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Cover

Tony Award winner Karen Olivo (in fuchsia dress) and Tony Award nominee Brandon Victor Dixon (in white shirt with purple trim) appear with other professional actors, actors from the community, and community groups ranging from a youth theatre to a marching band in the Public Theater’s free Public Works production of The Odyssey, which ran Sept. 4-7, 2015, at the Delacorte Theater in New York City. Public Works is an innovative program that brings diverse groups of people into the theatre as participants as well as spectators. Public Theater Artistic Director Oskar Eustis hopes to make Public Works a national movement, helping to heal the societal division that exists today. See story, Page 6. (Photo by Joan Marcus; Photoshop work by Garland Gooden; cover design by Deanna Thompson)
Who Is a Professional? And What Is a Professional Theatre?

Wherever I go in the SETC region, I encounter theatres that describe themselves as “professional.” But are they? What exactly is a professional theatre anyway? Let us begin by consulting any good dictionary.

A “professional” person is one who earns a living by following a certain profession. Thus, a professional teacher earns a living by teaching, a professional director earns a living by directing, and a professional actor earns a living by acting. A “professional” theatre, therefore, is a theatre that employs professionals to create theatrical productions, notably including professional actors. There are unions of actors, directors, stagehands and so forth that would like to limit the term “professional theatre” to those using union members only, but there is no need to cede them that much power. Let’s just stick with the dictionary.

Many fine community theatres employ professional directors and designers, but use volunteers from the community as actors. I have seen excellent productions done that way, and such theatres usually are justifiably proud of their work. But occasionally there are theatres operating without professional actors which nevertheless describe themselves as professional theatres. SETC, as an organization of practicing and aspiring theatre professionals, should actively resist such mislabeling.

Some dictionaries recognize the use of the word “professional” simply to mean “of high quality,” but such use in our context is sloppy and imprecise, and often a disguise for deliberate falsehood. We should maintain higher standards in our profession, decrying false advertising where it occurs and celebrating good work wherever it is found – in whatever type of theatre. All that is required is simple adherence to proper use of the English language.

When local media outlets use the word “professional” incorrectly, we should correct them. When local theatres are truly professional theatres, we should support them. When local theatres incorrectly describe themselves as professional, we should correct them. If they continue to describe themselves as such, we should shame them. We should decry false advertising. It’s the least that we as professionals can do for our profession.

Send your column of 400 or fewer words to deanna@setc.org.

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This issue of *Southern Theatre* highlights the keynote speakers at the 2017 SETC Convention: Oskar Eustis, J. Allen Suddeth and Alice Ripley. From the power of creating theatre with your community, to creating safe stage violence, to advice for a new generation of theatre artists, this issue is filled with inspirational and practical information and guidance for artists.

The power of theatre to make a difference in our divided world was a key focus in the keynote delivered by Eustis, artistic director of The Public Theater and this year’s SETC Distinguished Career Award recipient. Paul B. Crook shares Eustis’ thoughts on the importance of having people not just watch, but also participate in theatre, and provides information on the “national mission” The Public is undertaking with its Public Works program.

Fights have been part of the action since the beginning of drama, but for many years the role of the fight director was an afterthought. In a Friday keynote speech, Suddeth, a stage combat expert, detailed the progress that has been made and explained why early involvement of fight directors is critical for both safety and artistry. Matthew Wilson shares the fight master’s story.

Students and professionals alike were mesmerized by Ripley, the Tony Award-winning actress and singer who was Thursday’s keynote speaker. She shares her personal journey from small-town Ohio to Broadway, along with advice for a successful and healthy stage career, in a story by Trent Blanton.

The SETC Teachers Institute drew participants eager to learn about toy theatre. Elaine Malone describes how the event’s keynote speaker, Robert Kallos, has revived this form of theatre that was popular in the 19th century and uses it to teach drama to teens.

At the annual SETC Awards Banquet, we presented the Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award, our most prestigious award for one of SETC’s own, to Ron Keller, in absentia. We celebrate Keller, who had to miss the convention due to a play opening, on Page 31.

In our regular “Outside the Box” column, Emily Phillips details the process for creating inexpensive gobos using plastic transparencies and LEDs. Megan Monaghan Rivas shares recently published large-cast shows in our new plays for creating inexpensive gobos using plastic transparencies and LEDs. Megan Monaghan Rivas shares recently published large-cast shows in our new plays.

In our regular “400 Words” opinion column, Phil Hill urges theatres that are not “professional” to stop misrepresenting themselves as such. We close out the magazine with abstracts from the winners of SETC’s Young Scholars Award.

This issue includes a number of calls to action from our keynote speakers: promote change in your community through theatre; practice safety in performance; and work hard to achieve your dreams. I hope these important messages will prompt you to take action and commit to making a change with, through or in theatre. Nothing can grow or improve by staying the same.

Tiza Garland, SETC President
Custom Gobos
Create Effects at Minimal Cost with Plastic Transparency Sheets and LEDs

by Emily Phillips

During preliminary meetings for the University of Alabama’s 2014 production of Urinetown, the scenic designer proposed a light box for a sign reading “Urine Good Company.” However, at the play’s conclusion, the sign needed to change to the company’s new name, the “Bobby Strong Memorial Toilet Authority.” To facilitate this change quickly, the lighting designer proposed using two customized gobos on a rear projection screen, switching between the two as the script required.

However, custom gobos can be expensive. A single gobo – let alone two – would have exceeded the lighting budget for the show. Instead, the lighting team opted to create its own in-house gobo for almost no cost, using materials already owned.

By following this same procedure – which involves printing designs onto plastic transparency sheets and placing these gobos into LED fixtures – you can create your own custom gobos, producing them instantly at a very low cost.

Materials and Methods
To bring your custom gobos into being, all you need is an image, a printer, transparency sheets and an LED ellipsoidal fixture (see Caution, next page).

Step 1: Begin with your image. In a photo editing program, edit and tweak it until satisfied. Maintain the highest possible resolution to keep your image as crisp and clear as possible. Then, scale and shape the image to match the size of your gobo holder. For reference, a standard A-size holder has a 2.95” diameter and a standard B-size holder has a 2.36” diameter. Be sure to check the dimensions of the holders in your inventory, as they can vary depending on the intended fixtures.

Step 2: Load transparency sheets into your printer. I’ve had the most success with using quick-drying transparency sheets on an inkjet printer. The quick-drying nature of these sheets reduces the likelihood of accidental smudges and wasted material. Although a laser printer will also work, I’ve found that an inkjet produces fewer streaks, crisper images and more saturated colors.

Step 3: Play around with your printer settings before you print. You will want to choose the highest possible quality and the lowest possible print speed. At these settings, your transparencies may take a little longer to print than normal, but the increased time is negligible – and the difference in image quality will be worth the wait. If you find your image is oversaturated, increase the print speed a little to compensate. Although your image should already be high-resolution, check the settings on your printer to make sure it is at the maximum dpi (dots per inch), so it produces the highest resolution possible.

Step 4: Click print! After your image has printed, wait a minute or two before touching it. If you’re satisfied with the result, it’s time to test it out.

Tip: If your gobo doesn’t utilize color (is simply black and clear), run it through the printer again. This will thicken the coating of black ink, reducing light leak and increasing contrast.

Transparency in hand, cut your image out using scissors, a paper cutter or an X-ACTO blade. Slip the image into a gobo holder just as you would a standard gobo, and you’re ready to test.

Testing
While light labs are great for quick tests that don’t require a personnel lift or crawling around in a box boom or front-of-house position, they’re not necessarily going to give an accurate representation of the end result. I recommend testing at the position you intend to project from, as
distance and position will influence your design based on scale, beam and angle. You may find that you need to increase the saturation of your colors if you’re shooting from a long distance, or that you need to scale down your text so that it can properly fill the rear projection screen.

This phase is all about trial and error. Depending on what you’re looking for, you may nail the perfect result on the first go-round, or you may have to tweak several times. Fortunately, the materials are cheap, and your printer is likely nearby. A quick walk to the office to tweak the image and reprint is nothing compared to the cost of reordering a gobo from a supplier.

**Parting Thoughts**

The process of printing custom gobos onto transparencies is far from flawless. The transparency can warp over time due to heat exposure if fans are not run, and crisp images are next to impossible to attain.

To avoid problems, create a mock-up to test these issues. Test your gobos from the exact position for the fixture, and test at a higher intensity and for longer than you expect them to run. You will discover any issues you may have with image clarity or heat distortion with minimal time lost and money spent.

Ultimately, printing custom gobos onto transparencies rather than ordering them from a supplier can save you significant time and money, while allowing you to produce results customized to your production.

**Application: More Examples of Custom Gobos**

Just like their manufactured counterparts, transparency gobos have infinite applications. The theatre department at the University of Alabama has used them in a variety of ways during my four years in school. The signs for *Urinetown* were so successful, the designer decided to print a steel mesh pattern to splash across the back wall during most of the show. Through a week of tech and a week of performances, the design never warped or faded.

The following semester, the lighting designer for *Merrily We Roll Along* experimented with creating his own breakup patterns (right). He designed a bold and splashy breakup with several colors. To diversify his cues, he shifted colors in the Source 4 LEDs in order to mute some colors in his gobo and enhance others. Of course, customized gobos with more than two colors are more expensive than single-color gobos. The cost of buying the 10 used in the show would have far exceeded the budget.

In spring of 2015, we produced two one-act plays simultaneously with a tour of *42nd Street*, which meant resources were limited. For one of the plays, the scenic designer wanted to depict train tracks encircling the three-quarter thrust stage. The audience enters and exits the theatre seating via the carpeted surround, so scenic treatments were out of the question. Instead, the scenic designer created gobos to project train tracks in this area (above). Through extensive trial and error, he produced 10 gobos, each carefully tailored to specific lighting positions in order to project cohesive tracks. Using transparency gobos produced in-house allowed for extensive testing and alteration at minimal cost.

**Note:** This article was written in response to questions raised at last year’s “Outside the Box” session at the SETC Convention, where Tony Penna from Clemson University outlined how he had used a transparency gobo in an LED fixture to help in taping a floor for rehearsals of a show that had an organically shaped turntable. Many of those present were unfamiliar with the technique that is used to create transparency gobos for LED fixtures.

Caution: While most LED fixtures run cool enough at their pattern holder slot (especially with the cooling fan running) to accommodate transparency gobos, some other fixtures or LED upgrades to fixtures can be too hot for this technique.
OSKAR EUSTIS
Theatre
for the People
by the People
and of the People
Anyone who has turned on a TV, listened to a radio or opened a web browser in the past two years has heard about Lin-Manuel Miranda’s theatrical sensation Hamilton. And most people, certainly those who work in the world of theatre, know that the show began its New York productions at The Public Theater, under the artistic direction of Oskar Eustis. But Eustis, the Saturday keynote speaker and SETC Distinguished Career Award recipient at the 2017 SETC Convention, is so much more than an administrator and a producer. He is a visionary. Addressing a packed room at the Lexington (KY) Hilton, Eustis talked about the Mobile Unit and Public Works, two of the inspiring new programs he has implemented at The Public, as well as highlighting the direction in which he would like to see U.S. not-for-profit theatre companies move. Of course, he talked about the phenomenon of Hamilton also, along with why he sees such value for society in the production of theatre. As Eustis pointed out in his talk, “[w]hen rehearsal works, you become a better person than you are outside of the rehearsal room.”

‘The training ground for citizenship’

Eustis began his talk by telling the audience he had just come from Dallas, where he was with linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath, who studies and works with community arts organizations and youth in under-resourced communities. While studying at-risk kids who are involved in after-school activities, Heath discovered that kids who participated in theatre improved their social behavior as well as their school test scores. Although Heath was not necessarily a “theatre person” at the time, these studies showed her – Eustis noted – that “theatre is the training ground for citizenship.” That’s a concept that Eustis embraces wholeheartedly, noting that empathy, collaboration, problem-solving and language skills are all needed to succeed in theatre – and to be a positive and contributing citizen in society. Speaking about those students and all of those who work in theatre, Eustis noted that “we, in relationship to others, are becoming better versions of ourselves.”

Eustis’ discussion of Heath’s discoveries served as a jumping-off point for a quick trip through the historical timeline for the development of theatre and democracy. Eustis highlighted parallels between the growth of theatre and the growth of democracy, tying the two together in a way that was both fascinating and inspiring. For Eustis, theatre is intrinsically tied to community, society and politics. When asked after his talk if all theatre is political, he replied, “Yes, because it all has to do with how we live together.” He went on to hold Shakespeare and his plays up as an example, noting that all relationships in Shakespeare’s plays affect more than the two people involved. In that regard, there is, in his work, no such thing as a “private” relationship.

“The values of a community,” Eustis said, “are a part of your personal relationships.”

The interconnectedness of theatre and community is reflected in all of Eustis’ work. As a Shakespearean scholar and director, Eustis finds the sociopolitical and communal aspects of the Bard’s work to be defining. “Shakespeare created what it meant to be English,” Eustis told his SETC audience. Because Shakespeare’s audience was the broadest and most diverse the world had seen since the Greeks, his plays had to appeal to a diverse group.

“[Shakespeare is] great because he had to write to please all of those different people,” Eustis said.

‘When people are deprived of [Shakespeare’s] stories, they need them’

The broad appeal of Shakespeare is what led Eustis and The Public to develop the Mobile Unit, a nod to legendary theatrical producer Joe Papp’s “Mobile Theater,” a 1957 touring company that evolved into The Public. In 2010, Eustis and director Barry Edelstein (then serving as the director of the Shakespeare Initiative at The Public) created the Mobile Unit as a touring program that presents free performances of Shakespeare at prisons, homeless shelters, halfway houses, battered women’s centers and community centers. The Mobile Unit operates on the principle that the “need for what Shakespeare has to offer is as strong as the need for food, shelter and sex,” Eustis said, and is the only setting where the “diversity of the audience matches the diversity of New York City.”

The connections are so strong, and the experiences so powerful, he said, that the artists at The Public all want to work on these tours. As an example of just one of the powerful experiences, Eustis related an anecdote from the Mobile Unit’s performance of
Measure for Measure at a women’s prison in New York. He set the scene for the audience by describing Act II, Scene iv of the play, in which Isabella has gone to plead with Angelo, the interim Duke, for the life of her brother, who has been sentenced to die for the crime of sleeping with his betrothed. Though initially unmoved by her arguments, Angelo eventually tells Isabella that, if she will sleep with him, he will free Claudio, her brother.

Distressed and angered by Angelo’s hypocrisy, Isabella closes the scene with a soliloquy. Eustis described Nicole Lewis, playing the role of Isabella, stepping downstage to begin the speech, saying “To whom should I complain?” Before she could continue, Eustis said, a woman in the audience shouted, “The police!” Though taken aback, Eustis relayed, Lewis simply looked at the woman who had shouted and continued with the next lines Shakespeare wrote: “Did I tell this, who would believe me?” Before she could continue, Eustis said, a woman in the audience shouted, “The police!” Though taken aback, Eustis relayed, Lewis simply looked at the woman who had shouted and continued with the next lines Shakespeare wrote: “Did I tell this, who would believe me?” Before she could continue, Eustis noted that “Shakespeare’s political masterpiece has never felt more contemporary.”

Stepping into the director’s chair this summer for the first time since his 2008 production of Hamlet, Eustis chose to bring back Julius Caesar. The first of Joe Papp’s free Central Park productions in 1956, Caesar has been produced at the Delacorte only one other time in the history of the venue (in 2000). In a Feb. 9 New York Times article that announced his direction of Caesar, Eustis noted that “Shakespeare’s political masterpiece has never felt more contemporary.” In an interview after his talk, Eustis noted that “producing provides maximum impact, but [I lose] something when not in the rehearsal room” as a director. Directing for Shakespeare in the Park plays right into Eustis’ passion for ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to engage with theatre.
Oskar Eustis: Bio and Career Highlights

EDUCATION:
- Attended New York University
- Received honorary doctorate degrees from Rhode Island College (1999) and Brown University (2001)

THEATRE POSITIONS:
- 1974, NYC: Founded Red Wing Theatre Company
- 1981-1986, San Francisco: Resident Director and Dramaturg, Eureka Theatre Company
- 1986-1989, San Francisco: Artistic Director, Eureka Theatre Company
- 1989-1994, Los Angeles: Associate Artistic Director, Mark Taper Forum
- 1994-2005, Providence, RI: Artistic Director, Trinity Rep
- 2005-Present, NYC: Artistic Director, The Public Theater

TEACHING POSITIONS:
- Currently Professor of Dramatic Writing and Arts and Public Policy at New York University
- Previous professorships include: UCLA, Middlebury College and Brown University

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:
- Commissioned and directed world premiere of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* at the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles
- Directed world premieres of Paula Vogel’s *The Long Christmas Ride Home* and Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* at Trinity Rep, Providence, RI

SELECTED AWARDS:
- Tony Awards (as Producer/Original Presenter with The Public Theater):
  - 2009, Best Revival of a Musical, *Hair*
  - 2015, Best Musical, *Fun Home*
  - 2016, Best Musical, *Hamilton*
- Drama Desk Awards (as Producer/Original Presenter with The Public Theater):
  - 2009, Outstanding Revival of a Musical, *Hair*
  - 2012, Unique Theatrical Experience, *Gob Squad’s Kitchen (You’ve Never Had It So Good)*
  - 2015, Outstanding Musical, *Hamilton*
- Pulitzer Prize for Drama (as Producer/Original Presenter with The Public Theater):
  - 2016, *Hamilton*
  - 2017, *Sweat*
outlined and as the theatre’s website states, “is a major initiative of The Public Theater that seeks to engage the people of New York by making them creators, and not just spectators.” Formed in 2012, with its first performance in 2013, Public Works “challenges the idea that we are separated by professions,” Eustis said.

Public Works draws its inspiration from the pageant movement of the early 20th century, which saw entire communities come together, as amateur actors put on performances that celebrated a town’s history. Under Lear deBessonet’s direction, artists at The Public spent a full year studying the pageant movement, to understand the power of the form. From that study came Public Works, which presents large-scale, participatory performance events that deliberately blur the line between professional and amateur. It “reaches back before World War I … before the bloody 20th century” to create, as its website says, theatre “that is not only for the people, but by and of the people as well.”

To explain the Public Works initiative, Eustis played a video for the audience providing a behind-the-scenes look at the program’s first project, a 2013 musical adaptation of The Tempest. (View the video here: www.publictheater.org/Programs-Events/Public-Works/). Living up to the motto that deBessonet espouses in the video, that the “theatre belongs to everyone; culture belongs to everyone,” and drawing from each of the five boroughs of New York, the performance involved 250 community members, five professional actors and five professional musicians. The performers had limited rehearsals for a year before coming together for four days of performances. In the video, Eustis says, “We believe that theatre has a specific role to play – it always has. It’s a democratizing impulse, an empowering impulse, a participatory impulse.”

That empowerment has not come easily, Eustis said. Despite a year of study and preparation, unexpected challenges still arose as the first Public Works production moved toward its opening. For example: When the diverse cast moved to the Delacorte for final rehearsals, The Public’s leaders discovered most of the community performers did not have subway passes, which meant, of course, that the price of subway passes had to be added into the budget.

‘We believe that theatre has a specific role to play – it always has. It’s a democratizing impulse, an empowering impulse, a participatory impulse.’
The Public partnered with five community organizations for its first Public Works presentation: Dreamyard, an arts education organization in the Bronx; Domestic Workers United, which advocates for Caribbean, Latina and African domestic employees across New York; The Children’s Aid Society, which assists children living in poverty in neighborhoods throughout the city; the Fortune Society, a nonprofit that works to help former prisoners re-enter society and to provide alternatives to incarceration; and the Brownsville Recreation Center, which provides artistic and athletic programs for youth and senior citizens. Partners work to help identify participants for Public Works, and then provide those participants with opportunities to take classes and workshops in music, acting and dance, as well as to attend play readings and join in creating a singular piece of theatre, which culminates in public performances at the Delacorte.

Public Works: Starting ‘a national movement’

Public Works is being funded in large part, and perhaps somewhat ironically, by Hamilton revenues. “Hamilton is a game-changer,” Eustis said, and it’s partly because “hip-hop can deliver information so much quicker” than standard dialogue or musical theatre songs. Hamilton (which premiered at The Public and is produced by The Public, Jeffrey Seller, Sander Jacobs and Jill Furman on Broadway) has enjoyed wild success, but its popularity is a bit of a double-edged sword. In fact, the high prices of Hamilton and other successful Broadway shows have influenced many nonprofit theatres, as they have increasingly begun to follow the commercial model. Public Works is a shining example of Eustis’ belief that nonprofit theatres should not try to follow the commercial model at all. Hamilton is helping accomplish that, because Eustis has taken a different approach than Joe Papp did decades ago with A Chorus Line. While Papp poured all the profits from the highly successful A Chorus Line back into the Public’s budget, Eustis said that, “with Hamilton, we are only putting $250,000 into the [Public’s] operating budget, with the rest going into reserves.” Included in that operating budget is Public Works, which means that the high-priced, market-driven hit supports this wonderfully inclusive initiative. Meanwhile, Eustis’ long-term investment strategy should allow the initiative to grow and thrive for many years.

Public Works is helping to “turn theatre back into what it’s always been: a set of relationships among people,” Eustis said. To accomplish that and to capitalize on the talents that all humans have, this initiative seeks to “spread the glory,” Eustis says in the Public Works video, and to communicate the message that “the power of theatre is unleashed when people are not only watching it, but participating in it.”

Spreading the glory of participatory theatre and...
recapturing the civic pride of the pageant movement is a national goal for Eustis, not just a local one. Immediately prior to the SETC Convention in Lexington, he had been in Dallas, where Eustis and The Public helped the Dallas Theater Center and Southern Methodist University recreate the Public Works initiative locally with a production of *The Tempest*. That replication of the Public Works program was only the first of what Eustis hopes will be a long line of them. The next iteration will be Public Works Seattle at Seattle Repertory Theatre.

The staff at The Public is creating a “playbook” of sorts that will include all of the lessons learned through the Public Works development process. Eustis hopes to have it ready by December of this year. It will be available to theatres and organizations that would like to implement the program in their own communities. His vision is that theatres that would like to recreate the initiative in their cities would be able to contact The Public and use the playbook to learn the ins and outs of the program.

“We’re starting a process of trying to make this a national movement and seeing if somehow … we can have an effect on the division in our society,” Eustis said.

No matter if Public Works is happening in New York, Dallas, Seattle or any other town in the future, the key to its effectiveness, Eustis said, is the development of community partnerships.

The call for theatre partners to join the movement was the closing point for Eustis in his SETC Convention speech. As he looked out across the audience filled with students, teachers and professionals, he noted the common vision shared by all of them.

“You’re doing the work,” he said. “You’re out there working, caring about the things we all care about, often times with populations who do not get the chance to do the things we get to do. I’m honored to be one of you.”

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Paul B. Crook is a professor of acting and directing at Louisiana Tech University and author of the recently published book, *The Art and Practice of Directing for Theatre* (Routledge, 2016). He is a frequent contributor to *Southern Theatre*.

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**Unified Professional AUDITIONS**

> **When:** August 27-28, 2017
> **Where:** Crowne Plaza Atlanta-Airport, Atlanta, GA
> **Registration is now open!** setc.org/auditions/fall-professional

**SETC Fall Unified Professional Auditions by the Numbers for 2016**

Participating companies were looking to fill **1,035** roles

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**140** actors, singers and dancers auditioned

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Large-Cast Plays
by Megan Monaghan Rivas

Our regular column on newly available plays and musicals focuses in this issue on plays with large casts. For many of us, the first thrilling taste of the excitement of working in concert with many other people comes through the theatre. These freshly available plays for large casts have settings ranging from ancient historical times to the immediate present, and they span genres from broad comedy to tightly structured drama. The five featured titles throw open the doors and welcome between 10 and 20 people to the stage. Large casts, ahoy! To develop the following list of suggested titles, we surveyed major play publishers’ offerings during the past six months. With each play, you’ll find the cast breakdown and a referral to the publisher who holds the rights.

**Mary Page Marlowe**, by Tracy Letts, winner of the Pulitzer Prize

There is no such thing as “ordinary.” This drama’s title character, a mother of two working as an accountant in Ohio, demonstrates this truth. Tracing the choices that have shaped 50 years of her past, the audience discovers the unexpected richness and intricacy of her present.

**Cast breakdown:** 11 females; 6 males; 1 girl  
**Publisher:** Samuel French  
[www.samuelfrench.com](http://www.samuelfrench.com)

**Akhnaton**, by Agatha Christie, winner of the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award

This highly praised play departs from Christie’s well-traveled mystery territory to create “a drama of ruthless logic and theatrical power.” After the armed forces and the priesthood oppose the pharaoh Akhnaton’s effort to end the Egyptian people’s long tradition of polytheism and unite them under one god, the audience discovers whether the leader’s vision of a peaceable kingdom will bring his real-world kingdom to a state of civil war. Written in 1937, the play recently was reintroduced by Samuel French.

**Cast breakdown:** 4 females; 12 males  
**Publisher:** Samuel French  
[www.samuelfrench.com](http://www.samuelfrench.com)

**Kentucky**, by Leah Nanako Winkler, winner of the Samuel French Off Off Broadway Short Play Festival

You can take the girl out of Kentucky – and in Hiro’s case, plant her in New York City. But when her little sister decides to marry, Hiro is drawn back to her long-abandoned home as she seeks to persuade her sister not to take that step. She returns to overcome years of estrangement and take her last, best shot at shaping a more hopeful future for the sister she loves.

**Cast breakdown:** 11 females; 5 males  
**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
[www.dramatists.com](http://www.dramatists.com)

**Airline Highway**, by Lisa D’Amour, winner of the Obie Award

Why not hold your funeral while you’re still alive, so you can enjoy the party, too? Miss Ruby, a famous New Orleans burlesque queen, makes just this choice. She gathers her friends and admirers for a Mardi Gras-style celebration. And by doing justice to Miss Ruby’s story, all of the characters get a chance to reveal their own as well.

**Cast breakdown:** 5 females; 5 males  
**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
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**Wilderness**, by Seth Bockley and Anne Hamburger, winner of the Edwin Booth and Lee Reynolds Awards

A documentary theatre piece that blends six real families’ stories, this co-created work explores our culture’s coming of age by tracing the pressures and complexities that each family’s adolescent must navigate. The play touches on mental health challenges, questions of gender and sexual identity, and addiction. *The New York Times* declared, “Wilderness is at its eloquent best when it is simplest, when the characters and their parents discuss their lives in unadorned language, with an honesty that is deeply affecting.”

**Cast breakdown:** 11 females; 9 males  
**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
[www.dramatists.com](http://www.dramatists.com)

Megan Monaghan Rivas is an associate professor of dramaturgy in the School of Drama at Carnegie Mellon University. Recipient of the Elliott Hayes Prize in Dramaturgy, she served as literary manager of South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa, CA; the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta; and Frontera @ Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, TX. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
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SETC celebrated the 68th anniversary of its founding at the 2017 SETC Convention in Lexington, KY. SETC President Tiza Garland (above) presided over Saturday’s business meeting. On these pages, we revisit scenes from the annual convention, which was attended by more than 5,000 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 Mark Mahan unless otherwise noted
“Let’s talk about movement,” the Fight Master began, tilting his head at the paradox. For those who make art out of action, talking only gets you so far. What matters is what you do.

For fight choreographers, though, both talking and doing have historically been a challenge. The fight director has not always been given a voice in the conversation among other artistic collaborators. By 1950, when the Southeastern Theatre Conference hosted its inaugural annual convention, fight direction had long been a crucial part of a play’s or a film’s success. Swordsmen like Patrick Crean crossed steel with the likes of Laurence Olivier and Errol Flynn, but their work was not always recognized and their voices were not always heard, even though the physical stories they told could make or break a project.

Fast forward to 2017, at the 68th annual SETC convention in Lexington, KY: Crean’s protégé J. Allen Suddeth scans a packed ballroom and quietly says he is “very honored” to be the first member of the fight community ever invited to address the convention as keynote speaker. The audience applauds in support and a few rousing whoops are heard from other combat professionals, many of them Suddeth’s former students. Onstage, the Fight Master nods reverently and repeats to himself as much as to anyone else, “Sixty-eight years.”
Suddeth – a past president of the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) and one of just 18 individuals who have attained the group’s highest level of recognition, Fight Master – has directed fights for Broadway, TV and film. He captivated his SETC audience with anecdotes from his own life, musings on the history of stage combat, and a sort of rhetorical *apologia* for the necessity of combat training in theatrical curricula. He referenced fights from Shakespeare to Disney, deftly balanced on his palm a gleaming rapier by armorer and artisan Tom Fiocchi, and drew repeated laughs with his dry humor. However, Suddeth’s amusing stories were anchored by a solemn thesis about the demand for respect and the struggle to change perceptions within the industry, a struggle supported by the audience’s frequent interjections of applause.

The afternoon’s biggest crowd reaction followed the final question of the post-talk Q&A: A female student looked up at Suddeth from a microphone in the aisle and asked simply, “What is the career field for women in stage combat?” Spontaneously, Suddeth arched his eyebrows, flashed a broad smile and leapt sprightly from the stage to kneel before SETC President Tiza Garland, presenting her the microphone as a knight presents a sword. Garland, herself an SAFD Certified Teacher, vaulted to the platform (“in heels,” she noted) and proclaimed, to an exuberant crowd, “The field of stage combat for women is the exact same as men. My gender does not identify me as an artist; my artistry identifies me as an artist.” It’s a tribute to Garland and feminists everywhere that the crowd cheered for gender equality. It’s a tribute to Suddeth and his
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forebears that no one even blanched at her other assertion: Garland had equated “stage combat” with “artistry.”

Is Stage Combat an ‘Art Form’?

A current theatre student might toss off, “Sure,” as quickly and thoughtlessly as a producer of yesteryear (and some who are still around) could offer a confused, scoffing, “No.” These days, Suddeth noted, “Stage combat is everywhere, from high school theatre to the vastness of the Metropolitan Opera stage,” and yet the struggle is far from over in defining what combat is – or is not – and how it fits into the artistic process.

Looking at Suddeth’s career, one might be surprised to learn that he and others in his profession are not always respected as equal artistic partners. His work is currently featured on Broadway in Disney’s Aladdin, and his résumé includes fight direction at nearly every major theatre from New York to the West Coast, as well as stunts for more than 750 television shows. In general, the fight director touches the most crucial, most exciting, most difficult and most dangerous part of any project and, in Suddeth’s words, is “called upon to solve problems and physicalize stories.” Still, the work is often seen as an afterthought.

No one would approach 42nd Street saying, “We’ll get it all staged and then invite a dance choreographer in for a day to teach the actors how to tap,” but fight directors are frequently asked to stage climactic battle scenes in a matter
of hours. Directors might say, “We’ve got it all blocked; we just need you to add the fights,” but the fight itself is the blocking, the story, a part of the character, an extension of the script, the main event of the play. Sometimes a fight director is reduced to serving as a safety monitor or a liability shield: “It’s choreographed; can you just make it safe?” Imagine telling a designer, “We’ve finished sewing all the costumes; now can you make them fit?” or “We finished building the set; can you just make sure it’s load-bearing?”

Neither safety nor artistry should be an afterthought because, as Suddeth proclaimed, “Fights are not little moments!” He noted that six of the 10 most produced professional plays and six of the 10 most produced high school plays last year contain moments of violence, but the combat is not always given serious attention. “I take it personally,” Suddeth said, when actors anywhere are hurt, traumatized or even killed because of errors on set or onstage, and he proved his investment not only through his passionate appeal, but also through stories of putting his own body on the line to protect performers. He once leapt into a raging river to rescue an actor and would himself have drowned had he not arranged to have a rescue boat on call. That one incident is a microcosm of an entire industry that is now much safer than it used to be, thanks to the work of professionals such as Suddeth.

A Fight Master’s Journey

So how does one find oneself on set battling a raging river or on Broadway wrangling 23 musical theatre performers (including a nine-year-old child actor) for the Act One finale of Newsies?

Suddeth, like many in the entertainment industry, first encountered theatre as an actor, arriving at Ohio University as a self-described “skinny, nerdy, tightly-wound” kid. Despite failing his Movement 101 class, he found an awakening through stage combat, which granted him the permission he had been lacking to “live in the moment.” “The training,” he assured his audience, “can set you free.”

While studying in Ohio, Suddeth met Patrick Crean, an instrumental figure in the development of professional stage combat training in the United Kingdom and North America. Crean came to lead workshops at the school for five weeks each year. After training with him, Suddeth was hired as an undergrad to teach combat regularly to the actors in the master’s program. (Recounting those early teaching experiences, he confessed to attendees at the convention’s Society of American Fight Directors panel, “I figured I only had to stay a week ahead” of the master’s students.)

After graduation, Suddeth moved to New York and continued working as an actor but realized, “Stage combat gave me another road to the industry that in those days was unknown.” The phone continued to ring more and more for fight gigs, and Suddeth became a leader in a burgeoning field.

The Rise of Stage Combat

Suddeth’s personal story parallels the rise of stage combat as a recognized part of the entertainment industry. Combat first entered actor training programs as nothing more than what Suddeth called “the trick-of-the-month club,” where someone

J. Allen Suddeth: Why Stage Combat Is Good Actor Training

- It’s the ultimate “outside-in training”: You get it right, or you don’t!
- It sharpens partnering skills.
- It provides the physical confidence to bring forth an emotion and control it.
- It is mental, physical and kinetic training.
- It asks you to retain choreography.
- It makes you better with props.
- It leads to physical transformation.
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such as Crean would visit a program for a few weeks to offer “a surface touch” of the discipline. However, by the 1970s, professional fight societies – including the SAFD – had been formed and were providing networking forums where teachers and professionals could improve training, standards and opportunities.

For Suddeth, American combat in the 1980s was defined by the establishment of the SAFD National Stage Combat Workshop, a yearly intensive in which students and performers can train under recognized Fight Masters and participate in “skills tests” for credentialed proficiency as stage combatants. (The SAFD National Stage Combat Workshop is held every June-July at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and regularly features Suddeth as one of its principal instructors.)

The 1990s saw a sea change for stage combat in three crucial ways based on the tools, training and professional...
opportunities available. For the first time in contemporary theatre, an industry of skilled artisans emerged to create specific weapons for different periods and styles, a phenomenon Suddeth dubs “The Rise of the Armorer.” While fights had previously been staged using whatever could be borrowed from the realm of sport fencing, Suddeth marveled, “Now you can buy anything you can dream up.” In professional productions, it also became more common to have fight directors included alongside other production members, contributing in design meetings and collaborating with the director to envision, develop and implement historical sources to push the discipline in new directions.

The Fight Going Forward

Stage combat continues to gain momentum, as evidenced in part by the 10 SAFD Certified Teachers who attended this year’s SETC Convention and the nine combat-related workshops programmed by SETC’s Stage Movement Committee. However, the fight world still struggles for equal artistic acceptance. The American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) and SAG-AFTRA (the union formed from the merger of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) have ways of acknowledging stunt and combat professionals, but Actors’ Equity remains vague in its standards. The Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) now represents professional fight directors, but producers’ organizations continue to oppose unionization or standards for the people hired to choreograph fights. Unlike the old days, stunt players are now credited in films, but stunt coordinators and performers are still shut out of the Academy Awards, just as fight directors are omitted at the Tony Awards. “We are not a category,” Suddeth said matter-of-factly.

Even so, he is optimistic about the future of stage combat. Safety standards are better today than they have ever been. Theatrical training in areas from children’s programming to graduate education now recognizes the importance of safe and effective stage combat. The best professional processes today include a fight director as a full contributor on the artistic team.

“So, does stage combat finally have a place at the table?” Suddeth mused with satisfaction. “I think we finally do.”

Matthew R. Wilson is an SAFD Certified Teacher, an SDC director/choreographer and a professor at the University of Mississippi. He authored the stage combat chapter in the newly revised Movement for Actors (Allworth, 2017).
A by Trent Blanton

Alice Ripley is, by anyone's standard, a success story. She won a Tony Award for her portrayal of Diana in Next to Normal and a Helen Hayes Award (Washington, DC's version of the Tony) for that role as well. Her work spans the gamut from Broadway to national tours to regional theatre to film and television, including the Netflix show Girlboss, which premiered in April. So, all this success could go to one's head and begin to cultivate a sense of entitlement and expectation. But that isn't the case with Ripley. Both in her workshop for high school students on Wednesday and her keynote address at the SETC Convention on Thursday, Ripley demonstrated a true connection with her audience, a desire to help students reach the next level in their careers – and a humility that belies her success.

“I was talking to my mom this morning, and I was telling her that I feel so grateful for this opportunity,” she said in an interview before her keynote. “Being here [at the SETC Convention] has brought me full circle.”

A Start at SETC

Years ago, as an undergraduate student at Kent State University in Ohio, Ripley made the trek to the SETC Convention herself to vie for a role in the Professional Auditions. She remembers the pressures of crafting the perfect 90-second audition. She remembers that students from her school didn’t have enough money to stay overnight, so they did the drive to SETC, the audition, the callbacks and the drive home all in the same day. She also remembers the pieces she chose for her audition.

“I sang Who’s That Woman? from Follies,” she recalled. “And I sang it as an up-tempo song. Here’s someone who’s never seen Follies and never seen much musical theatre. We just didn’t have it. The touring shows didn’t come to our town. We didn’t have a theatre. We did our high school plays in the classroom. We did the musicals
at the elementary school. I didn’t really know what I was doing. I just knew I really liked that song. I had never even kissed anybody before. My monologue was from *Thieves* by Herb Gardner because I was working on that play.

“I remember standing there – and a guy with a stopwatch in his hand. I also remember being really scared, thinking, ‘Am I crazy? What am I doing here? Do I ever have a chance of getting cast in anything? Who actually makes a living doing this?’ You ask yourself these questions, but you just do it.

“Because I knew that I would have the last word when I sang. I knew I could silence a room when I sang.”

It was her voice that had given her an identity growing up in a chaotic household with a multitude of brothers and sisters. It was that same voice that was her ticket to her dreams. Somehow, she knew this already in the depths of her soul.

**Finding Her Voice**

Born in a suburb of Oakland, CA, Ripley moved at age 2 to Pennsylvania with her parents and two brothers and then to Ohio, which is where her parents were from originally. Her parents eventually divorced. After her father’s remarriage, she ended up with 11 siblings from the two marriages. By her own admission, she never had her own pair of socks until she was in college.

She grew up miles from the lights and glamour of Broadway, living from ages 10 to 15 in the village of Andover, in northern Ohio, before moving to West Carrollton, a suburb of Dayton, OH. Despite the distance and challenges, Ripley already knew she wanted more than small-town life could offer her.

“I was walking around barefoot in Andover, OH, where the only thing to do was just stand outside and hope the cute boy on the John Deere tractor would tip his hat to you when he goes by,” she said. “So, you really live in your imagination. But luckily, I knew, somehow all the way through, that I had something that could change the world – even if it was my own world.”

Her imagination was so rich, Ripley said, that she had a hard time watching television as a child. Even shows like *M.A.S.H.* affected her deeply because she saw them as real. Alice believes that this rich imaginary life is present in everyone who does great art. At this point, she knew she had something “magic,” a sensitivity that propelled her into the arts.

After high school, she enrolled at DePauw University in Indiana as a voice major. Her teachers there wanted her to pursue a career in opera.

“I loved singing that kind of music, and I still do,” she said. “But I always wanted to be an actor. My voice was something that was a ‘given’, but acting was the real question mark for me. I wanted to figure out … how do they do that?”

Pursuing her acting dream, Ripley left DePauw. She didn’t have the resources to attend a conservatory, but soon realized that was okay, that the state school she enrolled at as a musical theatre major – Kent State University – offered just what she needed.

“It turns out that a liberal arts college was really great, because you get a little bit of everything,” she said. “It forms who you are. That’s the most important thing in acting. It [the liberal arts] got me excited about everything.”

Her first summer stock job was at the Red Barn Theatre in Indiana. It was there that she learned what being in the theatre is all about.

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**Alice Ripley: Bio and Career Highlights**

**EDUCATION:**
BFA, Musical Theatre, Kent State University

**BROADWAY CREDITS:**
The Who’s Tommy, Les Miserables, Side Show (Tony nomination, Drama Desk nomination), Sunset Boulevard, James Joyce’s The Dead, The Rocky Horror Show, Next to Normal, American Psycho

**REGIONAL THEATRE CREDITS:**
Earned her Equity card at La Jolla Playhouse, San Diego, CA; Emma in Tell Me on a Sunday, Kennedy Center (Helen Hayes Award nomination); Amy in Company, Kennedy Center (Helen Hayes Award nomination); Margaret White in Carrie at the Moore Theatre in Seattle (Balagan Theatre Co)

**FILM/TV CREDITS:**
Films: The Adulterer, Temptation, Isn’t It Delicious, Sing Along, The Way I Remember It, Bear with Us, Sugar!, Muckland. TV: Blue Bloods, Royal Pains, 30 Rock, Netflix’s Girlboss (released April 2017)

**MUSIC:**
Everything’s Fine, Beautiful Eyes (both solo albums), Outtasite (with her band RIPLEY), numerous original Broadway cast recordings

**SELECTED AWARDS:**
- 2009 Tony Award, Best Leading Actress in a Musical, Next to Normal
- 2009 Helen Hayes Award, Best Leading Actress in a Musical, Next to Normal
“I have a lot of stories from that summer,” she said. “The thrust of the story would be, ‘This is what it is, guys. It’s a blue-collar job. It’s blood, sweat and tears. And it’s fun. It’s really hard work. You all become a family. Then we all go our separate ways at the end.’”

She then spent a summer with the Indianapolis Shakespeare Festival. She remembers having to also work at a local car wash to survive.

**Connecting with Students**

It’s these experiences that made Ripley feel so connected with the students attending the SETC Convention. She especially enjoyed having the opportunity to inspire students whose homes – like hers as a teen – are far from the cultural hubs of the entertainment industry, encouraging them to cultivate their own “magic.” She knows what it’s like to have a dream and live in a place where that dream seems so far away.

“I want these kids to get fired up about how we come from the same place,” she said during her time at the SETC Convention. “This is like coming home to me. And it’s so exciting.”

In addition to reaching out to young artists, she also praised the teachers who brought students to the convention.

“It’s so great what it says about those people [teachers] that care about their growth,” she said. “I want to hug those teachers and say, ‘Thank you for this’, because this is huge for them [the students]. There is so much possibility that is set up for them now, because they are here and they are part of a community. And they are never going to forget that.”

In particular, she mentioned a group of high school students from Opelika, AL, who were attending the SETC Convention for the first time.

“I was thinking ‘If they knew how fortunate they are …’” she said. “I would have flipped if I had this chance.”

**Rudiments for Success**

In her workshop with high school students on Wednesday, Ripley engaged her audience with a series of lessons for success, even working one-on-one with some students onstage.

Calling on her own experiences, she offered students what she called the “rudiments” for a life in the arts. These “rudiments” are ways to keep healthy, happy and creatively fulfilled in this often dehumanizing and challenging profession.

“There are rudiments that are physical, and then conceptual and then soulful,” she said. “Some of these rudiments exist in this world, and some exist in your mind and your heart together. It’s good to have a balance of all of those things. These rudiments add up to make a performer. Your choices add up to the sum of your parts. You won’t always be young, and you must learn how to take care of yourself.”

Ripley stressed the importance of seven simple steps:

1. **Hydrate.**
   - From using a steamer to drinking enough water, proper hydration is essential for vocal and physical health, she said.

2. **Sleep.**
   - Getting enough rest is vital, she said.

3. **Exercise.**
   - Cultivate a physical routine. From spinal roll-downs, to hip stretches, to yoga, to hanging upside down on a daily basis, she said it is important to develop regular practices that can benefit you throughout your career.

4. **Disconnect.**
   - She cautioned students against becoming addicted to technology: “We had an incredible world before the cell phone existed. It’s an important tool. But technology can be a distraction. Learn the balance. Learn the disconnect.”

5. **Work hard.**
   - It’s critical to develop and practice a good work ethic, both before and during the rehearsal process, she said.

   “Rehearse before you get to rehearsal,” she advised. “Get ahead, so you can have a dramaturgy day. Perfection doesn’t happen at birth. Strive for constant improvement, not perfection.”
During the rehearsal process itself, continue that commitment, she said. “Use your breaks to keep rehearsing. Use all your time. Stage managers keep working through breaks. Actors should work as well. Look over your lines. Write down your blocking. This will make you more masterful. Pull together all the threads.”

A strong work ethic, she said, is the key to great acting. “Take Viola Davis in Fences,” she said. “You only get to that depth with that work ethic and that concentration. Most of Viola’s day is spent working.”

Cultivate a sense of joy. She urged young artists to develop a sense of purpose and joy about their work. “When you are in rehearsal or your classroom, take part,” she said. “Put aside all feelings of anything that isn’t joy-based and take part. We all have a struggle. We can lean on each other. Spare yourself judgment, especially self-judgment. Every time I judge someone who is blocking the door on the subway, it only hurts me.”

Stay inspired in tough times. She urged young artists to recognize and continue stoking the passion that led them to this career. “You want to sing,” she said. “That fire, that little candle that burns in you – you have to keep it alive. Keep building little creative bonfires to keep it alive inside you.”

Discover the Key

Perhaps the most profound of all the wisdom she imparted during her time at the SETC Convention was advice that, on the surface, was simple but seemed to have a deeper subtext. “Always know what key your song should be in,” she said in her workshop with high school students. “It’s important to sing your song in the right key. If the key is too high, ask for a lower one.”

These wise words seem to transcend the literal, imparting a lesson about the importance of confidence and self-awareness for the young artist. Knowing who you are and appreciating your originality is vital for health and success.

And she added one final piece of wisdom: “Buy a pitch pipe. You’ll need it.”

Trent Blanton is an associate professor of theatre at Rider University. He is a member of Actors’ Equity, the Society of Directors and Choreographers, and the National Alliance of Acting Teachers. Currently the chair of SETC’s Acting Committee, he has been affiliated with the organization since 1992.
TOY THEATRE

Teachers Institute Provides Hands-On Lessons on Using Miniature Theatres to Teach Design
What if you could interest students in theatre design by having them create miniature theatres – complete with tiny figures, sets and costumes – and then have them present shows in those theatres?

That’s the concept being used in middle and high school classrooms by Robert Kallos, technical educator at The Hockaday School in Dallas, TX, who served as the keynote speaker for the Teachers Institute at the 2017 SETC Convention. Kallos has reached back to the 19th century to an art form called toy theatre to inspire young people’s interest in theatre design.

He brought his concept to the Teachers Institute, giving the educators who attended an opportunity to learn hands-on by crafting their own toy theatres, complete with figures, sets and costumes made from scraps of paper, fabric and cardboard.

**What Is Toy Theatre?**

Toy theatre is an art form that was popular in the 1800s as entertainment for children, who used the paperboard designs to put on shows for their families and friends. Originally toy theatres were manufactured replicas of shows being produced in London. They were sold as ready-to-assemble kits, typically including a stage, scenery, costumes and figures or characters, usually made from paper mounted on thin cardboard. At one time, over 300 shows had been reproduced as toy theatres.

Toy theatres provided inspiration to many children, including the writer Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote in 1884 about the joy that toy theatre brought to his childhood. In his essay, “Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured,” Stevenson describes his experience as a young boy standing outside the store that sold toy theatres in London: “In the Leith Walk window, all the year around, there stood displayed a theatre in working order, with a ‘forest set,’ a ‘combat,’ and a few ‘robbers carousing’ in the slides; and below and about, dearer tenfold to me the plays themselves, those budgets of romance, lay tumbled one upon another. Long and often I lingered there with empty pockets.”

After listing a long catalog of plays he had owned and performed, Stevenson went on to write, “In this roll-call of stirring names you read the evidences of a happy childhood; and though not half of them are still to be procured of any living stationer, in the mind of their once happy owner all survive, kaleidoscopes of changing pictures, echoes of the past.”

Toy theatres fell out of favor in England in the early 20th century, but have enjoyed resurgences of interest over the years since then. For example, actor Laurence Olivier made a toy theatre version of his film *Hamlet*; and director Julie Taymor used toy theatre in a scene in her 2002 movie *Frida.*

**Toy Theatre in the Classroom**

Kallos discovered toy theatre when he was awarded a summer travel grant to study theatre in London and Berlin by the Atlanta school where he taught at the time, The Galloway School. While in London, he found Pollock’s Toy Theatre Museum, which began his journey into the use and history of puppets and toy theatre.

“I was by myself in Pollock’s Museum, which is a creaky, dusty place, and I felt that I alone was discovering this world,” Kallos said. “Many stories were told in that little place, and I could see where I could go with the children and young adults in my classes.”

He purchased a toy theatre kit with a classic story about pirates to show his students. Later, after moving to another school, The Hockaday School in Dallas, he traveled to Germany to study shadow puppet theatre on a second grant and soon began devising lesson plans using both puppetry and toy theatre techniques to help his students explore theatre from a design perspective.

He uses toy theatre “to teach the whole design experience, from conception to build, in ways they can accomplish it. … Students learn how to make artistic..."
choices, and then they see the consequences of their choices.”

Kallos said he doesn’t worry about staying true to scale in developing the toy theatres.

“I just want the students engaged in the thinking about how to build the environment for the story and how to execute it,” he said.

The Hockaday School is an all-girls school, and Kallos said the toy theatre experience is “how I got a group of girls to join the technical theatre crew.” Because of the fully immersive process of toy theatre, his students are ready by high school to completely design the school’s musical.

**Teachers Learn Hands-On**

The participants in SETC’s Teachers Institute experienced a 90-minute “speed theatre” version of the nine-week toy theatre curriculum Kallos uses with his seventh grade students.

Here is the process Kallos uses with his students – and the steps the Teachers Institute participants took to learn Kallos’s technique:

1. Kallos begins his students’ exploration of toy theatre by dividing them into teams of three. They visit the library to read and select a story. “Journey” stories work best with students, Kallos said.

2. The Teachers Institute participants also divided into teams of three, and each team selected a multi-cultural creation story from books provided by Kallos.

3. After selecting the stories, the students work in their teams to write their plays, turning “toy theatre into a life-sized event,” Kallos said. Using a group project concept helps all of the students be engaged in the way that is meaningful for them, he said. It helps even the reluctant ones who tend to hide in the shadows find a place to feel safe and still be seen. The students “light up when allowed to make their own choices and decisions, and it strengthens their negotiating skills,” Kallos said.

4. Kallos guided the Teachers Institute participants along the same path that his young students take, with each team working together to create a play from the story that team members selected.

5. To assist in writing their plays, Kallos has his students make a storyboard that visually describes each scene. Then the students begin discussing the story and turning it into a script. The essentials of storytelling are followed along the pattern of beginning, middle and end, defining and resolving the conflict.

The Teachers Institute participants followed that same procedure, talking, scribbling and exchanging ideas as they wrote plays based on their chosen stories. After the script is complete, students begin construction of the figures, sets and costumes.

“The most important part of this phase is the construction of the figures,” Kallos said. “Within the limited time frame of a class, I ask the students to work on the characters first and then build toward the other elements. Using just the storyboard sketch they have created, if nothing else, they can still perform the story with only the characters.”

6. The Teachers Institute participants were provided with paper, scissors, cardboard, markers, fabric scraps and glue to construct the figures. Cardboard boxes were available to create performance spaces. The conversation in the room was electric as the teachers discussed their designs. Laughter and noisy sharing took over as each group worked diligently to prepare its presentation. Characters took shape, and individuals became part of the whole. The teachers were the students as Kallos went from table to table to encourage and applaud the collaboration.

7. Next up with Kallos’ students is a series of complete run-throughs to gauge the need for revisions to the script, designs and figures.

8. Following that same process, the Teachers Institute participants were able to see what worked and what didn’t as they rehearsed. The journey continued as each group rewrote, redesigned and rebuilt to make its performance more effective. Once teachers had worked together to compromise and focus their ideas, Kallos asked each group to do another run-through using its revised script. Following the second run-through, Kallos encouraged participants to understand and discuss the impact of the revisions on the overall performance. How did the changes impact the concepts of the group?

The final step for Kallos’ seventh graders is a performance for first grade students.

The Teachers Institute participants performed for each other. Having a full performance for an audience allows the students to “implement the refinement of the rehearsal” and “allows you to bring the project to conclusion,” Kallos said.

**The Power of Toy Theatre**

Through the process of writing and designing in miniature, students at The Hockaday School develop big ideas that enable them to collaborate effectively, negotiate gently and persuasively, and investigate the power of creative choices, Kallos said.

“What challenges the students is the responsibility of creating the entire universe of their stories, including words, visual images and the performance (body language),” Kallos said. “Merging these elements is engaging and challenging for the students. All three elements compete to guide the students’ decision-making. The process of going back and forth between the story and its visualization adds to their engagement while focusing on the complex choices that must be negotiated among the students. The action of performance informs the final decisions of the words and visual information of their stories.”

Elaine Malone, chair of SETC’s Teachers Institute, spent 36 years teaching and directing theatre. She met and worked with Robert Kallos while teaching high school at The Galloway School in Atlanta.
Ron Keller Receives SETC’s 2017 Suzanne Davis Award

This prestigious award was established following the death in 1964 of SETC member Suzanne Davis, costume designer for Unto These Hills and wife of SETC’s 10th president, Harry Davis. Because of Suzanne’s dedicated work for the organization (and the fact that that work, along with others’ work, was not being recognized publicly), Alvin Cohen, then owner of Paramount Theatrical Supplies in New York, approached the SETC president and said he wanted to sponsor an annual award in Suzanne’s name to honor her, as well as an individual who had given outstanding service to SETC. The board accepted the offer, and the Suzanne Davis Award was born.

Ron Keller, the 2017 recipient of the Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award, is the interim chair of theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), a scenic designer and a longtime member of United Scenic Artists. He became involved in SETC in 1984 and, after just a few years, became a life member. He served for six years as SETC’s chair of Design and Technology and three years as vice chair. Keller has also been a constant promoter of the SETC Graduate and Undergraduate Design Competitions. His students have garnered 59 awards at SETC, KCACfT and in the Richmond theatre community for their design work. He is particularly pleased to have seen so many students nurtured and encouraged by participating in the competition, whether they won or not. He was involved in the formation and launch of the SETC/USITT LiNK Auditions and is thrilled about the opportunities this has created for students. Ron is also pleased that his drawings were featured on the cover of the SETC design-tech book, Outside the Box.

Keller has worked as a scenic designer on more than 200 productions, and his work has been seen internationally in Kishinev, Moldova, Beijing and Shanghai. This year alone, he designed five shows for four SETC member theatres: The Crucible for the Clarence Brown Theatre at the University of Tennessee Knoxville, The End of War for Virginia Repertory Theatre, The Seagull and Stupid F**king Bird for Swine Palace at Louisiana State University, and Spamalot for Theatre VCU.

In fact, his work on Virginia Rep’s The End of War is what kept Keller away from this year’s SETC Convention. He sent the following note to be read at the Awards Banquet in his absence:

“My dear friends, I am so very sorry that I cannot be with you tonight, and I’m sure the fates are grinning and chuckling over the fact that this is one of only two conferences I have missed since 1984. Those of you who know me know that I am seldom at a loss for words, yet when I heard this extraordinary news I was reduced to babbling and feared I had actually dreamt the whole thing. Even now, a tear comes to my eye as I write to express my thanks to you and, as we all know, it is not nice to make old people cry.

“This honor is so completely unexpected; you could not have surprised me more. I wish to thank the Nominating Committee and the Board of Directors for even considering me, let alone bestowing this honor on me. I also want to thank the many, many friends I have made through SETC and to tell you how very much I admire you and the commitment you have so nobly made to becoming better artists, teachers and practitioners of our craft through the work of SETC.

“I have always loved being a part of this organization and have been pleased to be able to contribute in any way that I could. Somehow, it just doesn’t seem right that I should be recognized for doing what has been a labor of love these many years. I know for certain that I have received far, far more from being a part of SETC than I could ever give in return. Even though retirement is near, I very much look forward to finding more ways to serve this organization that has always meant so very much to me. Again my sincerest and most heartfelt gratitude to all of you.”

Keller is retiring from VCU this summer and, though he and husband Danny plan to travel extensively, he has already committed to designing two shows in early fall.
Erin Stoneking is a dramaturg and doctoral candidate in theatre arts at Cornell University. She holds a BA from UNC-Chapel Hill and an MA in Performance Studies from New York University.

**Abstract:** Paula Vogel’s play *A Civil War Christmas* construes the Civil War as the birth story of the United States, pointedly centering a runaway enslaved mother and her child as the holy family within a large and diverse ensemble. This paper argues that, in re-performing the Civil War onstage, Vogel’s play witnesses the traumatic past, even as it frequently and sentimentally elides the violence, racism, and aggressive sectionalism of history to imagine a better future in the present and in our own future. The play repeats the past, in other words, to revise it. Above all, *Civil War Christmas* enacts and bears witness to the persistence of the past in the present and the weight of the American Civil War in cultural and national memory. The play is not only commemorative of American history, but is invested in enlivening 19th-century history in the immediacy of live performance in order to define and maintain a broad, unified national identity in the present moment. In infusing the story of the Civil War with an anachronistic multicultural progressivism that ignores the time period’s harsher realities, Vogel presents a celebratory, therapeutic rehearsal – or, more literally, a pageant, in the sense of the word as “public celebration” or “religious drama” – of the United States as a united community, a nation that, though forged in blood, can achieve peace.

**Undergraduate Winner: WILL CONARD-MALLEY, Towards a New Theatre: Edward Gordon Craig and the Durable Drama**

Will Conard-Malley is a senior at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where he studies history, theatre and music.

**Abstract:** Edward Gordon Craig is perhaps best known for his theoretical writings about the theatre. This paper argues that while his writings are often associated with the first part of the 20th century, the ways in which he went about formulating them – especially with regard to his emphasis on non-Western performance traditions – reveals that he had more in common with the 19th-century imperialist mindset of conquest and exploitation. Craig’s decision to pick and choose elements of many East and Southeast Asian performance traditions and fuse them in new ways, with no regard to their original context or culture of origin, reflects a world view that is decidedly Eurocentric. While Craig was looking outside of Europe, he was doing so in order to reinvent Western theatre. He felt that East and Southeast Asian performance traditions preserved certain qualities that the ancient Greek theatre had possessed as well, and he believed that restoring these concepts – including the use of masks and puppets, as well as dance more than the spoken word – would create “durable drama” that would surpass time and location, becoming even more immortal than the works of Shakespeare. While Craig’s intent may have been admirable – to create a new type of theatrical performance – his method of execution was to appropriate from multiple, vastly different cultures, separating the elements from their original context and significance.

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