

CURTAIN RAISER

Fall 2016

2016 - 2017 Season



(Joe Turner's Come and Gone, Fall 2015. Photo by Michael Brosilow)



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Esperanza Rising, Fall 2015

***Curtain Raiser* for The Theatre School’s 2016-2017 Season**

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Prospero’s Storm, Winter 2016



Joe Turner’s Come and Gone, Fall 2015

(All Production Photos by Michael Brosilow)

Faculty Advisor Rachel Shteir

Staff Editors/Design..... David Keohane, Leslie Shook, Mishari Zambrano

Letter from the Dean

Welcome to our 2016-17 season! This year we are exploring identity, race, politics, and community through our upcoming programming and productions. Because what is the theatre if not a place to discuss the topics that touch the lives of our audiences? Our stages and our classrooms are the places where we can foster the next generation of theatre artists to be socially responsible citizens and to engage others through their artistic pursuits. We hope you will join us on this journey by being an audience member this season, and visit both the Fullerton Stage and the Sondra & Denis Healy Theatre to experience the work we create both on and off stage. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Culbert".

John Culbert
Dean and Executive Producer



Esperanza Rising, Fall 2015



God's Ear, Winter 2016



The Translation of Likes, Spring 2016



Prospero's Storm, Winter 2016

(All Production Photos by Michael Brosilow)

Chicago Playworks Season for Families and Young Audiences

Ernie Nolan, Artistic Director



The Kid Who Ran For President
by Jeremiah Clay Neal
from the book by Dan Gutman
directed by Ernie Nolan
musical direction by Mark Elliott
October 6 - November 12, 2016
Recommended for ages 6 & up

Cinderella: The Remix
book and lyrics by Psalmayene 24
music by Nick tha 1Da
directed by Coya Paz
April 20 - May 27, 2017
Recommended for ages 5 & up

Night Runner
by Ike Holter
directed by Lisa Portes
January 12 - February 18, 2017
Recommended for ages 9 & up

Peter Pan and Wendy, Spring 2016 (Photo by Michael Brosilow)

at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre, 60 E. Balbo Drive, Chicago (*Not a mailing address*)

Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences was founded as the Goodman Children's Theatre in 1925. Chicago's longest continuously producing children's theatre opens our 92nd season with *The Kid Who Ran For President*.

Our history is rich in creativity and connections with young people. We have served Chicago's young audiences as the very first theatre experience for many, with total audiences numbering 1,407,348. We have performed in three major venues throughout our history, occupying our permanent home at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre since 1989.

We provide **Teacher Guides** for each of our Chicago Playworks productions, created by our dramaturgy students who have a strong interest in theatre for youth. Guides are available on the web; if you would like a printed guide, please let us know.

Chicago Playworks Program Goals:

- To provide a live theatre experience for students and teachers in the Chicago metro area.
- To provide theatre for Chicago's children that reflects their experiences in a contemporary, urban, and multi-ethnic environment.
- To serve principals, teachers, and students in their pursuit of Illinois State Learning Goals and Common Core Standards.
- To integrate performances and teacher guide information/activities into the classroom curriculum.
- To offer our performances within a workable, convenient time frame.
- To contact principals and teachers with valuable and solid information that will help them to make choices that fit their students' needs.

Join us for Chicago Playworks 2016-2017 Season at DePaul's historic Merle Reskin Theatre.

SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORTATION

If schools would like to apply for school bus transportation reimbursements in our 2016-2017 season, please contact us at theatregroupsales@depaul.edu. The bus reimbursement program is supported, in part, by Lewis and Hilary K. Josephs, in memory of Bernice Z. Kromelow and Darrell Zwerling.

The Theatre School

2350 N. Racine Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614

Dexter Bullard, Artistic Director

On the Fullerton Stage

Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

directed by Cameron Knight

November 4 - 13, 2016

We Are Proud to Present

*A Presentation About the Herero of Namibia,
Formerly Known as South West Africa,
From the German Sudwestafrika,
Between the Years 1884-1915*

by Jackie Sibblies Drury

directed by Erin Kraft

February 10 - 19, 2017

Wig Out!

by Tarell Alvin McCraney

directed by Nathan Singh

April 14 - 23, 2017

World Premiere!

Mrs. Phu's Cleansing Juices

by Emily Witt

directed by Krissy Vanderwarker

May 19 - 27, 2017



The Misanthrope, Spring 2016
(Photo by Michael Brosilow)



In the Blood, Winter 2016
(Photo by Michael Brosilow)

In the Healy Theatre

Eurydice

by Sarah Ruhl

directed by Michael E. Burke

October 21 - 30, 2016

Richard III

by William Shakespeare

directed by Jacob Janssen

January 27 - February 5, 2017

World Premiere!

Michael Jordan in Lilliput

by Mickle Maher

directed by Erica Weiss

performed by graduating MFA 3 Actors

May 5 - 14, 2017

Selected performances in our season will have Audio Description, American Sign Language, and Sensory Friendly accommodations. For more information visit: <http://theatre.depaul.edu/on-stage/plan-your-visit/>

R O M E O

A N D

J U L I E T

On the Fullerton Stage

Dramaturgy by
Hannah Greenspan,
BFA3/Dramaturgy/Criticism;
Ben Claus, BFA4/Playwriting

by William Shakespeare

directed by Cameron Knight

Thoughts on the Play

There are no #spoileralerts when it comes to *Romeo and Juliet*. Two feuding households with two young lovers who take their lives. It's the story that everyone knows. How exactly can a story written in the late 1500s relate to audiences in 2016?

Due to its timeless themes — hate, tension, love, fate — *Romeo and Juliet* is reflective of our society today. By telling this story now, we are making a specific theatrical choice. We are making these choices in response to our current social and political climate. We have chosen to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* to 2016 because the Black Lives Matter movement, police brutality, political drama, and same-sex relationships are some of today's concerns.

Tension in our society, rooting from shootings of people of color and world terror, has made this classic story essential. *Romeo and Juliet* reminds us that, despite hate, something beautiful can still form. With all that occurs between these two feuding households, there is something amazing that happens at the end of the play: both families take a step back to listen to each other.

The entire country needs to do that: take a step back and listen to one another. Listening can't bring back Romeo, Juliet, and innocent people who have lost their lives. But it can spark a conversation that will lead to change.



Cameron Knight
(Photo by Tony Moux)

Interview with the Director, Cameron Knight

Hannah Greenspan: *What inspired you to adapt Romeo and Juliet, a classic and timeless play, to the world of today?*

Cameron Knight: It's in what you said, the fact that it's timeless. I think sometimes we use words like timeless and think we don't need to do anything with it. And in my pure Shakespeare heart, I agree. But when I thought about the audience that will be consuming it, the relevancy, I felt that there needed to be some adapting. This is a beautiful play, that was well written, that has timeless themes, but not timeless interpretations. I think the themes are universal.

HG: *What can the city of Chicago learn from watching our version of Romeo and Juliet?*

CK: Hopefully the play will hold a mirror up to our current political and social views. How we are disregarding the people in front of us for the sake of being right. Which is at the core of this play. We begin with “two households both alike in dignity,” and I think that line sets the backdrop of the entire play and where we are today.

When you take the views away, there’s no difference racially, politically, and socially. And the differences that are there are minute. Except that we fan the flames of those differences in order to have superiority over someone. So when we say “two households both alike in dignity,” it says to me that they’re arguing over the same point, and they are still fighting. And that is happening now. We often overlook the things that are very valuable. We see this with Chicago Public School system, the police system, the gentrification of the South Side, even Lincoln Park, it is not the area it once was. If one side wins or if everyone has their way, then what do we have left? These children are dead, these families have no legacy left because they were so committed to fight and hurt one another that they lost what they were fighting for.

When I listen to the campaigns now, I hear people talking about the future and the children and what we’re going to do for the children. But both sides are systematically destroying the country. So no one is really concerned about the children; they use that as a “catch all” phrase to get people to vote for them, because what they really want is to win. And I think shining a light on how similar both sides are could be cathartic for an audience. If we can have them see themselves and see what’s lost when we fight. I think a Chicago audience can very easily notice the irony and the potential for epic loss if we don’t act now.

“The words take on a new meaning when they are said by women. There is something done to a narrative when people get to speak for themselves.” -Cameron Knight

HG: *What work does gender bending half of the cast do?*

CK: What it doesn’t do is change the story. I think people get so caught up with the gender bending. But all I really did is change some pronouns, but I kept the names the same. What it does do is empower women in the play to speak beautiful language, to not be trafficked or used as leverage.

When you read Shakespeare’s plays and don’t address gender at all, the women are some of the smartest characters in the canon. But, they are often marginalized. Even in *Romeo and Juliet*, Lady Montague only has one line and then she dies. Gender bending the cast swings the story into 2016, where women and women of color are among the most celebrated and underappreciated in our society right now. Women of color are the largest percentage of graduating students in the country but are often disregarded. So putting them in a position of power, for me, is important. The words take on a new meaning when they are said by women. There is something done to a narrative when people get to speak for themselves. I am excited to see what that brings.

I know this will work, I know two young women falling in love will work, because I see it all the time. It works; it just works. And why not realize it? When we talk about the timeless nature of these plays, same-sex love is timeless, it has existed. For so long, women were not allowed to be in these plays, or even have the capacity to speak for themselves. It was such a foreign idea. So in some ways, I think moving the gender around allows history to be told more accurately.

WE ARE PROUD TO PRESENT A PRESENTATION...

by Jackie Sibblies Drury

directed by Erin Kraft

On the Fullerton Stage

Dramaturgy by
Lauren Quinlan,
BFA4/Dramaturgy/Criticism;
Hampton Cade, BFA4/Theatre Arts

Refractions of History

"For Africa to me...is more than a glamorous fact. It is a historical truth. No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at his present place."
~ Maya Angelou

Art of all forms is often viewed as a reflection of life. This phrase often fosters a sense of ease when consuming art, creating an affirming relationship that holds a mirror up to one's own experiences, but it does not question them. Jackie Sibblies Drury's *We Are Proud to Present...* is a work that refracts life rather than reflecting it. It takes the impulses and experiences many people face and contorts them in order to hold the audience member accountable for the urges they may not realize lie within themselves. As the actors craft their characters and motivations, we have the potential to see ourselves — but not in a comforting, reflecting light. Instead, we would be compelled to see ourselves refracted into the many people we have the potential of becoming, if only our environments were a bit different. What can be viewed as a "backstage comedy gone wrong," *We Are Proud to Present...* exhibits theatre in its purest state, but is not a love letter to the form. Instead, it gives a word of caution to the well-intentioned (and possibly a bit naïve) audience members and artists we all are.

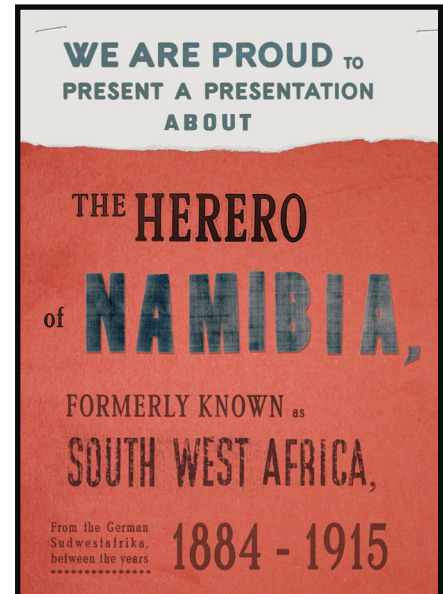
The exchanges between the actors of *We Are Proud to Present...* always return to the eternal question of "How did we get here?" By the play's tumultuous end, the actors are left to grapple with the destruction their actions leave behind, with everyone bewildered and blind as to how they fell to that point. The audience can also find resonance with this uncertainty, as the political and societal turmoil of the past year or so has stunned everyone into attempting to find a new definition of the American story.

In considering the vastness of history and the relative immensity of the story of the United States, it seems only natural that certain parts of history echo or repeat other parts. These reverberations create less perfect — less whole — replications. *We Are Proud to Present...* demonstrates how the American story is imperfect and ever changing — a process not unlike the theatre-making process — and those harsh realities, prejudices, and atrocities must be dealt with head-on in order to create a more lasting solution. In Drury's work, the race, identity, and roles within the ensemble clash into one messy conglomeration, making the process more difficult, but ultimately more important. The actors are both the antidote and the poison to their own discourse. The forward momentum of the play hangs in a delicate balance between many extremes — authenticity and fraudulence, inclusion and erasure. By leaning too far into fear and erasure, the human relationships forged in the play — both theatrical and personal — are shattered, along with the possibility of a more conscious tomorrow.

Interview with the Director, Erin Kraft

Hampton Cade: *So, why this play?*

Erin Kraft: I read it sometime my first year and was really amazed by how surprising it was. I think that with difficult subject matter like privilege, institutional racism — the kind at the base of this country's history — and racial violence, that it is difficult to make a play that is this surprising, this theatrical, and this entertaining. So I was struck by how relevant the subject matter is. And how every week something in the news makes me think about something in the play, and how badly I wish that weren't true. But I was also struck by the humanity of the characters and this tragedy of a well-meaning young ensemble who tries to make something together and ends up revealing all these divisions — divisions that they aren't even fully aware of.



HC: *Who do you hope to speak to with this play?*

EK: There are so many people who come to the theatre who see themselves as well-meaning liberals who don't realize the ways they, or we, are contributing to problems of racial tension and oppression and continuing violence. And for artists, it asks how do we tell other people's stories responsibly, or collaborate constructively on complicated material? How do we include everyone's voices in our stories, when our history has silenced or marginalized so many people?

HC: *What interests you about the history of Africa? What drew you to this?*

EK: I think, in a funny way, Africa is actually immaterial to the play. The play may fail to live up to its title. The ensemble has a real desire to do justice to that history, and, for some of the characters, to feel connected to that ancestry, but there is so little information about the Herero that it's tough for the characters to build on the specifics of that story. They *think* they're telling a story about the Herero genocide, but they end up being completely wrong. They *can't* tell that story, because they don't *know* it, and so they tell a story they do know. For me, I guess a personal hook into the play is that I've always been interested in stories about community and tribe. As a theatre person, so many of our ensembles are also our family. And the idea of how we work as communities, when we're all individuals, is in so much of my work. I ask what happens when one event or one change reverberates through all those people individually. Does the community find a way to adjust, come back together, or is the rift permanent? Does the community survive or not?



Erin Kraft
(Photo from LinkedIn)

“Just because something happened in rehearsals and not in a final product, doesn't mean that it didn't happen. Process is more than the product that comes out of it.” -Erin Kraft

HC: *What scares you about the play?*

EK: *(Deep sigh)* It asks me to implicate myself. And to recognize the things that happen on stage—even though I don't want to. I want to live in a world that is different than the one that emerges, but I don't.

HC: *What would you say to people who are skeptical about whether a play like this is actually helpful?*

EK: I think that when tackling political or inflammatory or threatening material, fiction is useful. It helps us release all this reflexive defensive tension that comes up when you come at challenging topics head on. So, you relax, you listen better, and you can identify with people who are different from you. You can examine the failings of people who are too similar to you. Since the play starts as a backstage comedy, it's easier to invest in these people. What I like most about doing the play at The Theatre School is that the status quo of this group is really familiar to us. The conflicts of the ensemble start really small: little ego disagreements, little cultural blind spots, diva behavior, and you know, we laugh with them because we've all seen these conflicts in various forms whenever we've rehearsed plays or tried to make art. As we laugh with them and identify with them in the small ways, we're more vulnerable to acknowledging the destructive things about them that may live in us. When you start without the fun, it's harder to identify in the end.

HC: *My last thing you've kind of touched on. You did Circle Mirror Transformation [in 2015]. There are some interesting things going on with rehearsal room plays, with the backrooms of the theatre, the bone of theatre. You mentioned family before, but what is it that draws you to this kind of theatre?*

EK: In order to make something, you have to be vulnerable to other people, and when you're vulnerable to other people, interesting things happen. You have to really listen and really open up, and that's a place where real change comes from. So, to me, making art is inherently dramatic. You know one of the advantages of theatre — something that it's better at doing than any other art form — is depicting layers of reality. This idea that you can be performing something and that it is happening for both you and the character, works better in theatre than any other medium. So then you can have an audience member seeing multiple levels of reality, and seeing that both the character and actor are inevitably changed by something they enact. And with rehearsals, just because something happened in rehearsals and not in a final product, doesn't mean that it didn't happen. Process is more than the product that comes out of it.

WIG OUT!

by Tarell Alvin McCraney directed by Nathan Singh

Dramaturgy by
Trisha Mahoney,
BFA3/Dramaturgy/Criticism

Cinderella in Chicago - A Short History of the Ball Scene

The Grimm Brothers wrote the story of *Cinderella* in 1857, but people have always expressed a desire to don their glass slippers and ball gowns to have a ball. The queens from Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Wig Out!* are no exception. The underground drag ball community in McCraney's production is not fiction. Today, there is a thriving populace in Chicago that has a history reaching as far back as the infamous story with a midnight deadline.

In the earliest iterations of the ball in 1896, the aldermen team comprised of John Coughlin and Michael Kenna threw the "First Ward Balls" at the Chicago Coliseum. These balls were frequented by prostitutes, drag queens, and pickpockets, who began the festivities with a Grand March through the ward. Taking place in impoverished neighborhoods, these gatherings had to be held on Halloween and New Year's Eve, the only times when it was socially acceptable to dress up as the opposite gender without fear of getting arrested.

In the 1930s, African-American business owners in Chicago began to host an increasing number of these events, with even more of a following. These events were particularly popular on the Chicago's South Side. To those who attended, it was a trend-setting party that provided a cheap escape from rough day-to-day realities. To the rest of the population, these were explained away as costume parties, since a man dressing as a woman was still a punishable offense.

The most famous of these balls were run by Alfred Finnie, a gay Black man who began holding events in 1935 in the basement of a Chicago South Side nightclub. These balls cost 25 cents to attend and became one of the most popular Halloween events of the South Side, with attendance of up to 1,000 people.



Sir-Honey Davenport
(Photo from Vogue It)

Slowly, the balls progressed from parties to competitions. The documentary *Paris is Burning* gives an in-depth look at the ball community in New York which was relatively unknown until the documentary's premiere. *Wig Out!*, which was first produced in 2009, explores the same competitions with an increased focus on the familial aspect of the ball houses. In these modern balls, individuals are judged on "realness," or how these Cinderellas could pass as princesses in everyday life. Contestants would walk, similar to a runway, in categories such as Business Executive Realness and Butch Queen, to demonstrate their fierce moves and killer personalities to win prizes and acclaim, with the ultimate goal of becoming legendary.

These princes and princesses by night have built a community that affords them the opportunity to express themselves and create a family. The drag balls, though still underground, are going on regularly today. Chicago has branches of many legendary families, such as the House of Ninja. For many in the Chicago area, this community has become a refuge where they are free to express themselves in any manner they choose, even after the clock has struck midnight.

About the Playwright, Tarell Alvin McCraney

Tarell Alvin McCraney, an alumnus of The Theatre School's BFA performance program and the Yale School of Drama's MFA playwriting program, has gained acclaim in the United States as well as internationally. Originally from Miami, McCraney has been an International Writer in Residence for the Royal Shakespeare Company, an ensemble member at Steppenwolf, and a resident playwright at New Dramatists. In 2013, McCraney was awarded the MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship.

McCraney is passionate about writing plays that tell untold stories in African American history. He has said that for him, writing *Wig Out!* was “a way to explore how all marginalized communities – in an effort to thwart modernity or the center of societies – push out to the fringes and create hierarchies within themselves.” These themes prevail in his other works, including *The Brother/Sister Plays*, *Choir Boy*, *Head of Passes*, *American Trade*, and *Again and Again*.

Wig Out! was originally produced at the Sundance Theatre Institute and has since been performed at the Royal Court and Vineyard Theatre, where it received the GLAAD Award for Outstanding Play. As McCraney told Sophia A. Jackson from *Afridiziak Theatre News*, “Each play is different. With *Wig Out!* the idea was more of a way into a world we don’t think of. People would say that they didn’t know this world existed, so it was about bringing that world to theatre. It’s about dialogue and engaging people, and if I can bring forth issues that concern, make you go home and think, or make you angry, then I’ve done my job.”



Tarell Alvin McCraney
(Photo from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation)



Nathan Singh
(Photo by Ashley Singh)

Interview with the Director, Nathan Singh

Trisha Mahoney: *How did you find Wig Out!, and what drew you to direct a production of it?*

Nathan Singh: I didn’t find *Wig Out!*; it found me. I spent the last few years investigating plays within the LGBTQ cannon that told stories about queer people of color. There weren’t many. Only within the last fifteen years have a small handful of plays come out. I knew I wanted to tell these stories because I often gravitate towards plays about individuals and communities who I don’t often see in theatre. I also knew that I wanted to spend my last production at DePaul directing a play that is a big spectacle in its vision but deeply human at its core. That pretty much sums up who I am as an artist. While reading it, I became really energized by its highly theatrical style and found it to be incredibly complex in its portrayal of identity and community.

TM: *Why do you think that this is an important story to tell now, in this season, in this school, in Chicago?*

NS: I am honored and excited that *Wig Out!* is included in this powerful and conversation-starting season. All the plays on the Fullerton Stage this season wrestle racial issues within contemporary America. *Wig Out!* adds to the conversation by tackling race through the lens of gender, sexuality, and queerness. This is a new type of play that shows us where the discussion about race and gender is going in the American theatre.

TM: *It can be assumed that the regular theatre-going audience may not have an intense familiarity with the Chicago ball scene. What would you like your audience to gain from seeing this production?*

I go to the theatre (and make theatre) to learn. And if I’m being entertained or having an emotional experience while I’m learning – that makes the perfect theatrical event. There is no other play, to my knowledge, that really educates people about the ball culture (or underground drag culture) than *Wig Out!* Besides the documentary film *Paris Is Burning* and a few limited resources, there is not a lot of information out there about this culture except first hand experiences from people who are part of that community. This play not only educates audiences about the history, rules, language, and lifestyle of ball culture but makes the information incredibly personal by having it come from specific members who are living within the culture. We are being educated about this culture by each member of the “House of Lights” family. Not to mention that the play helps us learn through the iconography of gay culture concepts like voguing, drag performance, camp, throwing shade, and so much more.

TM: *This play deals with a very specific group of people: drag queens in the ball scene. What in this play will a wider audience relate to?*

NS: At its core, *Wig Out!* is about young adults finding their own identity within their family. It’s about people who are looking for love and acceptance; whether it be from their family, their culture or from themselves. We can all relate to this.

EURYDICE

In the Healy Theatre

Dramaturgy by
Kaysie Bekkela,

BFA4/Dramaturgy/Criticism
Stephanie Meza, BFA3/Theatre Arts

by Sarah Ruhl

directed by Michael E. Burke

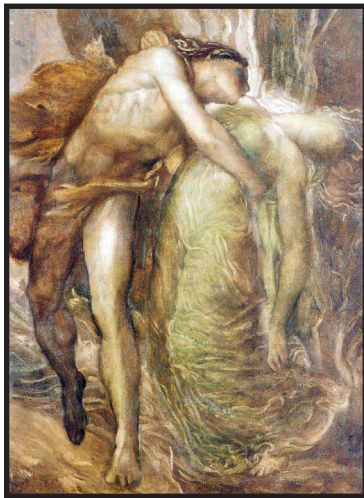
“Ruhl’s goal is to make the audience live in the moment, to make the known world unfamiliar in order to reanimate it.”

(John Lahr on *Eurydice*, *The New Yorker*)

About the Play

One look is it all it took; both to begin and end the love between Eurydice and Orpheus. We all know the tragic tale of Orpheus losing his bride with nothing more than a glance to Hades and the Underworld, but with *Eurydice* [2003] we take a wondrous look at a classic tragedy. Sarah Ruhl’s *Eurydice* unfolds an unfamiliar side to a classic myth with the main focus being Eurydice and her journey through a looking glass. You see a fresh retelling of the Orpheus myth, in which Eurydice is reunited with her dead father as he teaches language to her all over again. The play shines light on the importance of words and songs as a healing process. Written right after the death of Ruhl’s father, *Eurydice* touches upon the grieving process, the importance of words through time, and the unconditional love between father and daughter.

You will fall between the cracks of language and music and appreciate the many ways they help people cope with loss. Ruhl wrote this play as a love letter to her father, Patrick Ruhl, who died of cancer when she was just 20 years old. Her fascination with language came from her father, who would teach her words over a pancake breakfast each Sunday. Those language lessons and some of Patrick Ruhl’s words – “ostracize,” “peripatetic,” “defunct” – are memorialized in *Eurydice*.



Orpheus and Eurydice
G.F. Watts, 1870

The Original Myth

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has been told and retold and is one of the most tragic love stories in the world. It starts with Orpheus, the most talented and musically gifted player of all time. Some retellings of the original myth say that Eurydice was a shy and very beautiful wood nymph. She fell in love with Orpheus and his wonderful songs. They decided to get married, but tragedy struck when Eurydice, trying to outrun Aristaeus (a shepherd who had plotted to conquer the fair wood nymph), fell in the forest and was bitten by a deadly snake. To Orpheus’ dismay, his new bride died. He then planned to rescue her from Hades’ grasp. To reach the Underworld he sang a song so tender and sad that Hades himself let him retrieve his beloved Eurydice. On one condition: Hades warned Orpheus that for no reason should he look back at his wife until they have completely passed the threshold into the normal world, for if he did she would go back to the Underworld never to return again. Whether it is disbelief in Hades or disbelief that it is truly his Eurydice, it only took one glance to have Eurydice fall back to her second death. Orpheus, sad and alone, was left to wander the Earth day and night until his own death reunited him once again with his true love.

On the Author, Sarah Ruhl

Sarah Ruhl was born in 1974 in Wilmette, Illinois. Her mother was an English teacher, actress and theatre director; her father was a toy marketer and her older sister a psychiatrist. Originally wanting to become a poet, Ruhl didn’t start writing plays until her junior year at Brown University in 1995. While working under Paula Vogel, she wrote her first play *Dog Play* which moved Vogel so much she insisted Ruhl focus on playwriting. Another turning point for Ruhl came in 1997, at a production of *Passion Play*, her first full-length work. Her plays are usually distinguished by minimum backstory and submerging the audience in a series of unfolding dramatic moments. They have been produced all over the country, at Yale Repertory Theater, Goodman Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and Piven Theatre Workshop in Chicago. Her plays have also been produced internationally and have been translated into over twelve languages. She currently lives in Brooklyn with her family. Other of Ruhl’s plays include *Stage Kiss*, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, and *The Clean House*.

Interview with the Director, Michael E. Burke

Stephanie Meza: *Why Eurydice?*

Michael E. Burke: As I'm sure you're aware, this year's election has been particularly divisive and volatile. At every turn more is revealed of how frequently and how deeply people think of themselves as separate from everyone else; some for good reason, others for horrible reasons. What draws me to this play in this tumultuous time. It is truly about the things that unite as humans, growing up and losing loved ones. Not a single person—regardless of politics, wealth, race, sexual orientation—will avoid the fact of death. This play should remind us all that we're one giant family.



Michael E. Burke
(Photo from Michael E. Burke)

SM: *Do you gravitate to mythology in general?*

MB: I do tend to gravitate toward the mythic in theme and in scale. I am drawn to big unanswerables; things that we can't really know real answers to, but we can only grasp at in the dark hoping to find our own ways through the mess.

SM: *There are a few parallel themes in this play (i.e. music vs. language, living vs. underworld) which would you say you focused on?*

MB: There are many dualities in this play, and it's my hope that through the design and staging as many of them will manifest themselves as possible. However, the one that took the most precedence over the course of this particular production is childhood versus adulthood. This particular duality, for me, captures the entirety of the play under its umbrella.

SM: *In the play, Orpheus uses music to get Eurydice back; is there any song or artist that shaped what you think Orpheus would sound like?*

MB: The short answer is yes, but there's such a myriad of artists who have inspired this piece (from Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday to The Cinematic Orchestra and Lana Del Rey). If I had to pick just one track that has inspired my perception and understanding of Orpheus it would be *Ethereal* by Hjaltafn.

A Conversation with the Dramaturgs

Stephanie Meza: *What is your favorite element of this play?*

Kaysie Bekkela: For me this play is all about giving women the chance to be at the forefront of the story. Ruhl takes the original myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and flips it on its head. In the original myth Eurydice could have been anything—she didn't need to be a person. She could have been a cup of water that Orpheus fell in love with, and she would have served the same purpose. In Ruhl's version, Eurydice is a person above all else. The audience is able to see her grow as a person who makes her own choices.

SM: *Why this play now?*

KB: Well, I think lately, as a society, we've been really good at breaking down barriers of what it means to be human. The biggest thing I can think of that is going on in the world for women is Hillary Clinton running for president. Looking at Hillary circa Bill's presidency is very similar to the original myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. When Bill first took office in 1993, Hillary was expected to be the perfect wife. Now, fast forward to today and Hillary, like Eurydice, is running the show, and Bill has become a secondary character. In Ruhl's play, Eurydice is the main focus of the story and not just a placeholder for Orpheus, giving a different reason for the fateful glance that gives Eurydice her second death. Making the connection between Hillary and Eurydice allows a simple way for us to relate a classic myth and its 2003 retelling to the political conversations on feminism today.

R I C H A R D I I I

In the Healy Theatre

Dramaturgy by Mariah Schultz,
BFA3/Dramaturgy/Criticism

by William Shakespeare

directed by Jacob Janssen

'I am a villain: yet I lie. I am not.' ~Richard, Act V, Scene II



*Late 16th century portrait of Richard III,
housed in the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

Richard III presents two powerful families in England, the Yorks and the Lancasters. Both families have laid down their arms after a long, great battle, The War of Roses. The family of York has won. Edward VI sits on the throne, as his brother, Richard, lurks in the shadows, scheming to take his place. We wait to see if Richard will step out of the wings and prevail as he confides in us and plans his evil plots.

Richard is known as one of Shakespeare's most famous villains, alongside of Iago and Macbeth. Richard stands out in his use of powerful rhetoric to convince others to carry out his desires. He recognizes his worth and embraces his villainous role. He feels he could prove more useful than his brother in putting the country's affairs in order. He declares at the beginning of the play: "I am determined to prove a villain and hate the idle pleasures of these days."

Shakespeare took many liberties with the historical figure of Richard III, in order to build the case for Richard's manipulative scheming and dark deeds. So who is the man behind the myth?

From Richard's very birth, Shakespeare indicates how he was not welcomed so kindly into the world. His mother Cecily Neville, the Duchess of York, laments how ill-tempered Richard was as a child: "He was the wretched'st thing when he was young, So long a-growing and so leisurely." As the play progresses, she even states how much of a burden he was and how that continued into his adulthood. Richard was also one of seven siblings (others had died in infancy), though only two are mentioned in the play. His brothers Edward and Clarence were more favored (presumably by his mother), and Richard appeared to be the black sheep of the family.

Unlike Shakespeare's other villains, Richard was also known for a disfigurement that developed in his adolescence known as idiopathic scoliosis, a small curve that occurs in the spine for no known reason. Richard's character is constantly attributed to this condition. It's brought up as a reason why Richard isn't to be trusted as a person, let alone a ruler. Apparently, Richard's actual disability wasn't that noticeable in his appearance. However, Shakespeare makes it a large component of Richard's character to show the physical manifestation of his wickedness. Actor Anthony Sher simplified this in the picture to the right with his prominent hunchback. In some other productions, it is made less subtle in a slumped walk or a crouched over shoulder to draw away from making Richard's disability the entire focus of his character.

Richard has nothing to lose and everything to gain. He gleefully stirs the pot, hinting at a faulty political system in England. Despite Richard's desire to step into his brother's shoes, there were signs of corruption while Edward sat on the throne. Edward had a mistress, Lady Shore, who stayed in the palace along with his wife and children. In some adaptations, like the 1955 Laurence Olivier film, she is included to show how disruption within the familial unit was causing a rift in the political sphere of a supposedly peaceful time.



*Anthony Sher as Richard III,
Royal Shakespeare Company, 1984*



Richard III and Queen Anne Neville, Stained glass window at Cardiff Castle (Geoff Wheeler, Richard III)

Historical sources recorded Richard primarily as a villain. Since then, scholars and historians still try to find justice for Richard: Jeremy Potter, a former Chair of the Richard III Society, claims that “At the bar of history Richard III continues to be guilty because it is impossible to prove him innocent.”

Richard was a product of his times in wanting change but not necessarily having the ideas of how to implement change. He was trying to form a stable position for himself in periods of war and power, with a bitter history between dueling families that kept pushing and pulling the citizens of England apart. Ultimately, both history and Shakespeare give us varied accounts of the actual King Richard, leaving behind a legacy we continue to grapple with today.

Interview with the Director, Jacob Janssen

Mariah Schultz: *What inspired you to direct Richard III?*

Jacob Janssen: About a year ago I picked up my copy of the complete works, and I started thumbing through the pages. I landed on the first scene of *Richard III*. Three hours later I finished the play. I never intended to read the play that evening, but there is something powerful in that opening speech. I knew then that I needed to spend more time with the play.

MS: *What past experiences have you had working or studying Shakespeare? What lessons have they left you with?*

JJ: For a few years after college I ran a small Shakespeare company at Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts. Plimoth is a 17th century living history museum dedicated to the lives of the English Colonists and the Wampanoag people. The productions at Plimoth were an attempt at a certain type of historical recreation, with minimal setting or props, and with a good amount of doubling and tripling of roles, and, of course, lots of gender bending. After Plimoth I spent time producing at the Folger Shakespeare Library, as well as at Shakespeare Theatre, both in Washington, D.C. In all of the places I have worked with classic texts, I learned that a Shakespeare performance is only as good as its connection to the audience and that Hamlet’s advice to the players still holds true.

MS: *Instead of the traditional protagonist, Richard is classified as an anti-hero. What attracts you about Richard’s character and his story?*

JJ: The hero of any story always does what is needed to rebalance their world, and to that end, there is a certain predictability. Once we know the story, we know the problem. Once we know the problem, we know the hero’s journey. The anti-hero is something else. The anti-hero is chaos and question. The anti-hero dares to ask, “what if?”

When Lucifer fell, it was because he questioned the eternal order and in doing so introduced doubt and question to the world. Anti-heroes imagine a world that is outside conventionality. These rogues defy order and introduce one of their own. They are idols of self-actualization, and we Americans, the rugged individualists that we are, cannot help but be drawn to them.

MS: *Richard III is a play centered around politics, with Richard fighting to persevere whatever the costs in the race to claim the throne. Given that 2016 has been such a politically charged year, what sort of message do you hope to leave audiences with in this time of political unrest?*

I suppose I would take issue with the idea that we are currently in an era of political unrest, though we are in a time of decision. What I think this play illustrates is how tenuous our attachment to civility is. Demagogues and strong men are quick to rise and commandeer the instruments of the state. We must remain vigilant if we hope to protect our democratic way of life.



Jacob Janssen
(Photo from Jacob Janssen)

New Work at The Theatre School

New Playwrights Series (NPS)

Dramaturgy by
Lauren Quinlan,
BFA4 Dramaturgy/Theatre Criticism;
Danielle Szabo, BFA4 Theatre Arts

“Actors are all about entrances, but writers are all about exits.”

~ Vincent H. O’Neill

What exactly is NPS?

NPS, or **New Playwrights Series**, is presented in conjunction with The Theatre School’s annual **Wrights of Spring Festival** of new, student-written work. Since the Festival first began in 1996, Wrights of Spring has presented the work of more than 170 playwrights. Since 2004, one student is given the opportunity to have his or her play fully realized on the stage. A team of designers, directors, and actors work together to bring the student’s play to life. Past NPS productions include *The Women Eat Chocolate* by Caroline Macon, *Video Galaxy* by Jared Hecht, and *The Scavengers* by Lucas Baisch.

Wrights of Spring acts as a springboard for the creation of the New Playwrights Series. Third-year playwriting students work all year on a full-length play that will be considered for the NPS slot. During Wrights of Spring, they are given two time slots in which to gain invaluable information about how their play interacts with an audience. Using this knowledge, the playwrights make edits to their plays between each reading to test out new ideas or tactics. Carlos Murillo, head of the BFA Playwriting program, views this revision process as integral to the work and helps to achieve a “growing clarity of what the playwright wants the play to become.” These staged readings are then considered for the following season’s NPS production.



Carlos Murillo,
Head of BFA Playwriting
(Photo by Andrea Tichy)

Following the Wrights of Spring Festival, a decision is made by the faculty about which young writer will have his or her play fully produced at The Theatre School. Often, playwriting students who were not chosen for the NPS slot will be given a **Studio**, **Elevated Studio** or **Workshop** production of their play, to be performed the following school year. After that decision is made, an artistic team is decided upon, and production meetings begin in November. A cast list of BFA and MFA Theatre School students will be chosen in the winter of 2017, with rehearsals beginning in April. In six weeks, the cast and creative team create the world premiere production, the playwright will write at least a dozen drafts of their play.



The Women Eat Chocolate, Spring 2016
(Photo by Michael Brosilow)

Murillo considers a full production of a play “a gift to any writer,” and giving a young writer the opportunity to work on a full production of their work “is a major learning experience for them that few programs in the country can provide to undergraduate playwrights.” In the spirit of the Wrights of Spring Festival, which aims to build a collaborative, school-wide, student-driven, and interdisciplinary community centered around The Theatre School’s commitment to fostering new plays and playwrights, the New Playwrights Series is a truly unique experience that each year showcases the immense talents of Theatre School students.

Meet the Playwrights

For more than a year, these dedicated playwriting students have poured over their plays. The candidates for the 2016-2017 New Playwright Series are...

Drew Beyer

D. Matthew Beyer is well on his way to becoming a hack genre writer. His play, *Down the Rocky Road and All the Way to Bedlam*, explores questions of love, family, and humanity through the eyes of an artificial intelligence. He considers magic and science (and the practitioners of both) to be his biggest influences, along with writers like Isaac Asimov, Susanna Clarke, and Neil Gaiman.

Emily Witt

Emily Witt is a writer fueled by human complexity and coffee. She's most inspired by playwrights who confront the grotesque while showing the beauty of humans. Among her favorites are Lynn Nottage, Phyliss Nagy, Caryl Churchill, Sarah Kane, and Suzan Lori-Parks. She's also deeply inspired by the poetry of Ai, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sylvia Plath, to name a few. Her play *Mrs. Phu's Cleansing Juices (And Also Salads)* confronts the divisive abortion debate through dark humor (she hopes).

Ben Claus

Ben Claus is most inspired by things he cannot quite understand. Favorite artists include Hunter S. Thompson, Will Eno, and Robert Wilson; "when the going gets weird, the weird turn pro." His most recent play, *52-Hertz*, explores the pain within and caused by a school shooter, and searches for a way to heal after such a tragedy. Currently, Ben is obsessed with *V a p o r w a v e*, and you should be, too.

Emily Pabish

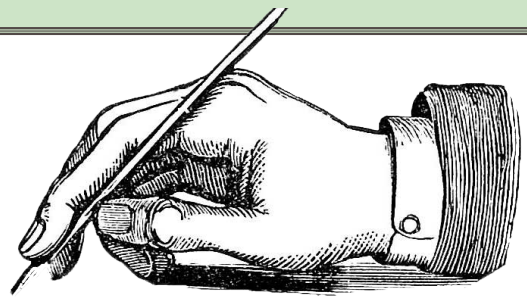
Emily Pabish has a semi-sheltered style of writing; an "innocent, but trying for more" if you will. As a writer and regular 21 year old, she draws from her life as a New Jersey geek living and working in her new home of Chicago, sharing her views and interests with others as she learns about how the world really is.

Shea Corpora

Shea Corpora hails from the East Coast and likes to write about family. Whether that family has a mom, dad and 2 ¼ children or is missing a few parts – whether they live in modern day suburbia or a futuristic sand-land – family is where it's at. ('It' being her writing). Shea would like to enforce that NPS is an important part of The Theatre School season because it is written by a student for a modern audience. So come check out the new play – who knows, one day you might be able to brag that you saw one of these plays first!

Devin Asperger

Devin Asperger is 6'2", 180 pounds, blonde hair and blue eyes. He has been missing since a loud bang was heard somewhere outside The Theatre School after a reading of his play *The Adventures of Doctor Science*. The police report has a statement from witnesses saying he sprinted out of the school yelling, "They know I know! I know too much!" If seen, please report to the authorities.



New Work at The Theatre School

MFA 17

Dramaturgy by
Trisha Mahoney,
BFA3/Dramaturgy/Criticism;
Mariah Schultz, BFA3/Dramaturgy/Criticism

World Premiere!

Michael Jordan in Lilliput

by Mickle Maher, directed by Erica Weiss

Featuring the Class of 2017 Master of Fine Arts in Acting candidates in their final casting assignment. This world premiere production is commissioned from an exciting playwright and directed by a guest artist from the Chicago theatre community. It is presented as the final production in the Healy Theatre.

An Interview with Dexter Bullard, Head of Graduate Acting

Trisha Mahoney: *Could you explain the inspiration for this program?*

Dexter Bullard: When we imagined this ensemble project, no one knew how we'd find the material to suit it. At first, we selected a play with the right cast number and gender breakdown and hired a faculty or guest director to lead it.

I am a dedicated director of new plays, so the idea worked: what if a professional playwright got a commission to work on a new play, with no commercial pressure or reviews, writing the play based on the ensemble? Dean Culbert found the funds and now we offer the students a "tailor-made" play for them.

TM: *What are the benefits of the MFA production that you have seen arise in past years?*

DB: The biggest benefit by far is connecting the graduating actors, designers, technicians, stage managers, playwright assistants, and dramaturgs with the professional playwright and director. From these connections, Theatre School students have gone on to get paid work after graduation. From these connections, the professionals introduce our students to many others in the theatre network. Another benefit has been the inclusion of a "risk-taking" original show in our season. MFA directors and faculty directors often focus on well-known works; the MFA play is always fresh, today, and subject to controversy.

TM: *How do you feel the program ties into the overall mission of The Theatre School in training young theatre professionals with the ideas of diversity and equality at the forefront?*

DB: When we cast our plays, we often have to do so with color-blind, color-conscious or color-specific justifications for who plays who. Since the material is based on the composition of the graduating class, the MFA play is perfectly inclusive. Laura Jacqmin's *We Are Going to Be Fine* had Vahishta Vafadari (MFA '15) as a lead character who was South Asian. This was the only South Asian role that that actor got to play while in our program.

TM: *What feedback have you received from students and faculty about the benefits as well as challenges that the program poses?*

DB: The student actors can feel "unmoored" in a new play. That's to be expected, but they are very proud of the work. It is a critical training link to have actors put themselves fully into new work. I think, compared to our other offerings, the MFA production can seem rogue or unfinished, but that's because a dead white man from years ago in another country (Shakespeare, Chekhov, etc.) didn't write it and have the script pass the test of time and cultural expectation. Personally, I find new work always to be more interesting than "museum" plays. Others get anxious that new things might not "work" or be "good." I feel gesture is gesture, and art is art. At school we are not working for ticket sales or awards; we are working to find truth in ourselves and the now.



Dexter Bullard
(Photo by Andrea Tichy)

A Conversation with the Playwright, Mickle Maher

Playwright Mickle Maher chats with co-dramaturgs Mariah Schultz and Trisha Mahoney on the search for inspiration, binge-watching television shows, and the importance of drawing from classical works.

Mariah Schultz: *What interests you about theatrical arenas in our day-to-day life?*

Mickle Maher: I put my characters into theatrical arenas that are not strictly theatre not because I find those arenas interesting, but because they're funny and dramatic. Funny because duh, and dramatic because drama arrives best when there's something in the room that resists its arrival. The whole point behind the not strictly theatrical theatre space of a Presidential debate, for example, is that the debaters (and moderator) are there to show how in-human, how undramatic, they can be. Laughing too loud is out. Crying is absolutely out. Saying what's actually in their hearts and minds is way, way out. I just think most playwrights make it too easy on themselves and start in the burning building with the alcoholic dad beating off on his pile of dead babies or whatever.

Trisha Mahoney: *You mention how the reason you are drawn to these arenas, like forums and public debates, is due to the opportunity for humor and drama. What opportunities for humor and drama do you see in the setting of your new play?*

MM: So, this new play is set in a basketball post-game press conference. The pronounced thing that's funny and potentially dramatic about sports reporters is that the person being questioned by the press comes in front of the cameras with a persona, a mask, a mask that is obvious to both the person wearing it and the ones they're addressing (the press).

This distinguishes it from, say, a police interrogation where it's not clear if the suspect is hiding something (masking) or not. It's also different from a Presidential debate, where it's clear everyone's wearing a mask, but where there's not a newly existing loss or victory hovering over the stage to highlight that mask's ridiculousness.

With the sports reporter we're immediately in a kind of comedy of manners. It's taboo to show too much emotion, whether you've won or lost, but especially if you've lost. You can look bummed, but you can't cry. You can be sullen about a bad call that cost you the game, but you can't start throwing chairs or screaming about it. Likewise, your language has to be (for some reason!) constrained: clichéd, platitudinous, and unrevealing.

It gets dramatic where there's an unspoken objective of the interrogating reporters: get behind that mask. Get it to drop. They (and most of us, the viewers) want to see some genuine pain (or joy) come out. So there's an immediate tension and conflict — and the ultimate action of the reporter is the same as a good play: through their resistance, get the main character to know and speak their true heart. In a sports press conference this doesn't happen so often. In a play, it's the expectation.

MS: *What do you do to keep inspired throughout the process?*

MM: When I get enough sleep and read poetry, I do okay. When I stay up too late eye-vacuuming mediocre TV shows, not so much.

TM: *What draws you to a certain work, such as Gulliver's Travels, and how do you integrate them into the world that you are creating with your new work?*

Almost without exception the works that I end up throwing into a piece are 1) works that I read when I was younger, and loved as only a young person can, and 2) works I feel no compunction about making fun of or egregiously misinterpreting, because a) I love them, and you always make fun of and misinterpret what (or who) you love, and b) all their authors are dead and can take it.

I steal the parts that are helpful to my story and leave out the parts that aren't.



Mickle Maher
(Photo by Joe Mazza)

2016-2017 Chicago Playworks Season
at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre, 60 E. Balbo Drive, Chicago

The Kid Who Ran for President

by Jeremiah Clay Neal, from the book by Dan Gutman

directed by Ernie Nolan

music direction by Mark Elliott

recommended for ages 6 and up

October 6 - November 12, 2016

Night Runner

by Ike Holter

directed by Lisa Portes

recommended for ages 9 and up

January 12 - February 18, 2017

Cinderella: The Remix

book & lyrics by Psalmayene 24, music by Nick tha 1Da

directed by Coya Paz

recommended for ages 5 & up

April 20 - May 27, 2017

Box Office and Group Sales: (321) 922-7900

2016-2017 Theatre School Season
at 2350 N. Racine Avenue, Chicago

ON THE FULLERTON STAGE

Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

directed by Cameron Knight

November 4 - 13, 2016

(previews 11/2 & 11/3)

We are Proud to Present...

by Jackie Sibblies Drury

directed by Erin Kraft

February 10 - 19, 2017

(previews 2/8 & 2/9)

Wig Out!

by Tarell Alvin McCraney

directed by Nathan Singh

April 14 - 23, 2017

(previews 4/12 & 4/13)

Mrs. Phu's Cleansing Juices

by Emily Witt

directed by Krissy Vanderwarker

May 19 - 27, 2017

(previews 5/17 & 5/18)

IN THE HEALY THEATRE

Eurydice

by Sarah Ruhl

directed by Michael E. Burke

October 21 - 30, 2016

(previews 10/19 & 10/20)

Richard III

by William Shakespeare

directed by Jacob Janssen

January 27 - February 5, 2017

(previews 1/25 & 1/26)

Michael Jordan In Lilliput

by Mickle Maher

directed by Erica Weiss

May 5 - 14, 2017

(previews 5/3 & 5/4)

*Check the web for performance
dates and times.*

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