer advisors for 2009-10 to represent and advise the undergraduate students of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance. Congratulations, Bob!

In recent years, BFA program director, Judy Bard, has put together alumni events across the country in conjunction with her visits to specific cities for auditions or college fairs. The Guthrie's Ken Washington joins her on many of these occasions. Last year she met with former students in Los Angeles and New York City. According to Judy, it was terrific to catch up with them and see what they are doing. And our alumni are also forming closer ties to each other. For example, a group of recently graduated students who planned to move to New York took advantage of alumni ties to get first-hand information and advice about the lay of the land.

Parents of our students have become more involved and have created parent networks with other parents of students in the same BFA company. During student orientation in the fall, Judy hosts a parent session, co-hosted by parents of current and recently graduated students. Participants learn about the history of the program and our curriculum, followed by a chance for discussion and to ask questions. The parents exchange e-mail addresses so that they can keep in contact over the four years their students are with us. These parent networks have become quite active, planning such activities as coordinated trips to London to visit their students, attendance as a group at BFA Studio Series projects, and graduation parties.

Every year our few but active and very committed faculty members, Ken- neth Mitchell, Steve Cardamone, Lucinda Holdren, Eliza Carlson, Marcela Lorca and Delb Pearson work closely with our stu- dents as teachers and, as well, as directors and coaches for various studio projects and workshops. To supplement the permanent faculty, we often bring in visiting directors, writers and coaches for our BFA Studio Series and Subscriber Series productions. Last year, the list included: Sari Ketter, Suzy Messore, Bonnie Schock, Jef Hall- Fain, Benjamin McGovern, Sarah Cam- eron Sunde, Mitra Keohoe, Randy Reyes, Vincent Delaney and Peter Gil-Sheridan.

We have recently updated our website to include a video and comprehensive in- formation about the BFA program, from audition appointments to what the pro-
MA/PhD Program in Theatre Historiography

A graduate program is only ever as vigorous as the research work of its faculty and students, and this has been an exceptionally vigorous year in the MA/PhD Program. Professors Sonia Kuffinus and Michal Kobialka both published new books: Teatres, Facililities, and Nation Formation in the Balkans and Middle East (Kuffinus) and Further on Nothing: Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre (Kobialka). In addition, Margaret Werry was promoted to Associate Professor.

All of our program’s faculty members have received major awards in the last year. In addition to the publication of his book, professor Kobialka held the Bela Vrban Zuzulyn Professorship at the University of Utrecht, and participated in The Year Of Kronowskis—a series of meetings at North Branch College, York University. He was also honored in a workshop organized by the University of Copenhagen’s Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals to recognize the impact his book, Juba. My Body, has had on medieval scholarship as well as on theater/performance historiography. Professor Kuftinec was named Scholar of the College by the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), and guest edited an issue of TFG (Test and Performance Quarterly) on critical theory. Professor Werry received a Fellowship at Berlin Free University for the 2010-11 academic year. She also gave a plenary talk at ASTRA, the American Society for Theatre Research, and invited talks at the University of London, the University College Cork, and the American Studies Association.

Professor Cindy Garcia received two very prestigious awards for her dance scholarship. Her article in Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory entitled “Don’t leave me Celis!”, Sahra homosociality and pan-Latin corporalities” won the Gertrude Lippincott Award, given by the Society of Dance History Scholars for the best English-language article published in Dance Studies in 2008. And she was awarded a Bodley and Knowles Fellowship for Spring 2010 by the U of M’s Institute for Advanced Studies. Finally, professor Megan Lewis-Schurter won a U of M Course Transformation Grant to develop the department’s Introduction to Theatre class (and has already doubled the enrollment of the course!). In addition, she will be presenting a plenary paper at the 2009 ASTR Conference in Puerto Rico in November.

Last year was a bumper year for our students also, with several of them receiving degrees and three current students receiving extremely competitive University-wide fellowships to support their research. Lisa Peschel, Wendy Woznau-Barrett and Joanne Zerdy all received PhD degrees in the College. College and University Grants Joint and Jonath Wern-Lenktey received MAs. Dr. Peschel has published a bilingual German-English edition of plays written by prisoners in the Terezin Ghetto, and she is currently a fellow in Residence at the National Holocaust Museum. Dr. Zerdy is a visiting professor at the University of Hiroshima. Current PhD student Rachel Chaves has been awarded the Norman Johnston Dewitt Fellowship by the Graduate

Program Highlights

In 2008-09, students in the dance program had the opportunity to work with Sarah Stackhouse, a Cowles Visiting Artist who had worked for many years with the Limón Company, to restage José Limón’s epic 1958 piece, Missa Brevis, which was performed in the February 2009 University Dance Theatre (UDT) concert, Dance Revolutions. That performance was named in City Pages’ Best of Minneapolis 2009 as Best Dance Performance of a Classic. Moreover, several students were selected from that cast to perform in Missa Brevis with the professional Limón company on the Northrop stage in March 2009, which says a great deal about the maturity and training of our students. One of our alumni, Brent Radke, is performing with the company in China in December 2009. We also successfully hosted and produced the annual 2009 American College Dance Festival Conference last March, which was attended by a wide variety of colleges and universities, creating great networks and connections with our regional and national colleagues. During that conference, we also successfully hosted a brilliant concert at the Ted Mann Theater, Critical Mass, featuring all of the dance companies associated with the faculty at this university. For our 2008-09 UDT Season and our Symposia Series, we also featured some renowned international artists and scholars, including visiting artists Sardono Kusumo and Bambang Suryono, and visiting scholar Anna Tzing, who we sponsored in collaboration with Phi Beta Kappa and the Department of Anthropology.

For the 2009-10 academic year, our Cowles Visiting Artist Program will feature two newly commissioned works by guest artists Laurie Carlos and Colleen Thomas, and a restaging of Louis Falco’s Espectro by guest artist Alan Senet. The Cowles Program will also host a lecture by visiting scholar Lena Hhammergren from Stockholm University.

The dance program is proud to announce that we received a 2009 American Masterpieces: Dance grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Together with this funding, we have been selected for the Troy Center Grant, which says a great deal about the quality of what we do. Again, the Cowles Program was also selected for the funding, which says a great deal about the quality of what we do.

This year, we are proud to announce that we received a 2009 American Masterpieces: Dance grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for the project, “Continuously Rich: Legacies of Black Women Artists in American Concert Dance.” Finally, we would like to congratulate Director of Dance, Amayya Chatterjea, for being named by the Women’s Environmental Institute at Amador Hill as “Local Mother of Environmental Justice.”
Life in the Real World
Alumni Blurs and Updates—direct from the source (with little-to-no editing)

Alumni Focus

Producer: “It’s Black Entertainment” (Showtime and national syndication)
Producer: “Second City Presents” (Bravo-2002) Hosted by writer Bill Campolo, etc. The program was funded in part by Jay Leno.

NOLTHALS

PROHTEATUR OF MINNESOTA


Writer: Late Night TV - Over 1,200 jokes sold and on-the-air

Actor: TV movies and soaps for TNT, TBN and ABC but nothing of any real significance in this arena.

Awards And Accolades

Academy Of Television Arts And Sciences
Two Local Emmy Nominations

“The American Comedy Awards” (ABC) Salute To “Look Who’s Laughing”

The Museum Of Broadcasting (Chicago)

“Look Who’s Laughing” Inducted Into Permanent Archives

The President’s Committee On Employment Of The Disabled
Winner For Best Television Program

Corporation For Public Broadcasting Awards (PBS)
Winner (Gold) For Excellence In Television Programming

Berkeley Video Festival (2 Wins)

Two-Time Winner, Best Comedy Video: “Look Who’s Laughing”

“Tales On Thee”

Columbus Int’l Film And Video Festival (The “Chris” Awards)
Winner Bronze Plaque for Excellence

New York festivals

Silver Medal: “It’s Black Entertainment”

The Cal Governor’s Committee On Employment Of The Disabled
Two-Time Winner Of The Award For Best Media Product

Ed Awards (Easter Seal Foundation)

Best Television Show

National Educational Network

Bronze Apple Award

John and Annie Glenn’s Foundation

Best Television Program

Cine Golden Eagle Awards - Worldwide Productions

Golden Eagle Award

Warm Springs Film Festival – Arkansas

Invited To Screen Documentary: “The Joke’s On Thee”

Mathew John Tombers

Founder and Managing Director, Intermat, Inc.

Since its launch in 1999, Mr. Tombers has led the company in a number of successful consulting engagements and Executive Produced a number of television programs. For a full biography, see http://www.intermat.tv/ua.html.

Tell Us Something About Your Real World

Send updates that include your name, graduation year, current address, and email. Photos welcome!

SEND INFO TO: Jennie Germain, germaj52@umn.edu, OR

Department of Theatre & Dance, 518 Rigd Wing, 330 21st Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55455

Alumni Profile: John Skelley, BFA in Acting, 2007
An interview conducted on October 7, 2009 by the editor of Applause

by David Bernstein

Skelley: I tell you some stories. I guess one of the best experiences I had during my years here was going to London for the semester abroad. It was the first time for me being away from home and being away from my family for any length of time. I grew up here and I went to school here through high school. And I grew up a lot by doing that. I felt like I learned so much – not only about acting but about who I was. I mean that was an invaluable experience, even though I had some trouble with it, personally. Being away from home for the first time, I was definitely homesick. But I was able to concentrate my energy on what we were learning, which was really focused on Shakespeare, and the teachers were so good that what I was learning in the classroom really mirrored what I was learning in life. By the time I came home I felt like I had really gained a lot from the experience.

Applause: Most of us in the theater have stories about when something went terribly wrong. Can you share such an anecdote with us?

Skelley: Let’s see … here’s one from the Guthrie. About a year after I graduated, I was playing Puck/Nebuchadnezzar in A Midsummer Night’s Dream and we opened the show coming down on ropes from the rafters. I was sitting up there preparing for my big entrance moment and my stomach feels a little funny, and I think, okay, I’m alright, I’m okay. I go down, the giant fight scene where all the fairies go out into the audience, and they’re blessing them and it’s kind of the final scene is “bless this place, ” which is this big song number. When I’m not on stage, I’m in the bathroom. So I’m on and off stage the whole show. When I’m not on stage, I’m in the bathroom throwing up. Then I realize I have to go back on stage to pull up the clothes in the little magic section and then we have to run back off – so I’m on and off stage the whole show. When I’m not on stage, I’m in the bathroom. So the final scene is “bless this place,” which is this big song number in which all the fairies go out into the audience, and they’re out with everyone and they’re blessing them and it’s kind of the end of the play. For this final scene, normally I fly in, but I decided that day I wasn’t going to fly. Which was a good choice. So I’m standing there on stage and I do this little dance and I’m just waiting for everyone to move out into the aisles because I need to get backstage as quickly as possible. The second everyone moves, I run toward backstage. I get about a foot off stage – so I’m on and off stage the whole show. When I’m not on stage, I’m in the bathroom. So the final scene is “bless this place,” which is this big song number in which all the fairies go out into the audience, and they’re out with everyone and they’re blessing them and it’s kind of the end of the play. For this final scene, normally I fly in, but I decided that day I wasn’t going to fly. Which was a good choice. So I’m standing there on stage and I do this little dance and I’m just waiting for everyone to move out into the aisles because I need to get backstage as quickly as possible. The second everyone moves, I run toward backstage. I get about a foot off stage and I let it go. So I’ve officially christened the Guthrie stage with my … you know what.

Applause: I just took my class to see the Guthrie’s delightful production of The Importance of Being Earnest, in which you play……
Algonquin. How did your work as a student here prepare you for this and other recent professional acting roles?

Skelley: Well, I think certainly doing the play before on the Showboat was a big help. I knew the play really well. The nice thing about the Showboat is that you do a professional run; you know, you do eighty-some performances. That experience, by the way, was really incredible – to learn how to do that, how to keep that up. And so, knowing the way of being an Ear-

Applause: More generally, how did your education in our BFA in classical work in the program, it helped me in terms of the style and understanding of the play... Everyone needs to have a sense of safety and also a sense that you can have a good time at. I think the program really taught me to be confident about myself and what I think about theater.

Applause: Have you got any bits of advice for current theater students, either BFA and BA, about how to use their education in our department to keep themselves active and working in the theater after graduation?

Skelley: I think one of the most important things is to be a good student. And I do believe that every time that you go into a rehearsal, that you need to be present, to be all there in class. One of the pieces of advice my high school director gave me was don’t burn any bridges. I think that’s so important. I mean people respond to honesty in the theater and you have to be that way as a person, too. Also, by yourself and have fun. I feel that’s something that people overlook when, you know, they’re trying to think about all this other stuff. You have to show up and do your work and be present and be kind and respectful. I think that goes a lot further than people think. Find what works for you by trying everything, have an open mind; be willing to see if something works and how it can work. In the end, though, you must go with your gut and do it the way you feel it, because that’s the only way it’ll really speak to you.

Applause: What do you think is the most essential thing an actor needs to learn, and how did you learn this as a member of the U of M Guthrie BFA Acting Program?

Skelley: I answered part of this in my previous answer. Also, there’s that feeling of – I don’t know if I’m right – but what seems to have worked so far is a feeling of being alive. If I am working on a play and I am doing something that starts to feel like work, that starts to make me feel like I am doing it just to do it, that doesn’t make me feel alive, I will just throw it out. In school of course you should try everything – and I’m sure all of it helps – but as I said before, in the end you have to go with your gut and what feels right. And I don’t mind that people talk about truth and honesty on stage. I think it’s about a sense of truth within yourself. You have to find it for yourself and find what truth means to you. Of course you have to do what the director tells you as well. I don’t mind any actor having a sense that he walk? I use all of these things in different ways and every project is different. I think that doing so many different things for the most part I like doing plays that are fun and that people can have a good time at. I think the program really taught me to be confident about myself and what I think about theater.

Applause: Did it help that the program exposed you to quite a range of different styles and genres so you could find the ones that made the most sense to you?

Skelley: Yeah, definitely. And I used them all in different capaci-

ties. I learned that you must know your objectives, your action, what you want in a scene. But you must also ask, what kind of person is this? What’s his character? How does he walk? I use all of these things in different ways and every project is different. I think that doing so many different things for the most part I like doing plays that are fun and that people can have a good time at. I think the program really taught me to be confident about myself and what I think about theater.

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Skelley: I think the most important things is to be a good student. And I do believe that every time that you go into a rehearsal, that you need to be present, to be all there in class. One of the pieces of advice my high school director gave me was don’t burn any bridges. I think that’s so important. I mean people respond to honesty in the theater and you have to be that way as a person, too. Also, by yourself and have fun. I feel that’s something that people overlook when, you know, they’re trying to think about all this other stuff. You have to show up and do your work and be present and be kind and respectful. I think that goes a lot further than people think. Find what works for you by trying everything, have an open mind; be willing to see if something works and how it can work. In the end, though, you must go with your gut and do it the way you feel it, because that’s the only way it’ll really speak to you.

Applause: What do you think is the most essential thing an actor needs to learn, and how did you learn this as a member of the U of M Guthrie BFA Acting Program?

Skelley: I answered part of this in my previous answer. Also, there’s that feeling of – I don’t know if I’m right – but what seems to have worked so far is a feeling of being alive. If I am working on a play and I am doing something that starts to feel like work, that starts to make me feel like I am doing it just to do it, that doesn’t make me feel alive, I will just throw it out. In school of course you should try everything – and I’m sure all of it helps – but as I said before, in the end you have to go with your gut and what feels right. And I don’t mind that people talk about truth and honesty on stage. I think it’s about a sense of truth within yourself. You have to find it for yourself and find what truth means to you. Of course you have to do what the director tells you as well. I don’t mind any actor having a sense that he
Applause: Several of your research interests have to do with thinking about and studying acts or events we don’t usu- ally think of as performance from the point of view that they are in fact, performances: things such as tour- ism, teaching, or politics. Could you talk about how studying these things from this point of view has deepened your understanding of both the acts or events themselves, and of what constit- uutes a performance?

Werry: Essentially for me perfor- mance is a lens, a way of viewing both social and material reality. How this differs from other ways of looking at things is that you focus on the doing of things: people acting and communi- cating, and making meaning out of each others’ actions and expres- sions. If you think of phenomena as performance, you understand them as being made through human acts – human acts that are ongoing, that are processes. Seen this way, for example, the state or the nation (which are two objects that I am particularly interested in) appear not as things that are monumental and static – that is, given to us – but rather things that are made through the ongoing sequence and layers of performances by individuals and groups of individuals; performances that are on the one hand determined in a sense by scripts and roles, but that are also open to improvisation, contestation and creative human agency. So for me, that is the fundamental insight that thinking of the world through the lens of performance can lend us; that suddenly you apprehend human realities as in process – as in a particular kind of human process – so that they are therefore open for intervention, open for change, open to be made different.

Applause: So you’re saying that as we act as human beings within, say, the sphere of politics, that is a performance that we do in the “real world”, whereas the popular conception of perfor- mance is something fake, something imaginary ...

Werry: I resist that absolutely. There’s an old truism in Perfor- mance Studies – the discipline I come from – that “perfor- mance is making, not faking.” Even when we make fictions, the fictions have a reality to them. Stories make things happen in the world, and they give what happens meaning. We live by metaphors. So the distinction between an artificial or fake representation of performance and a realm of reality I think is bogus. How we interpret something or narrate something can have a real power, and in certain instances, a real consequence. It’s far more liberating to think of both reality as being performative and performance as being real. So, both are available for the kind of creative artistry, and responsibility, that we as perform- ers can bring to those spheres.

Applause: You got your doctorate from Northwestern in Perfor- mance Studies. Does this relatively new field represent a new way of looking at and thinking about theatrical performance, and, if so, how does it differ from other, more traditional modes of studying live theater?

Werry: Performance Studies as a discipline, particularly at North- western, comes from a really different genreology than theater. It comes not out of theater studies but from oratory, and in fact the early scholars of Performance Studies were not interested in performing theater but in performing literature. And what grew from that was the idea that literature was meant to be per- formed; that any literary fiction – be it a poem or be it a novel – has an inherent performance dimension to it; that the narrator is a character; that the words stage a sort of imaginative drama for you as a reader. Where scholars went from there was to say well, if we can say that of recent literature, can we say that of the early scholars of Performance Studies were engaged with W estern ways in which Polynesian people, as they travel and perform – particularly in the 19th Century – engaged with Western performance and really brought their own theory to engaging with Western forms. I’m extremely interested in not only mov- ing beyond the canon, but completely rethinking the canon by examining other forms, particularly of indigenous performance theory, as having as much to offer as Diderot or Brecht or any of our canonical theater writers. So in my research that’s absol- utely fundamental to everything I do as a scholar.

In my teaching it’s also been fundamental, although I also have to recognize that I am interfacing with a well established tradi- tion of theater in the U.S. that most of my students understand themselves as working within. So as a teacher, I try to begin in a place that students know, and I try to move out into places that they’re not as familiar with. In a course that I’m teaching at the moment, in dramatic literature – one of our core courses – I have the Great Tradition of W estern theater as heritage and in our own ways in which post-colonial authors in many parts of the world have engaged with and manipulated and used those comic forms to essentially turn theater to their own critical ends. And I also look at marginal forms of performance: popular performance and even protest or “guerrilla” performance, for example, as ways of pushing the boundaries of how we think about theater.

Applause: You wrote an article for Applause a few years ago in which you said: “We must move beyond the idea that the can- on of Western theater – or any canon for that matter – is what defines the discipline, and we must do this both in our curricu- lum and in our performances.” Can you tell us about how you yourself do this in your research and teaching?

Werry: In my research, I work on Polynesian performance. My first book was on performance in tourism and my second project is going to be on Polynesian performance as a global phenomenon. I’m looking at the indigenous peoples of the islands of the Pacific. Now, Polynesian does not have a tradition of theatrical performance. There’s a tradition of “storytelling”, and there’s a rich, rich tradition of dance and music and song verse forms. But the idea of mimicry – of recasting a fictional story becoming its characters – is not one that derives from that area. So, imposing Western ideas about theater onto what we see there doesn’t make sense. For me the most interesting question is: how can we allow their ways of thinking about perfor- mance to inform and enrich the way that we think about the- ater in the West? If we have an imperative to define our theater in our heads that is people doing role plays, there is this whole realm of extraordinarily rich perfor- mance material that isn’t accessible to us – or is illegible to us. So I’ve become very interested in the ways in which W estem- ers have read performances of Polynesian people; but also the ways in which Polynesian people, as they travel and perform – particularly in the 19th Century – engaged with Western performance and really brought their own theory to engaging with Western forms. I’m extremely interested in not only mov- ing beyond the canon, but completely rethinking the canon by examining other forms, particularly of indigenous performance theory, as having as much to offer as Diderot or Brecht or any of our canonical theater writers. So in my research that’s absol- utely fundamental to everything I do as a scholar.

“Stories make things happen in the world, and they give what happens meaning.”

Applause: It is a lot of your work seems to be informed by the dy- namic and dialectical nature of the relationship between events or issues in a culture or a society, and representations of these events or issues as performance. Can you talk specifically about how some event or issue in the past few years have influenced what you are studying and how you are studying it?

Werry: This is a huge question and I could approach it from ten thousand directions. Something that I thought about a lot that I think was particularly relevant to the work of the university and the work of this department came about as a result of the clerical work- ers’ strikes – two years ago and several years before that. These really brought to the fore the role of labor in the university – and in the world at large – and I think raised really some in- teresting questions, particularly for people working in theater where performance is your labor. But it was also an opportu- nity to reflect on labor at the same time. Likewise, teaching is a labor, and it’s a labor that is a pleasure, like performance, so that the line between the thing that we must to do to survive and the thing that we desire to do, or that we are driven to do, is a thin one for us. It was a thin line for many of the clerical work- ers as well, who are as invested in the creative and intellectual mission of the University as faculty or students. I’ve become very curious about the fact that the shape of labor in our society is changing extremely. Over the past twenty or thirty years, the old distinctions that people used to draw between what you did for money and what you did for your family and what you did for pleasure or leisure have become increasingly blurred. Theorists of labor say that as a society we are increasingly becoming “immaterial” labor- ers – our work is communication. As you saw, what we do in theater or what we do as performers or cultural workers is at the forefront of those kinds of changes. Those old boundar- ies don’t seem to hold anymore, and I think that this is both an extraordinary opportunity in some ways but also there are risks attached to it. How do you make sure that people are not exploited in these sorts of situations? That their contributions are recognized? How do you make sure that the costs and the gains of labor are distributed fairly through society? And I think that performance is a space in which we can reflect in really productive ways and really curious ways about labor. I’m interested in teaching a class in the next couple of years possi- bly under the dramatic literature class umbrella about labor and theater that would involve looking at everything from the pro- test melodrama of the 19th Century to the work of the WPA in the Depression, and the ways in which theater was involved in the labor movement, all the way through to groups like El Teatro Campesino – and the way that they were addressing the organization of work as an issue. And then I’d like to ask, what kind of theater will help us address the specific challenges of work in our contemporary era? Because I don’t think we’ve invented it yet.
WOYZECK PROJECT continued from page 3

“cage” at the center of the action, as in the mainstream version. And once again, the piece, once more formal, but still slightly raw. Southern Theatre – will provide new challenges whose solutions will directly influence the direction of the piece.

Creative collaboration – the model we used to develop the first two versions of Woyzeck (and will use for the new version as well) – places emphasis equally on the process and the product. Its goal is to exploit literature, events, ideas, paintings, sculptures, etc. and find imaginative and creative ways to present this work to an audience. This nonstandard way of working with atypical performance source material often creates unusual works, and thus the process stretches both the artists who create the performance and the audiences who experience it. Traditional theatre is usually developed from an existing script, with directors and designers often working independently from the performers. When working in this more collaborative model, props and scenery are driven as much by the needs of the performers as by a text. Consequently, design becomes an active player in the production and not simply a part of the aesthetics. Lighting and sound design are often dictated by the designers’ responses to what inspires them onstage during the rehearsal process. In this process it is essential that the actor/artist propose possibilities for the event. Ultimately the imaginations of the performers, directors and designers, working together in the rehearsal space, are the driving force in the creation process. It is sometimes a risky process and, as with any risk, there is the chance of failure. But we think it is far more important that our student artists take risks rather than repeat what we (and they) know they can do.

The arc of the Woyzeck project is not only exciting in its own right, but it’s also a good model for what we hope to accomplish with the BA Performance program’s new emphases on creating original work, on collaboration and on physically-based performance. There are currently plans for two somewhat similar projects involving faculty students in the BA Performance program. Lisa Channer is directing a new adaptation of the Gilgamesh epic, which will most likely be performed at the Southern Theatre in the Fall of 2010. A first adaptation of Gilgamesh was developed and shown in workshop production last winter. It was researched and created by Lisa and a group of students in her Creative Collaboration course, together with a group of designers connected with her theatre company, Theatre Novi Most. The new version of Gilgamesh, which is being produced by Novi Most, will be performed by a company of professional actors with approximately four or five student actors involved in smaller roles (they were mostly all members of the Creative Collaboration course). The piece is currently being further developed with a professional playwright (Kira Obolemsky), and professional actors and designers. In addition to the student actors, Lisa plans to use student designers as assistants to the professional designers on this production.

Also, Lovemei Scifert is currently working on a performance piece entitled The Wall, in a run-down wall that has been built along the Mexican-American border. The plan is to collaborate with former BA student Xanitha Walker, currently a graduate student at Arizona State University, who is completing a year long internship with Cornerstone Theatre this summer. Their goal is to spend two weeks this summer living in a border city researching and creating the piece. The plan is to take these O.U. of M students along, hopefully using funds from UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program) grants, who will take part in this creation process. They will then turn this into a creative collaboration in the Fall of 2011, possibly in partnership with the Department of Chicano Studies, and tour the resulting production to small communities in Southern Minnesota that have a large number of Mexican immigrants. Their hope is to bring these communities together and create a space for dialogue.

In addition, we intend to use a Creative Collaboration class in the fall of 2010 to create installations with University of Minnesota students that we hope will become part of a piece to be performed with a professional company at an off-campus venue. This idea is in the very early planning stage, with no specific plan or professional company yet identified, but it’s one way the BA Performance program sees of participating in the RICAP [Reimagining Community Arts Partnerships] program if community partners can be identified (RICAP is discussed more fully in another article in this issue of applause). In short, the arc of the Woyzeck project from the imaginations of our students and their faculty mentors, to a workshop production in an old gym, to a Subscribers Series production in a cavernous field house, to a production on a professional stage with a mixed cast of professional and student performers, is, in many ways, an appropriate metaphor for one of the major directions in which we see the BA Performance program moving.

...on a side note

Norris Hall
Performance of all the ’88-’09 Creative Collaborations (King Lear, Gilgamesh, Terror Town) and Subscribers’ Woyzeck Project took place in Norris Hall on the East Bank of the University of Minnesota Campus.
Norris Hall is where both the women’s office cubicles and is now vacated of all office cubicles and is now vacated of all ties, and our lives, our society would be far poorer in every way. And these wonderful students are our future. Without the gifts they bring to our classrooms and studios, our performance venues, our communities, and our lives, our society would be far poorer in every way. And your gifts can remove financial barriers from their paths and make their dreams, and ours, come true.

There are many ways for you to keep those dreams alive. A leadership gift of $1,000 or more can support a student right now. An endowment gift of $25,000 or more can qualify for matching funds through the Promise of Tomorrow or 21st Century Graduate Fellowship incentive programs – doubling the value of your gift! A gift to the University Century Council fund (#1414A) will enable us to direct the funds where they will do the most good; ensuring a bright future for all of our students.

If you would like to create a named scholarship or discuss any of these options, please contact Mary Hicks at 612-625-5541 or jicks002@umn.edu. To make a gift online, go to http://theatre.umn.edu/giving. Thank you!

Goodbye and our heartfelt thanks to...

Mickey Henry, the department’s Technical Director since the summer of 2001. In August he began working in Project Sales at Norcostco.

Sherry Wagner-Henry, the Managing Director of University Theatre and the Minnesota Centennial Showboat since July 1995. She is the new Director of Graduate Programs in the College of Continuing Education at the University of Minnesota.

Pam Mittman, who began her sojourn with the Department of Theatre Arts & Dance in 1978 as the Department Administrator.

Collin Sheraden, who started work with the department as a student in 2000, and then became the Technical Coordinator of the Barker Center for Dance in February of 2006. Since August he has been working as the Assistant Lighting Supervisor at the Children’s Theatre Company in Minneapolis.

We wish you all the best in your new endeavors!
spring event highlights

SUBSCRIBER SERIES
Love’s Labour’s Lost
by William Shakespeare
adapted and directed by Kenneth Noel Mitchell
February 26 – March 7, 2010

Execution of Justice
by Emily Mann, U of M MFA Alumna 1976, directed by Dominic Taylor
April 16 – 24, 2010

BFA STUDIO SERIES
Junior Company: Antigone Project
directed by Elisa Carlson
March 4 -7

Sophomore Company in Rep:
Anthony and Cleopatra
by William Shakespeare, directed by Lucinda Holshue
Measure for Measure
by William Shakespeare, directed by Steve Cardamone
April 1 -4

Guthrie Project Senior Company
Runs April 23- May 2

Junior Company in Rep:
The Gamester
inspired by Le Joueur, by Jean-Francious Regnard, adapted by Freyda Thomas (in verse and rhyme)
Marriage of Figaro
by Beaumarchais, adapted by Joan Holden (in prose)
April 22 -25

Fresh Scenes
April 29 - May 1

CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS
Examining THE WILDEST!!! HIP, COOL and SWINGING (A NEW MUSI-
CAL)
led by Dominic Taylor & Musical Director (TBA)
February 18 - 19

The Maltese Loon
led by Jon Fergeson
April 2010

X THEATRE
24 Hour Theatre
January 22 - 23

The Clown Show
directed by Allison Witham and Billy Mullaney
February 11 - 14

The Debutante
directed by Joe Stodola
March 10 - 13

Live the Revolution
directed by Katrina Dikkers
April 29 - May 2

TICKETS & INFORMATION AT THEATRE.UMN.EDU