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Tony Walton and Richard Pilbrow, SETC’s 2012 Distinguished Career Award winners, collaborated on this 2008 production of *A Tale of Two Cities* on Broadway. Scene design is by Walton and lighting design is by Pilbrow. See story and more pictures, Page 6. (Photo by Michael Gottlieb; cover design by Deanna Thompson)
I recently received a postcard from a well-known dialect coach whose recordings can be found in theatres and university drama departments across the country. The card was an advertisement that described recordings titled “Speaking with an Accent” and “Speaking with No Accent.” I found this confusing. I’m also perplexed about the claims of those who teach “accent reduction.” While I understand what these dialecticians think they mean, I see things differently. I believe that the only way to speak with no accent is to keep your mouth shut.

For 12 years, I lived in central Appalachia, home of hillbilly references and T-shirts warning tourists, “Paddle faster, I hear banjos.” During my childhood in upstate New York, I unwittingly accepted stereotypes about Southerners, and of Appalachians in particular. But while raising a child in rural southwest Virginia, I was stopped short by a section of Disney’s The Aristocats. The movie is set in Europe, and most characters are French and British. So why did the two dumb dogs, scripted for comic relief, have accents placing them in the American South?

I was speaking recently with two acquaintances, one a tenured theatre professor, the other an MFA theatre student, and described my realization about the prejudice against Southern accents. I detailed the familiar situation wherein speech teachers elevate a General American accent as “neutral” or “correct,” therefore implying that other accents are abnormal, with some teachers actually describing them as “wrong.” I proposed that college theatre teachers not only present General American speech as just another accent students need to learn, but also emphasize that it has no intrinsic worth making it better than any other dialect. My audience listened politely and nodded in seeming assent. Then the professor said, “but you’ve still got to be able to get back to neutral.” “Yeah, that’s important,” added the student.

Acadamy students of the South: there is nothing wrong with the way you talk. You should master a General American accent, just as students in Connecticut and Oregon should learn to master your accent. Speech teachers: Just as white skin or maleness is not “neutral” or “correct,” neither is a General American accent. You are unwittingly teaching prejudice when you support this philosophy, and as theatre artists and teachers, we have an obligation to root out prejudice and challenge assumptions.

Think about it, y’all.
Each year the SETC Convention gets better and better, and sometimes we just don’t get to see or hear everything that we would like to experience. In the following pages, we hope to remind you of the magnificent thoughts and ideas that were delivered by our keynote speakers and other presenters.

Can you imagine a 50-year collaboration? Theatre legends Tony Walton and Richard Pilbrow have been at it for five decades and then some. These SETC 2012 Distinguished Career Award winners and Saturday keynote speakers share the evolution of their craft – and some of their ideas on the future of theatre – with Brackley Frayer. Also, don’t miss the story of Richard’s wife, Molly, who got her start through SETC nearly 50 years ago.

Tony Award-winning actor Roger Robinson mesmerized Friday’s keynote audience with his journey from Seattle musician to Broadway actor. Paul Crook shares sage advice from Robinson on the actor’s craft and on the important role that regional theatres can play in starting and sustaining careers.

Actor and teacher Richard Robichaux shared his own powerful story about the importance of teachers. Chris Hardin chronicles how Robichaux overcame a speech impediment to become a successful actor and our Thursday keynote speaker – and Robichaux’s advice on how to be truly “famous.”

Also at the SETC Convention in Chattanooga, we surprised SETC member Robert Ankrom with the Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award, our most prestigious award for one of SETC’s own. Rick Kerby outlines his many contributions.

As we continue recapping SETC 2012 in this issue, you’ll also find highlights of guest artist Dudley Knight’s presentation outlining his new ideas on voice and speech. You’ll get a little different take on speech from Karen Sabo, who argues in our 400 Words column that prejudice is at the heart of efforts to change Southern accents.

We close out the magazine with abstracts from this year’s winners of SETC’s Young Scholar’s Award.

Please travel down the track of creative thoughts and wonderful ideas that we celebrated in Chattanooga. Enjoy!
Last October, I was at the LDI conference in Orlando when I came across an amazing program: “Conversations: Tony Walton & Richard Pilbrow.” At the session, I was struck by the camaraderie that these two iconic designers have and by the collaborating that they still do today – more than 50 years after they first worked together on a show in Britain. I approached them afterward and asked them if they would be interested in attending the 2012 SETC Convention. And that’s where our tale begins.
“Where is it?” Richard Pilbrow asked that day in October, as I invited him and Tony Walton to the 2012 SETC Convention. I explained the convention would be held this year in Chattanooga, TN. “Oh,” he said, not fully understanding what I was talking about.

Walton had been to a previous SETC convention as one of the design adjudicators so he knew something about it. As it turns out, Molly Pilbrow, Richard’s wife, also did. She was born in Alabama and received her first theatre job through SETC. (See her story, Page 10.)

I explained to the two designers what SETC was and how they would fit in perfectly with everyone at the convention. I have been attending SETC conventions since the 1980s and was the cofounder of the Lighting Design Competition in the 1990s with Steve Woods and Ron Shaw. Soon, Walton and Pilbrow had agreed to serve as respondents for the SETC Design Competition. They also were tapped to receive SETC’s Distinguished Career Award for 2012.

These winners of Academy, Tony, Emmy and Drama Desk Awards spent three days interacting with students and faculty as respondents (along with costume designer Jennifer Caprio) in SETC’s annual Design Competition at the 2012 convention in Chattanooga. On Thursday, they participated in a design keynote session where they discussed their work. On Friday night, they congratulated winners of the Design Competition at an awards ceremony. And on Saturday, they not only accepted SETC’s Distinguished Career Award in the evening, but also delivered an afternoon keynote address that recounted stories from their colorful past and their journey through design and collaboration.

Neither set out to be a designer. Their tales are winding stories about the twists and turns of theatrical life, of finding a career path and then finding another path. Over the years, Walton has designed scenery and costumes for theatre, films and TV, produced shows and in recent years, become a director. Pilbrow, meanwhile, has been a lighting designer, producer, author, theatre designer and theatre consultant.

**Pilbrow: From pushing buttons to lights**

Richard Pilbrow and Tony Walton were brought up near South London during the time of the Blitz, which taught them two things, according to Pilbrow: first, be ready for and accept anything, and second, war is a bloody horror.

Pilbrow’s first aspiration was to work in stage management. He began his career as a stage manager in the West End in London after drama school.

“I was struck with theatre at 12 or 13 years old and worshipped Gordon Craig, who spoke of a stage manager being a ‘master of the art and science of the theatre,’ and I said, ‘Well, that’s what I’d like to do!’” Pilbrow recalled in his and Walton’s SETC keynote address. “I left drama school and went straight into the West End of London as a stage manager in a show that ran for two years. Then I found stage management was not what I thought it was going to be, but a sheer, crashing bore! I sat in the front corner every night; an actor said a certain line and I pressed the button. Cue 15, cue 16. … So I was in despair. I thought I’d come to the climax of my career in London, and I hated it.”
Looking for something else to do, Pilbrow found a book that described a profession in America that did not yet exist in Britain: lighting designer. (In those days, the director lit the show in Britain.)

“So I thought, well, I’ll be a lighting designer!” Pilbrow said. “But then I thought nobody would pay me, because nobody paid anybody to light a show.”

He decided maybe he could make a living renting lighting equipment to various shows in London.

“I thought, I’ll beg, borrow or steal some old lights and rent them to people – cheap – and live off the proceeds,” Pilbrow said.

He created a company, Theatre Projects, in 1957, and began renting lights and designing shows. (This company, which later expanded into theatre design, now has more than 1,200 projects to its credit in over 70 countries.)

While Pilbrow had no qualifications as a lighting designer in 1957, he enjoyed lighting stage models, which he would show to clients – and soon was hired as a lighting designer. His early success included As You Like It, which featured Vanessa Redgrave in her first starring role at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Walton: From marionettes to sets

Meanwhile, Walton was drawn to “all things theatrical” from an early age.

“My first efforts in this field were teenage presentations of operettas (Gilbert and Sullivan) and operas (Mozart) in ambitious marionette productions,” he said in an interview.

He was working on a marionette show where he designed the marionette, the scenery and even the lighting, when John Piper, a famous fine artist, came to the production and, impressed with what he saw, encouraged Walton to pursue a career in set design.

“He came backstage ... looking like a medieval saint, pencil-thin, and he looked around and said, ‘Which one is Walton?’” Walton recalled during his SETC keynote address. “And I put up my finger and he said, ‘You should do this.’ And I said, ‘What is this?’ And he said, ‘Stage design, and you should do it.’ So he was the one who was responsible for sending me to the Slade School of Fine Art in London.”

Walton later spent two years in the Royal Air Force. After his final pilot exam, the supervisor wrote: “This pilot is not equipped with a proper sense of danger and would be ill-advised to drive in civilian life.”

So theatre it would be for Walton, which, as he says, is a good choice for someone lacking a sense of danger. He designed several successful shows in the West End and soon was working on Broadway, too.

The collaboration begins

Walton and Pilbrow met and began their first of many collaborations with a production called Pieces of Eight in London in the late 1950s. The show was such a success they were asked to do a sequel, and Pilbrow had the idea of varying the look by designing projections for it. His inspiration came from a book about scene projections.

“This is a book written in the early ’30s about German scene projection, and it showed me you could do projection on a scale that had never been done in the ’legit’ theatre in London at the time,” Pilbrow

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TONY WALTON:
What brief words of advice do you have for students interested in scene design?

“Don’t do it ... unless there is simply nothing at all else that you are prepared to do! If you find that there isn’t, you may well have the time of your life, with the best possible family of professional colleagues, and enjoyably risky but life-enforcing adventures, for which you are unlikely to be appropriately rewarded, unless you can enjoy the reward of ‘work well-achieved’ with collaborators as intent on excellence – and telling a story clearly – as you are.”

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Tony Walton (right) poses with one of SETC’s 2012 KEAP Award winners, Kendrell McGravey.

TONY WALTON
An acclaimed set and costume designer, director and producer, Tony Walton has received 16 Tony Award nominations, 14 Drama Desk Award nominations, and five Academy Award nominations for his set and costume designs.

Won Tony Award for:
Pippin, 1972
The House of Blue Leaves, 1986
Guys and Dolls, 1992

Won Drama Desk Awards for:
Pippin, 1972
Shelter, 1973
The House of Blue Leaves, 1986
Social Security, 1986
Guys and Dolls, 1992

Won Academy Award for:
All That Jazz, 1980

Won Emmy Award for:
Death of a Salesman, 1985

New Book:
The Designs of Tony Walton
by Delbert Unruh & Tony Walton
http://shop.usitt.org/Books_c_1.html
said. “So we devised this show that had about 70 of these enormous projected backgrounds, about 65 feet wide and 25 feet high, in a stage only about 25 feet deep. Using some very powerful projectors, you had this constant series of changing images created from Tony’s artwork. These large German projectors had a very bright lamp, a very big slide, a very short throw, and the images were tremendously bright. And at the time, that was a very big breakthrough.”

In 1962, at Walton’s invitation, Pilbrow came to New York for the first time, staying with Walton and his first wife, actress Julie Andrews (then starring on Broadway in Camelot), at their flat, while working on a projection design with pioneering lighting designer Jean Rosenthal. Soon Walton had introduced him to Broadway producer and director Hal Prince, whom Pilbrow credits, along with Walton, as being one of his most important influences.

By 1963, Walton and Pilbrow had become producers at the invitation of Hal Prince. Their first show was A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, scenery, projection images and costumes by Tony Walton, in London’s West End.

Over the years since then, Pilbrow and Walton have collaborated on many productions, providing stimulating visuals for each show. The two of them work brilliantly together, making magic on the stage and keeping a sense of humor during the entire process. They know each other so well that when Walton calls Pilbrow to do a show, Pilbrow will respond knowing that whatever the show will be, Walton will make it interesting and challenging for him to light.

As an example, Pilbrow noted the challenges in their 2008 collaboration on Broadway’s A Tale of Two Cities, for which Walton did the scene design and Pilbrow did the lighting design, winning a Drama Desk Award nomination for his work.

“The brilliant set was made of these towers that moved all over the stage,” Pilbrow noted. “It was an endless process of trying to work out how the hell you lit both between the towers and acting inside the towers, which effectively was like acting in a series of moving birdcages.”

Other recent collaborations included the American Ballet Theatre’s 2010 The Sleeping Beauty, with Walton designing sets and Pilbrow designing lights, and the Broadway rendition of Candida, with Walton directing and serving as set and costume designer and Pilbrow serving as lighting designer.

Responding to an audience question following their keynote address, Walton noted that an important component to their continued success has been their camaraderie: “Luckily, we have a similar sense of humor. Richard is seriously silly, despite his great genius, and so the ability to have fun, make fun, is a crucial aspect of it, to have a sense of humor.”

Key also to their longevity in the industry is their continual interest in new ideas and new fields.

Pilbrow moved from lighting design into producing and then into theatre consulting and design. It was Sir Laurence Olivier, whom Pilbrow credits as the third most important influence on his work. (Continued on Page 12)
Molly Pilbrow Traces Her Successful Career to the Connections She Made through SETC

by Deanna Thompson

When British-born theatre legend Richard Pilbrow was invited to this year’s SETC Convention, he was not instantly familiar with the event. His wife, lighting designer Molly Friedel Pilbrow, was.

She got her first theatre job through an interview at the 1964 SETC Convention in Tampa, FL.

“I can gauge everything that happened in my career after SETC as being a result of going there and the people I met there,” she says. “Certainly my first few jobs in New York were a result of people I met there.”

From those first few jobs, Molly went on to break new ground as a female lighting designer, working both in New York and the United Kingdom.

“I may have been the first female lighting designer resident in the UK,” Molly said during an interview.

‘I understand people can get jobs there’

Back in 1964, Molly Friedel was a student preparing to graduate from Birmingham Southern College with a degree in English. Involved in theatre since her teen days as an actor at Town & Gown Theatre in Birmingham, she was interested in going into the field of lighting design. Her professor, Arnold Powell, who also taught classes on drama and directed four shows annually, suggested she go to the SETC Convention.

“He offhandedly said, ‘Why don’t you go down to have a look because I understand people can get jobs there,’” Molly remembers.

Molly headed for the convention in Tampa. She remembers talking to various company representatives, including Robroy Farquhar, founder of Flat Rock Playhouse, the State Theatre of North Carolina.

“I remember I didn’t have a portfolio,” she says. “We sat and talked. He was an absolutely charming Englishman.”

A first theatre job

After the convention, Farquhar wrote and offered her a summer job as a technical assistant.

“This was my first theatre job for pay,” she says. “I worked at every possible backstage job for a 10-week season of summer stock.”

At summer’s end, she was offered another job for the fall – going on tour to high schools with a small Equity company from Flat Rock.

“I was company manager, stage manager, electrician, lighting designer and driver,” she says. “The good thing about it was: It allowed me to get my Equity card.”

Molly returned the following summer as assistant technical director and lighting designer and again went on tour in the fall. By then, she had become friendly with other actors and stage managers, some of whom also worked in New York.

“They said, ‘Why don’t you come up and we’ll see if we can’t get you some work?’” she remembers.

Connecting in New York

After moving to New York, Molly worked a variety of jobs in producers’ offices and off-Broadway and then went on to earn a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in theatre design and lighting from New York University. While still a student, she began working for her professor, Jules Fisher, an acclaimed lighting designer, as an assistant on off-Broadway shows he was designing. After graduation, she joined the United Scenic Artists, Local 829, lit several off-Broadway shows, and served as lighting designer for the Berkshire Theatre Festival in Stockbridge, MA.

In 1970, Fisher provided an introduction that jumpstarted her career – and changed her life. The introduction was to Richard Pilbrow,

“Richard had mentioned he needed an assistant for a show when he came to New York,” Molly recalls. “Jules recommended me.”

Molly worked with Richard on The Rothschilds, a new musical for Broadway. Later she moved to London and worked as his assistant on other shows and joined the lighting design team at his company, Theatre Projects. In April 1974, they married. Over the years after that, she continued design work and also assisted American lighting designers who came to the UK with shows – including Jules Fisher on Jesus.
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**Walton and Pilbrow**

(Continued from Page 9) career, who started Pilbrow on a theatre design track, tapping him to become the theatre consultant for the National Theatre in Britain. Pilbrow’s company, Theatre Projects, went on to design major theatres in England, the U.S., and around the world.

Walton, meanwhile, moved from scenic design for Broadway and London into producing. He made his entry into films in 1964, serving as costume designer and visual consultant for *Mary Poppins*, which starred Andrews. He went on to design costumes and sets for 20 films, including *The Boy Friend*, *The Wiz*, *Murder on the Orient Express* and *All That Jazz*, for which he won an Oscar. He also won three Tony Awards for his Broadway designs.

In his most recent reinvention, Walton became a director, “with remarkable success,” Pilbrow said in their keynote address. “I actually think he’s a better director than designer. But he does make me cross, because he only started this, what, 15 years ago, and if he’d started 55 years ago, we might all be much richer and more successful than we are!”

**A shared view of audience involvement**

With Walton as director and Pilbrow as designer, they have developed new views on today’s technologically infused theatre and the role of the audience member. Walton has come to realize that as a director and designer, he has been guilty of “spoon feeding” an audience visual information to support the intentions of the playwright. In this age of social media, videos and texting, audience members are often impatient when they sit down and watch a play. They expect everything to be fed to them so they won’t have to use their imaginations, Walton said.

When he directed a play by Peter Shaffer called the *The Gift of the Gorgon* in the Hamptons last summer, he spoke to the audience before the play began: “I am not really inviting you to bring your imaginations into play. I am ordering you to! Please contribute as much to this event as the performers, their script and the music will do.”

Walton was pleased at the outcome, as audience members left the theatre quarreling about the imagery and meanings of the play. Speaking of this in the keynote address. Walton quoted Shaffer from the play’s dialogue about the importance of imagination:

> “These days our infant ears cannot receive speeches longer than a minute, or any music made by spoken words. Our infant eyes, like those of animals, cannot see what is not actually before them. The imaginative muscle, once our most powerful, lies dead within us. And with it, therefore, the drama. Everywhere, the dragon wing of the literal o’erspreads the earth. Nothing is eternal. Not even the imagination. And yet, once, in earlier theatre, there were undeniable pictures formed of blazing words. Audiences came away astounded, scared, exalted. Theatre was an illuminant, sacred and indispensable.”

He related that to the involvement of audiences in the current Broadway production of *Warhorse*, noting, “Instead of having actual horses, just using sticks and magical manipulation gets the audience to become part

(Continued on Page 31)
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Dudley Knight: A Better Alternative to Good American Speech?

by Vivian Majkowski

Featured guest artist Dudley Knight shared his groundbreaking ideas on voice and speech at the 2012 SETC Convention in Chattanooga, leading master classes for professionals and students, as well as delivering a keynote speech.

Knight stepped fully into the spotlight of the actor training world in 1997 with the publication of his controversial article, Standard Speech: The Ongoing Debate. Published later for a broad audience in the book The Vocal Vision: Views on Voice by 24 Leading Teachers, Coaches & Directors, Knight’s article critiqued the traditional model of speech in America and its lineage, culminating with Edith Skinner and her book, Speak with Distinction, which describes a standard called by a variety of names: Good American Speech, Mid-Atlantic Accent, Stage Dialect or Standard Speech. Knight offered a vision for speech training moving forward into the new millennium.

Controversy in the speech world? Was anyone really listening? Well, with quotes like this, Knight had people’s attention:

“Skinner labeled it ‘Good American Speech.’ Speech it is, most certainly, and for better or worse it has shaped generations of American actors. But its definition as ‘Good’ is mired in a self-serving and archaic notion of Euphony, and in a model of class, ethnic and racial hierarchy that is irrelevant to the acting of classical texts and repellent to the sensibilities of most theatre artists.”

Knight argued that “speech training for American actors whose careers will take them into the next millennium requires a radically new formulation if speech training is to exist at all.”

He suggested that actors needed to embrace a new standard, letting go of the Good American Speech championed by Skinner.

“Good American Speech: let go of its pattern sounds, let go of its formulation of phonetics, let go of its instructional approach, let go of the vestiges of its ideology,” he wrote. “Most poignantly perhaps, we will have to turn away from those last putative native speakers of ‘Mid-Atlantic,’ huddled together in their dinghy bobbing in the swells somewhere off the Azores, calling for help faintly, but very, very clearly.”

In his keynote address, Knight discussed the training model he has developed based on his years of work as an actor, voice specialist (training with both Kristin Linklater and Catherine Fitzmaurice), and speech teacher (initially using Skinner’s book in class in the 1960s).

Knight developed his pedagogy in classrooms at the University of California, Irvine – testing, refining and constantly evolving the work.

“I didn’t have a sudden break and – boom – I came out with this new approach; it was a constant reexamination,” Knight says in the book, Voice and Speech Training in the New Millennium: Conversations with Master Teachers, edited by Nancy Saklad.

“That’s something that I have to say is really important for voice and speech teachers to do – especially because we exist within something of an apprenticeship model – that is, to reexamine what we’re doing … in my case I came to the understanding that speech and articulation training is actually a necessity within a curriculum, and that it needs to be presented quite differently from the way it had been. … Over this period I kept revising what I did. … It wasn’t change based for its own sake. It was change that was based on a close consideration of what a professional actor really needs,” he continues in Voice and Speech Training in the New Millennium.

Knight suggests a very specific criterion for speech in the performing arts: “The only consistent standard is intelligibility.” That is all. And to give actors the ability to determine this on their own, Knight moved beyond the prescriptive model of training into a wholly experiential one. The actor is taught all the
sounds in human language through a careful study of anatomy and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The IPA is not introduced until the student can fully understand all the articulatory combinations in the oral tract kinesthetically. Then the actor moves from broad transcription into very narrow transcription, receiving an education in speech tied closely to linguistic studies. The actor then has all the tools to discover accents and dialects with extraordinary ease and acuity.

“The difference from Good American Speech is that the criterion is simply detail – not that these elements sound better or that they are more euphonious or that they sound more culturally or cultivated or any of those socially imposed things, but simply that they have more linguistic information,” Knight says in *Voice and Speech Training in the New Millennium*.

Knight notes that there is a continuum from formal to informal speech.

“...What we want is to be able to let our impulses constantly renegotiate the mix, in order to meet the communicative needs of the character and his or her interaction with the audience, and also the acoustic demands of the physical space,” he says in *Voice and Speech Training in the New Millennium*.

He goes on to note that his work is based on the recognition that there is a constantly changing set of events “that defines the way the character actually speaks. That’s the challenge, and having these flexible skills is what’s really useful to an actor. These same methods assist the actor in finding the variety that allows her or him to explore all sorts of accents through the development of skills in sound-shaping that take the speaker into any accent very quickly and easily.”

In his SETC master classes, Knight led participants on this journey in sound-shaping through the oral tract with his usual dry wit, giving the attendees a taste of the depth and breadth of the work actors experience. At the end of the master classes, students were speaking in Omnish, a language with no cultural barriers, with laughter and a new respect for speech and learning.

The classes also gave participants a preview of some of the techniques spelled out in Knight’s new book, *Speaking with Skill: A Skills Based Approach to Speech Training*, to be published by Methuen in September and available for pre-order from Amazon now.

Knight’s method is already used in a number of actor training programs in the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland and the UK.

Vivian Majkowski is a professor in the performing arts department at the Savannah College of Art and Design and chair of SETC’s Voice and Speech Committee.
SETC celebrated the 63rd anniversary of its founding at the 2012 SETC Convention in Chattanooga, TN. At Saturday’s business meeting (above), outgoing SETC President Alan Litsey (left), passed the gavel to incoming President Jack Benjamin. On these pages, we revisit scenes from the annual convention, which was attended by about 4,000 theatre artists, managers, teachers, students and volunteers. The convention provided members with an opportunity to audition, find a job, perform, hear keynote speakers, learn new techniques, network, view exhibits, hire employees, watch top-notch theatre and much more.

Photos by David Humber
63rd in Chattanooga
In a Friday keynote address at the SETC Convention in Chattanooga, Tony Award-winning actor Roger Robinson inspired the crowd with the story of his wonderfully unlikely journey from young Seattle musician to successful theatre, film and television actor.

In his 90-minute talk, Robinson drew his listeners along with him as he travelled from Seattle, where he gravitated to the arts early in life, singing in variety shows and playing clarinet and oboe with the Seattle Youth Symphony, to Los Angeles and on to the U.S. Navy as a musician. There, he had the chance to play at three key events in the life of President John F. Kennedy – the 1960 Democratic national convention, his inauguration and after JFK’s assassination – before a transfer to Brooklyn provided an opening to begin theatre training.

The one constant, throughout Robinson’s life, is his active pursuit of opportunities. As Robinson noted, “If you put yourself in the way of opportunity, opportunity will happen.” He encouraged convention attendees to seek out opportunities in their careers and be diligent in taking advantage of those presented.

**Recognize opportunities**

Opportunities presented themselves early in Roger Robinson’s life, although it took him awhile to learn his lesson about actively pursuing them. His first experience in Hollywood was on the set of the Warner Brothers film, *The Sins of Rachel Cade*. The film, set in the Belgian Congo and starring Angie Dickinson, Roger Moore and Peter Finch, included a young Roger Robinson as an extra. In a jarring reminder of the differences between then and now, Robinson recounted how he was thought to be “too light-skinned” to be an African villager, so he was sprayed with “Negro #3” makeup. While he was working on *Rachel Cade*, a man approached him and, in what was to become a recurring theme, said: “You want to be an actor, don’t you? You need to go to New York and study with Lloyd Richards.” The man behind that advice (which...
at the time went unheeded) was Roy Glenn Sr., who went on to star in *Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner*.

Instead of heading to New York, Robinson joined the U.S. Navy, where he served as a musician. While stationed in Washington, DC, Robinson had the opportunity to see Diana Sands as Beneatha Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun*, the role she originated on Broadway and in the film version of Hansberry’s play. Robinson met Sands after the show. She looked at him and said: “You want to be an actor. You need to study with the director of this play.” The director, of course, was Lloyd Richards. Sands gave Robinson her number, with the invitation to call her if he was ever in New York.

As if scripted, nine months later Roger Robinson was stationed in Brooklyn, where the Naval band was playing in ticker-tape parades for returning astronauts. He took Diana Sands up on her offer and called her, arranging an audition with Lloyd Richards. After telling the director and teacher that his goal was to be the best actor he could possibly be, Robinson finally seized the opportunity in front of him and began his study of acting. Discharged from the Navy in May of 1964, mere months before the Vietnam call-up, Robinson took his next, and perhaps most significant, step and began working with Richards to become a full-time actor.

**Hone the actor’s craft**

From his study with Lloyd Richards, Roger Robinson shared with the SETC crowd the foundation of his approach to acting: “The greatest asset an actor can have is vulnerability.” He went on to emphasize the importance of the actor’s relationship to the audience, saying that “acting can be healing. The exchange with the audience is beyond – it’s bigger than you.” That relationship between actor and audience, when the audience is able to connect with the vulnerability of an actor, is why Robinson prefers the theatre to other entertainment mediums.

“*Theatre,*” Robinson said, “*is the actor’s medium. There’s no cut. You just step on that stage and go.*” In a career that has included television, film and theatre roles, Robinson consistently returns to the theatre.

He shared with his audience the importance of research to the actor, and how great the scope of that research must be. It’s not enough to research a character, he said. You also have to know the political and societal aspects of the character’s culture and the attitudes of the people, he said. That preparation, he noted, is all part of the craft of the actor. Robinson contrasted theatre with film and television work by saying that “theatre is different because of the craft. Plays demand a craft.”

Robinson exhorted the actors in the crowd to hone their skills through study. His own education in theatre began early in life, as he read plays throughout high school: “[Plays] were fascinating to me. That was my college education.” Robinson noted that today, the proliferation of training programs at colleges and universities is a great benefit to actors. The training and the learning are, for Robinson, never ending.

**Explore regional theatre**

Robinson encouraged young actors to “take baby steps” after graduation. Start by auditioning close to home, he suggested, no matter the type of theatre. Ultimately, he said, work toward finding jobs in regional theatres. “The regional theatre system in this country is second to none,” Robinson commented,
while noting that it would be wonderful for the United States to have a national lottery for the arts similar to the one in England. Even without it, he said, “we have amazing actors working [in regional theatres] in obscurity.” These actors are vital, vibrant and working throughout the country – in Memphis, Houston, Seattle and beyond, he said. Noting that community theatres also produce wonderful work, Robinson encouraged actors to audition there as well, because you never know who you might meet – perhaps even the next August Wilson.

**August and the Awards**

Because he had grown up in community theatre, August Wilson could be distrustful of people who had been professionals for a long time. That distrust, and the difficulties it sometimes caused, did not disguise the fact that Wilson was, according to Roger Robinson, a genius. Robinson had the opportunity to work on three plays with the playwright before his death in 2005, an experience that led to an interesting comparison: “August was similar to Shakespeare,” Robinson said. “Because I had done Shakespeare, I could do August.” The intricacies of Shakespeare’s language prepared him for that of Wilson, Robinson said, and equipped him to perform in those plays.

After making his Broadway debut opposite Al Pacino in 1969 in *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?*, Robinson appeared in several shows on Broadway, including Jose Quintero’s acclaimed revival of *The Iceman Cometh* in 1985. In 1996, Robinson worked on his first Broadway production of a Wilson play, garnering a Tony nomination for Best Featured Actor in a Play for his portrayal of Hedley in *Seven Guitars*. Though he did not win the award that time (that would go to his castmate Ruben Santiago-Hudson for the role of Canewell), the experience of being nominated did prepare him for the second time around.

The 2009 revival of *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* was a somewhat controversial production. Bartlett Sher, who at the time was the artistic director of the Intiman Theatre Company, was the first white director to be selected to direct one of Wilson’s plays on Broadway. Robinson remembered Andre Bishop, the artistic director of the Lincoln Center, asking him if he would meet with Sher, whom he had not previously met. “I’d heard there was a white director, but I didn’t know who,” Robinson said. “Bart was totally charming. … I wasn’t supposed to read, but we wound up working on the script for an hour and a half. He had a tremendous respect for African American culture and the work.”

The respect Sher demonstrated in his meeting with Robinson carried over to the production: “Bart was respectful. He would listen [to the ideas of the cast].” Ultimately, that led to a successful production that garnered six Tony Award nominations, including Best Revival of a Play and Best Direction. The production won two Tony Awards: one for Brian MacDevitt’s lighting design, and one for Robinson, for Best Featured Actor in a Play. Robinson said that being nominated a second time was a more relaxing affair – one he could enjoy more and share with family.

The 2009 production of *Joe Turner* did not revolve solely around race, Robinson said. “August would have loved that production,” he said. “Some plays transcend race. Some are race-specific, but [that production] transcends race.” Robinson’s portrayal of Bynum Walker in *Joe Turner* earned him another recognition, one which did, in fact, transcend race in its own way. In 2009, Robinson became the first African American to win the Richard Seff Award, presented each year by Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) to a male and a female actor over the age of 50, who have been members of AEA for at least 25 years, for the best performance in a featured or supporting role in a Broadway or off-Broadway production. The two awards, coming on the heels of such a successful production, highlighted Robinson’s personal preference for theatre over other mediums and his love of adventure in the arts: “Keep a sense of adventure in life. [Be] open to whatever happens.”

**Know those who came before**

Robinson notes that his own personal and professional adventure has been guided by a number of people. Throughout his talk on Friday and in a later interview, Robinson referenced people who have been integral to his career and to the profession itself – names like Diana Sands, Roy Glenn Sr., Harold Scott, James Baldwin, August Wilson and more. A continuing exhortation from Robinson to his audience was to “make it your business to know those who came before [you]!” One name, one of “those who came before,” cropped up again and again in Robinson’s story. It is the name of the man he referred to as “my artistic father.”

First mentioned to Roger Robinson by Roy Glenn Sr., and later mentioned again by Diana Sands, Lloyd Richards had a major influence on Robinson’s career.
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“Lloyd was a phenomenal luminary in our world. He took an interest in me, believed in my talent and hired me. He was more than a mentor, he also influenced my life personally.” A director and teacher, the former dean of the Yale School of Drama and head of the National Playwright’s Conference, Richards was influential in the lives of innumerable artists. As the director of the previously mentioned production of A Raisin in the Sun, Richards became a seminal force in American theatre, who would go on to introduce Wilson, Wendy Wasserstein, Christopher Durang and David Henry Hwang, among others, to the American public.

From his first audition with Richards in 1964, when he told the director he wanted to be the best actor he could possibly be, Robinson was continually linked with Richards in the world of theatre. “People thought I was his protégé, but what he was, was a great moral compass,” Robinson said. Richards taught the young Robinson that a good director is also a good teacher, a quality that he continues to find in the best directors with whom he works.

Robinson recently finished work on the West Coast premiere of Horton Foote’s Dividing the Estate, directed by Michael Wilson (director of the current revival of The Best Man on Broadway). He, like Richards, is a director who “gives you an understanding about your craft.” Robinson said. “You do things willingly with him.”

The journey continues

As successful as Robinson’s theatrical journey has been, he notes that it might have been even better had he known about SETC sooner. “I wish I’d heard about it 40 years ago!” he said. “It’s wonderful what this organization is doing.” Robinson praised SETC for the opportunities and information it provides people at all stages of their journeys in theatre. In his own journey, Robinson commented how fortunate he has been, proving his own axiom by putting himself in front of opportunity … so that opportunity can happen.

Paul B. Crook is an associate professor of acting and directing at Louisiana Tech University and the chair of SETC’s KEAP Award Committee.
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The river is famous to the fish.
The loud voice is famous to silence,
which knew it would inherit the earth
before anybody said so.
The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds
watching him from the birdhouse.
The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.
The idea you carry close to your bosom
is famous to your bosom.
The boot is famous to the earth,
more famous than the dress shoe,
which is famous only to floors.
The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it
and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.
I want to be famous to shuffling men
who smile while crossing streets,
sticky children in grocery lines,
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,
but because it never forgot what it could do.

- “Famous,” by Naomi Shihab Nye

This poem appears in Words Under the Words, Far Corner Books, Oregon, 1995.
“I hope you’re famous like that,” Richard Robichaux told the crowd gathered to hear his Thursday keynote address at the 2012 SETC Convention. “I hope you never forget what you can do, and don’t get trapped into what you should do, or oughta do. Or what so-and-so says you oughta, woulda, coulda, shoulda done. But that you’re famous for what you can do. That’s famous.”

Robichaux, an award-winning actor and teacher and the founder of The Robichaux Studio, has been teaching a master class called “Acting for the Camera” at the SETC Convention annually since 2009, and, as Executive Director Betsey Baun put it, “It’s the first class to sell out. The word is out. This man is the real McCoy – not only can he do it, he can teach it.” For those in attendance at his keynote address in Chattanooga, this fact became only too palpable.

Richard Robichaux has taught in such distinguished institutions as the New York Conservatory and The Juilliard School. He has also performed at the Yale Repertory Theatre, the Shakespeare Company in Washington, DC, and at countless theatres in New York, Los Angeles and other cities across the United States. Recently, he starred alongside Jack Black, Shirley MacLaine and Matthew McConaughey in the Richard Linklater feature film, Bernie (which opened in theatres April 27). An impressive resume for any actor, but especially one who hails from a tiny town called Channelview, TX.

“It is exactly as it is described – it has a view of the Houston ship channel,” Robichaux told his SETC audience. “That was its beautiful claim to fame. My mom was 16, and she was kicked out of high school for being pregnant. That’s what they used to do. She was denied an education at a time when she really needed one. My mother raised me, and she worked. We lived in some rough places. She says until I was old enough to actually sleep in her bed, I slept in the top of her chest of drawers, in a drawer with some towels in it.”

Robichaux says his upbringing wasn’t necessarily conducive to theatre patronage: “We didn’t go to the theatre a lot. It’s not like [my mother] had season tickets to the Alley [Theatre in Houston]. We had no television. There was no radio and no telephone – we used the neighbor’s telephone. My mother says, ‘I think that’s why you’re so good at talkin’, honey, you didn’t have nothin’ to do!’ ”

The importance of teachers: from speech impediment to keynote speaker

Throughout his address, Robichaux stressed the vital role that teachers can play in a student’s life. According to Robichaux, his success is due in large part to teachers he had – starting with Mr. Broussard, the third grade teacher who first recognized a special quality in young Richard.

“Two weeks ago I got a card from Mr. Broussard,” Robichaux said in his keynote address. “He had seen...”
me on television in something, saw my name, found me, and sent me a card that said, ‘I remember when you used to do impersonations of Sissy Spacek in Coal Miner’s Daughter.’ That’s third grade. Now, today I would have been in a very special class, but then Mr. Broussard just said, ‘Oh, he’s going to be an actor.’ ”

Then there was Mrs. Fleck, Richard’s fourth grade teacher. Mrs. Fleck was the first teacher to openly recognize that Richard had a speech impediment and confront it head-on.

“I couldn’t say ‘S’, and I had trouble with R’s and L’s and N’s if they were in the same sentence,” Robichaux says. “If you watch Wheel of Fortune, those are kind of the biggies, so that limited my ability to communicate.”

Since there were no elementary school speech teachers in Channelview at that time, Mrs. Fleck stepped in to help Richard. During recess, while the other students were playing, Mrs. Fleck did speech drills with him. “Now I blame her for my size,” Robichaux says. “That is Mrs. Fleck’s fault because I should’ve been out there playing. Mrs. Fleck had me doing speech drills, and last September, Betsey [Baun] called me and asked me to be the speaker at SETC – so thank you, Mrs. Fleck!”

Robichaux was introduced to theatre in high school, when his first theatre teacher, Ernie Landrum, cast him in his first play. “We did A Midsummer Night’s Dream – I played Puck, obviously,” he says. “And – that would be the first of many Pucks for me.”

When Robichaux won the Best Actor award at a statewide theatre competition, Mr. Landrum was approached by one of the judges, a professor at Southern Methodist University, who told him that his star pupil should be at a school for performing arts.

“Here was Ernie Landrum, this theatre teacher in this rural part of Texas who had been longing to have a [student like Richard] and he finally got it,” Robichaux says. “Then it was Ernie who got me an audition for the High School of Performing and Visual Arts in Houston, helped me with my pieces, and actually drove me to my audition. He let me go.

So thank you, Ernie.”

In college, Robichaux studied with Allen Oster, a professor who encouraged him, but was not afraid to correct him when necessary.

“I had a performance that I thought was very good,” Robichaux says. “The audience loved it, they were laughing, and I was having a good time. The professors would come to see it over the weekend, and I remember walking through the hall, and there comes Allen. I prepared myself for the compliments. He walks by me, and I smiled, and he said, ‘I saw you this weekend. Nice routine.’ But he was right. I had done a routine. I don’t think I was connected to anybody onstage. He was the first teacher that really said there was more to this; there is an art and a craft, and people who have dedicated their lives to the theatre.”

In graduate school at Rutgers University, Robichaux became the student of two very prominent acting teachers: Bill Esper and Maggie Flanigan. Speaking of Esper, Robichaux recalls, “He was authentic. He had a point of view, and he was confident, but not cocky. It was the truth – he said the truth. He didn’t apologize for it. I tell my students all the time, ‘If I’m going to demand authenticity from you, you should demand authenticity from me. Which means you should be prepared to hear the truth from me. You should know that I will give you an honest answer when I know it, and that I will give you diligent research when I do not.’”

Be an iPod: market your strengths

Robichaux learned another important lesson from Esper: “Bill Esper taught me that I no longer had to apologize for being an actor or a theatre major.”

That’s a lesson that many artists need to absorb, Robichaux says: Do not apologize for who you are and what you do.

“I was going to speak at some event, and there was a guy on the plane next to me, having way too much to drink,” Robichaux says. “I was reading a book on the film industry in Texas, and he was looking and finally said, ‘You in the film business?’ I said, ‘Yeah.’ He goes, ‘Well, what do you do?’ I said, ‘I’m an actor.’ And he goes, ‘Well, I don’t recognize you.’ And I turned to him and said, ‘I don’t recognize you either.’ The woman behind me chuckled.”

“And I realized,” Robichaux said, “we’re the only ones that take the brunt of that. Nobody does that to a dentist. Nobody says, ‘So do you do Obama’s teeth? No? Oh, so you’re like a local dentist. Just a regional dentist, not like a big fancy dentist.’”
“There’s something about being an actor and even saying that you’re an actor that takes a big risk,” Robichaux says. “I bet everyone has felt that way, if you’re in the theatre at all, because people will ask, ‘What do you do?’ ‘Well, I…I uh…I’m, um…I’m an actor.’ Well, shame on you. Shame on you for apologizing for what you love to do.”

It is that very apology that causes actors to fail in their auditions, Robichaux says. To illustrate his point, he asks his students to think about the iPod, the revolutionary gadget that has become ubiquitous since its invention. He asks the students to write down and share with the group some strengths of the iPod. The resulting answers are predictable and numerous: It’s small; it’s stylish; it’s efficient; it’s easy to use. Then Robichaux asks for some of the iPod’s weaknesses. The items on this list are just as numerous: It’s fragile; it’s expensive; it needs constant updating; it has low battery life. Then he asks his students to imagine this scenario:

“I want you to think about, God rest his soul, Steve Jobs when they were creating iPod. They finally finished it, then he calls the media from around the world to come to California for him to announce something. They all came. A big screen comes down with an image. Everybody thinks, ‘What is it, it’s so sleek, it’s so beautiful, what is it, what is it?’ Steve Jobs stands there holding it in his hands and says, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, it’s expensive, fragile, and has a low battery life: iPod!’”

“That,” Robichaux says, “is how you audition. You walk in with all of your weaknesses and expect me to buy an iPod. You come in and say, ‘I don’t deserve this. I didn’t rehearse it as well as I should have. I’m not ready. I’m nervous and I feel inferior. … What do you think? Want a little piece of that? Here’s your Hamlet!’”

For Robichaux, the key to actors’ success is knowing when to leave their weaknesses at home and sell their strengths – finding those things that they do well and not apologizing for them. “Remember,” he says, “if you get the audition, you were invited to the party … so party!”

Richard Robichaux’s journey to his SETC keynote address from a poor town in Texas, under the guidance of some very influential teachers, has left him with a very clear message to all students of the theatre: “It is possible. It is possible. It is possible. You can be famous. You can be famous like a buttonhole or a pulley is famous, famous for what you can do. Do it. When people ask you what you do, say, ‘I’m an actor. I’m in the theatre.’ Stand up. Stand up. It is possible.”

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Chris Hardin is an associate professor of voice and movement at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN, and the chair of SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award.

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Chris Hardin is an associate professor of voice and movement at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN, and the chair of SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award.
To borrow a line from the famous Broadway musical Rent: “How do you measure a life?” Is it really moments in time strung together or is it a group of positive actions that propel an individual into infamy?

Our recipient of the Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award has spent over 50 years in theatrical activism creating events and changing lives. He has touched every possible aspect of the theatre, having produced, directed, stage managed, house managed, adjudicated, and served as artistic director and publicity director for venues nationwide.

His professional credits include executive director of the professional theatre company at the University of Miami’s Ring Theatre and Sharon Playhouse in Sharon, CT. Professional directorial credits include Parker Playhouse in Ft. Lauderdale and off-off Broadway at the West Side Mainstage Theatre.

With his wealth of professional experience, he rose from instructor of drama to chairman of the University of Miami’s theatre department, a position he held for more than 14 years. At the University of Miami, he initiated the New Play Project, which went on to be produced in New York City. It was also his time at the University of Miami that sparked his passionate volunteer involvement.

He has served on the board of the Florida Association of Theatre Educators (FATE), is a past president of the Florida Theatre Conference (FTC) and is their current executive director. He spends endless hours planning the annual convention and has a hand in every facet. His colleagues have recognized his dedication. FATE has honored him with the Outstanding Administrator Award and FTC with both the University Career Award and the Lifetime Achievement Award.

It was his involvement with the state of Florida that brought him to the Southeastern Theatre Conference. He served as the college/university coordinator in the high school auditions room for many years, working to move things along, explain the process in a briefing, and to answer questions and solve problems for the professors. He went on to serve two terms as Florida State Representative and was instrumental in arranging for all state theatre executive directors to hold a meeting during each SETC Convention for the past eight years. At these important meetings, fellow executive directors discuss issues relating to their own state organizations, share ideas and best practices, and seek solutions for concerns and trends from each state.

So, how do you measure a life? It is by thousands and thousands of theatrical lives touched by this wonderfully grumpy old guy. A Broadway Playbill bio of [stage, film and television actor] Ernie Sabella a few years ago included a special note, “I would not be here if it wasn’t for Bob Ankrom.” I can also honestly say, neither would I!

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Loren Biggerstaff

Loren Biggerstaff recently graduated from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a bachelor of arts degree in theatre and minors in communication studies and American sign language. Exposed to theatre at a young age, she continues to be fascinated by the visual and performing arts. A few dedicated instructors guided her gift of writing and interest in history. Loren hopes to combine her interests in a career in arts management.

Paper: The Modernization of Melodrama through Show Boat and Sweeney Todd

Abstract: Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street and Show Boat are two musicals that are not often spoken of in the same sentence, much less the same conversation. At first glance, these musicals have nothing in common: Sweeney Todd is about a serial killer barber seeking revenge, and Show Boat is the nostalgic story of a theatrical family and their lives over a few decades. When the topical differences are laid aside and the basic elements examined, however, what is left is the remarkably similar melodramatic structure as the backbone of both musicals. This is astonishing, especially because the majority of people today consider melodrama to be predictable, overly dramatic, low-quality pieces of little merit. Melodrama at one time did encompass these elements and due to the audience’s interests and technological advancements of the time, had a period of great success. These minute aspects of melodrama can be stripped away and an effective structure for playwriting emerges, with endless possibilities and combinations. Show Boat and Sweeney Todd are two landmark musicals that accurately depict the evolution of melodrama by embracing the melodramatic formula and presenting it in a modern and innovative way, insuring the survival of melodrama for decades to come.

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the audience committed and imaginatively involved in the performance is vital.

“Our two interweaving stories come together in what we believe new theatre should be about,” says Pilbrow. “Intimacy, intimacy, intimacy, intimacy. Actors and us technicians and designers, we’re only half the story. The audiences are the important other half of productions in the theatre.”

**Encouragement for designers**

These two icons of the theatre world not only enjoyed their time at the SETC Convention, but also were truly impressed with the level of talent they saw in the SETC Design Competition. As they began their keynote address, Walton noted: “We have spent half a lifetime going to events of this sort, and I have to say — speaking for myself — that the level of skill, talent, brilliance in our design field is higher than I’ve ever seen it anywhere. It’s been an extraordinary experience to see your work, so major congratulations are in order.’

“And I,” Pilbrow added, “obviously second that.”

Brackley Frayer is a lighting designer who serves as chair of the Department of Theatre and executive director of the Nevada Conservatory Theatre at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

(Continued from Page 31)
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