

Fall 2015

Theatre UNI Alumni Newsletter, Fall 2015-Spring 2016

University of Northern Iowa. Department of Theatre.

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THEATRE UNI ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Fall 2015 – Spring 2016

IN THIS ISSUE

2 | **LETTER FROM THE
DEPARTMENT HEAD**
Eric Lange

3 | **UNI STUDENTS
TAKING (SUMMER)
STOCK**

4 | **RUTH MARGRAFF**
DAH, and
Proscenium
Delirious

5 | **INDEPENDENCE**
Brings Alumni Together

6 | **RECENT ALUMNA**
Returns as
Teaching Assistant

7 | **TAFT AT OKOBOJI**

8 | **ISABELLA AND THE
MOUNTAIN**
An Interview with
Cynthia Goatley

9 | **TOURING WITH FELD
ENTERTAINMENT**

**IOWA THESPIANS
FESTIVAL**

10 | **ALUMNI PROFILES**
Katy Slaven
Andrea Tonsfeldt

12 | **PUPPETS ON TOUR**
UNI *Avenue Q* Puppets Find
A New Life on the Road

13 | **SPECTRUM**
Theatre Works

14 | **HELPS CONFERENCE/
AUDITION SUPPORT
FUND**

ON THE COVER
Theatre UNI production of *RENT*

THEATREUNI

AT STRAYER-WOOD ♦ University of Northern Iowa
MEMBER OF NAST - NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

A LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD



As we prepare to end this Fall semester, I'm happy to share some of the exciting things that have been happening at Theatre UNI since our last newsletter. Several faculty members (and one student!) have made contributions to the articles that follow. I'll get things started by highlighting some recent activity.

This academic year (2015-16) saw the largest entering class of Theatre majors in several years. We had 42 new students join the department, while in the past several years we typically see closer to 30 students. I believe one factor contributing to the increase is that we have hosted the Iowa Thespians Festival for six years now (you'll read more about that later in the newsletter,) and many of our new students have been on campus each year they were in high school.

In the last several years we have embarked on the production of a musical every year. They have all been fun and exciting challenges. One article in this newsletter talks about our family of naughty puppets for *Avenue Q* – which seem to want a life even after the show last year! If you know the show, you'll appreciate the “disclaimer” signs we used in the lobby.



This year's musical was *RENT*. Several sold-out performances made this a record-breaking show in terms of sales. We used this show to connect to UNI's Cornerstone course for freshmen, which focuses on a particular topic each year. The “theme” for this year was “And Justice for All”. *RENT* deals with issues of privilege and diversity, which was the connection to the course for those students. In order to help them understand the world the play is set in, we created a substantial lobby display which included information about New York and cultural elements of the early 1990's. We also had the opportunity to do a “flash mob” where the cast went to the student union building and broke into one of the songs from the show a person at a time. By the end all the students in the union were watching and engaged and gave a hearty round of applause.

Next year we take on a new challenge: we will produce *Into the Woods* at the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center. Jay Edelnant will serve as director for that production. Jay also plans to retire after next year, making this his final Theatre UNI production.

In late February we will open *The Glass Menagerie*. We will be scheduling two matinee performances on week-days to allow students from high schools in the region to see the show. We also plan to send teams of our students to the schools that will be coming to see the show to help them connect with the themes of self-image (and group perceptions of those with disabilities) that resonate in the script.

Last year one of Theatre UNI's long-time supporters, Dianne Phelps, agreed to establish a fund to assist students who are travelling to combined audition opportunities, professional conferences, and to see professional productions. Many students have already benefitted by attending Midwest Theatre Auditions and to see productions at American Players Theatre and the Guthrie Theatre. We are extremely grateful for Dianne's support and the enhancement it provides to our students' education.

We have just formed a Theatre UNI National Advancement Board – the charter members are listed later in the newsletter. UNI's Department of Theatre is at a critical juncture. Our beloved facility – the Strayer-Wood Theatre – has turned 40! We have recognized for some years that a renovation is sorely needed in order for us to stay safe, create the learning environments that are suited to our students and programming of today, and to build for future expansion. The National Advancement Board will function to help us clarify and communicate that message.

I'll sign off by sharing something that I, with the help of our faculty, have developed during the first part of this semester. It has been a goal for some time to develop a vision to guide our efforts over the next several years, and the finished product is below. It's something we are all excited about.

UNI Department of Theatre Vision Statement

In order to continue to provide rigorous training and experience to an increasing pool of students, and to more fluidly use contemporary practice as the foundation for theatre education, we seek the following goals:

- Expand our program to one that is capable of supporting 150 students pursuing professional-level training in Performance, Design and Production, Drama and Theatre for Youth, and Musical Theatre.
- Provide students with quality teaching and collaborative experiences in order to connect them with the profession, post-graduate study, or disciplines for which their training serves them well.
- Seek interdisciplinary opportunities where our work is infused across campus, including coursework meant to develop communication and creative thinking skills for non-Theatre majors, and productions which serve as applied opportunities for STEM majors.
- Transform the Strayer-Wood Theatre into a dynamic and flexible teaching laboratory capable of serving students, the university, and the community with innovative programming in an environment with the versatility to support growth in an ever-changing art form.

Please send us updates on your lives, careers and aspirations. Oh – and by the way – we will also hold an Alumni Reunion in February. Those details will be found later in the newsletter. I hope we see you there!

Eric Lange
Department Head

UNI STUDENTS TAKING (SUMMER) STOCK

By Jenn Sheshko Wood

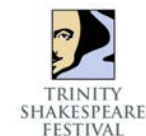
These past few summers have been incredibly rewarding for many of our students as they gained internships and employment across the country, some as near as Des Moines, others as distant as Texas, Utah, Colorado and New York. Their experiences have been diverse, bringing them back to our department ready to share their new skills and knowledge.



Madeline Achen (2015), Dylan Nicole Martin (senior) and Cory Skold (senior) all went to the Creede Repertory Theatre in Creede, CO. Madeline and Cory worked on their main stage productions as carpenters and stage hands, while Dylan stage managed their children's shows.



Brittany Staudacher (senior) went to Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre in Logan, UT as the costume design assistant for *Man of La Mancha*, and working wardrobe for their four repertory productions.



Melia Beschta (2015) returned for the second year to the Trinity Shakespeare Festival as one of their assistant stage managers and is shortly moving to the Dallas-Fort Worth area with management contracts in hand.



The Commonweal Theatre Company in Lanesboro, MN has contracted David Wasserman (2015) in a year-long acting apprenticeship.



Michael Hellman (2015) went out to the Hudson Valley in New York State to work as a stitcher in the costume studio for Bard SummerScapes.



Jennifer Hampton (2015) travelled to Chicago this summer to act as the administrative intern for the Red Kite Theatre Company.



The Des Moines Metro Opera employed Jared Wolt (sophomore) as a stagehand intern where he learned firsthand the joys of overnight changeovers.



Mallory Rustad (sophomore) returned to the Treasure Village Children's Theatre in Milford, IA as a costume design assistant.



Both Nick Mayhugh (senior) and Sam Wieggers (sophomore) worked with the Des Moines Young Artists' Theatre this past summer on their production of *Rent*. Nick was their assistant stage manager and Sam played the character of Benny.



Alicia Leto (senior), Zach Atha (senior,) and Haleigh Kent (junior) all worked at the Rose Children's Theatre in Omaha as teaching artist interns. They are all in the Drama/Theatre for Youth emphasis.



Kendra Gliem (senior) spent the summer with the Missoula Children's Theatre as an actor and as their touring program director.



Marty Wessels (senior) and Carter Smith (senior) joined the long list of students who have interned at the Des Moines Playhouse. Marty was a teaching artist intern and Carter was the technical intern.



The Cedar Fall Community Theatre cast both Katherine Smith (senior) and Mic Evans (senior) in their summer production of *Young Frankenstein*. Kat also then performed in *The Taffetas*.



Samantha Reece (senior) performed in the Waterloo Community Playhouse's production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, as Rona Lisa Peretti.



Olivia Frisch (2015) recently performed in Theatre Cedar Rapids productions of *A Chorus Line*, *Pippin* and will play Cordelia in their original production of *Primrose and Wells*.



Theatre minor Lauren VanSpeybroeck (sophomore) was Maria in Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse's production of *The Sound of Music*.



Maddie Grissom (freshman) returned to the Des Moines Civic Center as a junior counselor.

RUTH MARGRAFF

DAH, AND PROSCENIUM DELIRIOUS



RUTH MARGRAFF

In early September, Theatre UNI was fortunate to host playwright and performer, Ruth Margraff for her workshop, "Proscenium Delirious."

Ruth Margraff has been called a leader in the new opera movement in America and has toured with her Café Antarsia Ensemble and her own work throughout the UK, Canada, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Japan, Egypt and India. Her writing has been developed and produced in NYC at the Apollo Theatre, the Guggenheim Museum, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Hourglass Group, the Public, Cooper Union, Lincoln Ctr, Kitchen, NYTW, etc., and nationally at Actors Theatre of Louisville (Kentucky), Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park's "AlterActive Series"

Rosenthal Plaza (Ohio), Playwrights' Center, Red Eye, Walker Art Center (Mpls); and in many other national venues too numerous to list here. Ms. Margraff is currently Associate Professor of writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has also taught at Yale School of Drama, Brown University, University of Texas/Michener Center, Fordham, and the University of Iowa, to name a few.

Ms. Margraff's visit to UNI came about through connections between Cynthia Goatley and Dennis Barnett, professor of theatre at Coe College in Cedar Rapids. Dr. Barnett had published one of Dr. Goatley's articles about her work in Poland, and when the DAH Theatre Company from Serbia visited Coe College, Dr. Barnett contacted UNI about hosting the company. This was in 2013, and at that time, it was not feasible. However, when the company returned this fall, Dr. Barnett again contacted Goatley, and while UNI could not host the company in their performance of *Previously Blue*, the performance committee was interested in sponsoring a working for UNI Theatre students.

Previously Blue, a poetic summit on the mystery of disaster, resilience, and beauty, is a capstone project created with sustained devising techniques that have influenced artists all over the world. The piece was created by director Dijana Milosovic, designer Nesa Paripovic, and performer Maja Vujovic from DAH Teater (Belgrade) in collaboration with Del Hamilton and Faye Allen from 7 Stages (Atlanta) and writer/performer Ruth Margraff and composer/musician Nikos Brisco of the Café Antarsia Ensemble (Chicago).

Ms. Margraff's work with the UNI students was writing-based as she led them through an exercise designed to shake up their thought process. Speaking of the oppositional physical work that DAH had developed, and for which it is widely known, Ms. Margraff introduced an exercise that explored what that might mean for the writer. The participants wrote with continual prompts from Ms. Margraff to move them in an exploratory direction, making seemingly contradictory/oppositional connections in their work.

The time went quickly, and we found the two hours gone before we knew it. Hopefully, Ms. Margraff can return to UNI in the future with a longer writing workshop.

Article by: Cynthia Goatley

INDEPENDENCE BRINGS ALUMNI TOGETHER



Coming back to UNI as an instructor has been like coming home again in many ways. In the 20 years since I was a student I learned a lot, spread my knowledge in return, and matured as a theatre artist, while working from coast to coast using my connections and networking that began at UNI. I have jumped into teaching with both feet, and found it reawakened my passion for the concepts and craft of theatre. Inspiring and educating the next generation of theatre artists is truly rewarding. The welcome I received last year from the department, be it from my former professors or the newer faces, was really supportive and gratifying.

When I was asked to design a show for UNI this year, I looked at the scripts and found that I truly connected with *Independence* by Lee Blessing. I have been to Independence, Iowa many times in my life while growing up in Cedar Falls. Independence has become my family's preferred Fourth of July celebration destination - we go every year. The characters that Lee Blessing created are very real and I found a piece of myself in all of them. Each of the daughters has a personality trait or experiences that were similar to my own in some part of my life, and their relationship with their mother and each other is complex and conflicted. The characters resonate for me in a very personal way. Listening to Steve Taft talk about the script, and his excitement about it made designing costumes for it seem very appealing. Having worked as Costume TD for Amy RohrBerg's designs for UNI's production of *Guernica* a few years ago and then helping with *The Sweetest Swing in Baseball* last year, I

was somewhat familiar with Steve's directing style and I thought that I might be a good fit as a designer to work with him.

Then I found out two other alumni, John Bagby and Kristin Teig Torres, were going to be working on the production and I was SOLD! I remember John as an upperclassman when I was a freshman. I remember him being friendly and supportive of a terrified new theatre major transferred from the music department who had no idea what was going on or even how to find the makeup room. He still has that same upbeat "everything's going to be ok" demeanor about him that put me at ease back in 1988. Along with being classmates at UNI, Kristin and I had also worked together at the Waterloo Community Playhouse a few years ago. Kristin had acted on a couple of my sets there, and I was pretty stoked at finally getting to put some costumes on her, because I knew she would understand and use them well. I loved the idea of working and reconnecting with people I knew from UNI and designing for a show in the Bertha Martin Theatre again after so many years. I actually got pretty dang excited, to tell the truth. I may have even uttered a "Squeel!" and indulged in a "fist pump."

The process for this show has been straightforward and almost effortless from the start. Meeting with Steve, John, and Ron Koinzan, Theatre UNI's Technical Director, for lunch over the summer was a great start to the design process. Having drinks on a summer evening with Kristin and talking about her character and the script while our kids

played together was delightful. Three kids on a trampoline is very entertaining! (No major injuries.) Talking with John about growing up in eastern Iowa in this time period, and watching his designs take shape from his memories and photos of his family homes that might have resembled the character of Evelyn's was inspiring and engaging. His skill as a designer to help tell this story was compelling, and I loved watching our designs take shape. Pulling up memories, and a photo or two of my own from growing up in this area, when my fashion sense was forming, was integral to my design. Working with Jenn Sheshko Wood as my Costume TD to make my design a reality with all our great student labor has been a pleasurable and smooth experience that has opened new ways of thinking about my process as a designer. I even had the pleasure of seeing more of, and getting hugs from, my former WCP co-worker and UNI alum David Harnois when he was hired on for the show in the scene shop.

My thanks to everyone involved. I could not have asked for a better team to work with, or production to work on, for my return to UNI as a designer.

Article by: Katrina Sandvik - '94

RECENT ALUMNA RETURNS AS TEACHING ASSISTANT



MOLLY GIEGERICH

Teaching Assistant

A familiar face has returned to Theatre UNI this semester: Molly Giegerich, an alumna of the program who graduated in December of 2014, accepted a role as the teaching assistant in the first class in the Voice and Movement Sequence: Body, Voice, Awareness.

While the Voice curriculum at UNI is eclectic and covers many different vocal philosophies,

the work is primarily rooted in Fitzmaurice Voicework®, a full-body, somatic approach to voice training, developed by Catherine Fitzmaurice. Fitzmaurice Voicework is the primary vocal pedagogy at not only UNI, but also Juilliard, NYU, The Yale School of Drama and UCLA. The work is centered on a long vocal and physical warm-up, informally called “The Sequence,” which allows students to find freedom in the breath while also releasing muscular tension and stress. This work has been extremely helpful to our students, but it must be noted that it is highly rigorous and physically demanding.

The growing population of theatre students here at UNI has meant larger class sizes and the theatre faculty decided that it would be necessary to find a teaching assistant for this fall’s very large class to help ensure that students were able to receive the individual attention necessary in order to help them work with safety and precision. In this regard Molly has already proven invaluable as she has been able to step in and assist students find the best way to work through the warm-up sequence and even take the opportunity to lead it herself. This has allowed me to give students a high degree of personal attention and focus.

Molly was chosen among our alumni because as a student in the department she demonstrated a very high level of personal commitment to voice and movement work and experienced a great deal of personal growth. She was the unanimous choice of the theatre faculty to fulfill this important role this semester. “My favorite thing about Catherine’s work is that it’s beneficial not only on stage and in my work as an artist, but it has also allowed me to speak and be present with confidence in everyday situations,” says Giegerich, “and I never considered saying “No.” The truth is, it feels more beneficial to me!”

This essential connection between the work that we do in the classrooms here at UNI and the practical, real-world applications that this work has for students, even after they graduate and move on into the professional world, typifies the approach to training here at Theatre UNI and we are happy and lucky to have students who are willing to return to the classroom to share their expertise and knowledge.

Article by: Matt Weedman

THEATRE UNI NATIONAL ADVANCEMENT BOARD 2016

DICK DEVIN (1966)

MICHAEL PEITZ (1970)

RONALD KELLER (1978)

TOM NEVILLE (1983)

ANNE HEALY (1984)

JASON PALMQUIST (1993)

CRAIG COON (1994)

RANDY STEFFEN (1997)

ANDREA TONSFELDT (2000)

SARAH RINNER (2000)

SARAH NOLL (2003)

STEPH WESSELS (2011)



Associate Professor of Theatre, Steve Taft spent six weeks with the Okoboji Summer Theatre (OST) this past summer as a guest actor. It was his 4th summer working in Okoboji, Iowa with OST, a theatre company of Stephen's College, a private all-women's college located in Columbia, Missouri. Previous OST work includes portraying Dad in *Leaving Iowa* (2008), directing *What I Did Last Summer* (2009), and the classic British farce *See How They Run* (2010).

Q: What productions were you involved with this past summer?

ST: I was contracted to act in *Unnecessary Farce* as Mayor Meekly and in *Fiddler on the Roof* as the Constable. I actually thought I had retired from acting five years ago, but I was asked to reprise the role of the Mayor, a role I had performed in 2010 at OST. Dan Schultz, the co-artistic director who I had worked with on the show the first time, was kind enough to give me a call to see if I was interested. He thought *Fiddler* needed some maturity (as in age) and I definitely fit that need. It's also one of my favorite musicals so I agreed to do that role.

Q: Neither of the roles are lead roles . . .

ST: Correct. There are several reasons I agreed to these specific characters. First, I've had positive experiences with OST in the past. Second, the atmosphere is rather incredible in Okoboji during the summer. There are company outings on the lake, a unique company 4th of July parade, a couple of post-show bonfires and dances, and it's simply a very creative environment. Third, the guest artists and B.F.A. students are first-rate in many ways. It's a great opportunity to meet and to work with guest artists from around the country (actors, directors and designers.) This past summer there were 41 guest artists and staff and about 30 students — it's a rather large operation. We are all housed on the grounds of OST and

TAFT AT OKOBOJI

are provided three meals a day. Free housing, good food, talented people and great audiences, and I get paid to act. It's tough to beat. Finally, let me say that for me, as an actor, it's rarely been about the size of a role. I can either have an ego about such things or work as an actor. I hope to serve as an example for our students in that regard.

Q: Tell me about the directors you worked with.

ST: Both shows provided me the opportunity to work with two well-respected directors. Karl Kippola, the director of *Unnecessary Farce*, is a professional actor and director and works at American University in Washington, D.C. He's low key, somewhat organic in his directing and very funny. OST produces nine shows in ten weeks, plus four children's productions in another theatre. All shows begin rehearsals on a Wednesday and open up on Day 13, so it's imperative that actors come in prepared and ready to work. John Lampe and Travis Mitchell, fellow guest actors were great in that regard and a lot of fun to hang out with outside of rehearsal.

The director/choreographer of *Fiddler* was Allison Bibicoff. She has an impressive resume as well and has worked all over the country including Broadway. Putting together a show like *Fiddler* is not an easy task. I had a lot of down time but stayed in the rehearsal hall so that I could observe Allison's process. Observing both directors was advantageous to me as a director. *Fiddler* sold out every performance so it was a great way to end the season. It was a final performance on a Sunday, travel day on Monday, and back to UNI on Tuesday. A few days later we had auditions, classes began and it was back to rehearsal for *Independence*, the first fall Theatre UNI production. It's been a very busy three months.

Q: It's said that theatre is often a small world. Is it?

ST: This past summer was an example of that. As I was reading through the playbill I saw that Amanda Ladd, an actress based in NYC, has worked with UNI graduate Joel Waggoner on his original musical, *Carolina*

Breeze. Another actor, Jay Huguley — an actor out of L.A. — knows of a former student of mine (Dana Gourier) as they both have worked on *True Detective* and *Red Band Society*. A Stephens College student from San Diego knows a friend of mine there that is a successful playwright, actor and director, and Jay Edelnant knows the new Fine Arts Dean/Artistic Director at OST. In addition, it's surprising how many UNI colleagues or students or alums I run into in Okoboji.

Q: Final thoughts?

ST: Sometimes people think we as theatre professors can go off to major metropolitan cities and direct or act or design whenever we like. If that was the case, everyone in academic theatre would do it. The reality is that there are hundreds and perhaps even thousands of professionals or aspiring professionals that live in such cities trying to do the same thing. Contracting out-of-town professionals costs money in terms of travel, housing and per diem in addition to a contracted salary. So, it's cheaper to hire in-town talent and many times those people have already built a relationship with a theatre company. Even when an actor makes a commitment to move to NYC, L.A., Chicago or Minneapolis, it may take a couple of years or more of constant auditioning to ultimately get an opportunity. It's a tough business and constant networking is essential.

I personally find value in working here in Iowa. Over the years as I've worked either for OST or the Old Creamery Theatre in Amana, Iowa it's been an opportunity to represent the Department of Theatre and UNI in a positive manner not only on stage, but in various public relations events we attend as a member of the Theatre company. As OST had new leadership this year, it was an opportunity to get to know each other and to meet so many theatre artists from across the county and make new friends and remind myself, as a director, that acting is a difficult job no matter the size of the role. That was a pretty good way to spend the summer of 2015.

Article by: Steve Taft

ISABELLA AND THE MOUNTAIN

AN INTERVIEW WITH CYNTHIA GOATLEY



CYNTHIA GOATLEY

When Eric asked me to share a bit about my current writing project for this newsletter, I decided to have a conversation with myself about it. Not only would it deliver information for the newsletter, but also, it would give me an opportunity to revisit this project. For the sake of clarity, my interviewer self will be referred to as CI and my writer self as CW.

CI: It's good to see you again. It's been some time since we've had a chance to sit down and have a conversation about your writing.

CW: Definitely. Two years at least.

CI: That long? Hmm. We should get together more often. (Beat.) But before we set up another interview time, let's talk about your current project: *Isabella and the Mountain*. This is a new title, correct?

CW: You are correct. It takes me some time to come up with a title for a play or musical, and for the beginnings of this one, I just called it *The Isabella Bird Project*.

CI: Now, this is an opera libretto if I remember our last conversation.

CW: Yes, it is.

CI: Have you written in this format before? OK, I know you haven't, so let me just ask you, why an opera? You have been writing musicals with your partner Rebecca Burkhardt, haven't you?

CW: We have written two: *A Scotch Verdict* and *Just Ann*.

CI: These are both about historical events and subjects, aren't they?

CW: Right again. *Verdict* is based on a true story about Marianne Woods and Jane Pirie from 1810 Scotland when they were accused of "unnatural acts"-- trial transcript words, not mine--and took the perpetrator of the rumors and the ruiner of their school for girls to court.

CI: (Interrupting.) And the other?

CW: *Just Ann* is a musical about the former governor of Texas, Ann Richards, who lost in her second term bid for governor to George W. Bush.

CI: And now *Isabella Bird*. How did you get interested in *Isabella Bird*?

CW: I remembered researching her when I was directing *On the Verge* at UNI some time back with Liz Cook (2011), Diana Garles (2011), and Jessica Moore (2014) in the explorer leads. I forgot about this research until I was visiting my spouse's parents in Estes Park, Colorado. There is a program in Estes Park that artists apply for to get support to create an artistic piece about the Rocky Mountain National Park. We went to a performance of the recipient of one of these awards, who performed a one-woman show about *Isabella Bird*. I became fascinated with this Englishwoman who would become quite ill when she was home in Scotland (where she eventually settled) and would return to health when her family sent her abroad.

CI: You've received support from UNI for this work?

CW: Yes! For the research phase, I received a summer fellowship in 2014. In the fall of 2015, I was awarded a Professional Development Award to write a first draft of the libretto.

CI: That's helpful.

CW: You bet. The last thing I seem to do during the school year is write.

CI: I understand. I have that problem too. (Beat.) But let me get back to question I asked earlier ...

CW: Go for it.

CI: Why an opera? Why not a musical?

CW: I wanted to challenge myself in this very condensed textual style of writing. I believed that I could learn a great deal about the economy of language by writing an entire script to be sung.

CI: And did you learn that economy?

CW: Well, I don't know about that yet. I suspect I still have too many words, but my composer, Rebecca Burkhardt, needs to start working on it so we can see if what I have written is sing-able. It's on her "to do" list.

CI: Speaking of "to do" lists, I'm sorry, but we need to wrap this up. I've got to get to a meeting.

CW: (Looking at her phone.) Me, too. We're going to be late if we don't hurry.

CI: I look forward to talking with you again.

CW: Me too.



3181

PATRONS!

**OCTOBER 29, 30
NOVEMBER 1, 5-8, 2015**

IRF EVENT



TOURING WITH FELD ENTERTAINMENT

In recent years, four of our alumni have taken jobs with the Feld Entertainment Group, working in costuming, carpentry/rigging, audio and electrical/pyrotechnics. Touring with such shows as *Marvel Universe Live*, *Disney Live*, and *Ringling Bros & Barnum and Bailey*, they have travelled internationally and domestically, living out of suitcases and seeing much beyond their native Iowa and Illinois borders.

Alex Lee Westrum (2013) is an Assistant Carpenter and Assistant Rigger on the *Disney Live: Three Classic Fairytales* tour, joining them in November of 2013. His time at UNI was spent cultivating many interests, from assistant stage managing to stitching in the costume studio to working scenic and props for many of the main stage and UNISTA productions. He is currently on his 6th tour with *Disney Live*, visiting many American cities, with Mexico coming up next. His previous tours have taken him outside of the States, visiting France, Australia, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Myanmar. This tour is notable as it was the first time that a western production has been performed in Myanmar, and was one of the country's first exposures to the Disney brand. All tallied up, of the 22 months Alex has been with the company, 15 were spent on the road, visiting 10 countries, living on two different

types of busses and working in all types of theatrical spaces.

Michaela B. Nelson (2013) started on the *Marvel Universe Live Tour* December 2014 as the Assistant Wardrobe Supervisor and has since become the full time Wardrobe Electrician, working specifically with the LED-rigged costumes. While she still runs the quick change booths backstage, and other wardrobe responsibilities, she also manages all of the electrical components for each costume. At UNI, Michaela worked wardrobe both at the Gallagher-Bludorn and for our department's main stage productions, stitched in the costume studio, stage managed and acted as the Master Electrician on a number of productions. Her current tour has taken her to cities all over the United States and Canada, the most exciting of which for her were New Orleans, San Antonio, San Diego, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Vancouver and Montreal. While the touring aspect is rigorous, Michaela is trying to take full advantage of each city visited, having seen Cirque de Soleil, a FIFA Women's World Cup game, the LA Fashion District, and the Grand Canyon along the way.

Michael Cahill (2012) joined Feld's Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey tour this past February as an Electrical Technician. At UNI,

Michael worked for the Gallagher-Bludorn as a stagehand and focused on lighting for the department's main stage productions. With Feld, Michael is currently touring the States having started in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, moving to Omaha before hitting the west coast. After the summer in California, his tour will be moving to Salt Lake City. As an Electrical Technician, Michael is working primarily with the pyrotechnics of each show, encountering everything from missing equipment to product misfiring to having a supplier lose their product in a warehouse explosion.

Jillian Pereboom (2015) is the Assistant Audio Engineer for the *Disney Live: Three Classic Fairytales* tour. Starting with the company this past July, Jill is currently on her first national tour, which will transfer to Mexico in January. During her time at UNI, Jill was involved in many of the main stage and UNISTA productions, focusing primarily on audio engineering. She also worked as a stagehand at the Gallagher-Bludorn and as a stitcher in the theatre costume studio. With *Disney Live!*, Jill is fine tuning her audio skills and enjoys not just traveling to new locations, but experiencing all the new venues they visit and what interesting aural challenges they each hold.

Article by: Jenn Sheshko Wood

IOWA THESPIANS FESTIVAL



UNI has now hosted the Iowa Thespians Festival for the sixth time! The 2015 Iowa Thespians Festival was held on November 13th and 14th. The Festival is an annual event sponsored by the Iowa Educational Theatre Association celebrating young thespians and educators across the state. The Festival is a weekend long event, drawing nearly one thousand people to the University of Northern Iowa campus. Festivalgoers receive opportunities through main-stage and studio performances, workshops, individual events, and auditions for scholarships with collegiate representatives from the area. Students will also get the opportunity to explore UNI, attending events spanning the campus.

The Department of Theatre has been administering this event since 2010, growing and thriving along with it. Iowa high school students get a weekend long celebration encouraging their passion for theatre, and our students gain valuable experience as well. Students of the theatre program often lead workshops, work as technicians, gain skills in event

management, and get to connect with students as volunteers. The tireless and generous efforts of our students and faculty are immensely appreciated. A tremendous thank you to all those involved in making this event possible and successful year after year.

We are thrilled to be able to play our part in this wonderful Festival, helping young thespians showcase their immense talents and efforts.

Article by: Erika Kuhn
Student Festival Coordinator
Junior Performance Major



KATY SLAVEN
Class of 2010

Recently Katy Slaven, a UNI Theatre graduate (2010) took some time out of her day to chat with me on Facebook. Here is a text of our conversation.

Katy Slaven: Hi Cynthia! Just finished a trail race.

Cynthia Goatley: Great. How was it? How'd you do?

Katy Slaven: Met my goal! Enjoying a brat and a beer now. Ready to chat!

Cynthia Goatley: Glad you met your goal. Let's start with you reminding me of the year you graduated from UNI.

Katy Slaven: May 2010.

Cynthia Goatley: Not too long ago. Also, I remember vividly our work together on *The Three Sisters*, but what are some of the other shows you were in at UNI?

Katy Slaven: *A Chorus Line*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Marat/Sade*...

Cynthia Goatley: After you graduated from UNI, when and how did you decide to attend graduate school? Where did you go?

Katy Slaven: My situation was unique since I had a child at the time. I moved to Cedar Rapids and worked a few day jobs (credit union teller, department store sales associate) and got involved in a local theatre, Theatre Cedar Rapids, which led to other things. I realized I still really wanted to work in theatre, specifically

ALUMNI PROFILES

teaching, so I went to U/RTAs in Chicago in 2012.

I chose Florida Atlantic University because it fit my situation the best.

Cynthia Goatley: Can you tell me a little more about your U/RTA experience and how Florida Atlantic fit you best?

Katy Slaven: Two years on campus instead of three, foundation in the classics, and an assistantship, meaning college teaching experience and a stipend. Financially I couldn't justify paying an arm and a leg for grad school.

Cynthia Goatley: Understandable!

Katy Slaven: Also, I wanted to try living somewhere completely different for a while, knowing I would be coming back to Iowa eventually. I still had to take out loans, but not as many.

U/RTA [University/Resident Theatre Auditions] was tough for me. I had a hard time settling on my audition material, and looking back, I should have worried less about doing something "obscure" and just picked pieces I really loved.

I also tend to get very nervous at auditions.

Cynthia Goatley: Good point. And great advice.

Katy Slaven: But it all panned out in the end.

I wasn't too concerned with going somewhere "prestigious." I believe that where you go isn't as important as what you put into it. The great thing about FAU was that it gave me a fantastic opportunity to play some great roles.

Cynthia Goatley: What were some?

Katy Slaven: In my second year alone I played Varya in *Cherry Orchard*, Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being*

Earnest, Julia in *Two Gents [Two Gentlemen of Verona]*, and The Logician in *Rhinoceros*. Big year!

All on the main stage!

Cynthia Goatley: I'm going to ask you a question that I get asked and that I always find difficult to answer. Which of the roles that you played would you say was your "favorite"?

Katy Slaven: Well, Julia was my thesis role, so I suppose I have to say she was my favorite, but it's tough.

Cynthia Goatley: Of course.

Katy Slaven: I also loved playing Varya.

Cynthia Goatley: You had already done a Chekhov as an undergraduate.

Katy Slaven: Yes! We attacked Chekhov in a much more "American" way at FAU.

I played Therese Raquin in my first year. Awesome as well.

Cynthia Goatley: You got loads of opportunities! Any favorite classes?

Katy Slaven: Favorite class was Speech. Hands down. I'm an IPA [International Phonetic Alphabet] nerd.

Cynthia Goatley: What about IPA did you find compelling? How is it useful to you?

Katy Slaven: It gave me a system for breaking down accents, something that used to seem kind of mystical to me. It was like a code!

Cynthia Goatley: Fun!

Katy Slaven: I think that the notation appealed to the music minor in me. [wink emoticon]

Cynthia Goatley: You are working in a show now, is that correct? Can you tell me about it?

Katy Slaven: I am doing *Shipwrecked* at Riverside Theatre in Iowa City. In a nutshell, it's an imaginative telling of one man's life adventures set in the late 1800s. I get to play a ton of different characters, mostly distinguished by very specific voice and movement choices.

Cynthia Goatley: The photos look fabulous!

Would you recommend (or not) that a UNI student consider graduate school? If so, why? If not, why not?

Katy Slaven: I think if a UNI student is thinking about grad school, they should carefully examine why. Some people seem to use it to postpone the "real world." Some people hope that merely having an MFA will automatically get them jobs. If a student genuinely believes they are ready for intense training, self-discipline, and relentless hours of study and rehearsal with the same group of people (whether they get along or not), and having an MFA is necessary to their

future career goals, then by all means! I don't regret it. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but I'm glad I did it.

They should also be prepared to not get their dream job fresh out of school, lol. The work doesn't end at graduation!

Cynthia Goatley: Great advice, Katy. And now for one more question:

Looking back on your time at UNI and in the theatre department, what piece of advice would you give a current UNI theatre student?

Katy Slaven: Seek out opportunities. There are so many! Work hard, even when others aren't. Talk to your professors when you are struggling. Go see as much theatre as you can. Get involved with UNISTA if you're not busy with a mainstage show. Stretch yourself. Take responsibility for your own education. Don't skip class. Don't let Richard scare you. Read the damn play. Breathe.

(By the way, I learned way more from UNI's Chekhov work than anywhere else. Alice [Ivanova] rocks [acting teacher and director at the St. Petersburg, Russia Drama Academy].)

Cynthia Goatley: Thanks, Katy. It's been good to converse with you again. I look forward to seeing you soon. Do you mind if I use everything pretty much verbatim for the newsletter?

Katy Slaven: Verbatim is fine. Maybe spellcheck it for me? [wink emoticon]

Cynthia Goatley: It's wonderful to learn that *Three Sisters* was such a good experience for you. It certainly was for me! See you soon, Katy. And thank you so much!

Katy Slaven: Thank you Cynthia!



You're Invited
 UNITheatre Alumni Reunion
 February 26/27, 2016

Mark your calendars today and plan to return to campus for a special THEATRE UNI production:
The Glass Menagerie

A block of rooms has been established at Best Western Plus, Cedar Falls.

Call 319-277-2400 and ask for the UNITheatre Alumni Reunion rate of \$89.99.

Detailed reunion information will be mailed in January 2016. If you have questions in the mean time, please call Eric Lange at 319-273-6833 or email eric.lange@uni.edu

ALUMNI PROFILES



ANDREA TONSFELDT
Class of 2000

Andrea Tonsfeldt has extensive experience working within the non-profit arts sector as an administrator, technician and performer. She began her professional career as an arts administrator at the Pearson Lakes Art Center in Okoboji, Iowa. During her tenure as Performing Arts Director, she coordinated more than 30 events annually including one-night only performances, multi-week productions and special fundraising events. Ms. Tonsfeldt was responsible for securing sponsorships, acted as marketing and press coordinator, created advertising and other materials for each event, and worked with the press to secure articles and interviews. In 2009, Andrea moved to Minneapolis, MN to pursue further career opportunities in the arts. She acted as Arts Administrator for Rosetown Playhouse (Roseville, MN) and Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theatre (Minneapolis, MN) and most recently assisted in the grand opening and start-up years for The Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts as their Marketing Manager.

lis, MN) and most recently assisted in the grand opening and start-up years for The Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts as their Marketing Manager.

In 2008, Andrea started Mission Theatre Company with Okoboji productions of *Renegade Shakespeare* and *The Vagina Monologues*. *Desdemona, A Play About a Handkerchief* was the first Twin Cities production and the company has done a variety of classical and contemporary works. The fourth season will include a new play written by resident playwright, Sam Graber, entitled *Everything's Free!* This will be the 11th production Andrea has produced. As a theatre practitioner, Andrea has performed in more than 100 shows, worked as a costumer, hair, make-up and props designer. She has experience with all aspects of theatre production and finds her passions still lie in acting and producing.

Do you have any specific memories from class or production that stay with you today?

I have so many memories from class and productions at UNI that stay with me today. Some that stand out include embodying the Seven Deadly Sins in

Richard Glockner's acting class, producing my first production with UNISTA (*The Most Massive Woman Wins*), and the countless hours working in the costume shop; learning how to properly create patterns and beautiful costumes that helped bring the shows to life. Getting cast in shows like *Memoirs of the Warsaw Uprising* helped guide me to my current vision for Mission Theatre Company. Doing socially relevant and collaborative work is the bedrock of Mission, the company I started in 2008.

How did your education/training at UNI help you to navigate the choices you made in your career so far?

What I appreciate about getting my theatre degree at UNI is the well-rounded experiences I had. I have always been someone who likes to try things and at UNI I was able to try everything I wanted. While I knew that I wanted to have my focus in performance, being able to work in the costume shop, act as hair/make-up designer on shows, and being forced to work in the scene shop, showed me that I was multi-dimensional as a theatre practitioner. This helped when I decided to move into arts administration. It was daunting to think I could run a theatre, but knowing that I had done well in all areas at UNI helped me realize that moving into an administrator role in theatre would be extremely attainable. I love all the lists of things people with a theatre or artistic degree can do - be resilient and adaptable, take direction, act as a team, improvise, be fearless, and "fake it till you make it". Those are all things I learned during my time at UNI and will stay with me all my life.

Article by: Amy RohrBerg

Update Us!

Our newly updated website has an area just for alumni. It's important for us to keep your information current so we can spotlight your career, and get you the most up-to-date news from the department. Frequently, alumni are invited back to speak, teach and share professional advice to our current and graduating students.

Visit uni.edu/theatre/department/about-us/alumni to update your information and share your successes, accomplishments and career movements with us!



PUPPETS ON TOUR!

UNI AVENUE Q PUPPETS FIND A NEW LIFE ON THE ROAD



This past February, for our production of *Avenue Q*, our department had the new but exciting experience of building the puppets ourselves. Designed by professors Mark Parrott and Jennifer Sheshko Wood, we altered commercial patterns or made our own to create eleven of the different puppet characters. We started building in November of 2014, knowing that one of each character would be needed for a workshop in January before the start of classes.

Starting with mock-ups to determine scale and proportions, we built a total of 22 foam-bodied puppets, creating everything from their bodies to all of the details in their faces. Along with Amy S. RohrBerg and Katrina Sandvik in the costume studio, we trained students on how to approach each sewing project, to pattern new body parts, to shape the Wonderflex and Fosshape for their eyes and noses, and how to stitch it all together.

Along with learning the techniques necessary to building puppets, this was a great experiment for our students in translating their sewing skills from human clothing to puppet-sized garments. The shape of the

clothing, the scale, mode of closure, and navigating the tiny bodies with rods attached to their hands all played a part in the design and execution of the garments built or altered for these larger-than-life characters.

After our production wrapped last March, rather than striking the puppets, we did any necessary repairs and maintenance and got them ready for a life outside the walls of the Strayer-Wood Theatre. We advertised the ability to rent them at the National USITT Conference (United States Institute for Theatre Technology) in Cincinnati, OH and to alumni scheduled to produce *Avenue Q* themselves. We created dressing lists for companies that wanted all of the puppets (including the extra ones built for costume changes and site gags), or a condensed list for those interested in a scaled-back version.

Since February 2015, after their UNI premier, Princeton and the gang have already appeared with Trainwreck Productions this past July under the direction of Ryan Decker (2012) and are set to spend Christmas at Theatre Cedar Rapids for their production coming up in February. We look forward to seeing where they may travel next. While it was a time-consuming endeavor, building these puppets showed our students how to stretch their sewing skills beyond costumes, and brought us to new and different levels of creativity.

Contact the UNI costume studio (unicostumestudio@gmail.com) if you are interested in hearing more about them!

Article by: Jenn Sheshko Wood



The Bad Idea Bears get eyes!



Trekkie Monster's face.



Body of the "Nicky" puppet.

SPECTRUM THEATRE WORKS



Red painted play.

Blue painted water.

And Yellow painted light.

And so begins the theatrical adventure of *Pallet of Possibilities*, a 45 minute devised theatre piece about the colors Red, Blue and Yellow. What makes this piece unique is that it has been specifically created for an audience of young people on the autism spectrum.

Inspired by the work of the Oily Cart Theatre of London, *Pallet* is not so much a play, but a performance collage that weaves strong visual images, clear physical choices, audience interactions, participatory exchanges, and sensory friendly exchanges to lead its audience on a journey inspired by color. Relying heavily on visual cues, the piece uses less than 100 words as it leads the audience on an imaginative journey inspired by primary color.

Red introduces the concept of playing pretend; the ensemble of 6 actors gleefully transform a red box into a variety of objects: tractor, sailboat and fire engine to name just a few. The discovery of a big red ball inside that very same big red box launches a host of interactive games including bowling and catch. A roll of red cellophane inspires an exploration of a red camp fire.

By contract, Blue is a journey that takes the audience below the sea where they meet seaweed, a shy sea turtle, a playful jellyfish and a magical eel. The journey continues from the sea to the sky; students experience the wind through a variety of sensory exchanges: sight, touch, sound and taste. Blue culminates in a rain storm complete with audience generated sounds, thunder claps and “puddles” to splash in. And as the storm clouds break and the yellow sunlight appears, the audience is given ample opportunities to explore light and shadow by way of shadow plays, constellations, and moon light.

Gretta Berghammer, Professor of Youth Theatre/Drama Education began exploring ways of adapting the Oily Cart approach with undergraduate theatre majors in 2012. Her first devised piece, *Playful Inventions*, was the first of its kind in Iowa. Under Gretta’s leadership, a group of 12 actors created a 30 minute piece based on things that bounce. Its success in meeting the needs of youth with developmental disabilities, their typical peers and their families, led to the opportunity to create a second piece in 2015. *WONDERland* led the audience through a series of adventures inspired by those of Alice. And that led to a call from the Rose Theatre of Omaha: “Can you come and share the process with us?”

Gretta spent a portion of this semester in residence in Omaha working with 6 of their actors to create *Pallet* over an eight week period. The show was warmly received by the Spectrum and theatre community in Omaha and plans are underway for the show to tour throughout eastern Nebraska in early 2016. Similarly, UNI Theatre plans to include it in their 2016-17 season as well, with performances on campus and “on the road” throughout Iowa.

Since 2010, the Department of Theatre has been providing leadership in the development of drama and theatre programs for youth on the autism spectrum, a population now estimated at 1 in 66 children. With the support of local donors and an array of local, regional and national grants, Gretta Berghammer and her core of Youth Theatre emphasis majors have been providing Iowa with an array of approaches for using drama and theatre to engage, educate and enrich the creative and social talents of those with ASD and other developmental disabilities.

Article by: Gretta Berghammer

PHELPS CONFERENCE/ AUDITION SUPPORT FUND



The Phelps Fund also supports travel to see professional productions.

Here at Theatre UNI we strive to engage students, audiences, community members, teachers and guest artists in diverse, innovative and captivating theatre that illuminates the human condition. The department's coursework and productions serve both students preparing for a life in the theatre and those preparing a place for theatre in their lives. An important element of that mission is to help our students make the transition from the university theatre to the working world of theatre. In order to make this as successful as possible we strongly emphasize the need for students to engage with professional theatre artists while still enrolled in school. To that end, the students at Theatre UNI have been fortunate over the years to receive some support from the department to attend auditions and national theatre conferences.

Now, thanks to the generosity of Dianne Phelps, we have the opportunity to offer even more support to our students. Ms. Phelps is a familiar face to anyone in Theatre UNI. She is a long time supporter of our theatre program; she served many years on the board of Friends of Theatre UNI and she attends every single production in every season. In 2015, this gift enabled the department to send a record number of students to pursue these professional opportunities. This year, students attended the United States Institute of Theatre Technology conference in Cincinnati, where they interacted with designers, managers and technicians from around the world; the Southeastern Theatre Conference, where they attended workshops with world-renowned theatre artists and participated in job fairs for theatres around the country; to the Midwest Theatre

auditions in St. Louis, and The Twin Cities Unified Auditions in Minneapolis which gave our actors the opportunity to be seen by summer stock and year-round regional theatres. As a direct result of these opportunities, we have seen our graduates find placements in theatres around the US, including Commonwealth Theatre in Wisconsin, Creede Repertory in Colorado, and The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

Article by: Matt Weedman

THEATREUNI

AT STRAYER-WOOD ♦ University of Northern Iowa

MEMBER OF NAST - NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

SEASON SCHEDULE

FALL 2016 – SPRING 2017

DEAD MAN'S CELLPHONE

BY SARAH RUHL

*Directed by Cynthia Goatley
Bertha Martin Theatre*

TWELFTH NIGHT

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*Directed by Matt Weedman
Strayer-Wood Theatre*

PALLET OF POSSIBILITIES

A SPECTRUM THEATRE TOURING PROJECT

Directed by Gretta Berghammer

INTO THE WOODS

MUSIC AND LYRICS WRITTEN BY STEPHEN SONDHEIM

AND BOOK BY JAMES LAPINE

*Directed by Jay Edelnant
Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center*