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Contents

Features

10 Filling Seats
Study Finds Quality Children's Education Program Is Key to Attracting New Audiences to the Theatre
by Lisa Cesnik

22 Teacher of the Year
Roy Hudson’s Passion Is Teaching Theatre to Kids – and Educating Adults on the Value of the Arts in Schools
by Barbara Sloan

Special Content: Golden Anniversary

6 Southern Theatre Celebrates 50
by Philip G. Hill

9 Pictorial: 50 Years of Southern Theatre
Trace the history of Southern Theatre through its covers.

Departments

4 400 Words
Swim Together – or Sink Alone – in Today’s Economy
by Catherine Rye Gilmore

8 Outside the Box: Design-Tech Solutions
Fabric Release Curtain: Build a Kabuki Rig for Under $300
by Bill Webb

32 Words, Words, Words…
Review of The Influence of Tennessee Williams: Essays on Fifteen American Playwrights
edited by Philip C. Kolin
by Frazer Lively

Cover
Southern Theatre celebrates its golden anniversary in 2009. On the front of this issue, samples of covers from the magazine’s 50 volumes are displayed. See story, Page 6, and displays of additional covers throughout the magazine. (Cover design by Garland Gooden)
I just heard today of another theatre company closing its doors in this awful economy. Since the financial crisis has reached epic levels, most arts organizations are retreating to their respective corners trying to stay afloat – alone. What's wrong with this strategy? There is strength in numbers.

When the historic Virginia Samford Theatre in Birmingham, AL, was reborn in 2002, it became clear that business as usual was no longer the case. For more than 80 years, the landmark playhouse had operated as a single theatre company. Most of this time, it had served as the cultural center for the University of Alabama at Birmingham as the Town and Gown Theatre, under the direction of the legendary James Hatcher. In 1999, when the university decided to sell the theatre, the corporate community – which helped provide $3 million to restore the theatre – made it clear that the new nonprofit facility must establish a business plan to be self-sustaining. It meant we had to think outside the box about how to run a successful performance venue. It meant we had to reach out to other local theatre companies. What? Ask competing arts groups to work together toward a common goal? Impossible.

What followed were extensive meetings with theatre board members, artistic directors, actors, musicians, civic leaders, not to mention lawyers, to help iron out the details. Finally, a comprehensive and profitable plan emerged. Theatre companies could reserve performance dates on an annual basis for their respective seasons. Strict guidelines would ensure that each company had state-of-the-art technical and performance support in a beautifully restored facility, and each company would retain its identity with its own patrons.

This season the Virginia Samford Theatre will produce four of its own productions under the name VST Productions – and more than 20 stage productions from four other theatres and one contemporary ballet company, all of whom have chosen to lease our theatre and call it their home.

In addition, the theatre’s arts incubator offices provide administrative support for other new creative ventures. The revenue generated from these sources – the incubator offices, performance lease fees, a ticket preservation fee and rental from special events such as weddings and receptions – makes it possible for the Virginia Samford Theatre to provide below-market rental rates for its theatre and ballet companies while maintaining an in-house support staff and upkeep for the historic building.

We’re all swimming together and making it work!
From the SETC President ...

In this historic year, *Southern Theatre* celebrates its 50th anniversary as SETC commemorates its 60th anniversary. Traditionally, the 50th anniversary is the “golden anniversary.” As you can see from the cover and contents of this magazine, SETC is indeed rich in its “gold” – you, our membership. Raise a glass and toast yourself, the “gold” of SETC, as you enjoy this 50th anniversary celebration of *Southern Theatre*.

You can take a trip through the years and the many changes in the publication by flipping through the pages of this magazine. Your journey starts on Page 6, where you’ll find a short history of the magazine by Phil Hill, as well as illustrations of the first issue of Volume 1 and the first issue of Volume 50. On the following pages, you’ll travel forward in time, as we spotlight one issue from each of the other volumes in the right-hand column of the magazine pages.

If you want to attract new audiences to your organization’s shows (and what theatre doesn’t seek to do so today?), you’ll want to read Lisa Cesnik’s story about a recent John S. and James L. Knight Foundation study which examined double-digit audience growth at the Springer Opera House in Georgia. The chief finding? Quality children’s programming linked to a theatre’s core mission not only brings children into the theatre – but their parents as well. The Knight Foundation believes this information could prove vital to other theatres.

Those who bemoan the arts’ diminishing presence in schools will find a reason to cheer in Birmingham, site of this year’s SETC Convention. A teacher at Shades Valley High School in suburban Birmingham is the first-ever arts teacher to be named Alabama’s Teacher of the Year. Roy Hudson has a passion for teaching theatre – and a plan to use his position to educate others on the value of the arts in education. Barbara Sloan tells his story.

The downturn in the economy is having an impact on the arts as well as business, but so far no bailouts have been mentioned for theatre. Catherine Rye Gilmore, president of the Virginia Samford Theatre in Birmingham, urges fellow theatre operators to join hands to ensure their survival.


As you enjoy this celebratory publication, don’t forget that the “toasting” will continue in Birmingham. Don’t miss the opportunity to celebrate with fellow “golden” members at SETC’s 60th anniversary convention March 4-8.

Glen Gourley, SETC President
Southern Theatre traces its roots to 1956, when the Southeastern Theatre Conference published the first issue of Southern Theatre News, which billed itself as “a quarterly newsmagazine.” With the publication this year of Volume L, Southern Theatre celebrates the half-century mark. (It took 53 years to put out 50 volumes because of interruptions in publication.) Over the years, the format, content and size of Southern Theatre changed many times.

The first Southern Theatre News (cover page shown below) was edited by Burnet Hobgood, who simultaneously served as executive secretary-treasurer of SETC and put out an eight-page, newspaper-style publication that was 11 inches by 14.5 inches in size. His debut issue carried a story about the upcoming SETC Convention in Louisville, an article about a New York opening by Virginia’s Barter Theatre and other news from around the region.

In fall 1959, Jack Clay assumed the editorship and changed the size to 9.25 inches by 12.125 inches while keeping the newsmagazine format. When Arthur McDonald became editor in 1962, the publication moved to an 8.5 by 11-inch magazine format and was renamed Southern Theatre. To maintain continuity with Southern Theatre News, McDonald’s first issue was numbered Volume VII, Number 1.

McDonald and the next two editors, James Byrd and John Crockett, were elected to their positions, since the editor was constitutionally established as an elected officer of the corporation. However, it was easier to get elected than to get four issues out on time each year. There was endless distress at Board meetings over late or nonexistent issues on the one hand and the difficulty of finding articles on the other. Some issues during this time were never published, and others appeared as “combined” issues. From 1962 to 1971, 27 issues were published; it is possible that two more were published, but if so all copies have been lost.

Cost was also a problem. Southern Theatre from the first accepted advertising, but the circulation was not large and ads were hard to sell. Byrd was the first editor to print a full-color cover, but as printing expenses soared, color became more difficult to justify. Even printing pictures stretched the budget, and in some years the number of pictures was kept to a minimum.

Above all, the content of the magazine provoked disagreement. Some thought it should be primarily a newsletter for SETC members. Some thought it should be an all-theatre magazine in the mode of Theatre Arts, which had ceased publication in 1963. Still others thought Southern Theatre should be a scholarly journal. Elected editors simply chose for themselves among these and other options, and the Board remained divided over what should be done.

Robert Canon was appointed to chair a committee that examined the problems of Southern Theatre. Under his leadership, the Bylaws were revised in 1971 to create a Publications Committee (of which he was the first chair) and to make the Southern Theatre editor an appointed (but unpaid) position answering to that committee. With these changes, the magazine shifted to a less expensive format. Not all of the problems were solved, but there was progress: 11 volumes, each with four issues, were published in the next 11 years.

The five volunteer editors during those 11 years leaned for the most part toward a scholarly publication, a choice with which more than a few SETC members disagreed. The level of scholarship in the articles published was not always the best, a fact that the editors recognized. But finding good scholars willing to place their articles with a magazine whose identity kept shifting was no easy task, and more than one editor expressed his frustration in print. Advertising was even harder to sell in the new format, and printing costs continued to escalate.

In 1982, publication of Southern Theatre was temporarily suspended after Volume XXV, Number 2, and the Publications Committee was charged with finding a way to make the magazine pay for itself or cease publication permanently.
Readers can take a trip through 50 years of Southern Theatre in the pages of this magazine. One issue from each volume (except Volume 2, which is missing from the archives) is displayed, showing the magazine’s progression from 1956’s newspaper (opposite page, left) to 2009’s four-color magazine (opposite page, right).

Several plans were discussed, but the Board eventually voted to turn over full responsibility for the magazine’s content and its business management to Fisher-Harrison Publications (now Pace Communications, publisher of numerous in-flight, corporate and organization magazines). The Greensboro, NC-based firm believed it could not only solve the problems of Southern Theatre, but also could make a profit publishing it.

After a hiatus of more than a year, Southern Theatre returned with the publication of Volume 25, Number 3, by Fisher-Harrison. It was an 8.5-inch by 11-inch magazine with a full-color cover (nearly 20 years after the first one) and used more color throughout. The Board was happy with the immediate shift to more popular content in a more attractive format, but Fisher-Harrison found that it could not make the anticipated profit and terminated SETC’s contract after just six issues. Marian Smith, then SETC’s administrative director (later executive director), thereupon volunteered to assume advertising solicitation and production responsibilities for the magazine if the Publications Committee would hire a Greensboro-based person on a contract basis to serve as editor. The Board approved this arrangement, which continues today.

With the change to contract editors, Southern Theatre moved from a color publication back to a black-and-white magazine with a two-color cover. In 1994, the Publications Committee, which had also served as the Editorial Board, created a separate Editorial Board charged with reviewing stories submitted for Southern Theatre. In 1995, Southern Theatre began publishing the plays that won SETC’s annual Charles M. Getchell New Play Award.

In 1999, the magazine was redesigned and a second color added to the interior. The new design debuted in a double issue celebrating SETC’s 50th anniversary. In 2007, Southern Theatre became a four-color magazine and the magazine’s first College, University & Training Program Directory was published.

Southern Theatre has grown and prospered in recent years, as a result of the steady influence of paid editors who didn’t rotate out of office and the work of SETC Central Office staff, the Editorial Board and the Publications Committee. Costs are comfortably managed within SETC’s budget, with advertising paying a substantial portion of those costs. It is now universally accepted that Southern Theatre is SETC’s popular magazine appealing to the full range of membership, while Theatre Symposium is its scholarly journal.

This year, we publish Volume L – that’s 50! – of Southern Theatre, a nationally recognized, award-winning magazine of which SETC is proud.

Philip G. Hill, a past president of SETC, is professor emeritus of drama at Furman University in South Carolina.

Note: In the early years of SETC, before the first Southern Theatre News was published, there were several other attempts to create regular publications. More information about these can be found in Southern Theatre XL, #1 (Winter/Spring 1999), Pages 40-42.

Additional research on Southern Theatre’s 50 volumes was completed by Jennifer Motszko, curator of the SETC Archives at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; by Nanette Harbuck, SETC executive assistant; and by Deanna Thompson, editor of Southern Theatre.

EDITORS, 1956-2009

Burnet M. Hobgood
Catawba College
Vol. I, #1–III, #3
1956-1959

Jack Clay
University of Miami (FL)
Vol. III, #4–VI, #4
1959-1962

Arthur McDonald
St. Andrews Presbyterian College
Vol. VII, #1–IX, #1
1962-1965

James Byrd
University of Louisville (KY)
Vol. IX, #2–XII, #1
1965-1968

John Crockett
Maysville Community College
Vol. XII, #2–XV, #1
1968-1971

Ralph Swanson
Virginia Tech
Vol. XVI, #2–XVI, #4
1971-1973

Patton Lockwood
Longwood College (VA)
Vol. XVII, #1–XVIII, #4
1973-1975

Albert E. Johnson
University of Georgia
Vol. XX, #1–XXIII, #2
1976-1980

Gerald Kahan
University of Louisville (KY)
Vol. XIX, #1–XXIV, #4
1984-1985

Mary Anne Blazek
Vol. XXXV, #1–XXXVIII, #3
1985-1986

Darwin Honeycutt
Vol. XXXVII, #2–XXXV, #3
1987-1994

Deanna Thompson
Co-editor, Vol. XXXV, #6; Editor, Vol. XXXV, #4–Present
1994-Present

50 Years of Southern Theatre
Fabric Release Curtain

Build a Kabuki Rig for Under $300

by Bill Webb

For a production of Jekyll and Hyde at Elon University, the design team visualized the play beginning with the drop of a kabuki (fabric release) curtain. We set out to build our own rig for the china silk fabric drop we had envisioned. Our goal was to make a kabuki rig that was cheap, quiet, user-friendly and reusable. Depending on how many of the materials required are already in your stock, this rig could be built for as little as the cost of the pillow blocks. It worked very well for this production of Jekyll and Hyde and has subsequently been used for other productions.

Making the Rig

We made our kabuki rig from pieces of threaded, Schedule 40, 1½-inch, black steel pipe, with pillow blocks set at approximately every 10 feet, and 1-inch-long, ¼-inch steel rod pegs welded at every foot on center. We attached a T-handle (welded out of 1-inch, 15-gauge square tube) to one end of the pipe. Sash cord attached to one side of the T-handle became our operating line. It was counterbalanced by a small sandbag (weighing slightly more than the fabric) that we attached to the other side of the handle (see drawing above).

Loading and Operating

The loading and operating process is quite simple. The kabuki is tailed down or rigged off of a line set, and flown in for loading of the fabric. It is attached to the batten by mounting small sections of 1½-inch pipe to each pillow block, and then connecting that small pipe...
**Materials Needed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threaded 1½” Schedule 40 black pipe</td>
<td>Local steel supplier</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(required length)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼” Solid steel rod</td>
<td>Local hardware store</td>
<td>$  5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillow blocks</td>
<td>McMaster-Carr</td>
<td>$83.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(one for every 10 to 12 feet of rig)</td>
<td>Part #6494K18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1” Box tube</td>
<td>Local steel supplier</td>
<td>$  3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating line sash cord</td>
<td>Local hardware store</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small sandbag with sand</td>
<td>Sapsis Rigging</td>
<td>$27.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseborough clamps at every pillow block</td>
<td>Sapsis Rigging</td>
<td>$12.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric of choice</td>
<td>Local fabric store</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Cost: Under $300**

---

**Tips for Building Your Kabuki Rig**

- Be sure to grommet the top of your fabric. The grommets will easily slide off of the pegs.
- Be sure to space the grommets correctly. A little swag of fabric can’t hurt, but if the grommets are spaced too far apart the fabric may stretch too tightly between pegs. This could result in the fabric binding.
- Be sure to provide extra support for long rigs. Our rig, which was 40 feet long, was made from two pieces of threaded Schedule 40 pipe that were threaded and coupled together. We mounted a pillow block at the intersection of these two pipes to eliminate any unnecessary weight distribution on the joint.

- Modify the rig as needed. This is a very flexible system that can be used and modified dramatically if desired. Smaller diameter pipe and fittings can be used if the cost or weight of the rig is a consideration.

---

**WANT TO READ MORE TIPS?**

Visit SETC’s website (www.setc.org) to order the *Outside the Box* book.

**HAVE AN ‘OUTSIDE THE BOX’ IDEA?**

E-mail “Outside the Box” Editor Doug Brown at brownd@ncarts.edu. Or come to the “Outside the Box” workshop at 9 a.m. Friday at the SETC Convention. Check your program for location.
Study Finds Quality Children’s Education Program Is Key to Attracting New Audiences to the Theatre

‘The presence of children on the INSIDE will rearrange the molecules of your organization.’

- Paul Pierce, Producing Artistic Director, Springer Opera House

Ask Ron Anderson how the Springer Opera House in Columbus, GA, increased its attendance by double digits over the past three years, and you’ll get a quick rejoinder.

“What have we done to grow our audiences? Well, it sort of starts with a disclaimer. ‘Cause we didn’t set out to do this. We didn’t set out to build an audience. We set out to build an education program. That’s why Paul [Pierce] brought me to Columbus,” says Anderson, who came from Milwaukee in 1996 to start the Springer Theatre Academy.

“The idea that . . . 12 years later we would wake up and say, ‘Wow! Our audience is growing, and it has a direct relation to our Theatre Academy’ – that never occurred to us. It was a natural and organic byproduct of what we were doing.”

The humility and service-through-art philosophy exemplified in his remarks are key characteristics of the leadership of Springer Opera House. But regardless of the original intentions of the Springer Theatre Academy, this fact remains: The Springer Opera House is growing its audience, and the Springer Theatre Academy is the major impetus for that growth.

That’s the key finding from a study of the Springer Theatre Academy that was commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The study was conducted by Lisa Mount, director of the Georgia-based Artistic Logistics, a cooperative of
independent arts consultants that provides services across the U.S. Titled *Learning Everywhere: The Impact of the Springer Theatre Academy on the Springer Opera House*, the study was completed March 20, 2008.

For the study, Artistic Logistics surveyed 50 Theatre Academy families and interviewed parents, students, Springer staff, teachers and guest artists. The findings: This professional theatre seems to be doing what most theatres dream of doing – bringing more and more people of all ages, including young families, to see its productions even as the economy lags and belts are tightening everywhere.

“Audiences in American theatre are graying at an alarming rate,” Mount states in her executive summary. “Subscriber bases are collapsing and single-ticket attendance is slipping nationwide. Despite this trend, the Springer Opera House – a 137-year-old professional theatre in Columbus, Georgia – has experienced astonishing audience growth in the past several years. A 17% increase last year, 13% the year before, 9% the previous year.”

These unusually successful numbers are what drew the attention of the Knight Foundation, which wanted to understand the reason for this arts enigma. The Foundation maintains relationships with theatres throughout the country – theatres that are experiencing a collapse of their audiences and are looking for solutions to the audience lag conundrum and developing new models to build audiences for the arts.

A few years ago, the Knight Foundation commissioned a study from Wolf-Brown, Inc., in Cambridge, MA, to find out where symphony orchestra audiences come from. The results were enlightening. The study reported that more than 70 percent of symphony orchestra audience members had played a musical instrument as a child or had sung in a choir. Hence, the possibility of an educational program having a direct effect on audience growth already sounded plausible to Foundation leaders. The potential to quantify these facts to help other organizations helped lead to the Springer study.

So, can it be that a historic theatre in a moderate-sized city in the southwest portion of Georgia, a city known mainly for its history in the textile industry and its Army base, Fort Benning, is increasing theatre audiences and making a significant cultural impact on its community? And because Columbus has one of the fastest growing metro areas in Georgia, is it positioned to become a leader in the performing arts for the state? How and why is this happening at the Springer Opera House?

The answer to these questions lies with an unexpected population in Columbus – young people. This is not to say that the increase of audience is only among youth. The Springer has not transformed itself into a place where only children belong. But it is to say this: A substantial portion of young people, ages 5-18, in Columbus, GA, are passionate about live theatre. They are taking that passion home to their entire families and then totin’ Mom, Dad, aunts, uncles and babysitters with them to watch vibrant live theatre at the Springer Opera House.

One academy student quoted in the study speaks of the draw of the Springer. “The building inspires me,”” the student says. “I have a sense of owing this place so much, I love going back to it.”

However, it isn’t the venerable building alone that draws people. Because the students have created a large community unto themselves, when they get to the theatre, they see their teachers (professional
theatrical workers) onstage, and their peers working backstage, onstage or in the house as ushers. The youth of the Columbus community are leading the way to the Springer. Period.

Lisa Mounts says, in the Executive Summary of the report: “The findings are astonishing: For the past 11 years the Springer Theatre Academy, the Springer’s mammoth education program, has been doing innovative work with young people that has had a profound impact on individual children and their families. This, in turn, has resulted in these students and their families eventually emerging as subscribers, single-ticket buyers, donors and board members. The Springer audience is getting bigger and YOUNGER - a reverse of the national trend.

“This study recognizes these trends for what they are: The Springer is beginning to reap the benefits of its long-term commitment to developing audiences from the ground up. The Knight Foundation sees this as a potential ‘sustainability’ model that might be exported to theatres all over the U.S.”

Beverly Blake of the Knight Foundation encourages theatres across America to take note of the study findings.

“These results are extremely important for the entire theatre community,” she says.
“[This study] shows that if you get young people involved in every aspect, they are not only your future audience – they will develop future audiences.”

“Really?” one might think, “Well, that’s a no-brainer. Let’s get our organization to teach some more classes. We’ll beef up our education program and start reaping the benefits!”

Actually, the Springer Theatre Academy is not just any education program. “[Springer Academy] is a very different model than [the educational programs at] other theatres – this model works to build audiences,” says Blake.

Springer Theatre Academy is a carefully, uniquely pre-planned, rigorously organized venture, with an ambitious, creative and committed leader whose focus is on the learning of each individual child. In fact, according to the study, this leadership weighs heavily in importance, as do the teachers that Ron Anderson assembles (or essentially casts) to instruct at the Academy each year. When asked to rate elements of the Springer Theatre Academy in terms of what is important to them, 90 percent of those surveyed said that Anderson was “extremely important” and 82 percent said that the teachers were “extremely important.”

Evidence of the success of the Springer Theatre Academy is seen in the growth of fresh and committed audiences, new theatre-goers who, according to the Knight Foundation study, would not have come to the theatre except for the exceptional educational programming that their children participated in at the Springer Theatre Academy. According to those surveyed, 98 percent rate the overall experience of going to the Springer Theatre Academy as “excellent” and 87.8 percent say that they saw more plays since becoming involved in the Theatre Academy.

The Springer Opera House is an historic theatre that dates to 1871. The interior of the Springer is shown on Page 10.

Moonlight and Magnolias, like all of the Springer’s mainstage productions, featured lots of backstage work by Springer Theatre Academy students. Jef Holbrook (Ben Hecht), left, is a graduate of the Springer Theatre Academy and a longtime Academy teacher. Jens Rasmussen (David O. Selznick) is a professional actor from New York, with more than 20 years’ experience, who has been teaching at the Academy for several years.
Thousands audition...

180 are chosen.

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As one academy parent quoted in the study stated, “It makes our family’s life stronger, richer and closer. We’ve seen nothing like it, anywhere.”

But back to the point, how is the Springer achieving these fantastic results? Artistic Logistics notes that it arrived at some answers to that question through a series of interviews with students, parents, teachers, Springer staff, Columbus area leaders and education directors at comparable companies around the country. Following are some of the key strategies used at the Springer.

**STRATEGY 1: EDUCATION PROGRAM IS CENTER STAGE**

“The Springer has made the Academy integral to its programming and artistic vision, rather than treating it as a revenue generator that is ancillary to main stage programming.” - Learning Everywhere

There is a widely held perspective in theatre organizations that education programs are secondary or even tertiary to other artistic programming. In addition, many organizations utilize their training programs as a way to stabilize their cash flow concerns. While the study states that “the Academy does have a positive impact on the bottom line,” it also has a fundamental effect on “artistic decisions” and is viewed as “a resource of talent and ability for the organization.” Season scripts are chosen with the intent of utilizing students whenever possible, and students work in every aspect of production – backstage, administrative and, yes, onstage.

The Springer Board of Directors is also aware of the importance of the Academy and the key role it has played in the overall success of the theatre. In 2006, the Board changed its bylaws to include a student on the board of directors. This board member is not a figurehead, but an actual board member with a vote and lively involvement in board discussions.

The Academy also goes out of its way to include parents and to encourage parental involvement on all fronts. For instance, parents are invited to observe any and all classes at the academy. This builds parents’ trust and support of the program, and connects them to the big picture of what is so special to their children. According to the study, an average of 750 students attend the Academy each year and parents of academy students (past and present) hold 11 percent of the season ticket accounts and a remarkable 42 percent of single-ticket accounts. Those statistics alone are jaw-dropping.
STRATEGY 2: THEATRE’S ROLE IN LIFE IS EMPHASIZED

“The philosophical basis of the Theatre Academy – “life skills through stage skills” – creates an entry point for students regardless of their ambitions for a life in the theatre.” – Learning Everywhere

It is this philosophy that Academy Director Ron Anderson coined and developed, focusing on creating strong young people, emphasizing skills of commitment, discipline and teamwork – “an ongoing commitment to invest in an education program that builds good citizens who are now arts consumers,” says Anderson. This commitment to young people from the very beginning centered on his key principle of youth performing arts training: “Life Skills through Stage Skills.”

As one parent noted in the study, “It seems to me that the Academy and Ron and the staff make an incredible impact on a significant number of children and youth in this area – and it seems to me that that impact is positive, nurturing and growth enhancing and will carry forward into [the rest of] these young people’s lives.”

It should also be noted that Anderson’s commitment to building life skills through theatre did not begin in the Theatre Academy classrooms. The Springer Opera House risked an entire year of salary by sending Anderson to classrooms all over the city of Columbus, orienting the community to this concept and giving a taste of what would be offered in the coming years at the Springer – providing help to theatre teachers and making contact with area schools and principals. It was a risk that both Pierce and Anderson say has been profitable in ways they never dreamed, forging connections with their community that have only gotten stronger over the years.

Anderson adds that this philosophy also begins interviews for the positions of teacher and assistant teacher for the Theatre Academy: “We hire pro’s in the classroom – teacher/performers…. Whenever I interview potential faculty, I assume their stage skills… [from their resumes], and I ask them: What do you think of this phrase, ‘life skills through stage skills’? And if that tends to launch a whole new conversation, a real eager kind of give and take, then I know this is a person that I want to really, seriously consider hiring.”

So, despite Anderson’s denial of planning to grow an audience, it was a cleverly hatched strategy that brought the Springer to this point, even if it wasn’t a plan to develop bigger audiences. Anderson’s strategy was to change the face and culture of a community – one young person at a time – growing better citizens, creating thoughtful and confident young people. By doing so, the Springer may have stumbled on an audience development model that could benefit any performing arts organization.

STRATEGY 3: LEADERS ARE COMMITTED AND CARING

“The excellence of the program has built strong bonds between Academy families – students and their parents – and the Springer Opera House. The characteristics of this excellence include caring and com-
Fun Facts about the Springer

2008-09 BUDGET:
$2.2 Million

AUDIENCE GROWTH:
2007-08 Season 108,000
2006-07 Season 106,300
2005-06 Season 96,500

2008-09 PRODUCTION SEASON
Mainstage:
Menopause, the Musical
Father of the Bride
Peter Pan
Hamlet
Big River
Red, White and Tuna

Studio Series:
Why Baby Why: The Music of George Jones and Tammy Wynette
A Tuna Christmas
Charm School

Children’s Series:
If You Give a Pig a Party
Winnie the Pooh
The Big Friendly Giant

National Tour:
Tours nationally as Springer Theatricals, performing in about 60 American cities each year.

‘TUNA’ PARTNERSHIP
The Springer has developed a partnership with the creators of the “Tuna” plays (Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard) in which A Tuna Christmas was performed in the Studio Series by the producing artistic director Paul Pierce and associate artistic director Ron Anderson. Furthermore, the Springer is the first theatre in America to be given rights to Red, White and Tuna, which until now had only been performed by the original cast/creators. In addition, the Springer has mounted separate productions of A Tuna Christmas and the original play, Greater Tuna, and included those productions in its national touring schedule. All four productions will be directed by creator Ed Howard, who lives in Atlanta. Over the years, the Springer has premiered several of Howard’s other works, including The Tempest Tossed and Daisy Fay and the Miracle Man.

HISTORY
The Springer Opera House, which is the State Theatre of Georgia, opened February 21, 1871, and soon gained a reputation as the finest theatre between Washington, DC, and New Orleans. The Springer was saved from the wrecking ball in 1964 and underwent a major restoration in the 1990s that increased its size from 35,000 square feet to 75,000 square feet.

GHOSTLY TRIVIA
The Springer Opera House is well-known for its ghost sightings. Several years ago, The Travel Channel named it one of “The World’s Top Ten Ghostly Destinations.”

The excellence of the “caring and committed leadership” referenced above occurs in two ways. First, the producing artistic director (Pierce) and the associate artistic director/Academy director (Anderson), have a working relationship that sets the standard for all other interactions in the company. Pierce is quoted in Learning Everywhere, saying, “Ron Anderson is the conscience of this company. I ask myself, ‘What’s Ron going to say about this?’”

Parents also note the strong leadership. As one parent states in the study, “I truly cannot imagine the program being as phenomenal without Ron Anderson. The kids adore and respect his wise, firm, but gentle guidance. I cannot name a finer role model.”
As co-administrators and artists, Pierce and Anderson are a formidable force of creativity. Their solidarity of purpose leads to both season selections and day-to-day choices that benefit the entire organization, maintaining a connection between the Academy and all Springer productions. The level of pride and care that employees put into their jobs at the Springer Opera House also is unusual. There is a sense that every staff person, Academy instructor or guest artist working at the Springer has an awareness of being part of something bigger than himself or herself.

The Knight Foundation study asserts that Ron Anderson’s introduction to the Academy’s curriculum “encapsulates the philosophy and attitude of the program,” but it also seems to capture the spirit of the Springer Opera House itself. The introduction, as quoted in Learning Everywhere, states: “We want our students to have fun and make friends, learn something about theatre and learn something about themselves. We want our students to learn the value of discipline, commitment, integrity and teamwork. We want our students to be competent in the craft [of theatre] and confident in themselves, fearless on stage and joyously supportive of each other.”

**STRATEGY 4: SPRINGER CREATES SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

“The Springer has capitalized on its location, history, standing in the community and strong administration in creating and implementing the Academy.” - Learning Everywhere

One of the ways it has done so is by nurturing a relationship between community theatre artists, professional theatre artists and students. The rewards for this are many – but the crux of the reason that this works so thoroughly is this: In theatre, all types of persons are brought into the rehearsal room to do one thing – create a story that they hope will live on in the audience’s memory. The theatre at
“They’re always teaching by example. Paul fixes the sets if he sees they need fixing.”

TAKE-AWAY ADVICE FROM THE SPRINGER’S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

As Pierce digests the study results and what they mean for the Springer, he also is eager to share the results with other theatres.

He notes the following:

“Every organization is different and has different strengths. What I do know is that attracting audiences is like the country preacher saving souls – you save them one at the time, not in bunches.

“Of course, there isn’t a one-size-fits-all answer to the audience crisis in American theatre but this is what I have learned: The community wants IN. Young people want IN and, for the most part we have not created ways for them to get IN. By IN, I mean access to every aspect of our operations, policies and decision-making.

When the Springer begins to let young people IN, they looked for ways to participate – volunteering in our marketing department, working load-ins, answering phones, sweeping up, running errands.

‘The Knight Foundation sees this as a potential “sustainability” model that might be exported to theatres all over the U.S.’

- Lisa Mount, Artistic Logistics

large is one of the “great social equalizers.” Differences are left outside the door, and all hands are on deck to create something beautiful to give to an audience. This is one of the most satisfying aspects of the Springer Opera House organization, in action. It is not unusual to have 10 silent and efficient stage-hands from the Academy assisting as community actors and professional actors work onstage, while designers and staff and front-of-house volunteers perform their roles – all with the hope and intention of creating something wonderful together.

As Scooter MacMillan, Springer marketing director, notes in Learning Everywhere, “We want to have a theatre that the Academy can be proud of.”

How does the Springer achieve this atmosphere? A mystical and lucky happenstance? Perhaps at least a portion of the answer can be found with the chief executive officer.

Strong companies have steady leadership, and although Paul Pierce routinely redirects praise to other members of his team, his comment on audience building is a telling one.

“One of these days, when we lay our heads down in our graves, if the audience is not bigger than it was when we began our careers, we will have failed the American theatre,” Pierce states emphatically. “It is our responsibility to increase audiences and leave a larger audience for the next generation.”

Pierce has a leadership style that encourages growth, and he surrounds himself with the right people to help him achieve his goal of benefiting theatre at large. He also has and encourages a hands-on style of work.

As one student notes in the study, “They’re always teaching by example. Paul fixes the sets if he sees they need fixing.”
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“Two years ago, we asked the board of directors to revise the bylaws to provide a student slot on the board. Now, the voice of youth is represented at board meetings and these teenagers participate in every discussion from budgets to policy matters. We’ve got to look for ways to get the community IN – because unless we are an integral part of the community we serve, we don’t really have a theatre, do we?”

When asked what he learned from the Knight Foundation study that might transfer well to other theatres, Pierce stated:

“After many years in this business, there are still new tricks to learn. A revolution is still possible if you’re willing to allow change to erupt and allow for the unexpected. The presence of children on the INSIDE will rearrange the molecules of your organization. Running a theatre takes a lot out of you mentally, physically and spiritually. That’s why most artistic directors last about 10 years in one place, max.

“The exceptions to that [are] founding directors. If there was one basic idea that I think could transfer to other theatres it’s this: Run your theatre as if you are the founding director. Don’t let the theatre’s past weigh you down.

“The advent of the Springer Theatre Academy has put another 100,000 miles on my career and reinvigorated this theatre – this community, in fact.

“This is the fourth theatre I’ve run in my career, and I’m in my 21st season at the Springer. Even though this theatre is 138 years old, I feel like the founding director and I’m good for at least another 10 years. I think of all the years I spent trying to force my will on boards and citizens. I’m a strong-willed person, so I won many battles. But once I started opening doors and windows and allowing other people’s ideas, challenges, opinions, desires and dreams to blow through the theatre, it became a much happier and more creative place to work. And that free flow of youth and vitality began to define the identity of the theatre in ways that my hard head could not. And I’m guessing that identity will last long after I am gone.”

The Knight Foundation’s Learning Everywhere study pertains directly to the Springer Opera House and the Springer Theatre Academy, but the findings are far-reaching – and may provide the signposts other theatres need to guide them on a similar path to audience growth.

‘One of these days, when we lay our heads down in our graves, if the audience is not bigger than it was when we began our careers, we will have failed the American theatre. It is our responsibility to increase audiences and leave a larger audience for the next generation.’

- Paul Pierce, Producing Artistic Director

Lisa Cesnik is the producing artistic director and a founding member of Rose of Athens Theatre, a professional theatre in Athens, GA. She has worked at the Springer Opera House as an actor and a director and has taught in the Springer Theatre Academy.

Want to know more? Download a PDF of the Springer study online: www.artisticlogistics.org/wp-content/content/files/LearningEverywhere.pdf
Students meander into the large auditorium in twos and threes at 9:30 on an October morning. Some are in the cast of the school’s upcoming play, *Lilies of the Field*. Most come ready to work on scenes for the upcoming state high school theatre competition.

Once students have settled, their teacher – Roy Hudson, the first arts teacher to be named Alabama’s Teacher of the Year – takes center stage.

“Today’s sermon is on fear,” Hudson says.

Looking around at students, Hudson reminds them that they have only a month before the district competition in Alabama’s Walter S. Trumbauer High School Theatre Festival.

“We don’t go to Trumbauer for a certificate or an award, though those may be nice,” he says. “We go for the performance opportunities. We go so you will improve and perform well and feel good about how you have progressed.”

To progress, he emphasizes, students must be vigilant in their work, rehearsing their lines every day.

“If you haven’t done your piece a million times, you’ll never get it,” he says. “Never, never, never, never, never.”

Such fierce passion is a hallmark of Hudson’s approach to his advanced theatre class at Shades Valley High School in Irondale, AL, just outside Birmingham. He is head theatre instructor in the school’s
"Academy" magnet program, started in 2002 to allow gifted drama students the opportunity to study their craft in a professionally-oriented program intended for those who are serious about theatre. In addition to teaching at Shades Valley, Roy serves as theatre supervisor and drama consultant for Jefferson County, the second largest school system in Alabama.

The nationally acclaimed academy at Shades Valley attracts young people from all over the county to study theatre. For this particular school year, Shades Valley had 70 applicants, 30 of whom were accepted after an interview and an audition.

The program’s popularity is not surprising in light of the Shades Valley program’s artistic, academic and competitive success. In the state Trumbauer Festival, Shades Valley has placed Best of Show nine of the last 11 years. It has won the state Best Play Award four times and won the SETC regional competition once. State play winners include Meteor Boy (2000), Happily Never After (2003), The Zoo Story (2004) and Forever Plaid (2006), which also received the Best Play Award at the 2007 SETC regional competition. In 2008, Shades Valley won its district’s Best Play Award with My Father’s House, a play by Hudson.

Now Shades Valley is preparing to perform internationally. In August 2009, Hudson will take Once a Pond. A Time., with book and lyrics by him, to the American High School Theatre Festival at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. This year, 1,500 school programs were nominated and 30 of those applied to be part of the festival. Shades Valley was one of only 64 selected to perform.

Even with all this success, though, other theatre teachers in the state were surprised when a fellow arts teacher – Hudson – was announced in May as the Teacher of the Year for Alabama.

“I never thought that would happen,” says Alan Gardner, who teaches theatre at nearby Vestavia Hills High School. “I’ve been teaching for over 10 years and, in that..."
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time, experience has instructed me that most decisions in education are based on an ‘elementary’ model of teaching: one teacher, 26 students, a classroom, one door. But performing arts programs don’t work that way, and it’s great to see a theatre director get recognition – not to mention one of the best in the state! I’m proud of Roy.”

So how did an arts teacher become Teacher of the Year? That’s an easy question for Betsy Rogers, Alabama’s – and America’s – Teacher of the Year in 2003, who was on the panel that chose Hudson.

“What stands out about Roy is that he teaches theatre and he is good at it,” Rogers notes. “And he has a compelling story. He came late to teaching after a successful career in theatre.”

She notes that because his job involves instructing other teachers in the county, as well as teaching students at his school, he has an impact beyond the walls of Shades Valley.

“So many of us in the profession are so passionate about the arts,” she says. “Roy … teaches other teachers and takes delight in their progress. He is passionate about what he does.”

She believes that Hudson’s selection is a milestone because, through it, Alabama makes a strong statement about the importance of the arts in education.

“All children need the arts,” says Rogers. “In this day of teaching for testing, it is important for us as a state to step up to the plate and tell people: ‘The arts are important.’”

**Hudson’s path to the classroom**

Roy Hudson didn’t set out to be a high school teacher – and, in fact, didn’t enter the secondary school education field until he was in his 40s.

He grew up in Burkburnett, TX, a town with little theatre or arts, located halfway between Dallas, TX, and Oklahoma City, OK, on the Red River. He auditioned for a play his senior year in high school and was cast in the lead role of Ayn Rand’s *The Night of January Sixteenth*. “Then I was hooked,” he says with a grin. He pursued an undergraduate theatre degree at Midwestern State University and received a master of fine arts (MFA) degree from the Dallas Theater Center.

Migrating east in 1978, Hudson got a job on the theatre/music/dance faculty at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) as the set and lighting designer and technical director. After two years, James Hatcher hired him to be the set designer at Town and Gown community theatre in Birmingham.
Six years later, Hudson left to form his own company, Roy Hudson Productions.

"I did mostly art direction for commercials, industrial films, print ads, trade shows and sports events," Hudson says. "My big clients were Parisian, Food World, Big B, Vulcan, Liberty Jeans, several ad agencies like Lucky and Forney, and the Colonnade Sports Group (which is where I did my big business with the SEC and the PGA). Along the way, I did a lot of work for Birmingham Children’s Theatre, Birmingham Festival of Arts, and City Stages."

In his early 40s, he grew tired of traveling and decided to make a major career move – to teaching at the high school level.

"With my company, I was doing more sports production and less theatre," Hudson recalls. "I was doing a lot of commercial work, but I wanted to do theatre exclusively. I also wanted to work more with young people, having enjoyed teaching workshops and seminars."

Hudson began teaching at Shades Valley in 1995 – and soon discovered there were many advantages to working with young people.

“They have more passion than adults, and they bring such life to their work – such freshness,” Hudson says. “Plus, I wanted to create new work, and they are willing to do that. More established arts groups don’t want to do anything but what has worked in the past. Young people are willing and eager to explore new, uncharted waters. It has been an adventure, but it has been fantastic.”

**Inspiring Professionalism**

Hudson’s practical advice on running a high school theatre program is for teachers to learn everything they can about every facet of theatre, especially the technical area. He says the time he spent working at his own production company, where he had to “do everything,” was crucial in equipping him for the classroom.

“That prepared me to run a high school program,” he says. “Teaching the classes is the easiest part. What makes the difference is knowing how to act and direct and design and build scenery and all those other technical aspects.”

Hudson believes that his team’s professional approach is what sets his high school theatre program apart.

“We expect the students to perform at a high level all of the time,” Hudson says. “We don’t expect second best from them. We also are in constant production. It means they must always be prepared, always be working.”

The school also produces new plays annually, he adds, giving the students valuable experience in creating a role on their own. In new plays, “there is nothing to copy from,” he says. “They have ownership.”

In addition, the school brings in guest artists “to work with the students to give them a fresh perspective on their work.”

Jane Baker, the principal at Shades
Valley, who has worked with Hudson for a decade, calls him “the complete ‘teacher package.’”

“Roy has passion for the kids and his craft,” she says. “He is knowledgeable and talented. He can teach acting and technical theatre and design and painting and construction. And it is amazing what he and his team can get out of high school students. They accept constructive criticism from him because they know he has their best interest at heart.”

The end result of his work with the students is high-level performance, she notes: “You forget they are kids when they are onstage.”

Alan Gardner, Hudson’s theatre colleague at a nearby school, says that he has competed with Hudson from the vantage point of three different schools.

“He always makes me work harder,” Gardner says. “It has been a given in our district that his production would ‘make it to state.’ Roy is a natural leader and an inspiration to his students. He challenges them to dream big and follows it up with a whatever-needs-to-be-done attitude. Roy is also very practical and doesn’t waste time (his or the students.) Those are big assets for a theatre educator.”

A dedicated team assists Hudson, and he credits them with the program’s success. His team includes Janice Sanders, a fellow theatre teacher; Jamie Grimes, a fulltime dance teacher at the school; and Michael King, the school’s musical consultant.

Hudson also works with theatre students on the community level. He and Catherine Rye Gilmore, president of Birmingham’s Virginia Samford Theatre, created the STARS (Students Take A Role at the Samford) arts education program in 2006 to encourage and train young performers in all areas of live theatre in a professional theatre setting. Initially, students were recommended by their teachers and asked to write a full-page essay on why they wanted to participate in the STARS program. Ten-week classes were offered in acting, voice, scene study, dance and technical theatre, and concluded in a showcase of the participating students.

When the opportunity arose to produce Les Miserables - School Edition in 2008, the STARS program evolved from theatre classes into productions of educationally relevant musical works utilizing students from Birmingham schools. Les Miz was so successful that, in 2009, the Virginia Samford Theatre will produce a second musical through the STARS program, Jekyll and Hyde, with an emphasis on drug prevention and education.

Gilmore says she has been impressed with Hudson’s ability to work with young people.

“Roy Hudson possesses that rare quality of being able to extract professionalism and excellence from his participating students,” she says. “I have never seen better trained young performers from all backgrounds who work together as a team and who view working in the theatre as serious business.”

**Hands-On Teaching**

Back in the auditorium at Shades Valley, Hudson is talking to his class. “I said this yesterday and you weren’t all listening ...” Students persist laughing and chattering. “And you’re not all listening now,” he says, pausing. “Now you are. Tonight is final dress, and we’ll go to the Whistle Stop (Irondale Café) for supper. It’s our together time. Our family time.”

The class is paying attention now, and Hudson adds, “I am sorry I couldn’t make it for karaoke at the Chick-Fil-A last night.

‘In this day of teaching for testing, it is important for us as a state to step up to the plate and tell people: “The arts are important.”’

- Betsy Rogers, Alabama’s – and America’s – Teacher of the Year in 2003, and a member of the panel that chose Hudson
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but I was covered in dusty brown paint.”

He had stayed late painting the stage floor for the play, and many students comment on its beauty. A rumor floats among the performing arts students that their teacher never leaves the theatre.

“That’s not true – I think I’m really a lazy person at heart, but I also want everything to be perfect,” Hudson says. “Since those two elements don’t coexist very well, I had to develop a very efficient way to accomplish everything that I do. I don’t sit at work ever, so I think that’s what everyone at school sees. I love to go home, and there, I sit.”

Later, at a piano on the side stage, Hudson and King coach a young man singing “Extraordinary” from the musical Pippin. Once he is sure the student is progressing, Hudson moves to a scene being practiced on stage. After the duo finishes running through it, he commiserates with them over the difficulty of playing 30 when the young people are not even 18. Hudson particularly compliments one section, “That was a really good moment. You might even punch it some more. But,” he advises Dallas Taylor, “your reaction to your wife on forgetting your anniversary – you are glossing over it. I’ve been married a long time. Once, I forgot my wife’s birthday. I’ve never felt that bad in my life. And there was nothing I could do. You’ve got to have an instant where you can wait and feel… what? Remorse? Then you can move on and show anger. It’s a phenomenal scene and your nuances are starting to kick in. What is not working for you?”

He pauses and they discuss different

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Where Hudson’s Former Students Are Today

**Ben Hope**, a 2002 graduate of Shades Valley, went on to become a KC/ACTF Irene Ryan regional winner and national finalist while earning his degree at the University of Central Florida. He now is an Equity actor living in New York and working across the country. He recently appeared *(below at right)* in Hank Williams: Lost Highway at the Sierra Repertory Theatre in California.

**Aaron Thompson**, a 2001 graduate of Jefferson County International Baccalaureate (the sister high school to Shades Valley), is company manager for Atlantic Theater Company in New York. He earned a BA in communications from DePauw University in 2005 and is finishing an MFA in theatrical management and producing at Columbia University. “Hudson was very influential in my decision to enter theatre management,” he says.

**Ben Boyer**, a 1997 graduate of Shades Valley, attended the University of Alabama’s theatre program before becoming the resident scenic and lighting designer and technical director for the Virginia Samford Theatre in Birmingham. Hudson, Boyer says, “is responsible for where I am today. He recognizes talented people and helps them move forward, even after they have left his program.”

**Kristen Bowden Sharpe** attended Shades Valley briefly before leaving to tour nationally as a 10th grader. She portrayed Mary Phagan in the first national tour of *Parade*, Leisl in *The Sound of Music*, and Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. Now living in Birmingham, Sharpe says: “Mr. Hudson has an amazing vision and was so encouraging as a teacher and now as a friend. You can’t help but do great things coming from his program in whatever path you choose!”
parts. “I need to see more subtlety. Some of your emotion is…” In the middle of this dissection of the scene, Hudson notes that the Pippin singer has finished and prompts another student to go to the piano, revealing a mind that can be on several groups of students at one time. Hudson finds himself at that precarious place in young people’s lives where, as a teacher, he can lead them across a precipice and make a huge difference. Back at the piano, Hudson takes hands out of a student’s pockets as the fellow practices a piece from Les Miserables. “Diction, diction, diction. I can’t understand what you are singing. Now you have stopped singing. Don’t stop singing…” As the student continues, Hudson and his crew begin to coax greatness out of him.

Nomination for Award

Hudson’s first step toward the state’s highest teaching award came when he learned, as he prepared to leave the school for Christmas break in 2007, that his fellow

Students Say Hudson ‘Opens Doors of Opportunity’

Student Dallas Taylor (shown below in Once a Pond. A Time., a new musical fable by Roy Hudson, which Shades Valley will premiere at the American High School Theatre Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland in August 2009), says: “What is beneficial in the Shades Valley theatre program is that Mr. Hudson gives us a lot of freedom and choices, but he tells us if something is not working. He guides us, but also lets us make mistakes, and explore and learn…. We are all learning life lessons we will never forget: punctuality, hard work, getting up in front of people to speak and perform. I am a completely different person now than two years ago. This program helps you find yourself and what you love.”

Allie Bruner (pictured on Page 22) says: “He [Hudson] gets very involved. He helps pick scenes, and devotes time to get a scene working. He never stops. He goes on and on and on. Now he’ll work on scenery, then lines, then music… Mr. Hudson opens doors of opportunity. He finds what we are passionate about, and pulls the desire and the enthusiasm out of us. He makes us put that on stage. Mr. Hudson is honest and prepares us. He doesn’t baby us. He makes us face the music and trains us for what is to come.”

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teachers at Shades Valley had selected him as the school’s Teacher of the Year. Next, he competed at the county level and moved into the state competition.

Betsy Rogers notes that teachers who are nominated for the state title go through a rigorous selection process that involves many steps. Among other items, each nominee is asked to submit a paper application, a written essay and a resume.

When Hudson was selected as one of the 16 state finalists, he had to submit a video of himself teaching and a lesson plan. Teams that include business and professional people, as well as academic specialists and former state Teachers of the Year, read and viewed the materials and narrowed the group of 16 down to four finalists.

The last step for the four finalists was an interview, an hour-long session in Montgomery, during which the 16-member selection team asked questions.

“After digesting all that, we [came] to our final decision,” says Rogers.

The state names an elementary winner, a secondary school winner, and then an overall Teacher of the Year winner. Hudson recalls his surprise when his name was announced as the overall winner.

“We had a wonderful reception in Montgomery in May where they honored all 16 of the district finalists,” he says. “They showed a film of the four finalists. Then they announced the elementary and secondary winners. Then, they called my name. I assumed they had counted [the ballots] wrong.”

He was immediately asked to speak to the packed room, full of state school board members, local school board members, principals, teachers, family, friends and the press. Hudson says he is rarely overwhelmed, but “I was overwhelmed, and then asked to speak intelligently. I’m not sure how well I did.”

**Teacher of the Year’s Lesson Plan**

Since winning this prestigious honor, Hudson has regained his composure and spoken at many locations around the state about his platform: promoting the arts in education and promoting imagination across the curriculum.

Hudson has written about his agenda in education journals that have reached superintendents, principals, school board members, and educators. In July, he was honored by the Birmingham Area Theatre Alliance for being Alabama’s first arts teacher to be named Teacher of the Year.

He could have taken the year off from teaching at Shades Valley, but chose not to do so. He did get another teacher to help teach because he is on the road so much. But even so, Hudson can’t resist teaching her as well. He is mentoring Alyssa Crisswell, as this is her first year of teaching.

“That is such a great perk,” he notes. “She is wonderful, and it is like getting to teach this great student one-on-one.”

As the Teacher of the Year, Hudson received the use of a car for the year. The state also pays for his gas to attend functions associated with that role. In addition, he received a monetary award, which “is nice because I didn’t have any suits, and I need suits for all of these speaking engagements,” Hudson notes.

Shades Valley and his department also received $2,500, which Hudson used to purchase wireless microphones and scene paint.

“Of course, I also get to meet the new president of the United States in April,” he adds. “I can’t wait!”

Hudson is using his position to call attention to an important message: The arts are integral to education.

“I do not feel that we are in any way extracurricular,” he says. “We are and should be at the core of any curriculum. I have spoken and written about this everywhere. It was in my application and it is at the center of all of my appearances. As the first arts teacher in this position, I feel a huge responsibility to represent everyone in the arts to administrators and politicians.”

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Barbara Sloan is a freelance writer and executive director of *The Seasoned Performers*, Alabama’s only senior adult theatre, in Birmingham, AL.
The essays in this collection support the contention of editor Philip C. Kolin, a professor of English at the University of Southern Mississippi, that "Tennessee Williams is, unquestionably, the most influential playwright America has ever produced." The book examines the impact that Williams had on 15 other playwrights: William Inge, Neil Simon, Edward Albee, A.R. Gurney, Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy, John Guare, Sam Shepard, August Wilson, David Mamet, Beth Henley, Christopher Durang, Tony Kushner, Suzan-Lori Parks and Anna Deveare Smith.

Williams has clear connections to many of these writers. He promoted the early work of Inge, who admired his mentor until rivalry soured the relationship between the two dramatists. Edward Albee has acknowledged his debt to Williams in repeated interviews, including one by David Crespy in this volume. Both playwrights battled criticism because of their sexual orientation and, according to Albee, both felt a Chekhovian and tragic sense of life.

John Clum explains how Christopher Durang – who wrote two parodies of Williams, For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls and Desire, Desire, Desire – attacks the institution of marriage in a way that is similar to Williams’s style. Kirk Woodward claims that notions of scandal link Williams’s Cat on a Hot Tin Roof with Tony Kushner’s Angels in America. Verna Foster writes that Beth Henley’s plays provide comic versions of characters from A Streetcar Named Desire and The Glass Menagerie. Brenda Murphy’s essay, which is particularly well-written, looks at the fate of artists in plays by David Mamet and Williams.

One important aspect of this book is its analysis of what Williams has meant for African-American playwrights. Harry Elam describes how the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks follow in a Williams tradition of using illicit sexual desire as a visceral exploration of character. Sandra Shannon calls August Wilson and Williams fellow sons of the South; she shows how the South permeates Wilson’s dramas even though they take place in Pittsburgh. Nancy Cho claims that, although Lorraine Hansberry’s plays are more overtly political than those by Williams, both playwrights questioned the sexual and racial politics of America.

Better copy editing would improve Kolin’s book, which has a number of typographical and grammatical errors (e.g., use of the word “an” where “and” should appear, and use of a present-tense verb where past tense is needed). Nevertheless, The Influence of Tennessee Williams will interest anyone who wants to know more about one of America’s finest playwrights and his heirs.

Correction
Due to an editing error, an incorrect location was given for Riverside Theatre in the “Hot Jobs in Theatre” story in the Winter 2009 Southern Theatre. Riverside is located in Vero Beach, FL.

Frazer Lively is chair of the theatre department at Wesleyan College, a liberal arts college for women in Macon, GA.
Kenita Miller
is on Broadway in
the new musical
XANADU in the
role of Erato.

Ward Billeisen
is in the role of
Brick Hawvermale
on Broadway in
CURTAINS starring
David Hyde Pierce
and Debra Monk.

Gretchen Mol
is in the new movie
3:10 TO YUMA in
the role of Alice Evans.
The movie stars Russell
Crowe, Christian Bale
and Peter Fonda.

Tiffany Engen
plays Noreen in
the new film
HAIRSPRAY with
John Travolta.

Shannon Durig
is currently starring
in the leading role of
Tracy Turnblad in the
Broadway hit
HAIRSPRAY.

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