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How to Negotiate a Professional Contract

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Cover
The winner of our 2010 professional theatre cover contest is Cortland Repertory Theatre, in Cortland, NY, with a photo from Paul Rudnick’s I Hate Hamlet, presented June 17-27, 2009. Shown in the photo are Robert Boardman (left) as John Barrymore and Dustin Charles as Andrew Rally. Set design: Joseph Gourley. Costume design: Jimmy Johansmeyer. Lighting design: Shawn Boyle. Props design: Justin Peters. Director: Tony Capone. (Photo by David Blatchley; cover design by Deanna Thompson)
Acting Is CHEAP!

According to Aristotle, around 535 BC, Thespis stepped forward from a Greek chorus and spoke a character’s lines, thus earning himself immortality as the first actor. No mention was made of his compensation.

Long before that, the origins of theatre and acting consisted of ritual, myth and ceremony to enact successful hunts, the changing of seasons and the importance of life cycles. Mythologist Joseph Campbell asserts these performances were acted by village elders, priests and shamans. Again, no pay stubs exist to provide any salary reference.

About every three weeks, as head of BA and MFA performance programs, I receive a call or e-mail asking for student actors to appear in campus organization events, law school mock trials, community service agency programs, public re-enactments, locally produced independent films and other venues. Over time, I have learned to quickly ask: “Is there any compensation?”

My acting students are busy with their studies and performances; many have part-time jobs. I now don’t post notices for talent unless compensation is offered.

Having taught at large institutions in the Big Ten, Big Twelve and now the SEC, I’ve learned that every musical my departments have produced required the compensation of student musicians for orchestra. We pay students from other departments in the university to play at several rehearsals and during the performance run. Yet our own performers work 7-8 weeks, 20-24 hours per week, without any consideration of compensation. I’m not advocating universities pay actors (or am I?) but merely pointing out the imbalance.

In the professional theatre, actors are one of the last groups to be paid as a fledgling theatre emerges. Artistic directors, office managers, stage managers, designers and technicians are often the first to be offered a salary. The actors appear near the bottom of the food chain.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Just a quick note to say how impressed I was with the winter issue of Southern Theatre, and especially with Ray Paolino’s piece on internships and apprenticeships (From Classroom…to Profession). I found it informative and likely to be of considerable help to students considering such options.

URTA would add how important such activity is among its thirty-six member professional graduate schools when it comes to considering new students for their MFA acting programs. There is no question that undergraduates, or recent college graduates, who can refer to participation in intern programs of any length, substantially strengthen their pursuit of placement in competitive professional graduate programs. URTA strongly advocates internships as an interim step between undergraduate education and graduate training.

Further, apprenticeships at professional theatres are often an important part of each URTA school’s process to assist graduate actors with their transition into the workplace. Apprenticeships at major theatres, along with on-campus work with guest artists and eventual graduate showcases, are central to building both career skills and the professional network important to future employment in the field.

Scott L. Steele
Executive Director
University/Resident Theatre Association
New York, NY

The most recent salary report (2008-09) from Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) placed the median annual salary for its members at $7,688! Clearly, the market determines the value of actors, and the laws of supply and demand are in full play. Many actors would rather ply their craft for free than sit home watching reality TV. Yet what painter, sculptor or author would produce a piece and then give it away for free?

Historically, the actor has been the primary artist of the theatre, preceding even the playwright. We should teach our acting students to value their work. We should insist on their compensation when queried for talent by outside agencies. We should not volunteer them as “dog and pony” shows. We should encourage them now to insist on compensation for their services, so when they enter a new arena they will not be tempted or bullied into devaluing their work.

Alright, I admit… Thespis came cheap. Maybe he got a shiny gift. Shamans and priests had day jobs. But let’s give today’s actors the pre-eminence they deserve on the salary ladder.

Have an opinion you would like to share with your colleagues on a topic related to theatre? Send your column of 400 words or less to deanna@setc.org.

Clarification

In the chart on Pages 12-13 of the Winter 2010 Southern Theatre, the contract lengths given for apprenticeships/internships at some theatres were wrong, due to a line shift in survey results. See the corrected chart in the online version of Southern Theatre on the SETC website (www.setc.org). In addition, Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, PA, would like to note that it offers other apprenticeships besides those it listed on its survey form. See the online magazine for those additions as well.
SETC IS AT THE GATE … AND WE’RE OFF AND RUNNING TO LEXINGTON!
By now, you should have received your 2010 convention newspaper, and you can see that the schedule is packed with programs and opportunities for anyone and everyone.

If you’re an actor, you may be hoping to land a professional job at this year’s convention. And if you’re like a lot of aspiring or new professional actors, chances are you’ve spent some time fretting about contracts. Should you accept the salary offered or ask for more? What’s negotiable? What’s not? And if you’re offered an Equity contract, do you need to join Equity? It would be hard to find someone more qualified to answer those questions than Jerry Lapidus, the former company manager at Seaside Music Theater who, prior to that, was the business representative for developing theatre at Actors’ Equity Association. He shares advice from those dual perspectives in an article on how to negotiate a professional contract, beginning on Page 8.

Where do new musicals get developed? Increasingly, the answer is: on college and university campuses. In a story on Page 16, Tracey Moore shares how staged readings benefit writers, students, audiences and theatre in general. She also offers tips on how to start a staged reading series at your college or university.

Think you know Shakespeare? So did Kevin P. Kern, until he spent some time at an Alabama prison, educating 10 convicts on the bard. When his teaching stint ended, he realized he had learned as much from the prisoners as they learned from him. Read his story on Page 24.

The compensation of actors is the topic of our “400 Words” column. Ray Paolino, director of theatre at the University of Georgia, urges fellow teachers to instill in their students a sense of the value of their acting work. This issue also includes some great advice for those working in the design-tech area. In our regular “Outside the Box: Design-Tech Solutions” column, Jessica Thonen shares tips for creating faux carved wood. And in our regular book column, “Words, Words, Words…,” Chris Qualls reviews The Art of Clowning by Eli Simon.

The opportunities at this spring’s SETC Convention are just as varied as the stories in this magazine. Whether you are just out of the career gate or already at the winner’s circle, you’ll find something new to discover. From the beat of the movement classes to the glam of the red carpet banquet, Lexington is where you will want to be, and be seen, in March.
When Texas Shakespeare Festival in Kilgore, TX, produced *Arms and the Man*, the set designer imagined traditional Ottoman interiors, complete with luxurious carved wood detailing. From walls to chairs to beds to tables to poufs, everything needed to look hand-carved.

A typical technique for this type of design would be to create a 3-dimensional effect by carving the look into a medium such as foam (negative sculpting as the medium is taken away to create the piece). However, that would not work in this case because there was too much surface area to cover in a short amount of time with only a few technicians on hand, and purchasing that much foam would mean a hefty price tag.

Painting a faux carved-wood finish was not an option, due to the intimate character of the space, so we found ourselves searching for a miracle method that would be quick, cheap and convincing.

Rather than finding a material that we would carve away, we settled on a method that combined sculpting with paint. This positive sculpting technique (adding to the surface rather than taking away from the surface) also allowed us to take an environmentally-friendly approach that used reclaimed items, rather than foam that was purchased.

The end result met our goal perfectly. It was cheap, convincing and quickly created, with the added benefit of reducing the carbon footprint of the theatre! Here’s how we did it:

**Getting Started**

Begin by examining the surface where you will create the faux carved-wood look, making sure that the material you use is strong enough to accommodate this technique. We created the scenic units and almost all of the furniture in-house, making sure to provide a plywood or lauan surface ready to be stapled into. If you are not using pieces built in-house, be sure to find objects with wood surfaces that are sturdy enough to hold the applied textures.

**Gather Supplies**

The majority of the supplies that you will need will be scavenged, offering you both a cost-effective way to proceed as well as an opportunity to reuse/recycle items you might otherwise throw away.

First, collect small plastic soda bottles (16-ounce or 1-liter size). You will be using only the bottoms of these bottles to create the look of carved rosettes, and smaller sizes tend to be more convincing. You can make the collection of bottles a community project, placing collection containers in the rehearsal hall, scene shop, costume shop and prop shop. In our production, the collection spurred some friendly competition as people brought their oversized stashes of soda bottles into the shop and bragged about their commitment to the show! Once you’ve collected the bottles, measure two inches up from the bottom of the bottle and trim the lower portion off the bottles.

Second, locate some stiff fabric. Fabrics with the same weight or consistency as duck cloth work best. If your costume shop keeps remnants and is willing to share, you can achieve this without a trip to the fabric store. The color of the fabric is not important (it will be painted), but it must be stiff enough to stand away from the surface to which it is applied. While the paint will offer some rigidity after it dries, the fabric must be able to hold its shape on its own. In our case, we got everything that we needed from the costume shop. Once you have the fabric, you need to cut it into 4-inch strips.

Third, find some artificial grapes. We were able to scavenge these from past
props. You will not need many: one bunch is enough for a two-foot by two-foot area.

Fourth, purchase some latex paint, the magical ingredient for this process. You will need three tones: Wood-Shadow (dark), Wood-Medium and Wood-Highlight (white or yellow). The fabric will suck up more of the paint than you might imagine. Since you will be painting the fabric with the Wood-Shadow paint first, be sure to buy more than you think you will need.

Fifth, locate or purchase some two-inch screws for attaching the soda bottles, plus some ¼-inch staples and a staple gun for attaching the fabric and the grapes.

**Create the Positive Relief**

Begin by planning the design that you will apply. Once it is onstage, the specifics of it will become less obvious, but a balanced look is crucial to create a convincing end result. Our designer provided us with copious pages of research, images of furniture and wall details from the Ottoman Empire. These proved extremely helpful in planning the application of materials.

The rosettes will become the focal point of most of the carved surfaces, so you should apply these first. Each of our rosettes was applied to the wood with one screw through the center of the soda bottle bottom.

Next, apply the heavyweight fabric. Gather the fabric at one end of your four-inch strip so that it is only about an inch wide, and staple it to the surface in a bunched manner. Then, begin tightly twisting the fabric and stapling it to the surface to create the carved patterns on the surface. Staple the fabric close to the bottom of the twist so that you do not lose the height of the effect. The twists should create the look of carved spirals. If they don’t, you may be twisting too tightly or too loosely.

Finally, break the bunches of grapes apart, separating them into smaller portions of three, four or five grapes on a stem. Tuck

(Continued on Page 31)
How to Negotiate a Professional Contract

Don't Sign Yet!
When performers are offered a job, they are usually so thrilled that their first inclination is to simply sign whatever a producer gives them, no questions asked. I can’t blame anyone for that response, but for your own sake, please try to control that impulse. If you negotiate in a simple, direct and business-like manner, chances are very good that you can improve the conditions beyond any original offer. Especially when you’re first starting out, you may find there is no more money available. However, a wide variety of other items may be negotiable, and even a new, young performer will often be able to do better than the original offer. Remember this basic rule: If you do not ask, you certainly will not get.

For every job you consider, before you begin the process of negotiating with the employer, you need to negotiate with yourself. You need to decide what is important to you, what matters to you. Is it just the money? Is it the chance to work at that particular theatre or for that particular director or to do that particular role? Is it the chance to work in Florida in February? Is it the opportunity to work with or near your significant other? Only you can make these determinations, and clearly, they will vary with every job. But you cannot negotiate intelligently with an employer until you know what you want from the job, and what you are willing to give up to get it.

Get everything in writing.

Whatever you do, remember to have everything put in writing and signed by both sides. Never simply accept an employer’s word that something is “standard.” If it’s not a union contract, nothing is “standard,” and even a union contract may have added riders not approved by the union. For most union or guild agreements, the employer must sign first. Be very careful to read every document through to the end, including any and all riders, and if there’s anything in the contract you don’t understand, ask. Be 100 percent comfortable with every contract you sign.

You can negotiate a ‘standard’ contract.

If you’re signing a union contract, remember that a union contract is a MINIMUM agreement; you can add and should negotiate any extras that you can get. Even a “standard” Equity contract – such as a League of Resident Theatres (LORT) or Council of Stock Theatres (COST) agreement – often has riders. And even Sedition Theatre contract – Small Professional Theatre, Letter of Agreement and others – is individually negotiated, with its own specific terms and conditions. This may be based on (the Equity term is “referenced to”) a standard Equity contract, but there may be massive changes, concessions and special conditions.

Read the contract, riders and rule book.

You need to see the specific contract you’re being asked to sign, including all riders. You also need to read a copy of the applicable union rule book. If you are working on a union contract, you are entitled to have a copy of the rule book and to receive advice from union staff.

Seek help, if needed, from an Equity rep.

There are business representatives in each Equity office who are, at least in theory, experts on the various contracts. If there is anything unclear in the rule book or the contract you’re being asked to sign, consult the appropriate Equity representative in your nearest office. Make sure you write down the names of any union representatives that you speak with, in case of future problems.

GENERAL TIPS

For every job you consider, before you begin the process of negotiating with the employer, you need to negotiate with yourself. You need to decide what is important to you, what matters to you. Is it just the money? Is it the chance to work at that particular theatre or for that particular director or to do that particular role? Is it the chance to work in Florida in February? Is it the opportunity to work with or near your significant other? Only you can make these determinations, and clearly, they will vary with every job. But you cannot negotiate intelligently with an employer until you know what you want from the job, and what you are willing to give up to get it.

Let’s start with money

I’ll say it again: Know yourself. You have to decide how badly you want the job before you can effectively negotiate about the salary. Keep in mind, though, that these are difficult economic times and, even in the best of times, you may not be able to get what you want.

Don’t assume this is the final offer.

It’s the responsibility of the employer to bring in a cast at the lowest possible cost, especially at a nonprofit theatre. So chances are, the first offer isn’t the final offer. You aren’t being offered a job out of the goodness of the producer’s heart. You’re being offered the job because you auditioned for it, and the Powers That Be decided that you were right for the job. They want YOU. So you should start out by assuming that you are being low-balled, that there is more money available if you ask for it. We’re not talking a higher
order of magnitude, but certainly another $25 or $50 per week may well be possible if you ask for it. How much you ask for, of course, depends on the size of the theatre and the size of the contract. There’s a big difference between a LORT “A” salary and an SPT Category 1 salary, and how you negotiate depends upon what level of salary we’re talking about.

State your requests cordially.

Once you’ve set the specific parameters discussed above, you’re ready to negotiate. Be cordial and respectful. Make it clear that you are interested in the job, but that you’d like the employer to consider an additional “X” in salary. If the employer says no right away – and she might, especially in today’s tight economy – then you can proceed to ask about the various other terms and conditions below.

Have a timetable for response.

If you get a “we’ll get back to you” response from the employer, be sure to set specifics on when that call will come. Always be sure the employer is clear on your interest. You want the job; now you’re just discussing the money, terms and conditions. If the producer can’t improve the offer, you need to make sure he contacts you, to give you the chance to accept the job at the original offer.

What you want to avoid is a situation where the producer hangs up with you and then immediately calls the next person on his list. No matter how well you do your part, that can still happen, but you probably don’t really want to work for such a person.

Understand the ‘Favored Nations’ clause.

Make sure you understand the ins and outs of the very common “Favored Nations” clause. In its most basic sense, this means that a performer who signs such a clause will get the same salary (and possibly more, see below) as everyone else in the show. For the performer signed to such an agreement, it means that you benefit from whoever negotiates best, as you’re assured that your salary will be the same as theirs.

A producer hiring a number of stars can obviously use a “Favored Nations” clause to keep his costs down – getting all the stars to agree to the same salary – but that’s not your situation when you are starting out.

If you ask for or agree to “Favored Nations,” you must be specific. Request it not just for salary, but also for travel, transportation, housing and “all other terms and conditions.”

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“Favored Nations” clauses can be written to exclude certain roles while still covering others. If you’re in Camelot, for example, cast as Chorus, and playing the chorus part of Sir Dinadan, you’re unlikely to be able to get the same salary as Arthur, Lancelot and Guenevere, but you can reasonably ask for a “Favored Nations” agreement excluding these three roles.

“Favored Nations” clauses are not standard in Equity contracts. However, if you do sign a “Favored Nations” clause in a rider to your Equity contract, Equity will do its best to enforce it for you, at least in terms of salary, which is all it normally sees. You will be on your own to monitor all other terms and conditions your fellow cast members get, to be sure you’re being treated as the clause requires. If you discover you’re not treated equally and the producer is nonresponsive, you then can go to Equity for assistance, as long as you’ve made sure the clause is written to cover these other areas of compensation. If it’s not a union contract, you’ll have to be especially vigilant to ensure you receive the perquisites you expected.

Realize salary may not be negotiable.

While it is possible to negotiate a higher salary than is included in the original offer, many performers have greater success in negotiating higher on other parts of the contract. Giving you a salary increase will in most cases increase additional costs for your employer. For example, if you’re on a union contract, the employer will probably pay pension and/or health benefits based on a percentage of your salary. The higher the salary, the higher the percentage. In addition, if you’re being hired as an employee of the theatre – as you should, in most situations, although some theatres still get away with hiring actors as independent contractors – the employer must pay employee benefits such as Social Security taxes and unemployment insurance, based on a percentage of your salary.

Negotiating out-of-town jobs

Travel and transportation on out-of-town jobs are areas that might provide a better opportunity for you to improve the original offer.

Ask about travel allowances.

Travel – getting from your home to the job – is usually a one-time expense, so if the employer can’t offer you a salary increase, she may well be willing to increase your travel stipend or allowance. The increase may be only $25 or $50 more than the original offer, but that’s $25 or $50 more than you had. Alternatively, she may have an arrangement with a travel agent or airline to provide free or discounted tickets. If you haven’t been offered tickets or a travel stipend, be sure to ask about what may be available.

If you’re driving your own vehicle, obviously you can ask for mileage and/or other travel expenses, again on a one-time basis.

Request a round-trip ticket.

Be careful, especially on non-union, out-of-town jobs, that you receive a round-trip ticket or the cash equivalent before you leave home, barring extraordinary situations. You don’t want to begin your job having to beg for the money you were promised, or worse, end up stranded if the producer folds up his tent and disappears in the night.

Ask about on-site transportation.

If you don’t have your own vehicle and your housing is not within walking distance of the job, you will need some way of getting to and from work. A union contract will contain specific minimum terms, but once again, you’re free to ask for something better. Can the producer get you your own car? If not, perhaps he can guarantee that you will share a car with only one or two other people, rather than with a half dozen actors. The producer may have a car rental agency as a sponsor, so his additional cost for this may be minimal. However, you won’t get this unless you ask for it.

Consider housing and per diem.

You also need to ask for what you need in housing or per diem payments. Equity contracts generally

EQUITY CONTRACTS: DECODE THE ALPHABET SOUP

To learn more about Equity contracts, visit the Actors’ Equity Association website at www.actorsequity.org/benefits/contractbenefits.asp.

The website includes explanations of various contracts (and salary levels) you may be offered, including the following common ones:

LORT: League of Resident Theatres Agreement, used by not-for-profit professional regional theatres in the U.S.
COST: Council of Stock Theatres Agreement, used for non-resident dramatic or musical stock by commercial or not-for-profit theatres.
SPT: Small Professional Theatre Agreement, used by theatres with less than 350 seats in locations other than New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.
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require private sleeping spaces, but that is not true on all union contracts, or even all Equity agreements. If your privacy is important to you, don’t be afraid to ask for it. If your contract doesn’t include kitchen facilities (or other amenities, such as television or Internet access), ask for them.

Per diem – money paid by your employer each day to cover your living expenses – is likely to be a difficult issue because, like salary, this is direct money paid out by the employer. You can ask for more, but don’t be surprised to lose on this one. Further, keep in mind that under a union contract, “minimum per diem” – the level of per diem called for in the contract – is treated differently than any higher per diem you may negotiate. The higher amount negotiated is treated as additional salary, and thus is subject to pension and health payments, employee benefit payments and, for you, union dues payments.

You’ve Been Offered an Equity Contract … What Now?
by Jerry Lapidus

After yet another round of auditions, you get a call from your local LORT theatre, offering you your first Equity contract! Of course, you’re thrilled, but what exactly does this mean to you? You need the job, but should you join Actors’ Equity now?

If you’re a young actor just out of school, maybe even still in school, you need to think very carefully before taking that major step. What you need most right now is to work at professional theatres – to improve both your resume and your acting experience. You need to make sure that Equity membership doesn’t get in the way of doing that.

As a non-Equity actor, you can work at most theatres throughout the country. Virtually all Equity theatres outside of New York and Chicago (and even some theatres there) can hire non-Equity actors. Most do so, sometimes in large numbers. Of course, there are also many non-Equity theatres that pay a salary or fee to performers.

What’s the argument against joining Equity as a young performer?

Once you join Equity, you can work ONLY on Equity contract, either at Equity theatres or by special agreements. While there are more such options now for Equity actors to work at non-Equity theatres on Guest Artist Agreements or Special Appearance Agreements than there were in the past, there is no question that joining Equity can seriously limit your options.

So does that mean you have to turn down that Equity contract you were offered?

Not necessarily! In many cases, you can sign an Equity contract, receive a full Equity salary and benefits, and not have to join Equity at all, thanks to Right-to-Work laws. Those laws are in effect in 22 states, including the entire South, Texas and much of the Midwest. You can check online to find out if the theatre offering you the job is located in a Right-to-Work state. If so, feel free to sign the Equity contract – remember, you can always negotiate for more than Equity minimum – and when you get a letter from Equity inviting you to become a member, you simply explain that you are invoking your rights under that state’s Right-to-Work laws not to join at this time.

What if your job isn’t in a Right-to-Work state?

Then you need to carefully evaluate your situation. If you’ve done so and decided you don’t really want to join Equity right now, you can certainly ask the producer if he will hire you as a non-Equity actor instead. It may be hard to turn down the Equity membership you’ve waited for, but in the long run, this might be your best choice.

What happens if I decide to join Equity?

If you do choose to sign an Equity contract, you will receive a letter from Equity inviting you to become a member. After you join, your employer will get a letter from Equity instructing her/him to withhold money for dues and initiation fees from your salary. Until your initiation fee is paid in full, you are not considered a full Equity member. In practical terms, there’s a good chance Equity won’t get around to making this request until after you’ve worked at the theatre for a while, or even after you’ve finished the job. Although you technically owe Equity your full initiation fee when you join, the folks at Equity won’t really worry about it until your next job on Equity contract, when your producer will again get that letter.

Jerry Lapidus was the longtime company manager at Seaside Music Theater in Daytona Beach, FL, and prior to that was the business representative for developing theatre at Actors’ Equity Association for eight years. He is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
very significant exception. Virtually all contracts for Developing Theatres – for example, Small Professional Theatre contracts and Letters of Agreement – and some other contracts that pay less than LORT salaries have “More Remunerative Employment” (MRE) clauses. These MRE clauses allow you to leave your Equity contract – for a short time, or permanently – if you get a higher-paying job in the business. This can free you to do a quick TV or film project, or even allow you to leave a low-paying Equity job to take, for example, a national tour. There are specific terms and restrictions, varying with each contract. For example, you may be required to give a certain amount of notice or not leave within a specified time of opening. As long as you pay attention to these terms, the employer has no choice. He must let you out, and he must take you back.

The vast majority of union jobs performers get early in their careers will be in such theatres, so be prepared to deal with these issues. Now, being realistic, you may want to think twice before invoking these MRE clauses, especially to get out of a contract completely. Even though the employer is contractually bound to let you go, it doesn’t mean he’s going to like it or be prepared for it. If you’re playing Hamlet in such a theatre, chances are it won’t have an acceptable understudy, if it has one at all, whatever the union rules say. MRE may allow you to leave, but your departure may close or significantly damage the production, leading to a loss of employment for your fellow actors and resentment on the part of the theatre. You may still choose to leave, but you need to be aware of the reputation you create. In this business, “what goes around comes around,” so think twice before you invoke such clauses.

Avoid exclusivity clauses.

Be especially wary of “exclusivity” clauses that do not allow you to work anywhere else for a given time period, even after the show closes or you leave the production. Avoid anything that requires a buy-out from you, i.e., that requires you to pay the employer a specified sum or number of weeks’ salary if you want to leave your contract early.

### OTHER NEGOTIABLE ISSUES

On the “you-can-negotiate-anything” grounds, I’ll mention billing, house seats and dressing rooms. But frankly, my first reaction is, “Are you out of your mind?” If you’re in the early stages of your career, you really shouldn’t be worried about your billing or with how many people you have to share your dressing room or how many house seats you get.

However, if these are things that really matter to you, you can bring them up. A common negotiating technique is to include a number of issues on which you’re willing to give in, allowing you to push harder on those points you really care about getting.

#### FINAL ADVICE: AGENTS

If you are lucky enough to have an agent early in your career, you need to be aware that there may be pitfalls as well as advantages associated with this relationship.

As a rule, you will find that most agents have relatively little interest in low-paying, out-of-town theatre jobs. Since they get a percentage of your salary, they don’t get much money from theatre jobs that are low on the payscale. Their greatest interest is usually to keep you in town to audition for more lucrative film, TV and theatre jobs rather than helping you get the low-paying job in Podunk that you may want badly. Often, they don’t even bother to communicate low-level jobs to you.

It is therefore vital that your agent allows you to be the one making the decision to turn down any possible jobs. Yes, they can recommend all they like, but you have to be the one deciding. Don’t hesitate to say those words agents hate to hear, “Don’t lose this for me.” This should be your decision, not the agent’s decision.

Moreover, many agents don’t seem to understand nonprofit theatre. They’re often so used to getting more money from commercial producers that they use the same techniques on nonprofit producers, who may well have no more money to give.

If an agent has negotiated with a nonprofit producer and been told this is the final offer, all too often he will end the conversation with, “Come up with another $25, and call me back.” The producer will then call the next name on his list, and you will have lost the job. Don’t let this happen to you! Make sure your agent has clear instructions, and that you make the final decision on each and every job.

What if an agent wants you to sign something that you don’t want to sign? Three guesses. Never sign anything that you’re uncomfortable with, even if it means losing a job or an agent. Also, remember

(Continued on Page 31)
A different kind of education...

The theatre program at Clemson University combines the excitement of performance, design, playwriting, directing, criticism, and dramaturgy in an academically challenging environment. While our majors do specialize, they participate in every aspect of a theatrical event: actors design, writers act, and directors write. The Department of Performing Arts exposes students to a wide variety of theatrical challenges and endeavors.

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Western Kentucky University students perform as an ensemble in a staged reading of Greenbrier Ghost, with book by Susan Murray and music and lyrics by Clay Zambo. The musical, based on a true story about a young woman’s mysterious death, was presented as a staged reading at WKU’s Russell Miller Theatre in March 2009.
Staged readings of new musicals on campus serve as ‘out-of-town tryouts’ for writers, provide education and professional contacts for students, and create good PR for your school.

by Tracey Moore

I’ve got a to-do list the length of my arm: Contact newspapers, arrange for radio interviews, copy scripts, buy music stands and black binders, put together a flyer, tune the piano, hold callbacks, arrange for airline tickets, order food for the reception, get the second song transposed down a third, remind everyone to wear black, write the grant justification.... And then I stop, and I think, “Why am I doing all this?”

“This” is putting on a premiere of a new musical theatre piece in the form of a staged reading for one performance only, after 10 days – roughly 40 hours – of rehearsal. The reason I do it is because, despite the effort, I think it is tremendously valuable for my students, beneficial for writers and for the theatre community as a whole, educational for my audience and a great PR event for my university.

In 2010, we’ll present the third annual event in the “Before Broadway” series I started at Western Kentucky University after joining the faculty in 2007. “Before Broadway” has included two new musicals presented in a staged-reading format with the writers in residence: Chipper, a re-telling of the Cinderella story, written by John Thomas Oaks; and Greenbrier Ghost, a true story of a murderer brought to justice, written by Clay Zambo.
and Susan Murray. In March, Shakespearean drama meets High School Musical when we present Like You Like It, written by Sammy Buck and Dan Acquisto.

At WKU, we’ve found that staged readings are fast, cheap and easy to do. The limited rehearsal schedule means that you don’t have time to build a set or costumes. You can add a hat, if you want, or a bowtie, but mostly everyone dresses in black and holds a black, 3-ring binder. You don’t have to rehearse an orchestra (though you can add drums or bass if it’s easy). Mostly, it’s chairs, music stands and a piano on a blank – if lighted – stage.

Other universities that have programs involving students in the development of new musical works include Pace University in New York City, Pennsylvania State University, Oklahoma City University and Yale University. (See sidebar, Page 21, for more information on these programs).

So why are colleges and universities getting in the business of musical theatre development? And how can you tap into this trend with your own series? Let’s start with a trip back in musical theatre history to see how we got to this point.

Musical theatre history reveres the tradition known as the out-of-town tryout. The idea seems quaint to us now, but it used to be that a show headed for Broadway first spent some time in metropolitan areas like Philadelphia, New Haven or Boston so that writers and directors could tinker with it, away from New York critics and other prying eyes. If there were mistakes – and there usually were! – the out-of-town tryout was the place and time for writers to rewrite.

Now, of course, the Internet has made it impossible to really go “out of town.” Today, everyone knows everything, and there are pictures and video clips, too. One of the first shows to fall victim to the reach of the Internet was Seussical, whose tryout in Boston in the late 1990s coincided with the rise in popularity of online chatrooms. Online gossip about the show in a popular Broadway chatroom – some of it true, some exaggerated – affected the show’s opening and reviews in New York.

As the out-of-town tryout went by the wayside, workshops and programs that “develop” shows...
took their place. When I moved to New York right after college, I discovered the Lehman Engel/BMI Workshop, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the New York University (NYU) Graduate Writing Program, the Musical Writers’ Playground, the New Dramatists Composer/Librettist Studio and other workshops that offer an opportunity to “try out” material in front of a small audience (with only a piano and a singer or two), and get some reactions.

But soon, like the old-fashioned, out-of-town tryout, these workshops were no longer a “safe” space. Today, Broadway performers do the demo albums, the sit-down readings and the new works festivals. It used to be that writers called on talented friends to read the parts; now some workshops have high-powered casting agents. Workshops are the new “Off-Broadway,” where you can hear Idina Menzel and discover an up-and-coming writer at the same time.

But with the out-of-town tryout gone by the wayside, and an increase in publicity for the writer’s workshops, something important was lost. Writers no longer had a place to make mistakes. The bottom line is that having an audience helps writers learn how to write a show, or at least how to fix one. Audience response can tell you whether a joke works or doesn’t, whether a song needs a better button or whether a lyric makes a character likable enough.

That’s where staged readings at universities come into the picture. University theatre programs have become a new, safe place for writers, a place where they can make mistakes and learn from them – in front of an audience.

**STUDENTS, WRITERS BENEFIT**

Staged readings are a win-win situation for students and writers because connections are made, learning takes place and good work gets a fair hearing.

When I do a show on my campus, I ask the writers to come, if they’re available. This means I have to get funding from somewhere, but it’s well worth it. If the composer is available and can play the piano, I ask him or her to accompany the show. And while the writers are on campus, we make the most of their visit. Composers visit our music department and teach a composition class or two. Professor Michael Kallstrom, my colleague in the WKU music department, says that meeting a working music theatre composer “expose[s] the kids to yet another facet of the larger musical world.”

Sometimes writers visit a class in the English department. They participate in my music theatre classes. We visit local radio stations, TV stations and the campus newspaper, and I brag that this New York writer has chosen our program to premiere his or her work. (Although a bit of hyperbole, this creates great publicity for my school and my department, and so
Learn the craft of writing dramatic works and study the collaborative art of theatre during our six-week intensive schedule—and earn an M.F.A. in playwriting in just a few summers. You’ll work closely with such guest artists as Ruth Margraff, Naomi Wallace, and Mac Wellman and form professional relationships that can lead to reading and production credits before graduation—a potent formula few other programs offer. Call us at (540) 362-6326. Visit us at www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting.
I like to think of new musicals growing in academic settings as similar to those inner-city school programs where kids grow and harvest their own carrots for lunch. It’s good for my musical theatre students to understand that songs—and shows—come from writers creating multiple drafts over long periods of time. Shows are “watered” by the input of individual actors, directors, and musicians, and develop with each presentation. When a student in a reading does something that gets written into the script, it’s a thrill—and empowering.

Ellen Murrey, a student who was involved in WKU’s most recent reading, is one of those who influenced the production through her creative input.

“I just wanted to say again, thank you for giving me this opportunity!” she wrote in an e-mail after the staged reading. “I had never worked on a new musical before, and I appreciate that you had enough faith in me to allow me to have such an impact. I had so much fun and learned so much from this experience!”

I have also found that smaller roles in a staged reading are an excellent “entry-level” experience for my younger actors, who gain confidence from performing in front of an audience without having to let go of their script. It’s like riding a bike with training wheels, and they’re better for it.

2 Use a variety of resources to find a show.

There are a number of ways to locate a show for a staged reading. You can start by looking locally (nearly every town has someone who aspires to be the next Richard Rodgers). Or you can reach out to colleagues in the music department and your theatre department who might have connections. If you’re near a larger town with a regional theatre, you can contact the literary managers at those theatres and ask for advice or author recommendations (or pieces from their files which were rejected for one reason or another).

More Information on New Musical Staged Reading Series at Colleges and Universities

Following is information from the Web about new musical staged reading programs at several colleges and universities:

**Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City, OK**
www.okcu.edu/music/newsletter/BrokenLeg2009.doc

OCU began its student-run staged reading series called the OCU Stripped New Musicals Series in 2006. “Each semester a Stripped event is mounted.... Fall is an established musical and the Spring brings us what would best be called a ‘record jacket walk-thru’ of four new works.”

**Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA**
www.psunewmusicals.psu.edu/

“The Penn State New Musical Theatre Festival is an annual new works festival that allows up-and-coming composers, lyricists, and book writers to workshop their original musical theatre pieces at the Penn State University Park Campus. Four musical theatre pieces are chosen each year to be workshopped and performed (typically as a staged reading).”

**Pace University, Pace New Musicals:., New York, NY**
www.pace.edu/page.cfm?doc_id=28412

“The chosen piece will be given a full reading in the Schaeberle Theater at Pace University in lower Manhattan, with actors chosen from the musical theater student body.... Our objective is to nurture the creation of new musical theater in New York City and to provide an invaluable educational opportunity to our students to work directly with top professionals in the field.”

**Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY**

The “Before Broadway” series features a full-length musical theatre piece performed as a staged reading in the Russell Miller Theatre in the Fine Arts Center on the WKU campus, with writer(s) in residence. Contact theatreanddance@wku.edu for more information.

**Yale University, New Haven, CT**
http://drama.yale.edu/YIMT/

Yale Institute for Music Theatre (YIMT) was “established to identify distinctive and original music theatre works by emerging composers and writers, and match them with collaborators who can help them further develop their work in an unpressured workshop setting. In particular, the Institute seeks to provide the human resources to support writers in their own processes, including professional directors and music directors, and a company of actors and singers that includes professionals from NYC and current Yale students.”

- Deanna Thompson
You can also go further up the food chain to writing workshops, such as the graduate musical theatre writing program at NYU, the BMI Lehman Engel Workshop, New Dramatists or ASCAP.

If you’ve got the time and funding, you can attend festivals put on by such groups as the New York Musical Theatre Festival, National Alliance for Musical Theatre or the Academy for New Musical Theatre, and pick something you like. At the least, you should put your name on all these programs’ list-serves by calling or e-mailing them.

You can also place your name in the Dramatists Sourcebook, published every two years by the Theatre Communications Group (visit tcg.org), or contact the Dramatists Guild to put an ad in its newsletter. Either of these publications will bring you lots of submissions.

Create and circulate submission guidelines.

Make it easier on yourself by being specific about what you are seeking when you advertise for submissions. Pace New Musicals looks for shows that have not yet had a professional production, but which are finished. WKU handles only finished material, as well. On the other hand, the Yale Institute for Music Theatre presented three works this summer in very different stages of completion: One piece was an opera with only five scenes written, another was a musical that had never been read and the other one was a musical that was ready for full production.

Craft submissions guidelines that:
- Specify whether you’re looking for family-friendly, traditional or avant-garde pieces.
- Specify how material should be submitted (such as online or on CD).
- Note whether the full script should be submitted. (Some schools ask for three songs and a synopsis rather than full scripts and recordings.)
- Specify cast size, if appropriate, or ask for a cast breakdown with vocal ranges.
- Clearly indicate any payments or fees, residencies or accompaniment expectations.
- Ask for writers’ bios or resumes.
- Ask for proof of rights and permissions. (For example, if it’s a musical version of The Matrix, they’ll need to secure the rights to adapt it.)
- Give a deadline and/or date when writers will be notified of acceptance.
- Include your address or other contact info, such as your website.

Enlist others to help select shows.

Reading scripts can be challenging. Most likely, you’ll kiss a lot of “frogs” before you finally find a “prince.” Some schools have a committee that oversees submissions and shares the reading (and listening) load.

Choose a piece that is fairly simple.

Bear in mind that you want a show that is complex enough that audience members are engaged in (rather than three steps ahead of) the action, but not so complicated that they can’t follow the story. Musically, the piece must be interesting enough to hold the audience’s attention (it shouldn’t have too many or too few reprises) but it should still be “gettable” on first listen. Shows that are too musically complicated will frustrate the audience, and they will quit listening.

Choose your location.

Choose an intimate setting for the performance, where the audience feels close to, and part of, the action. I’ve seen readings take place on the sets of other shows, in library auditoriums and in rehearsal rooms.

Volume and articulation are vital to your success, so move the piano to the back if necessary. You can choose to amplify, but it should not be necessary. You are asking the audience to listen, as with a radio play, so make sure actors’ voices can be heard. You also want their faces to be seen. This means that lighting is essential, although generally light cues for a staged reading are very simple: general stage lights up and down.

You will need:
- a room with a playing area, and a place for the audience.
- a cast that is vocally and facially expressive, since the story is being told with a minimum of action.
- stage lights, a piano with a piano light, and actors.
- a narrator to fill in the gaps and read stage directions, since the show won’t be staged.
- a music director/pianist (sometimes the composer can do this), and a director. (Yes, even if the actors only sit and stand, you’ll still need someone to coordinate.)

If you’re looking to involve more people and increase the educational benefits of the reading, you can ask students to serve in additional roles: as literary manager (someone who reads submissions and helps
It’s time to stop pretending that there’s no difference between stage and film acting.

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SCHOOLED AT

HOLMAN

What 10 Prisoners Taught Me About Shakespeare
I exchanged my driver’s license and car keys for a pink tag and walked slowly down a cinderblock hallway. An electric current buzzed, and the yellow metal door that stood between 1,000 convicted felons and me opened. I walked through as the uniformed guard pulled it closed behind us. I heard the unmistakable sound of the iron door latching, and that was it. I was in prison.

The Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, AL, houses 998 inmates, including a high percentage of convicts serving life without the possibility of parole – or, in the prison lingo that I would soon learn, simply “life without.” The facility also houses a faith-based honors dormitory in which prisoners may petition to live in order to raise their standard of living, even if only slightly. Set within the prison walls, this dorm-style building is home to 50 men whose crimes include burglary and murder and everything in between. I was there to teach 10 of them all I knew about William Shakespeare.

At the end of my five-month class, I discovered that the men inside Holman Correctional Facility had taught me as much about Shakespeare as I had taught them, and maybe more. What follows are the lessons that I learned under the tutelage of the fellas: Daytime, ‘Nardo, Bishop, Booker, Big Mike and the rest of the men locked inside Holman.

Lesson #1: RICHARD BURBAGE DID NOT TAKE A CLASS IN IAMBIC PENTAMETER.

Because I am an academic, I could not conceive of teaching a course in acting Shakespeare without several hours of class spent discussing the verse in which he wrote. “It would be heresy,” I once opined at a faculty meeting, “not to ground the students in the discipline of the verse. It’s there for a reason!” But my classes in the prison were relatively short, because they were sandwiched between the afternoon count (which is exactly what it sounds like) and mail call, a time when it is understandably hard to keep the men focused on anything not having to do with letters from family, clergy or lawyers. So I skipped my trusty Iambic Pentameter lecture – in which I lead students to discover it’s the same rhythm as the heartbeat – and jumped right into the text. “After all,” I reasoned, “it’s not like I’m going to give a test.”

To my great surprise and delight, the men found the natural rhythms on their own, without prompts from the instructor. They discovered the commanding cadence of Richard III’s “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!” quite easily, placing the stressed beats correctly and escalating the line until the final horse rang out like a cannon shot. While reciting Othello’s line, “It is the cause, it is the cause my soul...” ‘Nardo instinctively stressed each cause, changing his intonation slightly with each repetition to suggest that he was trying to convince himself of the rightness of what he was about to do. There was a golden moment one afternoon during a chat when Bishop stopped the conversation about A Midsummer Night’s Dream. He noted with a smile that the guard posted near us had delivered his agitated warning to me – “We’re gonna start the mail at ten ‘til two” – in the same rhythm as Puck’s disconcerted warning to the fairy: “The king doth keep his revels here tonight.” Both lines were meant to hurry things along by noting something more important was soon to take place: in my case, mail call; in Puck’s case, Oberon’s reveling. Bishop heard the similar clipped, quick delivery within the rhythm of both lines.

On my drive home that day, I started thinking that perhaps I have been too prescriptive in teaching verse. Maybe the verse should be allowed to happen, without heavy-handed coaching from the director. What did the actors do before we developed courses on handling verse? One would presume they simply spoke the speech.

Lesson #2: PERSONALIZATION IS THE KEY TO COMPREHENSION.

In Respect for Acting, Uta Hagen notes: “Your own identity and self-knowledge are the main sources for any character you may play. Most human emotions have been experienced by each of us by the time we are eighteen.”

Using that mathematical formula, one can imagine the wealth of life experience that men who have been locked inside a penitentiary could bring to the rehearsal table. Most of my Holman students committed their crimes as young men – some as teenagers – and are now well into their 30s and 40s. Before knowing much of his background, I gave Daytime the Henry V speech before Harfleur. It is one of my favorites, and I thought he might...
enjoy the passionate exhortation of the king to his weary men just before the battle. I knew I was on to something when his eyes brightened as he read the opening passage: “Once more into the breech dear friends, once more.” But he read it differently than other Henrys I’ve heard; he cajoled them, he gently teased them, he playfully teased them in a way that I never would have directed it. AND IT WORKED.

Daytime instinctively knew that a challenge to the soldier’s lineage – “Dishonor not your mothers; now attest that those whom you call fathers did beget you” – could be a very efficient motivational tool to use on a young man. He sensed that Henry and his men took the moniker band of brothers from the earlier St. Crispin’s Day speech literally, and that the young king’s address worked better if he was not talking to thousands of nameless strangers but to an intimate few men who were bound by blood. How did he know this? Before his incarceration, Daytime had been involved with a gang for eight years and eventually found himself as their leader. Growing up black in urban Alabama, his gang was both his life and lifeline, and he viewed the members as brothers. These men – boys, really – probably weren’t much younger than those in Henry’s army and certainly at times were just as afraid.

After Daytime shared his story and went back to working the piece, it all made perfect sense. We are the sum total of our life experiences; the more life experience, the deeper the well is from which we draw. Undergrads: Take that elective course in the History Department, travel, chat with the strange woman on the park bench. It’s all food, not just for thought but for action.

Lesson #3: I DIDN’T KNOW AS YOU LIKE IT AS WELL AS I THOUGHT.

I have been involved with six productions of this pastoral comedy as a director or as an actor. I’ve seen several productions live and on film, as well as countless pieces in class. I know this play, and I certainly know Jaques’ “Seven Ages of Man” speech in Act Two; at least, I thought I did. But after hearing the speech spoken by a man who knows he will die behind bars, I can confess that I was hearing the monologue for the first time. It was raw and somewhat out of context, but poignant and fascinating nonetheless. I’ve heard many a sardonic Jaques deliver this treatise, but when “the infant
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mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms” is the child that an inmate cannot visit and will never hold, it doesn’t come out quite as cynical. Watching many actors tackle Jaques, and having played him once myself, I realized that part of the speech could be Jaques’ recollection of his own life. Then the fun is to determine at what age Jaques shifts from the man he was, to the man he will become. I was interested to see what age of man Big Mike considered himself to be. I assumed that he was in his early 40s, so I figured he probably saw himself somewhere around the fifth age, just after the soldier who is sudden and quick in quarell. Maybe, I reasoned, he had been a little too quick in quarell, which is why he was in the system (more lingo). But when he brought back the piece, having worked on it since our last class, he explained that he had indeed been through all of the seven ages because he looked at his life in two parts: the first before his incarceration; the second, his life behind bars. So the entire speech became a review of his own life, even up to and including the last scene, when he explained that during his trial, all his faculties had been taken from him: He could do nothing for himself. He was told when to eat and sleep, and he needed a lawyer to speak for him. Imagine watching a Jaques who uses the “Seven Ages” speech to report on his own life, not just through the first four or five ages, but all the way through to the last age. Jaques had been banished from the court to the Forest of Arden and couldn’t speak, couldn’t see familiar sights and couldn’t eat in the manner to which he had been accustomed – not much different from the situation of the prisoner who spoke his lines. I can’t wait to play the melancholy courtier again; I’ve got a great image of expression, the men recognized and appreciated. These are all methods of communication in their milieu, and, being so familiar with this manner of expression, the men recognized and appreciated it – perhaps even more than I do.

**Lesson #4: SHAKESPEARE ON FILM IS NOT NECESSARILY EVIL.**

I was an adjunct instructor when Baz Luhrman’s film version of Romeo and Juliet was released. Starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes, the movie became, at least in my circle of friends, easy pickings to insult. It was *de rigueur* to deride the lead actors’ performances in some vain attempt to prove that we, as educated theatre folk, could not be easily swayed by the power of celebrity. “Fish posh,” we seemed to say, “they can’t be as good as we are, they’re celebrities, not actors.” Whether it was jealousy, frustration or ignorance, we may have been a little hard on Leo and Claire, and indeed Baz. To be fair, the filmed versions of the plays have actually gotten quite good and are not the sacrilege that the snobs among us pretend they are. I tell my class with some confidence that Shakespeare was meant to be seen, not just read and that he was a playwright, not a novelist. I understand that we’d rather have the young folks go into a theatre, rather than viewing the stories from their couch. The men at Holman don’t have that luxury, but even if they did, would it be so bad if they watched Shakespeare on film? I hope this next statement doesn’t get me kicked out of Actors’ Equity, but there are some good things about the subtleties available on film that we lose in a large proscenium house, as I discovered after reviewing the film with the men. The inmates agreed that the close-ups were very helpful in understanding the character’s intention. This led to a great discussion about nonverbal communication, which is something these men know better than anyone else. The prisoners told many stories about the importance of small gestures and miniscule physicalizations behind the prison walls; the raise of an eyebrow, the brush of a pant leg, an almost imperceptible point of the finger. These are all methods of communication in their milieu, and, being so familiar with this manner of expression, the men recognized and appreciated it – perhaps even more than I do.

**Lesson #5: AS A PROFESSOR, I GENERALLY TALK TOO MUCH.**

When I’m nervous, I talk. When I’m well-versed on a subject, I talk. When I’m bluffing, I talk even more. The day I relaxed and listened to the men was the best time I’ve had in a classroom, behind bars or not. Let me be clear: I did not want to know why they were there, or hear stories about their crimes. Despite my liberal bent, I wasn’t always comfortable with what these men might have done. What if they had hurt a child like my young son? What about their victims’ families? These questions sometimes led me to wonder why I was talking to prisoners about my craft when arts programming in public schools keeps getting reduced to the point of virtual extinction. Shouldn’t I be at some middle school somewhere? So instead of asking, or even talking, I learned to shut up. Instead of trying to quiet them down when a side conversation arose, as I normally would, I listened to them talk with one another. I listened to them explain what they thought a piece of text meant, whether they were on the right track or not. Instead of trying to guide a conversation about Hamlet’s Act (Continued on Page 31)
you choose the best material), as a casting
or assistant director, as a dramaturg to
help research the show, as stage managers
or light board operators, as the publicity
crew, or as wardrobe supervisors to oversee
clothing, shoes and hair.

7 Consider a talk-back.

I always schedule a talk-back after
the show, and I try to do a small reception
so folks can meet the composer. Writers can
choose to take full advantage of the talk-
back by asking questions for which they
really want the answer, or they can simply
listen to the audience and learn from that.

The talk-back should be hosted (by
someone familiar with the show), so that
it maintains a respectful and generally
positive tone. The talk-back not only adds
to the audience’s enjoyment (people seem
to love talk-backs), but also is a great
educational tool for both the audience and
the cast. As they participate in the talk-back,
the audience members (and my young cast)
learn how to respond to and speak about
a work of art. This develops more active
and engaged listeners, who understand
that being in the audience is an active, not
a passive, behavior. It also is enlightening
for my students to get the audience’s
perspective on their work.

In addition to the other advantages for
students, the staged readings also provide
an opportunity for me to teach them how
to do readings. It’s a special skill – being
able to hold a book and yet act and sing
expressively. If they’re lucky, my students
will “read” many new works when they get
to Chicago, New York or L.A. So I need to
teach them how to mark their scripts and
scores so that they don’t lose their place,
and how to learn music well and quickly,
without the aid of a cast album.

Students also learn to project during
staged readings, because we don’t use
microphones. They learn to trust their
acting instincts, because readings happen
at lightning speed and there’s no five-week
rehearsal period to “set” things. They learn
how to communicate new material with
no frame of reference. No one has seen the
movie, heard the recording or seen any
pictures.

Rodgers and Hart had 12 shows in
17 years produced on Broadway and in
London. They developed their musicals by
doing them in front of audiences, an option
that generally isn’t available any more.
Today colleges and universities have an
opportunity to be the stand-in for the “out-
of-town tryout,” providing opportunities
for writers to develop tomorrow’s hit
musicals – and for students to learn by
doing alongside them.

Tracy Moore is a professor in the Theatre
and Dance Department at Western Kentucky
University and the author of Acting the Song
(actingthesong.com). Previously, she was a
professional actress and singer in New York
for nearly 20 years. Moore thanks Rob Meffe,
an assistant professor at Pace University, for his
contributions to this article.
Outside the Box

(Continued from Page 7)

even though agents are usually experienced negotiators, agents are not lawyers.
If you think you agent is missing a legal point, you may want to have an attorney
look at the agreement. Although the attorneys for Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts are
generally overworked, they may be able to assist you in this effort if you don’t know
an attorney yourself.

Paint the Positive Relief

Paint the entirety of the textured areas with the Wood-Shadow Paint, making sure to
cover every portion of the surface area still visible as well as all of the fabric, grapes
and rosettes. The quickest way to achieve this step is with a paint sprayer, but hand
painting will work.

After the Wood-Shadow Paint dries completely, brush the Wood-Medium
Paint onto the piece. As you paint, avoid the deeper, more recessed portions of the
piece. That will leave the Wood-Shadow paint exposed in those areas and create the
illusion of shadow.

Again, wait for the paint to dry. The drying period will be shorter this time, as
there should be less paint that will need drying.

Finally, touch the tops of the grapes, the highest portions of the rosettes and the
top portions of the fabric with the Wood-Highlight to complete the effect.

Jessica Thonen is an assistant professor of theatre at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL.

Holman

(Continued from Page 29)

Two speech – “I have of late, wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth” – I just let
them talk to one another and me about how they, like Hamlet, cope with depression.
Because there were no final tests, no student evaluations and no tenure committees
around to monitor my progress, I just let the discussions meander. Eventually they
would work back around to the text, and when they did, more often than not, the text
was made far more powerful.

My university students will be interested to know that I have decided to add a week
to my next rehearsal period – and allow it to be just conversation. About what? I
don’t know. We may find our way back to an important theme of the play, but then
again we may not. It’s a chance I’m willing to take, because after hearing from the men
of Holman Correctional Facility, I think Proust got it right when he said, “The only
real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new
eyes.”

Kevin P. Kern is an assistant professor of theatre at the University of West Florida in Pensacola and the artistic director of the Pensacola Shakespeare Theatre.

Contract

(Continued from Page 14)

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generally overworked, they may be able to assist you in this effort if you don’t know
an attorney yourself.

Jerry Lapidus was the longtime company manager at Seaside Music Theater in Daytona
Beach, FL, and prior to that was the business representative for developing theatre at Actors’
Equity Association for eight years. He is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

DO YOU HAVE AN ‘OUTSIDE
THE BOX’ STORY IDEA?

E-mail “Outside the Box” Editor Doug Brown at dwbtdmail@gmail.com. Or come to the “Outside the Box”
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**The Art of Clowning**

by Eli Simon

2009, Palgrave Macmillan

http://us.macmillan.com/palgrave.aspx


Pages: 192. Price: $26.95

by Chris Qualls

"The emergence of a clown is as breathtaking as that of a newborn baby," writes Eli Simon, professor of acting at the University of California Irvine, in his new book *The Art of Clowning*. Simon has written a delightful guide to the art and craft and shtick and prat of clowning. This is a very practical little handbook that is jam-packed with clowning exercises and methodology. Simon is a specialist in masking, commedia dell’arte and, of course, clowning, and his love of all things foolish permeates every page.

*The Art of Clowning* can be used as a teaching tool for anyone training actors, or as a guide to clowning for both the burgeoning and the experienced performer attempting to develop his or her own “inner child.” Simon elucidates silent improvisation and then expands to vocalizations and eventually to fully spoken texts from the Western canon, including Shakespearean clowns and fools in the mix. Simon tells stories of the great clowns of the world (such as Emmett Kelly, Laurel and Hardy, and Lucille Ball) and their idiosyncratic keys to success. He provides a framework for how the new clown (you) can follow in their footsteps and attempt to walk in their giant (usually floppy) shoes.

Simon believes in the unique voice of every prospective clown and describes clever methods for extracting the goofy power of each aspiring practitioner. He advocates for child-like play and a willingness to just say “yes” to the absurd, stating, “Genius begins when creativity turns logical choices upside-down.”

The book is a joyous exploration of the fundamentals that make expert clowning of all kinds successful. Simon astutely weaves personal anecdotes into the book, quoting his students extensively. He makes great use of feedback from his student jesters regarding challenges and triumphs they experienced while developing their clown identities. Also, as in any excellent text on acting, *The Art of Clowning* places a great value on the willingness to try and fail, not only as a means of finding greater solutions in the long run, but also as a clowning means to an end.

“The world [feels] a kinship with losers,” notes Simon, describing the beautiful and comic sadness of the great clown actors Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. “Has your clown evolved into a complete failure yet? ... Is your level of vulnerability increasing?” Simon asks, insisting on disappointments from his clowns.

Failure in our culture is seen as, well... failure, but in Simon’s clown-world people are stupid while clowns are smart. Failure is glorious, sometimes sad, but always appreciated by the audience. “Do first, judge later,” he says, then continues, “Better yet, do first, don’t judge at all.” Excellent advice when the exercise at hand is “Climbing inside a Purse” or “Diving into a Cup of Water.”

*The Art of Clowning* is a wonderful invitation to have fun and then share that fun with the world. Famous funnyman Red Skelton is quoted in the book as having said, “If it brings a smile to your face or a chuckle to your heart, then my purpose as your clown has been fulfilled.” And what a noble purpose it is.
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