

THEATER AT MASON NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Congratulations to the faculty and students of the School of Theater for being selected as the #8 Theater School in the country by Theater Schools.com. We always knew you were top-notch and this ranking shows we're not alone.

The year is only a few weeks old and the Friends of Theater at Mason have been busy. We kicked off the spring semester with the faculty and students at the convocation, saw the genesis of two plays – *Cloud 9* and *Middletown* – during their first rehearsals, watched a Master Class taught by Swiss performance troupe Mummenschanz, had the opportunity to hear the first reading of Professor Heather McDonald's new play *Masterpieces*, and were treated to an evening of song and comedy by the Mason Cabaret and Mason Improv. And before we 'meet' again in our next newsletter we'll have attended *Cloud 9*, observed a Master Class led by actor Dale Stein, attended Ms. Stein's play *A Fresh of Breath Air*, and enjoyed a post-show reception with her and our always-incredible Mason Theater students and faculty.

As we catch our breath of fresh air, it's easy to be distracted by the opportunities we Friends receive and forget that we receive because we took the opportunity to give. Our Friends of Theater membership donations led directly to \$2,500 scholarships for six Mason Theater students that you'll read more about later in this newsletter. As you read about our scholarship winners I hope your heart is filled with pride knowing that you played a significant role in rewarding their achievement and determination and that you are helping them fulfill their dreams. When it comes to the benefits of being a Friend of Theater, I think that's the best benefit of all.

See you in the theater,

Mack Miller, President
Friends of Theater at Mason

FRIENDS OF THEATER SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

Thanks to our donors, Friends of Theater at Mason is pleased to be able to offer six scholarships of \$2500 each in the spring of 2016. Qualifying students must be full-time theater Majors or students pursuing the Theater Education Certificate, with a minimum 3.0 grade point average.

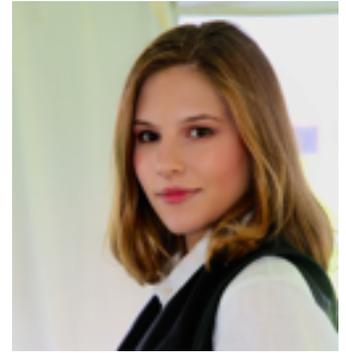
There were 14 applicants; six were chosen and a seventh, also scholarship worthy, will be given a stipend supported by Arts by George funding to attend a technical stagecraft conference in the spring. The applications were evaluated by their essays and the financial need expressed. Recommendations were made to the Board by the faculty and the Board approved the granting of the scholarships to the following recipients. The scholarships were awarded at the spring convocation.

Mia Amado is a sophomore working toward a BFA in Performance for Stage and Screen. She commutes from hometown Bristow, Virginia to save money. The scholarship will help her pay for the costs of tuition, supplies, books and travel or will allow her to pursue opportunities to either study acting or directing abroad or accept valuable unpaid internships. Since Mia began performing in plays in third grade, acting has been one of her greatest passions and pursuits. She is also seeking opportunities to grow as a director. Mia has been seen in *The Vagina Monologues*, the *Ten Minute Play Festival*, *Dido*, and *Boleros for the Disenchanted*. She is working to become a respected actor and director in theater, TV and film after graduation and says, "I aspire to create innovative work that inspires and touches audiences in a powerful, thought-provoking way."



Keenan Gibson, a sophomore theater major, comes to George Mason from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His main interests in theater are comedic storytelling and character work. He is an active member of Mason Improv and appeared in *Boleros for the Disenchanted* and *Peter Pan, the Boy Who Hated Mothers*. He is presently preparing for a role in *Middletown*. Keenan applied for the scholarship because of the need for financial assistance. Both he and his Mom have taken out loans to continue at Mason as an out of state student. He says he is not sure what he wants to do post graduation but is exploring staying in the area or perhaps even moving to Chicago or LA to pursue comedy on film and stage.

Laila Keadan is a theater major with a performance concentration, planning to graduate in May of 2019. As a fourth grader, and without truly understanding the complexity of the art, she proudly proclaimed that she wanted to become an actress. Laila has had broad experience in summer workshops and programs, which led to her realization that the best preparation for an acting career is to attend a university with a program dedicated to intensive professional training in the arts. The training that she is receiving here at Mason has enabled her to learn, grow and strive as not only an actor but as an individual. An out of state student, Laila, is deeply appreciative of the financial aid received.



Ashley King is a freshman theater major from Rancho Santa Margarita, California who enjoys acting but also enjoys the management aspects of theater. She hopes to be accepted into the accelerated Masters program for Arts Management. Her post-graduation dream is to open and manage a conservatory for students with disabilities. During the first part of the day the students would complete their core classes and then go to their specific areas of interest in music, theater, and other forms of dramatic art. Ashley was an assistant stage manager for *The Crucible* and will be for *Middletown*.



Stephanie Risch is a sophomore who comes to Mason from Grove City, Pennsylvania. Stephanie has studied theater, voice and dance from an early age, and has appeared in multiple theater roles throughout her academic career, including *The Mystery of Edmund Drood*, *An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Broadway Backwards*, *Ten Minute Play Festival*, and *The Crucible*. Her primary interest is acting, but she also enjoys musical theater and directing/choreographing. Her goal is to work professionally in the DC area as an actor, singer, and dancer in musical productions.



Savanna Stanton-Ameisen is a junior theater major from Bryn Mawr, PA with a concentration in performance and a minor in dance. She enjoys both performance and stage management and hopes to go to graduate school to continue to pursue her passion in theater, eventually acquiring an MFA. Savanna has appeared in *The Mystery of Edmund Drood* and the *Vagina Monologues*, served as choreographer for the *Goddess Diaries* and assistant stage manager for *Peter Pan* and *The Boy Who Hated Mothers*. She is presently a costume shop intern. The scholarship will reduce the amount of money she will owe after graduation.



FROM THE DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THEATER



What a great start to 2016!! Of course, I am not referring to the crazy weather that started our spring semester. January 2016, for some of us, began with the winter semester studying theater in London. It was two weeks of touring theaters, seeing thoughtful, powerful, amazing productions, and meeting with artists and activists making important theater. Oh, yes, we studied, too. We examined the history of London theater, considered for-profit and not-for-profit art, explored global history and its influence on theater, delved into the nature of inspiration and collaboration, and we created and shared performances inspired by historic forms and the experiences our group shared in the term. If it sounds like a couple of packed and exhilarating weeks, then you have some sense of what the term offered.

The London Theater Study has been part of Mason's Global education offerings for many years. It was an honor and a thrill for me to lead this tour of the first time. There is no doubt that the opportunity was as inspirational for me, in recharging my "creative batteries", as it seems to have been for the students on the tour. Time and again students communicated the transformational power of seeing great work and the philosophies, facilities and energies behind it.

We saw nine shows in all: cutting edge West End productions and musicals, devised work, small and political shows on the fringes, and an unforgettably divine Panto. All left indelible impressions. We discussed and explored new technologies for the stage and enjoyed master classes with the best theater companies and training programs in the world.

Mason's School of Theater values the development of new artistic voices for the world. The London Theater Study program is a valuable piece in the larger mosaic of training here. If you are interested in knowing more, please ask me about the trip and talk to the students who went. We are the stories we tell, and some of us have a few new ones to relate.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ken D. Elston".

Ken Elston



THE SCHOOL OF THEATER and

MASON PLAYERS

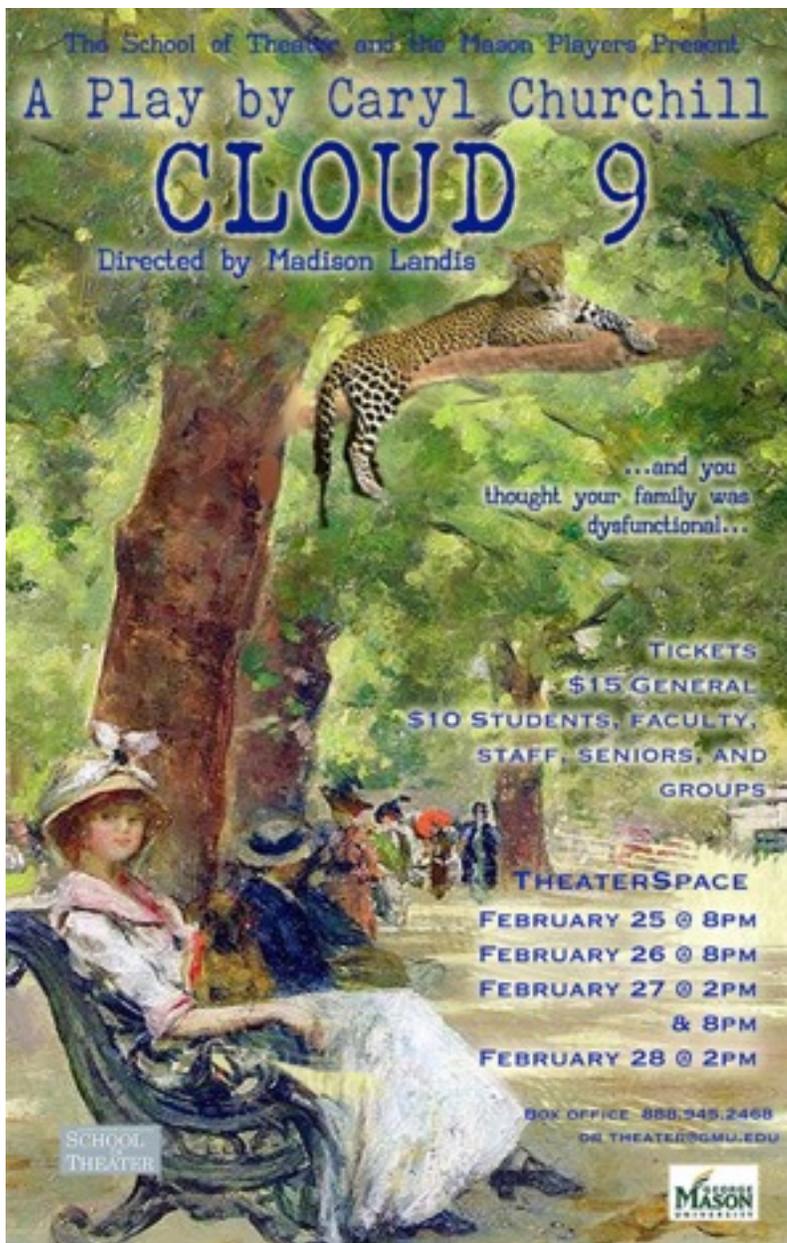
present

CLOUD 9

A Studio Series Performance

Written by Caryl Churchill

Directed by Madison Landis



The time-shifting gender-bending comedy both parodies and spoofs the Victorian Empire and its rigid attitudes as it shifts seamlessly between 1880's British Africa and 1980's London. Against a backdrop of imperial occupation, sexual repression, restless natives and a crumbling Empire, Churchill provides a marvelous send-up of a hundred years of Rule Britannia!

PERFORMANCES

February 25, 2016 at 8 pm

February 26 - February 27 at 8 pm

February 27 - February 28 at 2 pm

TheaterSpace

Tickets

\$15 adults

\$10 students, faculty, staff,
seniors and groups

Pay What You Can: February 24, 8:00
pm Preview performance



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

What stands out to me about *Cloud 9* is how, despite the fact it was written 37 years ago, the issues the characters are facing feel incredibly relevant. Homophobia, gender expectations, rape culture and colonization plague this family that's just doing their best. Caryl Churchill uses comedy to point out the ridiculousness of society's standards and uses time to show what's changed, and what hasn't. From the lens of both the distant and recent past, we can see how far we've come, and how far we still have to go.

As a director, the origin of this play fascinated me. It began as a series of improvised scenes based on the subject "sexual politics". Caryl Churchill worked with a group of actors in the Joint Stock Theatre Group to tell this ambitious story. In the spirit of Churchill's creation of this text, I worked intensely with the designers and actors to tell the story today. The use of collaboration and creativity was key to this production, and this play.

This production of *Cloud 9* would not have been possible without the talent and hard work of the cast, crew, designers, technicians, stage managers, students artists and faculty mentors of the George Mason University School of Theater. The mere two hours of show took months and months of planning and preparation, and I couldn't have, and wouldn't want to have, done it alone.

Madison Landis
Director

Madison Landis is a senior Theater BFA with a concentration in Acting and Directing for the Stage and Screen and a minor in Psychology. Previously, she's directed *The Vagina Monologues*, *WAVES* at Mason, *The Masquerade is Over*, TMPF '15, and *Monsters Calling Home*, TMPF'14. Her acting credits include *The Crucible* (Elizabeth Proctor), and *An Experiment With An Air Pump* (Susanna).

COSTUME CHALLENGES

When I came to George Mason University in the fall of 2013 I entered the School of Theater pursuing a BFA in Theater with a concentration in Performance for Stage and Screen. It wasn't until last semester when I took Professor Autumn Casey's Principles of Design course that I began to even consider pursuing a career in theatrical design along with my BFA in performance. It was around that same time that Elisa Perez, an alumnus of George Mason and the costume designer for *Cloud 9* approached me to be her assistant for the production. We had talked briefly before about my budding interest in theatrical design and she wanted to give me the chance to expand my horizons. I was thrilled to get the chance to design with Elisa because



she designed the first show I ever performed in at George Mason (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*). I knew *Cloud 9* was a show with crazy cross-dressing antics and absurd, theatrical comedy. It would be an incredible show to start my designing career, but also a challenging one!

To start, there were the challenges that come inherently from designing a studio show. For example, studio shows have a shorter production time span, which consequently means less time for designers to collaborate, render and build their designs. Second is the limited budget. It is by no means an insurmountable problem, but more of a healthy challenge. The most obvious answer for Elisa and I was to rely primarily on pulling costume pieces from our own storage rather than trying to construct specific pieces for actors. That's a great, easy way to cut back on cost! Of course, this presented yet another challenge for me and Elisa! We now had to design for a show which takes place in two very different time periods with limited time and budget while relying mostly on pulled costume pieces which we prayed would fit our actors with one other tricky factor: we had to have believable crossdressing on stage! For example, in Act 1 the character of Betty, the flighty wife of a straight-laced, respectable Englishman is played by a male actor. We had to think a little bit outside the box.

First, Elisa and I dove into the costume storage for any pieces that fit both the character and actor. We rarely were able to find a full outfit that fit one actor but with a little creativity and eye for color, we were able to match pieces and build believable costumes from the ground up for each of the actors. For example, for Betty's Act 1 look we found a frilly pink skirt and petticoat that would fit our male actor, but the matching top was entirely too tight for the actor. Taking his broad shoulders and the fact that he had to participate in some particularly demanding physical blocking and stage combat, there was no way his broad frame would fit into the tight bodice that came with the skirt. So, instead, we pulled a frilly lace shirt and coupled it with a similar pink corset but one we could much more easily adjust. In the end we were left with a costume that fit both the actor and character, as well as believable in the specific time frame. We repeated this process with many of the other Act 1 looks. If it fit the character and could possibly fit the actor after some adjustments, we grabbed it and sorted through things later. In the end we waded out of our sea of costume racks to assemble a collection of crazy, fun and creative costumes.

As a novice designer the prospect of helping design the costumes for such a fun and crazy show was an exciting but intimidating prospect. I had never even considered the idea of designing a show before this year suddenly was thrust into a completely different world. It took a little patience on my head designer's part and a lot of quick learning on my own part but in the end I'm immensely grateful for the opportunity to help Madison Landis bring her vision for this incredible show to life for the Mason Players. I knew I was in for a treat once Elisa asked me to join her and I've been on cloud nine ever since.

Adam Lemos
Assistant Costume Designer

Adam is a junior from Williamsburg, Virginia. He is Associate Company Manager for the Mason Players, Community Service Chair for Alpha Psi Omega, and a Teaching Artist for Acting for Young People. His roles include The Son in *Six Characters In Search Of An Author*, John in *Peter Pan the Boy Who Hated Mothers* and Armstrong in *An Experiment With an Air Pump*. Tech experiences include Light Design for AFYP's production of *Seussical* this winter. Adam's post graduation dreams include traveling, performing in touring theater and graduate school.

FIRST REHEARSAL

It finally stopped snowing!



ALUMNI AT WORK

ALAINA TALLEY



It's a wonderful feeling to find a path after graduation, but it's even better when that path leads you to discover a passion. My work with Mary Lechter and Acting For Young People through undergrad led me to be introduced to Potomac Arts Academy at George Mason. This organization, in collaboration with AFYP, represents the community arts division of the College of Visual and Performing Arts. Potomac Arts Academy offers year round classes, lessons, and summer programs for all ages in music, art, theater, and more! I manage a 250 student weekly calendar of private lessons in my role as Private Lesson Coordinator, but the amazing part of this

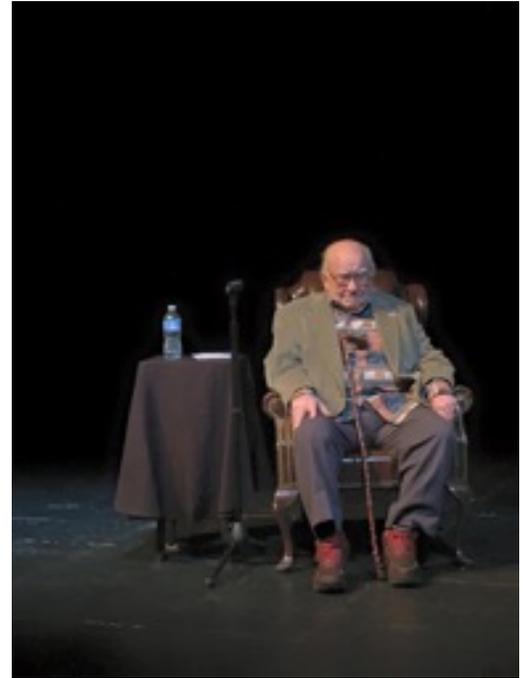
position is that I am also able to continue my role as a Senior Teaching Artist with AFYP all wrapped into one! I teach, administrate, and assist in creating new and fresh programming for their year round season. I am still very much connected to the university and am grateful for the opportunities even after graduation!

TWO WONDERFUL MASTER CLASSES

ED ASNER AT MASON

Mr. Asner came to George Mason as a guest of PART, the Professional Artist Residency in Theater (PART) Program, bringing professional artists of all theatrical disciplines to Theater at Mason to teach, mentor, and work with our students. He was introduced by Ken Elston, who and shared a short video of Ed's career and roles. With a career that began in the 1940s, it's safe to say that no one in TheaterSpace was familiar with all the roles Ed has played on stage, in movies.

and on TV. The total of his experience is staggering and everyone was in awe by the end.



Ed spoke about acting in the different media and spoke at length about the director/actor relationship. He pointed out that the director and actor may come at a role from two different directions and have to negotiate a solution to that dilemma. He spoke about several roles where his interpretation of his character was significantly different from the director's and he described for the students different approaches he used to present his view. He did caution the them to remember that in the final analysis the director is the boss.

Four students acted for him... a senior and junior who acted parts from *The Crucible* and a sophomore and freshman who acted their roles in *Boleros for the Disenchanted*. As the scenes were presented, Ed provided a director's direction to the students and after each scene he gave the actors constructive guidance. For the Friends of Theater in the audience, this part of the Master Class was very enlightening since those in attendance have not acted and saw a director at work for the first time.

At the end of the class, every one of the students and many of the Friends lined up to have their picture taken with Ed. A true professional, he had a few remarks to exchange with each student and Friend. Meeting him was an exciting end to the class.

MUMMENSCHANZ WORKSHOP



A very lucky group of theater students, Ken Elston's directing class, with some student from his Mask and Mime class, had the pleasure of working with Floriana Frassetto, co-founder of Mummenschantz, who were appearing at the Center For The Arts. They began with mask making using found objects. Plastic gallon-sized milk bottles formed the base and they were led through the process of giving these masks a personality.

Once the masks were made, Ms. Frassetto led the group through a series of warmup exercises emphasizing stretch, motion and mime. From there they progressed to individual portrayals with masks followed by group skits. It was wonderful to behold!

BROADWAY MIRACLES AND MADCAP COMEDY

MASON CABARET



A great evening of Cabaret was enjoyed by a packed house when Mason's own took the stage to sing a huge repertoire of Broadway favorites from Cohan, Kern, Hammerstein, Berlin, Gershwin, Loesser, Rogers, Herman, Kander & Ebb, Schwartz, Webber, and more.

The show was directed by James Gardiner with Musical Direction and Accompaniment by William Yanesh.

MASON IMPROV ASSOCIATION



The evening's second act offered two hilarious long form improvisations based on a single word from the audience. Mason Improv was in great form and the evening was enjoyed by all.

AN AFTERNOON AT HILLWOOD



Professor of Theater Howard Vincent Kurtz not only teaches costume design, fashion history, pattern making, makeup design, and an introduction to the theater arts for non-majors, but is also the Associate Curator of Costumes and Textiles at the Hillwood Museum and Gardens in Washington D.C., He recently led a private tour of the mansion and the *Ingenu* to *Icon* exhibit (which he curated) for Friends of Theater. It was a lovely gift to some of those who give to Friends of Theater.

COMING UP



**February 28, 2016
7:00 PM
CONCERT HALL**

Can two lost souls find love, hope, and redemption on a barren patch of earth under a lover's moon? Set on a Connecticut farm in 1923, this poignant and heartrending tale follows a fiery Irish lass with a sharp tongue and tarnished reputation. Fate has paired her with a tortured alcoholic, haunted by his own past. Sparks fly as their hearts open to each other on one autumn night, but as dawn breaks, is it enough to help them overcome a lifetime of disappointment? A prequel to *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and Nobel laureate Eugene O'Neill wrote this bittersweet play — his only true love story — at the end of his career, and it remains one of his most definitive works. This riveting drama is brought to our stage by Philadelphia's storied Walnut Street Theatre. "O'Neill at the height of his powers — masterfully employing classical fundamentals to wring hauntingly poetic truths about love and self-delusion from gritty everyday experience." (Los Angeles Times)

WELCOME TO FIFI'S CAFE



Enter the exhilarating world of Fifi's Café, a haven for neighborhood eccentrics. Portraying all its inhabitants, the captivating Dale Stein offers her unique, whimsical style in a tour de force performance that had the Washington Post describing her as an "adroit comic artist...a Tomlin-esque satirist... a surrealist who relishes life in the outer fringes."

Baltimore's Daily Record calls her "a voice so original and kind-spirited that you walk out of the show wanting to make a U-turn back in to see it all over again."

A perfect fit for our Season of Miracles and Madness!

A FRESH OF BREATH AIR

**Written and Performed by Dale Stein
March 3, 2016 at 8:00 pm
TheaterSpace**

**Tickets:
\$15 general admission;
\$10 students, faculty, staff, seniors and groups**



COME MEET THE ARTIST

**Friends of Theater
invite you to be our guests
at a reception honoring
Dale Stein
following the show
in the TheaterSpace Lobby.**