Connecting with Your Audience

Professional and Academic Theatres Share Strategies for Creating New Plays that Resonate with a Community

Nicolas the Worm

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Act One of the 2011 winner of the Charles M. Getchell Award, given by SETC to recognize a worthy new play, is published, with Act Two available online.
Friend (a writer like me, but not a playwright) calls me on my BlackBerry to tell me Florida Stage, a West Palm Beach theatre that billed itself as “the nation’s largest professional theatre dedicated to producing exclusively new and emerging works,” has filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

“Sorry to be the bearer of such lousy news,” he says. “I hope this doesn’t zap your writing momentum.”

“Not at all,” I reply. News that a theatre is closing doesn’t shock me anymore. It still saddens me, but it doesn’t stop me in my tracks.

“Doesn’t it uncharge your batteries at least a little bit?” my friend asks.

“Trust me,” I reply, “as a playwright I’m extremely comfortable with the knowledge that I will experience more rejection replies than ‘We’d-like-to-talk-to-you-about-producing-your-play’ responses. This is going to happen whatever direction the economy takes.”

Beat.

“And not to go all Mary Chapin Carpenter on you,” I continue, “but most of the time I feel lucky.”

“Really?”

“I’ve been writing plays for 20 years and, well, I’ve had a lot of productions. I mean, I’m not famous by any stretch of the imagination, and I don’t have a play running somewhere every night of any given week. Heck, lately, I’ve had more staged readings than full productions.”

“But you feel lucky?”

“Here’s why: What I write is still finding its way into the hands of actors. Sometimes I have to hand the pages out myself, but I’m actually okay with that. The actors hold those pages and most of the time end up sharing what’s on them in front of an audience. For me, there’s nothing in the world that really compares to that experience.”

Even though I’m talking into my BlackBerry, suddenly I’m standing on a soapbox.

“I think more than ever people are looking for a present moment experience,” I say.

“You mean like yoga?”

“No, like theatre. Look, people are spending huge amounts of time staring at computer screens, texting, sitting in traffic – I mean, nobody’s talking anymore.”

“We’re talking right now.”

“And I appreciate that. In fact, thank you for calling and not sending a text. But what I’m saying is that our human need for experiencing something live and in the moment hasn’t gone away. Maybe it’s stronger than ever.”

“Can you prove that?”

“No. I mean, well, maybe I could. But it doesn’t matter, because it’s what I believe.”

Beat.

“You should make a speech,” my friend says.

“I think I just did.”

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400 Words Submissions
Have an opinion on a theatre-related topic? Please send your opinion column of 400 words or less to Editor Deanna Thompson at deanna@setc.org.

Letters to the Editor
Southern Theatre welcomes letters to the editor. Please send letters of 250 words or less to Editor Deanna Thompson at deanna@setc.org.
New plays are theatre’s lifeline to the future. In these challenging times, nurturing new work is more vital than ever.

In this issue, we celebrate the work of the playwright, putting our spotlight on how new works can help a theatre connect with its community. You’ll read about an Alabama professional theatre that attracted a new, tailgating audience with a play about a coaching legend. You’ll learn how a university in West Virginia forged a link with its community through a play about a local mining disaster. You’ll find out how a college in Kentucky raised awareness of domestic violence through a class playwriting project while also teaching students about the impact theatre can have on a community. You’ll also discover how a professional theatre in North Carolina is drawing in audiences for nontraditional musicals infused with a distinctive Appalachian flavor.

This is the issue of Southern Theatre in which we regularly publish the work of the playwright who has won SETC’s annual Charles M. Getchell Award. Beginning on Page 25, you’ll find Act One of the 2011 winner, Nicolas the Worm, by Eddie Zipperer. (Due to the length of the play, Act Two is published online at www.setc.org.) On Page 21, you can read about Zipperer and the development of Nicolas the Worm in an interview conducted by Steve Burch.

Inclined more to the technical side of theatre? You’ll find helpful tips from Kyle Ankiel for building an inexpensive, collapsible jack brace in our “Outside the Box” column, which focuses on innovative and cost-saving design-tech methods.

Do you serve as an adjudicator or participate in theatre competitions? You may be interested in reading Michael P. Howley’s review of Dean Slusser’s new book, *Adjudicating Theatre Performance: Responding to Competitions and Festivals*, in our “Words, Words, Words…” book column.

Finally, in our “400 Words” column, we return to the role of the playwright. Steve Willis reflects on the closing recently of another theatre – and explains why he remains optimistic about the future of playwriting and theatre in general.

Whether you are a writer, aspiring playwright, creator of theatre or passionate supporter, we hope you’ll discover much to energize and inspire your creative spirit!

Alan Litsey, SETC President
Jack Brace

Build an Inexpensive, Collapsible Version that Stores Compactly

by Kyle Ankiel

In preparing for an upcoming children’s show, I went into our cave of storage to pull our jack braces. What I found were the jack braces that most theatres have. Made from pieces of 1-by lumber with scabs of plywood to hold together the joints, these old standards are rock-solid, but take up a lot of space in storage. The way they are built makes it difficult to attach them to any set other than the one for which they were built. I soon found that the ones we had in storage had been cut down to random heights to accommodate sight lines and different sizes of flats. That made them of no use in my upcoming children’s show, for which we were creating a large (18’ tall) soft-cover box set.

Looking for better ideas

I set out to build new jack braces, with a difference. My goal was to design a set of braces that could be easily stored and would have the potential to be used in the construction of many future shows.

I started brainstorming the best way to build them so that they would hold up over time and use, and address the biggest issue that most theatres have: storage. Our jack braces took up a pretty good hunk of space in our storage building. Varying sizes and styles of construction made organizing and storing difficult. Due to their odd shapes, the braces didn’t fit in storage racks.

Easy to use, easy to store

To remedy those problems, I decided to build a collapsible jack brace. It needed to be sturdy while in use but compact when in storage. I experimented with design ideas, but most used seemingly excessive amounts of materials to create stability. I settled on a concept that is lightweight, solid and, above all else, easy to use and store.

We built our braces entirely out of materials that we already had in our shop. The goal was to create a brace that cost no more than building the classic jack brace, but solved all the aforementioned issues.

Please note: This design is for a 10’ tall brace (maximizing the use of 12’ long stock materials), but can be shortened or lengthened by replacing the 10’ boards with the desired height. (See next column for list of suggested materials, but feel free to make substitutions as needed to use your stock.)

Materials Needed (per brace)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 1” x 6” x 12’, ripped into 2 strips 2¾” wide</td>
<td>$10-$12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1” x 4” x 12’</td>
<td>$6-$8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 6” strap hinge</td>
<td>$4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ¾” x 2” hex bolts</td>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ¼” washers</td>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ¼” x 1 ¼” carriage bolts</td>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ¼” nuts</td>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screws sized as needed</td>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood glue</td>
<td>Stock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL COST: $16-24

Note: If not in stock, cost of the last six items would be less than $5.

Preparation

Step 1: Rip the 1” x 6” x 12’ piece into two strips 2¾” wide.

Step 2: Cut the 1” x 4” x 12’ piece into a 10’ long piece and a 2’ long piece. Do the same with one of the 1” x 2 ¾” x 12’ pieces.

Step 3: Strike a center line down the 1” x 4” x 10’ piece (as illustrated in photo below).

Assembly

Step 1: Attach the strap hinge to the 2’ and 10’ pieces using screws and the ¼” carriage bolt. After attaching the bolt, either use an angle grinder to mushroom (or round the end of the bolt) or use thread lock to prevent the nut from coming off. Be sure that...
your hinge is exactly centered. You might take this opportunity to grind off screw points that may have popped through the plates.

**Step 2:** Cut a 45-degree angle into the 2’ piece and one of the 10’ lengths of 1” x 2 ¾” to allow for hinge movement.

**Step 3:** Cut a rough pattern of the hinge and bolt into both pieces to allow for a firm joint in the brace. (See photo, previous page, showing Assembly steps 2, 3 and 4.)

**Step 4:** Align the now-notched 1” x 2 ¾” piece onto one side of the center line on the 1” x 4” piece, creating an off-center hog’s trough (T-brace). Glue and screw.

**Step 5:** Round the ends of your remaining 10’ length of 1” x 2 ¾” to allow for free movement. We used a roll of electrical tape to get an even roundness.

**Step 6:** Use a clamp or screws to align the brace to exactly 90 degrees. I used a table corner and a framing square. Put the rounded end piece in place on the deeper side of the brace, leaving a small gap to allow free movement.

**Step 7:** Drill and bolt the board to the 10’ part of the brace with a 5/16” hex bolt.

**Step 8:** Unscrew or unclamp your piece from the table.

(Continued on Page 32)
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Connecting with Your Audience

Professional and Academic Theatres Share Strategies for Creating New Plays that Resonate with a Community
Throughout theatrical history, great leaders and powerful personalities have always been fodder for great drama. The trials and tribulations of these larger-than-life figures have provided the conflicts, the victories and the defeats that keep an audience enthralled in the action of the play. Henry V comes to mind. Joan of Arc. Julius Caesar. Bear Bryant?

That’s right – Paul “Bear” Bryant, the legendary college football coach, is now the subject of an original script, commissioned and produced by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival (ASF). The playwright, Michael Vigilant, who is also the chief operating officer of ASF, was given the idea in a budget meeting with colleagues. As Vigilant recalls, “Derek [Scott, ASF controller] said that if we ever did a play about Bear Bryant, it would do really well. Nancy [Rominger, director of the Southern Writers Project] looked at me and said, ‘Mike, you played football, you write plays, you wrestled a bear – you do it.’ Plus, she knew I’d write it for free.”

Developing the play

Although the idea came simply and easily, Vigilant found the process of creating the show daunting.

“I didn’t quite know what I was getting myself into,” says Vigilant. “The passion fans feel for their teams, from San Francisco to Detroit to New York, is intense. But in Alabama, there are no pro sports teams to dilute the passion of college football… The football here, I believe, is more personal – more us against the world.”

Not only is football a difficult topic to tackle in the Southeast, but the specter of Coach Bryant is perhaps the largest hurdle of them all. Some might have felt it was too big a challenge.

“When we announced to the ASF board that we were taking on this project, I saw the chin of the board chair drop to the floor,” Vigilant says.

Vigilant had only been at ASF a month or two, and still hadn’t quite grasped the magnitude of the task before him.

The research for the project was an intense process, but one blessed with good fortune. The aforementioned board chair with the dropping chin was Young Boozer III, whose father was the best friend and teammate of Coach Bryant. He had remained a lifelong friend of the family. Another board member, Charlie Stakely, was also connected to a friend of the Bryants. According to Vigilant, Boozer and Stakely “ran interference for me. In addition to doing my own research (a dozen books or so, tons of old magazines, Bear Bryant Show DVDs, lots of Internet research, museum, etc.), they set me up with interviews with a variety of former players and Bryant friends.”

Vigilant began to realize the overwhelming impact Coach Bryant had on the people of Alabama.

“As I interviewed people and players associated with Coach Bryant, that unique love of the game – and love for him – became more and more clear,” Vigilant says. “It also became important to me to not let them down,” as previous dramatic representations of Coach Bryant had done – most notably the films The Bear (1984) and Junction Boys (2002), Vigilant adds.

The creative process for any playwright can be a difficult one, without all of the added pressure of dramatizing a legend, and Vigilant felt the crunch.

“There were certainly times when I asked myself, ‘Who am I to do this? Who am I to write anything about the life of any man, let alone a legend like Coach Bryant?’” Vigilant says. “But then that 2 a.m. voice would come to me and whisper, ‘What are you, a quitter?’ (Coach Bryant?) I’m glad I stuck with it.”

And the Alabama Shakespeare Festival is certainly glad as well. Vigilant’s play, Bear Country, which featured four actors portraying fifteen characters under the direction of Tim Rhoze, premiered in January 2009 on the ASF Octagon Stage. It became
the biggest seller in that space’s 25-year history, playing at 98 percent capacity for six weeks – with 12,200 seats sold. The audience response was unprecedented.

“There were actual tailgaters in the parking lot,” recalls Vigilant, “and for the first time, there were scalpers at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.”

**Winning a new audience**

This venture opened up ASF to a whole new community: 40 percent of the audience for *Bear Country* had not been to ASF previously, and many of them had never even seen a play before.

The continued success of *Bear Country* included a mini-tour to the Virginia Samford Theatre in Birmingham in the summer of 2009, and a revival at the Shakespeare Festival in January 2011. There was an independent production at the Springer Opera House in Columbus, GA, last fall, and plans have been made for another independent production with Theatre Tuscaloosa (the proverbial belly of the beast!) this fall. So far, the only actor to take on the role of Coach Bryant in each of these productions is Rodney Clark, who is set to direct and star in the Tuscaloosa production.

Vigilant hopes the play will continue to have a life outside the South and perhaps outside the theatre.

“ASF’s producing artistic director, Geoffrey Sherman, is a strong believer in geo-specific work,” says Vigilant. “Bear Country was one of those pieces. They are designed not only to resonate with our local theatre audience but also the story must be strong enough to be interesting to folks in upstate New York.”

And he adds, “There has been some interest by film producers – so maybe a screenplay, but we’ll see.”

While the success of *Bear Country* has been an important moment in the history of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, it may also hold a lesson for other theatres looking to reach out to their communities: The theatre need not concern itself solely with the untouchable icons of history. Local heroes, legends from our lifetime can, in the theatrical setting, touch an audience that might otherwise stay home and watch the game.

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Chris Hardin is an associate professor of theatre at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN, and the chair of SETC’s Publications Committee.
Honoring a Loss

University Creates Play that Helps Community Come to Grips with 1968 Mining Disaster

by Tessa Carr

What if you could create a full-fledged script and production from scratch that got your community talking about current or past events? While she admits it will be challenging and time-consuming work, Francene Kirk, associate professor of communications and theatre at Fairmont State University in West Virginia, believes that it can also be an enormously rewarding experience. Kirk and a group of students wrote and produced Remembering No. 9: Stories from the Farmington Mine Disaster, a work that morphed from a staged reading of monologues into a two-act play about a mining tragedy that happened years ago in their community.

Kirk’s inspiration for Remembering No. 9 came from her fascination with a 2006 mine explosion in Sago, WV, which trapped 13 miners underground, killing all but one of them.

“As I sat staring at my television for several days, I could not imagine what the friends and family members of the trapped miners might be feeling or how they endured the waiting,” Kirk says. “I wondered what people might be talking about as they waited in the little country church or what they were thinking during the public announcements. But mostly, I wondered how they endured the heartache of losing the ones they loved.”

As the news unfolded on her television that day in 2006, Kirk pictured the waiting families, gathering in a local church for news of their loved ones. Who were they, how was a place of worship transformed into one of anxiety and grief, and how did the families cope with the uncertainty?

Kirk’s own community of Fairmont is located only 12 miles from the site of one of the worst mining disasters in U.S. history – the Consol No. 9 mine north of Farmington, WV, where 78 men were killed in 1968. The Sago tragedy was the worst mining disaster in West Virginia since the Farmington tragedy.

While the Sago disaster was too recent and painful to consider as a basis for a work of community-based art, the Farmington disaster loomed as a background to the current tragedy. Kirk knew that a community conversation about Farmington could also help with the discussion of what happened at Sago. Returning to school, she talked with Fairmont students Samantha Huffman, Celi Oliveto and Jason Young about the possibility of addressing the human story within these tragedies. Could they bring together so many different perspectives and find a play within it?

Beginning the journey

Kirk applied for funding from the Fairmont State undergraduate research office for oral history research, culminating in a performance. During the course of the project, the office provided $3,400 in grants.

With the first grant, Kirk engaged the help of professional oral historians Michael and Carrie Nobel Kline. Their simple advice to listen and pay attention to community members helped the students connect with residents across generational lines.

The students set out to hear the memories of the community by interviewing numerous people.

“Losing 78 people leaves a huge void in a small community,” says Celi Oliveto, one of the students involved in the project, who comes from a coal-mining family legacy herself. “I still have a hard time wrapping my head around that fact…. Seventy-eight people just never came home from work, and they left their lovers, friends, children.”

The students discovered, as Kirk states, “that these stories needed to be told.” The generosity of the community was overwhelming, as people shared photographs, memories, newspaper clippings and other pieces of memorabilia to bring to life the memory of loved ones lost.

“The community was all for the project,” says Samantha Huffman. “We would interview one person...
and then be flooded with more who wanted to be interviewed.”

After two years of interviewing people and researching press coverage, Oliveto and Huffman presented the first draft of the play as a series of monologues at the American Association for Theatre Educators (AATE) conference in 2008. At this point, they had powerful monologues, but the work lacked the dramatic arc of a play. At the conference, the Fairmont team met Greg Hardison, an expert in museum theatre, a genre used to teach historical and cultural information in educational and museum settings. With another grant from Fairmont’s undergraduate research office, Kirk hired Hardison and playwright Donna Ison to assist with further development.

From monologues to play

Ison, Kirk and the student team worked to focus the goals of the production and the basic story line.

The play actually emerged from an in-depth interview with the Rev. Richard Bowyer, a minister who waited with the families during the Farmington mine disaster, comforting them and shielding them from the intrusive media. His story gave the dramatic arc to the structure. The stories of newspaper photographer Bob Campione, who was 20 at the time of the accident, added detail and humor. Jason Young, a theatre student, had the primary responsibility of working the script into a dramatic production alongside Kirk.

“We have taken some dramatic liberties with the story,” Kirk says. “The characters in the play are creations based on the research. Likewise, the time period may not be recognizable. We have not attempted to recreate the details of 1968. Our goal is to tell a story in a way that is interesting, educational and artistic, and that honors the stories of No. 9.”

Through two productions and a performance at the state Capitol, the piece has enjoyed a long life. It is now being reworked again for another production.

The community response

The play drew about 100 audience members each night it was performed – typical attendance for a show that is not a musical, Kirk says. Many who attended had a connection to the disaster or to coal mining – and some attended multiple performances, Kirk says.

(Continued on Page 18)
Helping a Cause

College Develops Play about Domestic Violence to Benefit Local Battered Women’s Shelter

by Adanma Onyedike Barton

Domestic violence is a very important issue in Berea, KY, the community where I live. After reading in the local paper last fall about the closing of the only domestic violence shelter in our county, I set out to find a way to help through theatre.

Inspiration soon came to me. At the time, I was teaching a senior theatre seminar class at Berea College. Why not modify this upper-level theatre course into a service-learning class that would write and produce a play about domestic violence? The performance could serve as a benefit for Hope’s Wings, the local nonprofit agency that serves victims of domestic violence and operated the shelter. I believed this would not only benefit the shelter and connect us to our community, but also would teach my students valuable lessons about how to develop a play and how to use theatre to make a difference.

Developing a strategy

Not sure of how to create a service-learning course on my own, I contacted the Berea College Center for Excellence in Learning Through Service (CELTS). The mission of CELTS, according to associate director Ashley Cochrane, is “to educate students for leadership in service and social justice through promotion and coordination of academic service-learning and student-led community service. These experiences prepare students to be service-oriented leaders for Appalachia and beyond.”

With Cochrane’s help, I contacted Robyn Moreland, the executive director of Hope’s Wings, and came up with a plan for how my actors could help her organization. We decided to have students interview Hope’s Wings clients to write the play on the topic of domestic violence, and to produce the play in October, which is Domestic Violence Prevention Month.

In order to engage the community and not just college students, we decided to hold the production at the local high school theatre. Together, Moreland and I applied for a CELTS grant to cover the cost of props for the play and to assure that all Hope’s Wings clients who participated were paid for their time.

Preparing students

To prepare my students, I had them read Local Acts: Community Based Performance in the United States by Jan Cohen-Cruz. Using the textbook as a foundation, we had open conversations about the importance of theatre, not only for entertainment but also to assist the community. I strongly recommend Local Acts as a tool to assist students in making connections regarding how theatre can help community causes.

Creating the script

I invited a staff member from Hope’s Wings to speak to the class to prepare students for the types of clients they would be interviewing. A client from the shelter also came to our class and told her story. Later, we took a field trip to the shelter, and the students, in teams of two, interviewed clients.

After the field trip, I left the class alone for two sessions to create the play. My only instructions were that the script must include all aspects of theatricality: monologues, scenes, original dance or movement, and original music. Students put together an hour-long performance in two weeks.

The event

The play they created, From Her Eyes, informed audience members about types of domestic violence and how to recognize signs that friends, family and strangers may be suffering abuse. The play also educated the audience as to the frequency of the crime.

The performance of the play was one of a series of events we put together to benefit the shelter. On the night of the performance, my students held a domestic violence awareness rally on the steps of Union Church, a centrally located place in Berea. At the rally, we handed out purple ribbons as symbols
of domestic violence prevention, had a guest speaker from the shelter, and then began a 10-minute march to Berea Community High School for the performance. As we marched, more and more members of the community joined us.

**Impact on community**

The one-night-only performance of *From Her Eyes* raised $500 for Hope’s Wings, purely through donations. It also was a powerful healing tool for victims, an educational tool for students, and an eye opener for the community.

“Our clients still talk about the event,” Moreland says. “They are proud they were able to tell their story and see so many people respond to it in such a powerful way. Many victims of violence feel silenced. This event gave them an opportunity for their stories to be heard.”

The production also planted seeds. The Berea Community High School Key Club was so inspired by our production that members collected toys for the children of the shelter.

With its service-learning component, the play also created a stronger connection between the college and the community.

Chad Berry, director of CELTS at Berea College, notes that the idea behind service learning is to allow students to learn from the community while also serving its needs.

“This theatre service-learning project did this exceedingly well, but it also connected the college and our community in important ways.”

(Continued on Page 32)
Evoking a Region

Playwright, Songwriter Draw Record Audiences with Series of Appalachian-Inspired Musicals

by Christine Woodworth

What makes a story Appalachian? Music. Folklore. Religiosity. The land. In Greensboro, NC, a playwright and a songwriter have come together to create four original productions with an Appalachian focus, setting box office records over the past five years.

The unusual collaboration between playwright Preston Lane and songwriter Laurelyn Dossett has led to them being hailed as “the Appalachians’ Rodgers & Hammerstein” by their local newspaper. Their work also has helped establish their producing theatre, Triad Stage, as a regional powerhouse. The American Theatre Wing selected Triad Stage as one of the 10 most promising emerging theatres and awarded it a $10,000 National Theatre Company Grant in 2010. Started by Yale alums Lane and Managing Director Richard Whittington, Triad Stage has fostered what its founders call theatre of “radical collaboration.” In an era of small-cast productions, co-productions with other theatres, truncated theatre seasons, and other cost-cutting measures, Triad Stage continues to mount expansive original works that are decidedly “rooted where we are,” as Lane states, and also startlingly universal. Part of their mission, in fact, is to create a uniquely Southern voice.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the collaborations between Lane and Dossett. Dossett is cofounder of the band Polecat Creek and has appeared at numerous regional music festivals as well as on National Public Radio’s A Prairie Home Companion. Embracing Appalachian roots

The collaboration between Lane and Dossett began with Brother Wolf, an Appalachian re-envisioning of Beowulf. Lane, a native of the North Carolina mountain town of Boone, shares the inspiration for his retelling: “I had been searching for opportunities as an artist to take a look at my Appalachian roots and to honor the place I had come from. I had recently had conversations with Mike Abbott (who played Brother Wolf in the first production) about the sense of having to hide our Appalachian heritage in the theatre. I think when I sensed Beowulf would be a great role for Mike, I began to put the pieces together of making an Appalachian adaptation. It seemed a perfect fit: folklore, religiosity, a sense of good and evil, a belief in fate. The story seemed so easily connected to an Appalachian setting.”

Creating nontraditional musical theatre

One day Lane heard the Polecat Creek song “Leaving Eden,” about the closing of a textile mill and the impact on workers, on the radio underscoring a news story. He contacted Dossett about collaborating on this new production. Lane was drawn to her music as well as her obvious flair for storytelling. Neither was interested in creating a piece reminiscent of conventional musical theatre. Rather, they wanted to draw upon the music and stories of the mountains to create a 19th century retelling of Beowulf that honored the religion and culture of the region. In their version, the title character is a mountain preacher whose adventures are no less epic than in the original.

Although Triad Stage seemed to be taking a gamble with Brother Wolf, it outsold On Golden Pond, traditionally a popular draw for audiences. Brother Wolf holds the record for the highest-selling, 3-week run in the theatre’s 10-year history.

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produced in 2006 and remounted three more times, establishing itself as the overall top-selling show for Triad. That was followed in 2008 by Bloody Blackbeard, which recounted the swashbuckling history of the legendary pirate. Their most recent collaboration, in 2010, was Providence Gap, adapted from Shakespeare’s Pericles. All of these stories are unmistakably set in North Carolina. Yet each also features a connection to a larger piece of classical literature, theatre history or legendary folklore, granting them a broader appeal beyond the Piedmont region. Lane notes that “I’m always looking at big ways to tell a story, and I think as soon as you start telling stories in big ways you begin to recognize how they connect to stories that have always been told.”

Lane and Dossett both acknowledge the oral storytelling traditions of Appalachian mountain culture as inspiration for their work. Dossett notes that these stories were “epic and often dark or funny.” The stories go hand-in-hand with the music of the region. Lane explains that the minor key of the music often connects directly to the inherent darkness of many of the stories. Whittington also notes that these legacies have been a huge draw for their audiences, even in an urban center such as Greensboro. The land itself is often pivotal for these writers, too. While travelling together during the process of writing Providence Gap, Lane and Dossett stumbled upon a rowan tree or mountain ash, a tree invested with magical qualities in folklore. The tree became a central symbol in the play. When describing their collaboration on these original works, Dossett notes, “The songs guide the story and vice versa.”

Creating tangible and intangible rewards

The Appalachian sagas created by Lane and Dossett have been embraced by local audiences – both theatrical and musical. Lane credits some of this to the “event” quality of these productions being created in Greensboro. Whittington says the success of the collaborations can be measured both tangibly and intangibly. The musicals by Lane and Dossett are among the top 10 best-selling shows in Triad Stage’s history. They have also set records in terms of numbers of attendees as well as the percentage of capacity within the theatre.

These productions have had remarkable lives beyond Triad Stage as well. For each one, Dossett has recorded an album of the original music, which has enabled the musicians to work prior to rehearsals with the actors, allowed the theatre to use the recordings in promotional materials, and served an archival purpose. Additionally, Triad Stage continues to sell the albums. Although the recordings have

(Continued on Page 18)
Evoking a Region
(Continued from page 17) not generated much in terms of additional revenue for the theatre, they mark some of the intangible successes of these collaborations. After hearing pieces from the Brother Wolf album, nationally-known artist Levon Helm recorded Dossett’s song “Anna Lee” on his Grammy-winning Dirt Farmer album. Additionally, Rhiannon Giddens, a member of the Grammy-winning band Carolina Chocolate Drops, is featured on the Beautiful Star album. Playscripts, Inc., has published Brother Wolf and Beautiful Star.

Lane notes that some theatres have found their work too challenging to produce. “These are not simple folk-on-top-of-a-mountain plays,” he notes.

Nevertheless, Brother Wolf and Beautiful Star have been staged at theatres as far away as Ohio and Minnesota, contributing to Triad Stage’s national reputation.

While the exposure has been wonderful for Triad Stage, Lane, Dossett and Whittington all believe that the true measure of success for these original productions is their ability to connect with local audiences. Although the 2011-2012 season of Triad Stage does not include a new collaboration between Lane and Dossett, Whittington says that they have a number of projects in development and will definitely be back. Triad Stage’s audiences eagerly wait for Lane and Dossett to sing themselves home again.

Christine Woodworth is an assistant professor of theatre at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Honoring a Loss
(Continued from page 13)

“Everyone I spoke with after the show said how grateful they were to have seen their family’s stories told,” says Oliveta. “I think we gave the community a chance to see their story honored and told as respectfully and truthfully as our skill level allowed.”

After the first workshop production, 30 people from the audience of about 100 stayed for a talkback session, Kirk says.

“We expected audience members to talk about what worked and didn’t work in the script,” says Kirk.

Instead, they found people were eager to share their version of the events. Jason Young was struck by the need audience members had to tell their stories, or what performance scholar Linda Park-Fuller has termed the “Canterbury Effect.”

Young was particularly moved when a judge from the area stood up and said a character in the play had told his story. The character is a student who wants to quit high school after his father is killed. The judge told the cast: “You put my life on stage.” Young’s response: “We have no idea what we have done – no idea the lives that we touched by telling the story.”

Ricardo Nesbit plays a young boy who searches the newspaper for a list of survivors, hoping to find his neighbor’s name, in Remembering No. 9.

Tessa Carr is an assistant professor of performing arts at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, NC, and a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

Tips for Creating Theatre from Oral Histories

When you create theatre based on local events, the stakes are high. Students and community explore the ethics of public memory and the making of history with each word that is chosen and each story that is represented.

The Fairmont State University team that created Remembering No. 9 shares the following tips for others pursuing similar projects:

• Begin the play with an open mind.

“Every place and person has a story to tell,” student Samantha Huffman notes. “One piece of advice I would give any university intending to attempt a project like this would be to let the stories evolve naturally. Don’t have any preconceived notions about what you are going to hear.”

• Don’t take one side or try to make a political statement.

Press reports from the Sago disaster had poorly portrayed some area people, a problem repeated throughout the history of mining disasters, according to Francene Kirk, associate professor of communications and theatre at Fairmont State University. Her team was intent on showing the depth and breadth of community in West Virginia mining culture.

“We tried very carefully not to pick sides, not to have a political statement – we were the carriers of all the stories,” says student Jason Young.

• Let the stories dictate the play’s content.

The Fairmont State team says it is important not to focus on an end product before you know what stories “want” to be told. You need time and patience to let the work evolve. You also need support for creating work that may not turn out the way you planned. “You have to put your ego away and let the work evolve,” Young says.

Kirk says the Farmington play was the most rewarding theatre project she has ever guided. She notes that the connection to community and the deep learning experienced by her students on this project are unparalleled in her teaching life.

“You community might not have such a dramatic event, but there are stories to be told,” Kirk says. “Find the story and allow it to be told as it needs to be for the content.”

-Tessa Carr
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Eddie Zipperer Credits His Playwriting Prowess to Great Teachers

Eddie Zipperer, the winner of SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award for 2011, received a master of fine arts (MFA) degree in playwriting from Georgia College & State University in 2008, and has been teaching composition there ever since. His two published plays are Don’t Fear the Reaper (Dramatic Publishing Co.) and Jupiter Jones: Rock Star Vampire Hunter (Pioneer Drama). Since 2009, his short plays have won 13 contests and awards and have been produced in cities across the U.S. (including New York and Los Angeles) and in Canada and Australia. Zipperer also spends a lot of his free time helping his sister, Amy, with her theatre department at Georgia Military College. This interview was conducted by Steve Burch, an associate professor of theatre at the University of Alabama and chair of SETC’s Playwriting Committee.

STEVE BURCH: How did you begin as a writer? Do you have any training in other areas of theatre, such as acting or directing?

EDDIE ZIPPERER: The reason I’m a playwright today is that I’ve had great teachers. I began in the theatre as an actor in high school. I went to Lakeside High School in Augusta, GA, and they had an amazing theatre teacher, Joanne Greene. Unlike a lot of other high school theatre programs, we didn’t just do one-act plays and musicals. We did tons and tons of Shakespeare, which I wasn’t super pumped about when I first started. In my English classes, I hated Shakespeare. Like a lot of students, I groaned and wished for it to be in English, but my first experience with Shakespeare in a theatre setting was completely different. We did A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and I fell in love with it. After that I was addicted to Shakespeare. Before I was 19, I had played Lysander, Bottom, Feste, Romeo and Hamlet. Aside from acting, I had an intense dramaturgical interest in the plays. I kept acting through college, and signed up for a scriptwriting class where I met another great teacher who had an incredible impact on me, David Muschell. David can read students’ work and help them develop the skills to make it better more effectively than any playwright or professor that I’ve met so far. That class was where I wrote my very first play, The Pirate Musical, a script that I’m still proud of, no matter how many people tell me probably I shouldn’t be.

BURCH: Did you take any courses in playwriting? Do you think playwriting can be taught? Or did you learn by the seat of your pants while doing it?

ZIPPERER: I have an MFA in creative writing from Georgia College & State University (GCSU), and without the tools I learned there from the playwriting professor, David Muschell, I don’t think I would be very successful. I learned the basics about writing, but also how to take criticism effectively, how to rewrite, how to submit, and tons of other useful stuff. Also, I think I’ve read about every book on playwriting ever written. I devour those suckers. I can’t stand other people knowing stuff that I don’t know yet. These days, when I’m writing, I still pull out old lessons to improve my work. Once I took a workshop taught by Stephen Gregg, and at the beginning he blew up a balloon, and he said, “I’m going to pop this balloon at some point, but when you do, you’ll be surprised.” I thought, that’s what you think, and I kept my eye on that balloon the whole time, but when he finally popped it, it scared the hell out of everyone, including me. I use that lesson all the time. I set up events in the play, and then I try to make sure that when I pay them off, the audience will be surprised.

BURCH: Tell me about your first play written. Was it your first play to be staged? What was it like to see your play in the hands of other people? Was it thrilling? Scary?

ZIPPERER: The first play I wrote in grad school was called Evolution. It’s about the smartest caveman. He invents religion by dressing up as a “Bird God” and scaring the rest of the cavemen into doing anything he wants. I was absolutely in love with that play after I wrote it, but it’s hard to get productions when you’re starting out, so here’s what I did: I filled out a load of paperwork to start a student organization called “The GCSU New Play Project.” Then, as president of the organization, I
Zipperer advises playwrights to be persistent: ‘Every play I’ve had published has been rejected by at least two other publishers first.’

funny, or what’s sad, or what the characters are feeling without the writer telling them, I think that’s a play that needs another rewrite. Directors have consistently brought a dimension to my plays that I never could have – even if I spent a hundred years working on the script. And I love that.

BURCH: When your play is being done, do you ever hope that it will be the play you saw in your mind’s eye? Has a production been better than you imagined it?

ZIPPERER: I’ve had dozens of productions in the last couple years (mostly of my published plays), and every single one I’ve gotten to see has been better than the way I imagined the play in my head. I don’t direct my own work, and I don’t like to stick my hand into the production because I think a play needs fresh eyes and fresh thought to go from the page to the stage. If a decent director can’t figure out the tone, or what’s
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Playwright’s Lab at Hollins University
The Play

NICOLAS THE WORM

by Eddie Zipperer

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

NICOLAS: A Cuban exile living in Miami. Has a thick Cuban accent.
PEDRO: Nicolas’ brother. Obsessed with baseball and sounds much less Cuban than Nicolas.
CONCETTA: Nicolas’ wife. Also sounds less Cuban than Nicolas.
FATHER MARCANO: A priest who works with the Frente.
BILL: An American who is recruiting officers for an invasion of Cuba.
MAGNA: Nicolas’ daughter. She is 5 years old in Act One and 8 years old in Act Two. Her English is better than her Spanish.
JORGE: A Cuban soldier.

TIME:


PLACE:

Nicolas’ living room.

FOR PRODUCTION:

Eddie Zipperer
1776 Cedarwood Rd.
Milledgeville, GA 31061
Phone: (478) 491-1888
E-mail: eddie@sockpuppetstars.com
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NOTE:

Act One of Nicolas the Worm is published on the pages that follow. To read Act Two, visit the SETC website at www.setc.org and click on Scholarships & Awards, New Play Contest.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

(SETTING: The play takes place in the living room of Nicolas Gutiérrez’s house in Miami. There is a reclining chair and a table which holds a record player. There is also a large AM radio in the room. On the back wall hangs a Cuban flag and a large crucifix. There is a door to one side that leads to the rest of the house and a door on the other side that leads outside.)

(AT RISE: Nicolas is sitting on the floor next to a stack of newspapers. Nicolas is cutting out an article from each one, folding it, and placing it in an envelope. It appears he has been working on this for several hours. Nicolas’ brother Pedro is sitting in the recliner looking bored. The record player next to Pedro is playing a Tito Puente album. Nicolas moves to the music as he stuffs envelopes.)

PEDRO: Nicolas, how long are you going to listen to this album?

NICOLAS: I’m going to listen to Tito until the day I die, Pedro. I ain’t never going to get sick of this.

PEDRO: I can’t –.

NICOLAS: Shhh. This one of the best parts. (Nicolas conducts the music with his finger.)

PEDRO: I mean how long are you going to listen to it before you take a rest.

NICOLAS: What you talking about? Listening to Tito is a rest.

PEDRO: Not for me it isn’t. I feel like if I listen to this album one more time I’m gonna have to frisbee it across the room.

NICOLAS: Show some respect, Pedro. Don’t you know Tito is the greatest Cuban musician in the world. That your fellow countryman playing the most magnificent mambó the world ever heard. Don’t that fill your heart with pride?

PEDRO: He’s not even Cuban. He’s Puerto Rican. It says on the back of the album.

NICOLAS: You can’t be believing everything you read on the back of an album. You think I don’t know Cuban music when I hear it? You think I been hearing Cuban music for thirty years and then suddenly I get to Miami and don’t know what it sound like no more?

PEDRO: Even if it was Cuban, it’s not as great as you think it is.

NICOLAS: Tomorrow, Pedro, we going to take you down to Dr. Lopez and have him look in your ears with that ear telescope he got. Something broken in those things. That explain why you never listening to me and why you not hearing Tito right.

PEDRO: It’s not a telescope. Telescopes are for looking up into space. If he stuck a telescope in my ear he’d probably see right out the other side.

NICOLAS: For once I agree with you! (Nicolas laughs heartily at this joke. Pedro rolls his eyes. Nicolas notices Pedro isn’t laughing.) You know, cause you ain’t got no brain in there.

PEDRO: I get it. It’s just not that funny.

NICOLAS: Eez hilarious. You just can’t hear me from over there.

PEDRO: When can I turn this off? I want to listen to the Yankees game. Their left fielder, Hector Lopez, is Cuban, and every time he gets a hit, it fills my heart with pride.

NICOLAS: I be done when I sent this newspaper article to every single person I know in Cuba. And Hector Lopez ain’t Cuban, he from Panama. I know cause if he was Cuban he’d be hitting .300 batting average.

PEDRO: I don’t know why you always bother with that.

NICOLAS: Castro don’t let the Cuban papers publish this news, and everyone in Cuba need to know this. Listen to this article in the Herald, Pedro. Turn that music down.

PEDRO: Thank God. (He turns it all the way down.)

NICOLAS: I said down, not off. I told you your ears not working.

(Pedro turns it up a little.)

(Reading) “The darkness grows in Cuba.” (Stops reading) You hear that, Pedro, the darkness grows.

PEDRO: I hear.

NICOLAS: (Reading again) “On shipboard, it would be mutiny. Under—” I won’t say who, but you know his name—under his “brand of dictatorship, it’s standard operating procedure for silencing dissent. We referring, of course, to the method used to confiscate Cuba’s oldest newspaper and loudest critic of the—” you know who—“regime, Diario de la Marina. Hired hands seized control.” Hired hands! That mean bola de churre’s thugs, Pedro. “They broke into the pressroom and
snatched the plate of a page containing a statement of support for publisher Jose Rivero. Instead, the edition came out in honor of Mr. Rivero. You see that? The paper try to write something good about him and Castro replace it with something bad! You not even listening, Pedro.

PEDRO: I’m listening. I don’t have a choice. It’s this or Tito, and at least I haven’t heard this before.

NICOLAS: If you not mad yet, listen to this. “Dictators must shut the mouth of the free press.” Ay yi yi! Can you believe this? “Castro has made anti-anti-communism a national policy. According to him anti-communism is counter-revolutionary, his term for treason, punishable by death!” By death, Pedro.

PEDRO: Wow. Let’s listen to the baseball game now.

NICOLAS: Santa Maria, Pedro! Don’t you know what that means? It say the darkness is closing in for Cubans! Can you imagine that. Our brothers and sisters, our countrymen being left in the darkness! Eez horrible. Eez why I got to send this to every single Cuban if that what it take.

PEDRO: The G-2 probably already know what you’re sending. I bet they destroy every piece of mail from you.

NICOLAS: You think my big Cuban brain not think of that? That’s why I put made-up names in return address. (Nicolas holds up an envelope.) This one from Frank Sinatra. (Singing) “Night and you and blue Havana.”

PEDRO: It’s Hawaii.

NICOLAS: I make song better. Go ahead and put on baseball game.

PEDRO: Thank you.

(Nicolas yanks the needle off the record player)

NICOLAS: Hijo de puta! Careful with record, Pedro, or you going to be working off that fifty cents stuffing envelopes with me.

PEDRO: Sorry.

(Pedro turns on the radio and tunes it to the Yankees game.)

NICOLAS: That probably what you should be doing anyway.

PEDRO: What?

NICOLAS: Helping me stuff these envelopes.

PEDRO: No thanks.

NICOLAS: Sure, you in America. Everything chewing gum and baseball here. Why should you care about your brothers and sisters in Cuba?

PEDRO: It’s not that I don’t care. I’m just not sure what you’re doing is really... you know... helpful.

NICOLAS: Information is power, Pedro. People never going to get rid of bola de churre if they don’t know the truth about him.

PEDRO: What truth is that?

NICOLAS: “An odor has remained among the sugarcane: a mixture of blood and body, a penetrating petal that brings nausea.”

PEDRO: You don’t even make sense half the time, Nicolas.

NICOLAS: Eez from a Pablo Neruda poem about dictators.

PEDRO: Who’s Pablo Neruda?

NICOLAS: What! Come on, you not know Pablo Neruda? You got to be grabbing my leg. How can you not know? – He only the greatest Cuban poet ever!

PEDRO: Never heard of him.

NICOLAS: You heard of Shakespeare?

PEDRO: Of course.

NICOLAS: He like the Pablo Neruda of England. (Nicolas’ wife Concetta enters.) You see

CONCETTA: Pedro, you keep that radio turned down low. You don’t want to go waking Maria up.

PEDRO: The noise isn’t the radio, it’s your husband’s bellowing.

CONCETTA: Nicolas! What did I tell you about yelling at your brother? You got to cut people a break sometimes.

NICOLAS: Lo siento, Concetta, but this one ain’t never heard of Pablo Neruda!

CONCETTA: Hum, can you, Pedro.

NICOLAS: I tell him, “what? You ain’t never heard of the greatest Cuban poet of all time?”

CONCETTA: I told you before, Nicolas. He’s not Cuban. He’s Chilean.

NICOLAS: Look at this. Now she think I don’t know Cuban poetry when I hear it. I live in Cuba all my life, you think I not know Cuban poetry when I hear it. (Nicolas stands up and grabs his wife affectionately.)

CONCETTA: Nicolas, what are you doing?

NICOLAS: (Singing “Ran Kan Kan”) Yo comprendo, soy un hombre, Lo que quier nena linda

Es Disculpate Por los momentos de amargura Que pase por ti mujer – .

PEDRO: Nicolas, please, man, I’m trying to listen to the baseball game here.

NICOLAS: Pedro, it makes me sad, mi hermano, that you got no appreciation of nothing.

PEDRO: I’d appreciate some baseball if you would give me a chance.

(Nicolas sits down.)

NICOLAS: Come on. For just five minutes.

CONCETTA: Can’t.

NICOLAS: Just two minutes.

CONCETTA: Too much to do.

NICOLAS: What you got to do you can’t spare two minutes?

CONCETTA: I wish I could.

NICOLAS: One minute. Everyone can spare one minute.

CONCETTA: Not me.

NICOLAS: Sit down. Fold one paper, put it in an envelope, and I let you go without a word.

CONCETTA: Nicolas.

NICOLAS: Eez one paper. Eez faster just to do it than to argue.

CONCETTA: Okay. One paper. (Concetta sits on the floor; folds one paper, puts it in an envelope, and gets up.)

NICOLAS: Where you going?

CONCETTA: You said one paper.

NICOLAS: You always been too clever for my tricks.

(CONCETTA exits. There’s a knock on the door.)

PEDRO: I swear, God doesn’t want me to listen to this. I’m listening. I don’t have a choice. It’s this or Tito.

CONCETTA: (To Bill) Hello. My name is Nicolas Gutiérrez y Rivera.

(Nicolas extends his hand to the man, who shakes it.)

BILL: I’m Bill. I’m a bird beak.

BILL: That’s right. How long have you been in America?

NICOLAS: Four years.

BILL: Your English is very good.

NICOLAS: I know. I learn it from great English teachers, Captain America and Superman.

BILL: Is that right?

NICOLAS: Si. Si. Our neighbor boy in Cuba, Enrique, his father send him great big stack of American comic books. He couldn’t read them, but I need English, so he give them to me. I look at the pictures, see, and I figure out the story, then, I figure out what the words mean. When I get to America, this was all the English I had.

BILL: Sometimes I think my son learned all his English from comic books.

NICOLAS: You’d know if he did. When I first get to America, whenever I meet someone new, they say “Oh, eez nice to meet you,” and all I knew to say was “This look like a job for Nicolas Gutiérrez!”

(Bill laughs. Pedro reenters carrying a bottle of Pepsi.)

BILL: (To Pedro) Thank you. (To Nicolas) It just so happens, I might have a job for Nicolas Gutiérrez.

That’s what I was hoping we could talk to you about.

MARCANO: I want you to listen to this gringo, Nicolas. I told him all about you and your great love of Cuba.

BILL: What you want to talk about, Mr. Bill?

BILL: In private.

MARCANO: We hear the man, Pedro. This a grown-ups only conversation.

PEDRO: But the Yankees game –

MARCANO: We just going to be a few minutes, Pedro. Go.

(Pedro exits.)

BILL: What I want to talk to you about is a very sensitive matter.

MARCANO: You can count on Nicolas, Mr. Bill. You could ask him to hold your glass of ice water in hell, and the man wouldn’t take a sip.

BILL: He strikes me as that type, Father.

MARCANO: You guys making my face turn red.

BILL: Thanks for the Pepsi.

BILL: What I want to talk to you about is a very sensitive matter.

BILL: I’m not going to beat around the bush. (Nicolas sits down.)

NICOLAS: Sit down.

BILL: Now, what you mean frank?

BILL: I’m not going to beat around the bush. (Nicolas still looks lost.)

Sorry. I mean I’m going to be honest and direct.

NICOLAS: Oh, good! Me too. Eez what Jesus would want.

(Bill nods at Marcano.)

BILL: I came here because Father Marcano told me that before you came to America you were an officer in Fulgencio Batista’s army.

MARCANO: I was kid. Too stupid to know better. I been ready to leave Cuba since ’54 after Batista show who he really is. We used to be democracy there too before Fulgencio. Cuba go from dictator to democracy better and faster than any country in the world, you know.

BILL: Then you’re definitely not a Batistiano?

NICOLAS: You right about that, man.

BILL: That’s just the kind of men I’m looking for.

NICOLAS: What kind?

BILL: Men that want to see Cuba be ruled by its people. I assume you don’t think much of Castro.

NICOLAS: We not even say that name in my house. We say “bola de churre.”

BILL: What’s that?

NICOLAS: It mean like ball of... How you say churre in English, Padre?

MARCANO: Grease.

NICOLAS: Ball of grease. He don’t like to shower or something so he got all that greasy hair and beard, you know? Si, like the bola de churre. He call us – guys like me and Padre Marcano – gusanos. That mean, like, uh, worms! He think we disgusting little worms wriggling in the dirt because we not worship him like he a god or something.

BILL: Have you heard about what’s going on in South America right now?

NICOLAS: Whispers, you know. Nothing frank I don’t
think. I know Padre Marcano always have his hand in something political, but he never tell me what. I read in Revolucionario this Saturday, that he, is planning full attack on the Cuban people, but I no believe it.

BILL: Nor should you. All you’ll hear out of Cuba now is propaganda. Castro’s mouth speaks the words of every news outlet in that country. The company I work for – and we’re talking about a private company, mind you – we have certain interests in Cuba. The long and the short is, we share your vision of the future. We see a future where Cuba is a democratic nation. Where the people can be free to prosper and live their lives without any fear of tyranny.

NICOLAS: And you believe this can be done?

BILL: Better. It’s being done.

NICOLAS: Is this possible? (Bill leans in.)

BILL: We’re going to assassinate Castro.

NICOLAS: Santa Maria! Padre, assassinate?

MARCANO: Aseesinarlo.

NICOLAS: Eez what I thought! Good! Eez not enough though. What about the rest of the Movimiento 26, de Julio? If you kill Castro, there’s Raúl, Camilo, Che –.

BILL: That’s why we’re putting together the Brigade.

Killing Castro will create a period of chaos. There are underground groups ready to take out infrastructure, and that will give us a window of time to secure a beachhead – first from the air, then from the sea – rally the Cuban people, and take your country back.

NICOLAS: Sound easy.

BILL: I wouldn’t say easy, but as far as success goes it’s basically a sure thing. The CIA did the exact same thing in Guatemala in 1954, and there was an absolute minimal loss of life. They did the same thing in 1953 in Iran. Believe me, you fight a hundred wars like this, and you’re gonna win 99 of them.

NICOLAS: I not interested in fighting a hundred wars or losing one, or dying and leaving mi familia to provide for themselves.

BILL: I can’t promise there won’t be danger –.

NICOLAS: Of course not, I –

BILL: But I can promise you my company will plan this thing perfectly, we’ll plan our contingencies perfectly, and if we lose one single man on that beach we’ll be surprised by it.

NICOLAS: You going to be so surprised that you take care of that man’s family for the rest of their lives?

BILL: We can set you up with life insurance for that.

NICOLAS: It should be called money for your family after you dead insurance. Nobody can ensure life. You can ensure death and taxes, but not life.

(Nicolas looks hard at this.)

MARCANO: And you know, Nicolas, a Cuban man can always count on his church for something like that. Especially my church.

BILL: Can I count you in, Nicolas?

NICOLAS: I don’t think so. Bill, I’m sorry.

MARCANO: Nicolas, what you mean?

NICOLAS: I can’t leave mi familia, Padre.

MARCANO: Si. Si. A man has an important duty to his family.

NICOLAS: Exactly, and to leave them would be –.

MARCANO: But, according to God, a man also has an important duty to his country. Matthew 12:33: “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.” The tree is Cuba, Nicolas, our homeland. And we, and our brothers and sisters in Cuba, we are the fruit.

NICOLAS: That make sense, but –.

MARCANO: And you know what the Bible says about cowardice.

NICOLAS: Are you calling me a coward, Padre?

MARCANO: Of course not. If I thought you a coward, we wouldn’t be here. We’re here because I know your principles. I thought you to love Cuba more than any man I have ever met, except myself of course.

NICOLAS: I need to think about it.

MARCANO: Okay, Nicolas, but remember, this army isn’t short on patriotism, or gusto, or strength, but it needs experience and leadership. Those two things could be the difference between whether these boys succeed or fail. Whether they live or die.

NICOLAS: Boys?

BILL: Mr. Gutiérrez, 30 is over the hill compared to most of the soldiers that have enlisted. These guys are closer to your brother’s age.

MARCANO: In fact, Pedro would be perfect for –.

NICOLAS: No! Pedro will have nothing to do with this business, and that’s the end of that. Pedro stays here. You understand?

MARCANO: I’m sorry, Nicolas. I didn’t mean nothing by it. (Marcano drinks from his flask.)

BILL: Nicolas, you join us as an officer, and I promise you that even if Pedro seeks us out on his own and begs to join, he won’t be welcome.

NICOLAS: I can’t promise nothing until I talk mi familia into it. I don’t want to be away from them, but if I thought there was something I could do for my brothers and sisters in Cuba, and I said “no thank you,” I don’t think I could live with that. But nobody talks to Pedro. I say he not welcome to fight.

BILL: It’s you we’re after. A man of some experience. We have a thousand Pedros.

NICOLAS: Good. After I talk to mi familia, I going to tell Padre Marcano my answer, and he let you know.

BILL: I understand your reluctance. I have a wife too.

NICOLAS: Yeah, but I bet she ain’t Cuban.

BILL: That’s true.

NICOLAS: My wife, Concetta, ain’t like no woman you ever known. You don’t tell that woman nothing. You ask her permission, you know?

BILL: I just want you to think about it, Mr. Gutiérrez.

NICOLAS: I will.

BILL: We’ll be in touch then. Thanks for the Pepsi, Mr. Gutiérrez. (Bill exits.)

MARCANO: I know God wants you to say yes to this, Nicolas. If Cuba ever going to be free, we all got to do our part.

NICOLAS: Stay and stuff envelopes with me, Padre.

MARCANO: I wish I could, Nicolas, but the Lord has more important work for me right now.

(Marcano exits. Pedro enters.)

PEDRO: Can I listen to the Yankees game now?

NICOLAS: Yeah, man. They gone.

PEDRO: What’s wrong?

NICOLAS: Eez nothing for you to be worrying about.

PEDRO: What did they want?

(No response.)

NICOLAS: Quí?

PEDRO: What did Father Marcano want?

NICOLAS: Nothing. Don’t worry about it. They just wanting to know if they can get free Yankee tickets when you make the team.

PEDRO: Of course. I’ll get free tickets for all of you. (END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

(Nicolas kneels in front of the crucifix and crosses himself)

NICOLAS: Hello, Jesus. Eez Nicolás here, how are you? I not too good, Jesus. Let me tell you what going on here. A man has a duty to his family. Okay, I do that. A man has a duty to God. Okay, I do that. A man has a duty to his country, okay, I do that too. Eez all good to me. I do all these duty so I be the man you want me to be, Jesus. But what do I do when they different? If I have to choose between duty to mi familia and duty to Cuba, what do I do then? I know eez not supposed to be easy, but I want to know you want me to figure out this for myself. You probably up there going, “Oh, eez Nicolás again. What’s with this guy bugging me with every little thing in his life, all the time. Why can’t you figure nothing out?” I not want to make you say that, Jesus, but I want to be careful. I want to make sure that whatever I do, you look down, and you say, “Oh, hey look at Nicolás. That Nicolás always do the right thing. Why can’t every guy be like that Nicolás?” I can’t mess this up, Jesus. Eez too important because if I let mi familia down, or I let my country down, or I let you down, then in my mind that bastard bolo de churre is right about me, and I really ain’t nothing but a slimy little worm wriggling around with my head stuck in the dirt. En el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo. Amén.

(He crosses himself again at the end of the prayer.)

(END OF SCENE)
NICHOLAS: Yeah. He 17, and we still calling him “boy.”

MARCANO: (Pointing up) The boy who drank the fruit of darkness, the boat leaves when men ‘eat the fruit of the letter. –

NICHOLAS: (Reading again) “In America, guide Nicolas like:

MARCANO: (Reading again) “The son is not of one nation

NICHOLAS: (Reading again) “But then I realize –.

MARCANO: (Reading again) “Eez how growing up works.

NICHOLAS: (Reading again) “At first I thought my duty to mi familia was at conflict with my duty to my country –.

MARCANO: (Reading again) “You might not free Cuba.

NICHOLAS: (Reading again) “Oh, Pedro can’t handle nothing. He just a boy.”

MARCANO: (Reading again) “Maybe he should start with something smaller. Like getting a job.”

MARCANO: (Reading again) “Some are born great, some are achieving greatness, and some are having greatness thrown upon them.” Pablo Neruda said that.

MARCANO: (Reading again) “No, Nicolas, that’s definitely Shakespeare.

NICHOLAS: (Reading again) “That boy can’t take care of himself. Much less –.

MARCANO: (Reading again) “I'm not listening anymore.

CONCETTA: (Reading again) “I’m not listening anymore.

CONCETTA: (Reading again) “Okay Nicolas, you want to go to Cuba. Go to Cuba.

CONCETTA: (Reading again) “No you not.

CONCETTA: (Reading again) “Yes we are. (She stops cleaning, and is fighting her emotions.

CONCETTA: (Reading again) “Okay Nicolas, you want to go to Cuba. Go to Cuba.

CONCETTA: (Reading again) “You might die.

NICHOLAS: I swear to el Padre, I will not die.
SCENE 4

(Concetta kneels in front of the crucifix and crosses herself.)

CONCETTA: Padre nuestro. I want to talk to you. I've done everything that you've asked of me. All my life, I've gone to church and said my prayers and taken care of my family. All my life. Is this my great reward? Let me know what I've done wrong. Am I being punished for leaving family behind in Cuba? We couldn't bring everyone. They don't make a boat that carries six million people. If they did, you know I'd have brought the whole damn country with me. I had to do what's right for Maria. Does the catechism not say, “Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten human societies”? How can we do that in Cuba, now? I'm sorry, Lord, but I've had enough of this nonsense. I demand that you free the whole damn country with me. I had to do what's right for Maria and Concetta while I came.

PEDRO: You're not going to die, but that's not because it's true. It's because you always believe what you want. You can't see the divide between hope and truth, but the rest of us know it's as vast as the ocean between Cuba and Miami and just as treacherous to voyage. But you, you think you'll just hop right over it. That's not optimistic, it's dangerous.

Pedro will never forgive you, and Pedro will never forgive you, and (She points to heaven) el Padre will never forgive you. You live with that!

(Concetta exits.)

(End of scene)

SCENE 5

(Pedro is practicing swinging the bat. Nicolas enters and watches as a stúpido.)

NICOLAS: Uh oh.

PEDRO: What's wrong.

NICOLAS: You just hit into double play.

PEDRO: How do you know there's someone on base?

NICOLAS: Always imagine the worst. Then you never be disappointed.

PEDRO: That was a good swing.

NICOLAS: If you hitting a real pitcher, you gonna ground out.

PEDRO: I know what I'm doing.

NICOLAS: I can help you with –.

PEDRO: No.

NICOLAS: You no want to be good. Okay.

PEDRO: I'm already good.

NICOLAS: But you no want to be better. Okay.

PEDRO: I know more about swinging that bat than you do.

NICOLAS: I don't think so.

(Pedro ignores him and swings the bat again.)

Another ground ball.

PEDRO: Okay, what's your advice then?

NICOLAS: If you're going to hit a ground ball every time, you should learn to run real fast.

PEDRO: That's pretty stupid advice.

NICOLAS: You think?

PEDRO: Nobody can ever run as fast as an infielder can throw the ball.

NICOLAS: You should probably fix the flaw in your swing then.

PEDRO: What's the flaw?

NICOLAS: You the one who knows so much about swinging. You tell me.

PEDRO: You know more, okay.

NICOLAS: You think?

PEDRO: Yes. Will you show me?

NICOLAS: Nah. I don't know that much. Do I?

PEDRO: You taught me everything I know about swinging the bat.

NICOLAS: Well, that is true. But you so smart, you no need my help.

PEDRO: Please.

NICOLAS: Okay.

(Nicolas takes the bat.)

You swinging like this.

(He swings the bat.)

What wrong with that swing, Pedro?

PEDRO: Your hands and elbows are too high.

NICOLAS: That's right.

PEDRO: You're going to chop the ball right into the ground.

NICOLAS: See. Eez not that I know more. Eez just that you can't see your swing. Sometimes when you in the middle of something you don't got no perspective. But someone else looking at it from far away can see everything.

(Nicolas reaches in his pocket, takes something out and puts it right on Pedro's eye.)

What this?

PEDRO: I don't know.

(Nicolas moves it back and shows it to him.)

It's a quarter.

NICOLAS: See that. That's what perspective is. That's why you got to listen to people. You too proud. But if you want to be great, you got to accept that sometimes other people got better perspective.

PEDRO: Yeah. Yeah. When Saturday comes I'll show you what I got perspective. I'm going to get four hits. Carlos Santino is pitching for the Lions, and his curveball hangs right in my sweet spot half the time.

NICOLAS: Keep your hands low or it won't matter.

(Pedro practices keeping his hands low a few times.)

I not going to be able to make your game Saturday.

PEDRO: You working again? You already missed my two best games.

NICOLAS: I not going to be fixing cars anymore, Pedro. I going away for a while.

(Pedro stops swinging the bat.)

PEDRO: Where you going?

NICOLAS: Somewhere in South America.

PEDRO: We're in Miami. This is as south as America goes.

NICOLAS: Don't be stúpido. The content, South America.

PEDRO: The continent?

NICOLAS: Eez what I said.

PEDRO: What the hell for?

NICOLAS: Actually, I just stopping over there on my way to Cuba.

PEDRO: Cuba?

NICOLAS: Don't tell nobody. Eez all a big secret.

PEDRO: Are you crazy?

NICOLAS: I don't think. Although a lot of people been asking me that.

PEDRO: Now you're the one with no perspective.

NICOLAS: I don't think so.

PEDRO: You're just going to abandon your family?

NICOLAS: Calm down. Don't act like a child about this. I need you to learn to be a man if you going to take care of Maria and Concetta while I gone.

PEDRO: You're not dropping all your responsibilities on me so you can go act like a damn fool.

NICOLAS: Watch your mouth.

(Nicolas takes the bat from Pedro.)

You seventeen years old now, Pencio. Life not going to be all fun and baseball forever. Did you think you wouldn't never have problems bigger than how high your hands are? That's what's damn foolish. What you think eez like to be seventeen in Cuba right now? You think eez fun and baseball there?

PEDRO: That's why I'm here. If I wanted my life to be hell I'd have stayed there.

NICOLAS: You here these four years because of me. You been living the good life because I risk my life to sneak us out. I did that cause you my brother, but now that you grown, you got to do your part too.

PEDRO: Why go back?

NICOLAS: I got more brothers and sisters to save, and just like I risk my life to save you from tyranny, now I got to save the rest of mi familia. You understand?

PEDRO: No.

NICOLAS: Can I count on you?

PEDRO: No.

NICOLAS: Pedro.

PEDRO: No.

NICOLAS: Okay.

PEDRO: So, you're staying then?

NICOLAS: I can't do that.

PEDRO: Who's going to take care of things in your place?

NICOLAS: You are.

PEDRO: I just said I'm not. I'm going to live in New York City and play for the Yankees. I can send money, but I can't take care of them. You hear me?

NICOLAS: I hear you. I just don't believe you. So, I going to leave, and I going to bet everything on you. My home and my family. I going to bet it all on you becoming a man.

PEDRO: Then you're stupid!

NICOLAS: I no stúpido. Eez called faith, Pedro, and I got a lot more faith in the man you going to become than in the words this boy say in anger.

PEDRO: I'm telling the truth. You can't count on me.

NICOLAS: I know I can. I know my brother and you won't never be able to trick me into thinking I don't.

PEDRO: If you go, I won't ever forgive you.

NICOLAS: I'll stay, I won't never forgive me.

(Nicolas gives Pedro the bat.)

Keep those hands low on Saturday. (Pedro drops the bat and exits.)

(END OF SCENE)
Maria, you just going to walk right by the Lord Jesus? MARIA: Sorry, papa. NICOLAS: Don’t be sorry to me. (Maria kneels in front of the crucifix.) You got your rosary there? (She takes her rosary from around her neck and crosses herself.) MARIA: Hail, Mary, full of grace, hallowed be thy... NICOLAS: Nooo. You mixing them up again. MARIA: Sorry, papa. NICOLAS: Don’t be sorry to me. MARIA: Hail, Mary, full of grace... NICOLAS: The Lord is... MARIA: The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. That’s Jesus. NICOLAS: That’s right. MARIA: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen. NICOLAS: Amen. En español? MARIA: Dios te salve, María. Llena eres de gracia: El Señor es contigo. Bendita tú eres entre todas las mujeres. Y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre: Esta Jesús. NICOLAS: Corrija. MARIA: Santa María, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros pecadores, ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte. Amen. NICOLAS: Amen. (Maria gets up and walks to Nicolas who picks her up and puts her on his lap.) The Lord Jesus is very happy with you now, Maria. MARIA: How do you know, papa? NICOLAS: He can look right up there on the wall and see it in his eyes. MARIA: But they always look the same. NICOLAS: Not to me they don’t. You looking with your eyes, see. When you look at the Jesus on the wall, you got to look with your heart to see the real Jesus. MARIA: Does Jesus like prayers better when they’re in Spanish? NICOLAS: Maria, of course he does. But he listen to all the prayers in all languages. MARIA: But he likes Spanish best. NICOLAS: How could he not? Spanish is most beautiful language in the world. MARIA: Does he answer all the prayers? NICOLAS: Yes. MARIA: He’s never talked to me. NICOLAS: Really? Eez weird. He talk to me every day. MARIA: Really? NICOLAS: Si. Si. You just got to know how to hear him. MARIA: How do you do that? NICOLAS: Well, when you not sure about something, and you don’t know what to do, you pray about it, right? MARIA: Yes. NICOLAS: Then, after you pray, you think, “that smart Jesus, he got such a big brain, what he going to tell me to do?” And you think about how he the most loving, caring, forgiving man in the whole world, and you think of what he would tell you. And that’s him telling you! See that! You think ezz you, but ezz not. MARIA: Are you going away? NICOLAS: Who tell you that? MARIA: Uncle Pedro. NICOLAS: That was a secret. MARIA: Jesus just told me he doesn’t like secrets. NICOLAS: Oh, he did, huh? MARIA: Yes. NICOLAS: You probably right. MARIA: Where are you going? NICOLAS: Cuba. MARIA: Can I come? NICOLAS: Of course! You think I going to go without you? Like you going to wake up one morning saying, “Where’s Mommy and Daddy and Uncle Pedro? They must have gone somewhere and left me. I guess I’ll play with matches and talk to strangers and stay home from school.” You think that ever going to happen? (Maria laughs.) MARIA: No. I’m not supposed to do any of that. NICOLAS: Of course you coming to Cuba. That’s your home. MARIA: I can’t remember it. NICOLAS: That’s because we came on vacation here when you were really small. MARIA: Why? NICOLAS: You remember that bastard bola de churre I told you about. MARIA: The greasy bastard? NICOLAS: Maria! Don’t say that. But yeah, that’s him. He said he was going to beat me up if I didn’t leave. (Maria gasps.) I know. Eez crazy. He called me a worm too! Can you believe that? MARIA: What did you say? NICOLAS: I told him I glad I a worm. You know why? MARIA: Why? NICOLAS: The first thing you think of a worm is that eez all ugly and slimy and gross, right? MARIA: Right. NICOLAS: I thought that at first too, but you know what I remember? MARIA: What? NICOLAS: Worms also eat dirt and poop out soil. Without worms we wouldn’t have nothing to eat because dirt is useless until it pass through the guts of a worm. When I remember that, I no care if he call me that anymore. MARIA: But you left? NICOLAS: I did. MARIA: Because you were scared? NICOLAS: I not scared, but when you a man, or a woman like you going to be someday, you got to know not just who to fight but when to fight them. Then, that bully might beat you up every day after that. MARIA: But you’re ready now? NICOLAS: That’s right. MARIA: I don’t think anybody can beat you up. NICOLAS: Me either. MARIA: When are we going? NICOLAS: Well, first I have to go down there and beat up bola de churre. Then, you and Mama and Pedro will come and join me. MARIA: I want to go with you. NICOLAS: Don’t worry. You’ll be with me. Look at this. (Nicolas pulls out his wallet and takes a picture out.) MARIA: Can I write my name on the back of it? NICOLAS: Cause you’re the boss? MARIA: That’s right. NICOLAS: Me either. PEDRO: Where you going? NICOLAS: I told you I going to save six million Cubans. You’re not going to be surprising anybody. They know you’re coming. That gringo said that the Cubans would rise up and join in the fighting, but they won’t. NICOLAS: You can’t believe every piece of propaganda you read. PEDRO: It’s not propaganda. It’s in the Miami Herald. NICOLAS: I believe it happened, but bola de churre is behind it, believe me. PEDRO: That doesn’t change the fact that they see it coming. NICOLAS: They don’t know nothing. They don’t know who, when or how they’re going to be attacked. These are only suspicions. Bola de churre would be an idiot if he didn’t have suspicions. What you thinking telling Maria that I’m leaving, Pedro? PEDRO: She deserves the truth. NICOLAS: She only five years old. PEDRO: So? NICOLAS: So? So we protect her from these things. A child shouldn’t have to live in that kind of fear. PEDRO: I don’t want you to go. NICOLAS: I know, Pedro. PEDRO: I’m serious! I forbid you to go. (Nicolas laughs.) NICOLAS: You funny, Pedro. PEDRO: I’m serious. You want to be flooded with the blood of six million Cubans? NICOLAS: Of course not. I want to save six million Cubans from tyranny. PEDRO: You can’t. NICOLAS: I can.
PEDRO: The paper says —

NICOLAS: I told you, Pedro, I don’t give a damn what the paper says. I, 10.000 don’t speak for six million. Don’t you know that or are you a damn fool, Pedro? When you a man, you going to understand how things work. Fidel probably scraped up every Cuban he could for that rally. If there were a million people at the rally, I wouldn’t change my mind. You got to use your brain and understand that everything coming out of Cuba right now is a lie. Try to understand the politics. Fidel is killing people who are anti-communist or anti-him. What the hell you think people are going to be saying aloud? They no want to die. But in the end, they not going to listen to this, they going to listen to what’s really in their hearts.

PEDRO: Then you won’t listen to reason?

NICOLAS: You’re the one who won’t listen to reason.

PEDRO: I’m leaving.

NICOLAS: Oh no you not. (Nicolas gets up and blocks the door.) Unless you want to come through me.

PEDRO: Get out of my way.

NICOLAS: Where you gonna go? You ain’t got no money.

PEDRO: Maybe I’ll go to South America too, and I’ll invade Cuba.

NICOLAS: The hell you will. You just a kid, Pedro! You got your whole life to live.

PEDRO: I bet there will be more soldiers my age than your age.

NICOLAS: They don’t have me for a brother.

PEDRO: You were my age when you joined Batista’s army.

NICOLAS: Exactly! I read “Estoy con el Pueblo,” and I was dumb enough to believe it.

PEDRO: Get out of my way! (Pedro tries to go past Nicolas. Nicolas grabs him hard, pulls his arm behind his back, and holds him violently.)

NICOLAS: I don’t want to hurt you, Pedro. But you got to pull yourself together, man. I told you, it don’t matter how old you are. You not a man. You don’t have the brain of a man. You still just a boy. Eez probably my fault. If you go with me, you going to be the first man killed. I don’t no to make you understand, but you soft and weak, you not know nothing about the world. I wouldn’t let you go fight no more than I would let Maria go fight. I know is hard for you, but damn it, Pedro, if you would stop fighting it and have a little responsibility, you might just find that everything going to turn out okay.

PEDRO: I’m scared!

(Nicolas turns Pedro around and hugs him.)

NICOLAS: I know, mi hermano. I scared too.

PEDRO: I don’t understand why you’re going.

NICOLAS: Have I ever let you down? In your whole life, have I ever let you down?

PEDRO: No.

NICOLAS: That’s right. I took you out of Cuba when it was too dangerous, and I bring you here. I picked fruit all day long everyday so you could eat. Then, I get a better job so that you can have baseball glove and so you not have to work. I teach you to work on car so you’ll never have to pick fruit. I done everything for you, and I doing this for you too.

PEDRO: But I don’t want this.

NICOLAS: I know. Eez because you don’t know. You don’t know that you can become more in a free Cuba than you can become here. Eez nice here, but you can’t live your whole life among people who aren’t your countrymen. You can’t live your whole life in a place where you look different and sound different than everyone else. I know eez stúpido, but when you different, you got to work twice or three times as hard as everyone else for the same things. It won’t be like that in a free Cuba. You be where you belong.

PEDRO: I feel like I belong.

NICOLAS: Because eez all you really know. But trust in me. Trust in the man who ain’t never let you down. I don’t say everything I do for mi familia, but none of you can seem to reach down and scrape the bottom of a barrel for a few scraps of faith for Nicolas.

PEDRO: I do have faith in you.

NICOLAS: Then believe in me.

PEDRO: I believe in you. Don’t die, Nicolas.

NICOLAS: I swear to you, Pedro, I not going to die.

PEDRO: How do you know?

NICOLAS: Nicolas is faster than speeding bullet! (END OF SCENE)

SCENE 9

(Concetta is listening to music on the record player. Pedro has his ear against the radio, and he is working on softening his baseball glove.)

PEDRO: Hector Lopez just hit another sac fly. Can you believe that? That guy is a real team player. He’s not so fancy as those other two outfielders, but he gets the job done. Home runs are great and everything, but the player who sacrifices his own at bat for the good of the team, he’s the real hero. Concetta, are you even listening?

CONCETTA: Sorry, Pedro. What’s the score?

PEDRO: One nothing, Yankees.

CONCETTA: That’s nice.

PEDRO: Last time you asked, the Yankees were winning four to three.

CONCETTA: I remember.

PEDRO: And you don’t think it’s weird that it’s one to nothing now?

CONCETTA: What?

PEDRO: You can’t lose points in baseball, Concetta.

CONCETTA: I know that.

PEDRO: You’re not paying attention.

CONCETTA: I’m sorry, Pedro.

PEDRO: Why do I bother with the updates?

CONCETTA: I said I’m sorry. What’s the score?

PEDRO: Yankees six, Senators four.

CONCETTA: That’s good.

(Nicolas enters. He is wearing his uniform from Batista’s Army. He’s carrying a large bag.)

CONCETTA: (To Nicolas.) Julio down the street is always flirting with me.

NICOLAS: I find my old uniform. This guy is looking so handsome!

PEDRO: It looks okay.


PEDRO: I said it looks okay.

NICOLAS: Okay? Okay? Please, Pedro. I could be uniform model. Big chest, small waist, strong legs. This is what a man look like, Pedro. If you look like this, you could hit more home runs than Mickey Mantle.

PEDRO: So, this is it? You’re really going?

NICOLAS: I be back soon. Remember, Pedro, you got to take good care of mi familia. I putting my faith in you.

PEDRO: I know. You told me fifty times.

NICOLAS: Well, you only listen to one out of every one hundred things I say, so I need to tell you fifty more times. Remember, Mr. Jones expecting you at the garage at 7:00 Monday morning.

PEDRO: 7:00? You don’t start until eight.

NICOLAS: I know that, Pedro, but I don’t got to be at baseball practice at five. Also, you ain’t gonna get no special treatment. I know it seem like being the brother of such a magnificent man should have benefits, but it don’t.

PEDRO: I’ll be there.

NICOLAS: Concetta? (She does not respond.)

PEDRO: Leave us for a moment, mi hermano.

PEDRO: Be careful.

NICOLAS: I know, you tell me fifty times. (Pedro exits.)

Concetta?

(She ignores him again.)

Oh, I am all alone. I guess I will just sit in my chair and read my newspaper. (Nicolas picks up a newspaper and sits on Concetta and pretends to read the paper.) Wow. Sunbeam offering a 5 year guarantee on their mowers. (She keeps ignoring him.) Why my chair so lumpy today? (He moves around trying to get comfortable.)

CONCETTA: Get off me, Nicolas. (Nicolas jumps up and pretends to be surprised.)

NICOLAS: Concetta, I’m sorry, I had no idea you was there. Because you wasn’t talking or nothing.

CONCETTA: You hurt my legs. You’re too fat to play games like that.

NICOLAS: Fat! Santa María, Concetta! Look at this. (He shows her his figure in the uniform and does a Superhero pose.) I am Captain Cuba! (Concetta laughs.)

CONCETTA: You are Captain Stúpido.

NICOLAS: I not mind being Captain Stúpido as long as it make you smile. Come here. (He takes her in his arms.) I not want to leave with you being mad at me.

CONCETTA: I’m not mad.

NICOLAS: I want to know you proud of me.

CONCETTA: I’m always proud of you, you big gorilla.

NICOLAS: Ah, that’s my little lоро.

CONCETTA: Come back for us soon.

NICOLAS: I won’t be gone a minute longer than I have to be. Then, I come back here, grab you, and Maria, and Pedro, stuff you in my pockets and run back to Cuba.

CONCETTA: You have two months. After two months I find a new man.

NICOLAS: I feel sorry for him when I get back.

CONCETTA: That Julio down the street is always flirting with me.

NICOLAS: Concetta!

CONCETTA: It’s true.

NICOLAS: I take Pedro’s baseball bat and blast that Julio into space. Those Mercury 7 astronauts going to point out the window of that rocket and say, “Look at little Mexican guy. How he get up here?”

CONCETTA: Julio’s not Mexican.

NICOLAS: Are you sure?

CONCETTA: He’s just as Cuban as you are.

NICOLAS: Nobody’s as Cuban as I am.

CONCETTA: That may be, but Julio’s not Mexican.

NICOLAS: He looks Mexican.

CONCETTA: No he doesn’t.

NICOLAS: But he sounds Mexican with that weird accent of his.

CONCETTA: Shame on you.

NICOLAS: Okay, if you say he Cuban I believe you, but he going to be the first Cuban in space if he touches my beautiful wife while I’m away.

CONCETTA: Okay, I’ll give you three months.

NICOLAS: Now, that’s more like it. I be back before you can say dónde está ese Nicolas de gusano?

CONCETTA: Dónde está ese Nicolas de gusano? (He kisses her.)

NICOLAS: Adios, mi amor. (Nicolas grabs his bag and exits.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

To read Act Two, go to the SETC website at www.setc.org and click on Scholarships & Awards, New Play Contest.
Outside the Box

(Continued from page 7)

Step 9: Remove the top bolt of the brace and collapse the brace flat. Drill one final hole in the middle of the brace to create a flat storage bolt location. Bolt and store.

Step 10: If you wish, you can also notch out a small area for the hinge pin and bolt heads so the brace lies a little flatter. This will also allow you to add a bolt and use the collapsed jack brace as a hog’s trough (T-brace) if you desire.

These jack braces are durable and should last for a number of years if cared for properly. We have used our collapsible jack braces in numerous shows and installations during the four years since I built them. ■

Kyle Ankiel is the assistant technical director for the Gainesville (GA) Theatre Alliance. If you have questions concerning this technique, you may contact him at KyleAnkiel@gmail.com.

Hope’s Wings

(Continued from page 15)

Impact on Students

The From Her Eyes project gave students a deeper understanding of the power of theatre. As student Edwin Schiff said, “I learned that theatre, more than I ever thought, is a teaching tool. It is not a superficial art but serves a purpose devoted to teaching, inspiring, remembering and creating community.”

Student Marcus Leslie said virtually every student in the class was emotionally affected by the process of creating a play on the topic of domestic violence.

“We all changed the way we thought about domestic violence,” he says. “I personally made a dedication to never abuse my partner or any woman for that matter. I also vowed to try to help anyone I could overcome domestic violence. I know the signs now. I actually realized that one of my friends was being abused. It was right under my nose and I never recognized it until I took part in this production.” ■

Adanma Onyedike Barton is an assistant professor of theatre at Berea College in Berea, KY, and chair of the SETC Diversity Committee.

Adjudicating Theatre Performance: Responding to Competitions and Festivals

by Dean C. Slusser

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www.dramaticpublishing.com

ISBN: 978-1-58342-692-0

Pages: 131; Price: $9.95 (paperback)

by Michael P. Howley

In a slim volume of 131 pages, Dean C. Slusser provides what is described by Robert C. Hansen, an associate dean at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, as “a primer for anyone who is asked to adjudicate or judge a theatre competition or festival.”

Adjudicators are just one of the audiences that might benefit from reading Slusser’s Adjudicating Theatre Performance: Responding to Competitions and Festivals, a book that calls for systematic, objective and constructive evaluations from all judges. The book also may be of interest to actors, directors, designers and technicians who subject their productions to critical scrutiny at secondary schools, universities or community theatres.

Slusser has spent over a quarter-century in theatre as an actor, director, educator and adjudicator in Georgia. He notes that the prospect of being evaluated by strangers can be daunting for performers. He also notes that some adjudicators demonstrate cavalier attitudes, insensitivity toward their subjects, or downright ignorance of the destructive power of their words. His intention with this book is to promote high-quality theatre adjudication that is sympathetic as well as constructive.

The book’s 10 short chapters cover topics such as: healthy competition; the experienced adjudicator’s role; nuts-and-bolts information on content and form of adjudications; a mandate for formal training for professional adjudicators; and a call for creative critical thinking.

Because he believes everyone should know the rules going into an adjudication, Slusser describes the requirements of the models he uses: the Georgia High School Association, the Texas Educational Theatre Association, the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) and the American Association of Community Theatres. He analyzes their standards, pointing out benefits and pitfalls.

Using a British model from his mentor James Dodding, Slusser suggests that adjudicators should do a thorough and sympathetic assessment of “stage presentation, production, acting and endeavor.”

Slusser makes the contention in Chapter Eight that a mandate for formal training and certification for adjudicators in the United States would have a “positive and powerful” impact on the quality of adjudication. These requirements might reduce the number of “complaints about the judges” that Slusser claims early on is the one common denominator of adjudications. However, this idea is not without its challenges. It would be necessary to identify qualifying criteria, how to assess adjudicators, training details and who would regulate the process.

All written and oral adjudication according to Slusser “should deliver commentary that is objective, constructive, experienced, sympathetic, and specific,” [emphasis by Slusser] and his little book, though occasionally repetitive, does much to promote the practical application of these concepts. ■

Michael P. Howley, who recently retired from Alabama State University in Montgomery, has directed over 200 plays and is a frequent respondent for KCACTF in Region IV. He is the Alabama state representative for SETC.

Words, words, words… [Hamlet II,ii] reviews books on theatre that have a connection to the Southeast or may be of special interest to SETC members. Scott Phillips, an associate professor at Auburn University, edits this regular column. If you have a book for review, please send to: SETC, Book Editor, 1175 Revolution Mill Drive, Suite 14, Greensboro, NC 27405.
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