Trailblazers
8 Professional Theatres That Continue to Thrive at 50-Plus

Changemakers
10 Theatres Under 30 With World-Changing Missions
Rehearsals continue unimpeded while lighting notes are addressed above.
We’re changing the industry.

Now with BMD, it’s easy to integrate Broadway-quality Scenic Projections™ into your upcoming production.

Why? Because we broke the barriers to using the most innovative technology in theatre.

We believe every theatre deserves meaningful and compelling digital content regardless of budget. That’s why BMD offers its high-quality animated Scenic Projection™ show packages purposefully priced at less than $800. Combined with BMD’s affordable audiovisual hardware products and high-profile industry partnerships, the days of the stagnant painted-backdrop are long gone.

Now with our expertise, digital scenery can be painless technical theatre.
With NAST Accredited degree programs and plenty of scholarship opportunities, the School of Theatre & Dance has the advantages a large university provides with the one-on-one attention that only a close-knit artistic home can offer.

**BACHELOR OF ARTS**
- Theatre
- Dance

**BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS**
- Acting
- Design and Technology
- Puppetry
- Musical Theatre

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS**
- Acting
- Lighting Design & Technology
- Costume Design & Technology
- Scenery Design
- Technical Direction

**CONTACT**
theatre@mail.wvu.edu
(304) 293-2020
1 Fine Arts Drive
Morgantown, WV 26506-6111

theatre.wvu.edu

f WVU School of Theatre & Dance
@WVUTheatreDance

West Virginia University.
Eric Berryman (front), portrays folk hero John Henry in Steel Hammer, created by SITI Company and directed by Anne Bogart in 2014 as part of the Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville. The show explores the legend of Henry, who according to folklore defeated a steam-powered hammer in a competition, only to die afterward from the exertion. See story, Page 6, about Actors Theatre of Louisville and other regional theatres celebrating 50 or more years of presenting theatre. (Photo by Michael Brosilow; cover design by Deanna Thompson)

Contents

Volume LVIII Number 2 ● Spring 2017 ● Southern Theatre – Quarterly Magazine of the Southeastern Theatre Conference

Features

6 Trailblazers
Professional Theatres That Have Survived for 50-Plus Years Share Secrets to Thriving in the Face of Obstacles

16 Sidebars: Short vignettes featuring four more theatres that have survived for 50-plus years: a resident summer theatre, a dinner theatre, a children’s theatre and the first regional theatre to transfer a production to Broadway

Main story by Edward Journey
Sidebars by Deanna Thompson

29 Hot off the Press
Plays About U.S. Political Life
by Megan Monaghan Rivas

30 Play in the Park?
Avoid the Potholes When Performing on a Temporary Stage Outdoors
by Megan Monaghan Rivas

4 400 Words
$2,500 for a Hamilton Ticket?
I’m NOT Happy About It
by Sarah Grammar

29 Hot off the Press
Plays About U.S. Political Life
by Megan Monaghan Rivas

36 Words, Words, Words...
Review of The Art and Practice of Directing for Theatre by Paul B. Crook
reviewed by Richard St. Peter

Cover
$2,500 for a Hamilton Ticket? I’m NOT Happy About It

H

arvard’s American Repertory Theater, which has been a stepping stone to many a recent Broadway hit, sits a mere six-minute walk away from my dorm. Manhattan? Four hours away by bus. Yet, aside from student productions (typically less than $8 a ticket), I rarely find myself at the theatre.

As a college junior, I find that money is tight, and the cutting-edge performances happening in Cambridge and New York aren’t cheap. As a drastic example, Harvard professor and economist Gregory Mankiw wrote an article for The New York Times aptly titled, “I Paid $2,500 for a Hamilton Ticket. I’m Happy About It,” in which he explains how his family would not have been able to purchase last-minute prime seating at a performance of Hamilton were it not for resellers like StubHub upping the price.

Mankiw’s thesis? Thank Dionysus (and high market demand) that this ticket was five times its face value. Otherwise, someone else would have already bought the three tickets he purchased, and he – a person with $7,500 lying around – couldn’t have purchased them. The problem? Mankiw’s argument makes for a pretty exclusive theatre. Now, the producers of Hamilton didn’t set the ticket price at more than $2,000 – that was the result of ticket resellers and price-gouging. But resellers bought the Hamilton tickets for upwards of $500 apiece. Pretty steep.

Like some other Broadway productions, Hamilton has a digital lottery, which awards $10 tickets to 21 lucky people at each performance. But those are just a drop in the bucket compared to the masses yearning to see the country’s most talked-about show.

I can’t help but wonder what young, art-hungry minds were kept out of the Richard Rodgers Theatre the day Mankiw attended because of the prioritizing of profits over accessibility. This is not to say that capitalism is the enemy of art; artists deserve to be paid well for their work. But what usually stops me – and other young artists – from witnessing professional productions in this country is price.

When will we catch up to countries like the U.K., where professional theatre and affordability are able to coexist? When will groundbreaking American theatre productions like Hamilton be accessible to the majority of its citizens and not just those who can afford to pay $2,500 for a ticket?

Send your column of 400 or fewer words to deanna@setc.org.
Theatre shipping. $8, plus Canada; $47 per year, International. Single copies: $24.50 per year, U.S.; $30.50 per year, International. Subscription rates: in whole or part without permission is prohibited. The Theatre in the Southeast. Copyright © 2017 by Southeastern Theatre Conference, Inc., a nonprofit organization, for its membership and others interested in theatre in the Southeast. ISSN: 0584-4738 is published quarterly by the Southeastern Theatre Conference, Inc., a nonprofit organization, for its membership and others interested in theatre in the Southeast. Copyright © 2017 by Southeastern Theatre Conference, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without permission is prohibited. Subscription rates: $24.50 per year, U.S.; $30.50 per year, Canada; $47 per year, International. Single copies: $8, plus shipping.

From the SETC President

Theatres of impact are those that stand the test of time and those that attend to the changing social and political climate. In this issue of Southern Theatre, we focus on theatres that fit this description, having achieved recognition as trailblazers and changemakers.

The trailblazers are regional theatres founded more than 50 years ago that are thriving yet today, connecting with their audiences in innovative ways that continue to keep them relevant. Edward Journey takes a look at four of them – located in cities of varying size in the South – and shares what they see as the keys to their continuing survival. We also turn a spotlight on four other professional theatres that lay claim to longevity in areas from children’s theatre to dinner theatre.

The changemakers are 21st century theatres, organizations founded in the last 30 years that have laid out missions aimed at changing the world. Each works to bring about transformation in some specific area of concern, using theatre as the vehicle that drives the change. Stefanie Maiya Lehmann shares the stories of five of them and brief vignettes of five more.

Summertime beckons many theatre artists outside to present shows in park settings and other locales. But as anyone who has worked at an outdoor drama knows well, the great outdoors opens up a whole new realm of challenges. Megan Monaghan Rivas, who took the leap outdoors last year, shares lessons learned.

In our regular opinion column, “400 Words,” Sarah Grammar laments the high cost of tickets to groundbreaking Broadway shows such as Hamilton, questioning why the U.S. can’t be more like the U.K. in making tickets affordable.

If your interest in political theatre has been piqued by Hamilton and the presidential election, you’ll want to check out this issue’s column on new plays, “Hot Off the Press.” Megan Monaghan Rivas shares a list of newly available plays and musicals that touch on the political life of the United States.


I hope you enjoy this collection of articles offering key concepts, tips, lessons and opinions on a variety of aspects of professional theatre.

Tiza Garland, SETC President
Across the country, a select group of professional theatres that opened their doors during the 20th century has now passed the half-century mark. These are theatres that have survived economic downturns and changing demographics and continue to present professional theatre to audiences in areas ranging from rural communities to urban areas throughout the United States.

On the pages that follow, we spotlight four of these theatres, all located in the South in communities of varying size, and share their survival stories: the Cumberland County Playhouse, in rural Crossville, TN; New Stage Theatre in the small city of Jackson, MS; Actors Theatre of Louisville in the mid-sized city of Louisville, KY; and the Alley Theatre, located in one of the largest cities in America, Houston, TX.

Four additional theatres from across the U.S. that have achieved distinction in some area – from children’s theatre to transferring the first regional theatre production to Broadway – share their 50-year retrospectives in sidebars following the main story.
The four featured theatres from the South share some similarities despite their diverse settings. In each, a commitment to education is central to the organizational mission. As Actors Theatre’s Jeff Rodgers notes, this is key if theatres are to continue to develop the new generation of theatre-goers essential to the survival of live theatre production.

Each of the four theatres also has a firm and ongoing commitment to nurturing new works for the theatre, whether it is decades-long outreaches like Actors Theatre’s Humana Festival of New American Plays or a new initiative such as the Alley Theatre’s Alley All New. By giving new writers and new works an outlet to be seen and heard, these theatres help to ensure a fresh supply of rich and diverse works for the stage. A significant number of the new works presented at these theatres are drawn from the local lore and history of the communities that support them.

The most common element in these theatres’ long-term success is a true connection with their local audiences. All of the featured theatres were conceived to fulfill a need within the community, and their communities have responded by demonstrating their pride and support with dollars when the theatres needed them most. Both New Stage and Cumberland County Playhouse got help from their communities when they faced financial crises. Despite the ravages of severe flooding from Hurricane Allison in 2001, the Houston community made sure that the Alley pressed on, going to literal new heights – replacing its drenched production area with a state-of-the-art Center for Theatre Production which has been called a five-story, 75,000-square-foot “theatre-making laboratory in the sky,” built a flood-proof 14 stories above the city.

Actors Theatre’s Associate Artistic Director Meredith McDonough says that her city “takes a lot of pride in its unique culture being ‘made in Louisville’ and that is exactly what we are.” By the same token, “made in Cumberland County,” “made in Jackson,” and “made in Houston” seem to apply for the Playhouse, New Stage and the Alley. In each case, the community had a hope for quality, professional, local theatre and managed to make that hope a long-term reality.
Rural Theatre

Cumberland County Playhouse, Crossville, TN

The genesis of Cumberland County Playhouse (CCP) was a 1963 children’s theatre production of *The Perils of Pinocchio* directed by Paul Crabtree, a visiting Broadway actor and director whose wife, Mary, had family in Cumberland County. The local community, entranced by the production, convinced the Crabtrees to stay in the Crossville area and banded together to build a 500-seat theatre based on the promise of that first production.

After opening its doors in 1965, the Playhouse operated under the continuous leadership of two generations of the Crabtree family for 50 years. Its hallmark was “family-friendly” productions of both classic and original plays and musicals. The theatre’s original mission states CCP “is committed to the arts as an integral creative component of rural life, not simply a commodity imported from urban centers.”

As one of the 10 largest professional theatres in rural America, the Cumberland County Playhouse experiences all of the challenges of theatres in larger urban markets, but with the added issues created by operating in a rural, underserved community. Crossville, located in the southern Appalachians just off Interstate 40, is a little over an hour’s drive from the closest cities: Knoxville, Nashville and Chattanooga. A third of Cumberland County’s population lives below the poverty line.

The theatre addresses those challenges through aggressive education programs, low ticket prices, and a marketing program aimed at attracting tourists, who make up about 60 percent of the theatre’s audience.

“We attend travel shows and send out direct mail pieces to tour groups,” says Producing Director/CEO Bryce McDonald, who notes that the theatre often becomes a “stop along the way” for tourists and tour groups exploring the mountains of Tennessee.
The remaining 40 percent of the audience is local, coming in large part from three large retirement communities in the county.

In the 2011-2012 season, a fiscal crisis brought on by the national recession threatened the Playhouse, which responded by launching a major fundraising campaign. Recognizing the value of the theatre to the community and the boost it gives the local economy by attracting tourists, the city of Crossville and other supporters contributed additional funding to the theatre. The Playhouse implemented substantial budget cuts as well, reducing its then-$3.2 million budget to $2.5 million.

Today, the Cumberland County Playhouse has a resident professional company producing shows in limited rotating rep in two theatres for 46 weeks per year. In January 2016, the job of leading the Playhouse shifted from longtime producing director Jim Crabtree to McDonald, a Tennessee native who got his start at the Playhouse before making his mark in New York as an AEA production stage manager on Broadway and off-Broadway productions.

**Biggest challenge Cumberland County Playhouse has faced?**

“Our biggest challenge has been developing professional theatrical experiences of the highest caliber while also developing the significant earned and support income needed,” McDonald says. “We also face the challenge of introducing quality theatre to a rural Appalachian region in a nation where only 6 percent of America’s $40 billion in philanthropy flows to rural counties and where extensive poverty and low incomes have dictated low ticket prices. A USDA Rural Development loan received during the theatre’s Silver Anniversary expansion paved the way for construction of a second theatre and class/rehearsal space, but added a mortgage to the monthly expenditures.”

**How was it addressed or overcome?**

“We have overcome these obstacles thanks to operating within our means, developing fine production/performance facilities, and continuing to offer arts instruction to our community and region,” McDonald says. “Historically, CCP operated on an average 85 percent earned income through 1990 and 75 percent from 1991 to 2011. That figure has averaged 70 percent the past few years. This increase in support income has allowed us to address the challenges we face. Classes offered through our education program continue our mission of arts education in a rural underserved community while also providing income and bringing us a different audience demographic. The Playhouse also supplements its income through rental of sets, props and costumes and saves payroll dollars by drawing on a strong retirement community for front-of-house operations, with more than 350 residents volunteering in the daily operations.”

**The theatre’s formula for continued success?**

“Our audience was built on new musical theatre works by Paul Crabtree rooted in Tennessee and Appalachian heritage and life – and our repertory continues to include new works as well as traditional musical theatre and dramas,” McDonald says. “We continue deepening our repertory with plays rooted in Southern tales and history with local playwrights. Our goal is to become a home base for not only Tennessee playwrights, but New York artists as well, that are seeking a place to create, hone and shape their work without the financial constraints of bigger, more urban settings. We want the next Rodgers and Hammerstein or Neil Simon to come to Tennessee and let our resident company of professional actors bring your piece to life at a fraction of the cost of the old school ‘out-of-town tryout.’”

**Challenges for the future?**

“We remain challenged with too much debt, but success/survival is rooted in the factors we have always used to overcome obstacles,” he says.
When Jane Reid Petty and a group of theatre enthusiasts founded New Stage Theatre in Jackson, MS, in 1965, they hung a plaque in the reclaimed church that housed the theatre’s first thirteen seasons. The plaque simply said, “We Have This Hope,” a mantra that has helped steer New Stage through times of triumph and darkness.

New Stage is no stranger to challenges and has been creatively responding to them since its first production of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in a 150-seat space in a converted church in January 1966.

That first production was historically significant not just for New Stage, but for Mississippi’s capital city as well, because it was viewed by Jackson’s first racially integrated theatre audience. New Stage moved in 1978 from its original home to a larger structure containing a 364-seat mainstage theatre and an adjoining multi-use space. The theatre’s complex in Jackson’s Belhaven neighborhood was named the Jane Reid Petty Theatre Center in 1997, a year before Petty died, in recognition of her contributions to New Stage and to professional theatre in Mississippi.

New Stage’s mission “to provide professional theatre of the highest quality for the people of Mississippi and the Southeast” has remained essentially unchanged since 1965. The theatre’s Eudora Welty New Plays Series was established in 1984 with the goal of developing new plays and nurturing writers. The series is named for Welty, the acclaimed writer, photographer and Jackson native who was instrumental in the founding of the theatre and served on its board until her death in 2001.

New Stage’s active education program includes touring productions, in-house student matinees,
summer camps, residencies, classes, and workshops for teachers as well as students. Despite the ongoing challenges of building a subscription base, New Stage has practically doubled its subscriber base since 2002 through aggressive marketing and more accessible seasons, which include a five-show subscription series, a holiday show and children’s shows.

Many of New Stage’s staff and artists, including Artistic Director Francine Thomas Reynolds, have been involved with the theatre for a number of years. Longtime Managing Director Dawn Buck says one of the theatre’s ongoing challenges is to find new ways to attract new audiences.

“Commitment to an entire season through a subscription is apparently not in their DNA,” she says about the millennials who are New Stage’s future. To address that issue, the theatre has increased its social media presence and added more millennials to its board. One board member hosts a cocktail party before productions to encourage younger audiences to go to the party and then on to the show.

Biggest challenge New Stage has faced?

“In 2000-2001, our professional staff greatly overspent our board-approved budget and hired too many staff for a professional theatre our size,” Buck says.

How was it addressed or overcome?

“We let the entire staff go and mounted an all-volunteer ‘Intermission Season’ with seven or eight small-cast shows using professional actors, directors and production staff from the community,” Buck says. “All wanted to see New Stage survive, so they were glad to pitch in. We sold single tickets for shorter runs. At the same time, we were fundraising. A major donor’s generous gift allowed us to cut the deficit almost in half. At the same time, we put plans in motion for our 2005-2006 40th anniversary campaign. We raised $1.2 million during that initiative to erase all debt and burn the mortgage. We returned to a regular subscription season the next year and hired a small staff. Volunteers were integral to our continuing success. Mississippians said loud and clear that they wanted our state to have a professional theatre.”

The theatre’s formula for continued success?

“Our educational program is a major part of that effort,” Buck says. “A number of our board members try to encourage love of theatre by giving tickets to our holiday and children’s shows as an ‘experience’ to remember rather than a gift for a birthday or Christmas. It seems to help.”

Challenges for the future?

“To continue to be $1 ahead at the end of every fiscal year – and to identify new ways to build new audiences,” Buck says.
When Actors Theatre of Louisville is mentioned in conversation among people who know American theatre, the first response often is a comment about the Humana Festival of New American Plays. The Humana Festival, founded in 1976 by Jon Jory, Actors Theatre’s artistic director from 1969 to 2000, is internationally recognized as a showcase of new works for the theatre, having premiered Pulitzer Prize-winning plays such as Beth Henley’s *Crimes of the Heart*, Donald Margulies’ *Dinner with Friends*, and D. L. Coburn’s *The Gin Game*, in addition to new works by Constance Congdon, Horton Foote, Arthur Kopit, Tony Kushner, Jane Martin, Marsha Norman and dozens of other writers.

General Manager Jeff Rodgers says that the Humana Festival is still the theatre’s most significant accomplishment and the theatre’s “key competitive advantage.” The new play festival is a highly-respected showcase for Actors Theatre, which was founded in 1964 when two local acting companies, Actors, Inc. and Theatre Louisville, merged and began producing theatre in a tiny loft. Quickly outgrowing the loft space, Actors Theatre moved for a time to a former railroad station on the Ohio River and eventually to its present-day space in converted 19th century buildings on Louisville’s Main Street.
Theatre’s current mission statement calls Actors Theatre “the leading arts organization in Louisville,” which is “highly valued as a catalyst for creativity, innovation, inspiration and education.” The creation of artistic “community” has been one of the theatre’s continuing core values; the original 1964 mission included a goal “to promote good fellowship among persons within the dramatic profession and with those persons in the kindred professions of literature, painting, sculpture, music and dance.”

Most of the patrons attending productions, events and related Actors Theatre programming come from the Louisville area. While the Humana Festival draws artists and audiences from all over the world, 75 percent of those who attend the festival are local. Managing Director Kevin Moore says the theatre has a strong group of season ticket holders, but also has responded to changing audience needs by offering other packages and developing a generous and flexible ticket exchange policy. “Beyond our season ticket option, we have an array of packages that can fit a variety of interests and lifestyles,” he says.

Associate Artistic Director Meredith McDonough adds that another ingredient that has contributed to Actors Theatre’s success is its Professional Training Company, which has trained and mentored generations of artists and theatre professionals for over 45 years. She calls it the “secret sauce” because of the vibrant creativity and fresh perspectives these young professionals bring to Actors Theatre each year, as well as the deeply connected networks the company has grown through them.

**Biggest challenge Actors Theatre has faced?**

Moore cites one challenge, while Rodgers, the general manager, names another. Both are issues facing many theatres.

Moore: “A major obstacle that all arts organizations face is the rise and fall of the economy. The economy affects ticket sales, buying patterns and a patron’s willingness to invest in a commitment as large as a season ticket package.”

Rodgers: “Expanding the reach and diversity of our audiences and artists on our stages. A significant obstacle to the continuing success of the arts is the decline in arts education in the schools. For earlier generations, exposure to art and music was more deeply integrated in the American classroom. Research shows us that early exposure to arts experiences is essential for developing a lifelong interest in participating in the arts.”

**How was it addressed or overcome?**

Moore: “Though we have seen some waves of decline (in ticket sales), our season ticket holders have stayed tried and true to our programming, and our focus on providing flexibility in ticket purchasing and exchanges helps immensely.”

Rodgers: “As a result of the decline in opportunities provided by the schools, Actors Theatre and other arts organizations have established programs to take experiences with our art form into the schools.

**The theatre’s formula for continued success?**

“Louisville has a history of embracing new works of art in many forms,” says Rodgers. “I think one of the secrets to Actors Theatre’s success is the ongoing conversation with our audience members about the value of engaging with new work and the important role Louisvillians play in the development of new plays.”

**Challenges for the future?**

Continued concern about the sustainability of the subscription model; continued investment in new play development; arts support in general.
The Alley got its start when Nina Vance sent out 214 penny postcards with the message “It’s beginning! Do you want to see a new theater for Houston?” More than 100 people responded to that $2.14 investment by attending a meeting and paying a dime to become a voting member of the new theater. They named it The Alley because one had to go through an alley to get to that first meeting.

One of the nation’s three oldest resident professional companies, the Alley has emerged as a leading regional theatre serving the nation’s fourth largest city with a mission to “produce great theatre that embodies the resident company.” Artistic Director Gregory Boyd exemplifies the Alley’s longevity and community engagement after more than 25 seasons at the Alley’s helm – and he notes that other artists in the company have been there as long as he has.

Edward Albee had a long and close collaboration with the Alley that included some of his plays’ American premieres. Other premieres have included works by Eve Ensler, Horton Foote, Ken Ludwig, Keith Reddin, Frank Wildhorn and Tennessee Williams, and heralded collaborations with Vanessa and Corin Redgrave and Robert Wilson. Boyd says “the highest interest for us is to develop new work and new ways to work.”

After decades of presenting world premieres and nurturing new works for the stage, the Alley recently began a major new initiative, “Alley All New,” as a year-round source for new play presentation, development, workshops and readings. In addition to premiering full productions of new works, Alley All New includes readings and workshops that are free and open to the public. The first annual Alley All New Festival was presented in February 2016. New in 2018 will be a Latino Theatre Festival. These initiatives are designed to broaden the established theatre’s appeal to a less establishment audience and to reach out to Houston’s large and diverse community by bridging the gap between its traditional audience and emerging audiences who are finding new ways of engaging with the theatre. In that way, the Alley seeks to educate its base of support along with what will become its future.

In October 2015, the Alley completed the first major renovation of its distinctive Brutalist-style theatre
space since its opening in 1968. The $46.5-million project included a stage expansion that put 62 percent of the audience in the first 11 rows and alterations to wing space and loft space that made it possible for the Alley to present larger shows and more musicals.  

Biggest challenge the Alley Theatre has faced?

“There were major challenges with our renovation,” says Managing Director Dean Gladden. “We had to raise twice as much money as the previous Alley Theatre capital campaign in 2005. Renovating a historic building, which was primarily made of concrete and steel, in 12 months was a herculean task. Finding a location off-site to perform the entire season and convince our audience to follow us was challenging. You uncover many hidden surprises in a renovation: the challenges of the calendar, finishing the project in just 14 months; moving our operations out for a year and then moving back in time to produce a season; and most importantly, finishing on time and on budget.”

How was it addressed or overcome?

“Preplanning every detail and allowing for all types of contingencies,” Gladden says. “Our planning process took several years working with architects, engineers and staff... Every detail was planned and executed so that the project finished on budget.”

The theatre’s formula for continued success?

“The commitment of the artists, of the staff and trustees – and of the audience, of course,” says Boyd. “The theatre’s identity is built around the idea of company... a resident theatre company: namely, the artists live in the city for whom they perform. And many of the other artists with whom we work have a long relationship with the actors and with the audience. At the same time, we open ourselves to welcome artists new to the theatre with every production. And the renovation also lets us invite other artist-based companies that inspire us (KneeHigh, the National Theatre of Scotland, e.g.) to come for extended periods.”

Challenges for the future?

“The embrace of an increased commitment to new work, and to profoundly widen and broaden the audience that the company creates and performs for,” Boyd says. “The renewed theatre spaces here have let us open ourselves to the real question: What is the heart of the theatre experience? What is the relationship between the actor and the audience? Why make theatre? There is no point in going into a theatre building or theatre space to experience something you can get outside it.”

Edward Journey is an associate professor of performance at Alabama A&M University. He previously was a director, administrator and educator at regional theatres, including a stint as education director and managing director at New Stage Theatre in 1998-1999. He is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
Resident Summer Theatre

Peninsula Players Theatre
Fish Creek, WI
Recognized as: Oldest professional resident summer theatre in U.S.
Founded: 1935
Theatre: Proscenium (621 seats)
Annual Audience: 38,000
Annual Budget: $1.7 million
Website: www.peninsulaplayers.com
Answers Provided By: Brian Kelsey, Managing Director

Biggest challenge your theatre has faced?
The biggest challenge we faced was the deteriorating infrastructure on our property. Some buildings dated to the 1920s, when our property was a boys’ summer camp.

How was it addressed or overcome?
Over the years, new housing was built to accommodate our acting company, ultimately providing 19 studio-style units that met union requirements. The theatre, scene shop and canteen were deemed no longer adequate in the early 2000s. At the end of the 2005 season, after raising an adequate amount of funds to begin the project, the old theatre and scene shop were razed, making way for a $7.2-million theatre and production facility. We opened our 2006 season in the new space, which changed our available seating from 470 seats to 621. The new theatre and the technology required to operate the facility enabled the theatre to produce larger-scale productions while giving our patrons and acting company a more comfortable and safe environment to work and experience our productions.

The theatre’s formula for continued success?
The secret to our success is threefold.
1. We run lean and mean. We employ only four full-time employees and hire our full company each season based on our production and administrative requirements. We also challenge ourselves to write a balanced operating budget prior to adding our development costs and income. This way we do not rely as heavily upon unearned income as many other companies.
2. We treat our staff as a family. We bond together and work to create the best art we can, all whilst giving people the freedom to explore and express themselves in a safe environment. We also are not afraid to take risks and produce world premieres regularly.
3. We have a community, patrons, donors, volunteers and board members who solidly believe in us, applaud the risks we take and give freely of both their fiscal and nonfiscal gift-giving abilities.

Dinner Theatre

The Barn Dinner Theatre
Greensboro, NC
Recognized as: Longest-running dinner theatre in U.S.
Founded: 1963
Theatre: In the round (254 seats)
Annual Audience: 40,000
Annual Budget: N/A
Website: www.barndinner.com
Answers Provided By: Nate Alston, Playwright and Marketing Director

Biggest challenge your theatre has faced?
Being a for-profit theatre, we face challenges of the ever-changing economy and appealing to a broader, more diversified audience.

How was it addressed or overcome?
1. Broader demographic: Our main focus has been to create a more diversified season that would appeal to a broader audience. One step that we took was to introduce more African American-based shows to our regular season. The new addition was a big success. A huge buzz of African American patrons began filling up our mailing list. It was so amazing to see the immediate response to live theatre. We now add at least one or two African American-based shows each year, one being our yearly holiday performance of *Black Nativity*. This has not only opened us up to a broader audience, but has also driven sales through our entire season.
2. Better variety of shows: We’ve also shortened our run times for our mainstage shows and added “one night only” special concerts. This has allowed us to add more shows and more variety for our patrons. Today, our average run time is 4 to 6 weeks. Some of our more popular shows run 8 or more weeks. For our holiday season, we run two contrasting shows, one religious and the other a holiday comedy or revue.

The theatre’s formula for continued success?
We start small with what we do best, “dinnertainment.” We focus on great customer service and making sure that every guest is taken care of from beginning to end. We trade with many local businesses in order to help spread the word about our theatre. We are a destination stop for many bus tour companies. We are longtime members of the North Carolina and Virginia Motorcoach Associations and attend all of the conventions each year. We get tours from Georgia, Florida, New York, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina and many other states. This not only introduces people from other areas and states to our theatre, but it also introduces them to our wonderful city and area businesses.
**Children's Theatre**

Nashville Children's Theatre
Nashville, TN

Recognized as: Oldest professional children's theatre in U.S.
Founded: 1931
Theatre: Proscenium (535 seats)
Annual Audience: 80,000-plus
Annual Budget: $1.5 million
Website: www.NashvilleCT.org
Answers Provided by: Bennett Tarleton, Development Consultant, and Dan Brewer, Company Stage Manager

**Biggest challenge your theatre has faced?**

The sudden death of Nashville Children’s Theatre’s artistic leader and visionary for more than 30 years, Scot Copeland, in late February 2016, coupled with the planned departure of Kathryn Colegrove, managing director, a week earlier gave NCT an experience that few organizations, if any, ever face. Beyond the stunning immediate and ongoing grief, necessary actions had to be taken immediately – including opening the fourth production of the season one day after his death.

**How was it addressed or overcome?**

Although the emotional impact of losing its top two leaders was enormous, NCT’s staff and board leaders immediately acted to ensure that NCT would move forward as seamlessly as possible. The board promoted the company stage manager, Dan Brewer, who has been with NCT for 32 seasons, to acting artistic director and contracted an interim managing director (Bennett Tarleton, a retired arts administrator/fundraiser). Along with Director of Education Alicia Fuss, they became NCT’s key leadership team. Brewer and Fuss immediately secured an appropriate guest director for the only show remaining in the season which Copeland was to direct. The bumps in the road were not seen or felt by NCT’s family of students, parents, grandparents, educators, families, subscribers, attendees and participants, although big actions (shifting staff responsibilities, interim hires, launching the search for a new artistic director) were underway from the day after Scot’s death. (We honored Scot with a great “celebration of life” event and named his favorite NCT space the Scot Copeland Rehearsal Hall. A new artistic director, Ernie Nolan, was hired in 2017.)

**Theatre’s formula for continued success?**

NCT guards against mission drift. Every major step – moving from all-volunteer to Equity, lobbying for a city-owned building, undertaking a capital campaign, inclusion of new plays and some “edgy” choices, significant growth of the education program – has happened after careful consideration of what would best serve the young people of Middle Tennessee.

---

**Broadway Transfer**

Arena Stage
Washington, DC

Founded: 1950
Recognized as: First regional theatre to transfer a production to Broadway
Theatres: Fichandler Stage (680 seats); Kreeger Theater (510 seats); Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle (200 seats)
Annual Audience: 300,000-plus
Annual Budget: $18.9 million
Website: www.arenastage.org
Answers Provided By: Edgar Dobie, Executive Director

**Biggest challenge your theatre has faced?**

First, it’s important to note that the people who founded the theatre are not the current ones running the theatre, so this is a tricky question to address. The organization has faced many huge challenges. Our artistic founder, Zelda Fichandler, recently passed away and we looked back at her career and contribution to our field through her many speeches. I would say the biggest struggle remains the same: the delicate balance between capacity and ambition. You ask for a specific example, so I will provide one, but add that any continuing organization will never meet their “biggest” challenge and overcome it; any operating organization will meet multiple challenges, overcome them, and then meet more. A very huge challenge faced by Arena Stage in the last 20 years was dealing with our building, our physical space. As appropriate as it is to focus the majority of the organization’s resources to supporting the work, choosing to leave critical facility repairs as a low priority takes a toll. Artistic Director Molly Smith and Arena’s Board of Trustees chose a bold design and embarked on a bold campaign to turn the building into the Mead Center for American Theater. The deliberation and design process took several years, and the fundraising campaign took time to ramp up. After construction began, the bottom fell out of our country’s economic system. Investment returns were negative and philanthropists stopped giving.

**How was it addressed or overcome?**

We dug in deeper. It was less that there was one incident or one action that made it possible, but rather finding the fortitude, as a group and an organization, to persevere. Happily, our new Mead Center honors our founders’ original vision and positions us to serve effectively as the finely tuned instrument of civilization our community relies on us to be. So, clearly there is no one thing you can rely on. It’s a fool’s errand to look for a silver bullet.

**Theatre’s formula for continued success?**

Have enduring founding principles. Be a place for everyone. Be resident, and understand what that means in your community.
CHANGEMAKERS
10 Theatres Under 30 with World-Changing Missions

by Stefanie Maiya Lehmann
Southern Theatre magazine reached out to 10 theatre companies with missions designed to bring positive change in some area of society to learn more about the work they do. Founded in the last 30 years, these 10 companies have dedicated themselves, in very different ways, to changing the world around them through the power of theatre. Five share information in profiles, followed by quick views of five additional theatres.

SERENBE PLAYHOUSE
Impact Area: Community Connectedness and Environmental Sustainability
Founder and Executive/Artistic Director: Brian Clowdus
Location: Chattahoochee Hills, GA
Founded: 2009
Website: www.serenbeplayhouse.com

WORLD-CHANGING MISSION: Serenbe Playhouse aims to actively break down the walls between audience and actor by producing bold new works and reinvented classics that connect art, nature and community. We try to create unique experiences that no one else is doing. We look for titles that are unusual choices for outdoor site-specific activity, while allowing the opportunity to stage a show as it is really meant to be. For example, last year, when Serenbe Playhouse decided to stage the musical Carousel, we set the production within a fully functioning carnival, complete with fair games, Ferris wheel, and, yes, a carousel. By producing these kinds of immersive pre-show and intermission experiences, our large, diverse audiences are launched into conversation, and we believe that conversation is the first step of creating community. Additionally, in partnership with the Serenbe community plan, we are pioneering green theatre practices, aiming to set precedents on how to successfully stage plays while committing to social responsibility and environmental stewardship.

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE THROUGH THEATRE: We do not try to be too political. For us, now is not a time to divide our communities; we need to get them in the same room together to talk. For Serenbe Playhouse, this partly hinges on the production’s unconventional experience, an experience accessible to all, especially new audiences or non-theatregoers. Because Serenbe is a proud green community and all of Serenbe Playhouse’s productions are performed outdoors, part of the theatre’s environmental embrace was born out of necessity.
However, we quickly discovered that it is actually not difficult to be a green theatre. Far too many theatres build huge sets that ultimately end up in a dumpster. We consciously select shows that can be designed responsibly, minimizing production waste. From there, we design sets for disassembly and reassembly, repurposing existing structures, utilizing reclaimed and recycled construction materials, and utilizing natural light whenever possible.

**GREATEST SUCCESS TO DATE:** When we chose to produce *Miss Saigon* in 2016, I knew we had to find a way to get a real helicopter to land for the final scenes of the musical. It was so important to feel what it felt like to be one of the Vietnamese left behind by the helicopter. Watching audiences experience that every night was incredible. Additionally, the company reached out to local Vietnam veterans to fly the aircraft, which was a huge success, as seen by the national press coverage we received.

---

**Inmates Naszli Tagoai (front), David Rodriguez (sitting at right) and Edgar Aquirre (arms in air) perform a scene from Redemption in Our State of Blues, written and performed by the drama class from the B-yard at the California State Prison in Lancaster.**

The production, created by the inmates through the Strindberg Laboratory program, includes 11 original scenes with raps, songs and poems. The stories ask the questions: “Are there second chances?” and “How do you grasp them in time with life’s challenges?”

---

**Inmates Dee Mitchell (holding photo) and Jimmy McMillan (in white shirt) perform a scene from Redemption in Our State of Blues about Mitchell’s loss of his family as a result of his arrest.**

---

**STRINDBERG LABORATORY**

**Impact Area:** Prisoner Rehabilitation

**Artistic Director:** Meri Pakarinen

**Location:** Los Angeles, CA

**Founded:** 2013

**Website:** www.strindberglaboratory.com

**WORLD-CHANGING MISSION:** We believe that art is the great equalizer, so our mission is to create high-quality and original theatre with communities that have been marginalized to help give power to voices that are often unheard.

**HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE THROUGH THEATRE:** Theatre is one of the most effective and important ways to bring people together. We live in a divided world, so this building of communities and sharing stories and experiences is a powerful tool to help build bridges to heal the divides that exist. One example of this happening with our work was when we brought our first production, *Hustlin* – which was done in connection with the rehabilitation program Volunteers of America, located in Skid Row – to Burbank, which is predominantly upper-middle class. The show impacted not only the people that performed it – who perhaps never had the opportunity to have their voices truly heard – but also the audiences that entered into the play’s realities, which were foreign and, for some, controversial. But through the power of theatre, both the performers and the audiences had a shared experience that created empathy, love and unity.

**GREATEST SUCCESS TO DATE:** Doing good theatre under very difficult circumstances is sort of a small miracle every time we do it. We work primarily with prisoners in the Los Angeles County Jail and California state prisons through our Jails to Jobs program, helping them recover emotionally and make a successful transition to life after prison through workshops that include relaxation, group improvisations and scene development, and the development of original productions that are performed inside jails and prisons for other inmates and outside audiences. We now pay some of the
ex-offenders from our program to teach theatre classes to local community organizations. Probably the most exciting thing has been being a part of the program Break It to Make It, which is a collaborative partnership between us, Los Angeles City College and the Los Angeles Mission that gives free higher education, housing and rehabilitation programming to the people that we work with inside corrections facilities. We hope this collaborative model – nonprofits working together in an integrated way to address big societal issues – will be replicated by others.

SEESAW THEATRE
Impact Area: Autism Spectrum
Executive Director: Maddie Napel
Location: Evanston, IL / Chicago Area
Founded: 2012
Website: www.seesawtheatre.org

WORLD-CHANGING MISSION: Seesaw Theatre strives to enrich the lives of individuals living with autism spectrum condition and other developmental differences by increasing their access to theatre and fostering the use of performance as a channel for expression. We work toward this mission by producing high-quality, individualized and multisensory theatre experiences for young people with physical and cognitive disabilities and their families and caretakers. Attending a play – like going to a museum or attending a concert – comes with a set of socially inscribed behavioral expectations. Members of an audience will sit quietly in the dark for two hours or longer, laugh at appropriate times, clap at appropriate times, and leave the theatre after the curtain falls. For most, these expectations are easy to meet, but there are many would-be theatre-goers, both young and old, for whom they are anything but. The institution of theatre, in refusing to bend these conventions to suit the needs of all audiences, excludes many, chief among them young people with physical and cognitive disabilities. These are the young people that Seesaw Theatre serves.

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE THROUGH THEATRE: We do not view our work as therapy. It is art, plain and simple. We’re addressing an inequality using theatre, a medium we love, that by chance happens to be uniquely suited to multisensory presentation. Unlike visual art or music, which live in a single sensory realm, theatre by default lives in at least two, making it a clear choice for audiences with disabilities. Everyone has multiple points of access to a show: If they cannot hear it, they can see it, and vice versa. In a Seesaw Theatre show, we strive to incorporate all six senses (the usual five and the kinesthetic sense, or the sense of one’s body in space).

GREATEST SUCCESS TO DATE: When I’m watching a Seesaw Theatre show, I observe parents and teachers watching their children encounter art that speaks to them, often for the first time. Those are magical moments. I’m also particularly proud any time I get to share my work with my brother, a 26-year-old with cerebral palsy.
Ronnie Graham (front) performs the “To be or not to be” speech from Hamlet during the September 2016 production of And Comes Home Safe..., as Raymond Hubbard comforts him. The speech was the centerpiece of a suicide section in the play. Nancy Smith-Watson notes that “22 vets kill themselves every day, so this is an important part of any consciousness-raising piece about vets.”

Once again, be part of a “band of brothers.” Using Shakespeare gives them a “mask” of character and words that both elicit and hold the biggest anger, grief and pain, without having to tell their own personal stories.

**World-Changing Mission:** Feast of Crispian, Inc. (Shakespeare with Veterans) is a therapeutic intervention for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the range of challenges that brings – depression, substance abuse, disassociation and difficulty reconnecting with family and community. Using simple acting exercises and scenes from Shakespeare, we give these men and women a way to express their emotions, experiment with feelings, and, once again, be part of a “band of brothers.”

**How We Are Making a Difference Through Theatre:** For traumatized veterans who may have shut down their own feelings to stop the pain, theatre is a safe way to begin to let feelings in again and to explore what to do with those feelings once they are there. Theatre asks them to bring all of themselves – body, voice, mind and feelings – and it is an ensemble art that surrounds them with both camaraderie and support. For our mission, we see theatre as a way for veterans to find their way back to reconnection: with family, community, work and self. We also hope to inspire and educate the civilian population to reconnect with our veterans who have, in our names, been asked to do our dirtiest work. Theatre, in our bias, is our greatest hope in helping us understand those that we see as separate from ourselves.

**Greatest Success to Date:** Our full productions for civilian outreach have been enormously successful, helping hundreds of civilians begin an open dialogue with our veterans. Our most recent one, and our first original piece, And Comes Safe Home..., was moving, engaging, shocking, funny and heartfelt, as it tracked the challenges of returning warriors from Shakespeare to present day. But I must say that we are most proud of the individual veteran participants that we have watched transform their lives. To hear them tell us that they are working again, they are finally making their therapy work or going back to school or talking to estranged family is the greatest joy. We are proud and grateful when family members tell us how different their veteran loved one is. It is a great pleasure and honor to serve those who served us so faithfully. They served their country and now they are finally home.

**Veterans recount combat experiences in a scene from And Comes Home Safe... The idea behind the play, which mixed true and original content with relevant Shakespeare scenes and original songs, was to present the challenges of trying to find “home” after being a warrior.**
CREATING THEATRE ARTISTS

award-winning students
senior acting events in NYC & LA
nationally recognized guest artists
renowned professional directors
professional faculty with extensive Broadway credentials

BFA, THEATRE
performance
scenic design
costume design
lighting design
stage management

BA, THEATRE

MFA, PEDAGOGY
over 125 alumni currently teaching in higher education

MFA, SCENIC DESIGN
MFA, COSTUME DESIGN
unique professional working opportunities

For more information: email theatre@vcu.edu or call (804)-828-1514
922 Park Ave., Richmond, Va 23284-2524

theatreVCU
arts.vcu.edu/theatre

vcuarts
WORLD-CHANGING MISSION: Only Make Believe creates and performs interactive theatre for kids, taking our shows into hospitals and care facilities in the New York metro and Washington, DC, areas. Our program is a six-week series of performances that introduces children living with chronic illnesses and disabilities to live theatre. The children become the stars of the show, as every one of our performances is designed to include the audience in the storytelling process. The shows, with the power of “make believe,” fill the hospital playrooms with song, dance, movement and laughter, inspiring joy and happiness.

HOW WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH THEATRE: At Only Make Believe, we take theatre to those who ordinarily can’t make it to the theatre. Only Make Believe performs with children living with chronic physical and psychological illnesses and disabilities. These kids and their families experience a great deal of stress in their daily lives, and what our program aims to do is bring high-quality, interactive theatre as entertainment to these children. While participating in our show, a sick child can take an active role in creating a world of fantasy and fun that transcends the boundaries of hospital walls. The combination of theatre with the power of the child’s imagination enables them to see a world of possibilities rather than disabilities. Our shows also offer respite and social support for the patients, their families and hospital staff by allowing them to gather together for a purpose unrelated to medical issues. The parents enjoy seeing their children in a different light, often joining them in the fun.

GREATEST SUCCESS TO DATE: Every show we do is a success, because every Only Make Believe show puts a smile on a child’s face and that is quite simply the most rewarding part. Although the true purpose of our shows is to provide entertainment for the children, we’ve also been fortunate to witness wonderful medical breakthroughs, such as seeing a selectively mute child speak for the first time during an Only Make Believe show. What am I most proud of? Without a doubt, our actors. They are a talented group of people who are equally compassionate, empathetic and imaginative. They know how to engage with the children and allow them to shine and let them become the real stars of the show.
UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA
Theatre Company

2016 2017 SEASON

DARING, DYNAMIC, DEFIANT: your world is our stage.

PLA Y WEST.

College of Arts and Humanities
School of the Arts

NAST Accredited
Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theatre

FOR MORE INFORMATION
678-839-4700 or theatre@westga.edu
westga.edu/~theatre

• Access to professional theatre artists
• Access to industry standard software in theatrical sound, lighting, costume, and scenic design
• Performance and design opportunities starting in freshman year
• Design lab, lighting lab, sound recording studio, large scene shop, and new costume shop
• Internship programs (local, national, international)
• Practical experience in all facets of theatrical production
• Student scripts from playwriting course are produced in regular season
• Student-directed and designed theatre productions
• Conference participation and travel opportunities
• Strong alumni contacts
About Face Theatre
Impact Area: LGBTQ Adults and Youth
Artistic Director: Andrew Volkoff
Location: Chicago, IL
Founded: 1995
Website: aboutfacetheatre.com

About Face Theatre creates exceptional, innovative and adventurous plays to advance the national dialogue on gender and sexual identity and to challenge and entertain audiences in Chicago, across the country and around the world. Working within and beyond the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, About Face Theatre is committed to innovation, artistic excellence and community transformation. Through our projects, we strive to challenge our artists’ and audience’s intellects, imaginations, self-conceptions, moral expectations, and ideas about gender and sexuality in contemporary and historical contexts. About Face has two programming arms: its award-winning Mainstage productions and its nationally recognized education programs, including the About Face Youth Theatre and educational outreach tours that collectively reach approximately 5,000 Illinois students and teachers each year.

The Apothetae
Impact Area: Disabilities
Founder and Artistic Director: Gregg Mozgala
Location: Brooklyn, NY
Founded: 2012
Website: www.theapothetae.org

The Apothetae’s goal is to serve as an incubator for new works about disability in the hope that an entirely new canon of plays will be created. Disabled people have existed since the dawn of time, yet that history is largely unknown. Through the collaborative experience of the artistic process, the “disabled experience” can be more sincerely and accurately reflected on stage, new communities can be forged, perceptions changed and barriers to understanding and empathy can be shattered. The Apothetae commissions playwrights, provides fellowships, has had residency at the Kennedy Center and Shakespeare Society, co-produces new productions and workshops, and in 2015, collaborated with The Lark to host the first-ever national convention to discuss the issues at the nexus of disability and theatre.

Girl Be Heard
Impact Area: Young Women and Girls
Founder and Artistic Director: Jessica Greer Morris
Location: Brooklyn, NY
Founded: 2008
Website: girlbeheard.org

Girl Be Heard develops, amplifies and celebrates the voices of young women through socially conscious theatre-making. If a girl can change her own life, she can change the lives of girls everywhere. We envision a world in which every girl is valued and encouraged to be a leader and changemaker. Building self-esteem, growing individual talents (step dancing, singing, rapping and acting), and empowering girls to become leaders in and advocates for their communities is Girl Be Heard’s unique model and why Girl Be Heard has been so successful. What began in 2008 with 12 girls is now a theatre company of 170 girls and a global movement that has engaged audiences at the White House, United Nations, State Department, TED conferences, and in underserved communities locally and globally. The company provides after-school programs, school assembly performances, international cross-cultural exchange programs and teacher training, and has created six original shows.

Deaf West Theatre
Impact Area: Deaf and Hearing
Artistic Director: DJ Kurs
Location: North Hollywood, CA
Founded: 1991
Website: www.deafwest.org

Deaf West Theatre bridges the deaf and hearing worlds through theatre. The mainstage productions consist of adaptations and original works produced by experienced and professional deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing actors, directors, designers and technicians. Deaf West Theatre was the first resident
theatre company in the U.S. to be founded by and under the direction of a deaf artistic director, Ed Waterstreet, who stepped down in 2012. Now under the artistic direction of DJ Kurs, who also is deaf, Deaf West has produced and co-produced shows at various theatres that have won more than 80 theatre awards and continue to serve as a model for deaf theatre worldwide. Our successful Broadway productions of *Big River* (2003) and *Spring Awakening* (2015) created a large footprint that brought our community and language to new audiences, so much so that, in 2015, Deaf West Theatre reached 100,000 people.

**GOLDEN THREAD PRODUCTIONS**

**Impact Area:** Middle Eastern Understanding

Executive Artistic Director: Torange Yeghiazarian
Location: San Francisco, CA
Founded: 1996
Website: www.goldenthread.org

Golden Thread Productions, founded in 1996, is the first American theatre company focused on the Middle East. We produce passionate and provocative plays from and about the Middle East that celebrate the multiplicity of its perspectives and identities. We believe that immersing yourself in someone else’s experience is the best way to appreciate their point of view. Therefore, every play serves as an invitation to discover unexpected connections and engage in deeply moving conversations that last well beyond the life of the play. Our programs expose non-Middle Eastern audiences to the authentic voices and alternative perspectives of the region, while serving Middle Eastern audiences who rarely encounter meaningful reflections of their own culture in the performing arts. In our vast imagination, the Middle East is defined not by geographical boundaries and political separations, but as the shared experience of the people who throughout history have been touched by its stories and culture.

Stefanie Maiya Lehmann is assistant business manager for production at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. She is a member of the *Southern Theatre* Editorial Board.

**CELEBRATING 88 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN ACTOR TRAINING**

“Be who you are made to be…”
- Sanford Meisner

**VISIT US AND LAUNCH YOUR CAREER TODAY.**

APPLY NOW at NEIGHBORHOODPLAYHOUSE.ORG or Call 212–688–3770

“The most respected acting school in the country and first among all professional training programs.”
- The Cambridge Guide to Theatre
THE PLACE WHERE RIGOROUS ACTOR TRAINING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MEET.

SUMMER CONSERVATORY
APPLICATION DEADLINE: MARCH 15th
10 Weeks, June 5 – August 11, 2017
The Nation's Most Popular Summer Training Program for the Serious Actor

SUMMER INTENSIVES
THE MOST DIVERSE COLLECTION OF SUMMER TRAINING OPTIONS
Shakespeare Intensive
Chékhov Intensive
Physical Theatre Intensive
Self-Generated Theatre Intensive
Film & Television Acting Intensive
Teen Summer Conservatory

MUSICAL THEATRE INTENSIVE
5 Weeks, June 5 – July 7, 2017
Rigorous musical theatre training anchored in the core beliefs of the Stella Adler Studio

The Stella Adler Studio of Acting/Art of Acting Studio is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization and is accredited with the National Association of Schools of Theatre.
This issue’s column focuses on newly licensable plays and musicals that touch on the political life of the United States. Whether the central characters are political leaders themselves or regular citizens whose struggles connect with the nation’s bigger challenges, these pieces have the potential to show us who we can be as our civic life enters its next chapter. To develop the following suggested titles for your upcoming season, we surveyed major play publishers’ offerings during the past six months. With each play, you’ll find the cast breakdown and a referral to the publisher who holds the rights.

**Plays About U.S. Political Life**

by Megan Monaghan Rivas

Ann, by Holland Taylor, Emmy Award-winning actress

Ann Richards, the late governor of Texas, springs back to stage life in this tour-de-force one-woman show. A leading woman in every sense of the word, Governor Richards possessed a rock-solid set of progressive principles and a twinkling quip for every occasion.

**Cast breakdown:** 1 female

**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
www.dramatists.com

Hillary and Clinton, by Lucas Hnath, Obie Award-winning playwright

In a parallel universe, it’s 2008 and a woman named Hillary Clinton is running for President of the United States. To win the race, she needs more funds, so she calls in the cavalry: her wheeler-dealer husband. But his help could be more than she is prepared for... If this sounds familiar, remember, it’s an alternate universe where the outcomes are far from given.

**Cast breakdown:** 1 female; 3 males

**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
www.dramatists.com

The Walk Across America for Mother Earth, by Taylor Mac, winner of a Herb Alpert Award, with music by Ellen Maddow, winner of an Obie Award

Two idealistic teenagers join a motley collection of scrappy activists in a protest walk from Nevada to Washington, DC. They soon find out that utopia isn’t easy, as the problems of the “real America” they left behind quickly catch up to challenge the walkers. Through the playfully inventive methods of *commedia dell’arte* and the chance to sing and “dance it out,” the characters discover new connections and a new way to be a community.

**Cast breakdown:** 4 females; 6 males; 2 either

**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.  
www.playscripts.com

Hungry, by Richard Nelson, Tony Award winner for Best Book of a Musical

The truth always gets told in the kitchen. In this, the first of Nelson’s *The Gabriels: Election Year in the Life of One Family*, the minute details of preparing a meal take on epic scope. Over cutting boards and mixing bowls, the family gradually exposes the wounds created by loss and the plausible terror of being left behind in the wake of so-called “progress.”

**Cast breakdown:** 3 females; 3 males

**Publisher:** Broadway Play Publishing, Inc.  
www.broadwayplaypub.com

The Return to Morality, by Jamie Pachino, winner of the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award

A fast and funny satire that skewers the irrepressible nature of ideas and the squirming panic they can induce in their creators. College professor Arthur Kellogg’s new book, intended as fiction, is received as fact – and enthusiastically embraced by those on the opposite end of the political spectrum, making Kellogg the face of a movement with which he disagrees deeply. When he is called to the podium to give the keynote address at the Republican National Convention, what will he say?

**Cast breakdown:** 3 females; 3 males

**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.  
www.playscripts.com

Send Us Your Suggestions

Each “Hot off the Press” column focuses on a particular theme. Do you have suggestions for a future column? Email your theme idea to deanna@setc.org, with “Hot off the Press” as the subject line.

Megan Monaghan Rivas is an associate professor of dramaturgy in the School of Drama at Carnegie Mellon University. Recipient of the Elliott Hayes Prize in Dramaturgy, she served as literary manager of South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa, CA; the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta; and Frontera @ Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, TX. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

Spring 2017 | Southern Theatre | 29
There’s a reason they call it the great outdoors. The natural world is our home as a species. We belong there, feeling the breeze, the warmth of the sun and the contrast of cool shade, hearing the rustle of leaves overhead or the rhythmic whir of waves lapping a shore. And many forms of theatre performance originated there: tragedy under the bright Athenian sun, kabuki in a dry riverbed, the premieres of many of William Shakespeare’s greatest works under the majestic roof, fretted with golden fire.

But here in the 21st century, many of us pursue most of our theatrical work indoors. The same was true of me until last summer when, for the first time in nearly 20 years, I worked on a production outdoors, co-directing a contemporary translation/adaptation of *Peribañez* by the Spanish Golden Age playwright Lope de Vega (a contemporary of Shakespeare, whose work was always seen by daylight in his own time).

Taking a theatrical endeavor outdoors creates incredible opportunities to enhance the audience’s experience with the ambient aesthetics of the outside world. But it also requires additional forethought and planning by the artists and artisans who put up the show. If your outdoor work is performed at an existing venue – from one of the Southeast’s many outdoor theatres to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s grand Allen Elizabethan Theatre – then the nitty-gritty details are pretty much taken care of for you. But if you are in a position similar to mine, where the space will be built for this one production and disappear after it closes, then guidance from someone who has “been there, done that” may be helpful.

Some of what you read here will draw on successful elements of my production last summer; other parts will warn you about the potholes we didn’t see, fell into, and had to climb out of in order to continue on our way.

### Start with the Space

*Peribañez* transformed a formal garden in Pittsburgh’s Mellon Park into a theatre for eight weeks or so. We got to – we had to – think about space in ways indoor shows don’t require. We had to consider where to place the audience vis-à-vis the angle of the sun, which would still be up when performances began at 8 p.m. on an early August evening. We had to consider where we could place the
box office and front-of-house staff and their tables and boxes of goods. How close to the stage was too close? How far away was too far away? Since this element of the production had to be set up and broken down for every performance, we also had to think about making that as easy as possible.

We rehearsed in our space from day one. Therefore, we had to consider both security, knowing the venue couldn’t be “closed” when we weren’t there, and marketing and outreach, since every curious onlooker is a potential future ticket buyer. We quickly developed a “company line” about the production that any actor, stage manager, artist or artisan could reel off to an interested bystander. But we still had to work out where and how we could lock up the power tools we were using to build the set, knowing they would disappear overnight if not properly stowed away. Speaking of power tools, you also have to think about where you’re going to get power and how much. Our producer negotiated access to the park’s electrical system to get us the power that also ran our lights during performances.

**Pay Special Attention to Sound and Lighting**

Production design, already a fascinating objective when working inside four walls, becomes exponentially more interesting when working with no walls at all. Our design meetings started with the knowledge that there would be no sound system and our cast would not be wearing microphones. The actors would be responsible for generating all the sound in the play, from making their lines audible in the open air to playing and singing music. Our scenic design could have helped in this endeavor by setting up a few solid walls for the actors’ voices to bounce off of. But remember those potholes? This was one of them – our set had not a single solid wall. In early rehearsals, the actors worked hard to discover the best ways to communicate so their voices would carry through the open air. Thanks to their work and a truly outstanding voice coach, the audiences heard every word.

Ambient sound and light are inescapable when you’re working outside. Our lighting designer capitalized on this, starting the play in the golden light of sunset and subtly sneaking in more and more of his design as dusk deepened to full darkness. Still, his design had to account for the fact that one performance might take advantage of a clear, beautiful summer evening, while the next might start under clouds and continue in a light rain. (Stage lights look beautiful through misty rain, by the way.) Since Peribañez ran for a month, the light cues would also happen under much darker conditions much earlier in the show during the final week than they had during opening week. To address this, we fudged the real start time of the performance. During the first week we started near 8:15, and by the final week we were starting on the dot at 8 p.m.

The ambient sound could not be addressed quite so neatly. We heard everything, and I do mean everything, during performances of Peribañez: sirens, Harleys roaring by, helicopters circling endlessly overhead, and the best – fireworks celebrating a home run or a team win by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

One evening, a thundershower threatened early in the performance, punctuating actors’ speeches with eerily accurate peals and lightning. I have seen other outdoor productions create jokes their actors could use to hold a moment due to ambient noise; most memorably, a Henry IV plagued by frequent loud air traffic overhead. When they hit a moment when the planes and helicopters were overwhelmingly loud, that cast would point to the sky and exclaim, “It’s the French!” The audience would laugh and, after a moment to let the noise clear, the show would move on. We did not use that tactic, but the Peribañez cast was empowered to suspend a moment if proceeding would mean they couldn’t be heard and the information would be lost to the audience.

**Take the Audience’s Perspective**

Producing work outdoors requires you to think about every moment of a patron’s experience, including where they will park, how they will get into and out of the performance venue, and how to keep the audience comfortable in a place that has no running water. I’ve never thought about porta-potties in connection with a show before, but considering that angle of hospitality was absolutely vital to the show’s success. And knowing we wouldn’t have water where we wanted it, we also had to think about the fact that we wouldn’t have it where we didn’t want it. The first chairs we had for the audience were lovely and comfortable – thanks to their foam seats. Foam seats that would absorb every raindrop within a five-mile radius. Foam seats that, once wet, would take several decades to dry. Foam seats that would grow mildew at the drop of a… well, you get it. These were not the seats we were looking for. A different set of chairs, more impervious to the elements, formed the first part of the solution. A remarkably well-designed...
set of tarps and clamps formed the second part. The production team could whip those tarps into place in less than three minutes at the onset of rain, protecting the chairs the audience would later use.

Thinking about audiences and rain, we also had to consider what would happen if a performance was rained out. Would patrons receive a refund? Would they have a chance to see a different performance? How could they be accommodated if the run sold out? Taking a cue from the Pirates, we were prepared to take a “rain delay” – throw the tarps over the chairs and hold if it looked like the showers would blow over. But that left us with the problem that would arise if a performance had to be canceled completely. Our answer was to publish a performance schedule to the public that announced shows Wednesdays through Sundays. The cast and production team, however, were contracted for Tuesdays through Sundays. This let the company reschedule rained-out performances for the following Tuesday, ensuring that seats would be available for all patrons who had bought tickets. (This system, while great, could not account for what actually happened: Our closing night performance was rained out. You win some, you lose some.)

Consider the Needs of Cast and Crew

Taking care of the cast and crew was at least as important as taking care of the audience. Since we rehearsed outdoors in the heart of the summer, we provided ice water, sunscreen and bug spray for all company members to use. Our stage manager constantly reminded everyone to wear hats in rehearsal since our stage was in full sun during the afternoon. Why not rehearse at night, when it was cooler? We had no lights until the week before we opened; sunlight was our only light.

Rehearsal scheduling required more consideration as the weather grew hotter. Working outdoors takes more energy than rehearsing the same scene indoors, so we scheduled shorter rehearsal days. The stage manager and crew had extra work setting up for rehearsal and putting everything away in lockable storage afterward, so the shorter rehearsal day also helped take care of that important part of our production community.

When you produce outdoors, it’s extremely important to communicate during the casting process whether you’ll be rehearsing outdoors – or just performing outdoors. Some actors will opt out

---

When you produce outdoors, it’s extremely important to communicate during the casting process whether you’ll be rehearsing outdoors – or just performing outdoors.

---

Theatre & Dance within the Liberal Arts

Highly Competitive ◆ Academically Rigorous ◆ Nationally Ranked

10 Reasons to study Theatre & Dance at Wake Forest!
1. Small, individualized classes, integrated with production and performance
2. Beginning to advanced study in all aspects of theatre
3. Opportunities to double major/minor
4. 4 major productions and 2 dance concerts yearly
5. Two well-equipped spaces: proscenium and thrust
6. Faculty and student directed productions; multiple student producing groups
7. Talent-based scholarships for performance and production
8. Both merit and need based financial aid
9. Funding opportunities for student projects, summer study and travel
10. Over 400 approved study abroad programs in 70 countries

For information contact:
Department of Theatre and Dance
P.O. Box 7264, Reynolda Station
Winston-Salem, NC 27109
336-758-5294 ◆ theatre@wfu.edu
college.wfu.edu/theatre
Acting isn’t about pretending to be someone else. It’s about finding the parts of your self that reflect what’s in others. NYCDA trains the world’s most dedicated, aspiring actors in the craft as well as the business of acting for both stage and screen.

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR SUMMER & FALL 2017

NYCDA OFFERS THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS:

- Conservatory - AOS Degree in Film and Television Performance
- Summer Acting Programs for Teens and Young Adults
- Professional Workshops with Industry Leaders
- Coming Soon – Conservatory - AOS Degree in Musical Theater Performance

FOR MORE INFO TEXT NYCACTER TO 41411 OR VISIT NYCDA.EDU
on that basis, so this saves you time and difficulty later. But even those who opt in and do their mighty best sometimes are stopped by the challenges outdoor theatre brings. One hot afternoon, an actor felt the beginning symptoms of heat exhaustion. We called rehearsal to an end early that day and looked at rescheduling the rest of that week’s rehearsals into later, cooler hours of the day. This worked well as we moved toward tech, when we needed to work with lighting cues under show conditions. Farewell, midafternoon. Hello, midnight.

Most of our rehearsal process was weather-blessed. It might have been hot and uncomfortably sunny, but we were never rained out of rehearsal. However, looking back, I see one day when we should have been.

A heavy rainstorm broke shortly before our rehearsal was scheduled to begin. The actors, stage manager and crew sloshed in one after the other, with one pair of actors arriving drenched to the skin – they had gotten off their bus just before the worst of the storm. My co-director and I discussed the situation with our stage manager. The two of them thought we could rehearse; I thought we should call the day off. I let myself be overruled, and we commenced a compromised rehearsal. We couldn’t work on our stage because the deck was too wet to be safe. Everyone was uncomfortable and unhappy. We made a little progress, but we paid for it in ill will. The moral of this story is: When you are overmatched by your weather conditions, give in gracefully, and live to rehearse another day.

Think about Passersby and Police

Our Spanish Golden Age drama included considerable violence. We had a rape and three murders to rehearse. Working on those passages outdoors, where every dog walker and picnicking family could see and hear us, formed a specific challenge. We knew – hoped! – that any passerby who thought the violence was serious would call the police without...
a second thought. So how to avoid daily visits from our local precinct? We started by rehearsing the violence very, very slowly and very, very mechanically, just as you would indoors. As the rehearsals progressed toward “show readiness,” we made proactive phone calls to the police explaining what we were doing and that they should feel free to come by if they got a call about us. They never did.

During the final daytime run-throughs, we ensured that there was always a member of the production team on deck to answer questions or concerns from anybody who stopped to watch, and we made sure that person had no other responsibilities. **Take Care of Yourself**

Working outdoors can be incredibly rewarding, but it’s also very demanding.

So, last but definitely not least – **think about yourself.** Take real breaks. Hydrate. Wear comfortable shoes. My bottle of SPF 100 sunscreen was never far from my hand, and my cooler full of water and Gatorade was always empty by the end of the day. You may be the director, the producer or the stage manager, but whatever name tag you’re wearing, you are carrying a lot of responsibility and striving to take care of a lot of other people. Try to take care of yourself, too. And enjoy the great outdoors.

Megan Monaghan Rivas is a freelance director and an associate professor of dramaturgy at Carnegie Mellon University. She is a member of the *Southern Theatre* Editorial Board.

---

**Thanks to our Advertisers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVERTISER</th>
<th>WEBSITE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts People</td>
<td><a href="http://www.arts-people.com">www.arts-people.com</a></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadway Media Distribution</td>
<td><a href="http://bwymedia.com">bwymedia.com</a></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairmont State University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fairmontstate.edu/schooloffinearts/academics/department-communication-and-theatre-arts">www.fairmontstate.edu/schooloffinearts/academics/department-communication-and-theatre-arts</a></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilford Technical Community College</td>
<td><a href="http://theatre.gtcc.edu">theatre.gtcc.edu</a></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InterAmerica Stage, Inc.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.SkyDeckGrid.com">www.SkyDeckGrid.com</a></td>
<td>IFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine State Music Theatre</td>
<td><a href="http://www.msmt.org">www.msmt.org</a></td>
<td>IBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Playhouse</td>
<td><a href="http://neighborhoodplayhouse.org">neighborhoodplayhouse.org</a></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts</td>
<td><a href="http://nycda.edu">nycda.edu</a></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETC</td>
<td><a href="http://theatrejobboard.setc.org">theatrejobboard.setc.org</a></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella Adler Studio of Acting</td>
<td><a href="http://stellaadler.com">stellaadler.com</a></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Mississippi</td>
<td><a href="http://theatre.olemiss.edu">theatre.olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of West Georgia</td>
<td><a href="http://westga.edu/~theatre">westga.edu/~theatre</a></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Commonwealth University</td>
<td><a href="http://arts.vcu.edu/theatre">arts.vcu.edu/theatre</a></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td><a href="http://PerformingArts.vt.edu">PerformingArts.vt.edu</a></td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wake Forest University</td>
<td><a href="http://college.wfu.edu/theatre">college.wfu.edu/theatre</a></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia University</td>
<td><a href="http://theatre.wvu.edu">theatre.wvu.edu</a></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Advertising Info: jean@setc.org; 336-272-3645

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
Richard St. Peter, an assistant professor of theatre at Clemson University, is a professional director and the chair of SETC’s Directing Committee. He is spending the 2016-17 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar in Romania.

**The Art and Practice of Directing for Theatre**
by Paul B. Crook
2017, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group
Companion website: www.routledge.com/cw/crook
Price: $34.95 (paperback); $140 (hardback); $24.47 (e-book)

by Richard St. Peter

Since the first director walked into a rehearsal room approximately 150 years ago, debate has raged in the field as to whether directing can be taught. While there are dozens of books on acting craft, playwriting and design, the world of the director still remains shrouded in Wagner’s notion of “gesamtkunstwerk,” or the total work of art springing from the mind of a singular creative genius. Genius can’t be taught, correct?

I contend no one springs from the womb able to direct *Hamlet*. Like any other craft, in directing there are certain rules that can and should be learned. So if one is to teach directing, where does one go for an ideal text?

As a professor of directing and a practicing professional director, I have searched in vain for years for an ideal directing text to introduce to student directors. Francis Hodge’s *Play Directing* seems to have long been the text of choice for teaching beginning directing, and William Ball’s *A Sense of Direction* has a lot to recommend it. But both of these books have always fallen somewhat short for me in the classroom. There are a number of wonderful anecdotal texts on directing, and Katie Mitchell’s Chekhovian book *The Director’s Craft* is an outstanding book for students in an MFA program.

But where do we begin? Is there a text that can work from day one in an undergraduate class and/or graduate directing class? I believe there is now: Paul B. Crook’s *The Art and Practice of Directing For Theatre*.

Crook, a longtime member of SETC, is a professor of theatre at Louisiana Tech University, where he teaches both undergraduate and graduate directing. The depth and breadth of Crook’s teaching and directing experience shine through in this book, which should be required reading for any student interested in pursuing directing professionally or academically.

Divided into five sections, the book covers topics from the theoretical to the extraordinarily practical: What is a Director?; Preparation; Planning and Organization; The Director in Rehearsal; and Opening Night and Beyond. Crook focuses on all aspects of directing in a conversational way that provides information and knowledge without talking down to the reader.

The book also includes a number of exercises that will work well in a classroom setting and should encourage student directors to read numerous plays and other books on directing.

Crook also includes advice on compiling a directing resume, developing a director’s statement and cataloging your work for future reference. Perhaps my favorite section of the book is the appendices, featuring 10-minute plays that can be put immediately into rehearsal in a classroom setting to test theories and advice from the book.

*The Art and Practice of Directing for Theatre* has the potential to become the “go-to” text for our next generation of theatrical directors. It is specific, carefully researched, well-constructed and still a delightful read. I will be incorporating it as my text of choice for my future directing classes, and I would urge anyone who teaches directing to give it a serious read.

Richard St. Peter, an assistant professor of theatre at Clemson University, is a professional director and the chair of SETC’s Directing Committee. He is spending the 2016-17 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar in Romania.
Your Career?
We’ve got it covered.
Summer Jobs Available

www.msmt.org
207-725-8769
Work for Maine’s Premier Music Theatre

Your Parts?
We’ve got them covered, too.

www.msmtcostumes.org
207-208-8950
Costume Packages for Musical Theatre
a place for Creativity

Virginia Tech

Theatre Arts B.A. and M.F.A.

SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS
MUSIC | THEATRE | CINEMA

Fully Accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)
Blacksburg, VA 24061 | 540-231-5335 | theatrecinema@vt.edu