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Playwright's Lab

4-2009

The Lab Report, volume 02, issue 11

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Playwright's Lab
at Hollins University

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The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 02, Issue 11 (April, 2009)

Course Listings for Summer 2009

The 2009 Summer Session is only two months away and the time has come to start thinking about registering for classes.

We're very excited about the offerings available this summer in both the analytic and creative areas of study. We're also very pleased with the visiting faculty who will be teaching these courses and the ways in which our guest artists will supplement the curriculum with insights, workshops, and professional advice.

THEA 501 Playwright's Lab (4) Ristau

All students, faculty, staff, and guests meet regularly for readings of student work, guest presentations, exercises and discussion. Students submit an example of their best work for available public reading slots. Students whose work is selected for readings are responsible for arranging, rehearsing, and presenting them. Moderated discussion follows each reading. Course must be repeated three consecutive summers.

THEA 505 The Collaborative Art of Theatre (4) Ristau

Introduction to theatre as a collaborative art and profession. Required for those without prior theatre training or undergraduate theatre degree.

THEA 510 Playscript Analysis and Criticism (4) Metzgar

Intensive critical analysis of the playscript as a blueprint for production covering representative texts from a range of theatre styles, genres, and periods. Plays are considered in both their original historical/cultural

circumstances and implications for contemporary audiences. Course covers major approaches to dramatic criticism and the tools used in theatre research. *Required for first year students.*

THEA 514 Theatre and Society: American Women Playwrights (4) Metzgar

Study of the important female voices of the American stage.

THEA 520 Narrative Theory and Dramatic Structure (4) Ristau

Introduction to the basics of storytelling and the creation of dramatic texts using both organic and formulaic models with an emphasis on the one act play. Students will learn to observe the world for meaning, build characters, place characters in settings, write monologues, create dialogue between characters, and lay the groundwork for longer, more substantive work. *Required for first year students.*



THEA 550 Special Topics in Playwriting: Radio Drama (4) Grote

Detailed examination of the golden age of radio drama as well as contemporary markets for the audio play. Students will receive instruction in the special

demands of writing drama for a non-visual medium, and create a new radio drama or comedy ready for recording.

THEA 560 Advanced Workshop (4) Grote

Workshop course in which students further develop skills in the writing and analysis of stage plays. Designed for students with prior experience in playwriting.

THEA 570 Master Class: First Drafts (4) Ristau

In this intensive workshop, students will write a completely new full-length play each week, resulting in 6 new first drafts over the six week course. While it is possible that these first drafts might eventually be developed and revised into final drafts, the emphasis is on mastering the discipline necessary to produce substantive work on a deadline as well as reinforcing the student's understanding of the fundamentals of play structure.

SUMMER FACULTY

Jason Grote is a very successful playwright who has been working for the past few years in innovative applications of radio and sound drama in New York City. He teaches drama at Rutgers University.

Bonnie Metzgar is an artistic director, producer, playwright, dramaturg and director who has worked in new play development her entire career.

Todd Ristau is a playwright, director, actor, and designer who is also the Artistic Director of Studio Roanoke and Program Director for the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University.

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Studio Roanoke Opens Ambitious First Season!



Kenley Smith took his idea of a theatre dedicated to new play development from concept to construction in record time. The MFA playwright purchased the New York Fashions building downtown only a year ago and this month, under coffee can lights and seated on rented folding chairs, Roanoke audiences saw their first Studio Roanoke offering on April 8th.



The Angel of Brooklyn, a short play by local playwright Dwayne Yancey was presented as part of the new monthly **Lunchbox Reading Series**.

Short pieces of 25-35 minutes presented for free at lunchtime. Playwrights are paid \$25 and receive a DVD of the reading. The readings are directed and performed by local theatre artists drawn from several community theatres, colleges and universities in the area.

Best of No Shame (BONS) took the stage two days later. BONS is a twice annual showcase of some of the best received performances from the previous six months and features around 25 short pieces of all kinds. The Friday and

Saturday night performances were both sold out and standing room only. The show included magic acts, Goth burlesque dance, comic monologues, dramatic scenes, poetry, and lots of musical numbers by local singers and songwriters.

April 10 & 11, 2009 \$10 tickets

The Best of **NO SHAME**

THE BEST OF NO SHAME THEATRE

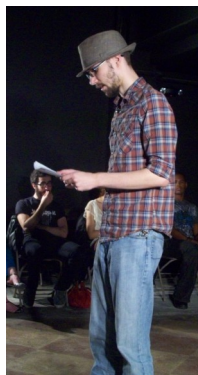
WWW.STUDIOROANOKE.COM
30 Campbell Ave. SW
Call 540.343.3054
for tickets and details

STUDIO ROANOKE

CONTAINS MATURE CONTENT AND THEMES

Starting this month, regular **No Shame** will be performed at Studio Roanoke every Friday night at 11PM.

Fridays aren't the only nights for audience generated performances. Each Tuesday Studio Roanoke will be offering a Lounge. First Tuesday of each month is a **Poetry Lounge**, hosted by award winning poet TJ Anderson III, the second Tuesday of each month will be a **Comedy Lounge** with stand-up, sketch comedy and improv. This lounge will be hosted by Big Lick Conspiracy member Ross Laguzza. The third Tuesday of each month will be the **Acoustic Lounge**, featuring original songs and



musical compositions hosted by local music icon Chris Shepard. All the lounges will follow roughly the same format, with several featured performers going first and followed by open slots for audience members to sign up and participate. All Lounges and No Shame Theatre are \$5 at the door.

The Biology Lesson and other experiments by Sandy Dietrick is Studio Roanoke's first full production and opened April 28th. In just 20 days, Studio Roanoke's volunteers (headed up by Jess Hilden, the new Technical Director) built platforms for raised audience seating and Barbizon installed a brand new light system and grid—complete with operating board and a new sound system.

Hollins students involved in the production included Heidi Hostetler (actor/lighting design), Meredith Levy (stage manager/light crew), Kat Osborn (props/light crew), Susanna Young (actor), Aimee Perkins (actor), Shannon Ariessoehn (actor/costume design), Lianne Jackson (actor), and Horizon student Elizabeth Matthews Jones (actor). MFA playwright Sunny da Silva served as production dramaturg and helped with costume design. The production demonstrated

important synergies between the undergraduate and MFA theatre programs at Hollins. Studio Roanoke provides experiential learning opportunities for all of our students.



DIRECTED BY TODD RESTAU WWW.STUDIOROANOKE.ORG

THE BIOLOGY LESSON AND OTHER EXPERIMENTS

CONTAINS MATURE CONTENT & THEMES

BY SANDY DIETRICK

30 Campbell Ave SW April 28-May 3, 2009 at BPM sharp
Call 540.343.3054 2PM matinee Saturday & Sunday
for tickets and details General admission, all seats \$10

"You are doing a great thing by giving playwrights a home and Roanokers the opportunity to see new plays," said Dietrick, a playwright from New York who also works for HBO/Time Warner, came to Roanoke for opening night. "And, at the risk of sounding overly sentimental, you reminded me what I've always loved about playwriting—the experience of having a bunch of people I don't know, sitting together in the dark, listen to my characters share their stories. It was, honestly, inspiring."

www.studioroanoke.org



Visiting Faculty: Jason Grote and Bonnie Metzgar



Jason Grote will be teaching an advanced playwriting workshop as well as a course on radio drama this summer.

Jason's plays include *1001*, *This Storm is What We Call Progress*, *Hamilton Township*, *Maria/Stuart* or *Platzangst*, and *Box Americana*. His work has been presented in theatres around the world, including Clubbed Thumb, The Glej Theater (in Ljubljana, Slovenia); HERE, The Lark, New York Theatre Workshop, Page 73,

Playwrights' Horizons, Portland Center Stage, Rorschach Theater, Salvage Vanguard, Soho Rep, Theater J; Theatre of NOTE, and The Working Theater to name just a few.

Honors include an Ovation Award from The Denver Post; the Page 73 Playwriting Fellowship; an NEA Grant via Soho Rep; a NYSCA Grant; a Sloan Commission; and "Best New Play" (for *1001*) from Denver's alternative weekly, *Westword*. *1001* was also included in critics' year-end top ten lists in *Time Out New York*, *The Rocky Mountain News*, and *The Boulder Daily Camera*.

He teaches playwriting and screenwriting at Rutgers University, is a member of PEN and New Dramatists, and was a contributor to Comedy Central's "Indecision 2008" blog.

www.jasongrote.com

Bonnie Metzgar is an award-winning producer, director, playwright, and dramaturg. Before becoming Artistic Director of About Face Theatre in Chicago, she was a professor and director of the graduate playwriting program at Brown University as well as Artistic Director of Brown's New Plays Festival.

Bonnie was co-creator and producer of the 365 Festival—a national festival based on *365 Days/365 Plays*, a yearlong play cycle written by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan Lori Parks. Metzgar was the artistic leader for this landmark international event, a shared global premiere by hundreds of theaters, universities and art spaces throughout the U.S. and abroad. *Time Magazine* named the 365 Festival one of its top ten theater events in 2006.

Metzgar was Associate Artistic Director of Curious Theatre Company in Denver from 2004 to



2007 and *The Denver Post* named her its 2006 Colorado Theater Person of the Year. Bonnie served on the literary committee of the National New Play Network. She was also Associate Producer at the Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival under George C. Wolfe from 1995 to 2003 where she was founding producer of Joe's Pub, responsible for creating the now world-famous venue.

Lie with Me by Keith Bridges opens in Los Angeles

Lie with Me, by MFA playwright Keith Bridges, was the inaugural production for the Mutineer Theatre Company, opening last month. This world premiere was directed by Joe Banno, former artistic director of the Source Theatre in DC.

Keith's play is a frank and oddly comic story about people who can't seem to help the damage that they inflict on one another. Sexual secrets and psychological collusion are revealed when the family matriarch falls ill.

The play received great reviews. Here are a sample of the notices:

"An impressive debut. The play's enormous strength lies in its smart, well-observed dialogue. The performances are truer than true." **LA Weekly GO**

"A very powerful study of a crisis...the quality of their work serves notice that they will be a force to be reckoned with." **Reviewplays.com**

"Heartbreaking and darkly funny new play makes the vitriolic altercations in *The Lion in Winter* seem like a Sunday picnic. Under Joe Banno's sharp and sensitive direction, a pitch-perfect ensemble and a splendid design team deftly serve. Fascinating play... an auspicious first effort from Mutineer Theatre Company." **Backstage**

"Mutineer Theatre Company stakes its claim on the word 'fearless with a capital F.U...' effective...a challenging piece of drama from a daring new theatre company." **Tolucan Times**

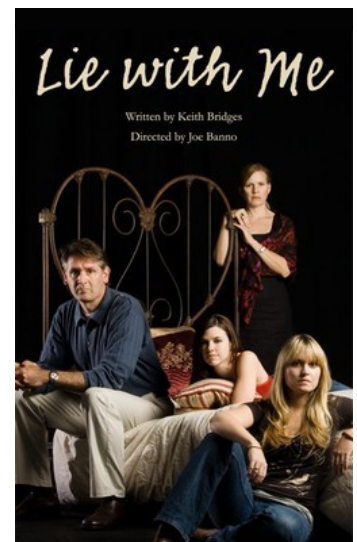
"Wicked ironic humor threaded throughout...providing a great balance...extremely complex and nuanced piece as their inaugural production...intriguing. Fascinating examination of the family dynamic...manages to ring true on all the right notes." **La Splash**

"You appreciate Bridges' care in delineating the characters' emotional arcs and the attention with which director Joe Banno listens to these people...a powerful performance." **Curtain Up**

"Bridges creates a psychological tragedy equal to *Oedipus*, but also with a few comic moments." **SoCal**

"All of the actors are exceptional. Exceedingly well staged by Joe Banno, down to the movement in the scene changes that helped tell the story rather than stop the proceedings." **LA Theatre Review**

The play is scheduled to be remounted as a co-production of Mutineer and Charter Theatres in Washington DC later this year.



www.mutineertheatre.com

Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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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: Your Letter of Interest

In a lot of ways, your letter of interest is at least as important as your writing sample. Of course we want to accept writers with demonstrated facility in form and craft. We're looking for interesting ideas, interesting characters, and a passion for writing that will carry you through all the demands of an MFA program.

At the end of the day, though, it won't be your plays that go to classes, participate in discussions, interact with our faculty, guests, and other students. **You** will be. Your writing sample introduces your work to us, your letter of interest introduces **you**.

That's pretty important stuff, there. Lots of pressure, but the only good introduction is an

honest one. In short, be yourself. Trying to be anyone or anything else is more work than it is worth.

Before you pick a school, you should have been selective in that choice—you should know why you want to go there, have specific goals and a plan for how the program you are applying to can help you meet those goals. All that should be in your letter of interest.

How else are we going to know anything about your passion for writing, how much you looked into our program whether your expectations of the program are realistic? Your letter of interest is the best tool we have (outside of an actual interview) to help decide whether or not the school and the student will be a good

team for the next 3-5 years.

An MFA is a huge investment in time and finances, but the university is taking a gamble too!

Choosing a cohort of students is like casting a play. Talent is important, but so is knowing the ensemble will work well together, be mutually supportive and be good ambassadors for the institution. And if you don't get in, that means nothing more than the path to your success lies in another direction. Ask hard questions of yourself and the institution. We'll do the same—and that is going to be a very good and useful conversation to have regardless of the outcome.



Todd Ristau, Director