



Center Stage

Newsletter of the UW Department of Theatre & Dance

Fall 2006

Nutz, Nutz, Nutz!

Seasons greetings from the University of Wyoming Department of Theatre and Dance! We hope this issue of Center Stage finds you well and enjoying the holidays!

For our own part, we are all catching our breath after a very lively and rewarding fall semester! The production season kicked off with the new stage adaptation of Tim Robbins' *DEAD MAN WALKING*, directed by **Rebecca Hilliker**. Both the UW St. Paul's Newman Center and UW School of Law were involved in supporting this very well-received production, as well as an associated staged reading of the docudrama *THE EXONERATED*, directed by UW Theatre & Dance student **Anna Brownsted**. The culminating event in UW's participation in the National Death Penalty Discourse Center's *Dead Man Walking* School Theatre Project was a panel discussion on capital punishment hosted by the UW College of Law.

The production season went in a completely different direction in early November with a savvy production of David Mamet's provocative 1970's comedy of sexual manners, *SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO*.

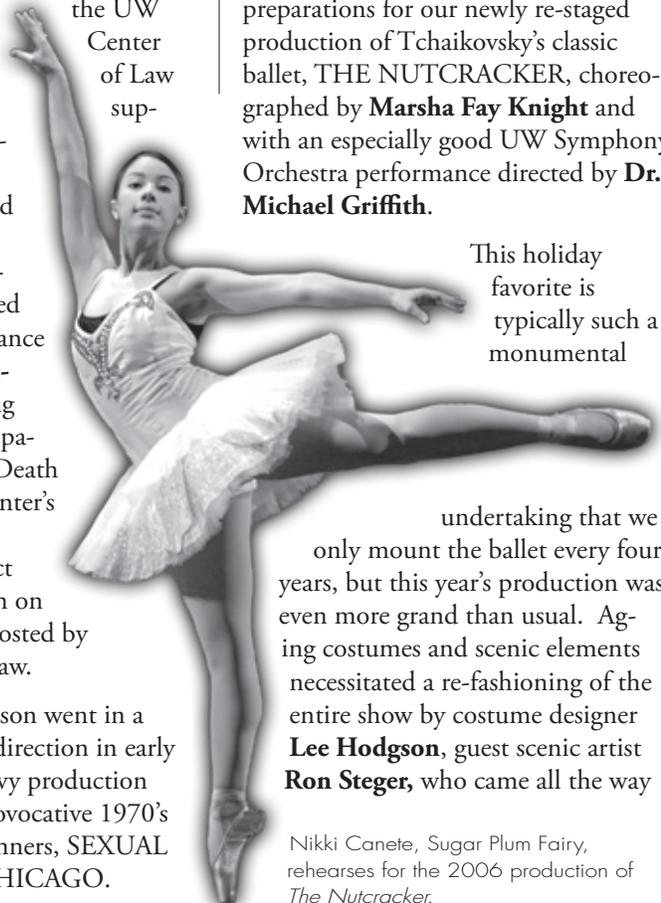
Directed by **Wolf J. Sherrill** in our experimental black box theatre, the production put a very human face on the sexual revolution of the 1970's, as well as the modern dating scene. The show played to great audience response and sold out houses.

While the dancers have left the stage, the dust has settled, the costumes are back in storage, for many of our faculty, staff, and students, the entire fall semester has been consumed with preparations for our newly re-staged production of Tchaikovsky's classic ballet, *THE NUTCRACKER*, choreographed by **Marsha Fay Knight** and with an especially good UW Symphony Orchestra performance directed by **Dr. Michael Griffith**.

This holiday favorite is typically such a monumental

undertaking that we only mount the ballet every four years, but this year's production was even more grand than usual. Aging costumes and scenic elements necessitated a re-fashioning of the entire show by costume designer **Lee Hodgson**, guest scenic artist **Ron Steger**, who came all the way

Nikki Canete, Sugar Plum Fairy, rehearses for the 2006 production of *The Nutcracker*.



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from his new digs in Jamaica to paint three new drops for us, and lighting designer **Larry Hazlett** (see more in UW's Production of *THE NUTCRACKER* Gets a "Western" Update, p. 2). The show went up the first weekend in December to much acclaim and great houses.

Closing out the fall semester was the ONE-ACT PLAY FESTIVAL put on by UW Playwrights **Amy Hollon**, **Christopher Weber**, **Michael Williams**, **Leann Torske**, and **Anna Brownsted** (producing director), with help from ASOPA and faculty **William Missouri Downs** and **Lou Anne Wright**.

As we head into the new year, we look forward to an exciting spring production season (*SPINNING INTO BUTTER, ...THE BODY THROUGH WHICH THE DREAM FLOWS...*, and *PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE*), *KCACTF*, and *ACDFA*. We wish you the best and can't thank you enough for your support of our programs! Drop us a line or stop by any time — we would love to see you!

UW's Production of THE NUTCRACKER Gets a "Western" Update

UW Theatre and Dance mounts THE NUTCRACKER every four years, which is always a tremendous undertaking, but this year's production has been a true labor of love by choreographer **Marsha Fay Knight**, costume designer **Lee Hodgson**, guest scenic designer/artist **Ron Steger**, lighting designer **Larry Hazlett**, and countless students and volunteers.

Based on the early 19th century German fairy tale by E.T.A Hoffman and featuring Tchaikovsky's score, THE NUTCRACKER has become a holiday favorite with the Laramie and surrounding community and features over 50 local children and community members in the cast and choir.



"The most exciting aspects of this production come from the conceptual redirection of the Act I scenes of the ballet, first suggested by costume designer Lee Hodgson and expanded upon by Ron Steger," said Marsha.

"I have always sought Lee's advice following each production of *The Nutcracker*. He has always suggested problem areas and areas of success, and we have discussed new directions for next time," she remarked.

After the 2002 NUTCRACKER, it became clear that many of the aging costumes and set pieces were falling apart and would have to be replaced. But rather than view this as an obstacle, Lee was spurred on to create a really unique NUTCRACKER, one that would not just present the typical romantic "Old World" that is so often the setting for the ballet, but that would really suit the spirit of Wyoming and the West.

"Four years ago, Lee suggested placing Clara's story in her Laramie home, and determined that she be an "Iverson" of Laramie rather than a "Strahlbaum" of Germany or Russia," said Marsha.

When Lee suggested the possibility of setting the story in the Iverson Mansion, the entire artistic team enthusiastically embraced the idea and a 4-year-long planning process began.



ARTIST FOCUS: LEE HODGSON

Leroy Hodgson began his long career at UW Theatre & Dance in 1980, while he was a student in the Master of Arts program. After receiving an MA with an emphasis in Acting and Directing, Lee went on to the California Institute of the Arts, where he completed a Master of Fine Arts degree in Costume Design in 1983. Lee returned to UW not long after in 1987 and he has been the costume designer for our program ever since.

Since his arrival, Lee has designed 5-6 shows each year—well over 100 productions. Lee designs in all genres and styles and his works range from original and contemporary productions like *Winter Moons* and *Angels in America*, to classics like *Twelfth Night*, *Pulcinella*, and *Macbeth*. Lee's designs are so exceptional that in 1986 he was inducted into the prestigious United Scenic Artists Local 829, which only a handful of artists from across the nation are accepted into each year.

A highlight of Lee's artistic accomplishments at UW has been his continuing work on *The Nutcracker*. This year's newly designed production is without question the single most important artistic project that Lee has undertaken and one that should capture the imagination of every individual in this community, and should also spark new interest in the Iverson Mansion and museum. And it's such a wonderfully innovative production, that who knows — it may just attract national attention.



ARTIST FOCUS: RON STEGER

Ron Steger retired as scenic designer from UW Theatre & Dance in 2004 to start a new adventure in Jamaica with his wife Trish. Lucky for us, he's been at work on various projects ever since, including UW's current production of *The Nutcracker*.

Ron joined us for just over two weeks in November to paint three (!) new full-stage backdrops for ACT I of *The Nutcracker*. Ron's professional record as a scenic artist and painter is unrivaled in our region. Our students and staff alike were thrilled to get to work with Ron this fall and gain first-hand experience in helping to bring the new backdrops to fruition.

Ron has painted some of the finest scenic paintings in the country and is well-recognized for his enormous backdrop paintings, which he still paints in the traditional Italianate style. He has designed for such prestigious companies as the Oakland Ballet, the Berkeley City Ballet, the Charleston Ballet Theatre, the Springfield Ballet, and the Colorado Ballet. Before his retirement, Ron received the UW's President's Award, the Governor's Arts Award, the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival Gold Medallion, and the Horace Robinson Award from the Northwest Drama Conference. You can reach Ron at Trish in their new digs at:

Ron & Trish Steger
26 Russell Heights, Kingston 8
Jamaica W.I.



Ron (left) is assisted by Don Turner in painting the Ivinson Mansion interior drop.

Lee began researching the project with Joney Wilmot, the curator of the Laramie Plains Museum, and Mary Mountain, its administrator. Original photographs from the museum formed the basis of Lee's costume designs.



Lee's conception of Clara's family, the Ivinsons.

Lee dedicated countless in-kind hours to the costume shop. He was joined this fall by new costume shop manager Ellen Bredehoft and many student workers and volunteers.

The Ivinson Mansion itself inspired the set designs, which were executed by Ron Steger, professor emeriti in the department and an accomplished scenic artist.

"Lee and I wanted to have within our department some work by Ron, our friend and colleague of many years whose scenic painting we both admire," said Knight. "As THE NUTCRACKER

Lee completed the costume designs in short order because he knew tailoring and constructing over 50 costumes couldn't possibly be completed in one fall season. Lee began costume construction work two sum-



Ron's rendering of "The Party" backdrop, which depicts the Ivinson Mansion interior.



One of Lee's "Snowflake" designs from Act I.

is a rare opportunity to create designs that will be used in future productions, we thought this the perfect opportunity to have Ron back," she added.

The result of this work is a very non-traditional and innovative production of *The Nutcracker* that provides the University, community, and State of Wyoming with a production all their own—one with a feeling of the romantic Old West.



Sponsors the Theatre & Dance 2006-2007 Production Season!

The faculty, staff, and students at UW Theatre & Dance were thrilled this fall when we received a corporate sponsorship for our production season through Wyoming State Bank, a new, locally owned and operated bank in the Laramie community.

Wyoming State Bank President Gary Crum wanted to work in partnership with the department to shore up funding of our production season. The help could not have come at a better time, with the cooperative DEAD MAN WALKING Theatre Project making additional demands on our resources and then the enormous re-staging of THE NUTCRACKER this fall.

"It's a genuine privilege to welcome Gary Crum and Wyoming State Bank to our theatre family," said department head Rebecca Hilliker. "This year they became our corporate sponsors and

many, many years. We hope that all of our alumni and friends will help us to thank them for their generosity and recognition of what our already stellar program might become," she added



Throughout the community it serves, Wyoming State Bank is involved in many civic, charitable, and other worthwhile causes. The bank is committed to providing a full array of financial products and services with a personal, friendly touch and a focus on each customer as an individual.

have enabled us to return to a level of technical support for our season and summer work that we have not seen in

UW Theatre & Dance thanks Wyoming State Bank for its commitment to helping our programs grow and excel!

Patron Focus: Dr. Steve Bieber

Dr. Steve Bieber, Head of the Department of Statistics at UW, may seem from his title an unlikely arts patron, but his love of the liberal arts, as well as the sciences, is clear from the first moment one speaks with him.

Steve grew up in the central valley of California, 60 miles from San Francisco, where fruit trees were more ubiquitous than surf boards. While a California native, this future professor was no beach bum—he didn't actually learn to surf until he was in Hawaii in the Navy!

Steve went to UC-Davis as an undergraduate, studying the unusual combination of psychology and math, a harbinger of things to come.

"I'm old school enough to think that universities are sciences married to the arts—the two most divergent areas—and should maintain balance among the disciplines. For me, a university has to have these elements; you have to strike a balance."

Steve's eclectic interests were nurtured at UC-Davis, and he found himself

drawn to many different cultural offerings, even though he didn't regard participating in them as his strength.

"I always wanted to act, but was too afraid to try," said Steve. "But the campus had a great theatre. It was modeled after the Globe, with a 300 degree standing area in the bottom. I went to that a lot as an undergrad," he said.

Now Steve realizes that one cannot teach introductory classes or be an aca-

demic without being an actor. "Every time you get in front of a class, there's an element of that," he noted.

During his early college years, Steve, an avid golfer, was also offered a sponsorship on the Pro Tour, but knowing that he was about to be entered into the now-infamous 1970 draft lottery, he joined the Navy instead.

Following his stint in the military, Steve went to Berkeley for graduate school, eventually earning a Ph.D. in Quantitative Psychology. His continued pursuit of diverse academic and outside interests was fueled at Berkeley by contact with many Nobel Laureates on its faculty, who often gave talks on their work. Steve attended every lecture they gave.

"I used to go to the receptions after the talks to find out who these people were really like," said Steve. "People who you'd think would be the most focused in the world had the most wide-ranging interests. Discovering



Dr. Steve Bieber

that certainly brought a richness into my life," he noted.

"When you talk to better students, they are like that — alive like that, doing all sorts of things and creating things. You just get overwhelmed even talking to them," he added.

After many years of similar engagement with the world at large himself, and then a hiatus while he was raising a family and advancing his career, Steve has once again become a strong supporter of the arts, and of the work UW Theatre & Dance in particular.

"I'm a patron of the arts because

I like to participate in the world," noted Steve. "I have a responsibility to participate in order to ensure that these ventures remain available." Steve takes this one step further.

"How can I become actively engaged in that which has meaning to me? To me I can participate by being there — showing up and being alive and involved are an integral part of a concert or performance," he said.

"The audience really has a role. I interact with my classes in the same way, as if they are a living thing, engaging with me."

Department Gets New Costume Shop Manager

A Wyoming native, Ellen Bredehoft joined UW Theatre & Dance this fall as our new Costume Shop Manager. Needless to say, with this being a NUTCRACKER year and a rebuilding year at that, Ellen hit the ground running in her new position.

Ellen most recently served as Associate Costume Shop Manager at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts in New York City.

She previously worked as Costume Shop Manager for Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, NY, and as a draper at the Huntington Theatre in Boston, MA.

Before moving back to her home state, Ellen also worked with such

companies as Barrington Stage Company in Great Barrington, MA, and the Idaho Repertory Theatre in Moscow, ID.

Ellen is also an experienced stage manager, having served as Production Stage Manager for two seasons at Penobscot Theatre Company/ Maine Shakespeare Festival in Bangor, ME and toured nationally with the Big Apple Circus.

Ellen completed her MFA in Costume Production at Boston University in 2003. She received her BFA in Technical Theater from the University of Idaho and her AA from Central Wyoming College in Riverton.

Student Award Winners Announced

UW Theatre & Dance gives out awards each spring to recognize outstanding students and provide them with financial assistance. Winners for 2006 include:

- **The Jack Oakie Award for Comedy** — *Stephanie Lovell*
- **Jeff Lee Acting Award** — *Thomas Stroppel*
- **June S. Lee Dance Award** — *Anna Keller & Krystal Stovall*
- **Peter Koi Simpson Award** — *Chris Egging*
- **CoCo Kleppinger Scholarship** — *Katie Herbert & Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako*
- **Theatre and Dance Technical Award** — *Jessica Sundell*

Congratulations to our winners and special thanks to those donors who make these awards possible:

- Jack Oakie Foundation
- Pete Simpson & family
- Jeff and June S. Lee
- Kent and Nicko Kleppinger

Faculty Spotlight

Cecilia Aragon published a teacher's resource guide in *Children of the Sun: Monologues and Scenes for Latina/o Youth* by Carlos Morton. The publication is due out in spring 2007. CiCi also toured a production of the children's show ALICIA IN WONDER TIERRA in conjunction with UW Cultural Outreach throughout Wyoming in October.

Casey Kearns has served as scenic designer for Pete and Lynne Simpson's production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL this fall. He is currently up in Cody, WY, getting ready for the show.

William Missouri Downs was inducted in to the Bay City Central High School Hall of Fame. Considering the fact that he almost didn't graduate from high school, he was pretty much shocked by the honor. Unfortunately, because of back surgery Bill could not fly back to Michigan to give the commencement speech. But he feels that this was for the best because if they saw him again they might remember his grades and pranks and withdraw the award.

Rebecca Hilliker is the new member-at-large on the National Executive Committee of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. She attended the national meetings on Lummi Island last summer

Lee Hodgson received an Extraordinary Merit in Teaching award by the College of Arts and Sciences this fall.

After a very productive spring semester hosting the Northwest Conference of the American College Dance Festival and having one of her dance works selected for performance at the national festival, **Marsha Knight** still found the energy this fall to choreograph Tchaikovsky's classic ballet, THE NUTCRACKER.

(Continued on p. 6)

Faculty Spotlight (Cont.)

Leigh Selting received an Extraordinary Merit in Research award from the College of Arts & Sciences this fall.

Wolf J. Sherrill's adaptation of A CHRISTMAS CAROL which was featured in our 2005-2006 production season, is being produced this December by Pete and Lynne Simpson at the Wynona Thompson Auditorium in Cody, WY. Wolf spent part of the summer attending the National Society of Fight Director's Actor Training Workshop in Las Vegas, NV. He received Skill Proficiency Certification in both rapier and dagger and broadsword. Wolf also directed PROOF for the 2006 Snowy Range Summer Theatre and Dance Festival.

Margaret Wilson is the current Chair for the Dance Kinesiology Teachers Group. She recently published "Biomechanical Analysis of Grand Rond de Jambe en L'Air: Skilled Versus Novice Dancers" in the *Journal of Dance, Medicine, and Science*. In October, she presented research on pelvis motion in grand rond de jambre en l'air in Fort Lauderdale, FL, at the 16th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science. Margaret also received funding from the NEA, New England Foundation on the Arts, WAC, and Dance USA to reconstruct the Loie Fuller work "Ballet of Light" and three Bella Lewitsky solos. These works will be presented this coming spring during the performance of ...THE BODY THROUGH WHICH THE DREAM FLOWS..., an evening-length original dance concert presenting stories and portraits of women. Margaret hopes to finish and defend her dissertation very soon and graduate from Texas Christian Women's University with a Ph.D. in Dance this May.

Alumni News Update

Brady Allen, BTD, '95, has been promoted to the Associate Director of Development for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in NYC.

Emmett Buhmann, BFA '02, and wife **Heather Welch**, BFA '05, are expecting their first child in May 2007.

Scott Little, BS, '89, is now technical director for Theater Emory, the production wing of the Emory University Theater Studies program in Atlanta, GA.

Devin Sanchez, BFA '04, has a starring role in **Jim Weber's** (BTD, '93) new short film TEMPS, which is about two long-term temporary employees bouncing from job to job in NYC.

Pete Simpson, BA, '93, and wife Naama moved to Amsterdam (yes, in Holland!) in early November 2006.

Sharon Trautwein, BFA, '00, MA, '03, is in her final year of the MFA Directing program at the University of Idaho. She recently directed the original student-written piece, WORDS, and an adaptation of a

one-man show from August Strindberg's INFERNO. Sharon has a daughter, who turned two last spring.

Garrett Neergaard, BFA '02, will be at the Baltimore Center Stage starting January 2 to do TROUBLE IN MIND, by Alice Childress, a play about a play in the '50's that deals with racism.

Brian Slaten, BFA, '02, was recently in an episode of LAW AND ORDER: CRIMINAL INTENT.



Devin Sanchez in a still from TEMPS.

Jed Schultz, BFA, '02, was recently in the Off-Broadway production of BHUTAN by Daisy Foote. The new drama, directed by Evan Yionoulis, opened at Cherry Lane Theatre on Oct. 29th.

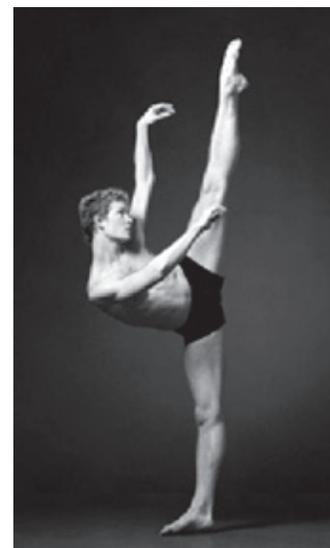
Adam Stolte, BFA, '96, has taken a position as Technical Manager at the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities in CO. Adam and his wife Darci have a new son, Jackson Christopher, who was born in early 2006.

For more Alumni News or to submit a note, please visit www.uwyo.edu/th&d/alumni/AlumniNews/default.asp.

2007 Snowy Range Summer Dance Festival

The 2007 Snowy Range Summer Dance Festival will be held July 18 – 29th. The featured company this summer will be Alonzo King's LINES Ballet. For more details on the festival, visit <http://outreach.uwyo.edu/conferences/dancefestival/>.

The Margie Mains Scholarship and Patricia Tate Memorial Scholarship Fund have been established in honor of these UW dance faculty to provide assistance to students attending the Snowy Range Summer Dance Festival. Donations may be sent to the UW Foundation using the return slip in this newsletter or at <https://uwsecureweb.uwyo.edu/GIVEONLINE/>.



Thank You to 2006-2007 Friends of Theatre & Dance

We'd like to say a sincere "Thank you!" to all our faithful supporters in the 2004-2005 *Friends of Theatre & Dance*. *Your gifts have been instrumental in supporting and growing our award-winning programs!* (We apologize for any errors.)

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Season's Greetings



Original Artwork © 2006 Ron Steger, "Snow" Scene's Design for THE NUTCRACKER inspired by Laramie's Iverson Mansion.

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FOR YOUR SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. WE'LL SEE YOU IN 2006!

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