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Performer Matt Mahaney is silhouetted against a projection of genetic code in Ferocious Beauty: Genome, a dance-and-media work by choreographer Liz Lerman, keynote speaker at this year’s SETC Convention. The letters A, C, G and T represent the four nucleotides that are components of DNA. An individual’s genetic makeup and all that entails (body, health, identity, heritage) are the sum of a specific sequence of these four molecules. See story on Lerman, Page 24. (Cover design by Deanna Thompson; cover photo work by Garland Gooden; photo by Ken Kennefick)
Texting and e-mail are informational, not conversational. Let me say that again. Texting and e-mail are informational, not conversational. I guess it could be a generational shift, or just a sign of the times regarding how we choose to “talk” to one another, but more and more people are attempting to collaborate in a theatrical production process via electronic means. And I think that is just, well … stupid.

At the last SETC Convention, I saw so many thumbs and fingers moving instead of lips that I thought I was at a signing convention for the deaf as opposed to a theatre convention. I have witnessed faculty members with offices in the same building attempting to “collaborate” on a theatre production via their cell phones and via e-mail. Why? Is it the ease of communication? Or is it the potential confrontation that can be avoided, along with the fact that e-mail and texting can be done at your convenience, without consideration of what others are doing when you push “send”?

Theatre is a process that demands face-to-face discussion to move a production forward. I guess if one member of your production team is in Germany and the rest are in Florida, texting or e-mail might be appropriate at times. But how about a Web conference instead? Or just a good old-fashioned conference call?

I know that many will read this and think to themselves, “Wow, this dude needs to move to the 21st century!” Trust me. I am in the 21st century. I’m swamped with learning new technology. But I also choose to be engaged personally with people – not technology. Yes, I’m writing this on a computer, not a typewriter. Yes, I like to have my cell phone when I need it. But, given the choice, I would much rather talk to people, hear their voices, and listen to their cares, concerns and needs than try to figure out how to type on a one-inch by one-inch square on buttons the size of Rice Krispies.

Call me old-fashioned. Call me “behind the times.” But do just call me. Don’t text me. Don’t e-mail me. Don’t try to design my show through the airwaves or a wireless connection.

Disagree? Agree? Send a letter to the editor or a 400 Words column to deanna@setc.org.

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Playwright’s Lab at Hollins University
It was great to connect with people from all disciplines of theatre at this year’s SETC Convention, the largest theatre event of its kind in the nation. Whether you’re a teacher, an individual working in theatre or a student aspiring to Broadway success, chances are you took some inspiration home with you from Lexington, KY.

Liz Lerman, Thursday’s keynote speaker, urged us to “hike the horizontal,” using our arts skills in the community as well as in performance. Arts work offstage can have a powerful impact, she says, and should be valued as highly as performances on Kennedy Center or Broadway stages. Distinguished Career Award recipient Judith Malina, whose pioneering work helped establish off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway also implored audience members to make a difference with their art, noting the power of theatre to bring about social change. In sidebars accompanying these stories, you’ll find two examples of university programs focused on achieving the goals espoused by our speakers. Our third keynote speaker, Broadway performer Tituss Burgess, shared numerous practical tips for achieving musical theatre success, both in his Friday address and in a master class that featured individual critiques of student performances.

Also at the SETC Convention in Lexington, we surprised a longtime SETC volunteer with the Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award, our most prestigious award for one of SETC’s own. David Thompson recounts the accomplishments of Dennis Wemm on Page 14.

Elsewhere in the magazine, you’ll find our regular “Outside the Box” column, featuring a new platforming technique, and our regular book column, “Words, Words, Words…” which includes a review of a book on acting. Our “400 Words” opinion column looks at the trend away from face-to-face collaboration in our increasingly online world.

Take a few minutes to get connected to the regional and national performing arts community through this magazine. As you turn the pages, you’ll find energizing ideas, discover timely inspiration and meet theatre people just like you – who care deeply about our art form and its future.
X-Brace Platforming

X Plus I Equals an Easier-to-Install, Quieter Platform

by David Stellhorn

We’ve all used them for years. In fact, we’ve become so accustomed to using them that we have stopped fighting them – stock platforms. They’re big and bulky, yet indispensable. They come in many styles: 2 x 4 frame, steel frame (if your school has welding capabilities), aluminum frame (if your school has money), stressed, skinned, homosote-covered, bolted legs, compression legs, coffin-locked, offset frames and so on. The variations are many, but the limitations are always the same.

Storage is the biggest issue, followed closely by the booming noise of a chorus of dancing actors. Then, of course, there’s the challenge of shimming the legs to compensate for our less than flat performance spaces.

Ready to try something new? Here’s a method I learned about 15 years ago that:

• is easier to install and strike;
• requires very little storage space compared to 2 x 4 stock platforms;
• allows for virtually any shape of deck that the designer wants; and
• is sturdy and quiet.

I call it X-brace platforming. But I must give credit where credit is due. I didn’t invent this system. I learned it from a former shop supervisor named Buck Jones in my undergraduate program at California State University in Fresno. Since then, I have used it everywhere that I have been with great success.

The system is based on collapsible supports that can be made from lightweight materials such as ¼” oriented strand board (OSB) or Masonite. Essentially, the X-braces are two rectangles slotted halfway up the middle. By sliding the two pieces on their opposing slots, you have created a free-standing X shape.

The orientation of the materials can withstand a heavy load because the force is compressive. And the X shape ensures the vertical direction of the material won’t buckle.

There is a second part to the system that is essential. I call these I-brackets. These are constructed from ¾” plywood and resemble a short section of manufactured I-beam. They should be constructed to be slightly shorter (¼”) than the height of the X-braces. Be sure to glue and screw the top and bottom flanges to the vertical member.

How the system works

Step 1: I-brackets are secured to the stage floor with screws. Two screws will be sufficient if they are put in opposite corners of the base. I typically use 8 - 10 brackets for every sheet of plywood decking. They should be placed in such a way that additional sheets of decking will share brackets (see picture in Step 3). Rotating the orientation of the I-brackets will help give overall lateral stability to the deck.

I-brackets are secured to the floor.

I-bracket.
Step 2: Distribute X-braces in between the I-brackets. This will carry the load of the deck. My general rule of thumb is to not have more than 18 inches of unsupported decking. (Side note: if you’re on a tighter budget, you can use 3/8” ply as the decking material, but you might want to use more X’s per sheet.)

X-braces and I-brackets are mixed together.

Step 3: Cover with decking material. Screw through the top of the deck into the top of each I-bracket with at least two screws. This will create a rigid stable platform level. Be sure to screw into the I-brackets placed down the center of the sheet; this will pull any flex out of the deck and eliminate tapping that would occur otherwise. Because the deck is supported throughout the sheet, the transfer of sound is distributed directly to the stage floor. It feels solid and is very quiet. You will want to screw a scab piece of 3/4” ply (about 4” x 8”) at two-foot intervals in between I-brackets to the underside of the deck. (not shown). This will take out flex at the seams between sheet goods. (Side note: If you use tongue-and-groove ply, you only need to add scabs on the four-foot side of the decking plywood.)

X-braces and I-brackets are covered with decking material.

Step 4: Continue adding X-braces and I-brackets to build out the size of your deck. The system allows for unlimited shapes of decking (including odd angles, curves and organic shapes). Simply cut the shape and add X-braces and I-brackets up to the edge of your cut line.

Some helpful tips
- I wouldn’t recommend using any material thinner than 3/16” for X-braces. We typically use Masonite that is recycled from show decks, but I prefer 1/4” OSB because it is lighter in weight.
- X-braces can be any size. Be sure to subtract your decking material from the overall height. For example, subtract 1 inch total for ¾” plywood deck and ¾” Masonite.
- Cut the slots for the X-braces just a hair wider than the material for easy assembly of the X-brace. Don’t cut it so wide that the X can easily fold up.
- If you cut X-braces just less than 16 inches wide, you can maximize the number that you can get out of a 4 x 8 sheet.
- I have gone as high as 3 feet in a single layer with this decking system, but it starts to get cost-prohibitive at about 24 inches. X-braces taller than this should be made of thicker material.
- You can stack layers to gain height, but you need a full layer of decking material for the next set of X-braces and I-brackets to build upon.
- Install tacking strips to the stage floor before attaching facing. If your deck is curved, install small blocks every 6 inches to attach facing. Hold all I-brackets back about two to three inches from the edge you are going to face to make room for tacking strips.
- The step-by-step pictures show the use of ¾” tongue-and-groove OSB as the decking material. However, I do not recommend this material. It’s difficult to maintain clean tongues and grooves. We heard some squeaking when it was installed with the waxy side down. And it is less re-usable in other scenic applications. I find that ¾” tongue-and-groove plywood sheathing is the cheapest, strongest and best choice for this system.

Some drawbacks
- This system does have limitations. Obviously, it won’t work if the design calls for a raked stage. Installation would be pretty time-restrictive on a traveling or repertory production (not to mention that the road house wouldn’t look too kindly on you peppering its stage with screws). And you are somewhat locked into your standard heights, unless you want to store an infinite variation of X and I heights. But so far, those are the only drawbacks that I have come across. In academic theatre – where we usually get to build directly in the performance space, have limited storage and budget, and want to be able to offer as much flexibility to our designers as possible – I have used this system with great success.

Materials Needed
- Scrap hardboard, masonite or OSB (minimum thickness 3/8”) for X-braces.
- Scrap ¾” plywood for I-bracing.
- Tongue-and-groove ¾” plywood for decking.
- Facing and deck covering as desired.

David Stellhorn is an assistant professor and technical director for the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Southern Mississippi. Before teaching, David was the assistant technical director at the American Repertory Theatre (ART) in Cambridge, MA.
Tituss Burgess still clearly remembers the SETC auditions he attended nearly a decade ago as a University of Georgia senior pursuing a BA in music with a major in voice performance.

“I was terrified,” Burgess told a large audience, including many students, during his Friday keynote address at the 2010 SETC Convention. “I felt like I was David, and the convention was Goliath. Only I had no slingshot.”

A native of Winterville, GA, just outside Athens, Burgess had come to the auditions hoping to find work – and despite his worries, he soon found a “slingshot” in his repertoire: his incredible voice, which impressed hiring companies at the SETC Professional Auditions and helped him launch a musical theatre career that would ultimately take him to Broadway.

“SETC gave me my start,” he said.
Move where you want to go (not necessarily to New York).

For those of you who burn for theatre but do not burn to live in New York City, rest easy,” Burgess said. “It was a confidence booster, and it was there that I started to burn for New York.”

After fulfilling his contract with Disney, Burgess entered the Savannah Music Festival - American Traditions Competition. Placing second, Burgess “took my (prize) money and moved to NYC.” Upon arrival, Burgess struggled to find his place. He recalled, “I was in NYC for a year and a half before anyone knew what to do with me. I would get lots of ‘wow’s’ and ‘hmmm, good jobs,’ but no job. They couldn’t figure it out. And I started to internalize it a little bit. I thought I was doing something wrong; I thought I was doing something incorrectly. But after one and a half years, I got my first big break.”

The big break was booking readings of two musicals, Good Vibrations and Jersey Boys. “In one summer,” he said, “my entire New York career was set into motion. All of a sudden, out of nowhere.”

He noted that “there was no rhyme or reason to my often unplanned, often winding journey to ‘success’ as we call it. But I went with it. I rolled with the punches.”

Encouraging students to follow their dreams, Burgess offered a series of eight tips for succeeding as a musical theatre performer.

1. **Move where YOU want to go (not necessarily to New York).**
   “For those of you who burn for theatre but do not burn to live in New York City, rest easy,” Burgess said. “Good theatre does not just exist in NYC only. There are so many options to choose from. You can move to Chicago, D.C., Seattle, Florida, Atlanta, San Diego, L.A., Minnesota, and the list goes on. Just because your peers have got ‘the-Big-Apple-on-the-brain’ does not mean that there’s something wrong with you” if that is not your goal, Burgess noted. All experience is good experience.

2. **Live below your means.**
   Whether you choose to go to New York or elsewhere, don’t live in the trendy neighborhood or spend extravagantly. “Even when you get your first Broadway show, don’t go and move...”
Burgess traded his ability to cut music to others in return for free lessons. "Although we love what we do, the heart cannot rule the head," Burgess said. "Often you will have to accept a role because your rent has to be paid."

Burgess noted that he "recently had a job where the experience was not creatively fulfilling and it was the first time that I realized, 'Oh, yeah. I do this for a living.' In order to live, I oftentimes do work that I do not believe in. It is the nature of the beast."

Being in this business, he said, requires that you: and change your lifestyle," he said. “You’ll likely be paid Equity minimum.”

He noted that the reality of Equity pay may be much less than you expect. For his first Broadway contract, Burgess said he received the then-minimum for Equity, $1,650 per week. “After my agent fees, Equity dues, after New York (state and city) and federal taxes, I netted what I would make gross in a LORT A contract in a regional theatre,” without a per diem. He brought home about half, $800.

“Don’t up and change your lifestyle,” he said. “You will shoot yourself and your finances in the foot.”

Asked how young performers can find teachers and coaches on a shoestring budget, Burgess recommended doing as he did: calling on friends. “Excellent accompanists and teachers and singers are all around you,” he said. “Get your friends with excellent skills, techniques and ability to teach you.”

What was the most important thing you learned from your work with Tituss Burgess? That I have a long way to go in terms of mastering my own voice instrument. However, this is encouraging, because with lots of practice and persistence, I can accomplish anything and everything. There were moments in the master class when Tituss would be coaching me vocally, and after, say, five attempts at one part of my song, I achieved the sense of openness that he was helping me with. More or less, practice does make perfect, as muscle memory results from practice, practice, practice.

How will you use this in your next audition? By practicing as much as I can! Where do you hope to be this time next year? I hope to be a content senior, on my way into the professional world with an open, ready and fearless mind.

Singing Technique and Performance Tips from Tituss Burgess’s Master Class

**Singing Tips:**

✓ “Don’t collapse the nasopharyngeal space or lose the placement when not singing.”
✓ Sing the vowels; care about the consonants. “Consonants help you reinvest in the placement of the tone….Every consonant and vowel deserves the same attention as the one before it.”
✓ “You’re still singing when silent, don’t stop the performance. Continue the phrase or thought through breaks, rests and pauses.”

**Performance Tips:**

✓ “Down, Set, Hut” acting is stale, mannered and manufactured acting. “When eating at home alone, do you set out the fine china or do you sit in front of the TV? Keep it real.”
✓ “It’s OK to have something rehearsed and planned, but leave a window open to let in some fresh air.”
✓ “Don’t ask permission to sing before singing.”
✓ Approach the song with confidence. “Sing out of what you just left.” Use the moment before.
✓ “Talk to people. Singing is only elongated speaking.”
✓ “First tell the facts. Then play the text and subtext.”
✓ “Don’t report on events; experience them.”
✓ “High notes do not a great performance make. Riffing does not a great singer make.”
✓ “Color the verses to show their progression.”
✓ “When you have lists – and they’re not there for nothing – use them to make the point.”
✓ Imagery used by the actor is very important. “The audience will experience what the actor sees.”
✓ “Don’t move till it’s time to move, and it’s not time to move till you have something more important to say.”
• Treat others well.

“It behooves you to be nice,” Burgess said. “Be nice to the doorman, for he will let you in after hours to get your keys you left behind in a rush to do something else. [Be nice] to the dressers because they can make or break your entrance, and tip your dressers! Have a good relationship with that conductor (your tempos).

“Get in the habit of being nice and being for real about it,” he said. “I’ve watched so many people in positions of power who abuse it just because they have the power. It creates a very disturbing working environment. You set the tone, especially when you’re the lead; it’s a pyramid, a trickle-down effect. If you want this run to be nice and long and healthy and happy, then you put that type of energy out there.”

• Go to dance class.

It is not so much that you can do 5, 6, 7, 8 brilliantly, as much as they want to see how well or how quickly you pick up 5, 6, 7, 8, Burgess notes.

“It may not matter that your pirouettes are ‘en pointe,’” he said, but it matters that when you learned the combination that you “didn’t complain, were paying attention, that you were enthusiastic about learning. They are seeing how well you work, not how well you work it.”

• Be professional.

When asked what he considers to be markers of professionalism, Burgess answered, “Work ethic. Let the work speak for itself, the word can spread like wildfire and your reputation can build.”

In addition, he says exhibiting a positive attitude is crucial.

“People want to work with easy-to-work-with-people, people who come to do their job on time and are prepared,” he said. “If you want to make an impression, then you’ve got to do the work in advance and show up ready to work.”

Also be sure that the people you associate with are as professional as you are.

“You are only as successful and fierce and flawless as the people you keep around you,” Burgess said. “So if you don’t have a good team of people (teachers, coaches and friends) around you, you’re going to sink.”

It’s your audition.

Remember this point, Burgess said: “You are not powerless in an audition.”

Be sure to research the play and the part in advance whenever possible. “But,” he noted, “sometimes you don’t get the audition until the night before,” leaving no time for the research. Burgess encouraged actors to “ask the questions you need to ask to give the best performance you can.” He notes that your agent will forward questions to the casting director, who will get you the answers in advance. “They both want you to do your best,” he said.

Burgess’s additional auditioning advice included:

• Use the audition space and fill it. “You have creative license until they tell you not to do something.”

CHRISTINA JOHNSON
BA, MUSICAL THEATRE, 2010
BIRMINGHAM SOUTHERN COLLEGE

What was the most important thing you learned from your work with Tituss Burgess? The most important thing that I learned from working with Tituss Burgess is that the simpler the song is, the better. Speaking the truth is what catches an audience, and being completely vulnerable and open with them will leave them wanting more.

How will you use this in your next audition? In my auditions to come, I hope that by using what I have learned from Mr. Burgess that I will stick out among the rest of the auditionees. Communicating the truth of the song has proven to be more effective to me than using it as a “chance to belt as high as I can.” My goal is to use this technique to reel in casting directors the same way that Mr. Burgess has done with his audiences.

Where do you hope to be this time next year? I hope to be anywhere that allows me to practice and further my career in musical theatre. If that happens to be on Broadway, so be it!
for a particular production or producer. “You’re auditioning them, too,” he noted.

• Make sure the right songs are in your book. “Absolutely have age-appropriate material, absolutely have music from all the eras,” he said. “But if you are trying to land that gig on Broadway this year, look and see what is actually in this season. Look and see what is playing and find something either in the likeness of the role that you are right for or something from that show. When auditioning for different regional theatres, research those theatres’ seasons” and put representative (or similar) songs in your book.

Burgess notes that your book should not stay the same. “Your book should be as transient as New York City,” he said. “Seasons change; what was appropriate last season may not be appropriate now. Take it out and put some new stuff in.”

‘No’ is not a reflection on your talent. “It is imperative that you learn right away that ‘no’ does not mean that your offering is insufficient,” said Burgess. You may be told “no” for a range of reasons. For example, many emerging actors in professional theatre get their big breaks as replacements in established shows. Producers, in an effort to keep costs down, won’t build a new costume for the replacement. “So if you don’t fit the costume, you don’t get the job,” Burgess said. “It doesn’t mean that you’re not good. It just means you don’t fit his or her jeans.”

Yet another reason you may not get a part has more to do with the actor you’re paired with than you. “‘No’ could mean we hired someone before you and have to see what you look like next to them,” said Burgess. For example, if you’re being cast as part of a romantic couple, you may not pair well with the other half of the couple. “Unfortunately, standing next to this person, you could look like their brother,” Burgess said. Or “unfortunately, standing next to this person, she looks like your mom.”

Sometimes hearing nothing at all is worse then hearing “no.” But don’t read anything into your rejection, no matter how it comes, said Burgess. “Don’t internalize rejection and let it calcify and turn into a cancer of information where you filled in the blanks,” he said. Conversely, Burgess added, “If you learn to not say ‘no’ to yourself, most people won’t say ‘no’ to you.”

Reflecting on his career’s start, Burgess explained, “I wish I allowed myself the freedom to make mistakes and not edit myself. When in rehearsal you don’t know what works until you do it.” If you are being cautious in an audition or in performance then
the decision makers or audience get a marginalized performance.

Work to get an agent.

“Here’s why you need an agent: to get you more work,” Burgess explained. “How can agents get you more work? If you’ve already worked!”

It may sound like a Catch-22, but it’s the way the world of professional theatre works.

“You’ve got to get some good solid roles on your resume on your own to prove (to agents) that you are worth representing,” said Burgess. “If you’ve proven that, then you won’t be a waste of time to them. Go and get some roles first and then start pursuing agents.”

Once you’ve gotten some roles, how do you find an agent? “Ask your working friends who have representation if they don’t mind pitching you to their agents,” Burgess recommended. “Would their agent take a meeting with you? Ask your friends to e-mail their agents to look for your headshot you are sending.”

Sometimes agents will find you themselves. They may catch you in a performance or their friends may see you in a performance.

Burgess also strongly advises taking classes and workshops taught by “casting directors at the top of their game, so you are on their brain.” Some institutions that offer classes “will bring in agents to audition the students. So you can find agents that way.”

If an agent is interested in you, Burgess suggested you do as much research as possible before meeting. “Make sure you investigate the costs and who from what company is going to show up,” he said. “In other words, is this an assistant … or the real deal with some signing power?”

Burgess recommends against a scattershot approach. “Mass mailings of hundreds of headshots and resumes don’t work,” he said. “Don’t waste your money.”

“You gotta believe in yourself.”

“If you don’t believe that you … have an offering that is worthy of sharing with someone … [and don’t believe that you are] deserving of the chance to do this, then game over!” Burgess said. “Go home. You should quit.”

Get in the habit of saying and remembering these mantras, Burgess said:

“I can do this.”

“No doesn’t mean no.”
Dennis Wemm Honored with Suzanne Davis Award

Following are the remarks made by past SETC Past President David Thompson in presenting the Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award to Dennis Wemm at the 2010 SETC Awards Banquet.

The Suzanne M. Davis Memorial Award is established to honor one SETC member each year for distinguished service to SETC over a number of years.

Suzanne M. Davis was the wife of Harry Davis, an SETC founder, its ninth President and the original director of Unto these Hills. Suzie was that production’s first costume designer and was first to suggest that there should be an annual award to a person for outstanding service to SETC. When Suzie died, Alvin Cohen endowed that award in her memory.

By tradition, the name of the recipient remains a closely guarded secret until the last possible moment. Tonight I will diverge from that tradition, but only slightly, as I reveal the name relatively early in my remarks. I feel that in order to fully understand the contributions of our recipient it is important to connect the name with the efforts.

Our recipient has served SETC as an interest group chair, a committee chair and an officer, holding positions on the Board of Directors for over a decade. Of particular note are stellar service as President-Elect and President, which were preceded by terms as Secretary, which are still considered our organization’s gold standard. His efforts are not limited to SETC, but include two terms as President of the West Virginia Theatre Conference in the wild and wonderful state where he is also professor of communications at Glendive College.

Of course, by now you know that I am referring to our own Dennis Wemm.

All of Dennis’ efforts are linked by a simple, yet profound concept. He creates foundations upon which others can build. And he builds structures that allow others to create. Without fanfare or false bravado, Dennis acts with calm determination and quietly surpasses standard expectations.

I mentioned his term as SETC Secretary a moment ago. One might think that keeping a thorough record of our Board meetings while contributing to the discussions would be more than enough. But Dennis went beyond that, reviewing minutes of meetings from years earlier and merging key elements into a single searchable file. With just a call or an e-mail, Dennis can tell you every Board action that has occurred in the last quarter century.

It would also be enough for Dennis to do his job on his home campus. But he joined with other educators at small colleges to discuss challenges and share solutions. The result has been so influential that small theatre programs of all sorts are now routinely represented in our convention programming.

I recall one occasion that speaks to his quiet confidence in the assistance of others. Many of you may not be aware that the Executive Committee meets several times each year. At least two of those meetings are marathon affairs that can last a full day or even a full weekend. On one occasion, after meeting for eight or nine hours, the officers had gathered for a well-earned beverage before dinner. Dennis received a call on his cell. What we heard went something like this:

“Excuse me, I need to take this. … Hello. … Are you ready to open the house? … Remember that before you open the house you need to do a light check … and be sure the exits are clear … and be sure the aisles are clean. … But you need to open the box office before you open the house. … And before you open the box office you need to get the starting money. … Well, it’s in the secret hiding place. … Okay, I’ll tell you where that is. … Go to the stage. Cross stage left. Just upstage of the stage left proscenium is a small alcove. In that alcove is a tool box. Open the tool box. Remove the top tray. Lift the lower tray. At the bottom of the tool box you will find a bag. The starting bank is in the bag. … Alright, call me if you need help.”

We looked at Dennis and asked if there was a problem. Unfazed, he replied, “No, it’s just opening night.”

SETC continues to benefit from that steady commitment and calm attention to detail. During this convention, Dennis served as an adjudicator for the Community Theatre Festival. Dennis currently serves as my trusted colleague on the Bylaws Committee, where his insight is priceless. He has worked to make us a better organization through the Self Study Task Force, the Strategic Planning Initiative and his current position as the chair of the Long-Range Planning Committee.

His work makes it possible for us to do our best work. Please join me in congratulating – and thanking – the recipient of the Suzanne Davis Award, Dennis Wemm.
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SETC celebrated the 61st anniversary of its founding at the 2010 SETC Convention in Lexington, KY. At Saturday’s business meeting (above), outgoing SETC President Beth Harvey (left), passed the gavel to incoming President Alan Litsey (right). On these pages, we revisit scenes from the annual convention, which was attended by more than 4,000 registered 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 Larry Neuzel, Melissa Dvozenja and David Hawkins
61st in Lexington
Alice Allen holds an undergraduate degree in speech and theatre with a concentration in arts administration from Louisiana Tech University. She is currently pursuing her master’s degree through Regis University.

Abstract:
The question, “Was Maxwell Anderson successful in theatre according to his intentions as outlined in his essays on tragedy and theatre?” will be examined in this paper. Through a combination of personal belief and a study of theatre, Anderson found that a successful tragedy contains a “tragic hero” who fights against evils that confront him with everything available in order to ensure the success of the forces of good. The message of Anderson’s plays comments on the spirit of man and the hope for a continued moral evolution. Anderson theorized that the human race strives to be more like that which we find godly, and that only through a moral evolution of our race will we ever achieve god-like status. Anderson believed that the dramatist, through the stage, was responsible for leading men toward godliness. Winterset, Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, Key Largo and The Wingless Victory are analyzed to determine if Anderson created an appropriate tragic hero while delivering his message of hope for the continued evolution of mankind. Full paper online at: www.setc.org/interest/history.php#scholarAward

Mary Robinson is a senior at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she is pursuing a dual major in theatre and media studies. She plans to continue her studies and earn a doctorate in theatre history.

Abstract:
Sarah Bernhardt challenged the acting conventions of her time, performed when society expected women in the home, and called upon her own resources to achieve an unparalleled level of stardom. In a career which spanned nearly 60 years, this French actress spent approximately two-thirds of this time performing for London audiences. During her 1879 London season, Sarah Bernhardt crafted the legendary phenomenon by honing her corporal skills. The Divine Sarah’s vision and control of her corporal craft resulted in the English audiences’ continual support and admiration. In her memoirs, she notes that, “This first night in London was a definitive one for my career.” In addition to her own words, evidence provided by Agate,aston, Sauter, Skinner and Taranow reveals the process through which she crafted herself to achieve unrivaled fame with non-French speaking audiences. Wilmar Sauter discusses the Bernhardt oeuvre which brought about the legend with, “I don’t think there is any other actor or actress, dead or alive, who can challenge her fame during her own life time and after.” Her success at the London Gaiety proved a catalyst, not only for her life but for the course of her theatrical career.

2010 SETC Young Scholar’s Award Winners

Graduate Winner: Alice Allen
Paper: Andersonian Tragedy
Alice Allen holds an undergraduate degree in speech and theatre with a concentration in arts administration from Louisiana Tech University. She is currently pursuing her master’s degree through Regis University.

Abstract:
The question, “Was Maxwell Anderson successful in theatre according to his intentions as outlined in his essays on tragedy and theatre?” will be examined in this paper. Through a combination of personal belief and a study of theatre, Anderson found that a successful tragedy contains a “tragic hero” who fights against evils that confront him with everything available in order to ensure the success of the forces of good. The message of Anderson’s plays comments on the spirit of man and the hope for a continued moral evolution. Anderson theorized that the human race strives to be more like that which we find godly, and that only through a moral evolution of our race will we ever achieve god-like status. Anderson believed that the dramatist, through the stage, was responsible for leading men toward godliness. Winterset, Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, Key Largo and The Wingless Victory are analyzed to determine if Anderson created an appropriate tragic hero while delivering his message of hope for the continued evolution of mankind. Full paper online at: www.setc.org/interest/history.php#scholarAward

Undergraduate Winner: Mary Robinson
Paper: Poetry in Motion: The Divine Sarah on the English Stage
Mary Robinson is a senior at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she is pursuing a dual major in theatre and media studies. She plans to continue her studies and earn a doctorate in theatre history.

Abstract:
Sarah Bernhardt challenged the acting conventions of her time, performed when society expected women in the home, and called upon her own resources to achieve an unparalleled level of stardom. In a career which spanned nearly 60 years, this French actress spent approximately two-thirds of this time performing for London audiences. During her 1879 London season, Sarah Bernhardt crafted the legendary phenomenon by honing her corporal skills. The Divine Sarah’s vision and control of her corporal craft resulted in the English audiences’ continual support and admiration. In her memoirs, she notes that, “This first night in London was a definitive one for my career.” In addition to her own words, evidence provided by Agate,aston, Sauter, Skinner and Taranow reveals the process through which she crafted herself to achieve unrivaled fame with non-French speaking audiences. Wilmar Sauter discusses the Bernhardt oeuvre which brought about the legend with, “I don’t think there is any other actor or actress, dead or alive, who can challenge her fame during her own life time and after.” Her success at the London Gaiety proved a catalyst, not only for her life but for the course of her theatrical career.

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At 83, Judith Malina could easily rest on her laurels as the co-founder of The Living Theatre and one of the avant-garde legends who helped create off-Broadway and off-off Broadway in New York. But Malina still burns with the passion that has marked her entire life – and seems intent on passing along to a new generation her belief in the power of theatre to evoke social change. During her 2010 SETC keynote address, Malina shared the stage with Brad Burgess, 25, her protégé and the associate artistic and administrative director of The Living Theatre. During a Q&A session after her talk, she glided back and forth across the dais to answer questions. Occasionally, she passed her wireless microphone to Burgess to answer questions that she felt he was better equipped to answer. And when she did so, it seemed she was passing more than just a microphone. It almost seemed she was passing a torch, one that she had borne aloft for a lifetime.
During an interview the morning of her keynote address, Malina was asked what she would talk about. With modest, airy confidence and a twinkle of curiosity, she answered, “I’m going to open my mouth and see what comes out. Probably, I’m going to talk about commitment.”

Of course, she would talk about commitment. She has lived her entire life with commitment, and commitment is the cornerstone of the theatre she founded in 1947 with her late husband, artist Julian Beck. The Living Theatre’s commitment is to bring about social change, to politicize theatre and use it in all its forms to draw attention to oppression and injustice and to the sanctity of the individual standing before the Goliaths of social and governmental institutions.

“But don’t we need these institutions? They give our lives shape. What would we replace them with?” wondered the interviewer, who had never met anyone even remotely like Malina.

“With anarchy,” she patiently affirmed. “Get rid of the law. Law only reinforces anger and the tendency to break laws.” Instead of a world run by governments, she envisions one where individuals take charge. During her afternoon address, Malina described how she came to anarchy as a philosophy and solution to the world’s problems. Facing a world filled with

(Continued on Page 22)
injustice and needing to work against it, she said, “I studied all the possibilities: tribal forms, socialism, communism, democracy. None offered a pacifist answer. All entailed punitive law and militarist vision, nationalism. Then we [she and Beck] found the beautiful philosophy of anarchism.” Her personal mission, and by extension The Living Theatre’s mission, is to “encourage people to [recognize] the possibility of a beautiful, non-violent revolution.”

The revolution . . . Whether in the privacy of a hotel suite or upon the dais in front of several hundred people, Malina and Burgess refer to the revolution with the comfortable certainty of parents discussing what university their child in the next room might attend. To Malina and Burgess, the revolution is not a question of whether, only of where and when. During the Q&A of her talk, Malina had the opportunity to bring the concept of anarchist revolution full circle to her audience. To the question, “Would you like to see a Secretary of the Arts?” she replied, “I have a long-range hope that we can abolish the government, so there wouldn’t be a Secretary of the Arts.”

A commitment to the abolition of all government will appear radical to most, and those who are not already familiar with Malina and her life’s work will probably wonder how a nice young Jewish girl from New York became a peace-loving anarchist devoted to using theatre to bring about social reform. Very simply, she is her parents’ child: “I was born to be a political artist.” Born in 1926, she was the child of a social-activist-German-rabbi father who organized rallies and poetry readings to save German Jews who were enduring the horrors of institutionalized oppression and genocide at the hands of the Nazis. He had an itinerant congregation that followed him all over New York City. “A service here, a service there, sometimes they celebrated the High Holy Days in a rented hotel ballroom,” but wherever they worshipped, the rabbi’s activism played a role.

Malina’s mother was an actress by training, but in those days it was not proper for a rabbi to have an actress for a wife, so her mother’s theatrical ambitions were passed along to daughter Judith, who quite happily accepted them. As a student actress, Malina was heavily influenced by Erwin Piscator, who, along with Bertolt Brecht, was one of the twin colossi of epic theatre in the 1920s and 1930s. Both fled
Nazi Germany and eventually migrated to America, bringing with them a transformational theatre that emphasized theatre’s power to bring about social change. In their theatre, sociopolitical content sat in the driver’s seat, while emotional truth and artistic beauty took a backseat.

Malina met Erwin Piscator when he taught at The Dramatic Workshop at the New School in New York City, which she attended as an actress. Piscator was a powerful teacher and he made a substantial impression on the young Malina. A list of his other students at the New School reads like a Who’s Who of Theatre: Marlon Brando, Tennessee Williams, Elaine Stritch and Tony Curtis, to name a few. Is it any wonder, then, that, with parents like hers and a mentor like Erwin Piscator, Malina would form her own theatre company, one that was dedicated to changing the world? The only piece of the puzzle that was missing was Julian Beck.

One day in 1943, acting student Judith Malina was on a 46th Street sidewalk eating chocolates when she bumped into William Marchant, a playwright acquaintance (The Desk Set). He said, “I’m going to introduce you to someone. Ya got a nickel for the phone?” And with that, the wheels were set into motion toward an introduction that would lead Malina to Julian Beck, to marriage and to The Living Theatre. Speaking of Beck, who was one year older than she, Malina said, “We immediately knew we were soul mates.” He was a poet and abstract expressionist painter, but she quickly turned his head toward theatre and the two of them began to attend Piscator’s classes. In 1947, they formed The Living Theatre.

In the wake of World War II, theatre history in America exploded and jumped quantum levels in a variety of directions. The off-Broadway movement began, with the regional theatre movement soon to follow. New theatres and new ways of perceiving and doing theatre sprang up. Trailblazing for the rest of the avant-garde and leading to the off-off-Broadway movement was The Living Theatre. One of its strongest influences was iconoclast Antonin Artaud. His Theatre of Cruelty advocated shocking the audience out of its complacency. This was revolutionary medicine for a world that was just learning to tune its TV to I Love Lucy. With Beck and Malina at the helm, The Living Theatre rapidly made a reputation for itself as a radical new voice in the theatre world.

Piscator had asked them, “What do you want to say? What can we really hope for?” The Living Theatre’s answer was, “A world without war, without national boundaries, without police, without poverty.” They began producing the work of Brecht, of Gertrude Stein, of Jean Cocteau and of T.S. Eliot. And for the last six decades, their answer to Piscator’s question has guided The Living Theatre’s course.

That course has never been easy, but one gets the sense from Malina that easy has never been a consideration for either herself or the theatre she founded.

(Continued on Page 31)
What happens when we shift the paradigm in artistic work from a hierarchical ranking to a horizontal perspective?

Amazing things, says Liz Lerman, founder of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and Thursday’s keynote speaker at the SETC Convention in Lexington.

She urged her SETC audience members not to think of their careers as vertical climbs to the top, but rather to “hike the horizontal,” placing artistic work in the community or with the elderly in a senior citizens’ center on the same level as a performance before thousands on a Kennedy Center or Broadway stage. Rather than limit yourself, you can do both types of work, she says.
“Some people think, ’Here’s our work at the Kennedy Center up here,’” she said, holding one hand up high. “And here’s our work at nursing homes down here (holding another hand low). This (the high hand) – really important, great art. This (the hand at the bottom) – oh, let’s call it average.’”

“Or, some people think this: ’That stuff in the community is incredible, Liz. Why are you still bothering to do anything in the concert hall? It’s dead, it’s old, it’s elitist, it’s a luxury – give it up.’”

“Now you tell me – why would we want to choose between those two things? Really. I think of it like this: When there’s this incredible spectrum of possibility… why would we want to choose?”

It would be hard to find anyone who could speak to that point better than Lerman, who has been doing exactly what she advocates for years. A dancer, choreographer, writer, performer and educator, Lerman has been pushing the boundaries of the stage since she founded her professional dance company, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, in 1976. In fact, one of the projects that spurred the start of her company was her work in creating dance with residents at a senior center in Washington, DC. But Lerman, the recipient of a 2002 MacArthur “Genius Grant” Fellowship, also has choreographed works for the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center and other major spaces.

Based in Takoma Park, MD, her company performs, teaches, conducts residencies and is grounded in the conviction that dance is a birthright, and that dance is a profound means of communicating and investigating that which could not otherwise be understood. To make this happen, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange asks four questions: Who gets to dance? Where is the dance happening? What is it about? Why does it matter?

Her approach, which is easily applicable to theatre as well as dance, has drawn her into a wonderful variety of settings and communities to tackle big and cumbersome issues through performance. She has explored death and the afterlife with the elderly in nursing homes, change and endings with an entire community in a naval shipyard, and the implications of mapping the human genome with geneticists. Her current project, The Matter of Origins, ponders the idea of beginnings, including the beginning of the universe, drawing ideas from the fields of science, history and religion. This work, developed in collaboration with physicists, will premiere at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland in September 2010.

**Hiking the Horizontal**

Lerman’s bold approach to making dance in eclectic and unexpected environments is not only the basis of her life’s work but also the jumping-off point of her new book, Hiking the Horizontal: Field notes from a choreographer, to be published by Wesleyan University Press in early 2011. The book is a series of essays sharing Lerman’s thoughts on her life’s work, her dance company, her “critical response process” for meaningful input while making creative work (see sidebar, Page 26), and her bold hypothesis for how to find value in art in its many forms.

“The whole notion of hiking the horizontal is it’s never either-or,” she says.

For example, both community engagement (process-oriented) and formal performance (product-oriented) are equally important and meaningful experiences, she says. One informs and enriches the other, Lerman says.

She challenges us to consider how ideas and artistic work and organizations can live in a horizontal world, not a vertical and hierarchal one. In this horizontal context, you do not have to choose either/or, performance or outreach. You do not have to rank someone below and someone above. This is an environment which allows a co-existence of content without a qualification of status.

Rather than thinking in traditional hierarchal ways, Lerman challenged her SETC audience to consider these three standards for creating great artistic works, whether they are working on stage or in the community:

- First: The people who are doing the work are 100 percent committed.
- Second: They know why they’re doing what
they’re doing. They know why they’re gathered.

- Third: Something is revealed. Something happens to the people who are performing or the audience.

To underscore this concept, she states, “Every time you are think you are in an either/or situation – process or product – it’s both, and it’s both every second.”

The Matter of origins

A good example of how Lerman takes art in unexpected directions is her current work in rehearsal, The Matter of Origins. She began it just as she was winding up another science-related project, Ferocious Beauty: Genome, exploring the human genome.

Her new collaboration began after a casual conversation that Lerman had with Gordy Kane, Victor Weisskopf Collegiate Professor of Physics and Director of the Michigan Center for Theoretical Physics at the University of Michigan.

“A mutual friend suggested that she and I talk and that she might be interested in particle physics and the cosmology side of things, and the physics done on the Large Hadron Collider at the CERN project in Geneva, which is the biggest world laboratory for particle physics by far,” says Kane. “And so we got together, and it clicked.”

CERN is the European Organization for Nuclear Research, a multi-nation organization whose mission is “finding out what the universe is made of and how it works.” At CERN, the organization’s website notes, “the world’s largest and most complex scientific instruments are used to study the basic constituents of matter – the fundamental particles. By studying what happens when these particles collide, physicists learn about the laws of nature. The instruments used at CERN are particle accelerators and detectors. Accelerators boost beams of particles to high energies before they are made to collide with each other or with stationary targets. Detectors observe and record the results of these collisions.” The Large Hadron Collider is a huge scientific instrument which scientists are using to recreate events just after the Big Bang by colliding subatomic particles at very high energy.

Lerman visited CERN and came away eager to use the scientists’ work as a vehicle to look at beginnings through dance. She described a “goosebump” moment when she visited the CERN lab and saw the huge instruments for the first time, including the detector analyzing the results of the Large Hadron Collider experiments.

“One thing is the sheer size of the detector,” she says. “You can’t imagine how big this thing is. It’s five stories tall. And of course it’s measuring these things you can’t see. That’s the thing, the sense of scale. Whether you are talking about the scale of time, the scale of speed, the scale of uncertainty, that is really amazing.”

Taking that cue, Lerman decided to explore this
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juxtaposition of abstraction and specificity with a few provocative questions in *The Matter of Origins*. She asks, “How do we measure and what do we measure? Why does the measurement make us feel secure about ourselves and also why does it seem that the more important things are immeasurable?” Certainly, these are tasty morsels for artists in any discipline.

For example, in a piece about measurement in *The Matter of Origins*, audience members will see a scientific formula displayed on stage, then dancers will say the formula aloud and then the dancers will dance the formula.

In developing the work, Lerman also brought another well-known physicists’ project into the mix. As part of the setting for the work, she plans to recreate the aura of a Los Alamos, NM, tea house run by Edith Warner during the 1940s for the physicists working on the Manhattan Project, the codename for a project to develop the first atomic bomb. Edith Warner served food and poured tea for the physicists who had arrived to work on the project—and was known for the chocolate cake that she served.

Hearing her story prompted Lerman to ask several key questions: What conversations took place while the scientists were drinking tea and eating chocolate cake? The combination of secretive science and a quaint tea room serve Lerman’s artistic tendencies to create work on and off a traditional stage with everyone participating. In the production at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center next fall, the audience will sit in the tea room and interact with dancers and others as part of the performance.

“You go into the theatre, you sit down for 50 minutes and you see this piece,” Lerman says. “You come out of the theatre, you sit at these tables and you have tea. And you get to have a provocateur, which would be either a physicist or religious person, at every table. And you get to talk about what you’ve seen. Then there will be more dancing around the people.”

Just like those long-ago scientists at Los Alamos, the audience members will also enjoy Edith Warner’s chocolate cake.

“Her recipe – isn’t that fun?” says Lerman.

Including tea, food and conversation in the performance encourages the audiences to be part of the production.

“I think audiences, I know audiences want more interaction and they want to be a part of things and...
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they … don’t leave the theatre when it’s over,” says Lerman. “They sit in the theatre yammering at each other. So we know they want something more.”

The Collision of Science and Art

Physics and the arts are typically thought of as very different disciplines, but there are similarities between the collaborative communities of artists and scientists. Kane, for example, points to both groups’ need to communicate ideas and concepts and information in order to progress as “universal aspects of how people do creative things.” Kane notes that he, as a physicist, enjoys having someone from a totally different creative perspective examine his projects. “It’s for me a whole different way of thinking of things,” he says. “It’s very interesting for me to see how a different point of view gets to it.”

Lerman, meanwhile, says of Kane and other physicists, “I love their speculations. They are like poet-philosophers.” She also notes that she is particularly intrigued by the work of physicists that involves math because “it strikes me that they have an abstract language like we do, and it’s their love.”

She sees the power of the collective in science, just as in dance and theatre. She says CERN is “just an amazing place. There are people working together from every country.” To Lerman, it clearly defines her constant call for collaboration and communication and inquiry.

“The world can work together,” she says. “if you have a good question to ask.”

Art from Community, Collaboration

Whether it’s a scientist’s collider, a community’s forum or a nursing home’s activity room, Lerman is a strong believer in taking art offstage and involving others in the process of creating it. In her keynote presentation, Lerman urged the audience to look outside its discipline’s walls for new ideas, to be open to the world outside. She

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Skin Deep Troupe: Using Theatre for Social Change on Campus

As people approached the door of a small meeting room at the SETC Convention, there was a noticeable change in the energy level. Walking slowed and those entering the room looked on with curiosity at two tall African-American young men standing at attention on either side of the door. Both wore white plastic masks. They did not greet the arriving audience members. Inside the room, nearly 20 young African-American students lined the walls. Many were wearing the same shocking white plastic masks.

Suddenly music filled the space, the lights went out, and Skin Deep, the Winthrop University social justice troupe, took over the room, performing a pantomimed piece that illustrated the power of being pulled into a group against your will. The group surrounded a young man not wearing a mask and through dance “initiated” him into reluctantly putting on the mask – illustrating the intimidating power of peer pressure.

The performance gave a glimpse into a student-led group that is using theatre to make a difference on campus and in the community of Rock Hill, SC. Annie-Laurie Wheat, a professor of theatre and the group’s faculty advisor, brought Skin Deep to the SETC Convention to “inspire others to make a difference in their communities.”

Now in its fourth year of using the power of theatre to communicate social issues, the group includes 35 members, primarily but not exclusively African-American, and is led by co-founders Roderice Gilliam and Robin Fryer. They have tackled issues ranging from substance abuse to suicide on campus.

In the community, they have an ongoing partnership with local high schools to create Prom Pledge performances that ask students to commit to healthy choices on prom night. And these programs have been successful. Not only do students sign the pledges, but as Wheat says, “I have seen engaged discussion between actor and audience that makes you stop and think about risky behavior … and if they can change behavior after the audience leaves the building, then they have made a difference by not being afraid to speak out.”

- Tessa W. Carr
shared three charges for the audience:
- One: Get out of the studio.
- Two: Learn how to listen.
- Three: Find out how to converse with people in other fields. Maybe there’s something there for us, to make us stronger.

In the end, her insights into complex concepts lead us back to some simple

Judith Malina
(Continued from Page 23)

Until 2007, The Living Theatre never had a permanent home. Over the years, it has migrated from North America to Europe to South America. Often, its audience has had to follow it, much like her father’s congregation had to follow its rabbi.

That course led her to jail more than once, both in this country and in Brazil. In 1957 during the A-bomb scares, Malina, as a protest, refused to take shelter during an air-raid drill and received a 30-day jail sentence, which she spent with Dorothy Day of Catholic Worker newspaper fame. She described her time in jail with Day as though they were doing field work for a graduate course in social work.

“It was a great time, those 30 days,” she said. “I learned a lot about humanity. There were 900 innocent women in that prison. They were drug addicts and prostitutes. I learned about the suffering of young, innocent girls who are driven to a life of misery.”

Malina said that Dorothy Day is now being considered for sainthood by the Vatican. When asked about the miracle required for sainthood, Malina referred to the inmates’ language in jail. “The women in the prison used the “Oedipal” [m-f] adjective a lot, but while she [Day] was there, their language began to change and they didn’t use it any more.”

In 1968, The Living Theatre toured Paradise Now to Brazil, but its radical message offended the authorities and they were deported after serving several months in prison. No, her course has not been easy.

After six decades of itinerant life, The Living Theatre finally came to roost and, in 2007, set up shop in a 100-seat basement theatre in New York’s Lower East Side. Malina lives upstairs, and every day she and Burgess talk about the revolution. The message remains the same and her vision is still set on using theatre to create a better world. Audience involvement and confrontation are still the hallmarks of Living Theatre productions, but now multi-media effects are employed to help bring the point home. “In Eureka,” she says, “the people entered the theatre and there were no seats, only a beautifully lit space. The audience performed the play.”

George Hillow is head of design at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, VA.

Diane Litsey is executive director of the Children’s Dance Foundation in Birmingham, AL.

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Words, words, words... [Hamlet II,ii] reviews books on theatre that have a connection to the Southeast or may be of special interest to SETC members. Scott Phillips, an associate professor at Auburn University, edits this regular column. If you have a book for review, please send to: SETC, Book Editor, P.O. Box 9868, Greensboro, NC 27429-0868.

**Fine on Acting:**

*A Vision of the Craft*

by Howard Fine (with Chris Freeman)

2009, Havenhurst Books, Paperback

www.havenhurstbooks.com/


Price: $24.99

by Scott Secore

*Fine on Acting* is an easy read, speaking to the reader in a very accessible and conversational style. The material is presented in a way that leaves the reader feeling as if he’s just had a chat over drinks with a very intelligent, confident and engaging new friend. Throughout the book, the author reminds the actor of the basics, while advising on alternative ways in which to approach the craft, as well as ways in which to add more depth to what he or she has already achieved.

In this book, Fine attempts to address all aspects of the actor’s experience: the beginning stages of exploring a role, the common mistakes most young artists (and even seasoned veterans) make, and how to properly approach auditions and the rehearsal process.

The book also addresses how an actor may approach different genres and mediums (film/TV/stage), as well as the pitfalls caused by such problems as nerves, emotional blocks and working with bad actors/directors. The “Eight Steps to Role Preparation and Script Analysis,” found in the appendix, is an extremely valuable tool that would benefit any actor.

Fine stresses the fundamental principles of acting, especially the importance of researching roles, time periods, people and vocabulary. He repeatedly emphasizes the importance of fully understanding the text, developing both a history of and an emotional and intellectual understanding of your character and other characters, while using your imagination and knowledge to “fill in the blanks.” Fine consistently reminds us that good acting requires research, study, composure, patience and a willingness to work. While some people are naturally talented, hard work is still the most essential ingredient in achieving success.

While Fine has enjoyed great commercial success in his professional career (mainly in the film and television industry), his book breaks no new ground and suffers from an overemphasis on the author himself – as attested by the 27-page section devoted to his biography and accomplishments. This hybrid of biography and training manual also makes for a somewhat meandering and choppy read, at times tangential and overly focused on dropping names of celebrity clients.

Even so, I would certainly include *Fine on Acting* on a “recommended reading” list. Despite the book’s stylistic shortcomings, students should benefit from the information that Fine shares. At $24.99, this book offers a much less inexpensive way of gaining those insights than hiring Fine as a coach or attending classes at his studio in Hollywood.

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