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Special Section

D-1 2016 SETC College, University & Training Program Directory
Find the perfect school for you in this comprehensive directory, which lists SETC member institutions and the degrees they offer.
(Special section begins after Page 18.)
To Get an MFA or Not: These Are the Questions

Over the past 20 years, I have spoken with many people who were weighing a life-changing, mid-career decision: Should I return to school to get a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree? My advice, as a person who contemplated and pursued an MFA and as a professor who now advises students considering this path, is to start with some questions.

**Question 1:** Why do you want an MFA? For those who have been working for a while, the typical answer is: I want to teach. The MFA acts as teaching certification for most colleges (although many MFA programs do not offer teaching opportunities). In addition, an MFA may help if you want to start a whole new career or if you want to move into a more specialized area in your existing field. For example, you want to get into automated scenery, but don’t have an engineering background. An MFA at an accredited school could help. Other common reasons are to study with faculty whose approach or style you admire, or because you would like an opportunity to spend three years on your art full-time. If your answer is that you simply want to gain more experience, don’t pursue an MFA. Change jobs.

**Question 2:** How will you pull it off financially? The good news is that almost all MFA programs in all areas of theatre offer assistantships. An assistantship consists of a paying job and some free tuition. And you can work summers and breaks to supplement your income.

**Question 3:** Is this what you really need to do to achieve your career goals? Then start planning. Look for schools in areas close to friends and family – not for financial reasons, but for mental support. And yes, you probably do have to move. You cannot distance-learn theatre. Start now to save money, because you are going to be poor at the start. And be prepared for a return to homework.

There are a lot more considerations I can’t address in this short space, but the bottom line is: If you want an MFA, go get it! You will be investing three years of really tough physical and mental work at low pay, plus long hours of studying, in order to reach a different career path – one that (hopefully) will last 20-plus years.
At this time of year, many of us are planning for exciting new beginnings. Some people may be starting the New Year by applying to colleges and universities for education and training in theatre, while others may be exploring job opportunities available in the field.

In this issue of Southern Theatre, we provide assistance to readers in finding their own educational and career paths in theatre. We begin on Page 9 with a story on how to shop for a school, geared to students beginning their search for a college or university where they can study theatre. Stefanie Maiya Lehmann, who earned her undergraduate degree in 2013 and her master’s in 2015, shares fresh, honest advice from someone who has recently been there, done that.

Acting is often the magnet that draws people into the theatre, but it is not a lifelong career for most. In a story beginning on Page 19, Karen Brewster explores the many other options beyond acting that are available to those interested in a theatre career and shares profiles of professionals in more than a dozen theatre positions. As part of our career focus, Larry Cook and Megan Monaghan Rivas provide an even more in-depth look at three jobs – vocal coach, prop master and casting director – in “A Day in the Life” vignettes featuring professionals in these fields.

Questions about degrees and alternative career paths aren’t just the province of younger people starting out. Many mid-career artists ponder whether they should expand their opportunities by returning to school for an advanced degree. In our “400 Words” column on Page 4, F. Randy deCelle shares advice.

This issue also includes a comprehensive resource for students and their teachers as they look for the perfect place to begin or continue their study of theatre. In the center section of the magazine, you will find the 2016 SETC College, University & Training Program Directory, which lists SETC member institutions and provides details on the degrees they offer. The directory has grown to 24 pages this year.

We debut a new regular column on Page 7 that will be of interest to all who produce theatre. “Hot off the Press” by Megan Monaghan Rivas will share information on newly available plays, keyed to a particular theme. The focus this time is large-cast plays.

Finally, we spotlight the career of a theatre legend in our regular “Words, Words, Words...” book column on Page 35. George Hillow reviews designer and theatre consultant Richard Pilbrow’s A Theatre Project, originally published in 2011 and updated in 2015.

I hope this issue of Southern Theatre provides helpful information to those seeking education and training in theatre, as well as opening new perspectives for those interested in exploring the many career options within the profession.

Tiza Garland, SETC President
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Welcome to our new regular column focusing on newly available plays and musicals. In each issue, we will offer suggestions for your upcoming season based on a survey of major play publishers’ offerings during the previous six months. With each play, you’ll find the cast breakdown and a referral to the publisher who holds the rights. We hope to introduce material you might not be familiar with yet and save you time as well. Each issue will embrace a theme. For this outing, the theme is large casts, shows that provide performance opportunities for 10 or more – sometimes many, many more.

### Love/Sick by John Cariani
Described as “a darker cousin to Almost, Maine,” Cariani’s new romantic comedy built of interconnected short plays shows nine suburban couples hitting key moments in their relationships during a single Friday night. You’ll see beginnings, middles and even an ending or two. Wrapped in whimsical humor and interlaced with short musical numbers, Love/Sick whisks us through love’s brightest and darkest moments and always leaves a candle in the window so we can find our way home.

**Cast breakdown:** 9 females; 9 males  
**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
www.dramatists.com

### Our Lady of Kibeho by Katori Hall
In this drama based on true events from 1981, students in a Rwandan Catholic school claim to see visions of the Virgin Mary. The church’s investigation reaches its climax when the girls receive a message presaging the genocide that would occur 12 years later. Our Lady of Kibeho is full of nuanced, dimensional roles for African American performers.

**Cast breakdown:** 8 females; 7 males  
**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
www.dramatists.com

### Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812 by Dave Malloy
In this electropop musical spun off one story in Tolstoy’s War and Peace, imperial Russia has never felt, or sounded, more contemporary. A love triangle involving a bold young woman, her absent fiancé and a seductive rogue is set to an immensely singable score that runs from folk to R&B to house music.

**Cast breakdown:** 5 females; 5 males  
**Publisher:** Samuel French  
www.samuelfrench.com

### Gathering Blue by Eric Coble
If you have students who inhaled The Hunger Games, then Gathering Blue could be for them. Kira, a young artist in a dystopian future culture, undertakes a project that reveals the brutal secrets of her community’s history. Leavened by moments of comic relief, this drama extols the value of creativity and thinking for yourself. Adapted from Lois Lowry’s novella, Gathering Blue works beautifully as a companion piece to Coble’s very popular The Giver.

**Cast breakdown:** up to 15 females; up to 15 males  
**Publisher:** Dramatic Publishing  
www.dramaticpublishing.com

### Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 and 3) by Suzan-Lori Parks
Named a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize, this major new work brings us Hero, a slave who finds a chance to gain his freedom – if he joins his master fighting for the Confederacy. This original epic, flavored with Homer’s The Odyssey, shows how strongly we must hold ourselves and our communities together against the forces that would rip us apart.

**Cast breakdown:** 2 females; 8 males  
**Publisher:** Samuel French  
www.samuelfrench.com

### Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind (30 Plays in 60 Minutes) by Greg Allen
The format is simple: 30 short plays are performed in the order the audience determines, clocked by a 60-minute timer onstage. When the timer rings, the show is over, finished or not! Published as a collection of 90 exceptional short plays, Too Much Light invites every ensemble to curate its own selection of 30 for an unrepeatable evening of theatre fun.

**Cast breakdown:** 2-10 females; 2-10 males  
**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.  
www.playscripts.com
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Congratulations, you have made the courageous decision to pursue a higher education in theatre! Whether you are an emerging actor, designer, technician, director, playwright or all of the above, you have recognized the importance of continuing your education and developing your craft. Those who have stood in your shoes (as I have) will attest: Making this decision is only the beginning of the adventure that is the “college hunt.”

Looking at and applying for colleges can quickly seem overwhelming. There are hundreds of articles telling you what is most important and ranking programs from best to worst. You could spend weeks looking at the U.S. Department of Education’s
collegiate data and statistics, located online at www.collegescorecard.ed.gov. Your parents or teachers may have their own ideas about what is best for you, and once you begin speaking with college representatives, they also will have input on the “best” college experience. While these sources all can be useful, what is most important is ... to thine own self be true.

You are about to make what may be the biggest choice of your life so far, one that can be of great cost, both in time and money. You must make it from a place of true self-awareness. The whirlwind of the college search becomes less daunting when you focus on what is important to you. And here’s a secret – when you are true to yourself, there is no wrong choice.

Type of Degree, Type of School

One of the first questions you face is what type of degree (Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Fine Arts) and what size and type of school are right for you. Many will claim that a BA is for those destined to be teachers and that “Top 10” schools are the only way to make it to Broadway. However, those who have worked in the industry know there is absolutely no specific degree or school choice that guarantees your career path. What determines your future success is not the letters that follow your name, but the person and the artist you become.

The primary thing that degree letters represent is coursework required for degree completion. Ask for the coursework at schools, and see if it interests you. In essence, degree differences come down to a question of breadth versus depth. Typically, a BA provides a broad and flexible course load, with opportunities to explore other areas of interest as they are discovered. Meanwhile, a BFA provides a focused and prescribed course load with little room for flexibility, but greater opportunity for in-depth study. One is no better than the other, and each school can offer variations on the specific course load.

“Always go with your gut when visiting a school. You will know what feels right. Education is really what you bring to it and how you attack it. So, whatever you do, go for it. Don’t expect education to happen. It’s an active participation.”
- David Rossetti, BFA, Musical Theatre Performance, Valdosta State University, 2003
The same can be said for the types of schools. Although some may lead you to believe there are tiers, every college theatre program is unique and should be examined as such. Websites can be deceiving, and at the end of the day, college representatives are paid to market their schools. You are the one choosing an institution for the next four years. Once you are there, the category doesn’t matter if you are unhappy.

**Visits Are Critical to Your Decision**

How do you know what you want out of a college theatre program? Preliminary research can easily be done online. Countless sites review schools, rate professors and publish statistics. I also suggest that you reach out to current students and graduates, asking for their honest opinions using social media sources.

Hands down, the best way to discover what you like and dislike is to visit schools. This can be the most difficult thing to coordinate, both for time and cost reasons, but it is invaluable. You would never buy a car without looking under its hood and taking it for a test drive. You are about to invest much more in your education. Why would you do any less?

Your first step in planning a visit is to notify the Admissions Office of your interest. A phone number or email address is typically found on the college’s website. Ask the Admissions representative about activities such as tours, info sessions, financial aid meetings and even classes available during your stay. Don’t be shy – being keen shows that you are invested. You may want to ask if you can “shadow” a student, spend the night in a dorm, watch a rehearsal or see a show. To learn more about the theatre program, contact professors. If you meet college representatives at the SETC Convention, ask for business cards and follow up directly with them. If you don’t have contact information for professors, you can usually find email addresses posted on the faculty or department Web page. Remember, a college’s responsiveness and quality of communication now can speak volumes.

“Take cost very seriously. The real world can be scary, but it’s even scarier with a giant pile of student debt. It’s difficult when you’re ‘following your dream,’ but you have to start being your own business manager sooner rather than later.”

- Gabrielle Norris, BA, Production Studies in the Performing Arts, Clemson University, 2014

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about your future at that school.

There are several key factors in the college selection process that are best measured in person:

1. Classroom Style: How many students will be in your classes? Is it a larger, competitive program or an intimate, mentor-based program? Do students seem to have friendly personal relationships or more formal professional relationships with teachers and staff?

2. Production Quality: Would you be proud to be part of the cast or crew of a production? Do others recognize the program for quality (i.e., awards, national recognition)? Is there a mix of production genres and styles?

3. Opportunities: How many productions are presented each year? Do undergraduates compete with graduate students for roles or is there a seniority system? Do students have opportunities to lead projects or learn about other areas of theatre? Are there professional development opportunities, such as workshops, showcases, industry networking, conferences and auditions for summer work?

4. Facilities: Will you work in a variety of venue styles (proscenium, black box, thrust)? Is there a space reserved for the study and congregation of theatre students? Is there a theatre library or resource area?

5. Personality: Would you want to work alongside the students and professors you meet? Is the environment one where you would thrive or one where you would struggle? How do the students appear – bored, challenged, exhausted or inspired?

6. Normal College Concerns: Beyond the questions you have as a theatre student, there are more general concerns you will have as a college student. You will be living, working and playing in this place for four years or more. What are the living options – dormitories, apartments or other? Do you like the city that surrounds the college? Is it close enough or far enough away from home? Does it feel like a safe place to live? Does it have an active campus life?

“When looking for the ‘perfect’ college, find one that has professional ties. The connections I made in college continue to help guide and support me.”


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The cost of your education is not only the listed price of tuition, but also all of the expenses necessary to support that education. If you will no longer be living at home, you must also budget for room and board (housing and food) and determine whether you will be living on campus or off, another large expense. These costs will vary significantly based on the university and its location. Then there’s transportation and books. Some have found that attending community college for the first two years can cut these costs dramatically, as the costs per credit hour are lower – and you can save money by living at home.

The government requires that most colleges post a Net Price Calculator on their websites, usually located on the financial aid page. This can be a valuable resource for students to research the affordability of an institution. Your net price is the sum of: Direct Costs (tuition and fees) plus Indirect Costs (room, board, books, travel and other living expenses) minus Financial Aid (grants and scholarships).

"You may be talented enough to get into a particular school's program, but you may get rejected because they already have accepted someone similar to you. The best advice I was given was: ‘Don’t go in trying to be Sutton Foster. There’s already a Sutton Foster, but there isn’t a you yet.’"

- Rachel Prather, BFA, Musical Theatre Performance, Boston Conservatory, 2012

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Finding Financial Support

No matter what type of college or university you are interested in, the first step in getting financial help to attend school is to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. This form will ask for information from your family and prospective school to determine eligibility for most grants, federal student loans and work-study programs. Very little aid is available without first filling out your FAFSA, and the earlier the better. A word of warning: The only official website for the FAFSA is www.fafsa.ed.gov. Beware of other misleading or fraudulent websites that may offer to assist you with the FAFSA.

Once your FAFSA is completed, you can start exploring the forms of financial aid that can help make college more affordable:

1. Grants and Scholarships: These are the best types of financial aid, referred to often as “free money” because they do not have to be paid back. They may be provided based on financial need (i.e., Pell Grants) or awarded on merit. Schools, governments, corporations and organizations are all sources of grants and scholarships with eligibility requirements and an application process. You may be surprised to learn that many scholarships go unawarded due to a lack of applicants. Do your homework to find those that apply to you. You can start by checking out SETC’s scholarships on Page 17.

2. University-Awarded Scholarships: These are another form of “free money,” awards typically given by a school based on your GPA and best college entrance exam score. In the university’s eyes, your GPA is a measurement of your discipline and work ethic and how serious you are about your education. Many students erroneously think talent will outweigh poor grades, but listen up: Many talent-based scholarships are also tethered directly to your GPA and test scores.

3. Work-Study Programs: These offer part-time employment in an on-campus job, providing you with

“Initiate a deep thought process within yourself. What are my true dreams? A life in the theatre isn’t about knowing every lyric to every show tune but rather about building a comprehensive understanding of the human experience.”

- Alexander Whittenberg, BFA, Scenic Design, SUNY Purchase College Conservatory of Theatre Arts, 2014
income from an employer who knows the importance of your class schedule and schoolwork.

4. Student Loans: The types of loans include subsidized, which are based on need and do not accrue interest while you’re in college, and unsubsidized, which are not based on need and accrue interest even while you are in school. Loans can be from private institutions or from the federal government. Private student loans usually have higher interest rates than federal student loans. Many students who need to borrow can qualify for federal loans.

A popular rule of thumb is to never borrow more for a four-year degree than the entry-level annual salary in your field, meaning if you expect to make $35,000 per year from your first job out of college, do not take any more than $35,000 in loans.

Your College Choice Should Reflect You

Many students think they must approach colleges with a “Pick me! Pick me!” attitude, trying to become what a college wants them to be. You should do just the opposite. The greatest success in college shopping comes when you know what you want to buy. Think about who you are, who you want to become and what type of college experience feels right to you.

As Polonius advises Laertes in Act I of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, “This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man. Farewell; my blessing season this in thee!” Now, let the college shopping begin!

Stefanie Maiya Lehmann earned a BFA in Theatre Arts Management from Brenau University’s Gainesville Theatre Alliance in 2013 and both an MBA and an MA in Arts Administration from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music in 2015. A two-time winner of SETC’s Robert Porterfield Scholarship, she is assistant business manager for production at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

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iwu.edu/theatre

“Keep an open mind, and research options that you wouldn’t necessarily consider. Speaking from personal experience, don’t be impulsive. Take a step back. Remember you are going to be there four years.”
- Jordan Stovall, BA, Performing Arts, Marymount Manhattan College and University of Tampa, 2011
SETC Offers College Shopping Resources

College, University & Training Program Directory
This annual directory, which begins after Page 18, includes information on degrees offered at SETC member colleges, universities and training programs.

Education Expo
Browse the exhibits of SETC member institutions and talk directly with representatives about the degrees they offer at the annual SETC Convention, March 2-6, 2016, in Greensboro, NC. More info: www.setc.org/exhibits-convention

Undergraduate/Graduate Auditions and Design-Tech Interviews
Audition and interview with more than 100 colleges, universities and training programs from around the country at the annual SETC Convention. More info: www.setc.org/auditions/school-auditions

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SETC awards thousands of dollars in scholarships to students each year. You just might be the next recipient. More info: www.setc.org/scholarships-awards

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Marian A. Smith Costume Award: $2,000
William E. Wilson Award (for secondary school educators): $6,000

“Many students will be tempted, as I was, to choose a program based purely on its reputation. Instead pick a school where you fit in, where you have access to high-quality faculty, and where you are intentionally prepared for the future.”
- Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, BFA, Theatre, Southern Methodist University, 2015

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INTERVIEW LOCATIONS

Like many people who work in theatre, I began my career as an actor in college. I loved being on stage as a performer. At that time, I had no inkling of the wide variety of other careers available in the field. And I certainly did not understand my own temperament and talents well enough to know how any of those might “fit” me. I just knew that I loved the theatre and had to do it. Many years later, I am now a theatrical designer and college professor. I love what I do now as much, if not more, than I loved acting. With time, I found my own theatre career fit. Now much of my work life involves helping others find their own career paths in the theatre.

Have you ever wondered about a career in theatre beyond acting? Have you noticed names and titles in playbills and wondered what exactly those people do? There are many jobs in the theatre that students and emerging theatre artists have little knowledge of – and one of them might be the perfect fit for you. Explore some of your options on the pages ahead.
A Primer on Types of Theatre

Before you start exploring careers, it helps to understand the many types of theatre. (If you are an advanced student or artist who is already familiar with the types, skip ahead to the “Caveats” section.) To make this as simple as possible, we’ll divide theatre into four categories: Professional, Academic, Amateur and Other. A wide variety of careers is available in all four categories.

Professional theatres are those in which all or most participants are paid a living wage, although some categories of professional theatre include unpaid interns, apprentices and volunteers. Professional theatres include commercial theatres (most Broadway, off-Broadway and touring shows, and most dinner theatres) and nonprofit theatres (most regional theatres, off-off-Broadway theatres, and a few New York-based theatres that perform on Broadway under special agreements). Both commercial and nonprofit theatres may use Actors’ Equity Association (union) actors, depending on their agreements with Equity.

Academic theatres are those located in institutions where the goal is the training of individuals in theatre. This includes public schools, colleges, universities and specialized training programs. Some nonprofit theatres are affiliated with educational institutions, allowing students the opportunity to work with and learn from professionals while still in school.

Amateur theatres are those in which most of the participants are volunteers. These are most often called community theatres, and they draw their unpaid staffs from the communities in which they are located. However, the managers of such theatres are often paid; technical directors, directors, designers, and/or musicians may be paid as well.

The Other category includes careers in which trained theatre artists often find their work in non-theatre settings. These jobs include storytellers, drama therapists, teaching artists and applied theatre artists. It is common for artists in these categories to wear many hats – working in multiple categories simultaneously.

A Few Caveats

While the array of potential careers in theatre is vast, job opportunities will vary from theatre to theatre because most companies hire only for those positions that are essential to making theatre happen in their own particular set of circumstances.

Individuals interested in a specific career typically can find jobs across multiple theatrical categories and in a wide range of job settings, ranging from full-time to freelance. For example, a sound engineer can find full-time or freelance employment in nonprofit or commercial theatres, touring productions, theatre for youth, community theatres, theme parks or community centers.

When looking at job opportunities, keep in mind that the same position may have many different titles. For example, Costume Shop Manager, Costume Shop Supervisor and Costume Shop Foreman are all names for the same job. In addition, people in these positions often hire assistants and interns. Those entry-level positions can provide an avenue to hone your skills and learn from more experienced artists.

Theatre career options are detailed below in the following broad categories: Leadership/Administration, Advancement/Marketing, Performance, Production, Education, Front of House/Box Office, and Other Theatre-Related Areas. In each category listing, you will find an overview of that general area, a listing of representative jobs in that area, a spotlight on one or more positions, and profiles of artists who hold those positions. In addition, you will find three “A Day in the Life” vignettes that provide a more in-depth look at selected positions: vocal coach, prop master and casting director.

Careers in Theatre Leadership/Administration

People in theatre leadership positions determine the overarching mission and direction of a theatre company. They are responsible for setting larger goals and maintaining relationships with the theatre board, the community, other theatre companies and unions. They guide the theatre company logistically, artistically and/or financially toward an established vision. They ultimately have the last word on those hired for all other positions within the theatre company.

Job titles include: Artistic Director, Company Founder, Company Manager, Director of Devised Theatre, Executive Director, Managing Director, Producer, Production Manager

SPOTLIGHT ON ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The artistic director focuses on creating and implementing the artistic vision of a theatre company.
What does your job entail?
The artistic director crafts the mission and dreams the vision for a theatre, then determines the programming and artists that will advance them, all the while being a primary advocate for the theatre in communities both local and national. I am also resident artist of the theatre, directing two projects per season and developing creative work and artistic relationships to populate future seasons.

What is your favorite part of the job?
My time in the rehearsal hall and with designers, bringing a text to life for our audiences.

How did you prepare for this career?
My work experience has been as a director, a producer, a teacher, a dramaturg and a critic — and while I draw on all those things in my day-to-day life, I often find that it’s my long ago studies in sociology, psychology and ethics that provide the clearest maps.

Your advice for those considering this job?
Pay close attention to everything you do and everyone with whom you work — because lessons are everywhere.

What is your education?
BFA, Theatre, Denison University; MA, Theatre, Northwestern University.

SPOTLIGHT ON COMPANY FOUNDER
Nonprofit theatre company founders often fulfill multiple roles in their organizations and enjoy having the freedom to create theatre their way. They need strong business skills as well as artistic vision.

What does your job entail?
I co-founded this company in 1983 with my husband Jeff as a venue to produce work we both wanted to do. My title is co-artistic/producing director, which means that I oversee both the artistic and business aspects of running the theatre company.

What is your favorite part of the job?
What I like most about my work is being able to take ideas and make them a reality. I have an idea, I find the money, and I do it. I enjoy the chase and the challenge of that. Over the years, I have changed this job to suit what I want to do. I like that part of it, too.

Your advice for those considering this job?
When you run a theatre, you are running a business. If you don’t like business, partner with someone who does. Read books about business and entrepreneurship. Study theatre at college, graduate school and/or a professional training program. Be open to opportunities, and discover where your talents lie in both art and business. Be ready to work 24/7 for at least five years. Think carefully about what you really want out of starting a theatre, and stay focused on that end goal.

What is your education?
BFA, Acting; Post-Graduate Work, Directing, University of Illinois Champagne-Urbana.

Careers in Theatre Advancement/Marketing
Individuals in this area work to secure a strong foundation for the theatre through long-lasting corporate and individual relationships. Jobs may include fundraising, grant writing, prospect management and data collection. Those in advancement work closely with the individuals in marketing who devise the theatre’s branding and messaging strategies.

Job titles include: Development Director, Director of Advancement, Director of Corporate Relations, Grants Manager, Graphic Designer, Individual Giving Director, Institutional Giving Director, Marketing Director, Media Management, Media Technologist, Publications Manager, Website Director

SPOTLIGHT ON MEDIA TECHNOLOGIST
A media technologist uses technology (video, graphic design and computer animation) to facilitate communication for a theatre or within a theatrical context. Some create digital displays in lobbies, stream website videos and archive theatrical events. Others work with the director and designers to create video projections or other media presentations as part of a performance. Hybrid media technologists do both.

‘When you run a theatre, you are running a business. If you don’t like business, partner with someone who does.’
- Lisa Adler, Horizon Theatre Company
What does your job entail?
My primary responsibility is to design the media for shows and develop/purchase/program the systems that we use to implement those designs. My secondary responsibilities include shooting and editing marketing videos and media archiving.

What is your favorite part of the job?
My position serves many different departments in the theatre company. I like the fact that my job changes often. It is challenging, interesting, busy and exciting work.

How did you prepare for this career?
I studied both mass communications (with a focus

Philip Allgeier
Media Technologist
Actors Theatre of Louisville (KY)

What is the single most vital tool you use in your work?
A well-trained and instinctive “ear” for the specifics of language/text, dialects and healthy vocal production.

Where do you do the main part of your work?
In rehearsal halls and backstage (theatre); production offices and on-set (film). I’ve also done Skype sessions with film actors.

What time does your day start? What’s the first thing you do?
In the theatre, I might have a session as early as 10 a.m. On a film, I’ve done plenty of 7 a.m. on-set sessions. The first thing I do when dialect coaching is to listen to samples in preparation for working with the actor(s). I might also speak with the director about his or her concerns. For text coaching, I will review and score text. When text coaching an actor, I usually start with notating the punctuation, which is like musical phrasing that would inform the actor on where to breathe and what to emphasize. I then identify operative, or “storytelling,” words the actor might stress. We talk about “new thought/new pitch” and how to lift or drop a word for emphasis.

Dialect plays an important part in speaking complex texts, too. For instance, the musicality of British dialects is of great help in sharing the complex thoughts of George Bernard Shaw’s characters in a way the audience can follow. It all feels very technical to the actor at first: It’s like learning choreography. At first you are just doing someone else’s steps, and then suddenly you are dancing and making it your own. Each play has different clues in the text. For August Wilson, I might look at how long vowel sounds illuminate the rhythm of the character. For Eugene O’Neill, we explore how the ellipses marks (…) show how a character’s mind and heart works – which will be different from how ellipses work in an Edward Albee or Tennessee Williams play. For Naomi Wallace’s beautiful play The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, we looked at how the characters’ very short sentences might reflect the small-town oppression they were feeling.

What time does your day end? What’s the last thing you do?
If we are in tech/dress rehearsals for a play, my day can end as late as 12 or 1 a.m. On a film set, I’ve stayed as late as 4 a.m. The last thing I do is to send emails: notes to the actors, questions/comments for the director, and suggestions for scheduling to stage managers or production managers (film).

What is typically on your to-do list?
Listening to dialect sources, scoring text, checking in with the director. Also, if I’m prepping for a film, I will watch other performances an actor has given before working with her. For theatre, I might read the resume of the actor I’m about to work with so I can better understand his training and experience.
on video production) and theatre in college. This unique set of skills prepared me to do live events for concerts, television and theme parks, and ultimately led me to this position at ATL.

**What do you like about this job in the theatre as opposed to other types of events?**
I like working in the theatre because a play is unlike the other live events. Artists are creating a distinct world in a play, and video is a powerful tool to get people into that world.

**What kind of education, training or prior experience helps you with your job?**
I had terrific speech, dialects and text training in graduate school as an actor. I supplemented that training with workshops by master teachers (Patsy Rodenburg, Catherine Fitzmaurice and others). Working as an actor and director informs my coaching, as I am sensitive to the demands and pressures of those jobs.

**How did you get started in your career?**
I had a good ear and good training, and friends began asking me to listen to their monologues or lend an ear in rehearsals. I discovered I liked the work and began to seek it out between acting gigs. I learned by doing, by trusting my instincts, and by listening closely to actors and directors. I hand-wrote a long letter to Campbell Scott, who I knew through a friend, to persuade him to hire me to coach his film of *Hamlet*. I was persistent.

**What is the best piece of advice you’d give to a young theatre artist looking to do what you do?**
Learn to listen with artistry.

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**Your advice for those considering this job?**
Learn as many things as you can. You never know when you will have an opportunity to use what you know. Many times people start out in the theatre wanting to be actors. But just because you start in one part of theatre does not mean you can’t end up happy in another part.

**What is your education?**
BA, Mass Communications, Minor: Theatre, Western Kentucky University.
Careers in Theatre Performance/Support

These are jobs that collaboratively focus on the performer, the ensemble, the performance, the literature and its interpretation, and the support needed to make acting performances happen.

Job titles include: Acting Coach, Actor, Casting Director (see A Day in the Life, Page 30), Choreographer, Dialect Coach, Director, Dramaturg, Fight Director, Musical Director, Playwright, Production Stage Manager, Production Assistant, Stage Manager, Tour Director, Tour Production Director, Vocal Coach (see A Day in the Life, Page 22)

Spotlight on Production Stage Manager

A production stage manager is usually a seasoned stage manager who oversees the entire stage management team for a theatre company. In addition to stage managing shows, AEA (union) production stage managers typically manage a team of multiple stage managers, assistant stage managers, production assistants and interns. Production stage managers create daily schedules for the team while coordinat-
props master/assistant stage manager that summer after graduation. That fall, I moved over to the scene shop as a technical apprentice, then moved up to master carpenter/scenic artist. When the stage management position opened up a couple of years later, I applied and got the job – and never looked back.

**Your advice for those considering this job?**
You have to be flexible, a good listener, organized and calm. You need to be able to communicate what the directors say in rehearsals to the rest of the production team, keeping communications open. You must be good at “follow-through.” Be proactive and not reactive. Be a big force in helping to create a non-judgmental area where the actors can be free to try absolutely anything and not be afraid to be laughed at or judged. The stage manager is the mom/dad figure, or the lifeguard in the room. You have to be the leader and run the rehearsals but not be overbearing with it.

**What is your education?**
BS, Political Science, Concentrations: Theatre and Spanish, Hollins College (now University), VA.

### Spotlight on Tour Production Director

In general, a tour production director plans, organizes and sometimes conducts long-distance travel for performers and technicians in a theatre company.

**What does your job entail?**
I manage an office of three people and up to 90 tour actor directors (our name for the actors). I am responsible for making sure they are trained properly. I speak with numerous points of contact at the residency locations and with parents who have concerns or accolades. I attend conferences to find new employees and manage site visits of current tour actor directors.

**What is your favorite part of the job?**
What I like most about my position is guiding young adults to be successful in the best job I ever had. (I toured with Missoula Children’s Theatre for three years right out of college.) I feel fortunate every day that I am able to make a living at a nonprofit arts organization that instills success and self-esteem in children around the world.

**Your advice for those considering this job?**
I do think that earning a degree, no matter what you study, is imperative for success as it teaches one life skills and hard work. Patience, keeping calm in crisis, and being able to listen and see the big picture have served me well.

**What is your education?**
BA, Music, Emphasis: Vocal, and Psychology, University of Montana.

### Careers in Theatre Production

Theatre production jobs are positions that revolve around the stage technology of the theatre. These trained artists work collaboratively to support the work of the playwright, the director, the performers and other artisans through advanced and specialized visual and technical means.

**Job titles include:**
- Costumes: Costume Designer, Costume Shop Supervisor, Crafts Specialist, Draper, Dresser, First Hand, Makeup Designer, Milliner, Stylist, Tailor, Wardrobe Supervisor, Wig Master.
- Scenery: Automation Specialist, Carpenter, Deck Crew, Flyman, Master Carpenter, Rigger, Scenic Charge Artist, Scenic Designer, Shop Foreman, Stage Carpenter, Technical Director.
- Sound: Sound Designer, Sound Engineer, Sound Operator.
- Properties: Properties Assistant, Prop Master (see *A Day in the Life*, Page 26)

### Spotlight on Costume Shop Manager

The costume shop manager is in charge of a theatre company’s entire costume department. He or she supervises all aspects, including design, construction, wardrobe and crafts. The manager also oversees budget, personnel, supplies, equipment and tools.

**What does your job entail?**
A costume shop supervisor is a “jack of all trades.”

- Joyce Coffaro

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What is your favorite part of the job?
I like to manage and be in charge and acknowledge that the help of others is essential to what I do. I enjoy participating in the thing I love (theatre) without having to know in detail the specific skills of the other artisans in the shop. We work as a collaborative team.

Your advice for those considering this job?
If you want to be a costume shop supervisor, you should take costume construction classes, design classes and business (management and accounting) classes because a large part of the job is managing budgets. Learn how time, money and labor interact. Work in summer stock learning from professionals and doing all the jobs you ultimately will supervise. Work your way into assistant manager, then manager. Know state and federal employment rules and pertinent union rules. Be passionate about your work.

What is your education?
BFA, Technical Theatre/Costume Design, Auburn University.

Ben Hohman: Utah Shakespeare Festival

Ben Hohman has worked at the Utah Shakespeare Festival for 22 years, 15 of those as the properties and display director. In this position, he oversees the acquisition, creation and maintenance of all prop and display items used by the festival. The Utah Shakespeare Festival is a Tony Award-winning professional regional theatre located on the campus of Southern Utah University in Cedar City, UT. USF produces 10-plus shows annually, most in rotating repertory in two theatres (with a third theatre being added in 2016) during a four-month season. Seven of the shows open over a period of just three days in early summer, and the others open in late summer.

When not in full production mode, I typically end my day about 6 p.m., but when in production my day usually runs until 7 or 8 p.m., with some nights going until midnight or later. It all depends upon rehearsal schedules, note sessions, and when we can access the stage to do notes. The last thing I do is to make a priority list of things to accomplish the following day.

What is typically on your to-do list?
A typical to-do list for a prop master would consist of things like pulling props for rehearsal, reading upcoming scripts and preparing prop lists and budgets, researching objects or historical periods, organizing and updating our stock of props, searching for and procuring prop objects and materials to build those objects, attending meetings, and of course building the prop items for the shows.

What one thing do you wish people knew about your work?
I wish people knew the amount of research and detail that prop people put into every object that appears on stage for a production. As an example, a mailed letter that appears in a scene could require that we research when a type of writing utensil was invented or made popular, what kind of paper is period-appropriate, how letters were folded at that time, when and how stamps, zip codes and addresses were used, as well as the type and style of writing, printing or typing that would have been used.
SPOTLIGHT ON SCENIC CHARGE ARTIST

The scenic charge artist oversees the painting of all stage scenery, including the reproduction of color, texture and style per the scenic designer’s specifications. This includes any necessary aging or distressing required for creation of the set. Often the scenic charge artist is responsible for the budget and for hiring personnel to perform the work under his or her supervision. This job is also called a charge artist or a charge scenic artist at some theatres.

What kind of education, training or prior experience helps you with your job?

Life experience is the most helpful educational tool for a prop person. My parents owned an antique store when I was growing up, and my grandfather was a contractor. I learned by doing. Classes or workshops in such subjects as History of Art, History of Design, Period Styles, and general history are all useful. Strong research skills and a thirst for knowledge (curiosity) are needed. Also, internships or workshops in furniture building, cabinet making, upholstery, electronics and electricity, welding, furniture restoration and refinishing, and scenic artistry are all valuable training that would serve a prop person well.

How did you get started in your career?

My second season at Utah Shakespeare Festival, I was offered a crew supervisor position. They had two available, one in scenery and one in props. After I talked with the production manager, he felt I could do either one. He searched and found someone strong in scenery, so I got the prop job. Over the course of that summer, I realized props was a really good fit for me, with my antiques and construction background. I also really liked the wide variety of challenges and opportunities for creativity that are offered in the props area. I have never looked back.

If someone is interested in this line of work, how might that person prepare?

Start making stuff – anything, just make it: Halloween costumes, spice racks, robots, quilts, whatever. Do any kind of internships you can get your hands on. Learn from mistakes and grow from them. Be observant of details and textures. Be curious, imaginative and fearless. There is not a skill I can think of that would not be useful at some point in a career in props.

What is the best piece of advice you’d give to a young theatre artist looking to do what you do?

The best piece of advice I would give to a young theatre artist looking into the props field is to not let a designer, professor or teacher force them into choosing to focus on a single design area. The props field requires knowledge of construction, metalworking, costuming/fabric manipulation, art, makeup, lighting, sound and tons of other things. So if you can’t or don’t want to choose a single design area – don’t. Take all the classes and workshops and absorb all the knowledge and information like a sponge. It will all be useful someday in the world of props.

Larry Cook is director of design and technology for the Department of Theatre at the University of North Georgia in Gainesville, GA, and a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

JILLIE EVES
Scenic Charge Artist
University of Tennessee’s Clarence Brown Theatre

What does your job entail?

I coordinate and execute all painting, specialty sculpting and texturing of set pieces built for an
annual 8-to-9-show season, working with student designers as well as professional designers. Here at CBT, I am the only painter on staff. I coordinate any overhire, students or volunteers that work in the paint shop. We have been known to have up to five painters work on one show, all at different skill levels. I have to be very versatile and make sure to simplify painting techniques for each skill level and make sure all people feel confident with their abilities.

**What is your favorite part of the job?**
My job is different every day. I really like being a creative problem-solver. Painting is an amazing thing. Maybe because of the material you are painting on or the unique ideas the designer has about color or texture, I never paint the same thing twice.

**Your advice for those considering this job?**
Draw, paint and create every chance you get. Always be willing to learn something new and look at things differently. Open your eyes to the world around you. Take classes and meet new artists. Each artist you meet will change you in some way.

**What is your education?**
BA, Speech/Theatre, Louisiana Tech University.

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**Open your eyes to the world around you. Take classes and meet new artists. Each artist you meet will change you in some way.**
- Jillie Eves, Clarence Brown Theatre

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**Your advice for those considering this job?**
Having a facility for math is important. Take a lot of classes in engineering or technology. Understand physics. Be curious and ask questions. Spend time with riggers in your chosen category. You can sometimes find useful information in unexpected places.

**What is your education?**
BSEd, Speech and Theatre Arts, Western Carolina University; MFA, Theatre Design and Technology, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; PhD, Speech, Concentration: Theatre, University of Florida.

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**Careers in Theatre Education**
Careers in theatre education focus on the age-appropriate artistic enrichment of students, from young children through college-aged young adults. Positions in this category demand training in theatre as well as education. Work in theatre education typically requires a broad knowledge of theatre, including literature and interpretation, performance, design and technology.

**Job titles include:** College Professor, Director of Education, Director of Instruction and Curriculum Development, Director of Theatre Camps, Elementary, Middle and High School Teacher, Educational Outreach, Family Programs Manager

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**SPOTLIGHT ON ENTERTAINMENT RIGGER**
There are three entertainment rigging categories: theatre rigging, arena rigging and aerial rigging. Delbert Hall is one of the few riggers who do all three types.

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**What is your favorite part of the job?**
I enjoy the problem-solving aspects of designing new flying systems and choreographing the performer flying. This aspect of theatre spectacle is unique and challenging.

**How did you prepare for this career?**
Although there are differences in each category of rigging, there are also many similarities – particularly in how physics relates to rigging. I read everything I could find on the subject, took workshops and asked questions of skilled riggers. Rigging is a skill you learn by doing, so I tried to make the most of every opportunity. Choreographing performer flying effects just takes practice and experimentation.

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**SPOTLIGHT ON DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**
A director of education is typically responsible for the artistic quality and administration of educational programming for a theatre organization. This includes maintaining positive relationships with local schools and students and working with other members of the administration on fundraising and strategic planning.

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**What does your job entail?**
I oversee the Education Department at Lexington Children’s Theatre, and I also direct two or three shows per year. I work with all ages – 4-year-olds to college age. We do both theatre for youth and theatre with youth.
SPOTLIGHT ON DRAMA THERAPIST

The New York University Steinhardt Drama Therapy Program website defines drama therapy as the intentional use of theatre techniques to facilitate personal growth and promote health, thus treating individuals with a range of mental health, cognitive and developmental disorders.

What is your favorite part of the job?
What I like about theatre education is the opportunity to do all things. I direct, devise, design and do tech work – and I do all these things with young people, who as a whole are very creative.

Your advice for those considering this job?
Learn about the field. Too often we think everyone can work with kids. You have to be both a trained teacher and an artist to effectively do educational theatre. Get a firm foundation in literature and storytelling. Know how to build stories and how to tell them simply and clearly.

What is your education?
BA, Theatre; MFA, Drama and Theatre for Youth, Emphasis: Directing; University of Texas at Austin.

Amy Smith
Box Office Manager
New Stage Theatre
Jackson, MS

What does your job entail?
My everyday jobs are subscription and ticket sales, daily sales reporting, maintaining our main office, scheduling our box office staff, and customer calls. On a show-to-show basis, I compile royalty reports, reconcile box office sales, compare house reports, as well as schedule and invoice for school matinees. Collecting attendance information in our database is an important part of my job, so that other theatre departments can use the data to compile grants.

What is your favorite part of the job?
I love working in the creative environment of the theatre. I am using my strengths of customer service and management as part of something bigger. We have subscribers who have been with us since the beginning of New Stage 50 years ago. I want to maintain our patrons’ enthusiasm for our theatre by making each ticketing experience a positive one.

Your advice for those considering this job?
Always remember that the box office is the first interaction a customer has with your theatre. It is a great place to begin pursuing theatre whether your goals are acting, technical or administrative. The skill sets you learn in the box office will serve you well as a foundation for a variety of careers.

What is your education?
Currently completing BA, Theatre, Belhaven University, Jackson, MS.

Careers in
Front of House/Box Office

All aspects of patron services are covered in this category of jobs, including ticket sales for shows, patron comfort, and easy access to refreshments and purchases in the gift shop. Making the theatre an efficient, pleasant and rewarding experience for patrons is the focus.

Job titles include: Box Office Manager, Box Office Associate, Director of Sales, Gift Shop Manager, Group Sales Manager, House Manager, Public Accommodation Specialist, Ticket Services Manager, Usher, Volunteer Coordinator, Food and Bar Staff

SPOTLIGHT ON BOX OFFICE MANAGER

The box office manager supervises the office that sells tickets for all productions staged at a theatre company. The job involves supervising the individuals who dispense tickets (online, by phone and in person), managing cash and credit cards sales, and overseeing season subscriptions and group sales. These managers typically have very strong organizational, computer and “people” skills.

Amy Smith
Box Office Manager
New Stage Theatre
Jackson, MS

What does your job entail?
For additional information about planning a career in theatre, visit www.setc.org/careers-in-theatre
What is the single most vital tool you use in your work?
There are some practical answers that come to mind: Imdb Pro, which is a version of imdb.com, with agent contact info and not-yet-announced projects; and Breakdown Express, which is a stage actor database, breakdown release and actor submission service online. But more than those sites, or any other tangible tool, I use tickets. Seeing plays at all of the theatres around my region, as well as in New York, is the most valuable tool for seeing who is out there that we might want to engage at Arena – actors, directors, designers and playwrights.

What time does your day start? What’s the first thing you do?
My day usually starts at 8 a.m. The first thing I do is check my email.

What time does your day end? What’s the last thing you do?
My day tends to end between 10:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. The last thing I do usually is see a play or a musical.

What is typically on your to-do list?
I generally break up my to-do list by show title: first, the shows that are coming up on the main stage; then, the shows in development with readings or workshops; then, the scripts in my inbox to read for the future. Then, under each of those headings, I’d typically have a list of tasks like read, re-read, call the director and talk through the concept, make a list of ideas for actors, put calls out for interest and availability, cut sides, hire audition reader, hire accompanist, gather headshots and resumes, make a day sheet, etc.

What one thing do you wish people knew about your work?
I wish it was more widely known that casting is a creative art form. It is not an administrative task. A good casting director should have a dramaturgical mind and an innovative perspective. That way, the casting director can work collaboratively with the director to find the most dynamic, interesting cast possible to suit the vision the director has. The casting process might affect the core concept of the production in ways such as changing the traditional racial, gender or age breakdown of a piece, using actor-musicians rather
equal parts theatre and psychology.

**Your advice for those considering this job?**

Check out the NADTA (North American Drama Therapy Association) website, and find a drama therapist in your area. Contact the therapist to find workshops or other ways to get involved in the field. Take some psychology classes. But most importantly: If your passion is theatre, follow your passion! You will be a better therapist if you follow your passion first and get a good foundation in theatre.

**What kind of education, training or prior experience helps you with your job?**

Because there are no undergraduate or graduate degrees in casting, it is a job I learned through apprenticeship and mentorship. I received a great education in general theatre in college at Georgetown University. My prior experience as a voracious audience member at several DC-area theaters also helped significantly. My pre-existing familiarity with some of the performers working in town gave me a leg up on making idea lists for shows. My experiences as an actor and a director have also come into play throughout my time in this job. First, those experiences give me compassion for the artists that we work with and allow me to form a personal connection. Second, they inform my creative thinking as I read a script and start to think of ideas.

**How did you get started in your career?**

I started my career at Arena Stage through the Allen Lee Hughes fellowship program. Then, I worked closely with the casting director at that time, who showed me the ropes through on-the-job experience, as well as additional conversations and reading materials.

**If someone is interested in this line of work, how might that person prepare?**

The best ways to prepare are to see lots of plays, read lots of plays, follow the careers of actors in your region, as well as on Broadway and in TV and film, and to seek out opportunities to observe, intern or apprentice with current casting directors.

**What is the best piece of advice you’d give to a young theatre artist looking to do what you do?**

Like all jobs in the theatre, being a casting director has everything to do with forming relationships. Relationships with the artistic directors and administrators who might hire you, the directors you might cast for, the actors and their agents and/or managers, the box offices at theaters where you scout for new talent, the universities where you might teach master classes, etc. Seek out those relationships early and then maintain them carefully. Assume that everything you say in public can and will be overheard, so don’t say anything you wouldn’t want repeated! Assume that everyone you meet will turn out to be a major player in the business, so don’t burn bridges!

Amelia Powell says her work as a casting director occurs in multiple locations, from the Arena Stage’s rehearsal hall to New York audition studios to other DC theatres where she scouts talent.
educators, who engage people in learning experiences in, through and about the arts. And the National Storytelling Network defines storytelling as the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener’s imagination.

**TARSHAI PETERSON**
Teaching Artist/
Storyteller
New York City

**What does your job entail?**
I perform interactive storytelling for children. Kids love to be a part of the storytelling process, and I work strategically to keep them engaged. Most of my performances occur in daycares with children ages 2-5. I also perform for schools, camps and birthday parties. I work with multiple companies, including Marquis Studios, Black Spectrum Theatre, and Kids Creative, NYC.

**Why is your favorite part of the job?**
I appreciate that I can create my own work schedule. I get to present different art forms to children and allow them the opportunity to explore their creativity. I know that I am making a difference academically and socially. I love when a child remembers a story that I told in the past, and when they realize that they too can be a storyteller!

**Your advice for those considering this job?**
Choose an art form or art forms that you enjoy and are especially good at performing. Get some training in education, but you do not necessarily need a degree in education to be a teaching artist. Start reading stories and have fun practicing in front of an audience at an open mic event. Attend storytelling events in your community, or watch storytellers perform on YouTube.

**What is your education?**
BFA, Theatre, Bennett College; MA, Educational Theatre, New York University.
What does your job entail?
I chose a freelance life. I am always running to the next job, but I am never bored. For the last 32 years, I have been acting, storytelling, writing and cartooning/illustrating in Pittsburgh. For example, in the last two weeks, I closed a production of *Into the Woods*; performed seven storytelling shows for children and family audiences; narrated a concert with the Pittsburgh Symphony; and drew 10 political cartoons, a cover for a book and a caricature for a couple of old friends. After 25 years of this kind of schedule in Pittsburgh, I booked a couple of shows in New York City and realized very quickly that I preferred my frantic arts life in Pittsburgh. I just get to do all kinds of things in this smaller town, which I never could have done in New York.

What is your favorite part of the job?
I enjoy being able to use all of my skills at different times on a single day. Because my talents are all art-based, there is often overlap. I’ve done a lot of artwork for theatre companies and have been asked to do voice-over work for commercials for other companies. That constant mixing and matching of skills is extremely satisfying.

Your advice for those considering this job?
Do it. Find any and all opportunities to be in front of an audience. Lose the inhibitions. Listen, watch and learn from those with whom you work. If you think you know it all, you are foolish. You’ll never get better if you aren’t humble enough to learn from someone else.

What is your education?
BA, Bible, Minor: Fine Arts, Milligan College, TN.
Putting It All Together

Once you have identified a job or jobs that look appealing and fit your talents and temperament, find a mentor (a professional who holds the job that you want to have) to help you on a path to career success. If possible, apply for an internship or apprenticeship in your target area. Ask questions and learn from those around you. Most theatre professionals are more than willing to share experiences and advice with those whose careers are just beginning.

Karen Brewster is a professor, resident costume designer and costume shop supervisor at East Tennessee State University. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

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A Theatre Project
by Richard Pilbrow
PLASA Media; www.atheatreproject.com
Paperback. $49.99. Also available as e-book
with interactive links

by George Hillow

Question: What do Stephen Sondheim, Judi Dench, Hal Prince, Julie Andrews, George Abbott, Tony Walton, Vanessa Redgrave and Laurence Olivier have in common? Answer: Richard Pilbrow. Their careers all intersected with his in one way or another, and they’re just a fraction of the theatre luminaries who have worked with Pilbrow over the six or seven decades of his storied career.

His magnum opus, A Theatre Project – published in 2011, updated in 2015, and available now as an e-book – details every aspect of his life as a lighting designer and theatre consultant. As is the case with so many theatre people, Pilbrow’s work comes as much from who he is as from what he does. And who he is, based on A Theatre Project, is someone who would be wonderful to sit with in a pub and just listen to – he has more stories than Scheherazade, all of them entertaining. Some of the stories he recounts end unhappily, but they are all about theatre, its art and craft, its people, about theatre architecture and theatres themselves, and about the business end of theatre that the audience never sees.

Drama became Pilbrow’s passion at an early age. The theatre described on the first page of A Theatre Project is one that Pilbrow designed at age 10 on the second floor landing of his parents’ London home, complete with raked seating: The audience sat on the steps to watch Pilbrow, as Horatio Nelson, die at the Battle of Trafalgar. The remaining 400-plus handsomely illustrated and thoroughly engaging pages of this book detail Pilbrow’s evolution from 1950s lighting designer – who would go on to write the bible of stage lighting, Stage Lighting Design: The Art, The Craft, The Life – to founder of Theatre Projects. Started as a simple lighting business in London, Theatre Projects made quantum leaps in scope to become regarded today as the world’s foremost theatrical consulting firm specializing in theatre architecture.

A Theatre Project regales readers with stories that entwine Pilbrow’s life with Theatre Projects’ ascent to international prominence. One story describes Peter O’Toole’s insistence to Laurence Olivier that Pilbrow be sacked, but Lord Olivier engaged him and Theatre Projects anyway to help create one of the foremost theatres in the world, London’s Royal National Theatre.

No need to elaborate about RNT’s importance, but it seems fitting to note that this review is being written in the Ferguson Center for the Arts at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, VA, yet another performing arts venue designed by Theatre Projects. Whatever role you play in theatre, this is a book that will provide inspiration and insights to guide your next project.

George Hillow has taught, designed and directed at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, VA, since 1981. He is a regular contributor to Southern Theatre.
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