

Fall 2005

# Review: The Newsletter of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, volume 16, issue 1

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The  
Newsletter  
of the  
Literary Managers  
and Dramaturgs  
of the  
Americas



# review

Volume 16, Issue 1  
Fall/Winter 2005

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# EDITORS' NOTE

Ok, so let's be honest: it's a crazy time to be an editor of *Review*.

Shelley and I just began jobs as Assistant Professors at universities in the southwest, teaching dramaturgy and theatre history. The new jobs are keeping us busy, to say the least. But just in time for the holidays we've assembled this Austin retrospective issue.

The bulk of the issue recalls the events, texts, and performances of June's LMDA conference in Austin, Texas. One main feature of the conference was The Collaboration Project, co-sponsored by LMDA and Austin Scriptworks. In this issue, the members of each team of collaborators have been given the opportunity to submit some notes about, responses to, or texts from their collaborative experiences. Scripts and comments are listed in the order in which the collaborative teams performed at the conference.

A few other things going on in this issue: Neil Blackadder is trying to start a fight, and the editors of *Review* helped him out. Neil has contributed an essay challenging what he sees as some of the premises behind new play premiere-itis in theatres. New play development has been a recurring theme at recent LMDA conferences, so Neil is taking a critical backwards glance at the ideas that animated the discussions, and which motivate the lives and careers of many dramaturgs and literary managers. Responding to Neil's molotov cocktail — or at the least, his martini in the face — are three 'turgs who have done some thinking about the place of new work: Lue Douthit, DD Kugler, and Michele Volansky.

Rounding out this issue: Liz Engelman introduces the key points from the keynote speech at our 2005 conference, Lee Devin shares his acceptance speech, delivered upon receiving LMDA's 2005 Elliott Hayes Award; and Elizabeth Cobbe gives us her perspective on the conference, from the point of view of an early career 'turg.

In other news: At the bottom of this page is a photo that will serve as a preview of an item in our next issue: the project for which I received Dramaturg Driven support is now officially "in the pipeline" (not a very official-sounding phrase, I know). The first

phase of the project was a combination mini-conference / Northwest regional meeting, held on October 22 at the Seattle Public Library's new Central Library. My thanks to everyone who took the time and made the effort to join the tour of this remarkable building and participated in the lively discussion that followed. In our next issue, Madeleine Oldham and I will compare notes as we "review" the library; we'll also include some of the thoughts expressed by those who attended the event. And there will be a few more pictures.

As always, drop us a line with questions and comments — note our new emails.

D.J.H.

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## *review*

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*Inquiries from prospective contributors are encouraged. General inquiries and inquiries regarding feature articles may be directed to Shelley Orr: "Shelley Orr" <orr@email.arizona.edu>.*

*Review no longer does Regional Updates. Regional Update inquiries should be directed to your LMDA regional representative or to Megan Monaghan: "Megan Monaghan" <meganm@scr.org>.*

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Some of the participants in the SPL event, looking at Madeleine's wedding photos in the "Living Room" of the Seattle Public Library.

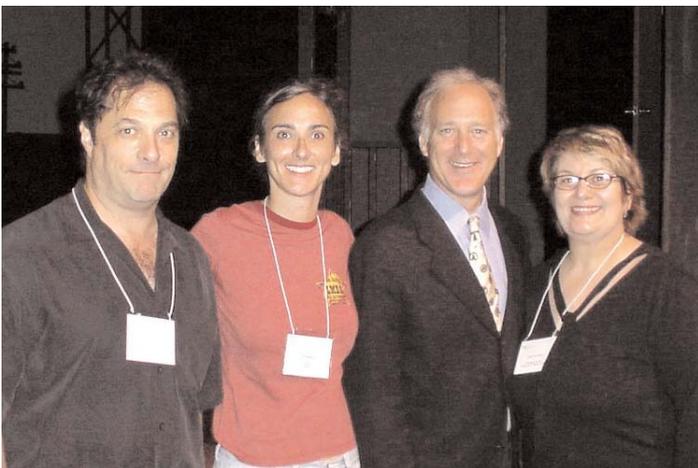
Photo: Shelley Orr

# Kirk Watson's list for making a cool city.

*Former mayor of Austin, Texas, Kirk Watson delivered the keynote address for the 2005 annual LMDA conference. As a souvenir for those who were in attendance — and as a tantalizing and occasionally cryptic text for those who were not — here is a list of Watson's suggestions for good management — a management approach that he himself used in consolidating the vitality of Austin, and which he advocates as a plan for revitalizing cities all over. These fifteen-points formed the core of his keynote and inspired discussion throughout the LMDA conference.*

*Watson is currently a public affairs consultant and attorney practicing in Austin. In 1997, Watson was elected Mayor of Austin, Texas. He was reelected with a record 84% of the vote. The Fort-Worth Star-Telegram recognized his “proven knack for forging compromise among divergent political factions.” At right is his list of suggestions for doing just that.*

*For more on the surprising (or, perhaps, not-so-surprising) intersection of creativity and commerce, see Lee Devin's Elliott Hayes acceptance speech on page twenty-four.*



Scott Kanoff, Liz Engelman, Kirk Watson, and Ann Ciccolella at the LMDA Keynote Address at the State Theater in Austin.

*Photo: Cynthia SoRelle*

1. Throw away the labels.
2. Create new opportunities to hear and to be heard.
3. You will never meet everyone's concept of perfection.
4. Follow the 84% Rule.
5. Don't require your concept of perfection.
6. Be biased toward action.
7. Don't wait for the better deal to come along, and recognize that there is value in failure.
8. Hope matters.
9. Have a short term focus with long term goals.
10. Know your core values and assets.
11. Admit your weaknesses.
12. Avoid the nitpickers, naysayers, and know-it-alls.
13. Create new and different constituencies.
14. Don't create unnecessary enemies.
15. Don't believe your own bull.

# Remembering The Collaboration Project

## TEXTS FOR AN UNTITLED BIRD PLAY

Dan Dietz

D.J. Hopkins

Spot

If I try to stand outside myself and look at our performance, it might resemble — go with me — a 15 minute exercise in Brechtian “separation of the elements”: three performers, each doing his own thing, those “things” occasionally overlapping, even occasionally informing each other, but remaining separate rather than integrated, synchronized but not singular. While that may describe a potentially interesting structure for a performance, I’m sure that any “separation” on display on stage was not the result of intention on our parts.

From this assessment of the performance, I wonder about the process. Did we three really work together? Or did we instead work *simultaneously*: in the same room, but not really on the same piece? Did we each work on our own “thing” and subsequently present three private projects at the same time? *Simultaneity*, but not *collaboration*? Not a trio but three concurrent solos? I don’t have an easy answer to these questions.

In the discussion that followed the performances, I joked that our group hadn’t experienced a revelatory unifying discovery, as one or two of the other groups seemed to have done. I shouldn’t have joked: something amazing happens when people who are practically strangers start thinking the same thoughts. Such collaboration is an enviable phenomenon. The question then, in retrospect, is: did our group actually collaborate?

Our group came together around bossa nova. Dan wrote a short play about a guy and his bird for his application to the Collaboration Project, and in after a couple of exchanged emails we agreed that it could be the germ of our piece. Soon “The Bird Play,” as I’ve always called it, had a setting: Brazil. In a subsequent email, I expressed an interest in travel and airports. When I discovered that the Jobim International Airport in Brazil was named for the founder of bossa nova (Antonio Carlos Jobim), Spot mentioned that he had a bossa nova theme in his guitarist’s bag of tricks. That three-point line of thought (Brazil-airport-bossa nova) was the core concept that we relied on when we got together in Austin. At Dan’s suggestion, we explored making the “The Bird Play” a music-theatre piece, in which Spot’s music would be foregrounded as often as text.

Ok, so that was exciting, I admit. That linked chain of connections developed via email led us to a music-based performance, a melancholy smoking macaw, a dramaturg with a monologue, and Spot’s memorable neologism, “bluesa nova.” Which, as I review the experience, seems like a collaborative outcome. So what’s left to be skeptical about?

Perhaps what really ought to be critiqued is my own limited conception of “collaboration.” Perhaps the combination of simultaneity and separation of the elements (whether intentional or not) is as valid a way of thinking about collaboration as the vague, inarticulate ideal of the process that I’ve been harboring. Perhaps at its most basic, this is what theatre is: an art that puts people in the same room with each other, artists and audiences alike. And even if they’re not thinking the same thoughts, at least they’re thinking at the same time and in the same place.

D.J. Hopkins

*The following text was part of the prologue (for lack of a better word) to the Untitled Bird Play that our group presented. At the suggestion of Dan Dietz, our playwright, I assembled lines from the texts that I found most exciting in my research, with some additional lines discovered by Dan. The opening exchange is taken from the application form that Dan filled out to participate in the Collaboration Project; this is the story that he wrote on that form, the germ of our subsequent project.*

D.J.: Tell us a good story.

SPOT: Keep it short.

DAN: Once there was a tropical blue bird who'd been taught by his owner to smoke cigarettes. At the unique cluck of his owner, the bird would bend down, pull one from a pack with his beak, hop on to the custom made lighter, and manipulate the switch until a flame popped out. Then he would smoke. The idea was to get on David Letterman. One day, attempting to return from a business trip to Brazil, the owner was caught with delicate speckled eggs wrapped in his jacket pockets. He was placed in detention, where he remains until the embassy can sort the mess out. The bird waits in his cage, his body a confusion of longing. He misses his owner — for food, of course, as well as companionship. But mostly he misses the cluck. The blue bird has begun lying to himself that he hears the cluck, and smoking promptly afterwards. The pack is just about empty.

D.J.: We are inundated with advice on where to travel, but we hear little of why...

It's not even worth making a distinction between airports and malls.

It's all just... shopping.

Geographic confusion.

The Hyacinth Macaw is the ROLLS-ROYCE of PARROTS.

Covered head to foot in a deep Hyacinth blue

Their primary nation of origin is Brazil.

The statement "WOW!" pretty much sums up this huge, beautiful bird.

Accomplished escape artists, they can and will disassemble their cages.

The name of Rio de Janeiro's international airport was changed to honour the father of bossa nova, Antonio Carlos Jobim.

Setting trends in wildlife crime.

Jobim achieved worldwide fame with the song "Girl from Ipanema."

Smuggling eggs instead of animals.

*Everyone whistles theme to "Girl from Ipanema."*

So I called United Airlines and told them I was travelling with my pet Hyacinth Macaw, were there any restrictions?

Even when I asked: "So, can I let my bird fly around the cabin of the airplane for exercise?" the operator only replied, "Let me check on that for you, sir."

The art of travel seems to sustain questions neither simple nor trivial....

## OPENING

Sound of breathing. Kind of like that scene from 2001, that enclosed, space-suit kind of breathing. Claustrophobic. A series of slides begins, depicting a journey through an American airport, from the entrance, through security, past the shops and coffee stands, all the way down to the gate. Silhouetted against the projections is a man: JUDE.

The slide series continues past the gate and onto the plane. The plane takes off. We see the ground fall away from us. Breathing picks up a bit. Ground falls away. Pause. Ground starts to get closer. The plane is landing. And just as the plane hits the tarmac...

Sound of feathers. Rustling. Kind of like a large bird beating his wings. Not frantically, but repeatedly. Compulsively. A series of slides begins, across the stage from where the other slideshow continues through another airport, depressingly similar to the first. This new series of slides depicts the interior of a large wire cage. The point of view hops around, as though we were seeing through the eyes of a trapped animal who never really thought he was trapped until very recently, and even now it isn't a thought so much as a tiny edgy feeling in the corners of his body. Not panic. Not yet. Silhouetted against the projections of the cage is a bird: ZIMMER, the blue macaw.

The slide series continues moving around the cage. Pieces of an apartment can be made out from behind the bars. It's kind of a crummy pad, but here and there a few colorful elements pop into view: a tropical flower in a green glass vase, a bold Latin American rug, a kitschy sombrero hanging on the wall. Is the TV on? Is that Trading Spaces playing? Can't tell. Finally, a slide shows a pack of cigarettes inside the cage. The rustling sound quickens. The cigarettes get closer. Closer. And just as the pack overwhelms the visual field...

## TRANSGRESSION SCENE

(JUDE in his hotel room in Rio. He sits on his bed. Next to him is a box of twelve small eggs, about an inch and a half long. He stares at them for a while. Then he reaches over and carefully plucks one from the box. Music: a tiny version of Zimmer's Song. JUDE freezes. Simultaneously, we hear a startled musical squawk from ZIMMER as lights rise on him in his cage. He looks like he's just woken up from a dream.)

(JUDE carefully shakes the egg. A note sounds out. ZIMMER's feathers rustle, he looks at the cigarettes. JUDE shakes the eggs again, another note, ZIMMER's feathers rustle again, he looks at the cigarettes again. A moment of decision. JUDE carefully, slowly, wraps the egg in a layer of cotton. At the same time ZIMMER carefully approaches the pack of cigarettes and draws one out with his mouth.)

(JUDE picks up the tape. ZIMMER goes over to the lighter.)

(JUDE holds the egg to his inner thigh. ZIMMER holds his cigarette to the lighter and creates a flame.)

(JUDE and ZIMMER inhale a breath. Agonizing pause.)

(They exhale. JUDE tapes the egg to his leg. ZIMMER watches the smoke swirl around his cage. JUDE finishes taping. ZIMMER takes a few more drags. JUDE looks back at the box. ZIMMER glances

over at the pack.)

JUDE & ZIMMER

Eleven.

ZIMMER SINGS 1

(ZIMMER in his cage. He sounds out a few notes. They're expectant—he seems to think someone will come over to him when he sings like that. Nobody comes. ZIMMER sounds them out again. Nobody comes. ZIMMER hopes over to his seed dish, pecks a few into his mouth, crunches. Moments pass. ZIMMER sounds out a few notes. Nobody comes.)

ZIMMER SINGS 2

(ZIMMER sits in his cage. A talking head—Larry King perhaps—is interviewing a guest. Larry King asks a question. ZIMMER hoots a response. Larry King questions again. ZIMMER hoots more authoritatively. The guests start arguing. ZIMMER hoots along with them. It sounds like an amazing jam session, voices and notes combining to form a chaotic melodic weave. ZIMMER is full and vibrant and alive. Larry King cuts to a commercial break. ZIMMER's expression of joy fades to inert blankness. Moments pass.)

SMOKING 1

(JUDE smokes. ZIMMER sits in his cage, watching him. JUDE coughs. ZIMMER hoots out a few notes in response. JUDE continues to cough—one of those gross coughing fits. ZIMMER happily hoots along, jamming with the music of the cough. JUDE's coughing subsides. ZIMMER's music fades. JUDE breathes. Looks down at the pack of cigarettes.)

JUDE

Mother...(breath)...fuckers...

SMOKING 2

(JUDE comes home with a plastic grocery bag. ZIMMER perks up, happy to see him. JUDE grabs the remote and turns on the TV: David Letterman. JUDE pulls a box of nicotine gum out of the bag, tears it open, pops out a piece and starts chewing intensely. ZIMMER watches. JUDE chews. Starts to relax. He sees his pack of cigarettes, grabs it and heads for the trash can. David Letterman announces that it's time for "Stupid Pet Tricks." JUDE stops, hand hovering over the trash. He watches the TV. ZIMMER watches him. JUDE turns and stares intently at ZIMMER. He chews intently. ZIMMER hoots out a questioning note.)

SMOKING 3

(ZIMMER sits happily on a perch, outside his cage. JUDE stands behind him, lights a cigarette. ZIMMER hoots questioningly. JUDE clucks comfortingly. ZIMMER seems satisfied. A moment. Then JUDE grabs ZIMMER, stuffs the cigarette in his mouth and holds it there. Struggling, muffled music. Finally, ZIMMER inhales. Pause. ZIMMER coughs violently, musically. JUDE lets him go. ZIMMER's coughs calm down. He looks at JUDE warily. JUDE clucks comfortingly. A moment. JUDE lunges at ZIMMER again.)

TRANSGRESSION SCENE CONT'D

(JUDE stands next to the bed, carefully pulling up his pants around his thighs. He buttons, zips and buckles. Looks at the door. Deep breath. OK. Here we go. He takes a step. A chorus of tiny bird music erupts from his pants. Pause. Another step, more music. Pause. This is going to be harder than he thought. He grabs his suitcase off the bed, straightens his tie, and heads for the door. A flood of music pours out from under his pants as he goes. Lights out, door shuts.)

(ZIMMER looks down at the butt of his now-finished cigarette lying on the floor of his cage. He feels good...and guilty. Nervous rustling of feathers. Pause. Again. ZIMMER goes to his food dish, scoops up a mouthful of seed, and spits it out onto the butt, burying it. Yeah. That's better.)

HYACINTH BLUES

(ZIMMER flaps frantically around his cage.)

no. not still this wirebox. these bars, thin reeds. can't. can't be here. empty. the whole out there. suspicious. something's up. empty of him. come in. jingle little shinies at the door. come in come in come in. end this. come in like the sun does. end this day for me when you come in you'll make the sound and i can do can do the thing you want me to the thing the thing not quite eating more being eaten not quite breathing so much as finding breath in a place where none should be the kind of breath that grabs me by the feather roots and says i own you now. i am you.

(ZIMMER's flapping slows down. He commits the bird equivalent of a long slow slump.)

what is this. my feathers feel falling off. body kinda curling up. where am i headed. the egg after the egg. my skin a shell, in the process of shelling. no. i can break free of this. i can crack the bone away before it surrounds me and

no.

no i can't.

something's missing.

gone.

goin goin gone.

goin down.

goin downwwwwwn.

goin downwwwwwn mmmmississippi.

mississippi?

goin downwwwwwn mmmmississippi.

goin get myself

some shhhhhhhhhhhhoes

goin downwwwwwn to mmmmississippi

get myself

new pair

walking shhhhhhhhhhoos.

cuz when your feathers echo cobalt

you can't fly away from them hyacinth blues

(ZIMMER eases into a blues song.)

i'm goin down mississippi  
goin get myself some shoes  
i'm going down mississippi  
get a new pair of walking shoes  
cuz when your feathers echo cobalt  
you can't fly away from them hyacinth blues

my man he left a while ago  
and why he left i do not know  
i got these sticks i got this fire  
they singing like a devil choir

i'm goin down mississippi  
goin get myself some shoes  
i'm going down mississippi  
got get a new pair of walking shoes  
cuz when your feathers echo cobalt  
you can't fly away from them hyacinth blues.

Dan Dietz is a playwright living in Austin, Texas. His plays include *Dirigible*, *Blind Horses*, *Tilt Angel*, *tempOdyssey*, and *Americamisfit*, and have been seen in New York, Los Angeles, and points in between. Dietz has been honored with a James A. Michener Fellowship, a Josephine Bay Paul Fellowship, and the Austin Critics Table Award for Best New Play. He is a two-time finalist for the Princess Grace Award and a nominee for the Oppenheimer Award, the Osborn Award, and the ATCA/Steinberg Award. His short plays *Trash Anthem* and *A Bone Close to My Brain* were produced at the 2003 and 2004 Humana Festivals of New American Plays, respectively. *Trash Anthem* received the 2003 Heide-man Award from the Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Dietz has developed his work at CenterStage (Baltimore, MD), Annex Theatre (Seattle, WA), Horizon Theatre (Atlanta, GA), The Playwrights' Center (Minneapolis, MN), Salvage Vanguard Theater (Austin, TX), and the Millay Colony for the Arts. His play *tempOdyssey* was recently presented in a staged reading at the Public Theater as part of their New Work Now! Festival. Dietz's work has been published by Samuel French, Heinemann, Smith & Kraus, and Stage & Screen. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Theater from Kennesaw State University in 1995 and his Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting from the University of Texas at Austin in 1999. Dietz is a Resident Company Member of Salvage Vanguard Theater.

If musical styles were mountains, you'd have to say that SPOT has climbed both the "Rockies" and the "Folkies." An exceptionally strong guitarist, tenor banjoist, multi-instrumentalist, this is a two-fisted picker who backs it up with outstanding composition and writing. Definitely not the usual singer-songwriter fare and, self-effacedly, he does not consider himself a songwriter at all! Instead, here is an accomplished performer with some pretty striking original songs and tunes that cover a wide range of out-of-the-ordinary styles. This is music that goes beyond the usual limitations of the solo acoustic genre at the hands of someone who has played before a wide variety of audiences.

Defying the easy categorizations, his roots reach down firmly in the soils of rock, jazz, country, avant-garde, folk, traditional and, notably, Celtic styles. And it should be mentioned that for many years he was identified mostly with the "alternative" music world as a producer but the old dog knew way more tricks than the rock world could ever imagine.

SPOT has:

- toured with Mike Watt (Minutemen, Firehose, Porno for Pyros, Stooges) as an opening act (spring 2002);
  - done a songwriters' tour with Jen Hamel of the late Celtic band Clandestine—once tourmates with the Chieftains (late 2001);
  - shared stages with folks like Sonic Youth, Fugazi, Bob Mould, Guitar Wolf, Cherry Valence, Drive-by Truckers, Gaza Strippers, The Woggles, Poison 13, The Sadies, Eugene Chadbourne and with more traditional artists such as Alejandro Escovedo, Clandestine, Jean-Michel Veillon & Yvon Riou, Ed Miller, Michael Fracasso;
  - recently teamed up with bodhran (Irish frame drum) player Albert Alfonso, whom the legendary Mick Moloney once deemed "the Celtic-Cuban Connection."
- His most recent release "Unhalfbaking..." (Upland 001) has garnered critical praise and soundtrack offers. Currently, he is putting the finishing touches on an upcoming release of hot-rodged and electrified reels and jigs to be titled "DeLorean Mechanics" and he has begun a more traditional acoustic studio project with the abovementioned Mr. Alfonso.

D.J. Hopkins is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre at San Diego State University. He just finished two years as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Performing Arts and English Departments at Washington University in St. Louis. Hopkins holds a PhD in Theatre Studies and an MFA in Dramaturgy, both from UC San Diego. He has served as dramaturg for Tina Landau, Joe Chaiken, Robert Woodruff, Chay Yew, Greg Gunter, Jose Rivera, Naomi Iizuka, Les Waters, Chuck Mee, and numerous other writers, directors, and theatre companies. His publications appear in *TheatreForum*, *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Topics*, and collections including *Shakespeare After Mass Media*, *Performing Transversally*, and *Reconsidering Ephemera*. His book *City / Stage / Globe: Performance and Urban Space in Shakespeare's London* is forthcoming from Routledge.

# MIX TAPE

a collaboration

Molly Rice

Madeleine Oldham

DJ Katastrophik

I love it when plays start out with something other than words – when the words come (at least partially) from something non-verbal. When text rises from a writer’s gut to her head and then the page, all of a sudden there is art where there wasn’t art before. Intellectual exercises and experiments have their places I suppose, but I’ll take raw emotion every time. Especially with a writer like Molly who is so smart and deliberate about how to channel those feelings into the vessel of a play.

For me as an institutional dramaturg, the opportunity to cook up a project like this is rare. But with no organizational interests to balance, I simply had a blast. Molly and Kat rock. Both literally and figuratively. When Kat sent us an email saying “I am a DJ who plays records. I am not a musician,” I knew we had something special. There was a respect for music inherent in Kat’s words that amazingly, within the organized chaos of a random collaboration, Molly and I happen to share. By not being the people generating the music, it freed us up to concentrate on the feelings the songs generated for us and subsequently, how to translate those feelings onto the stage.

So from Kat I learned that reverence is not a dirty word. (And not to assume that all DJs are boys. I was humbled and thrilled when DJ Katastrophik’s email came from “Katherine Strickland.”) And Molly blew me away by not only sharing my inner life about music and its uncanny ability to hurl a person back to specific moments in the past, but by creating a language to express that ability in the totally different medium of theatre.

I bow to you, ladies.

Madeleine Oldham

DJ Katastrophik (Katherine Strickland) = music  
Molly Rice = words  
Madeleine Oldham = dramaturgy  
M= Jeffrey Mills  
W= Adrienne Mishler

## NOTES

M = man  
W = woman  
The DJ = onstage, spinning records

Two microphones on stands are set downstage for M and W to use  
The DJ is not invisible to the audience  
The DJ is not always invisible to M and W  
The DJ is a part of the action, a voice in the room

## LIST OF SONGS

This piece is incomplete without its music  
MP3s of all these songs can be found on the Internet

### TRACK ONE

*Middle of the Road*, The Pretenders

### TRACK TWO

*Apocalypse*, White Magic

### TRACK THREE

*Ghost Rider*, Suicide

### TRACK FOUR

Lock Groove\*

### TRACK FIVE

*Mother Sky*, Can

### TRACK SIX

*Friends*, Led Zeppelin

### TRACK SEVEN

Lock Groove\*

### TRACK EIGHT

Medley:

*It's Good To Have Met You*, The Pupils; *I Love Rock and Roll*,  
Joan Jett and the Blackhearts

\*(the rhythmic popping groove at the end of a vinyl record that feeds  
back into itself, repeating forever)

### TRACK ONE.

*M surfs the radio*

*MIDDLE OF THE ROAD* comes on

**W** Wait wait

Leave it there

See, listen to that

That's how you be a rock star

CHRISSE HYNDE

I'm standing in the middle of life with my pains behind me

M

Did she say "with my pants behind me?"

W

My pains, dumbass  
She doesn't smile  
That's her secret  
I bet she wears t shirts with suit coats  
She's fuckin serious  
**M** She smiles  
**W** Yeah but hardly ever

*They pause*

*PRETENDERS* play

**W** Stuff that's rare is valuable

Stuff you can't get easy

**M** Wow

You are so brilliant

**W** Shut up

Listen, though

She's not smiling now

It's like she's doling it out

Like you'd be totally graced if she smiled at you

Bet it would settle on you like a

Like a

Gold

**M** Wing

**W** Yeah

A gold wing

*They pause*

*PRETENDERS* play

**W** Every note of this song is like burned in my memory

**M** How can it not be

It was on the radio like seventy times a day

*They pause*

*PRETENDERS* play

**W** What does it remind you of

**M** Middle school

**W** Yeah

Specifically, though

*They pause*

*PRETENDERS* play

**M** Defrosting the freezer

**W** Defrosting the freezer?

**M** It was my chore

In the summer

God, I remember that smell

Freon or whatever

That refrigerator smell

*They pause*

*PRETENDERS* play

**M** That's so weird

**W** What

**M** That's like gone

It can't just be gone

Where is that, you know?

**W** The freezer

**M** That time  
It must live somewhere  
It can't just be gone  
**W** Uh, yeah it can  
Unless you recorded it  
Like right now, we're listening to the very moment when the  
Pretenders laid this down  
That kills me

*M counts off with Chrissy Hynde:*

<b>W:</b>	<b>Chrissy Hynde:</b>
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

**W** This is that very moment  
**M** And also the moment of me defrosting the freezer  
In my tube socks and adidas t shirt  
**W** Yeah  
And us right now  
Right?  
Later on  
When we hear this song  
This very minute will be in there too

*They pause*  
*PRETENDERS play*  
*The moment sinks into the song*

**M** But where is that time  
Me defrosting the freezer  
Like, can't I go there somehow  
I feel like it's like hovering somewhere  
Just out of reach, you know  
Suspended  
Waiting for me to come back  
And everything would still be exactly the same  
**W** I think it's gone  
God, listen to her  
So fucking cool  
I wanna try it

*W gets up and goes to microphone*

**M** We got to go to Leon's  
**W** Later  
Watch

*PRETENDERS play the second solo*  
*W tries to do Chrissy Hynde*  
*Lip synchs a little*  
*Tries not to smile*

**W** Am I doing it

*W cracks up*

**W** I have to stop smiling so much  
**M** You smile just enough

*W smiles*

**W** Shut up

*PRETENDERS play the last solo*  
*M and W dance like idiots*

## **TRACK TWO.**

*APOCALYPSE plays so quiet you almost can't hear it*  
*Volume increases slowly, steadily*

**W** What's the matter?  
**M** I think there's something I'm supposed to be doing  
**W** Like right now?  
**M** I think so  
**W** What is it  
**M** I don't know

*WHITE MAGIC*  
*(And from the sky began to rain blood)*

**W** Is it important?  
**M** I'm not sure  
**W** We gotta go visit Leon

*WHITE MAGIC*  
*(Touching our flesh, dissolve to bones)*

**M** That's not it  
**W** We do, though  
**M** I know  
Not now

*WHITE MAGIC*  
*(Ending in pale piles in the dirt)*

**W** Hell no

*They pause*

**M** Do you ever  
**W** Hang on

*W and M can hear it now*  
*It's loud enough to hear the words*

**M** Oh yeah

*WHITE MAGIC*  
*Then came the mighty hail powder*

**W** Yeah.

*Music keeps creeping louder:*  
*WHITE MAGIC*  
*Powder that blew with the dirt and dust*

**W** What were you saying

*Shouting over it:*

**M** What

*WHITE MAGIC*  
*Ran into the cracks in the earth*

**W** You were saying

*WHITE MAGIC*

*That lead to its heart center, hell*

**W** “do you ever”

*still louder*

*WHITE MAGIC*

*How it came to be*

**M** I have no idea

*WHITE MAGIC*

*And so easily*

*HOW WE WASTED ALL THIS TIME*

*YOURS THEIRS OURS AND MINE*

**TRACK THREE.**

*Spotlight on W, who takes a microphone*

*“Ghost Rider” by Suicide plays loud*

*A duet: W lays her words down as a second layer of lyrics*

**SUICIDE** Ghost rider motorcycle hero.

**W** I had this punk-rock friend in high school.

**SUICIDE** Baby baby baby he’s a looking so cute.

**W** He had the most amazing electric blue eyes.

**SUICIDE** Sneakin round round round in a blue jumpsuit.

**W** His name was Peter.

He told me to call him Peterbilt.

**SUICIDE** Ghost rider motorcycle hero.

**W** Like the truck.

Peterbilt.

He was built.

**SUICIDE** Baby baby baby he’s a blazin away.

**W** He was beautiful.

Nobody knew I knew him.

**SUICIDE** Like the stars stars stars in the universe.

**W** I got hot,

blushed bloody

in my skin

when he passed me

in the hall.

**SUICIDE** Ghost rider motorcycle hero.

**W** He was my secret.

We talked on the phone through the night.

I hid in the garage

With my back against the freezer.

**SUICIDE** Baby baby baby he’s a screamin the truth:

**W** With the phone cord

threaded

through the crack

under the door.

**SUICIDE** America America is killin its youth.

**W** Hah!

Hah!

If one of us fell asleep the other would go,

Hey

You still there

And we’d keep talking

**SUICIDE** Baby baby baby he’s screamin away

**W** Hey

You still there?

**SUICIDE** America America is--

*Record skips*

**W** --Hey

You still there

**SUICIDE** America America is killin its youth

**W** Hey

Peterbilt

You still there?

**SUICIDE** Ghost rider

**W** Hey

I’m in the future

You still there?

**SUICIDE** Ghost rider

**W** Hey

Peterbilt

I’m in the future

You still there?

I’m calling

Through time

I’m on the line

Wake up

**TRACK FOUR.**

*Sound of the LOCK GROOVE*

*M and W, backs to the audience, speaking into microphones*

*They count quietly together along with the LOCK GROOVE rhythm*

*Like they’re working out the beats of a song*

*When one speaks, the other keeps count*

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

**W** You know that bracelet with the tiny shells

4

my dad gave me

7

8

**M** Yeah

2

3

4

5

6

W I can't find it anywhere

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

**TRACK FIVE.**

*MOTHER SKY* plays, starting after first chorus  
Plays so quiet you almost can't hear it  
Volume increases slowly, steadily

W What's the matter?

M I think there's something I'm supposed to be doing

W Like right now?

M I think so

W What is it

M I don't know

W Is it important?

M I'm not sure

W We gotta go visit Leon

M That's not it

W We do, though

M I know

Not now

W Hell no

*They pause*

M Do you ever

W Hang on

*W and M can hear it now  
It's the eternal gut twisting solo*

M Nice.

*They pause*

*They pause*

*They pause*

W What were you saying

*Music creeps louder*

M What

W You were saying

"do you ever"

**TRACK SIX.**

*FRIENDS* by Led Zeppelin comes on  
We can hear the words  
This is not a dance  
This is more of a game

*W and M plant themselves facing  
the same direction  
a few feet apart  
W falls into M's arms  
They smile  
He pushes her back up  
They turn*

*W backs up a step  
M falls into W's arms  
They smile  
She pushes him back up  
They turn*

*M backs up a step  
W falls into M's arms  
They smile a little less  
He pushes her back up  
They turn*

*W backs up a step  
They are getting far away now  
M falls into W's arms  
It's hard for her to catch him  
She pushes him back up  
They turn*

*M backs up a step  
W falls into M's arms  
She almost hits the floor  
He pushes her back up  
They turn*

*W backs up a step  
She is too far from M to possibly  
catch him  
M begins to fall*

*Lights out*

**Led Zeppelin**

*Bright light almost blinding*

*Black night still there shining*

*I can't stop, keep on climbing*

*Looking for what I knew*

*Had a friend, she once told me*

*"you got a friend, you ain't lonely"*

*Now she's gone and left me only*

*Looking for what I knew*

*Mmm, I'm telling you now*

*The greatest thing you ever can do now*

*Is trade a smile with someone who's blue now*

*It's very easy just--*

*Met a man on the roadside crying*

*Without a friend, there's no denying*

*You're incomplete, they'll be no finding*

*Looking for what you knew*

*So anytime somebody needs you*

*Don't let them down, although it grieves you*

*Some day you'll need someone like they do*

*Looking for what you knew*

**TRACK SEVEN.**

*Sound of the LOCK GROOVE*

*M and W, backs to the audience, speaking into microphones*

*They count quietly together along with the LOCK GROOVE rhythm*

*Like they're working out the beats of a song*

*When one speaks, the other keeps count*

4

5

6

7

8

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

I can feel all my bad plans

4

5

6

hanging in the air

1

2

3

*W puts her hand on M's shoulder*

*They stop counting*

*The LOCK GROOVE plays*

*They pause*

*Then:*

1

2

3

**TRACK EIGHT.**

*IT'S GOOD TO HAVE MET YOU plays, starting after first chorus*

*Plays so quiet you almost can't hear it*

*Volume increases slowly, steadily*

**W** What's the matter?

**M** I think there's something I'm supposed to be doing

**W** Like right now?

**M** I think so

**W** What is it

**M** I don't know

**W** Is it important?

**M** I'm not sure

**W** We gotta go visit Leon

**M** That's not it

**W** We do, though

**M** I know

Not now

**W** Hell no

*They pause*

**M** Do you ever

**W** Hang on

*THE PUPILS*

*It's good to have met you my good friend*

*It's good to know I'll know you until the end*

*I could never forget you*

*Before I even met you*

*It's good to know I'll know you til the end*

**W** That is so

*They pause*

*Music recedes into background*

**W** What were you saying

**M** What

**W** You were saying

"do you ever"

**M** I have no idea

*They pause*

Do we even have Leon's number

**W** It's on the freezer

*Neither makes a move to get it*

*Music keeps playing in the background*

*W gets up*

*Goes to the mic*

*Speaks into the mic*

**W** Hey  
What if  
What if  
All of a sudden  
Right this minute  
Everything stopped

*M gets up  
Goes to the mic  
Speaks into the mic*

**M** Like what  
**W** Like everything

*They pause  
Music keeps playing*

**M** Like what  
**W** Like right here  
Doing this  
Right now  
Just right here forever

**M** Forever

**W** Yeah

**M** Yeah

**W** Would you be—

**M** Oh wait, wait—

I love this song.

*Huge fast shift to:*

*I LOVE ROCK AND ROLL*

*W and M are rock stars*

*Perfected*

*Beyond CHRISSEY HYNDE*

*Beyond Mick Jagger*

*Even beyond JOAN JETT*

*They stare out deadpan with their perfect rock and roll*

*They lip synch*

*They rock*

*JOAN JETT screams*

*Into the mics*

*They scream with her*

**END OF PLAY**

Molly Rice is a native Texan whose plays have been read, produced, published and workshopped in Austin (Salvage Vanguard, Austin Script Works, FronteraFest, The Vortex, Refraction Arts Project), Dallas (Kitchen Dog Theater), Rhode Island (Brown University/ Trinity Repertory Consortium) and New York City (Clubbed Thumb, The Drilling Company). Her ten-minute play "Yes, Sir" was a finalist for the 2003 Actors' Theater of Louisville Heidemann Award, and her one-act "The Birth of Paper" was chosen as Best of the Week and Best of the Fest in FronteraFest 2004. Most recently, her musical "The Mercury Sloop" was a semifinalist for PlayLabs at the Playwright's Center and a finalist for the 2004 Metropolis Performing Arts Center New Play Festival (Chicago, IL) and for the 2004 Princess Grace Award. In June, NYC's Drilling Company will produce her short play "Medea Unharnessed" as part of their REVENGE series. A CORE member of Austin Script Works, Molly is a recipient of the Lucille Lortel Playwriting Fellowship at Brown University, where she is earning her MFA in Playwriting.

Madeleine Oldham currently serves as the Literary Manager and Dramaturg at Berkeley Rep. Before moving to Berkeley, she was the Literary Manager and Associate Dramaturg at Baltimore's Center Stage, and prior to that, served as Literary Manager at Seattle Children's Theatre. She presently acts as Treasurer of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) and is also Books Editor of the LMDA Review. Madeleine graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Theatre from Pitzer College in Claremont, CA and will receive her M.A. in Whole Systems Design with a focus on Systemic Dramaturgy from Antioch University Seattle in March of 2005.

DJ Katastrophik (Katherine Strickland) was born in San Antonio, TX on February 4, 1971. Her mother was an elementary school music teacher and her father was a social worker, at the Kerrville State Hospital. Having been raised around music, Katherine began working in record stores and collecting records as a teenager. Eventually her mother discontinued her attempts at teaching Katherine to sing. While her father nurtured her curiosity about punk rock and helped explain people's motivations after early experiences at hardcore shows. By 1992, Katherine was acclimated to all types of live music and had spent a lot of time dancing. So, to justify her mounting record collection assumed the alias of DJ katastrophik and began playing records on the radio and at different events, such as, parties, art openings, live shows, magazine launches, and even a few weddings. She is a founding member of the Minimal Skillz Crew and also enjoys photography and printmaking.

# an untitled piece

Zell Miller III

Vicki Stroich

Phillip Owen

*“...when do we stop experiencing something in order for thinking about the experience to take over.” Phillip Owen. May 23, 2005.*

I found this piece of text from my teammate Phillip in one of the emails that made up the preparation for our collaborative project with Zell Miller III. I was looking back at these emails because I was trying to come up with some way of expressing my thoughts about the experience of working with these two and what came out of that exchange.

Other words that popped out at me from our correspondence: people, reaction, voices, personality, “swing with it,” “masterpiece in the moment,” visceral, human, kids, energy, play, explore, present, respond, immediate, freestyle, conversation, risk. Looking at these words it is clear, even though we tried typing as a mode of communication and creation, that our process and our project would come alive in each other’s presence, in the moment. The email correspondence was frustrating for us, but it guided the process by planting some ideas and by helping us recognize that what we wanted to create and present could not be achieved with email. The form we came up with was an ever-changing, spontaneous conversation between Phillip’s instrumental and compositional voice and Zell’s words, voice, and breath. The piece was never the same twice and it demanded that both performers be fully present, really listening and responding to one another.

Reflecting on this experience, and the piece that was created out of it, also makes me marvel at the strange alchemy of collaboration. As a team we were interested in the mysteries, complexities, and potential of human beings, but one of the greatest mysteries was why or how we worked together so well. It was central to our process and the piece that Phillip and Zell be able to talk and listen to each other, it was essential that they get along. And they did. Phillip’s amazing musical versatility and enthusiasm just fit with Zell’s sharp wit, the musicality of his voice and breath and his electrifying performance style. As a matter of fact, they got along so well personally and artistically that they’re just continuing with the work we started and collaborating on a hip hop project. And, as any dramaturg knows, it is important that the artists are open to you. I felt totally a part of this collaboration and I look forward to continuing a friendship with Phillip and Zell and working with them again.

A small part of me would like to ask Liz Engelman and the wonderful folks at Austin Script Works how they knew to put the three of us together. Or any of the other teams for that matter; each group seemed perfectly suited to one another and each created something unique. But I don’t want to think too hard about this experience, I’d rather keep enjoying it.

Vicki Stroich

(in darkness the sound of a lonely guitar weeps. There is a breath that joins the guitar it's a breath in the spirit of a gospel moan but I wouldn't look for any musicality from it. Lights rise to show a poet standing in a introspective stance. Poet is dressed in modern day hip-hop gear, complete with baggy jeans Adidas footwear, and an oversized political tee-shirt. He is pantomiming pouring water between his hands. There is a very cool looking Guitar player on the opposite side of the stage. He is dressed 1920s cool, he sits with a beautiful guitar on his lap. They make no mention of the other. SOUND CUE: The city on a busy morning. Guitar is mixed in the city sounds then becomes it's own energy. Poet Speaks over the guitar sometimes with the guitar / sometimes against the guitar / sometimes he will be silent and allow the guitar player to sing to his own energy.)

**Poet**

there are these oral communicators who use rhythm as a gun  
they keep one foot in the dilapidated hoods they are from  
while the other rest on the neck of those who cash their checks  
in stores that quietly remove one percent  
see

these depleted sections of concrete are wasting precious  
diamond shaped dreams on lottery schemes  
policed by fiends who are protecting the american dream  
they use clubs for bully sake  
and tazers and glock 9s with 15 shots  
verbal abuse and invest in racial profiling for their stops  
and it's hot right

I mean these edutainers keep saying  
quote

“the ghetto is so hot”

but how many millionaires does it take to feed a hood?  
cool down these crime infested codes that are area  
as we greet each other with broken slang  
and outfit our babies in the latest fashions craze  
and in this maze of psychological warfare  
but you can't cash out on a veteran's pension  
hate to mention that your houses of worship stay half full  
while across the street the liquor store junkies are sipping cyanide in  
the form of liquid crack called malt liquor  
and they can't keep these niggas out of the store front  
thinking about these ills  
makes the pulse beat quicker  
but if I think too long  
I'm heading head strong for the silent killas  
called high blood pressure and diabetes  
and now the government wants us all healthy  
but they have removed recess from schools  
continue to funnel them government blocks of dairy needs  
and they about to tax shit they say we don't need  
call it a junk food tax  
but I'm thinking if they want us to reach our max  
or our full capability  
why not lower the price of healthy food  
meanwhile

(SOUND CUE: music changes)

**Guitar Player:** (sings)

“if I tell ya If I tell ya

how I feel would ya keep bringing out the  
best in me”

**Poet:** (somewhere between confusion and annoyance. quiet rage  
built off the annoyance of not knowing his footing.)  
in a dramaturgy design

I'm resign to witness 8 page emails

but I can't respond openly through these hi-tek channels  
she can't open mp3s and I can't get through this heavy text  
and he is just trying to find footing to glue all these together  
so we 3 sit in separate states of mind  
but jewels are moved by time

quote “I'm not sure whether this is a realistic idea but I'll just propose it. I wondered if it might take the form of a kind of dialogue between and instrument and voice. Music often supports lyrics but I wonder if it can make counterpoints or arguments of its own. If it could pose questions and respond to them. If it could have a thesis. And also if it could respond to a challenge posed by the writer. How immediate could that dialogue be? Could we work some sort of freestyle improvisation - a conversation between two people with one voice being an instrument? A piece that has that thrilling immediacy and risk (and immediacy and risk are two of the most addictive things about theatre in my opinion)”

**Guitar Player:** (sings. SOUND CUE: music changes)

and immediacy and risk are two of the most addictive things about  
theatre in my opinion

**Poet:** (more agitated, he moves about the stage as a cage elephant  
heavy in his steps, rage emotes from every part of him)

date line: Serengeti

52 rhinos have been found dead in one of the biggest gaming reserves. after video surveillance, it was found that 10 young bull African elephants have been attacking the rhinos. after careful study, its been found that these young adolescent bull elephants have been orphaned. The are moving in a gang unable to know their true existence. specialist say they are suffering from post war traumatic stress syndrome. they have no where to go, their land is being erased, there parents and friends are being murdered in front of them. so these young male bull elephants have found each other. it appears no one has shown these young adolescent bull elephants how to be an elephant. game officials started executing these young males. but someone had the sense of mind to call in a specialist. she suggest after finding the history of these young African bull elephants. she suggest bringing in an ADULT bull African elephant, and within a day, the young elephants have calmed down, and fallen in line. I'm blown away. this appears to mirror the black community in America. or any community for that fact, once the fabric of a community is broken, it appears the youth will lash out in violence. how many young men and women can be saved if some specialist just suggest bringing in adults, could it be that simple? (breath) imagine that shit

**Guitar Player:** (sings. Music changes again)

somebody somebody somebody please tell me  
what's going on  
what's going on  
what's going on

**Poet:** *(over the guitar music)*

he sits shot gun  
the night breeds compliancy  
we ride with a Monk groove on the tape deck  
he sits facing out  
at some point he blows his breath on the window and writes his  
grandmother's name in the fog  
meaning to maneuver temptation  
just 24 hours ago  
he had a zip gun pressed inches from his face  
but it jammed  
he has his father's hands  
they big and right now they hold nothing  
we are riding city's back streets to old jazz cats' beats  
I purposely made him late for his date with destiny  
he had appointment to purchase a death machine  
with 15 rounds and he sits with dreams the size of the state he claims  
he's 3 credits away from graduation  
stopped a red light he speaks with out looking and he says  
quote "dawg, you just don't, dawg, mannnnnn, fuck it dawg," pause.  
quote "see it's the infuriation that cause frustration killing my moder-  
ation don't blame it on occupation my whole generation is built on  
devastation, klu klux klan's awaiting for every man's expiration  
minds need elevation," end quote. pause. quote again " you don't  
know man, you just don't know". end quote. I look at the digital time  
table on my car stereo and it reads 12:10 a.m. I laugh tell 'em "we  
just drove into tomorrow." silence  
another pause.  
then he laughs. cause he knows that I knew much more then ever  
cared to know. some things don't have to be spoken  
words  
sometimes  
confuse the moment

**Guitar Player:** *(music changes. he sings)*

*yeah yeah yeahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh*

END.

Vicki Stroich is Associate Dramaturg at Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. In addition to her duties at ATP this year, including dramaturgy for the Enbridge playRites Festival and the Banff playRites Colony at The Banff Centre, Vicki directed ATP's most recent Shackter Show, *Get Lost! A Love Story*. She was also production dramaturg for Sage Theatre's production of *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*. In 2004, she enjoyed creating and coordinating *Grand Stand: Live Performance in Inter-Disciplinary Arts*, an event and public discussion at the Mutton Busting Performance and Visual Art Festival. She is a member of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas.

Zell Miller, III is an interdisciplinary theater artist and a spoken word performance poet. As a poet Zell has opened for Nikki Giovanni, jazz musicians Kyle Turner and Curtis Polk. He was a featured poet in 1998, 1999, and 2000 at the "Jump on It Summer Concert Series". He is the winner of the 1999 Heman Sweat Symposium Slam at the University of Texas. He is also the winner of the 1999 Austin International Poetry Slam. He was the alternate member of the National Slam Team representing Austin, Texas in 2001. In 1999 and 2002, he has been a featured poet and performer at Penumbra Theater Company's "Late Night Series" in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has also been a featured artist at the "Austin International Poetry Festival" in 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2001. Zell was a featured poet on the Spoken Word Stage at the South By Southwest Music Festival in 1998, 1999, and 2000. Working with DJ Brainchild, Zell has completed work on his debut CD, "The Heretic Chronicles Volume 1." Recently, his spoken word collective Xenogia, was selected to perform at the 2002 Singers of Daybreak Spoken Word Conference, along with such luminaries as The Last Poets, Slam poetry founder Marc Smith, pan-Asian spoken word collective i was born with two tongues, and others.

As a playwright, his first original script was a one man show performance piece titled *Cell Therapy*, and it won "Producer's Choice Award" at the 1996 Frontera Fest. Zell followed the next year, with his smash one man show titled *MAD IZM*. "MAD IZM" took top honor with "The Best of the Fest" in 1997. Frontera Theater Company then produced the play in the same year, where *MAD IZM* was nominated for a B. Iden Payne Award for "Best Original Script" also in 1997. Zell served as writer/director and performer for the previously mentioned work. His 3rd play, a hip-hop inspired love story, titled *Arrhythmia* was selected by Penumbra Theater Company as part of their 2002 Corner Stone: Reading Series, a playwright reading and workshop series. Daniel Alexander Jones directed the reading. Austin Script Works selected *Arrhythmia* to be presented as part of their "Script Works: Ahead Series reading Series" also in 2001. That reading was directed by Vicky Boone. At this time, *Arrhythmia* is under consideration for possible production by a company in the Chicago area and a company in the Minneapolis, MN area. His 5th play, *She: A remembered prayer a dream* won "Best of the Fest" at Frontera Fest 2002. Zell is also credited as writer on *Alaskan Heat: Blue Dot* produced by Frontera Theater Company, directed by Laurie Carlos. He was also selected as a featured performer at the 2002 R.A.T. Conference, a theatre festival held in San Francisco.

Philip Owen. Guitarist, musician, sound designer.

# Untitled Baseball Play

Heidi Taylor

Jason Tremblay

Sam Baker

The collaboration project was a sort of rehearsal for dramaturgy, or of dramaturgy. My sort of dramaturgy is what I consider play/creation. So, when Jason Tremblay, Sam Baker, actor Greg Romero, and I gathered in Jason's living room, we didn't so much write a play as play at writing. Play, serious play, like playing baseball or jazz, was a recurring linguistic metaphor, but also our basic organizing principle.

I hear the echo of my seven year-old self: "Let's say that..."

Let's say that we have two days, ten minutes, three collaborators — make it four with our actor — and have never met each other.

Let's say that we'll all write, and we'll all read, and we'll all find the music in it together. Let's say losing your voice is a good thing, and that voices from four different parts of the continent make their own melody.

Once we started playing for keeps, it was easy — hearing a rhythm that cooked, seeing an image that popped, feeling the moment of revelation come right on time. We said yes a lot, but also no — and that was easy too, because something about the game made it clear when one of us was throwing a great football pass into the middle of the baseball diamond.

So now I'm back at work, here in Vancouver, making shows on bicycles, shows with dogs, shows with fire. There's no shortage of playing in my plays. But I've also got a bundle of scripts from Jason and Greg, and a CD of songs from Sam (still waiting for a script from him), and I'm wishing I could continue that game we were playing in Austin — even though I don't play baseball.

Heidi Taylor

We started our collaboration by discussing some general topics and theatrical forms of interest prompted by emails from Heidi. I then headed down to the antique stores on South Congress here in Austin and started picking up random postcards. I found all types of text, stuff that I wrote, stuff that I read somewhere, even bits of text that I found on the street and wrote on the postcards which I mailed out to Heidi and Sam. Heidi has this really cool, really old postcard projector that she picked up somewhere along the way and originally we were thinking that we would use the projector in our presentation. But the primary idea behind the postcards was that we would have some material to start with and talk about when we finally met.

The group came together for the first time at the Vortex Theatre in Austin at the official collaboration project meet and greet. Because of the limited amount of space (and because Sam was really wanting to hear me play the cello) we headed to my house for about 5 hours of rehearsal.

We sat and read through the postcards and the one that immediately jumped out to all of us was the very first card that I had sent to Heidi that contained a quote by the major league baseball player Ichiro Suzuki. The text was taken directly from a post game interview earlier this summer. Using the quote as a starting point, we each picked one sentence from the text and did a ten minute free-form/swimming writing exercise. After reading what we had written, we each picked another sentence and did another writing exercise. After reading the second set of exercises, we each picked a sentence or a phrase from someone else's writing and did a third exercise. What we ended up with was nine sets of text, written by all three collaborators.

Then we got to work. And it was really easy. Most of the work that I am doing now involves poly and multi vocal sections similar to the jazz stylings of writers like Laurie Carlos, Sharon Bridgeforth and Daniel Alexander Jones and Heidi had recently worked on a Sara Kane piece in which you have a body of text, but no stage directions or character divisions. Sam and I toyed with our instruments, trying cello and guitar, two guitars, and solo guitar, but it just didn't seem to work. The instruments gave the piece a tone that just didn't match the spoken voices. What we decided on was having Heidi sing sections of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" throughout the piece. Heidi was fighting a nasty cold so her voice was beautiful but very scratchy and rough. We thought it was perfect. Later in the day, my

friend Playwright/Dramaturg Greg Romero joined us to lend his performance skills, giving us our fourth voice. We met once more for an hour on Friday at the State Theatre to finish working on the piece. I took it home and typed it all up. We got together for an hour or so before the performance for a run through and then got on stage and did our thing.

I think that we were all extremely happy that our project was really collaborative. We all wrote, we all directed, and we all performed. There was no distinction between musician, dramaturg, and playwright, there were just three artists who took this journey together. And we all became really good friends, Heidi and I are still talking about working together in Vancouver and I joined Sam on stage with my cello at the after party at Habana. This collaborative project was invaluable to all of us. All of the projects were so great. And as an Austin playwright it was a tremendous honor to be selected along with Molly, Zell, and Dan, three writers who are absolutely amazing. A big thank you to the LMDA for getting this project together and to Adrienne Dawes and Jennifer Hamilton for making it happen.

Thanks,

Jason Tremblay

# Untitled Baseball Play

Pitchers don't just lob it in there  
They've got a whole hell of a lot of training to make you miss

A game see.  
to who?

A game.  
a game.

to who?  
to make you miss  
to make you want  
to make you want

to make you need  
to make a connection

a game  
to make you miss

training  
to avoid connecting  
and if the ball hits you  
that too is a connection

pitchers don't just lob it in there  
what I really meant to say

what I really meant to say  
don't just lob it in there

throw it hard  
throw it at me

I want to feel it  
don't just lob it in there

make it connect  
make it connect with me

no bunting here

no bunting here

no bunting here

no bunting here

*(round)*

(1) But now you've got the rest of your at-bats now you've got  
(2) but now  
(3) but  
at-bats

flying objects zipping towards my  
heart fist in a glove  
Beating  
Beat  
No way to win the game

(3) But pride

*(free form)*

Or fear of inertia  
Keeps me swinging  
Swinging, hanging by a thread  
this is the one crack  
that brings it all together  
that sends the earth  
piloting round the sun  
the moon around the earth  
orbits restored  
But now  
You've got  
*A lot of never throwing that at me (x3)*  
making me swing  
by a thread  
from the heart  
fist in your glove  
spinning round a bat  
extended  
keep your eyes on the ball  
the rest of the world  
faded out  
white noise  
to the hiss of sphere  
and oxygen  
adrenaline  
pounding  
feet as someone steals  
a base  
no bunting here

(4) crack take a crack at it

(1) *SINGS*: Take me out to the ballgame...

(3) you've got the rest  
leave me alone  
at bat, squinting into  
the sun hazy green  
and gnats by the trash can  
and alone grit under my shoes and sweat under my arms travels  
faster than I do  
you're at bat  
but now  
swing

(2) The nature of batting is such that even if a pitcher gives you ten  
tosses right down the middle, you're still not going to bat 1.000.  
That's just the way it is, and I accept that. Now, since pitchers don't  
just lob it in there like that, there are also times when they are just  
going to outright beat you. I accept that too. But now you've got the  
rest of your at-bats. Pitches I believe I should have been able to con-

nect on for a hit but didn't are for some reason my mistakes. That's what I want to reduce.

(4) That's what I want to reduce.

Ichiro  
Ichiro don't reduce a thing  
blow it wide open, swing  
with your eyes closed  
make it happen like making love  
slip and fumble  
it's a game  
but the science of it  
is a pleasure too. The  
exactitude of repetition  
of knowing when to inhale and how long to hold to explode with the  
bat  
toe muscles knowing their jobs, finely tuned — not machine, but  
instrument  
play not like tag not like blind man's bluff, but play

(2) Click it starts

(1) Click it stops

**S** — like Coltrane? Like Oscar Peterson?  
like Mingus on piano  
He hit the notes wrong but so wrong no one else could repeat. Impro-  
vise everything

**G** —like on 220 high hurdles  
or maybe a longer race

**H** — but you can only keep the swing if you can still hear  
the downbeat  
that's what I want

**J** — but for some its a damn short race

**S** — to hear

**G** — Click it starts  
easy legs pumping, eyes darting

**H** — the

**J** — pitcher still running

**S** — that's what I want to

**G** — fumbling who am I kidding  
Click it stops.

**H** — That's what I reduce

**J** — Home. Big source of blah, blah, blah

**S** — Reduce me  
to tears  
Ichiro

**G** —Click it starts  
slide to first base. safe

**H** — Play  
Not like blind man's

**J** —dust off

**S** —I want to hear  
I chi ro  
Re

**G** — base man sly, attitude  
ready ready

**H** — Introduce me  
to blind tears

**J** — Click it stops.

**S** — like Mingus on Piano

**G** — another ball, seven tries and I could still be  
click it starts

**H** — no one else  
could repeat

**J** — leaving the base leaving the

**S** — Re duce

**G** — home base sliding away or  
towards, going in circles, same

**H** — I chi

**J** — people, changing positions, always  
trying to tag you out, my team  
strung out base to base  
no contact till we've all come home

**G** — for better or worse  
we all come or just get called in. End of game.  
Rained out. Thunderstorm.  
Click. Click. Bang

*SINGS:* I don't care if I ever get back...

**J** — for some reason my mistakes

**S** — for some reason my mistakes are not kept like major league  
baseball in Cooperstown where they know the babe's pant size but  
are kept in the back of my mind on good days and in the front on rest  
of the days like some gray flesh abacus and mistake after mistake is  
stacked one on top of each other like cut brush on a pile never to be  
burned or strewn across the landscape like lost tribes. like the Incas  
or maybe like the Egyptians of lived so long on the Blue Nile. or was  
it the White Nile. I forget or get confused or something. But if you  
see the carved egrets and falcons at the met... it is hard to believe...  
hard to believe what? I almost said they were gone those Egyptians  
and yes they are gone but not the Egyptians. they are still there. Just  
different ones — the ones that have street side shops with roll up  
metal doors and they sell cds and cassettes and dvds and stuff like  
that. Who has time to carve a bird now?

**J** — But back to mistakes. My mistakes specifically. No Ichiro's  
mistakes specifically. One man's mistake is another man's beautiful  
fastball. maybe a drifting fastball down and away that catches the

corner and never floats up where it can be sent packing to the cheap seats and clocks in at 98 or 99 I mean hot and fast.

**S** — then hey it is a swing and miss and there you have it

**J** — my mistakes.

*(J continues under text / move to next page)*

the rest of your at-bats  
man that sounds so final.  
like you have the rest of your life. something you would tell a kid.  
“no you cant do that yet. you have the rest of your life so don’t be a crybaby.”  
like a coda or something on a life.  
like a clock maybe.  
no  
more like a stop watch.  
click it start and click it stop.  
like a 220 high hurdle or maybe a longer race like an 880 but for some it is a damn short race like click go  
click stop.  
or just click click.  
the blink of an eye then done deal. on to the next then. but that on if there are no more at-bats.  
but if you have say, for example just to talk about it. say just to think about it out loud that more than likely you are going to swing just EXACTLY like you always swing. I mean if you are a sucker for a change up the way some people are— then you are going to whiff change ups.

and even the best most jacked up pumped up steroided bat box monster will have trouble with a 101 fast ball that dances like barishnikov. i mean that is like hitting a bb out of a bb gun with a sharp pencil. damn hard I mean.

all those at-bats know what I mean?

so the rest of em. mostly bout the same. if you are a strong armed shortstop who hits 320 it is not like you are going Ted Williams on us and hit 400. Won’t happen.

**S** — The rest of your at-bats.

The rest is that it?

What I have left to anticipate, to appreciate those last few droplets, those fortunate infinite future events to —

**H** — Stop reflection.

Degeneration of

what it is, was, will —

**G** — I don’t want the rest I don’t want anymore that I already have I don’t want

I don’t need nor do I expect the continuation of this existance any further on down the tip of a breath and to fill my lungs back up again a series of fortunate events

**S** — But we still have to deal with the rest one must still prepare take precautions preparations for unknown events whose mere existence just whispers on the lips of unknown unknowns on tramps on beggars on grainy field and sand sluft days of summer and dying trees of winter branches branches that fall cars that pass notes unsung but yet prepared for by generous, ingreivous breathe

**H / G** — inhale

exhale

and in the future ending we stop to contimplate various issues moods transactions canceled out null and void undiscovered breath.

**S** — breathe.

*(wait for J — “Won’t happen”)*

**SINGS:** ‘Cause it’s root, root, root for the home team, if they don’t win it’s a shame...

**G** — I heard a story once about a man who refused to hit. He’d walk into the box, stand there and knock the dirt off his shoes and then, as the pitcher did his thing, he’d look up in the stands and look at his fans, smile at the girls in the front row. Glance at the pitcher but never stare at him, never concentrate. And the funny thing. The funny thing about this guy is that he almost always got on base. He led the team in runs and never once did he swing, he always made it on a free pass. I don’t know how I don’t know why but it seems as if this attitude, this faith in the incapacibilities of the pitcher, I don’t know maybe the pitchers just get freaked out and can’t throw the ball straight. Anyway. He never once squared around to bunt. And that’s about it.

It seemed to work.

For him.

But I don’t think I have that faith

I don’t have...

I don’t know.

**J** — so what if it’s all the same. seems kind of hopeless. maybe that’s why that line is so gauling. the rest of your at-bats.

**S** — the condemned batter who has to face the rest of those at-bats.

**G** — stop reflection

**J** — now that’s easier said than done. i know it is cliché but tell that to a mirror i am nothing but reflectioin. like a reflector on a guardrail in the middle of the night and bingo headlights and I am alive. i mean like show time. like a mirror and what ever you send I send back. but that wasn’t what you meant was it?

**S** — No you meant like don't think a lot about a lot of things. Like hey... don't reflect on that so much. But I reflect on everything. the gig last night, the concrete floor, the batteries in my tuner. it is all reflection but maybe you are talking bigger reflection. like the moon reflecting the sun and then we make up stories about that reflected light like maybe it is man in the moon or some kind of cheese like one would really want to eat it being so far away and all.

**G** — but back to earth and the biz of reflection and that brings me back to reflection and my life and my dogs life if I had a dog who had a life to reflect on and my girlfriend who is far away now in the catskills and her car and the tires and how much tread is left and the brake pads and calipers and how when you take the tire off the brake drum, no matter how many times you grind it, is still shiney like a mirror and you can see your hand in it. greasy and dirty — not the drum i mean you hand and the drum can't help it. it can't stop...

*SINGS:* 'Cause it's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old ball game...

**S** — can't stop the reflection

**G** — The nature of batting is such that even if a pitcher gives you ten tosses right down the middle, you're still not going to bat 1.000. That's just the way it is, and I accept that. Now, since pitchers don't just lob it in there like that, there are also times when they are just going to outright beat you. I accept that too. But now you've got the rest of your at-bats. Pitches I believe I should have been able to connect on for a hit but didn't are for some reason my mistakes. That's what I want to reduce.

The nature of batting is such

**END OF PIECE**

# ELLIOTT HAYES REMARKS 2005

by Lee Devin

*The Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) is proud to announce the recipient of the seventh annual LMDA Prize in Dramaturgy: The Elliott Hayes Award. The 2005 Elliott Hayes Award winner is Lee Devin, Professor Emeritus at Swarthmore College and Consulting Dramaturg at People's Light and Theatre Company of Malvern, Pennsylvania. The Award was announced at the celebration concluding LMDA's annual conference, held this year in Austin, Texas from June 9 – 12.*

*The LMDA Prize in Dramaturgy is named in honor of Elliott Hayes, the late literary manager and dramaturg at The Stratford Festival in Canada. The Elliott Hayes Award, which is accompanied by a \$500 prize, is presented annually in recognition of dramaturgical contributions to the conception, development, and / or production of specific theatre projects; for recent writing or other publications about dramaturgy or theatre in general; for contributions to an institution or theatre season; for significant accomplishments in advocacy for the field of dramaturgy; or for exemplary educational projects.*

*This year the Award honors Devin's co-authored book *Artful Making*. Subtitled *What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work*, Devin's book uses theatre methods to suggest ways in which business managers can think about their work. The book was written with Rob Austin and published by *Financial Times / Prentice Hall* in 2003.*

First, thanks.

To Magruder for that encomium. Listening to such nice stuff, and being given such an honor to live up to, could be hard on your character. I hope I'm equal to the task.

To Rob Austin, who should be here, but he's at a conference on business and the arts in Denmark, for having the idea first, and for being the prime mover.

To Geoff Proehl, for being my mentor in dramaturgy all these years

To Michael Dixon, for encouraging me to submit the proposal

To Generations of students

To colleagues and friends at People's Light, for nearly 30 years of support and relief from generations of students.

And, to the judges, for choosing *Artful Making*. I'm in great company, a little shy about it, really glad it happened.

Finally and mostly, thanks to Abigail. Without her such things as this project wouldn't happen, and even if they did, wouldn't have any meaning.

Now, remarks.

There's an overt business message in *Artful Making*, the reason why a business press published it. It's this: for certain kinds of business

— especially in what we're learning to call "knowledge work," and for situations that require original, creative thinking — theatre, especially collaborative rehearsal, can be a helpful model.

That's right there on the surface of the book. And it must be interesting. Think about it: *Financial Times* publishing a book that invokes Aristotle. Does that compute?

There are some overt theatre messages along with.

1) Theatre people know something corporate people wish they knew. How to do creative work on a schedule. We can use this to change our relationship with corporations from mendicants to partners.

2) Thinking of our work as "making" (effecting changes on materials, toward a form, for a purpose) can help us look at rehearsal more effectively.

3) Collaboration can be more than a conversation; it can be an exchange of materials that creates unpredictable, and thus genuinely new, ideas.

There's a larger, sneakier message lurking in the subtext. It's this. Learning a new way to understand collaborative rehearsal can lead us to a practical understanding of other complex social processes.

When we think of all the elements of rehearsal as interdependent—change one change all—we're led to two main considerations.

First, our attention shifts from end product to creative process. If the final product emerges from an interdependent, unpredictable process, it can take up little of our attention. There isn't any there for us to think about. In fact, if we chase this idea, it turns out that the end product is, after all, no more nor less than the process itself. Certainly this is true of plays: which don't exist unless we're actually making them.

Second, if we focus on process we're led to reconceive our idea of form. The form of rehearsal isn't pre-conceived or ready-made. The form of collaborative rehearsal is an emergent form, the result of interaction among the interdependent maker, materials, form, and purpose.

When we hang out in collaborative rehearsals, seeing how the director (a maker) teases the play into being, or when we watch good actors (makers) creating given circumstances and characters in collaborative improvisation both off and on the text, we begin to see that form is in part the "invention" of the makers, that it emerges from their work.

We begin to see that for a thing made of interdependent parts and processes, the form is, in fact, the making itself at the moment of our observation.

When we get it that a play exists only in rehearsal or performance we can notice that's another way of saying that performance is the play, the play is its performance.

In this model, the old process/product dichotomy ceases to exist; simply goes away. In its place some interesting other ideas. Among them:

*Present time.* If there's no definite future product out there to be discovered or replicated, we're at work in the present moment. We can focus attention on our process, on what we're actually doing, rather than on what we did, or what we hope we're going to do, or what (God help us!) we should do.

*Work for its own sake.* If product and process are the same, then we're working for the sake of our work. And we measure that work, judge it, by internal, formal principles, not benchmarks, or preconceived notions, or other standards imposed on us from outside. As artists, we give up the luxury of letting other people tell us what we should do. What's interesting to me is how this leads us to practicing and improving our formal sensibility, our faculty for perceiving form out in the great world.

One deep purpose of art, I believe, is to promote joy in makers and spectators. Artists do this by story telling, by imitation, and by sheer exuberance of technique or invention. Christo's installations are of the latter kind. Closer to home, at Swarthmore there's a collection of white Adirondack chairs put out every spring. They're nice to sit in on the big front lawn, and they look swell scattered over the grass. This spring they appeared as usual, along with an extra one. It's about 10 feet tall. A giant white chair. No story, no imitation, just the sheer pleasure of too much energy. Excellent.

I'm not able to tell you why these things promote joy, but they do. Likewise a good play, though it celebrates life's hardships, promotes a more complex, but recognizable joy.

And likewise other forms. We get a great big extra when we get good at watching, appreciating, perceiving the complex process of collaborative rehearsal; we can apply our formal sensibilities to other emergent forms, other processes.

We learn, when we've put in our 5000 hours of rehearsal, to know when the thing is right. When we find closure, we know it, the whole room knows it, and we don't often have a line of reasoning to explain our knowledge. We simply experience the joy of creation, of emerging form.

So it can be when we confront complicated processes in the great world.

Let me indulge in one personal example that I hope will kick start your own thinking about your own possibilities outside rehearsal.

Very early in this project, when doubts still overwhelmed me—I mean, come on, me and business? Hah!—I went down to a hotel by the airport to sit in while Bluestone, a software development company, kicked off their huge team effort to develop the next version of the flagship product. Maybe 40 people in the room, full of a lavish fruit and yogurt and muffin breakfast (they even had good coffee); the main guy, after a pep talk and some tee shirts given out for jobs well done, started outlining and assigning for the task ahead.

Every person in the room had two or three assignments in a complex dance of accomplishment that would occupy them all for the next couple of months and on which the fortunes of their company depended.

That main guy had a plan printed out, so he could read off what each team was going to accomplish, and what the whole program would do when complete.

Then he said something very important. As I remember it: "Now, here's what to keep in mind. When this thing's in the box, 50% of what's on this spec sheet won't be there; and 50% of what is there, in that box, ain't on this sheet."

Is that like rehearsal? or what?

And it struck me then that, amazingly, I had stayed with these guys for three days, with no idea what they were doing, because by listening and watching hard I came to understand how they were doing it. I began to know things about this making process in much the same way that I know things about a rehearsal. I could conceive the emerging forms. I could sense patterns of "casting," as this person or that joined that team or this. I heard repetitions of content and method, as the "director" "staged" the way work would go forward. I listened to team leaders tell each team how they would proceed, and felt them adjust when they heard something new or realized the potential of an unanticipated configuration of talents and skills.

Somehow, there lurked that old lurker, Mr. Form: Aristotle, hunkered down in a Philadelphia airport hotel, in his jeans, sneakers, and his Bluestone tee shirt, eating a muffin and building software.

Think about it.

Thanks again, everybody.

# A Newbie at LMDA Conference '05

reconstructed journal entries with a mostly unforced *bildungsroman* narrative structure

by Elizabeth Cobbe

To the listserve regulars, “early careerer” is now an accepted, if hard-to-chew, moniker for the legions of newcomers who seek guidance and a foothold into the profession of dramaturgy. Working dramaturgs have them as students or interns; several established ‘turgs volunteer as noninstitutional mentors through LMDA. The website offers free resources to early careerers, who can also participate on the listserve, provided they’re flame-resistant.

And if that weren’t enough, the 2005 Conference presented numerous opportunities for early-career dramaturgs to share meals, chat in the elevators, and interact as equals with some of the best minds in American theatre. The conference was about building connections, and for us—dramaturgs just starting their careers, that is—it was about learning to join the conversation.

“I felt star-struck by all these dramaturgs that nobody else has ever heard of,” said Christina Killingsworth, a junior at the University of Texas and a conference volunteer. But, she added, “It was more than just networking. There was no competition, there were no egos.”

“It was fun to listen to people whose work I’ve admired... It was a really interesting thing to find out about *their* process,” said Kristin Leahy, a graduate student at the University of Texas.

What follows is a reconstructed conference “journal” from an early-career dramaturg. Parts of this article appeared previously in another publication; they have formed a convenient base from which to share the experience of one early careerer at the 2005 Conference.

## Friday

I wander into the State Theater on Friday morning to find before me a veritable sea of dramaturgical luminaries. It’s enough to make an early careerer go hide in the bathroom.

I’m saved from my survey of the State Theater’s toilet paper selection when a few friends tap me on the shoulder and remind me that I’m allowed to come to this conference, too. In fact, a surprising number of faces are familiar, from Humana or ATHE or other conferences and festivals. Apparently, that’s how this professional dramaturgy thing works: you see each other once or twice a year, reunite at the LMDA Conference, and tell the people you don’t know, “Oh, I’ve seen your name on the listserve.”

Speed dating: Thank goodness for business cards.

The morning’s session with former Austin mayor Kirk Watson is amusing and interesting. I’m eager yet skeptical, having seen what Cincinnati (where I am living until July) has failed to do after publicly seizing onto the concept of the “creative class.” I listen for the magic key in Watson’s speech that I might take back with me, but don’t find it. There isn’t time for my question. Is it too early in the Conference to leave the room scratching one’s head?

I share lunch (and beer) with DD Kugler, my quasi-official LMDA mentor from the year before. We wind up at the same restaurant where the mass of early-career dramaturgs eventually come, looking to be adopted by more established ‘turgs, like London children hop-

ing for a good home in the country during the Blitz. All that’s missing are the tags on their (okay, our) clothing.

I once shared lunch with another established dramaturg who set a record for the number of times it’s possible to tell me I’m wrong in a single conversation; not even my family members can touch it. But Kugler isn’t like that. His assertions and suggestions are additions to the conversation, not correction fluid for underdeveloped ideas; his interest in the professional accomplishments of a younger ‘turg is a welcome validation.

Following a mix of afternoon panels, Friday evening’s activities take a group of us to a barbecue joint on the way to Stallgraffiti AFX. At the restaurant, Kelly Miller and I watch in awe as a third female dramaturg (identity withheld) puts away an entire platter of ribs like nobody’s business. No side dishes, no apologies: just ribs.

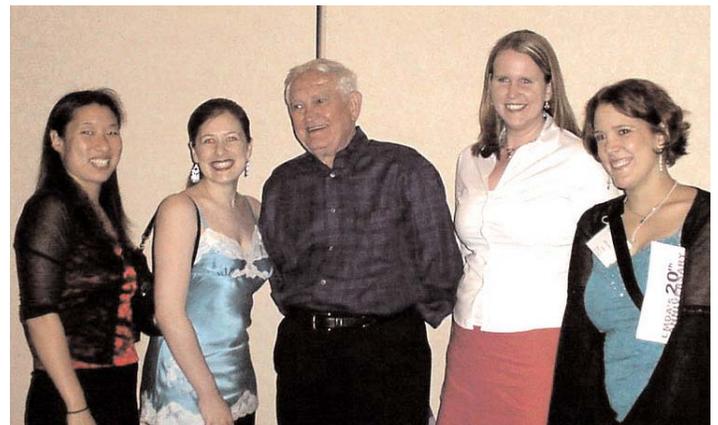
The evening’s performance at the Blue Theater is memorable as a do-it-yourself playwriting mini-festival. A great approach for a town that seeks to nurture new writers: have an idea, ask some friends to pitch in, and see what works. Can that approach work elsewhere? How can I take that sense of openness and carefree trial-and-error back to Cincinnati?

Tip: always try to catch a ride with [LMDA Administrative Director] Louise Lytle McKay. She’ll pay the cab fare.

## Saturday

The morning’s breakout discussion groups force me to make a choice: am I an early careerer? Or am I a freelancer? It feels like the turning point in a coming-of-age movie from the 1980s, minus the Debbie Gibson number.

In a burst of pastry-fueled self-confidence, I declare myself a freelance dramaturg and join the big kids’ group. They don’t ask me to leave. In fact, the conversation is quite helpful. It’s more than rhetoric; it’s a useful reminder that freelance dramaturgs can make a meaningful contribution to the work of theaters, universities, and independent artists without threatening the position of in-house ‘turgs.



Oscar Brockett surrounded by Early Career Dramaturgs at the LMDA Conference in Austin.

Photo by: Cynthia SoRelle

The exchange between the early careerers and freelancers is bizarre. I have no graduate degree; I have completed an internship and survived a few years in the real world. There are early careerers my age with advanced degrees who are asking me for advice on how to find work. Apparently this is not common knowledge.

A few weeks later, I interview Bronwyn Eisenberg, who has helped organize early-career opportunities and mentoring partnerships across North America. “There are about one trillion actors out there, but by the time they get to their late twenties, they’ve turned to something else, partly because the field can’t support that many,” she explains. “Just like acting, I like to think that dramaturgy is preparation for many things.”

LMDA president-elect Brian Quirt acknowledges that LMDA’s open-arms approach to newcomers is “partly a response to the number of graduates in the U.S. There’s such a wave of people coming out of various programs who both need and want the attention. I think it’s also an acknowledgement by the established people in the field that people entering the field give it energy and vitality.”

My selfish concern is that the explosion of dramaturgy programs may encourage employers to assume that a degree is necessary. There are several established, respected ‘turgs who don’t even have a bachelor’s degree. Are we eliminating the possibility of welcoming bright, creative individuals who come to dramaturgy as artists rather than students from formal training programs? Does that not also limit the field itself? One hopes others will address these questions, people who are not writing a journal entry, which already puts them at risk of self-aggrandizement.

We break for lunch and I meet more dramaturgs, plus a few interns who tag along. Again, I feel like a Paleozoic amphibian who’s no longer a fish but not quite a mammal, either. Yet something has emboldened me to venture beyond the swamps. Lunch becomes an idea-fest as people dump half-formed thoughts on the table in a lovely round of dramaturgical truth-or-dare. Dramaturgs traffic in possibility and potential; comments are welcome even from the most neo of the neophytes, because all reactions are informative.

That afternoon, the musician-playwright-dramaturg collaborations are unique creatures. Each play deals with rhythm in a very specific way. Blues guitar and language? Recorded music and narrative? Flapping pages of a script and an escaping bird? A narrative junkie, I am baffled but intrigued.

Check out the other reactions, though. The woman next to me hated the presentations. She said, “If that’s what theater is supposed to be, then I feel very discouraged.” She looks visibly let-down.

Later, Liz Engelman tells the Austin Chronicle she experienced a “moment of glowing recognition inside” to see what these artists accomplished in so short a time. The drastic differences in opinion are fascinating.

I bail on the post-show discussion and grab a beer with Sheila Rinear, my former undergraduate playwriting instructor. This conversation may have been more revolutionary than any other that weekend, as Sheila and I toss around ideas for possible homes for her plays. I’m agog that she takes my ideas seriously, until the thought occurs to me that I’m a dramaturg, early-career or otherwise, and part of my job is to find a home for plays. Likewise, when it’s time to offer an opinion, perhaps some confidence is now warranted. Otherwise, what’s the point?

The banquet and after-party are full of zany moments, such as

the bleed-through of a really corny selection of wedding music, and various rumors circulating as to what Oscar Brockett keeps in his junk closet. (I claim no firsthand knowledge.) Over drinks at the bar, I decide to hell with ducking behind my mid-length resume that still fits on a single page if I shrink the margins and font size. An empty chair sits at a table with a whole bunch of highly respected dramaturgs.

Damn the torpedoes: I sit down.

## Sunday

An early flight prevents my attendance at the business meeting. Instead, I am in the lobby by 4 a.m. to catch a shuttle. Like an early departure from summer camp, it’s perhaps best to leave the shelter of spiritual encouragement while one is still too sleepy to notice.

The LMDA Conference was an opportunity and a dare to put serious trust in what I have to offer—to have faith in the potato salad I bring to the picnic. Perhaps other early careerers feel similarly; perhaps they resist this somewhat tongue-in-cheek portrayal of the weekend’s events. Regardless, the more general excitement of the weekend is a welcome comfort to dramaturgs of many levels of experience. Scott Horstein spoke of “recharging my batteries;” Vicki Stroich mentioned a “renewed energy.” It’s clear that in the face of so much professional fatigue, the experience of renewal is important.

As a journalist and dramaturg, I resist the option to end any article on so positive a note. In fact, some of the issues hinted at above perhaps deserve greater attention in other venues. For instance, one would be hard-pressed to find a dramaturg willing to suggest publicly that LMDA should scale back their welcoming attitude to early careerers—but at the same time, are early careerers best served by a “more the merrier” approach? Is there enough discussion of how to apply dramaturgy to other fields, so that graduates do not regret earning their degrees? I do not pretend to be in a position where I hold the answers to these questions.

On the other hand... Even if I am an early careerer, I have opinions, too. Damn the torpedoes!

*Parts of this article originally appeared in “Becoming a dramaturg: Students get a glimpse of the literary life,” Dramatics Sept. 2005: 5-10.*

# What's so great about new plays?

a position paper on the focus on new plays in the field of dramaturgy

by Neil Blackadder

with three responses

by DD Kugler, Michele Volansky, and Lue Morgan Douthit

What's so great about new plays? I feel like a bit of a heretic asking this question within the context of LMDA, but it's been on my mind since before and especially during the conference in Austin.

January's *American Theatre* featured a piece that must have struck a chord, if not touched a nerve, for many LMDA members: an essay by playwright Theresa Rebeck about "premiere-itis." She explains how both theatres and funding organizations favor plays that have not yet been premiered over works that have been produced once or twice, and do so to the point of obsessiveness. I found Rebeck's account quite eye-opening, and dispiriting. Then at the conference it struck me just how much one hears about New Plays: so-and-so works for a company that only produces new plays, someone else directs a new play development lab, this other person just joined a publisher specializing in new plays, that other person works at a regional theatre "but we try and do some new plays." Just what does 'new' mean, and would all these people give the same answer? The title of Rebeck's article suggests what it often amounts to: "Is Your Play a Virgin?" Are all these people putting all this time and effort into identifying, developing, supporting new plays that get produced once and then become Old Plays?

My aim here is not, of course, to campaign against the promotion of new work. In our valuable new book *LMDA's 20th Anniversary: Celebrating the First Twenty Years*, Mark Bly writes of "the need for the 'questioning spirit' to be at the center of our work"—and it's in that spirit that I address these issues.

Newness isn't in and of itself a virtue, is it? There seems to be a widely held sense that at any given time as many theatres as possible should be producing as many brand new plays as possible. But what if the plays being written this year, or decade, actually aren't as original and stimulating as those that were getting read by literary managers and maybe staged by one or two theatres in the previous year or decade? Do literary managers and artistic directors, in making their decisions about what to include in their next season, ever say "None of the x hundred scripts we've considered in the past year excites me as much as that play I saw at Such-and-Such Theatre a few years ago, so let's give that a second production"?

To me, these are the two ways in which LMDA members most often characterize themselves: as dramaturgs, we are people with a fine understanding of how plays do and can tell stories; as literary managers, we are tireless advocates of contemporary playwriting, seeing to it that theatres produce as much new work as we can induce them to. But when "new" really means unpremiered, mustn't those two perspectives sometimes come into conflict—when none of the brand new work someone is reading in her capacity as a literary manager strikes her, in her capacity as a dramaturg, as very effective drama?

(And the issue of, for want of a better term, quality, is more generally one that seems not to get talked about much, at the conference at least. It often seems to be suggested that because we're all dramaturgs, we all know the difference between a Good Play and a Bad Play; but of course we don't all really agree. All LMDA members must have their own lists of playwrights and plays they consider over- and under-rated. But where exactly do such subjective divergences of opinion fit into our work?)

As I read through *LMDA's 20th Anniversary*, a couple of points stood out: the centrality of new play development during the organization's pre-history and early years; and the hard-earned and understandably gratifying sense that we have established ourselves—that, as David Copelin puts it, "we are much more confident in who we are, sure that we have a place in the North American theatre." Isn't there a degree to which literary managers are still fighting a battle in which, while they might not exactly have emerged victorious, they have at least reached a pretty good settlement? How valid is it to still bemoan theatres' reluctance to produce new work?

Rebeck's essay suggests that it might be time to think differently about the amount and kind of support given to new work, and it would be wonderful as well as fitting if LMDA could be instrumental in bringing about such a shift. Curing theatre management, marketing departments, and funding organizations of "premiere-itis"—or just getting them to self-diagnose and treat with simple home remedies—would in itself help enormously. Perhaps we need to advocate an alternative definition of a "new play" as, for instance, a script that has not yet been given more than two full productions. Literary managers must be well placed—not to mention well qualified—to explain to their colleagues and to foundations that for supporting new work to really contribute to the development of North American theatre, it must involve more than just funding premieres.

In her interview, the very first LMDA President Alexis Greene says that "there is something about helping a play move from the moment it lands on your desk, to a reading, to a workshop, and then to a full production that is incredibly creative and rewarding." I know that many current LMDA members share that feeling; but isn't there a serious problem if many of those exciting new works aren't making it beyond the second or third of those steps, and if even the ones that do get produced then sink into oblivion?

# What's so great about new plays?

three responses from DD Kugler, Michele Volansky, and Lue Douthit

## New Plays in Canada

DD Kugler

I can only respond to Neil Blackadder's "questioning spirit" from my experience within a Canadian context.

Canadian theatre has little more than a 30-year history. We've slowly built a theatre infrastructure that no longer depends on foreign (largely USAmerican or British) actors, directors, designers, etc. Developing Canadian playwrights and their work was/is a further, and more difficult, step in that evolution.

Our playwrights, supported by other theatre artists, lobbied for the production of new work primarily because major theatres across the country were/are not producing the work of contemporary Canadian playwrights. Meeting the loosely defined "Canadian creation" criterion to receive funding from The Canada Council For The Arts, in theory, encourages theatre companies to produce (new) Canadian work.

In a USAmerican context there may be a dramaturg or literary manager implicated in choosing works for a season, but in Canada—where dramaturgs are mostly freelance and literary managers almost unheard of—those decisions generally fall to the Artistic Director. And those decisions certainly deserve scrutiny.

Although I'm a freelance dramaturg/director, I once served five years as an Artistic Director. Perhaps, some self-reflection would be useful.

Oddly enough, despite working across Canada almost exclusively in new play development, when I became Artistic Director of Northern Light Theatre (in Edmonton), I chafed against producing exclusively Canadian work, let alone new Canadian work. Looking back, I see that during my tenure Northern Light produced five new Canadian plays that we commissioned and/or developed, and five previously produced Canadian plays. But we also produced two foreign plays (Howard Barker's *Women Beware Women* from England, and Mou Sen's *File 0* from China), and Planet Play—staged readings of six international plays that I liked but couldn't afford to produce. [Tellingly, I argued that the production of foreign work was, in fact, play development because it demonstrated to playwrights the kind of more radical work I would produce if they would write just it.]

If Blackadder is calling for mixed seasons—premieres, subsequent productions of recent premieres, as well as foreign/classical work—my own season-determining decisions demonstrate that I'm in full agreement.

However, I don't share Blackadder's concern about "premiere-itis". I do not see new work crowding our stages. A premiere, and subsequent near-universal production, of one play or two (small cast, crowd-pleasing) cannot be understood as an obsession with premieres. In fact, the phenomenon creates an unsettling uniformity of seasons, and actually prevents a much-needed variety of new work—local playwrights, regional voices—from reaching our stages.

On the other hand, an emphasis upon new work has clearly led to a burgeoning of new play development activity. In addition to non-producing play development organizations across the country, suddenly nearly every theatre in Canada now has its own play development process. But this increased development activity has definitely not led to an over-production of new work.

Here's my hierarchy of play development concerns:

- I'm concerned that new work is still not getting produced.
- I'm also concerned that the few scripts getting a second production amazingly fall within the artistic vision of so many theatres across the country (not that I begrudge any playwright the bonanza).
- I'm more concerned that in response to an emphasis upon new plays, we have created a frantic façade of largely interchangeable development activity without a corresponding commitment to production.
- I'm most concerned that few theatres demonstrate a distinct/dynamic artistic vision that's evident in the work produced on their stages, and equally evident in the development of playwrights and their scripts.

# What's So Great About New Plays— A Thought or Seven

Michele Volansky

Over lunch during a break from the conference in Austin, Texas, a very smart colleague asked the question, "Isn't every play a new play? I mean, when you get right down to it, you have to approach a text as though this is the first time it is being directed."

I thought about that for a long while, and then Neil posited the above question. Having read his thoughts and having been ruminating on the question of a play's "virginity" for a while, I would contribute the following to the discussion.

As I march through the history, I am reminded of a few things. In the first era of American dramaturgs, we were researchers. We were the folks who put the play in context, which would inform our other collaborators (directors, actors, designers, etc) and ultimately our audiences. We wrote program notes for a production of *Our Town*, we re-imagined Chekhov for the contemporary landscape and we dug around libraries looking for the source material of *King John*. We were able to produce paper, documents that, for all intents and purposes, legitimized our existence.

The next era brought the onslaught of "the American voice." Regional theaters began producing new plays, requiring someone to read, weed, and proceed toward or away from the accumulating piles. In this frame, we championed the voices that reflected our communities, drank coffee with the produced and unproduced playwrights and sat in artistic staff meetings that decided the next season. We

were able to produce names, which, for all intents and purposes, ensured our place at the table.

As we moved forward to becoming an established presence in the theater, we sought out more ways to contribute. One way was through tangible involvement in the new play development process. Coincidentally, monies were made available for this purpose. As programs, readings, workshops increased in number, we were instrumental in the execution—from producing to full-court dramaturgy.

And so here we are, with all of this history and, at this moment, what seems to be a sharp focus on new work. At this juncture, I would urge my colleagues to remember, again and again, our history as a way of guiding us forward.

We must create conversation areas and programs for "older" plays, we will find ways of getting freelancers into our university libraries, we can insist on fostering dialogues with our good friends at New Dramatists, we need (for the survival of all of us) to make concerted efforts at reshaping the conversation about second productions. Whether one is a "new play dramaturg" or a "research dramaturg" or a "classical dramaturg," all are vitally important to creating theater and it is LMDA's mission to shape and reshape programs that serve all of us. Our ability to live life, as Anne Bogart challenges us, "in the interrogative mode" is our greatest gift. Let's keep asking "how" and offering answers.

# Thoughts on New Plays from an Elliott Hayes Award Acceptance Speech

Lue Morgan Douthit

I came to this work because I was a playwright. My advocacy and the passion I bring to the work always comes from the standpoint of the playwright. What occurs to me now about my dramaturgy work is what working on new plays has contributed to my working on already-established texts and vice versa, what I bring to new plays from my work on older texts.

We should never assume that we know a play before we work on it. Plays should always be new to us—regardless of when they are written, 400 years ago or 4 minutes ago. New plays have a "now-ness" which we must subscribe to older plays as well. All plays are always new because of the context—when (and by that I mean, time and place) they are produced or re-produced, in the case of already-established texts, is always different. And we must remind our fellow practitioners to address that.

As for the vice versa part, what working on older texts brings to my work with new scripts. Older texts are given the presumption of "working," that somehow, at some time, somebody made them work theatrically. We rarely give that presumption to new plays. Which is not to say that all new plays come out of the word processor fully realized—that's another conversation—but I would like to propose that by the time someone chooses to produce a brand new play, we must give it the same presumption we would to all plays; we must enter the rehearsal process assuming that it works. For only then, can playwrights really assess what they have. We must give them that gift.

I'm looking for a theatre world where practitioners have been taught how to read plays, to value the "form" as meaning, to understand that their job is not as originators, but as interpreters, and that interpretation is based on textual evidence, not on some momentary

whim or some attempt to make the text fit a personal world view. Where I work [at Oregon Shakespeare Festival], 99% of my work deals with plays in the old-fashioned way—they start with a singular playwright. We must always enter the text to find its organic world-view, not fit the play to our fashion. As Tom Stoppard puts it, "You don't write a la carte when you write a play. One writes set menus. Take it or leave it." At the moment, I don't see that ideal world. I have been through 3 graduate programs myself and I know that directors and actors are not being properly trained to do "close readings" of texts, nor are they able to appreciate the formal structure of plays in terms of how to enliven them in 3-dimensions. They are taught technical and performance elements, which are important to be sure. But I find myself continually dismayed at the lack of respect for text that I see around me.

Of course, I work at a place where authorship is always in question. Thank you, Shakespeare, for not paying attention to the printing of those plays. So sometimes we forget our responsibilities to modern and contemporary writers. But I don't think my theatre is the only one where directors have been given total authority where the text is concerned. I believe the play's the thing and that is all too frequently forgotten. I don't often win the argument where I work, but somehow that fuels my sense of purpose all the more. To my academic colleagues, I urge you to fight for and retain script analysis and dramatic structure classes on your curriculums. To my professional colleagues, I propose that our job is to be the playwright's friend, sometimes the only ally a playwright has. And whether they are still living and available for comment, or long in the grave, they all need protecting.