

Newsletter September 2015

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September 2015

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Welcome to the Season of Miracles and Madness!

The School of Theater faculty, students, and FOTM Board are collaborating to provide the Friends of Theater with unique events that will enhance your theater experience and bring you closer to the Theater at Mason. In the first month of this semester we were treated to a special theater performance by Mason Alumni at the Workhouse Arts Center and were invited to the School of Theater's Fall Convocation and the first reading of *The Crucible* – this fall's mainstage production. We also invited the new students to our annual FOTM Fall Picnic. And we aren't finished nine more special events are possible before the holiday break. Perhaps we are mad to consider this many events (and it may take a miracle to pull them off), but I guarantee that if you attend some or all of the events, you will learn something and you will associate with the finest theater students, faculty, and friends group you will ever meet. Watch your email for information on upcoming events.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mack Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mack Miller, President
Friends of Theater at Mason



THE SEASON OF MIRACLES AND MADNESS

Miracles and Madness abound at Mason's School of Theater. How is that different from any other day around here? Well, this season, our amazing productions will be exploring the energies and intersections of faith and reason, family and friendship, fantasy and certainty.

We begin the season with our Mason Fringe. These shows are big on theatrical ideals and low on technical demand. Again this year, we have two shows running in rep. These are pay-what-you-can, because we want to make certain our audience does come to see both offerings: *Boleros for the Disenchanted* and *A Bright New Boise*. Both explore family dynamics and generational development with a lot of heart.

On the occasion of Arthur Miller's 100th year, we enliven one of his most enduring works, *The Crucible*. The script for this mainstage production is the product of a long-term, undergraduate research project, and we can expect to see new energy, new interpretations, and a new approach to Miller's famous piece.

On the subject of enduring works, *Peter Pan: The Boy who Hated Mothers*, will bring a fresh look at Barrie's original book. Exhilarating theatricality pairs with this exciting tale we may imagine we know well. We guarantee a few surprises, at least.

After the holidays, Caryl Churchill's time and gender-bending comedy, *Cloud Nine*, spoofs more than imperialism. And, the contemporary work, *Middletown*, makes us question our social assumptions in ways that may hit close to home.

The season closes with the expected cavalcade of our Ten Minute Play Festival. This is always chock o block with miracles and madness, both onstage and behind the scenes. This year's shows will add a bit more madness and a few more miracles to your lives.

Each show this season seems timely, and each will be full of life, as only Theater can be. Let the miracles and madness begin.

See you in the theater,
Ken

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ken D. Elston". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Ken Elston
Director, School of Theater



**THE SCHOOL OF THEATER
and
MASON PLAYERS PRESENT**

The School of Theater
and
the Mason Players present

Boleros for the Disenchanted
By José Rivera
Directed by Matt Succi
*Passion, humor, infidelity
amid the warm breezes of
1950s Puerto Rico*

A Bright New Boise
A Play by Samuel D. Hunter
Directed by Nathan Vasquez
*Torn between Faith and Family,
a disgraced evangelical chases a modern miracle*

MASON FRINGE

TheaterSpace
October 7th at 8pm
October 9th at 8pm
October 10th at 2pm

TheaterSpace
October 8th at 8pm
October 10th at 8pm
October 11th at 2pm

Each show is pay what you can!
(\$5 increments only please)
Box office 888.945.2468 or theater@gmu.edu

SCHOOL THEATER

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

BOLEROS FOR THE DISENCHANTED

**A Mason Fringe Performance
Written by José Rivera
Directed by Matt Succi**

Passion, humor and infidelity collide amid the warm, sunny breezes of 1950s Puerto Rico when Eusebio sweeps Flora off her feet and off to America – away from her family and her familiar life. Nearly 40 years later, the cracks in their marriage have begun to widen as old secrets are revealed, causing Flora to question the life she has tirelessly built in a foreign land.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Before I came to college, I didn't really have an appreciation for my Latino heritage. Back home everyone looked like me, talked like me, and the Latino culture was just a part of my everyday life. Coming to Mason, I dealt with some culture shock as I began to realize that I am now a part of a minority. This prompted some soul searching from me in the form of rediscovering my heritage as a

Puerto Rican. The culture of my ancestors is both a beautiful and tragic story that is often left untold in today's society. By taking two things that I love, theater and my heritage, I choose to direct *Boleros for the Disenchanted* with the ambition of illuminating the migrant and immigrant experience for so many Americans in this wonderful country. As the playwright José Rivera once said about this play: "These are not people who have stories written about them." Well, I feel it is time to tell this story as it is one that is long overdue to be told. It is amazing how much your future can change when you have a new found appreciation for your past.

Matt Succi is a Senior Theater Major and Criminology, Law and Society Minor at George Mason University. He's been involved primarily with the Mason Players as both an actor and a director, but has also dabbled as an actor in the DC theater scene, most notably with the Capital Fringe festival. Matt is currently applying to law schools in the DC area.

PERFORMANCES

October 7 at 8 PM

October 9 at 8 PM

October 10 at 2 PM

TheaterSpace

Every Fringe Performance is Pay What You Can!

(in \$5 increments, please.)

A BRIGHT NEW BOISE

A Mason Fringe Performance

Written by Samuel D. Hunter

Directed by Nathan Vasquez

In the bleak break room of a run-down hobby shop in Boise, Idaho, Will, a disgraced evangelical touched by scandal, chases a modern miracle -reconnection with his estranged son. Soon, his fellow employees uncover his secret past, his son falls even deeper into depression, and Will must choose between rebuilding a normal family life or returning to the faith that at one time gave his life meaning.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I was first introduced to Samuel D. Hunter's *A Bright New Boise* by a good friend and colleague about a year ago. We were in the living room of his house in North Carolina watching the finale of *The Bachelor* on TV and munching on some leftover Chinese takeout when he tells me about this play he'd been reading for class. As I casually spun some lo mein onto my fork I asked what the play was about. He was silent for almost a minute before he said: "It's about faith and family." The next day I went out looking for a script. I located a copy a week later, and from that moment up to this present moment in time Hunter's play has become one of my absolute favorites.



My friend was right, *A Bright New Boise* examines the relationship between faith and family, and the lengths to which one will go to achieve both. The play asks us one question: are faith and family mutually exclusive? If so, how do balance them both in our day-to-day lives? If not, where do we draw the line? In less than seventy pages, Hunter tells a beautiful story of a father chasing a modern miracle: a second chance. Months later, when it was announced that the Mason Players' 2015-2016 season would be the "Season of Miracles and Madness," I knew I had the perfect play to share with our audience!

In the play, Will, an evangelical with a troubled past, searches for truth and comfort in the bleak, cynical world of a Hobby Lobby breakroom in Boise. Within the confines of this world, the lost souls of Will, Alex, Anna, Leroy and Pauline try to give their lives meaning. Are we not all trying to do the same thing? Do we not mindlessly go about our lives—going to work, school, etc.—in the hopes that by doing so one day we'll wake up and understand it all?

Will certainly thinks so. With that said, I invite you all to join me, the cast of *A Bright New Boise*, the Mason Fringe company and the Mason Players on a journey to a small city in Idaho—where who knows, we might just find that answer we're all looking for.

Happy trails,
Nathan Vasquez, Director

Nathan Vasquez hails all the way from the Emerald City, or as it's known on the map, Seattle. He moved to Northern Virginia back in 2007. Two years later, during his second week of high school, he wandered into the audition room for his school's production of *Bye Bye Birdie*, and ever since he's been involved in the theatre in some capacity. In

2012, Nathan made his directorial debut with Ariadne Blayde's *The Other Room* (which featured two current Mason theater students!) and has since fallen in love the art of directing. In his spare time Nathan loves watching late night talk shows and baking brownies! He is a Junior Theater major with a concentration in Acting and Directing for the Stage and Screen. Next up on Nathan's schedule is to serve as the production stage manager for the Mason Player's production of *Middletown*.

PERFORMANCES

October 8 at 8 PM

October 10 at 8 PM

October 11 at 2 PM

TheaterSpace

Every Fringe Performance is Pay What You Can!

Remember that Fringe does not mean far-out. These are warm human dramas we can all relate to. Fringe simply means there is minimal scenery and costumes. The shows will run in repertoire on alternate days. The cast of each show serves as the production crew for for the other. Here is an early peek of both casts as they begin their serious work.



EXCITED ABOUT THEATER EDUCATION

Katherine Brunberg is a recent George Mason alumna who offered to share her experiences as a new theater teacher in the Fairfax County School System. This editor thinks she has very lucky students!



Please give us a little background. Did you come to Mason to major in Theater Education?

I have always been interested in theater education. However, I originally went to college thinking, "I'll major in theater to be an actor, and then teach it as my backup." Hilarious. Six years later, here I am! How did this happen? Suddenly, and without warning. I was in Mary Lechter's Acting 2 class. I had heard about her company, Acting For Young People, through my boyfriend who taught with them. I approached Mary about a job, and that was all she wrote. I've worked with AFYP since Fall of 2010. I absolutely loved it. My backup plan became THE plan. As soon as I heard about Mary's new theater education program at Mason, I jumped on the opportunity. It was the best decision I ever made.

The curriculum looks very broad and oriented toward liberal arts. What was your area of concentration? Has it paid off in the classroom? Are there courses you wish you had taken?

My main areas of expertise in college were acting and scenic painting. I tried to be as involved as possible. I have worked in almost every area of theatrical production, thanks to Mason theater providing such a range of opportunities to its students and encouraging them to branch out whenever possible. I have been light board operator, assistant stage manager, scenic paint charge, director, and actor. I've taken classes in movement, acting, stage makeup, theatre history, scenic painting, and more. All of the classes and experiences have influenced what I teach and the way that I teach it. I do wish that I had taken more technical theater classes, particularly lighting design and sound design. I feel that these are the areas in which I am weakest, and as a theater educator you need to have at least a basic knowledge of every aspect of theater.

Can you describe your job? What is your class load? Are you responsible for student productions? Is that part of your job or an additional contract?

I am a part-time (50%) salaried employee of Fairfax County Public Schools. I have three classes that all meet on the same day (as opposed to a full load of 5 classes). We are on a block schedule, which means I am only contracted to work every other day. I am currently managing a full-time after-school program. This is something that I agreed to do when I was hired, even as a part-time employee. There is a stipend for doing the extra-curricular program, but it doesn't come close to covering the hours put in to make it happen. If you were to calculate how much an average theatre teacher makes per hour based on how much time they spend and their total salary, no one would ever become a theater teacher. It is hard that I am getting half the salary of a full-time teacher, but doing just as much work, but at the same time I am grateful for the extra time that I have. I can't even imagine my first year with a full course load. The good thing is, I'm not in it for the money. I told myself if I get a job that pays enough to get by, I'm doing that and only that. I won't be getting a part-time job. I might sub occasionally, but ultimately I'm here to do the best job I can for these kids, and give them a stellar education. I'm happy to be doing what I love.

Is this your first year? I assume you had a student teaching experience. Are you teaching in a secondary school? Are your kids serious about theater or do they just want to act in a play?

This is my first year as a salaried professional! Hooray me! I did my student teaching in the Fall of 2014 with Terri Hobson at Woodson High School. I then almost immediately went into long-term substitute teaching for Amy Hard at Robinson Middle School. It wasn't too long after that that I was hired on at Annandale High School. My students are very serious about theater. I was lucky to come into a program where there were already established student technicians. The kids were actually begging me to give them work to do when I first got here, and I was like, "Um... and your name is?" It's been a whirlwind, but I couldn't have asked for a better group of kids to help me through my first year. And that's really true. Don't be afraid to ask your kids for help your first year, especially coming into an established program. Some of them probably know the spaces better than you do.

What part of teaching do you like best? Worst?

The best thing about being a theatre teacher is getting to teach them what I want, when I want, and in a way I want to teach it. The worst part about being a theatre teacher is having to teach them what I want, when I want, and in a way I want to teach it. What I mean to say is... there is a lot of freedom of choice that comes with being a theatre teacher. You choose the shows, you build your syllabus, you determine how to cover the information, what to emphasize, what to spend less time on. I was talking to a new math teacher at my school, and I asked her how her syllabi were coming. She said, "Oh... that? They just give us one." I'm pretty sure I stared at her blankly for a good thirty seconds. It's been a challenging first few weeks, but the moments where I can connect with a student and make them feel important or make them try something they never would have ever tried without me encouraging them to just do it... that's what I'm here for. That's why I teach theatre. That's why I teach.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

This is an eight minute interview with Sarah Weinstein. Sarah graduated in the mid-90's with a degree in theater and started teaching theater internationally soon after. She is currently teaching in Macao, near Hong Kong. Her interview is very interesting, her life-after-college story. She was interviewed because she was in town and telling Rick Davis about her experiences. He wanted a record of it to inspire others pursuing Theater Education degrees.

Teaching is for those who love it. Mason's graduate program in Theater Education has a 90% placement rate in getting students hired. Tying it to STEAM shares the approach that critical thinking and creativity are directly tied to have an arts experience. Using theater as a catalyst for learning works!



If you want to connect even further, the Discovery Forum on October 3rd is offering Continuing Education Units to educators (in any subject!) who attend, counting toward their recertification.

THE DISCOVERY FORUM

Presented by The STEAM Table at Mason

OCTOBER 3
FROM 8:30 A.M. TO 5:30 P.M.

HYLTON PERFORMING
ARTS CENTER
On the Science and Technology
Campus of George Mason University
in Manassas, VA

What will
you discover?



Scientists, engineers, artists, educators, technology, and business leaders gather "outside the box" to share innovative approaches to business and education. As we move further into a 21st century economy, global competition demands creative, critical thinking in order to remain competitive, regardless of your age or experience. Whether you choose to participate or simply observe, you will experience interactive discussions, all and video exhibits, educational tools, various games design and more that incorporate creativity into your everyday work. Tap into your creative spark. Engage across disciplines and make professional and personal connections. **Science/STEAM - Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics.**

TICKETS:
\$35 (Includes one adult admission to the children's play, *A Penny Saved*, at 4 p.m. in the Gregory Family Theater.)
Educators coupon code: 4theday

Visit Steamtable.org
for more details.

Presenting Sponsor 



FALL CONVOCAATION

Convocation brings the entire School of Theater together at the beginning of each semester. TheaterSpace is alive with electricity. It follows a routine: first Ken Elston, Director of the School of Theater, welcomes all and introduces the faculty, who talk about their courses and interests. Then the upper class students take over---

Mason Players, Alpha Psi Omega, and the directors of this semester's plays. A special highlight in the fall is the presentation of major scholarships. This year the Chris Parsons Scholarship for Acting was awarded to Justin Sumblin. The Howard Vincent Kurtz Award in Design and Technical Theater was awarded to Blake Taft and Mailey Shimon. The Mason Improv Association provided entertainment and a mountain of pizza was consumed.





FRIENDS OF THEATER ANNUAL PICNIC

This year's cookout was held in the cosy and comfortable Burke Community Center, where we enjoyed great food and fellowship on an Autumn Sunday afternoon.



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