

NETC News

A Quarterly
Publication of the
New England Theater
Conference, Inc.

volume 16 number 1 winter 2007

Memories of 2006 NETC Annual Convention Yale Omni New Haven, November 16–29, 2006

by *Tim Fitzgerald*,
2006 NETC Convention Chairperson



Bevie Lord, NETC Board member, congratulates Major Award Recipient composer/lyricist Stephen Schwartz (left) and Special Award Winner Producer Rick McKay (right) after the awards ceremony.

Doing double duty as the convention chairperson and the awards chairperson is very tiring, but very fulfilling after the fact. We had over forty workshops in varied areas of theatre crafts, and the words are coming back from attendees as “Amazing,” “The best in years,” and “A weekend that should not have been missed.” I am grateful to all our attendees, award recipients, vendors and colleges who took part in this year’s event. In short, a good time was had by all!

Some of the highlights included the ever popular Theatre Olympiad, workshops by Rick McKay (producer of DVD, *Broadway The Golden Age*), Tony Award Winner Joanna Gleason and Gregory Jbara (*Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*), the Viewpoints Master Class with Jennifer Hubbard, and our special interview with this year’s Major Award Recipient, the incomparable Stephen Schwartz. There was literally something for everyone.

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41st Annual NETC Theatre Auditions March 17, 18, 19, 2007

NETC is proud to announce our 41st annual Theatre Auditions.

The Auditions bring together over 1,000 actors, singers, dancers, technicians and other theatre practitioners. The annual NETC Theater Auditions provide a service whereby producers and directors of New England and other theatres from throughout the country meet in a group to audition and interview candidates for positions in summer and year-round professional theatres as performers, designers, technicians, and theatre/production staff.

The annual NETC Theatre Auditions bring together over 1,000 actors, singers, dancers, technicians and other theatre practitioners. An average of 60 companies are represented; professional theatre training companies and conservatories are also represented.

These theatres offer both job-in and full-season employment, as well as apprentice and intern positions and Equity Membership Candidacy Programs. An average of 60 companies are represented at these auditions annually, including summer and year-round theatres (Equity and non-Equity), college-based summer theatres, repertory companies, Shakespearian and Renaissance Festivals, outdoor dramas and faires, music theatres, touring companies, theme parks, children’s theatres, and dinner theatres, whose seasons include the classics, dramas, musicals, comedies, and revues. Casting companies and professional theatre training companies and conservatories are also represented.

These auditions are open to non-Equity members and Equity Membership Candidates. **Equity members are not eligible to apply.**

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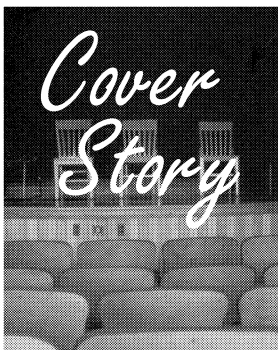
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new england
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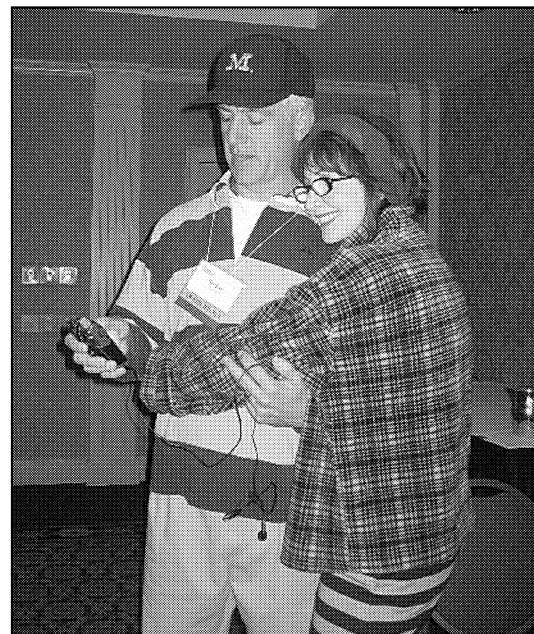
Special Award Winners Gregory Jbara (left) and Joanna Gleason (right) with NETC Convention Planner and Awards Chair, Tim Fitzgerald. NETC planner Tim Fitzgerald.

On Saturday evening, our annual awards banquet was a sumptuous buffet followed by the Award ceremony, which was both touching, in particular the presentation of a posthumous regional award to Lisa Barnett of Heinemann, and entertaining with the constant thanks given to Stephen Schwartz (which became a running gag for yours truly). Award recipients ranged from as nearby as New Haven (Yale Rep and Southern Connecticut State College) to as far away as Melbourne, Australia (Gassner playwrighting winner David Blackman). The evening moved along with a great pace keeping one and all appreciative of the happenings. Except I didn't get dessert again this year...maybe next year.



Regional Award Winner and Marshfield MA native Jamie McGonnigal was honored for his work as producer/director for numerous benefit performances with Broadway stars.

The next morning, a large group of people shared a lovely brunch with our Special Guest Speaker, Ben Sammler of the Yale School of Drama. Ben was also our award recipient for the 2006 Leonidas A Nickole Educator of



Gregory Jbara and Joanna Gleason share some casual fun during a workshop.

the Year Award. {See a reprint of his speech on page 10.} All in all, it was a very successful event for NETC, and we thank all who were able to be a part of it.

I want to give some special thanks to our Business Manager Joe Juliano, who spent tireless hours with me getting this convention together and again at the registration desk (with some help from some wonderful volunteers). Also thanks to all of our NETC Board who were able to contribute their time and efforts to our convention this year.

The following is a listing of this year's award recipients.

2006 NETC Major Award Recipient

Stephen Schwartz, composer/lyricist

2006 NETC Special Award Recipients

Joanna Gleason, actress; Gregory Jbara, actor; Rick McKay, producer

2006 NETC Regional Award Recipients

Jamie McGonnigal, producer/director; The Yale Repertory Theatre; The Friends Of The Concord City Auditorium; Lisa Barnett, editor (posthumously).

2006 Moss Hart Memorial Award Competition

Winner: *The Diary Of Anne Frank*, Staples Players, Staples High School, Westport, CT

Memories of 2006 NETC Annual Convention

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DIVISIONAL RECOGNITION RECIPIENTS

College /University

Pulling Apart, Southern Connecticut University, New Haven, CT; Honorable Mention: *The Elephant Man*, Salem State College, Salem, MA

Secondary Division Recognition

The Diary Of Anne Frank, Staples Players, Staples High School, Westport, CT; Honorable Mention: *The Crucible*, Westborough High School, Westborough, MA

Children & Youth Division Recognition

Ragtime, Weston Drama Workshop, Weston, MA; Honorable Mention: *Middle School Madness*, Center Stage Theatre Company, Westport, CT

Community Division Recognition

Wit, Arlington Friends Of Drama, Arlington, MA; Honorable Mention: *The Spitfire Grill*, Concord Players, Concord, MA

2006 Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award Competition

First Place:

Telling William Tell, By Evan Guilford-Blake;

Second Place:

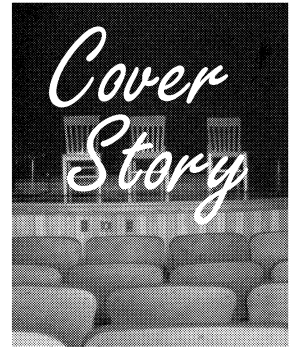
Yorkshire Fairy Tale, by Thomas H. Diggs

2006 John Gassner Memorial Playwriting Award Competition

Enola Gay, by David Blackman



NETC president Jim Quinn with Australian playwright David Blackman, winner of the 2006 John Gassner Award for his play, *Enola Gay*.



Keep an eye in your mail and on our website (www.netconline.org) for information on our 2007 Convention, being held in New Hampshire in November 2007.

41st Annual NETC Theatre Auditions

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Applicants must be college students or adults, 18 & older. High school students or individuals under 18 are **not** eligible. In addition to young performers, producers are interested in seeing mature, adult talent with professional experience and/or experience in community or summer theatres, for both seasonal and job-in employment. Producers will also be interviewing musical directors, designers, and applicants for technical and staff positions.

All applicants must pay an application and processing fee. The fee for current NETC members (membership paid for 2006-2007) is \$30.00. For non-members, Audition fees are \$45.00 for students and \$55.00 for non-students. Non-member Audition fees include membership in NETC through August 2006. **Please note that all fees are non-refundable and do not guarantee an audition appointment.**

The Auditions are held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 1360 Worcester Road (Route 9) Natick, MA.

Complete information, instructions and application form are all available at www.NETCOnline.org, or from our office at 215 Knob Hill Drive, Hamden, CT 06518, 617-851-8535, fax: 203-288-5938.

We'd like to hear from you!

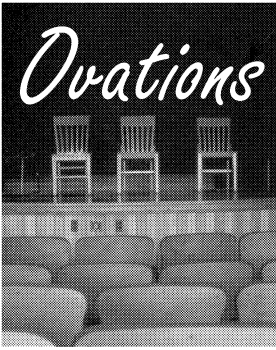
Deadline for the next issue of NETC NEWS is **February 15, 2007!**

Send articles (WORD format) and pictures (jpg) to ashea@worchester.edu

"The Forum," NETC News opinion column, wants to hear your responses, gripes, rants, raves, predications and panaceas for theatre in New England, the nation, and the globe. Send articles to sramczyk@bridgew.edu.



Keeping in mind that there may be a turnaround of several weeks between deadline and actual publication, please submit time-sensitive material accordingly.

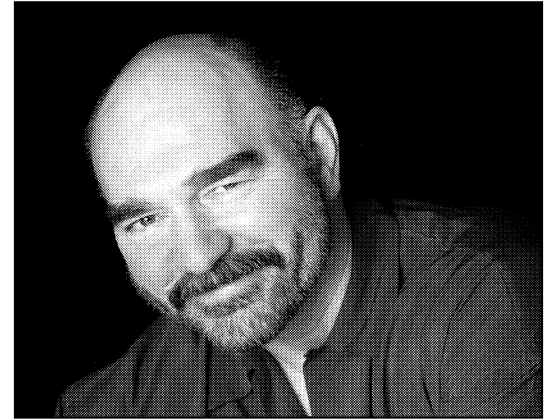


Spirit of Broadway Theater Honors North Shore Music Theatre's Artistic Director and Executive Producer

Jon Kimbell, Artistic Director and Executive Producer of North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, MA, was presented with The Spirit of Broadway Theater Board of Directors Award for Lifetime Achievement, as part of the 6th Annual Spirit Awards at The Norwich Inn & Spa in Norwich, CT on Saturday, December 9, 2006.

Since 1983, Mr. Kimbell, has created one of the finest musical theater companies in the country. Recognized for his commitment to musical theater, Mr. Kimbell has received the **New England Theatre Conference Award for Outstanding Achievement in the American Theatre**, Salem State College's Lifetime Achievement Award, and the 38th Annual Moss Hart Award for NSMT's adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. NSMT also received the Actors' Equity Association's Rosetta LeNoire Award in 2003 for the theater's outstanding commitment to non-traditional casting. Mr. Kimbell is responsible for the artistic direction, administration and long range planning of NSMT, as well as the commissioning and development of new musical theater works with Associate Producer John La Rock. Throughout his career, he has directed and produced many critically acclaimed musicals, Shakespearean works, and as a passionate believer in developing new musicals, the premieres of 21 new musicals. An active member of the theater community, Mr. Kimbell has served as an evaluator and panelist for the NEA's Access and Musical Theater Panels, the New Hampshire Commission on the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and the Ohio Arts Council.

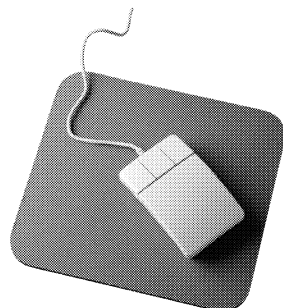
"Mr. Kimbell's passion and conviction for advancing the future of musical theater is beyond reproach and



Jon Kimbell

one that deserves honor and recognition," said Spirit of Broadway Theater Board President, Mark Barry. "Each year the Board of Directors honors a visionary in the theater industry who exemplifies passion, leadership, innovation and a commitment to advancing the music theater form. Mr. Kimbell's inspired and exemplary leadership has not only positioned North Shore Music Theater at the vanguard of new works production, but has earned Mr. Kimbell the respect and admiration of his peers, his colleagues, staff and artists worldwide. We are honored to recognize the bold and innovative leadership of Mr. Kimbell with our Lifetime Achievement Award."

Past recipients of the Spirit of Broadway Theater Board of Directors Lifetime Achievement Award have been Madeline Gilford (Actress / Producer), Paulette Haupt (O'Neil Music Theater Festival Director) and Sue Frost (former Producer, Goodspeed Musicals).



Check out the new and improved version of the NETC webpage!

www.NETCOnline.org

- Latest information about NETC events
- Upcoming awards and competitions, as well as information on past winners
- Archived NETC NEWS, as well as current issue for members only!

Sweet Tornado Chronicles American Theatre Legend

After a successful airing on public television stations nationwide last spring, *Sweet Tornado: Margo Jones And The American Theater* is now available on DVD. Starring Judith Ivey as the dynamic and idealistic director from Texas, and Richard Thomas as Tennessee Williams, whose early career she championed, the one hour documentary, produced in high-definition format, is narrated by Marcia Gay Harden. Fifty years ago, Margo Jones was famous in the American theater world as “The Texas Tornado.” She fought for success as a woman in a man’s world, lived too fast, and died too young. Few know her name today, but her vision transformed the American stage. The more-than-450 nonprofit resident theaters that now stretch across the country are all offspring of Jones’ beliefs and commitment.

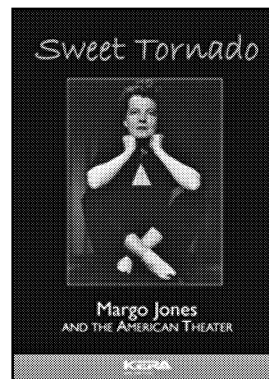
Margo Jones (1911–1955) came to prominence in the cultural upsurge after World War II. She triumphed on Broadway as co-director of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1945, but dreamed of something beyond commercial theater. Summoned to culturally ambitious Dallas, TX, after *Menagerie’s* success, Jones began her own experimental professional playhouse in 1947, where she launched the career of playwright William Inge, and presented the world premiere of Williams’ *Summer and Smoke*, both in her first season.

Jones had failures, notably *Summer and Smoke’s* 1948 Broadway production, but amassed a striking record of finding new talent, and literally wrote the book, *Theatre-in-the-Round*, on how to make non-profit professional theater work in American communities. The book later became “the bible” of the resident theater movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

Margo premiered Jerome Lawrence’s and Robert E. Lee’s *Inherit the Wind* in conservative Dallas in 1955, after it had been rejected by eight Broadway produc-

ers. The play went on to world fame—but Jones herself died soon after, at the age of 43, and her reputation died as well.

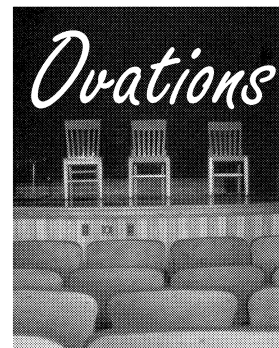
The documentary has been praised as “smartly crafted, bold, moving” by *The Dallas Morning News* and by Leonard Maltin as “a heartfelt tribute to a woman with great dreams and equally great demons in her life.”



In addition to documentary, the DVD includes features and footage of particular interest to theater lovers, theater educators and libraries. Among them: an incisive interview with noted Tennessee Williams authority Albert R. Devlin and a discussion—with contributions from Arena Stage founder Zelda Fichandler and director Adrian Hall—about how and why the professional nonprofit theater took root half a century ago.

The DVD also includes material about *Inherit the Wind*, and assessments of her life and career from playwright Horton Foote, actor Ray Walston, and others. Judith Ivey offers her account of how she “found the role” for this unusual amalgam of live performance and documentary biography. Other extras include behind-the-scenes footage from shooting of the performance portion of the documentary.

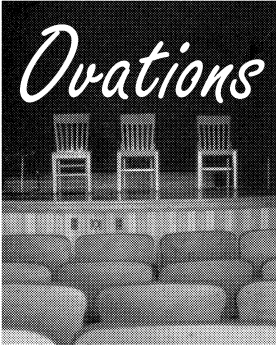
Copies of the DVD are available for \$25.95 at www.margojones.org or by phone at 1-800-496-3198.



Two Plays by Cape Cod Playwright Published

Congratulations to Albert T. Viola, Playwright-in-residence at Harwich Junior Theatre on the publication of two of his plays. *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, winner of the 2005 NETC Aurand Harris Playwrighting Award, is now available through Pioneer Drama Service.

His *Twin Towers Anthology*, *The Pentagon and Flight 93*, which was presented at the NETC convention in 2002, is being published in hardcover by Courier Corporation.



Regional Award Recipients Share Their Success Story

Editor's note—All present at the convention awards banquet on Saturday night at the Omni New Haven were impressed by the energy, vision and dedication of the regional award recipients, the Friends of the Concord City Auditorium. Carol Bagan's acceptance speech is here reprinted in hopes that other communities may gain inspiration from their accomplishments.

The Friends of The Concord City Auditorium are deeply honored to have been recognized by the New England Theatre Conference as a 2006 Regional Award recipient. We are a community of everyday Yankee people, quite dazzled at finding our name on the roster with the Yale Rep and Stephen Schwartz and Jamie McGonnigal. We are a community of people who are devoted to an old theatre building because it is essential to our sense of place, now, as it has been in this small capital city for 102 years. We are thrilled that our community stage has been singled out for special recognition, for it is just a little venue in the NETC galaxy of theatrical stars.

Sixteen years ago a city manager, upping the ante on a history of neglecting the municipal building, decided that the theatre should be melded into office space for the adjoining city hall. He looked at the peeling paint, the simple lighting. He did not look at faces of the people in the seats, coming as their parents and grandparents had, to the Wednesday lecture series, the Community Players, the Community Concerts, the recitals filling stages with tiny ballerinas and young musicians. He did not hear the greetings of neighbors, the applause of families, the tribal sounds of recognition. He was going to develop modern office space to serve the community.

We've heard a story of foreign development workers in a village where the women had to walk to a well and carry heavy jugs of water back home. The workers solved their problem by installing a pump and piping

to a tap in every house. The women turned the taps for a few days, and then they picked up their jugs and walked back to fetch and carry the water. Why? Because they needed the well more than they needed the water.

The Concord City Auditorium is Concord's village well. We are all separated by age, occupation, sport, children, religion, economics, neighborhood. We could stay in our separate areas and turn our taps on an off and get the water we need. But when we come to our Auditorium we are one community, and this is the only place in our city where this occurs. We need the well.

Wells are expensive to operate, and theatres more expensive than wells. Concord City Auditorium is owned and now operated—booked and managed—by the city's Public Properties Division, an understanding group of local people. The Friends of the Concord City Auditorium is an

umbrella over all the users of the theatre—performers, presenters, producers, and audience—working in a unique partnership with a new enlightened city government. The group's mission is to preserve and maintain our historic community stage, and to foster its affordable and accessible use for the benefit of all our people.

So what about the “expensive” factor? Having worked to rescue the building in 1991, the Friends formed a 501(c)(3) with the basic philosophy that we would all work as volunteers, each one giving their particular talent. There would be no feasibility studies until every local brain was picked, and every possible dime would be spent locally, respecting the multiplier.

In 16 years, sticking to these tenets, The Friends have worked with a cooperative city government and created a jewelbox. They have raised and invested over one million dollars in upgrades ranging from sound and lighting to ADA and BOCA compliance, from



The Friends of the Concord City Auditorium received a Regional Award in recognition of their successful volunteer efforts to save and restore a local performing arts landmark

North Shore Music Theatre Spotlight Honors Teens

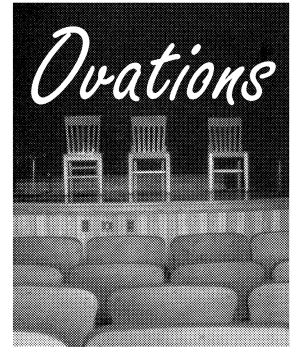
After last year's rousing success, North Shore Music Theatre (NSMT) has announced that the North Shore Music Theatre Spotlight Awards will become an annual tradition. The Spotlight Awards honor the accomplishments of high school students and encourage students and teachers to achieve the highest levels of excellence in musical theater. 25 high schools from Massachusetts and New Hampshire will be participating in NSMT's 2nd Annual Spotlight Awards.

"The response to the North Shore Music Theatre Spotlight Awards program has been overwhelmingly positive since its inception last year," said Burgess Clark, NSMT's Director of Education. "We are thrilled with the feedback from the schools that participated last year and with the increased interest in continuing this pioneering program. This year's participants represent an even broader range of communities, including two from New Hampshire."

Over 1000 students from twenty-five high schools from across the region will be participating in this year's program, ten of which will be returning from last year. Additionally, ten schools will be chosen to perform at the black-tie awards ceremony on May 15, 2007 at NSMT.

The following schools will be represented: Andover High School, Beverly High School, Bishop Fenwick High School, Dracut High School, Ipswich High School, Lawrence High School, Leominster High School, Manchester/Essex Regional High School, Marblehead High School, Medfield, High School, Natick High School, Oliver Ames High School, Peabody Veterans Memorial High School, Pembroke High School, Pentucket Regional High School, Pope John XXIII High School, Portsmouth Christian Academy, Reading Memorial High School, Salem High School, Salem, N.H. High School, Saugus High School, Silver Lake Regional High School, Tyngsborough High School, Watertown High School, and Wellesley High School.

Awards will be presented for Best Musical, Best Direction, Best Choreography, Best Musical Direction, Best Orchestra, Best Ensemble/Chorus, Best Lead Supporting Actor/Actress, Best Supporting Actor/Actress, Best Featured Performer, Best Costume Design, Best Scenic Design, Best Lighting Design, and Best Crew and Technical Execution.



Regional Award Recipients Share Their Success Story

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carpets, chairs, and curtains to online booking and restored dressing rooms. They built a lobby raising the money "One \$10 Brick at a Time", and the thousands of local families who bought bricks are listed in random order on the wall. An annual summer "Pitch In" finds dozens of workers shining the house for each new season.

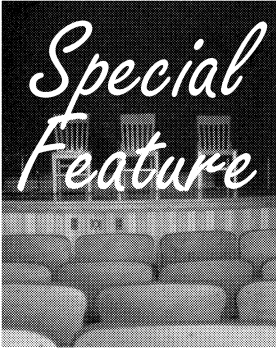
All of this has been done by volunteers. The theatre has no paid staff. To celebrate the Centennial, the Friends spent less than \$500 for bulk postage to raise \$50,000 and meet a match challenge, creating a \$100,000 endowment "Fund for The Audi" for its second century.

One great change has occurred. The faces in the audience have multiplied and a new generation has joined them. Over 75,000 people come through the door every year for more than 100 events. Now social

service groups hold benefits, school groups hear classical music, senior citizens and fourth graders mingle at travelogue intermissions, nine companies of young dancers perform. Affordable and accessible to all, it is the home of our community-based arts and entertainment.

The theatre is now a beautiful place. The shows, homegrown and touring, are an olio of entertainment and education, excitement and enchantment. But the real wonder is the sense of community that thrives in this old theatre building, pulled back from destruction by people who needed the well.

The Friends of The City Auditorium are grateful to the New England Theatre Conference for honoring our theatre and the spirit which supports community theatres throughout the region.



Jennifer Hubbard's Viewpoints Master Class— One Perspective

by Suzanne M. Ramczyk

"What are your burning questions?" was the opener with which master class leader, Jennifer Hubbard, greeted the thirteen participants of the ten-hour workshop at the recent NETC annual convention in New Haven. Having been involved in an early *Viewpoints* workshop, I was interested in finding out how this approach to acting, movement and directing had evolved since the early years. Further, as a performance pedagogue, who, like most, pirates from a myriad of approaches, I was also somewhat curious as to what I had integrated or "internalized" from that earlier training into my teaching and directing.

Years ago, one of the most important lessons of a life in art that I picked up from Jerzy Grotowski was the concept of the artist as the *tabula rasa*, approaching a work of art, training, or workshop experiences, not necessarily unprepared, but truly open to the experience, or "blank" in the sense of allowing the art (or the workshop or training) to take on its own form. In other words, stay out of the way by not letting too many expectations misguide the work. I was thrilled to learn on the second day that one of Jen Hubbard's aspects of approaching the work is to "Come hungry."

In a more onjective approach, our convention brochure noted, "*The Viewpoints* allows a group of actors to function together spontaneously and intuitively and to generate bold, theatrical work quickly. It develops flexibility, articulation and strength in movement and speaking, and makes ensemble playing really possible." With the ongoing support of music and in the masterful hands of leader Jen Hubbard, we all moved seemingly effortlessly through the several hours of this highly physical training. We became acquainted with each component of *The Viewpoints* and worked in partners, small groups, or the entire group on improvisational composition and movement pieces, layering in text at the end of the second day.

It was truly a rewarding experience to behold seasoned educators and directors being challenged in new ways and learning to make decisions on their feet, decisions supported by a clear vocabulary and system of working. It was equally exciting, however, to watch the two young artists in the group (my 23-year-old step-daughter and another young woman) come up with exciting, vibrant, and often riveting

choices. Jen was truly masterful in dealing with and guiding participants of varying background, training, and experience.

A highlight for me occurred during the second day when Jen Hubbard asked three of us to volunteer to demonstrate an extended piece—a journey through working/moving in "lanes," on a grid, and in the larger "free" space. By this point in the workshop, while performing this improvisational movement piece, I felt fully supported, inspired, and guided not only by Jen and the concepts of the *Viewpoints* themselves,

It was truly a rewarding experience to behold seasoned educators and directors being challenged in new ways and learning to make decisions on their feet, decisions supported by a clear vocabulary and system of working. It was equally exciting, however, to watch the two young artists in the group come up with exciting, vibrant, and often riveting choices.

but also by my fellow performers. After we finally reached some stage of completion with the piece and were stopped by Jen, I became keenly aware of a sense of ease and some sense of accomplishment. What a fabulous reminder that exciting and solid improvisational choices are always rooted in firm underpinnings of some sort of methodology and/or vocabulary. (Additionally, it was also just a "high" to work with two such talented performers.)

So, at the completion of the workshop, where did this experience leave me? On a more mundane level, "yes," my less-than-burning questions were answered. On a more important one, however, I was left truly wanting more—more in a "larger" sense. I don't know if this means more *Viewpoints*, more workshops, or more training of any kind; but I do know that it means more *tabula rasa*. I truly hope I never become too jaded, not allowing others and other experiences to write on that personal slate. Oh, and I've revised Jen Hubbard's admonition of "Come hungry," into a new studio rule to share with my students: "Come hungry, leave hungry!"

Norman Leger 1925–2006

The New England theatre community lost a valuable colleague and leader with the death on December 15, 2006 of Norman Leger, producer emeritus of the New London (NH) Barn Playhouse. Norman was associated with Barn Playhouse for 50 years of its 75 year history.

A native of Nebraska, Norman served in the Navy during World War II, graduating from the University of Nebraska in 1949. He studied acting in New York city at the Neighborhood Playhouse, and came to New London in 1951, acting or directing in several productions for the next two years. In 1955 he became owner/producer of the Barn Playhouse, a position he held until assuming the title of producer *emeritus* in 2004.

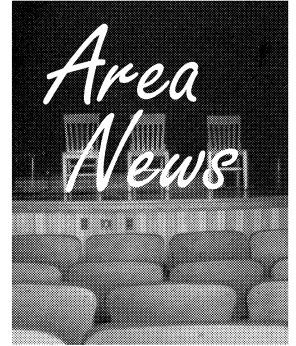
Over the years, generations of young theatre professionals were introduced to professional theatre at the Barn Playhouse, under Norman's leadership and guidance. Earlier this year he was awarded the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award at the New Hampshire Theatre Awards.



Norman Leger

Norman was a longtime NETC Member, and a member of the College of Fellows.

Norman was known to have a great love of animals. To learn about how to make a memorial donation to ASPCA in his honor, contact Linda Tiramini, ASPCA Special Giving, 110 5th Ave., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011.



YTI Cast Four Southcoast Massachusetts Actors in Gurney Play

Four area actors have been cast in Your Theatre, Inc.'s upcoming production of A.R. Gurney's Off-Broadway comedy *Later Life*.

The actors are Margo Wilson-Beauregard of Fairhaven, Robert Duquette of Swansea, Michael FitzGerald of Westport and Linda Tarricone of Tiverton.

Lawrence R. Houbre, Jr. of New Bedford will direct, with Lawrence R. Houbre, III, also of New Bedford stage managing. The production will run Wednesdays through Saturdays January 17–20 and 24–27 with a matinee on Sunday, January 21.

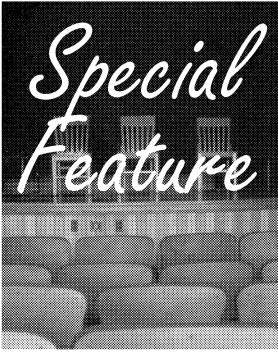
A highly acclaimed Off-Broadway hit by one of America's most prolific writers, *Later Life* tells of Austin, who one night at a party, overlooking Boston Harbor, has the pleasure of rekindling a romance begun thirty years earlier with Ruth. Comically, and sometimes painfully, these two people rediscover each

other and themselves while a bevy of free-spirited guest rally behind them.

Critical comments on the original production include: "Charmingly clever yet immeasurably touching" (*NY Post*); "Seldom can a sad story have been told with more fun and humor than this.... There is no dramatist like [Gurney] on either side of the Atlantic—*Later Life* is, I think, the best of them all." (*The New Yorker*).

Ticket and other information about the production is available by calling YTI at 508-993-0772. The theatre is located at 136 Rivet St. (at County St.), New Bedford, in the auditorium of St. Martin's Episcopal Church.

Now in its 60th season, Your Theatre, Inc. was rated the favorite 2006 community theatre organization in Southeastern Massachusetts in a poll conducted by *The New Bedford Standard-Times*.



“The Forum” Thirteenth Edition:

by *Suzanne M. Ramczyk, Ph.D.*

Professor of Theatre Arts, Bridgewater State College and NETC Board member-at-large

Ben Sammler, head of Technical Design and Production at Yale School of Drama, was honored with the Leonides A. Nickole Theatre Educator of the Year award at the recent NETC annual convention in New Haven. He has been on the Yale faculty for 35 years, mentoring nearly 250 technical theater majors who have gone on to become prominent professionals in their respective fields. He is the author of the prize-

winning *Structural Design for the Stage* (Focal Press, 1999), and edits Yale’s “Technical Briefs.” Professor Sammler has kindly allowed the NEWS to reprint the following excerpts from the address he delivered at the convention Sunday brunch, observations we feel deserve a larger audience and more considered appreciation.

—Suzanne Ramczyk, Editor, “The Forum”

*In this edition of
the Forum*

“Bringing Order to the Chaos—How Can We Encourage More Students to Pursue a Career in Technical Theatre?”

by *Bronislaw J. “Ben” Sammler*

Throughout my years in theatre, the technology required to produce theatre has grown exponentially. Prior to the 1960s, stagecraft witnessed little significant change. Scenery was basically two dimensional: painted drops, legs and borders. But in the 60s we began to see a shift to three-dimensional scenery: wagons, platforms, and turntables. The art of stagecraft now needs to employ elements of engineering (such as structural design) to construct increasingly complex units. And as these units gained in weight and movement, we needed to develop stage machinery to position them. Without our permission, or in some cases, our desire, the days of the flyman with a rope gave way to motorized line sets; the spotlight operator became a computer operator of moving lights; and the black suited stage hands who rolled platforms on and off stage were replaced with winches. A profession that was generally learned through an apprentice system now requires practitioners who are trained at universities. Stagecraft gave way to the rise of theatre technology—a technology that now requires the expertise of trained technical managers. Furthermore, there has been a tremendous demand for people trained in technical theatre from many related fields—theatre consulting, museums, themed entertainment, and corporate events—to name but a few.

One of the sayings that my students say I am famous for is “...and your point is?” My point is that **we need more of us!** Not just stagehands that can push scenery between acts, but more of us who understand the unique needs of theatre. More of us who can preserve the integrity of and often improve a design within the

confines of space, time, and money. All of us can recognize a gifted actor, a fine designer—but how many of us can sense a budding theatre technician? And when we do, do we encourage them to explore the many opportunities of the field?

Some years ago an income analysis was done of the graduates from all the programs in the Yale School of Drama. On average, the graduates who earned the best yearly incomes were from the Technical Program. I receive many more calls for positions each year from people looking to hire graduates of the technical program than I have graduates and/or alumni looking for employment. Yet, the field remains little known. It long ago outgrew the stagehands union and is no longer simply a trade. *Yet secondary schools and even undergraduate institutions are not encouraging their students to go into technical theatre.* And many, of those students who continue and pursue graduate training are treated as low paid assistants, receiving little significant training.

How do we recognize potential technical managers? And when we have recognized a gifted student, how best can we, as professionals, encourage them to pursue a career in technical theatre?

My story is quite similar to many of the students I have mentored. I came from a farming family. I worked alongside my father building and fixing things, facing real deadlines—hay needs to be brought in from the fields *before* it rains! I went to a small college, enrolled in math education and worked summers in construction. I’d never seen a play.

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One of my roommates was involved in a production which needed some *construction!* Some badly built flats needed repair. I volunteered. The following spring I was handed an art teachers' sketch for a production of *The Visit* directed by the chairman of the drama department. He asked if I could I build it. I ordered the materials and asked a couple of friends to join me for a weekend of work. The chair walked in on Monday morning to find his two story structure, staircase, and revolving wall completed on the stage. He didn't notice that the construction techniques I employed were the same as one would use to build a home, which is just as well. Because after I graduated as a math teacher he hired me to be the technical director for the Drama Department at SUNY Brockport.

Very few of the applicants to Yale's Technical Design and Production Department enrolled in undergraduate programs with the thought of working in technical theatre.

Many of them were math, science, or engineering majors as undergrads. Most of them grew up with someone who was experienced in one of the various "trades." And while each found theatre differently, they all share the same joy in the ever changing problem solving that theatre offers and the same satisfaction that comes from seeing the finished "product"—on stage and on time.

Giving these students the opportunity to work on productions is easy. But once identified, how best do we encourage that student to the field?

Look at our list of graduates at the back of the TD&P department brochure and the positions they hold. For those of you dealing with young people, this listing should give you courage. I'd bet that no youngster ever answered the question "What do you want to be when you grow up" with the answer "A theatre technician!" But if they've been somehow drawn to theatre, and if they learned that the profession not only existed, but was exciting and rewarding, might they consider it? Who better to suggest it than you?

I'm reminded of an odd experience of mine. My wife and I hold a graduation party each year at our home for graduates and their families and guests. A few years ago a proud father bet me a Starbucks Coffee that his son would soon lose interest and would not be working in technical theatre a year from that day.

(Parents also think technical theatre is not a viable career option.) His son is now a project manager with Pook Diemont and Ohl, a major theatrical rigging firm. And I enjoyed that Starbucks Coffee.

So I ask that when you encounter a young person that shows promise in the field, don't hesitate to let them know that you *recognize their talent*, and that

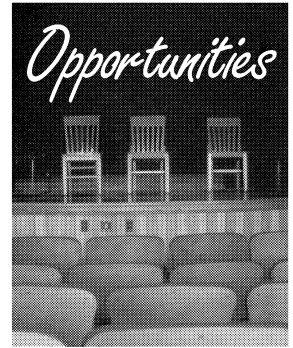
We need more of us! Not just stagehands that can push scenery between acts, but more of us who understand the unique needs of theatre. More of us who can preserve the integrity of and often improve a design within the confines of space, time, and money. All of us can recognize a gifted actor, a fine designer—but how many of us can sense a budding theatre technician?

there are *opportunities to employ that talent*.

And we should find ways to encourage that talent. We can create and maintain working environments that expect the technical manager to contribute to the entire process—from design, budgeting and planning to opening—not as someone who simply works long hours, but as a valued partner. And—a relatively new insight of mine—we might consider the European model that lists the technical manager prominently on the title page of the program. In my opinion, their skills and commitment to the realization of the entire production is no less important than any member of the production team.

What do technical directors do? What do they need to meet the demands of this field? I know that you are a diverse group of professionals. But each of our interactions with our technical team helps to inform them of our expectations.

We are all "Theatre Folk". From Children's Theatre to Community Theatre to Regional Theatre. From High School to undergraduate and graduate training programs—we are quite aware of the team approach that is essential to our art and our craft. Indeed, while Shakespeare eloquently stated "The play's the thing", we know that the play without the players is simply a



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***Shakespeare as Theatre:* Professional Development Workshops for Teachers**

Shakespeare & Company's rationale and strategies for creating dynamic, engaging experiences in the classroom will be the content of a series of workshops for teachers and teaching artists.

The workshops give educators more tools to bring the plays alive through multiple levels of participation by students. Rather than "cover" the material in the classroom, activities are created that compel students to: uncover their personal connections to the characters and relationships; to discover genuine and rigorous connections to the big ideas and big feelings in the text; and finally, by walking away with Shakespeare's story as a part of themselves, to "recover" the 400-year-old script.

Workshops are scheduled for Thursday evenings, and all day Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Series I—

Getting Shakespeare on Its Feet for Non-Actors will be offered February 22–25; Series II—*Playing HAMLET in the Classroom* will be offered April 19–22; and Series III—*Directing Shakespeare with Students*, August 16–19, 2007. All sessions will take place at the Shakespeare & Company site in Lenox, MA.

Successful participation in the workshop yields **professional development points** towards the 150-point requirement for re-certification in Massachusetts.

For more information on the workshops, including an enrollment form or for information on other offerings for teachers, call Karen Harvey in Shakespeare & Company's Education Program at 413-637-1199 ext. 123, or email kharvey@shakespeare.org.

New Director of Marketing and Communications for UNH Theatre & Dance Department

Look for a new face representing Theatre & Dance at UNH. Nancy Pearson is the new Director of Marketing and Communications. Nancy brings with her over 25 years of theatre experience, ten years in education and five years in marketing and communications. She



Nancy Pearson

has performed on stage, television and film, has directed both adult and children's theatre and has won two play writing awards. Nancy is looking forward to meeting others in the New England Theatre Conference and hopes to continue the excellent work of her predecessor, Kay Megorden-Staten.

Improbable Players— Open Workshops

Improbable Players are holding open workshops beginning January and running through June 2007 to develop a new play about substance abuse prevention for young people. Exact scheduling is still in progress.

Project leaders are Lynn Bratley, M.Ed., Artistic/Executive Director of Improbable Players; Brian Jansen, Actor/Educator; and Christina Everett, Actor/Educator.

Teens and adults are invited to join us—for one session or many—in creative exploration of personal stories about addiction/recovery through sociodramatic improvisation and scriptwriting.

These workshops will take place in a large studio space in Watertown Square and be facilitated by members of the company. A nominal fee will be charged. Please call for details: 617-926-8124. Visit our website for information on our mission and our company: www.improbableplayers.org.

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story, and all of the arts involved in producing a play require an equal amount of craft and creativity.

I've been fortunate enough to be doing what I do, and what I train my students to be capable of doing, for a long time, and their success suggests to me that I've "gotten a handle on it."

It's not practical—nor advisable—for undergraduate programs to have separate departments for each discipline as we have at the graduate level. Everyone should take a core of courses to understand each other's role and how the 'pieces fit together'. This is fundamental to understanding the collaborative process that is theatre.

But in our training programs, or in practical production settings, we need to do a better job of *defining the differences between technical management and design*. According to Ming Cho Lee, it is the designers, in collaboration with the director, who *creates* problems and it is the technical manager who *solves* these problems. I agree!

Designers must be free to imagine. It is the technical manager who brings the technical knowledge to the discussion, to develop solutions, and quantify the resources needed to implement the designers' ideas. My definition of the technical manager's role is "Bringing Order to the Chaos."

It is a rare occurrence when estimates do not vastly exceed the available resources, which is why the process requires collaboration. It is no more appropriate to tell the technical manager to go back to the drawing board and "make this happen" than it is to tell the artistic team to re-conceptualize the show as a staged reading!

At this point it is important to remember it is the producer who defines the resources. that neither define the available resources, but everyone (including the artistic team and the technical manager) is required to work within them. In an undergraduate program, this may be the department chair; in a resident company this may be the artistic director.

I say this to you *emphatically*, because there is clearly a misconnect in the experiences that the students entering our program encounter. It may be because they are not involved in this dialogue, or it may be because this dialogue is not occurring. But when I ask my incoming students if "available resources"

were ever part of the dialogue when working on a production, there is rarely a hand raised. *This year no hands were raised!*

Among his many accomplishments and gifts to American theatre, the recently deceased Lloyd Richards served as Dean of the YSD for twelve amazing years. Very early in our working relationship Lloyd described the inherent conflict of theatre as art which "wants no constraints, yet *must* abide within them." His solution was "*to create art within a defined frame.*" This perspective always informed him, and it never once diminished his art.

The resources—space, time, and money—are our frame. And the discussions that result in a play being designed and produced within that frame need to occur with both the artistic goal and that frame understood by all of the participants.

We can't expect undergraduate or novice technical managers (or designers, or directors) to have the experience or expertise to participate in this process as knowledgeably as a professional. But neither can we expect them to develop the skills needed to solve the problems that theatre presents if we don't *acquaint them with a process that should be a foundation for their education.*



Marie Phillips Service Award to Hank Zappala



Hank Zappala receives Marie Phillips Service Award from Bevie Lord for his long and loyal devotion to the interests of NETC.



Message from President

A year ago in my first message to the membership as president, I said, "I hope to travel more and see more of the faces of the members who are working for NETC in and around New England but who don't get a chance to come in and visit the Board Base Camp very often." I want our members in the northern states to know that we are reaching out to you in this next year.

Our 2007 Convention will be held in New Hampshire. We have plans to meet with leaders from various theater companies in Maine, and we will be contacting and visiting our members in Vermont to strengthen our support for your work. As regards our recent convention in New Haven, based on what I personally experienced and the feedback I have received—I am very proud to be a member of NETC.

Jim Quinn
President, NETC

Art in Greenwich

The Acting Company of Greenwich will be presenting *Art*, by Yasmina Reza, on February 16, 17, 23, 24, and March 2, 3, 2007. Curtain will be Fridays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Art is the winner of the 1998 Tony Award for Best Play, and 1996 Olivier Award for Best Comedy.

Chris Arena will direct. Featured in the cast are Phil Cutrone, Larry Schneider and Antonio Soares.

Performances are at the First Congregational Church, 108 Sound Beach Ave., Old Greenwich, CT 06870. Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$7 for seniors at matinees.

For further information, call 203-629-2094 or go to www.ActGreenwich.org.

Oklahoma! Coming to New Hampshire!

Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic *Oklahoma!* will be staged by Actorsingers of Nashua, NH, on May 4–11 in the Keefe Auditorium in Nashua.

Auditions are scheduled for Sunday, January 21 and Monday Jan. 22 at the Actorsingers' Hall, 219 Lake Street in Nashua. All interested parties are invited to an "Information Night" on Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. to meet the directors, learn about the audition process, the show and the Actorsingers' organization.

All are welcome. All roles are open. No previous experience or appointment necessary.

For more information contact Director, Dan Barth at: Patriotdb@comcast.net, or secretary@actorsingers.org, or call 603-891-0734.

Vince Gill To Perform At North Shore Music Theatre

Country music sensation and Grammy winner Vince Gill will rock out at North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, MA, for a single performance on Tuesday, March 20 at 7:30 p.m. as part of the 2007 Concert Series.

Gill, originally from Oklahoma City, is a Nashville superstar and has released over 20 albums throughout his career, including "I Still Believe in You" (1992), his critically acclaimed album "The Key" (1998) and "Let's Make Sure We Kiss Goodbye" (2000).

His most recent release is *These Days*, a collection of country, jazz, bluegrass and rock tunes on four disks. Over the years, this musician, singer and songwriter has also worked with other notable performers, including Dolly Parton, Reba McEntire, Amy Grant, Barbra Streisand, Wynonna Judd and Richard Marx. Ticket prices are \$95 and \$80. For more information or to purchase tickets visit www.nsmt.org or contact the box office at 978-232-7200, or in person at 62 Dunham Rd. Beverly, MA 01915.

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