

NETC News

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New England Theater
Conference, Inc.

A Brief History of the New England Theatre Conference Auditions

The first NETC "Summer Theatre Auditions" were held on April 15, 1967 at the University of New Hampshire. The following year they moved to Northeastern and then to The Boston Conservatory. Chairperson for those first three years was John Edwards. Harlan Grant, who taught at the Conservatory, chaired the auditions for three years followed by Robert Leibacher and the Conservatory hosted until 1974.

In 1975, Patricia Sankus took over as chair, moved the auditions to Northeastern and developed a system of preliminary and final auditions. Pat chaired the auditions until 1979 when Marie Philips took over. Marie ran the auditions until March of 1992. During that time, the preliminaries system was eliminated and the current plan and format was developed. During Marie's term as chairperson the audition moved back to the Conservatory for a time and then to Tufts where they were held from 1986 through 1994.

Joe Juliano assumed the reins of the auditions in 1995 and has been managing them ever since. The "NETC Summer Theatre Auditions" became The "NETC Theatre Auditions" since more and more year-round theatres began attending. Due to the rising costs of university facilities and the need for better facilities for the producers, a variety of hotel sites were used. When the cost of hosting the auditions in downtown Boston became prohibitive, the auditions were moved to the Crowne Plaza Natick Boston in Natick, Massachusetts in 1999. The facility is outstanding and meets all NETC's needs.

The "NETCs," as the participants refer to the auditions, have a national reputation for excellence, sensitivity and fairness. Thanks to the work of all the chairs and volunteers over the past 37 years, The New England Theatre Conference has the best national/regional audition program in the country, though not the largest. The members of NETC should be very proud of this program and the service it provides to actors, technicians and theatres alike.

NETC Continues to Honor America's Best New Plays with the John Gassner Award

John Gassner was one of his generation's leaders in the American theatre. Born in Hungary, he emigrated to the U.S. as a child, and later attended Columbia University. He became a critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* and *New York Magazine*, and was an editor for Simon and Schuster. From 1931 to 1944, he was chairman of the script department of the Theatre Guild. Aside from producing many stage productions, he wrote and lectured prolifically on the theatre; he was on the Yale faculty. He's best known for his critical works on American plays.

This quote from his work gives us some idea of his insight: "So long as theatre exists there will always be two standards, the absolute standards of the literaturers who can live a comfortable distance from the stage, and the relative one of those compelled to live with the stage and come to terms with it."

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Report on 2003 NETC Auditions

Joe Juliano, chair of the NETC Auditions, was pleased to report that another successful weekend of auditions were held on March 15,16,17, 2003, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Natick.

With 965 applicants who ranged in age from 18 to 60+, producers were treated to an incredible pool of very talented performers and technicians.

Special thanks to the volunteer staff: Lorraine Stevens, Barbara Horrigan, Gamalia Pharms and Ann Marie Shea; and to Hank Zappala for his help and support, the four guides who kept the hundreds of candidates on time for their auditions, as well as Todd Gordon, accompanist and Angela Ruggiero, choreographer.

NETC received numerous complements and much praise for the efficiency of the process and the respect

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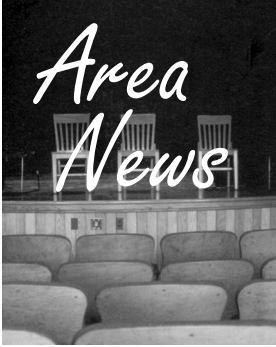
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new england
NETC
theatre conference



Williamstown Theatre Festival Announces the 2003 Season

Michael Ritchie, Producer of the Tony Award winning Williamstown Theatre Festival has announced the line-up for the 49th season. The season will open with a revival of *The Three Penny Opera*, directed by Peter Hunt, who returns to the Festival after a seven year absence. Slated to appear as the infamous MacHeath is Jesse L. Martin (of *Rent* and the television program, "Law and Order"), Betty Buckley will portray his mistress, Pirate Jenny, and MacHeath's bride, Polly Peachum, will be portrayed by Melissa Errico.

Other highlights of the season will be rare revivals of contemporary works by John Guare and Welsh poet Dylan Thomas's only work for the stage, Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*, and Mandy Patinkin will star as *An Enemy of the People*. A week-long celebration of plays by Anton Chekhov will include many actors who have made the festival their summer home, including Blythe Danner, Olympia Dukakis, George Morfogen, Austin Pendleton and Louis Zorich, among others. In all, the Festival will present ten productions in nine weeks, as well as host its famous late-night Cabaret among many additional events.

The 2003 season, scheduled to run June 25 through August 24, marks the 49th year of the Williamstown Theatre Festival on the campus of Williams College in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts.

32nd NH Community Theatre Festival Held

The 32nd Annual New Hampshire Community Theatre Festival was held on March 15th at Concord City Auditorium, Concord NH. Community Players of Concord won the Best Production trophy for their production of *Baby*. The production also won acting awards for Barbara Lawler and Michael McCarthy and an award for stage managing to Sally Kelly.

J & W Productions of Nashua/Derry's production of *Once on this Island* won an award for Production Elements in choreography, set, and costumes. This was awarded to Jeff Caron, Tom Caron, Lorrie Poliquin, and Judy Colby. Megan Borase, an actress in this production, won an award for Youth Performance.

The awards were chosen by competition adjudicators, Andrea McCullough, a New York City performer and director/choreographer, and Kent R. Brown, author and adjunct professor at Fairfield (CT) University.

EMACT Seeks Consultants

The Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theaters (EMACT) is seeking new consultants for its EMACT Achievement Recognition Program (EARP). This is an educational program offered to EMACT member groups to provide an objective view of a production. The consultant views a production and provides either a verbal or written evaluation, depending on the preference of the group. Written consultations are expected to be completed within two weeks of attendance. Verbal consultations can be scheduled the night of viewing or at a later date, as arranged between the group and the consultant. The perspective is positive—what was perceived, what worked and what alternative choices that might be considered in the future. Consultants receive a small stipend upon completion of the consultation.

Groups view the evaluations as a learning tool, to be used either during or after a production to review their choices, performances and overall experience. Some groups even use these adjudications as a "post-production get together" with the production cast and crew, or as a segment of a general membership meeting. The EARP program is currently under review and consideration is being given to offering pre-opening/in-progress consultation as well as filling requests for specific types of advice, i.e. just direction, set design, costuming, etc. EMACT expects to have the redefined program ready to go by the start of next season.

EMACT's consultant pool is comprised of community theatre members and professionals with a background in theatre arts, arts education, and/or extensive hands-on experience. Strong verbal and/or written communication skills are required in addition to a solid background in both technical and performance aspects of theater. Some training is available for those with a suitable background but limited experience. Writing samples or references may be requested. Consultants are needed throughout Eastern Massachusetts, particularly in the South Shore/Cape areas and west of Framingham.

When group consultation requests are received, they're emailed to the entire pool and consultants can volunteer. The heaviest concentration of requests is in the Spring and Fall—particularly November and April/May, but requests are received year 'round.

If you are interested in being considered as a consultant for the EARP program, please contact EMACT President Jen Howard at jhoward@burlingtonplayers.org or call 781-377-6731 (days).

Huntington Announces Capital Campaign

\$19.7 million will build two new theatres and provide endowment

The Huntington Theatre Company announced plans to raise funds to build and operate two new theatres at the Boston Center for the Arts (BCA). The Capital Campaign, now entering into its public phase, is a \$19.7 million, two-phase effort. Phase I will raise \$16.5 million—\$12.7 million for the new theatres and \$3.8 million for endowment. Phase II will raise \$3.2 million in additional endowment. The Huntington has raised \$8.3 million to date, during the leadership phase of the campaign—more than half way to goal for the first phase of the campaign, which is expected to be complete by December 2004.

“It is my belief that this new theatre complex will transform the theatrical landscape in Boston,” says Artistic Director Nicholas Martin, “The opportunity to develop and produce new work and to create a theatre hub for the city will have a profound impact on Boston’s theatre profile.” Adds Managing Director Michael Maso, “It has taken a unique partnership to make this vision a reality. We are extremely grateful to Mayor Menino and the City of Boston, to the Boston Center for the Arts, and to the Druker Company for their commitment and support. And now it is time to recognize the support of Huntington Board Chairman David Wimberly, the Huntington’s other Trustees and Overseers, and some key private sector leaders who have brought us to the halfway mark in this campaign.”

The Campaign

The Huntington is entering into the first Capital Campaign in its 21-year history. In addition to raising funds to build two new state-of-the-art theatres, the Huntington will raise \$7 million in endowment to support expanded operations and artistic initiatives. Contributors to this campaign include substantial leadership gifts from the late Stanford Calderwood and the Huntington’s Chairman of the Board J. David Wimberly. A lead corporate gift of \$250,000 has been committed by John Hancock Financial Services, a significant statement about the importance of this project by a leader of Boston’s corporate community.

The Project

The Boston Center for the Arts and the Huntington Theatre Company have entered into a partnership to build, manage, and program two new theatres at the BCA. The Huntington is responsible for raising the funds to build the theatres and will manage the new facilities. In addition to providing a second stage for the Huntington, the new theatres, which

will be cooperatively programmed by the BCA and Huntington, will also host a range of performances by smaller arts organizations. The new Theatre Pavilion is scheduled to open in the fall of 2004. The Huntington will also continue to perform at its current home, the Boston University Theatre on Huntington Avenue.

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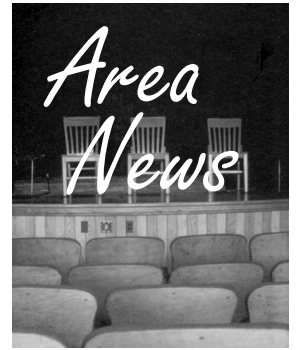
—Nicholas Martin
Huntington Theatre Artistic Director

The Impact on the Community

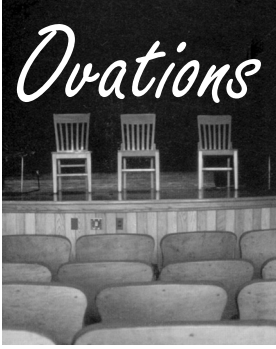
The new Theatre Pavilion at the Boston Center for the Arts will house the first new theatres to be built in Boston in more than 75 years. Located in the vibrant South End neighborhood, they will serve as a theatre hub and a cultural landmark for the City of Boston. The Theatre Pavilion will provide a home for artistic innovation, including new play development by the Huntington; help build and diversify audiences; create more opportunities for youth and community outreach; and expand the existing BCA complex to include more performance venues for Boston’s smaller arts organizations.

The History

In October 2000, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced the agreement between the Huntington and the BCA to build a new Theatre Pavilion. The City of Boston pledged a total investment of \$3 million to the project to cover costs of site preparation, utility infrastructure, new streetscaping, and sidewalks. The Druker Company agreed to build the “shell and core” of these spaces—exterior walls and connections to major systems—a value of more than \$9.3 million. Wilson Butler Lodge Inc., a Boston-based architectural firm, is in charge of designing the interior of the Theatre Pavilion.



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The Road to Becoming a Successful Community Theatre Company is Paved With...

(NETC News would like to present a series of success stories about New England Theatre groups representing all divisions from the six states. We welcome articles featuring theatrical success in the six states. We begin this series with the community theatre division.)

In days of budget cuts, limited grants and a drought in volunteerism, it's not often that you see community theatre groups growing or thriving. Many operate in the red just to operate. Others taper seasons, merge with other groups, discontinue performing all together for a time—or forever. In the past decade, it seems that more community theatre groups have disappeared than in the prior 50 years collectively, but others have managed to maintain and persist. What's their secret? Was it limitless funding or steady financial support, familial dedication past down from generation to generation, owning a performance space, perhaps a subscriber base or membership? The answer is all and none of the above.

In one group's case, however, the answer is known. For Chelmsford (MA) resident John J. Goodwill, it was a matter of dedication and persistence. Back in 1967, Goodwill had just completed his term as President of the [now defunct] Chelmsford Players, which, at that time, was the oldest, biggest and most well known community theatre organization in the Greater-Lowell and Merrimack Valley area. It would be difficult to find a person with a stronger passion for community theatre than Goodwill. He was heavily involved in every production with directing, acting, producing, sets, props, and promotion. With the Chelmsford Players as his example, Goodwill evaluated the organization. They had board members, officers and ex-officios. They had committees, ad hoc committees, sub-committees, by-laws, rules, regulations, customs, SOPs and traditions. The Players were so weighed down by elements having nothing to do with producing plays that it was a wonder they ever performed, Goodwill believed. So, Goodwill sat down with his wife, Helen, and four other couples—all movers and shakers in the Chelmsford Players. The others shared Goodwill's feelings, and all decided how to proceed with their New group—full of aspiration.

Locally, the popular Speare House Restaurant, decorated in a King Arthur and the Round Table motif, came into Goodwill's head as a possible performance venue. He approached the management with the then unheard of idea of dinner theatre. For one all-inclusive price, audience members could enjoy a sumptuous dinner, a couple of drinks, and then—

without having to leave their chairs—they could turn to the front of the hall and enjoy a fine evening's entertainment. The restaurant, the group and the audience would profit. Not surprisingly, this deal sold itself and The "Camelot" Players were born. Each couple paid \$100 to fund the first production, Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park*. It was a huge success. Other successes soon followed. Production after pro-

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duction, Goodwill carefully and judiciously increased the size of the group by personally inviting select individuals who he thought could make a contribution. Productions were low-budget with minimal sets and requirements. The directors were in total control of their shows. There were no committees, no by-laws, no baggage. The group's treasury and its popularity increased.

The early years, weren't without turbulent times, however. In 1972, shows and rehearsals were preempted by the venue's political pursuits. In 1975, dinner guests indulging in too many libations sometimes tried to join the casts, mid-performance, and this was followed by a strained relationship with The Speare House. So began a "gypsy" period during which Camelot performed at various restaurants, lounges, country clubs and other venues. Every production was packed into the back of a pick-up truck and hauled to a performance venue, as is the case with many "homeless" community theatre groups throughout the region to this day.

Despite the harried schedule, Camelot kept performing faithfully and participated in such activities as the then NETC Annual Drama Festival. Weather at cer-

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North Shore Music Theatre Recognized Nationally for a Commitment to Non-traditional Casting

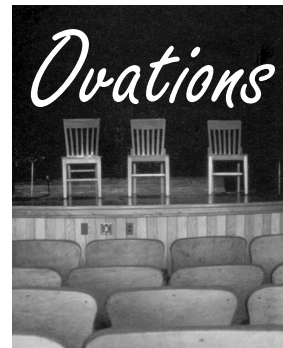
North Shore Music Theatre (NSMT) is the recipient of the 2003 Rosetta LeNoire Award. This annual award, given by Actor's Equity Association, recognizing contributions made to the "universality of the human experience in the American Musical Theatre" through non-traditional casting. John LaRock, NSMT's Associate Producer, accepted the award at the AEA membership meeting on April 4, 2003.

"The Rosetta LeNoire award is an extraordinary honor," says Jon Kimbell, NSMT's Artistic Director and Executive Producer. "We believe it is our duty to reflect the world on our stage. Not only do our efforts have a positive effect on our audiences, we are inspired by the creative and exhilarating work that springs from a culturally diverse cast."

The award was named in honor of the actress Rosetta LeNoire, who was also the first recipient, not only because of her body of work in the theatre—and her work with the then titled Actors'

Equity Association's Ethnic Minorities Committee—but also for founding the AMAS Repertory Theatre Company, an organization dedicated to maintaining an "interracial company" of actors.

North Shore has demonstrated a bold commitment to non-traditional casting. Some examples include Stephanie Pope as 'Dorothy Shaw' in *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*, Kimla Beasley as 'Philia' in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Riccardo Pitts Wiley as 'Claudius' in *Hamlet*, Janelle Robinson as 'Nettie Fowler' in *Carousel*, Josh Tower as 'Joseph' in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Enrico Rodriguez and Christine Toy Johnson as 'Ren and Ethel McCormack' in *Footloose* and Ken Prymus as 'The Wizard' in *The Wizard of Oz*. In addition, Thos Shipley is currently playing 'M. Lindsay Woolsey' in *Mame*, which opens our 2003 Musical Season on April 29, 2003.



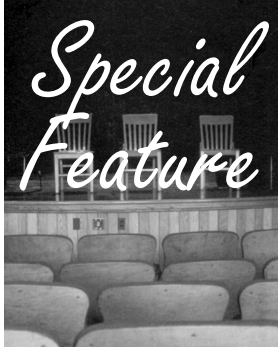
NETC Announces 2003 Excellence in Theatre Awards

NETC is proud to announce the Excellence in Theatre Award winners for 2003. The awards will be presented to an exciting line-up of recipients following a gala dinner on November 7 at the NETC Convention in Providence, Rhode Island. **Paula Vogel**, who won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for her play *How I Learned to Drive*, will receive this year's Major Award. Special Awards will be presented to **Eve Ensler**, author of *The Vagina Monologues* and *Necessary Targets*, and to Shakespeare and Company's Director of Educational Programs **Mary Hartman**. Boston's

Playwright Theatre (headed by Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott and playwright Kate Snodgrass), **Providence Black Repertory Company** (Donald King, Artistic Director) and the **A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theatre Training** will also be honored with Regional Awards. Join NETC in celebrating the extraordinary contributions of these theatre artists and institutions to American Theatre.



Please visit NETC
on the web at
www.NETCOnline.org
to find out how you can get
more involved in your community!



"The Forum" Fourth Edition

by *Suzanne M. Ramczyk, Ph.D.*

Professor of Theatre Arts, Bridgewater State College and Chair of the NETC Long Range Planning Committee

Gentle Readers,

At this time of year when so many of us are frantically mounting the final productions of our seasons, preparing for major final studio or class performances in our programs, or at least attending countless "duty" performances at the height of the spring season, I fall into that category of those who would "sell their souls" for almost any amount of free time. Thus, I can sympathize with all of you who could not respond to, or politely declined, my "call" for "Forum" writers. Sitting in front of this screen, with a myriad of inchoate ideas bouncing around in my head but refusing to take form in the allotted two-hour writing slot, I decided that my friend and colleague, Arthur Dirks, had already bailed me out. Two months ago, Arthur wrote a short article in response to my "Forum" addressing the tenuous art of adjudicating. It was far too long to print at that time, and I considered it far too elegant to edit.

For many of us, adjudication, or "responding" as we now like to call it, continues to be an important facet of our

art form, often, a contentious one. In his article, Arthur Dirks responds to some of the cogent issues I presented and offers carefully thought out insight and observations. As an adjudicator who is presently reassessing her own work, I am humbled by his observation that, "The value of the response is likely to be greater if the company can trust the respondent to understand what it is trying to accomplish..." and that "A great response is an art in itself." Sound advice for all of us who are a part of the "pad, pencil, and penlight" set!

Again, I hope that as our end-of-season and end-of-semester/school year activities calm down, many of you will feel moved to drop a short response to this edition of "The Forum" by emailing me at sramczyk@bridgdw.edu. Further, if you would like to be a future contributor to "The Forum," contact me at any time.

Suzanne Ramczyk, Ph.D., editor of "The Forum"

***In this edition of
The Forum:***

A Cogent Response to Suzanne Ramczyk's 'The Forum,' first edition

by *Arthur L. Dirks*

Chair of The Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Arts, Bridgewater State College

There are few things in adult life that we approach with as much difficulty as the evaluation of our work. As artists we invest heavily and personally in our work, including our identity as artists. We are finely tuned to hear unsupportive responses but realize we must try to know how our work works. We also want some sense of its fit in the Art world. Mostly we want some knowledgeable affirmation of our choices and intentions.

Several organizations have emphasized production feedback to artists in order to help theatres improve their work. Today we have ongoing and widespread use of the live post-performance response to the artists provided by someone uninvolved with the production or company.

In this space Suzanne Ramczyk struggled with her own feelings as both responder and respondee, but ultimately she thinks respondents pretend to too much authority and need better training. She suggested a pool of approved trained respondents be subsidized by theatre organizations such as NETC for use by member the-

atres. Respondent training currently is offered by some theatre organizations according to their own needs, and there also is ongoing networking among some theatres to identify and use good respondents.

We really do hope our respondents have some authority, or why should we listen? As one who has responded to college/university, community, and secondary school production, I recognize that different venues of theatre have different needs from the production response, and they vary in the kind of authority they want in the respondent. Some companies want suggestions of specific things they can do to make the work better. This kind of critique requires specific expertise in the respondent, and usually a fairly conventional approach to production. Others want a larger discussion of the effect of choices made. That critique requires a true openness to the production, a careful eye to choices as they appear, and a thorough reflective response. Often those respondents are expected to locate the production in the context of theory and the theatre Artworld. Consider that

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A Cast of Thousands

Or How To Direct Very Large Groups and Retain Your Sanity

by Linda Potter and Jeanie Furlan

Perhaps it is better to ask why not direct a cast of thousands. If you have ever seen the look on the face of a child who has been cut while his friends are cast, the look of a junior high school boy who was cut because he couldn't move at all, or the look of an adult who has never auditioned before and is trying to open up his life—and then he is cut—you'll never forget it.

When we directed *Peter Pan* many years ago for a community theater, a boy tried to commit suicide after not being cast. When we heard about this, justifications ran through our minds... 'We can't handle large groups...the stage can't hold so many kids...the parents weren't the helping-out kind.' There are always a myriad of excuses. This unfortunate situation became a catalyst for us to change our approach, and now we believe that we can make it happen if we are willing to accept the challenge. Consider the words of Johann Goethe, a German dramatist and philosopher who lived 200 years ago. He said:

"Until one is committed, there is always ineffectiveness. The moment one definitely commits oneself, Providence moves too. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."

We do not like to cut the casts in elementary school and junior high school productions because these are the formative years when a child may never come back to the theater. This one audition may be the only chance for you, as a director, to open up the world of theater to this child. You owe him an opportunity to try. Most certainly, with a little more time and care, any child can learn the basics of acting enough to be in a chorus on stage.

Remember:

- A large show builds a base for more shows in the future.
- A large show offers some role to all who want a theatrical experience.
- Ensemble members are as important as any star—there are no small roles. If you instill that in your actors, your show will be successful.
- With more cast members, you will have a larger pool of volunteers to choose from who are dedicated to seeing your ideas come to fruition.
- Success feeds on success. If your show is a good experience for all involved, you will be hired again.

So if you ignore the "nay-sayers" and replace those

voices with a sincere optimism, you will be able to surmount the obstacles and create a production of which you and your team can be proud.

How Is It Done?

So, how does a director counter the fears and the negative voices in his or her head? How do you not only survive, but also create a satisfying, theatrical happening and a fun event for all?

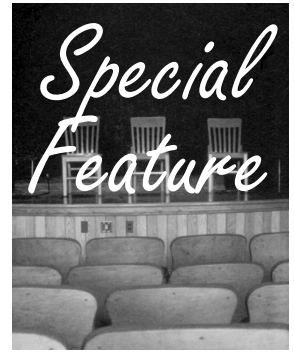
Here are some basic ways to start:

- Not all shows should have large casts; choose your vehicle with care.
- Plan early and thoroughly; begin six months before auditions.

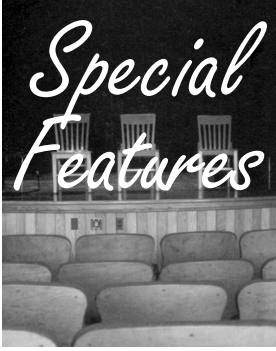
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- Choose, meet and work with your team: producer, music director, set designer, choreographer, and costumer. Consider paying a stipend to some or all of your team.

For a recent junior high production, we saw the sign-up sheets for auditions rise from 58 to over 230 students within one week. After the initial shock, we met with all team members and the principal of the school to find a solution. The result: we formed a large chorus, which appears three times with the 90-person cast. The junior high chorus teacher volunteered to rehearse these children. Hence, Providence of Goethe's predictions came forth as true. In the end we might had 100 members in this chorus, but we found a way for all who want to be involved to have a chance. Miraculous things happen when you say to a group of adults, "we want to include everyone—can you help us?" We have never been disappointed.



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The Forum

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a fresh approach to a work inherently invokes a reference to all other widely known productions of it.

The truth is that it is extremely difficult to deliver a great live response within minutes of curtain, thoughtfully considered and sensitively worded. No one knows the production better than those who are in it, yet the respondent must offer meaningful discussion. The session is worth little if it is not critical and analytical. As artists we may shrug it off and discount the source, but we cannot be objective about a critique. We unconsciously weigh the balance of approval in what we hear, alert to hesitation, deconstructing the rhetoric. This is not a situation set up for consistent success, but for the most part it works.

Suzanne is correct; we do need better-trained respondents, and based on my own observation and experience I suggest three essential concerns. Respondents must be willing to experience the production on its own terms. This is the most fundamental and most difficult part of the job and something we don't train people to do well. Second, a respondent really must respect the company and its production because these people are heavily invested. And third, facing a company of people who have had an intense and complicated relationship around this artwork, the respondent needs to show some humility. However, we know that no magic formula will make everyone a great respondent. Personality, finesse, and artistic authority all play a significant part.

A great response is an art in itself, but there aren't nearly enough great respondents to go around. Many are good and can be better, and many more could learn to be good. It is a very challenging and rewarding exercise. The rewards come in exposure to a broad range of production and all the artistic ideas therein. It sharpens one's critical analysis and enriches one's vocabulary of ideas. One gets the best seat for some wonderful art. The challenge is meeting the needs of the company for a response and managing it deftly, immediately after the event. One replays the event on the long drive home, wishing he had said this or that, often still mulling the meanings of the production. On occasion I have been unable to resist the next-day addendum note back to the company, realizing all the while that they have moved on and don't need my added comment.

Artists cannot be expected to ignore the response, otherwise why provide for it? They also must be trained to receive the response critically. Does it speak to the intentions of the production? Does it help you understand better how the work functions and all of its interconnections? Is it a response primarily based in con-

ventions and standards and the predilections of the respondent? How do you listen and yet preserve your convictions about your choices? How do you maintain your commitment when someone has suggested reasonable alternatives?

Responses are only for the benefit of the company, and companies could participate more directly in selecting respondents. Many companies and productions would never receive a post-performance response if it were not driven by competition and organizational participation. The respondent is assigned, which can result in a mismatch of respondent to production, and allows the

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company to distance itself from the critique. Ideally, the selection of respondents should not be left to assignment by someone else. The value of the response is likely to be greater if the company can trust the respondent to understand what it is trying to accomplish. As the response proves of greater value, the company is more willing to find the funding to support it. For the investment of a very long evening, a respondent should receive at a minimum dinner and expenses, plus an honorarium at least at token level if possible.

The divisions of NETC could help in compiling respondent lists, offering training, and supporting networks among theatres in developing and identifying appropriate respondents. I think it would be unwise to develop a "critic corps" of approved respondents. No matter how well they are trained to be deferential to the producing company, they will always be seen as ascribing value to aspects of the work. To the extent that some agreement among the respondents evolves, we construct a new conventionality—a problem that some find in current adjudicating processes. Responding to art is always messy but the options for cleaning it up are unpalatable. The answer lies in better training for respondents, better training in receiving a response, and greater participation by companies in selecting and inviting their own respondents.

President's Message

by Linda Murphy, President, NETC Board of Directors

Elliot Norton, the founding president of the New England Theatre Conference, celebrated his 100th Birthday in May of this year! What do we all know about this distinguished and beloved man? To briefly share some of the highlights of Mr. Norton's eminent life and career would be to note his 48-years as a drama critic for Boston newspapers and moderator of *Elliot Norton Reviews* on WGBH-TV. As "Dean of Boston Drama Critics," Mr. Norton reviewed more than 6,000 productions in Boston, New York, in other American cities and abroad. Mr. Norton is Professor Emeritus of Boston University's School of Theatre Arts where he served on the faculty from 1957 to 1978. The Elliot Norton Award were created upon his retirement and are known as the "Boston Tonys." Mr. Norton holds honorary degrees from ten colleges and universities, he was chairman of the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, served five terms as a Pulitzer Prize Play Juror and fifteen as a Tony Award nominator, and remains a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Fellow of NETC and was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in New York. Mr. Norton's passion, commitment and inspiring devotion to theatre is legendary.

Mr. Norton's credits represent the distinguished accomplishments of a life well-lived. Why he is so beloved can be measured by his wit, his charm and

his ability to graciously extend himself to everyone he meets. I have an Elliot Norton story to share—as so many of us do! Mr. Norton arrived at the 2000 Norton Awards in his wheelchair and I approached him with a smile, extended my hand and began to reintroduce myself to him. It had been eight years since I had last been in Mr. Norton's company and that was at the 1992 NETC Convention in Providence, R.I. As I reminded him of NETC's Awards ceremony on the stage of Trinity Repertory Company, the Major Award that was given to Terence McNally, and complimented him on his inspirational speech to the audience after seeing Trinity's production of *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*, I could recognize that he clearly remembered the events of the evening—but was having difficulty remembering me. In a brilliant moment of sensitive strategy and rather than risk hurting my feelings, Mr. Norton took my hand in his, smiled mischievously and asked, "My dear, will you marry me?" He was irresistible—and I was enchanted!

For all of us who have been blessed by knowing and collecting our own memories of Elliot Norton—let me extend NETC's heartiest best wishes—Happy 100th Birthday, Mr. Norton....you are so very, very treasured!



NETC Newsletter

The NETC Newsletter is written and published for members of NETC and is distributed free to all members as well as to other theatre organizations. The NETC Newsletter is published four times a year with deadlines on August 15th, November 1st, February 15th and May 1st. Issues include Cover Stories, Ovarions, Opportunities, Area News, Special Features and Upcoming Events. Individuals and organizations are encouraged to submit articles for each issue. All articles should be submitted Microsoft Word or embedded in email to: PMarsh0613@aol.com.

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Contact Peter Marsh, Vice President of Communications at PMarsh0613@aol.com, call 617-424-9275, or visit us on the web at www.NETCOnline.org!



Join a Community Theater And See the World!

The actors chosen for the cast of Theater Company of Saugus's production of Jean-Claude van Itallie's *Interview* were very pleased to appear at the annual EMACT Community Theater Drama Festival in Waltham Massachusetts but they never expected that it would take them on a trip to Europe!

The cast and crew of Theater Company of Saugus's production of *Interview* have been invited to Brussels, Belgium—Jean-Claude van Itallie's birthplace—to represent the United States at an International Festival scheduled there this summer.

Making the finals at the EMACT event was exciting. Exhilaration hit an all-time high when the show was chosen at the September New England Regional Festival (NERF) to represent the region at the National Festival, AACT/Fest 03. November brought still more thrills when they performed for the playwright and NETC attendees at the convention in New Hampshire. Now, even before the June Nationals in Torrington, Connecticut, the ecstatic cast and crew have been invited to Brussels, Belgium—Jean-Claude van Itallie's birthplace—to represent the United States at an International Festival scheduled there this summer.

The Saugus journey began at the 49th Annual Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theaters (EMACT) Drama Festival held at Brandeis University in Waltham. Every other year, winners of this Festival, and others throughout the region, go on to the NERF to compete to represent New England. The NERF winner is then selected for the Nationals, sponsored by the American Association of Community Theatre.

Princess Grace of Monaco was instrumental in establishing an International Community Theater Festival in Monaco and the practice has since spread throughout the world. National Festival contestants are invited to International Festivals as close as Nova Scotia and as far away as Japan. The system presents a unique opportunity for Community Theater participants, who usually participate in theater quite close to home, to experience theater and meet participants from all over the US and the world.

Though the national festival cycle is only every other year, state organizations throughout New England celebrate and compete at local festivals on the "off years". At the New Hampshire Community Theater

Association (NHCTA) in March, four groups competed for awards, including "Best Production", won by Community Players of Concord's *Baby*. The Maine Association of Community Theaters (MEACT) has scheduled their annual One Act Play Festival, a non-competitive event, May 2–3 at the Great Falls Performing Arts Center, Auburn, Maine. May 23–25 is a very big weekend, when both the Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theaters (EMACT) and the Community Theater Association of Western Massachusetts (CTAWM) will put up their annual festivals at Brandeis University, Springold Arts Center, Waltham, MA and in Easthampton, MA, respectively. This is the 50th year for the festival now run by EMACT, making it the oldest and one of the largest festivals in the nation.

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It's been 30 years since the national festival was presented in New England and it has a very special setting this year. AACT/Fest 2003 will be held in Torrington, Connecticut, June 25–28, 2003, at the beautiful, newly restored Warner Theater. Eleven theatre companies chosen as the best in their states and regions will compete at the national level. Critiques follow each show by three top adjudicators—Jack Phillips (Spokane, WA), Annette Procnier (British Columbia, Canada), and Chuck Sheffield (Dallas, TX). In addition, there are workshops and panel discussions, opportunities to meet and network with theaters from across the country, sharing ideas, successes, war stories, and the love for theatre. The festivities conclude with a 1930's theme Awards Gala and Dinner dance.

For more information about AACT/Fest 2003 or other community theater festivals, visit www.aact.org. For more information on NE Community Theater Festivals, go to: www.nhtheatre.com/nhcta

Moss Hart Entries Encouraged for Summer Season

Entries for the 2002/2003 Moss Hart Award competition are being accepted through August 31, 2003.

The annual New England Theater Conference Moss Hart award has a two-fold purpose: to honor the memory of Moss Hart, dramatist and director, for his wit and sensitivity, and for his unconquerable enthusiasm for life as well as for his work in the theatre; and to recognize and encourage theatrical productions throughout New England of play scripts which present affirmative views of human courage and dignity, which have strong literary and artistic merit, and which in their productions, exemplify fresh, imaginative, creative treatment within the intent of the playwright.

The Moss Hart Memorial Awards will be presented at the next NETC convention in Providence to theatre groups whose productions most completely fulfill the stated purpose. In order to provide recognition within each theatre division—professional, community, college, secondary school and children’s and youth theatre—up to five divisional awards may be presented each year. One divisional winner will also be selected as the recipient of the Winged Victory trophy, which it will retain for one year.

The entries which have been submitted this year include: *Of Mice and Men, 1776. The Scarlet Pimpernel, Les Miserable (school edition), Oklahoma, The Dream Machine, As You Like, Footloose, Once on this Island, The Tempest, Pinocchio, Fiorello, The Wizard of Oz, Oliver with a Twist, The Secret Garden and Merrily We Roll Along.*

To enter this contest check the web site www.netconline.org or write NETC, PMB 502, 198 Tremont Street, Boston, MA. 02116-4750.

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If so, email their names, emails and phone numbers to us at mail@netconline.org. For each new member you bring us you will get a \$5

Disney’s *The Lion King* to Open as the Inaugural Production at Boston’s Newly Renovated Opera House

Broadway in Boston/Clear Channel Entertainment announced in April, a season of 14 spectacular productions for the upcoming 2003–2004 Season, led by Disney’s *The Lion King* which will re-open the historic Opera House in the summer of 2004. Also among the blockbusters headed to Boston are the smash-hit musical comedy *Hairspray*, Billy Joel’s and Twyla Tharp’s rock ‘n roll dance extravaganza *Movin’ Out*, Tony Award winning musical comedy *Urinetown* and revivals of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* and *Porgy & Bess*, both of which made their pre-Broadway debuts at Boston’s Colonial Theatre. Both parents and children can look forward to the long anticipated arrival of *Dora the Explorer* and the return of *Blues Clues Live! Blues Birthday Party*. Russell Simmons’ Broadway phenomenon *Def Poetry Jam* makes its way to Boston and promises to be a unique theatrical experience.

In keeping with the Broadway in Boston tradition of bringing internationally acclaimed productions to Boston, three leading theatre companies will grace the Wilbur stage this season. Prominent Shakespearean Director, Sir Peter Hall’s Theatre Royal Bath production of *As You Like It*, presented by Broadway in Boston in association with Huntington Theatre Company. The Abbey Theatre’s production of Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* and the astounding Canadian theatre troupe—Cirque Eloize, co-produced with the Fleet Boston Celebrity Series.

Tony McLean, President of Broadway in Boston/clear Channel Entertainment said, “I’m proud to unveil the most exciting theatrical season in Boston’s history. With the addition of The Opera House to our family of theatres comprising The Colonial, The Wilbur and The Charles Playhouse, we look forward to bringing audiences world-class productions that will engage their intellectual curiosity, make them laugh and sustain their spirits. The variety of this season reinforces the commitment to developing a deeper sense of community and a more diverse audience.





Maine is the Site for the 2004 NETC Convention!

Planning is already underway for the 2004 NETC convention, and Maine will be the site. Tom Mikotowicz, Executive Secretary for NETC, and his committee are scouting out exact locations for the convention. One of the objectives for upcoming conventions is to go into areas of the New England states that haven't been host to a conference, and to reach out and make it possible for people who haven't been to a conference to attend. Because the Maine convention was held in Portland, other locations, primarily on the coast are being considered. Camden, Rockland, Boothbay, and other coastal towns are being explored. This convention, unlike those in the major cities, will focus on workshops with leading theatrical figures and be more intimate in scale. It promises to offer a lot of programs to develop skills with well-known practitioners, as well as to interact with other theatre practitioners.

2003 Olympiad in Providence

The Secondary Division is planning the return of the Olympiad at the 2003 Convention in Providence. If you are a secondary school teacher, please mark your calendars for the Olympiad. Your high school students will be able to participate in an informative and exciting day of theater Olympics. Events will include, set design, musical theater, costume design, Shakespearean Olympics, playwriting, improv, dance and much more. Teams will be awarded bronze, silver and gold medals a la Olympics at the end of the day.

A new addition this year for the secondary division will be the College Hour where your students can visit with, and listen to, presentations from some of the area's finest schools of higher learning in theater and musical theater.

New for this year at the convention will be certificates verifying your time spent at the convention in professional development. Massachusetts teachers will be able to take an intensive 10 hour course on Shakespeare for the Secondary Student. NETC is currently working with the Massachusetts Department of Education to offer this course for Massachusetts PDP points.

Keep your eyes and ears open for further news about the Olympiad!

Report on NETC Auditions continued from page 1

shown to applicants and producers alike. Many producers and candidates said the NETC auditions are the best run of any they attend.

Below is a list of representatives of Equity and Non-Equity summer and year-round theatres, professional theatre training programs, theme parks, festivals, dinner theatres, touring companies, outdoor drama, and casting agents that registered for and/or attended these auditions:

Acadia Repertory Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Allan Albert Productions, American Family Theatre, Arundel Barn Playhouse, The Beechwood Theatre Company, Berkshire Theatre Festival, Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre, Booth Theatre, Charlestown Stage Company, Circle In The Square Theatre School, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, Cortland Repertory Theatre, Dorset Theatre Festival, Foothills Theatre Company, Forestburgh Playhouse, GATE—Gregory Abels Theatre Ensemble, Galveston Summer Musicals, Hackmatack Playhouse, Hampstead Players, Inc., Hangar Theatre, Heart to Heart Productions, Hershey Park Entertainment, Lakes Region Summer Theatre, Lakewood Theatre, Lost Nation Theatre, Maine State Music Theatre, Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, The Missoula Children's Theatre, The Mt. Washington Valley Theatre Co., Inc., The National Players, New Bedford Festival Theatre, New England Shakespeare Festival, New London (NH) Barn Playhouse, New York Stage Film Company, Papermill Theatre, Penobscot Theatre Co./Maine Shakespeare Festival, Peterborough Players, Pioneer Valley Summer Theatre, Point Sebago Resort, The Rochester Opera House, Saxton's River Playhouse Seacoast Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare and Company, Shakespeare Productions, Inc., The Theatre at Monmouth, The Theatre Barn, Theatre IV, Universal Studios Japan, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Vee Entertainment Corporation, Walnut Hill School Summer Theatre, Walnut Street Theatre, Walt Disney Entertainment, and Weathervane Repertory Theatre.

CALL FOR ARTICLES!

The Fall 2003 NETC News
deadline is August 15.

Email submissions to
PMarsh0613@aol.com

A Cast of Thousands

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Actors of high school age and up can usually deal with cuts in casting. We tend to set stricter limits on our high school casts, making them smaller than our junior high and elementary casts. If cuts must be made, make them in numbers larger than five so that no one actor feels singled out.

At any level—elementary, junior high, high school, community or professional theater—the director’s prime objective must always be the quality of the show. The director’s job is to bring the written word to life and to be faithful to the playwright’s intentions. Large casts cannot be justified in many shows, especially many straight plays. The director, when choosing a show for a possible large cast, must always keep in mind the integrity of the script. If the show cannot be expanded without changing the basic structure and meaning of the story, then another vehicle must be found.

Choosing a Script for a Large Cast

Preparation is the single most important factor of success with a large cast. The script choice is the first step in preparation. When choosing a script for any size cast, keep in mind the following:

- The script must be of high artistic quality and must be well written. It makes no sense to spend months on drivel. No amount of hard work will make quality out of inferior music or poorly written script.
- The director must feel passionate about the play: Much of the feeling for the play will come from the passion of the directors. They must feel this show deserves to be seen and is important for the audience to experience.
- The play should be suitable to the audience: Your audience comes to the theater expecting to see a range of types of performances. Do not go beyond that range and offend community’s religious beliefs or good taste.
- The play must be suitable to the available talent, equipment, facility and budget.
- Musicals work better than straight plays to accommodate a large cast. The script should have large production numbers spaced evenly throughout the show.

Look for a script that has multiple possibilities for a chorus. For instance, *Oliver* has two chorus parts, orphans and urchins. *Annie* has two chorus parts, orphans and servants; *Peter Pan* has one chorus of pirates and one of lost boys. These chorus parts can be expanded to include many people and rehearsed at separate times. The goal should be to never have the

entire cast at rehearsals until later in the rehearsal schedule. Try to create stage time for all of the larger groups in the show. Some scenes may have to change to accommodate equal stage time for all large groups.

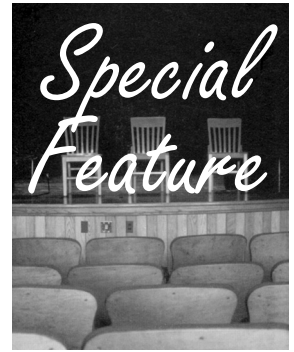
If the show is a musical, the show choice should be based equally on music and script. Many shows have a terrible script and good music or the other way around. It is critical that the music be in the right range and key for your performers. Look for music that is arranged in layers. In other words, is there music with simple melody line that a young or inexperienced chorus could handle and then some more difficult music with harmony parts that will challenge more experienced singers? Choose a show with well-written music that moves along the plot and that allows the audience to know the characters better. Spend time playing the music (or asking someone play it for you) so that you are familiar with each piece and the time it will take to master it.

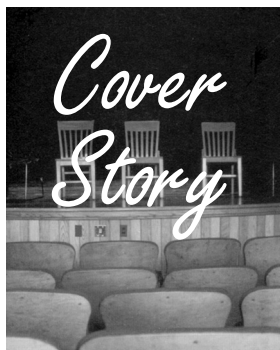
Making a show fit a large cast and still stay within the intentions of the playwright and the limits of your contract with the publisher is a challenge.

Consider the following ideas:

- Write a prologue for the show that introduces the time period of the vehicle. (This may take a bit of research on the team’s part but is well worth the effort.)
- Write an intermission act that ties the two parts of the show together.
- Have students perform as the audience waits to enter the auditorium.
- Balloon up the large chorus numbers.
- Double cast the show—but remember the rehearsal requirements are also doubled.
- Double cast only the leads of the show.
- Double cast the chorus of the show.
- Cast a chorus that only joins the show at specific intervals in large production numbers
- Create a way for part of the cast interact with the audience when they are seated in the auditorium waiting for the show to start.
- Use students as narrators or welcomers.
- Highlight students with special skills (acrobatics, juggling) before the show.
- Encourage students to be a part of the show by working backstage or with props, lighting, sound, ushering or makeup.

(To be continued in the September, 2003 Issue)





John Gassner Award

continued from page 1

When he died in 1967, his wife Mollie established the John Gassner Memorial Playwriting Award in his memory, under the auspices of NETC. Each year the NETC Gassner committee chooses one or two plays to be granted the Award. In addition to the honor, the First Prize carries with it an award of a thousand dollars.

The Gassner Committee has had three of the foremost American playwrights as its finalist readers: in three successive years, Israel Horovitz, Eric Bentley, and Jean-Claude Van Itallie chose the winning play from the finalists.

The Gassner committee is made up of dramaturges and playwrights, including many former winners of the award—people who live with the stage and come to terms with it. The reading process is very selective; in three years, in fact, no award has been given. This year the committee has received 56 plays, slightly less than the recent years' average, many of them from playwrights outside New England.

The Gassner Committee has had three of the foremost American playwrights as its finalist readers: in three successive years, Israel Horovitz, Eric Bentley, and Jean-Claude Van Itallie chose the winning play from the finalists. All have ties to New England: Horovitz, of course, is from Massachusetts, and founded with The Gloucester Stage. Mr. Bentley received his PhD from Yale; Mr. Van Itallie lives in western Massachusetts.

“What’s extraordinary about the Gassner Award is the range of form we see in the submissions,” says Steve Capra, the committee’s chairman. “Psychological realism, political drama, social problem drama, expressionism, high symbolism, epic drama—it’s all there, every year.

“The other impressive thing is the breadth of concerns we see in the subject matter. *Mockba* [1999 winner, by Ginger Lazarus] concerns American college students studying abroad; *The Prodigal* [2000, by James Magee] is about society in Northern Ireland; *Rimbaud with Strings* [1998, by Dennis Porter] is based on the life of Alfred Jarry. We look at dozens of plays every year on every conceivable subject; there seems

to be nothing that escapes the attention of American playwrights.

“Sometimes we’re tempted to give an award to half of them—or at least honorable mention. But The Gassner Award was meant to be very selective. In the very first year, the committee declined to give the award because no script merited it. We’ve retained the award twice since then—including last year’s award. We enjoyed the scripts last year, but none was to be put in a class with previous winners.”

Submissions to the competition are required to have had no professional (read Equity) production when submitted. However, many scripts have enjoyed success on stage after winning the award. *Pera Palas* (by Sinan Unel), for example, has had successful productions in New York, New Haven, and London. *The Jockey* (by Clint Jeffries) has enjoyed several productions across this country.

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—Steve Capra
Gassner Committee Chairman

We can look forward to a production of Joyce Berlin’s winning play, *A Girl’s War*, next season at New Repertory Theatre in Newton, Massachusetts. Jean-Claude Van Itallie chose the script as the 2001 winner. It concerns a successful Manhattan model from Armenia who goes back to her home country during the Balkan crisis. The clash between the two cultures is spread before in startling theatrical tones.

The deadline for submission to the Gassner—April 15th—has just passed. But it’s never too early to submit for next year’s competition. The award is given to full-length, non-musical plays. The guidelines are on the NETC website.

The Road to Becoming a Successful Theatre Company

continued from page 4

tain times of year presented a challenge trying to move sets in and out in less than optimal conditions. Camelot began receiving invitations to perform for the Newmarket (NH) Rotary Club which they accepted, as well as for local hospitals, golf clubs and elementary schools. Wherever they hung their lights was home.

After 21 years of perpetual motion, the Players were still among the homeless and their future was somewhat bleak. They had lost John J. Goodwill, their beloved founding father and first president, who had succumbed to cancer. Drive and ambition were lacking. Then a long-time Camelot member met with a friend who ran the Tyngsboro (MA) Country Club. On a far corner of the Club's land stood a picturesque, rustic building dating back to the 1920s. It was set in the midst of a bucolic grove of pine trees adjacent to the Country Club's outing grounds. The "Lodge" was available, and a home was found.

Since then, with a few lapses, the Players have mounted a production every May and October on the Lodge stage, testing their space with bigger and more innovative sets defying their intimate space's limitations. Productions have included Neil Simon's *Rumors*, *Fools* and *The Sunshine Boys*; David Mamet's *The Water Engine*; and A.R. Gurney's *Love Letters*; as well as productions of *Frankenstein*; *Count Dracula*; *Waltz of the Toreadors*; *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*; *Habeas Corpus*; *Living Together*; *The Lion in Winter*, and many more.

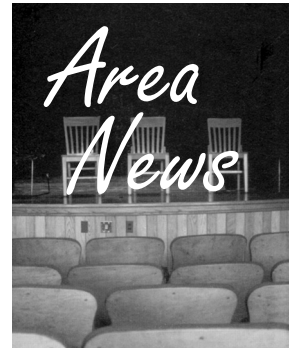
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strive to provide their audiences with entertaining plays and performances. The "Lodge" has had its share of repairs and challenges, better referred to as improvements and upgrades.

The group has caught up with the times with an interactive website, currently hosted at www.jacneed.com/CAMELOT/Home.htm. On the site, you can find information on the Players' history, its members and upcoming plans, online ticket reservations and other events. There are even photos and program covers to bring back memories of days gone by. Keeping within the vision of their founder, Camelot welcomes new individuals who could make a valuable contribution to the group onstage, backstage or in the wings. For more information, call (978) 649-7613, or visit them online.



Huntington Announces Capital Campaign

continued from page 3

The Huntington

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Nicholas Martin and Managing Director Michael Maso, Huntington Theatre Company is Boston's leading professional theatre. In residence at Boston University throughout its 21-year history, the Huntington produces a dazzling array of classic and contemporary plays and musicals for a growing audience of 175,000, including 16,500 subscribers. The Huntington has announced its ambitious agenda for artistic and organizational expansion, including plans to commission, develop, and produce new American plays.

Applications for the Moss Hart Memorial Award

NETC is still accepting applications for the 42nd Annual Moss Hart Memorial Award for the promotion of artistic growth and the development of excellence in theater. Visit: www.netconline.org (or call) 617) 851-8535 for details.

The Moss Hart Memorial Awards are presented at The New England Theatre Conference Annual Convention to theatre groups whose productions most completely fulfill the stated purpose.

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