SETC Adds New Events at Fall Auditions

ETC’s Fall Auditions lineup this year includes two new events, in addition to the Professional Auditions and Graduate School Auditions/Interviews that traditionally are held each fall. See box at right for links to apply for the auditions and interviews in Atlanta, GA. Below are details on the new events this year.

FREE WORKSHOPS FOR ACTORS!
Make the most of your time in Atlanta at the Professional Auditions and Graduate School Auditions by taking part in the free workshops being offered this year.
Workshop topics and presenters:
  • New Techniques Acting Workshop
    Don Williams of Stella Adler Studio
  • Actor Crossover Training
    Ken Feinberg of Creative Studios of Atlanta
  • The Business of Acting
    Clayton Whitfield of The Show Hub, Tom Miller of Actors’ Equity Association and more
  • Being Camera Ready
    Agents of respected film casting companies
The workshops can accommodate a limited number of attendees, so register early! Pre-registration is required!

FALL PROFESSIONAL QUALIFIERS!
Want to audition at Fall Professional Auditions, but don't meet all of the requirements? You still may be able to participate IF you earn a spot through the Fall Professional Qualifiers.

Take advantage of Fall Professional Qualifiers if you:
  • have one professional acting credit.
  • are 19 years old minimum.
  • can act, sing and/or dance.
  • want to get in front of 30-40 professional companies.
  • are willing to try out to audition.

Here's how it works:
  • Apply online.
  • Attend a tryout audition Sat., Sept. 10.
  • Pass.
  • Stay and audition Sun., Sept. 11.

DETAILS: For more information and to register for Fall Professional Qualifiers, go to www.setc.org (click on Auditions, Professional, Fall).

What Can You Get through SETC Fall Auditions?
“I got a job last year and into my top-choice grad school (with a full tuition waiver and teaching assistant position/salary). I’m definitely spreading the word of how well Fall SETC worked for me.”

Rachael Swartz, an Ohio native who attended SETC’s Professional Auditions and Graduate School Auditions in fall 2010, says they “shaped the direction I will be heading for years to come.”

At the Professional Auditions, the graduate of Baldwin-Wallace College scored a job with the National Theatre for Children.

“The Fall Auditions are situated in a perfect time,” Swartz says. "They really help fill in that gap of work before the larger spring conferences. [SETC Professional Auditions Director] Lisa Leonard and [SETC Professional Services Manager] April Marshall are lovely people who do everything within their power to make actors feel comfortable. With a smaller number of actors and companies present, I felt the companies who were interested in me were able to spend more time getting to know me.”

(Continued on Page 6)
SETC Leaders Hone Skills at Fall Meeting Workshops

ETC is fortunate to have so many committed individuals working on behalf of our organization. At this year's annual Fall Meetings, they will have an opportunity to further develop their skills as leaders. Voting members of the Board, committee chairs and interested committee members will participate in two breakout sessions focusing on programming and governance. The sessions on Friday, Sept. 9, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., will center on such topics as new idea implementation, collaboration, networking, and achieving goals within board and committee structures. An ExCom member and one SETC Central Office staffer will be in each session to facilitate and respond to questions.

These sessions will enable our leaders to add new tools to their toolboxes, helping them to continue growing and nurturing SETC and the art that we love.

EXCOM NEWS
by President Alan Litsey

According to SETC rules, “The President shall include a report on the proceedings of the Executive Committee [ExCom] meetings to the general membership in the SETC Newsletter.” ExCom is composed of elected officers, a division representative and a state representative. The Board of Directors, composed of elected officers plus all division chairs and all state representatives, reviews ExCom actions and has authority to establish or revise rules. The Executive Committee met in Greensboro on May 21 and 22. The following actions were taken (see full minutes on the SETC website):

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND WHISTLE BLOWER POLICY: ExCom approved these policies with changes.

HIGH SCHOOL PLAYWRITING COMPETITION: ExCom approved a proposal from the Playwriting Committee to delete the entry fee for this competition because entries are now electronic and most playwriting competitions are eliminating their entry fees.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MANUAL: ExCom approved minor housekeeping changes to the Finance Committee Manual.

CALENDAR, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE NEWS

2011-2012 SETC Calendar

Aug. 15, 2011
 Deadline:
◆ Online submission, professional actor applications for Fall Professional Auditions
◆ Online submission, student applications for Fall Graduate School Auditions/Interviews
◆ For POSTMARK on applications by companies for Fall Professional Auditions and by schools for Fall Graduate School Auditions/Interviews

Aug. 20, 2011
 Deadline: Hotel reservations for Fall Meetings/Auditions

Sept. 9 – 10, 2011
Fall Board/Advisory Council Meetings, Atlanta, GA

Sept. 10, 2011
Fall Graduate School Auditions/Interviews, Atlanta, GA

Sept. 11 – 12, 2011
Fall Professional Auditions, Atlanta, GA

Sept. 30, 2011
 Deadline: Program proposals for 2012 SETC Convention

Sept. – Nov., 2011
 Deadline: Applications for SETC Screenings for Spring Professional Auditions (dates vary by state). See Page 6 for list; or check with your state coordinator, your college or university theatre department; or visit www.setc.org

Oct. 15, 2011
 2012 SETC Convention registration opens

Dec. 1, 2011
 Deadline: High School New Play Contest entries

Dec. 19, 2011
 Deadline:
◆ Early bird convention registration
◆ Early bird hotel reservations
◆ Convention program advertising

Jan. 14, 2012
 Final Deadline:
◆ Convention Commercial Exhibit space reservations
◆ Education Expo space reservations (Non-Commercial Exhibits)

Jan. 15, 2012
 Deadline:
◆ Professional AUDITIONEE applications
◆ SETC Secondary School Scholarship (High School Students)
◆ Keynote Emerging Artist of Promise (KEAP) Award (High School Students)
◆ William E. Wilson Scholarship applications (High School Teachers)
◆ Marian A. Smith Award applications (Costume Design)
◆ Leighton M. Ballew Award applications (Graduate Study in Directing)
◆ Robert Porterfield Award applications (Graduate Study)

Jan. 16, 2012
 Deadline: Convention program to printer; no changes after this date.

Jan. 21, 2012
 Deadline:
◆ Polly Holliday Award applications (High School Students)
◆ Marian A. Smith Award applications (Costume Design)

Jan. 22, 2012
 Deadline: EMPLOYER registration for Spring Auditions and Job Contact Service

Jan. 28, 2012
 Deadline:
◆ Online applications from auditionees for Graduate Auditions and Undergraduate Auditions/College Interviews
◆ Entries in Graduate and Undergraduate Design Competition (Scene, Costume, Lighting, Crafts/Technology)
◆ Convention advance registration (Individuals, students and seniors not participating in Professional Auditions)
◆ Applications by college and university institutions and representatives for:
 ◆ Graduate Auditions/Interviews
 ◆ Undergraduate Auditions/College Interviews

Note: College/university reps should include ALL registrations with institutional activity forms.

FULL FEES WILL BE CHARGED to all applications postmarked after this date and on-site.

NO REFUNDS AFTER THE DATES LISTED ABOVE!

Feb. 15, 2012
 Deadline: Convention hotel reservations

March 7 – 11, 2012
 63rd Annual SETC Convention, Chattanooga, TN
Have You Visited the New SETC Website?

If you haven’t already done so, I hope you will take a moment to click on one of the links to www.setc.org in this newsletter. You will enter SETC’s transformed website. We have redesigned our site with two goals in mind: to help you learn more about the services, programs and opportunities the organization offers than ever before and to make the process of doing so user-friendly. I’d like to encourage you to surf through the new website. We invite you to send suggestions on how we can improve it, but we also will accept your "wows!"

First major redesign

Our website had not been thoroughly updated since its inception about eight years ago. We have had a lot of great improvements over the years, but this time we entered into a huge overhaul under the capable hands of Judi Rossabi, SETC communications and marketing manager, and Mishi Clauberg of MiraBella Designs, a website design firm.

In addition to providing fast access to information and ease of maneuverability to you as members of SETC, we wanted to intrigue, welcome and inform the first-time site visitor. We set out to catch Web surfers’ interest by using captivating visuals and a number of tabs showcasing our vast opportunities.

Changes in website organization

Judi led an extensive process that examined all aspects of what SETC actually does. After categorizing content and identifying items that needed cross-routing for information, she and Mishi organized the site content.

If you are looking on the website for something you are sure SETC offers but can't find it, let us know. Our aim is to capture it all and keep it simple.

Send us a photo

The rotating pictures you see at the top of the home page feature SETC members and moments from past events. Our initial photos feature convention moments, including Sculptural Arts Coating’s commercial exhibit, Kenton Yeager demonstrating the Light Lab, a performance from the Chattanooga High School Center for Creative Arts’ Choo Choo Kids, a photo from Lexington Children’s Theatre, shots of auditionees, and scripts from the Dramatists Play Service exhibit.

The pictures on the home page will change at least every two months. PLEASE SEND US YOUR PHOTOS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION. We are looking for a wide range of photos, ranging from production and design images to people and company photographs.

Comments and kudos welcome

While you are welcome to send your comments about our website makeover to me at betsey@setc.org, Judi also would welcome your thoughts and suggestions at judi@setc.org. Don’t forget the kudos!

Looking for Theatre-Related Info? SETC’s Archives at UNC Greensboro Hold Hidden Treasure

After 35 years in professional theatre and dance – where a traditional resume was sufficient – I recently faced the daunting task of creating the formal curriculum vitae required in academia. It was during this process that I discovered the SETC Archives, located in the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Manuscripts Archivist Jennifer Motszko provided me with original programs from SETC Conventions dating back to my first (1972, Columbia) to my most recent (2011, Atlanta), plus back issues of Southern Theatre magazine and SETC News.

With her gracious assistance, I was able to fill in the gaps on my vitae with missing titles of sessions, exact dates, times and places, along with specific volumes, issues and page numbers for published articles.

It was also fun to peruse the oldest documents on file (from the late 1940s), including correspondence, minutes from board meetings, and titles of plays produced at various festivals, all of which are a testament to the tradition of excellence that is SETC. These documents are a tremendous resource for the membership, and we owe a debt of gratitude to UNC Greensboro for keeping these archives in such pristine condition.

~ Keith Martin

Do You Have SETC Memorabilia?

The SETC Archives are missing some items from before 1972. If you have old SETC convention programs, magazine copies, newsletter issues or other items of interest, please send them to SETC for possible inclusion in the Archives. The SETC mailing address is on Page 8.
Task Force Welcomes Ideas for Resolving Challenges

“Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” -Will Rogers

Growing pains are a natural part of maturing – whether it be as a human being or as an organization. The Community Theatre Division of SETC has experienced phenomenal growth in the last 10 years. Especially since competition rules were amended allowing two theatres to advance from states with a certain level of participation, the March festival has been jam-packed. Leaders in the Community Theatre Division are looking for ways to improve our process as we grow. However, as the novelist Ellen Glasgow said, “All change is not growth, as all movement is not forward.”

In order to maximize our efforts to improve, a task force was appointed at the division meeting in March. The task force members include: Lynn Nelson, Rick Kerby, Lyle Tate, Murray Chase, Ginger Heath, Kim Frick-Welker and Stephanie Richards.

Some of the issues the task force is struggling with include:

• It has become a logistical challenge to schedule both rehearsal and performance times for all participating theatres in three and a half days. Allowing each theatre adequate rehearsal time in an unfamiliar performance space is critical for the success of the festival process.

• It is also a challenge to find suitable performance venues for community theatres in cities large enough to host the entire SETC Convention. Competition rules dictate certain minimum standards that must be met.

• We want to improve other areas in the infrastructure of the festival process. This includes finding excellent adjudicators and looking for ways to present workshops geared toward community theatres. In general, we want to look for ways to improve the festival experience for all participants.

What are the solutions? In the coming weeks the task force will meet via conference call and be searching for answers. We would like to hear what you have to say. In the SETC family, there are countless years of collective experience dealing with similar issues. All of us are stronger than some of us. So we ask for your advice in finding ways to deal with these difficult problems. Please e-mail me any ideas or additional issues that you would like for the task force to consider.

Lynn Nelson, lynnnelson@hotmail.com
Chair, Community Theatre Division

Share Photos, Schedules

The Theatre for Youth Division is gearing up for a wide variety of summer programming: from youth workshops at Lexington Children’s Theatre to public outreach performances by the North Georgia Theatre for Youth. In the spirit of sharing our great works, I would like to encourage any organization producing theatre for youth to send production photos and performance schedules for us to post on our Facebook page. We are creating a visual history of Southern theatre for youth and would love to include your organization. Please send these materials to me at jspiegel@piedmont.edu.

Looking ahead, we encourage anyone with an interest in theatre for youth to register to run a workshop at the spring SETC Convention. We also want to hear from organizations interested in producing shows at the Theatre for Youth Invitational Festival during the 2012 SETC Convention. Please contact Amie Dunn Kisling, our festival chair, through the SETC website if you would like to propose a festival entry.

John F. Spiegel, jspiegel@piedmont.edu
Chair, Theatre for Youth Division

Ben Cameron, John F. Kennedy and College Theatre

The “meaning” of an SETC Convention, just like the meaning of a play, is created in part by the mind of the individual audience member. At this year’s convention, I was engrossed in writing a departmental report for a college-wide prioritization process. Thus, for me, the highlight of the convention was the keynote speech by Ben Cameron. It spoke directly and with urgency to my situation.

Ben addressed the crisis facing traditional theatre. He spoke about economic challenges and identified the “new normal”: diminished resources, downsized staffs, reduced expectations, smaller casts, fewer shows, shorter runs and good theatres closing. But he suggested that although the catalyst was the economic downturn, the crisis was not financial, but a matter of the “urgency and relevance” of our theatre. He urged theatres, in the words of the immortal Gretsky, to “skate to where the puck will be.” He challenged us to ask four questions when considering the reason for our existence: What is the value of theatre for my community? What does theatre do better than other arts for my community? How would my community be harmed if there were no theatre? And how is my theatre the optimal conduit for theatre in my community?

Ben was optimistic about the future of theatre. He spoke of the possibilities provided by new media and by the skills of young people. He spoke about a “reformation of the arts” and enthused about new opportunities and new paths for a new generation.

Ben spoke about the benefits of arts education, in particular about studies that suggested that “kids who study theatre have greater verbal acuity, greater tolerance for ambiguity and greater self-esteem” and that “kids who act in a play are 40 percent less likely to tolerate racist behavior.” And he spoke about John F. Kennedy’s social agenda in the arts and fitness, postulating that by encouraging observation in the arts and participation in sports, Kennedy created a culture where we “watch the artist but be the athlete.” Ben sees that culture reflected in the traditional approach to the arts in education.

The questions that Ben raised and the climate of de-emphasizing arts participation that he identified were the very issues that I was facing in writing my report. They became the questions that I answered as I completed the process of restructuring my department.

Lesley Preston, jpreston@presby.edu
Chair, College and University Division
any theatres in our region are beginning to rebound at the box office as the economy starts to slowly pick up.

While watching the Tony Awards, I was astonished to hear that this was the biggest-grossing year in Broadway history. Broadway sold a record $1.1 billion of tickets in the past 12 months, led by Wicked, The Book of Mormon and other hits that charge $300 and up for the top seats. Ticket revenue was up 5.9 percent from a year ago, said the Broadway League, a trade association of producers and theatre owners, in a release. All told, 42 shows opened during the season, the second highest total in at least 24 years.

Several studies cite the increased use of social media as an inexpensive, yet effective way of building the level of engagement of audience members. While social media does not sell tickets, it serves as a mid- to long-term strategy in building loyal audiences that buy into the theatre's brand. In addition to the marketing component of social media, it can also be used to increase customer service and assist with fundraising. It is a way to connect your company with audience members, local businesses, other theatres, current and potential employees, alumni, vendors, funders and other artists.

Devon Smith did wonderful research for Theatre Communications Group that indicates social media “builds relationships, not one-night stands.” The study, which examined the effectiveness of all major social media platforms, can be found at www.slideshare.net/devonsmith/tcg-social-media-presentation-draft-1.

As theatres in many areas continue to deal with decreased season subscription sales, perhaps we should all strive to increase our Facebook fans and the frequency of our tweets on Twitter in order to keep making meaningful art.

Dewey Scott-Wiley, deweyw@usca.edu Chair, Professional Theatre Division

Secondary School Theatre Division

Take Advantage of Opportunities for Students, Teachers

Greetings from the Secondary School Theatre Division! We had a terrific convention in Atlanta and are looking forward to seeing you next year in Chattanooga, TN! In addition to the many workshops and audition opportunities, next year’s play festival will be held at the beautiful Tivoli Theatre in downtown Chattanooga, just a couple of blocks from the convention center.

Tickets for parents/chaperones

A major change for 2012 includes a new policy on tickets for parents and chaperones who wish to attend the High School One-Act Play Festival on the day of their kids’ show only. In the past, any person wishing to watch the festival plays had to be a full-paying convention registrant. This year, individuals can buy tickets for either the morning or the afternoon block of each day’s shows for $15. All-day passes will be available for $25. Tickets will be available for purchase during online pre-registration or at the venue the day of the show (cash only). Festival tickets will not provide entrance to the convention.

Parents and chaperones also will be able to purchase tickets when their school group pre-registers for the banquet. Look for more info on the SETC website at a later date.

Opportunities at the convention

There are many other opportunities at our convention for teachers and students, in addition to the play festival. If you have questions about resources listed, visit www.setc.org for details or call the SETC office at 336-272-3645.

Opportunities include:

Undergraduate Auditions and Interviews
Student performers can participate in auditions, and design/tech students can participate in interviews with colleges and universities from across the country.

SETC scholarships for college

Scholarships available to high school students through SETC include the $1,000 Polly Holiday Scholarship and the $2,100 SETC Secondary School Scholarship. More info: www.setc.org/theatre/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=116&Itemid=191.

High School New Play Contest

SETC sponsors a new play contest for young writers. See details below.

KEAP scholarships for convention

Begun with a donation from playwright Samm-Art Williams, the Keynote Emerging Artists of Promise (KEAP) Award provides financial assistance for students who otherwise might not be able to attend the annual SETC Convention. Award winners receive an SETC membership, convention registration, a shared room or up to $250 room reimbursement, recognition at various events during the convention, and the opportunity to meet with the keynote speakers at the convention. More info: www.setc.org/theatre/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=123:keynote-emerging-artists-of-promise-keap-award&catid=40&Itemid=198.

SETC scholarships to teachers


Attention: High School Playwrights and Teachers

SETC sponsors a High School New Play Contest to encourage young writers, and we hope you will take advantage of this opportunity.

• Unproduced one-act plays written by one high school student are eligible.
• Entries should be submitted between October 1 and December 1.
• Winner receives $250, SETC Convention registration, a staged reading and more!


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• Winner receives $250, SETC Convention registration, a staged reading and more!


Questions? E-mail contest chair Nancy Gall-Clayton at nancygallclayton@earthlink.net
Looking for a Better Way to Collaborate and Communicate on a Show? Or Are You Looking for the Best Place to Post an Online Resume?

Chances are, you brought home a tote bag from the SETC Convention emblazoned with the name “The Show Hub.” But have you been online to check out who this organization is? I visited their website at www.theshowhub.com, and here’s what I found. The Show Hub is an online service that offers a simple but sophisticated production collaboration, communication, coordination and hiring system worthy of every thespian’s attention.

The Show Hub offers programs to two types of clients: producing theatres and artists.

Services for Producing Theatres

The Show Hub program for theatres provides a central online location for production collaboration and communication. It is available to production personnel in both general and specialized areas.

Everyone on the production team can communicate with any other production team member or with entire crews. From the same tool, they can access production calendars, graphics, rosters and so forth.

For example, the wardrobe manager can send a message to an actor, “Rob, don’t forget your socks again tonight.” The stage manager can notify the properties crew, “Hey, gang. I hope you remember to put coffee in the coffeepot tonight.” Further, the director can view the design and tell the set designer (who may live across the country), “Looks great. This is approved.”

Clayton Whitfield, a professional actor-turned-software entrepreneur, developed the program in conjunction with a team of expert software developers. He gave me an enthusiastic online demo via Go To Meeting. As he demonstrated the design collaboration, document sharing and calendaring capabilities, I thought, “This service provides not only production management, but also a way to keep perfect archival records of productions, including the prompt script, design documents, lists of casts and production personnel, marketing documents and attendance records.”

I also saw terrific potential for management applications beyond theatre productions. Are you producing a festival or a convention? I’ll bet The Show Hub services can be adapted to your needs.

The Show Hub is an online service, not a downloadable program. Production management service fees are offered on a sliding scale depending on the clients’ budgets.

The company website includes some testimonials, including one from Jim Hammond, artistic director of the Gainesville (GA) Theatre Alliance, who says: “The Show Hub allows us to do something we’ve never been able to do before: centralize all of the people, design collaboration, reports, calendars and communications needed for our productions and our department.”

Services for Artists

Connected to the production management tool for theatres is a slate of artist services. The most interesting of these offerings may be a resume service that keeps on giving. Each artist’s data is stored at The Show Hub website. Any theatre client can look for actors and other production personnel within The Show Hub’s system, add them to a production and begin communicating/collaborating with them in seconds.

The website declares, “Your Show Hub artist profile is better, faster, cheaper and way more search-engine-tuned than a personal website. It takes only a minute to set up. Once complete, you are instantly reachable and searchable by any theater company in North America.”

Individual artists also are offered career management, work management and employment tools.

Want to know more?

Visit www.theshowhub.com. You also may want to ask for a demonstration and talk to people who recommend it on the website. Don Wolfe can be reached at wolfe@wfu.edu.

Reach Potential Students via SETC’s Annual Directory

Attention, colleges and universities: Act soon to ensure that your institution receives its free listing in Southern Theatre’s 2012 College/University/Training Program Directory. Don’t miss this opportunity to reach prospective students! Join SETC as an organizational member and provide listing information by September 15 to be included. Limited ad space also is available. Contact Judi Rossabi at judi@setc.org for more info.

How can I propose a program for the 2012 SETC Convention? And when is the deadline?

Go to www.setc.org/conventions/program_proposal.php to submit a proposal for a workshop. We welcome proposals on all types of theatre-related topics. You will find details on the website on how to submit your program idea and on further information needed. Deadline for submitting program proposals for the 2012 SETC Convention is Sept. 30, 2011.

Rachael Swartz

(Continued from Page 1)

Swartz also came to the Fall Auditions looking for a graduate school. She says the Graduate School Auditions helped her sort through the many options and find the best fit for her.

“Prior to attending the Graduate School Auditions, I was unsure what graduate degree to pursue or if a certificate program would be right for me,” she says. “Through the auditions, I met with an MA theatre program, several MFA acting programs and several certificate programs. I also became connected with an MM in musical theatre program that was not in attendance, but was recommended to me. Through meeting the reps at SETC, I was able to sift through what had been a very scary and enormous decision and find the program that was right for me.”

That program is a master’s program in performance at the University of Southern Mississippi. Swartz begins school in the fall.
The Symbiosis of Practice and Scholarship Makes Me a Better Actor, Scholar and Teacher

My mantra, as students in my classes will tell you, is: “I’m a better practitioner because I can think and write about theatre, and I’m a better scholar because I act and direct!”

I am committed to the idea that theatre education needs to involve the symbiosis of practice and scholarship. I believe this philosophy is one that not only champions the liberal arts ideal (i.e., a nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of the practice and power of theatrical expression), but also best prepares the next generation of theatre artists and scholars (i.e., those who will create and critically document and consider theatre). It is this belief that keeps me active in my field as both artist and academic. In other words, I practice what I preach/teach, which is why I am traveling to my hometown of Branson, MO, to act in the long-running outdoor drama, The Shepherd of the Hills, this summer.

I believe working an extended run is one of the best ways that a theatre practitioner can become a better practitioner. It does not matter how complex the script is, or the size of the role; what matters is practicing how to keep a performance fresh every night for those people who paid for their tickets. An extended run also helps a practitioner learn to keep the performance interesting for herself/himself.

As a teacher, practicing what I teach enables me to bring back techniques that can help my students not only survive a long run, but learn to make every performance “new” regardless of the run. As a scholar, continually questioning my performances and audiences’ reactions to them helps me to think deeper about this thing we call “theatre.”

Extended runs also expose practitioners, especially novices, to other practitioners. That allows people in positions of power to see not only how well you perform, but how committed you are to your role, as well as to the company. Long runs allow you to work closely with other practitioners that may become your directors, fellow actors, fellow technicians and friends. We have all heard and know it is true: Theatre is a small world.

Last, but not least, those of us who work long runs in theme parks, outdoor dramas or summer rep often find that these experiences give us our best stories.
What If? Is Your Theatre Too Close to the Edge?

“Live theatre, exciting theatre involves risk! Mistakes will happen: a slip, a stumble, a hesitation, a moment’s inattention.” - from “Spider-Man and Equity” statement by Actors’ Equity Association President Nick Wyman

I was recently at a college performance where one of the actors sat on a four-legged stool at the edge of a platform. Unbeknownst to the actor, one of the stool legs was halfway off the platform. Every time the actor stood up and sat down, I quivered and gasped, wondering if that leg would move and cause the actor to fall over backwards off the platform. Thankfully, the stool leg stood firm – but the show was only one-half inch away from an accident! (I pointed it out to the stage manager so that in future performances the stool placement would not be so precarious.)

What if there’s an injury at your theatre?

Who is liable for the damages? If the person injured is an employee (an actor or a staff member) the injury will, in most cases, be handled under the workers compensation laws of your state. You can visit the Actors Equity website for some general information about workers comp: www.actorsequity.org/benefits/workerscomp.asp.

Workers comp is a “social contract.” The injury is removed from general tort laws that require a finding of negligence. Instead, injured workers with work-related injuries are compensated based on a formula related to their hourly wage as well as payment of medical expenses. In essence, a no-fault system is in place for workplace injuries.

In theory, this makes it easier for an injured worker to be made whole after an injury. In contrast, a negligence lawsuit is often difficult to prove! The damages available under workers compensation are typically much less than would be available in a successful negligence action. Sometimes accidents simply happen; nobody is at fault. Under workers compensation, the employee still receives coverage. Claims are sometimes disputed; the typical issue is whether the injury was work-related.

What if the injury is to a volunteer?

If your theatre is all-volunteer, your state law might not require that you carry workers compensation insurance, but you may still be able to opt in to the workers comp system. Volunteers could be considered employees for purposes of workers compensation. Talk with your insurance carrier about this.

Similarly, if you have both employees and volunteers, talk with your carrier to see about coverage for your volunteers. If the injured person is not an employee, but is a non-covered volunteer or a student, then issues of negligence (and foreseeability) may come into play.

Review coverage annually

At least once a year, review coverage with your insurance carriers. Make sure they know the types of productions you present. For each play, there should be at least one person responsible for reviewing all aspects of the production for safety issues. Create a safety checklist for each production.

You have a legal responsibility to do everything you can to prevent accidents. You also have a legal responsibility to maintain adequate insurance coverage. $#! happens, and you need to be prepared.

Dan Ellison is a Durham, NC-based attorney who has concentrated on arts-related law and nonprofit law for 15 years. He is a past president and the current executive director of the North Carolina Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. Have a question? E-mail Dan at: artandmuseumlaw@aol.com.

Note: The contents of this column are intended for general information purposes only and should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion on any specific facts or circumstances.

Philip Rose

Broadway producer and 2006 SETC Convention keynote speaker Philip Rose died May 31, 2011, at the age of 89 following a stroke. Rose helped pave the way for African American playwrights and actors on Broadway as the producer of A Raisin in the Sun and Purlie Victorious. He also was a pioneer in color-blind casting. The author of a memoir, You Can’t Do That on Broadway, Rose delivered a riveting speech at the 2006 SETC Convention in Orlando, FL.

Paul Massie, a longtime theatre professor at the University of South Florida, died June 8, 2011, at the age of 79.