Happy Holidays to your and yours from the University of Wyoming Department of Theatre and Dance! We hope this issue of Center Stage finds you well and warm and enjoying the holiday season.

The fall semester has been very lively and great fun! Our production season opened with FUDDY MEERS, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Lindsay-Abaire’s wacky and poignant comedy about an amnesiac getting her bearings in a topsy-turvy world. Directed by John O’Hagan, the comedy inspired a new entry for Webster’s Dictionary among one group of area students: “puppet talk.”

Next came ERNESTINE SHUSWAP GETS HER TROUT, Tomson Highway’s sly and darkly comic depiction of four First Nations women as they prepare for the 1910 visit of the Canadian prime minister. Directed by Dr. Rebecca Hilliker and hauntingly lit by Adam Mendelson, the play was followed by a panel discussion with UW faculty and a special guest from the Lummi Indian nation, Francis Jefferson, who graciously also provided us with the voiceover for the show. We’d like to thank Caskey Russell, English department faculty member and interim director of American Indian Studies, for helping to put the panel together with us.

The Musical Theatre Workshop class, under the direction of Dr. Patrick Newell, then presented Jason Robert Brown’s gorgeous song cycle, SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD, which transports viewers through different stories, humorous and moving, about those moments of decision that define one’s journey.
GOING NUTS! (cont.)

But the fall season was overtaken by our updated, Western-style production of Tchaikovsky’s classic ballet, THE NUTCRACKER, directed by Marsha Knight and choreographed by Knight and Jennifer Deckert and featuring faculty Deckert as (Snow Queen) and Lawrence Jackson (Arabian) as performers.

The resetting of our production in 1890 Laramie and the Ivinson Mansion was first begun in 2006 by choreographer/director Marsha Knight and costume designer Lee Hodgson, with scenic designer/professor emeritus Ron Steger. (Please see NUTCRACKER REDESIGN COMPLETED on p. 4.)

The redesign was completed for the 2010 production with the addition of more scenic drops, portals, and costumes, much to the delight of our audiences and an enormous (and enormously appreciative!) invited group of area schoolchildren.

We are currently gearing up for an exciting spring semester, which opens just in time for Valentine’s Day with playwright-in-residence William Missouri Downs’ new, critically acclaimed comedy about real and imagined love, BOOKS ON TAPE.

The show closes just as over 50 of our student actors, designers, and critics head off to compete in the Region VII Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), which will be held this year at Humboldt State University in Arcata, CA. We are fortunate to be sending them off in safety and style on the new Fine Arts bus, which will be an invaluable resource in shuttling students to and from the many festival sites and performing venues.

Next on the docket in early March is BOXED SET, an original suite of vertical and contemporary dance works by Margaret Wilson that explores how our perceptions of dance are altered by the spaces in which it takes place.

Our student-written One-Act Play Festival goes up later in March, and we close out the 2010-2011 season in mid-April with Broadway’s razzle-dazzle smash musical, CHICAGO, directed by Leigh Selting.

Our Guest Artist Series (funded by the Excellence in Higher Education Endowment through the Wyoming State Legislature), continues to bring in top-notch professionals to teach, perform, and work with our students (please see GUEST ARTIST SERIES, FALL 2010 on p. 3). We had several artists this fall and have many more planned for spring.

We look forward to keeping you up-to-date on departmental goings-on and encourage you to send us your news as well. Thanks for your support of our programs and the best to you and yours this holiday season. Feel free to visit us any time—we’d love to see you!
FALL 2010
GUEST ARTIST SERIES

This fall our Guest Artists Series, which is sponsored by the Wyoming State Legislature through the Excellence in Higher Education Endowment, brought in the following artists.

Vocalist, pianist, and film and stage composer Kathryn Bostic was in residence in October to work with students in all aspects of our programs. Bostic has composed music for numerous plays, films, and concerts. She is a recipient of a Sundance Fellowship for Film scoring and a Project Involve Fellowship from Film Independent. Theatre credits include RADIO GOLF and GEM OF THE OCEAN (w/August Wilson); BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO (w/Moises Kaufman and Rajiv Joseph); ECLIPSED and OF EQUAL MEASURE (The Kirk Douglas Theater); DEATH AND THE KINGS HORSEMAN (Syracuse Stage), HARLEM (Kennedy Center); LITTLE WOMEN (Cornell University’s Schwartz Theater), THE BALLAD OF EMMETT TILL (The Goodman Theater), EMERGENCY (The Geffen Playhouse), HOME (The Signature Theater), IN THE CONTINUUM (Santa Barbara Ensemble Theater).

As a vocalist and pianist, Kathryn has performed in various clubs and festivals in the U.S. and abroad. She has toured and recorded with a variety of artists including k.d. Lang; Ryuichi Sakamoto, and John Hiatt, and is working on her own CD.

Accomplished Second City Theater alumni Rick & Laura Hall were in residence in August to work with student performers and playwrights, giving workshops on acting, musical theater, auditioning and playwriting. The Halls also presented the new original short film, SLICE OF PIE.

Rick Hall is a writer/actor/producer who spent many years on the Chicago theater scene before joining Hollywood’s film and television community. He has been involved with several films and a variety of television shows, such as “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” “24,” “Without a Trace,” “Seinfeld,” “Saving Grace” and “Everybody Loves Raymond.” Laura Hall is probably best known as the improvisational pianist on television’s “Whose Line Is It Anyway.” She also performed on “The Drew Carey Show” live episodes, and has toured the country doing live performances with “Drew Carey and the Improv All Stars.”

Dance specialist Richard Harvey was in residence during the first two weeks of November to teach all levels of jazz, modern, and ballet and to present on career paths in dance.

He began his dance training with Ballet in Northern California, and went on to the Gus Giordano Dance Center in Chicago, where he later became a soloist for the Gus Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago. Harvey has performed with many contemporary companies around the world, including among others: Le Ballet “Why Not in Paris, Danny Burzceski Dance (NYC), Dance Kaleidoscope (Indianapolis) and First City Dance Theater (Florida), and Watson Dance Company. He also served as Artistic Director of the Zurich Tanz Theater School in Switzerland.

Harvey teaches master classes and choreographs around the world and is a guest teacher and performer at the University of Arizona in Tucson for the National Jazz Showcase. His interests in body therapy led him to become a Zen Shiatsu Therapist, which he incorporates into his teaching techniques. He has also studied and practiced a form of 3-D movements called Spiral Dynamiks. He is furthering his studies in body therapy with voice and movement, as well as TCM.

Chuck Hudson was in residence as a movement specialist working with our performance students. Hudson is a New York-based Stage Director of Opera, Theatre, and Musicals, as well as an instructor of Acting and Movement Skills for singers and actors. Hudson has directed opera for various companies in the US and abroad, as well as award-winning theatre productions in New York and regionally.

Hudson also works extensively with young professional artists. He co-created Seattle Opera’s Young Artist Program, where he directed productions and developed specialized classes on Acting and Movement skills for singers, and has directed productions and taught master classes for several other training programs. Hudson has served as a guest professor and director at several universities and academies, and is an annual Adjunct Faculty Artist at North Carolina School of the Arts Theatre Department and Fletcher Opera Institute, and an annual Master Teacher at San Francisco Opera’s Merola and Adler Fellows programs.

Ballet specialist Jamie Johnson was on campus November 11 and 12 to teach advanced ballet classes. Jamie has danced with Sacramento Ballet, Ballet Pacifica, Ohio Dance Theatre, Boulder Ballet, and currently, Momix, performing roles from the classical repertoire to those created specifically for her. She is also an accomplished teacher and choreographer, and has taught as a faculty member and guest teacher throughout the United States, while her work has been performed by Boulder Ballet II and Interlochen Dance Ensemble.

Renee Knappenberger was in residence November 4 to hold workshops on performing Shakespearean pieces. Currently, Renee is Director of Education with Idaho Shakespeare Festival, overseeing educational programming, including directing the Idaho Theatre for Youth touring performances, and she also teaches at Boise State University and oversees the International Baccalaureate Theatre Arts Program at Riverstone International School.

Renee previously served as Theater and Arts Education Director for a Chicago public school, attempting to expand students’ literacy through theater and the arts. While there, she also worked with Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, The Children’s Theatre, and Another Chicago Theatre Company (ACTC) as an actor and teacher. Renee also has worked with Seattle Children’s Theatre, Company of Fools (Hailey, ID), Boise Contemporary Theater and Alley Repertory Theatre as an actor and teacher.
UW Theatre and Dance mounts THE NUTCRACKER every four years, which is always a huge undertaking, and this year's production was no exception, with the completion of the resetting of the ballet in 1890 Laramie by costume designer Lee Hodgson, guest scenic designer/painter Ron Steger, scenic faculty Casey Kearns, lighting designer Adam Mendelson, technical director Shaun Sorensen, shop foreman Donald Renaud-Turner, costume shop director Carole Urquhart, 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. This year's production is choreographed by dance faculty Marsha Knight (Act I) and Jennifer Deckert (Act II).

Knight noted that UW’s 2010 production continues the resetting of the ballet in 1890s Laramie at the Ivinson Mansion with new scenic drops and Western-inspired costumes.

“The project of a total scenic overhaul of the piece necessitated a two-step process,” said Knight.

“Three drops were designed and painted by professor emeritus Ron Steger for the 2006 production, and this year’s NUTCRACKER will include the completed scenic designs with three new portals, a vista of the Laramie Valley (inspired by M.D. Houghton), which will be seen during the Overture, and a new Act II drop,” she added.
soon became an “Ivinson” of Laramie rather than a “Strahbaum” of Germany or Russia, with the setting, costumes, and characters re-imagined as part of Laramie’s Old West.

Original photographs and research conducted at the Laramie Plains Museum with Joney Wilmot and Mary Mountain have formed the basis of Hodgson’s costume designs, while the Ivinson Mansion itself inspired the set designs, which have been executed by Ron Steger, professor emerati in the department and an accomplished scenic artist.

“The specific choices made by designers Lee Hodgson and Ron Steger take make an often vaguely-placed story quite immediate and meaningful,” said Knight.

For example, folk heroes like the “Hole-in-the-Wall Gang” and Cattle Kate are the romantic models for the mice in Clara’s dream, who are, of course, battled by the U.S. Calvary, and the interior and exterior of the Ivinson Mansion figure prominently in the drops.

“Symbols of this early Laramie settlement—of cowboy rope, timber saw, railroad, the university, ‘life’ on First Street, and so on—are embedded in the designs,” said Knight.

“We are presenting something very unique with this ballet. The beauty is in the details! We hope audiences enjoy it,” she added.
ALUMNI NEWS

Devin Sanchez, BFA, ’04, has a new web show, STOOP SALE, being picked up that is pretty fun. (Note that Stephanie Lovell, BFA, ’06 has a small part.) You can watch it at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqyQeVKRaEc.

Chris Egging, BFA, ’08, recently completed his MFA at UH. One of his final roles was Valmont in DANGEROUS LIAISONS, which he called “[A] great challenge. And an amazing play. So much fun to finish up grad school by wrapping myself around a character like that.” In August, Chris postponed his move to NYC and headed to Washington, D.C., to play Oberon for the National Players tour out of the Olney Center. His contract lasts until May 2011, for which he is very excited.

Garrett Neergaard, BFA, ’02, is currently playing Wilbur in CHARLOTTE’S WEB at Two Rivers Theater in Red Bank, NJ. Next, Garrett will head to the Humana Festival to do a play directed by Steve Cossen. Adds Garrett: “And then, most strangely, a short film I made with some friends through an improved-based script and a budget of $500 has made it into Sundance. I’m pretty shocked.”

Mike Mahlum, BFA ’01, and wife Jackie are expecting their first child in May 2011. They are about to move to Chicago, where Mike will continue to work with Visual Terrain. Mike had the privilege of lighting the Halloween party at the White House this year.

Tiffany McCann, BFA, ’05, is still living in Gillette and is in her second year with Live 2 Dance. She currently teaches ballet, lyrical, musical theater, and an adult tap class. Tiffany also works at Lakeview Elementary as their Building Fitness Coordinator and part of their Activity Club. Her daughter Samara just turned one year old. Says Tiffany: “I don’t know where the time has gone, but I love being a mom and watching her grow. Hope all are doing well! Take care!”

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

William Missouri Downs directed plays at the Telluride Rep. in Colorado and the Bas Bleu Theatre in Fort Collins. He also had ten productions of his plays in theatres all around the United States and in Canada.

In addition, he had two monologues published in Exceptional Monologues (Samuel French), and his play FORGIVING JOHN LENNON won the Millennium Playwriting Contest @ SteppingStone Theatre Company, New York City. FORGIVING JOHN LENNON will premiere at the Detroit Rep in March.

Dr. Rebecca Hilliker will become the National Vice-Chair of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival this coming April.

This winter, she will be serving as the national representative to the Region I and Region IV KCACTF festivals, holding town meetings, judging the Irene Ryans acting competition, and conducting directing workshops, as well as managing the National Selection Team.

Congratulations to John O’Hagan, who received an Extraordinary Merit in Teaching Award from the College of Arts and Sciences.

Lou Anne Wright was an actor for the Telluride New Play Festival in July of 2010 in Telluride, CO. She also served as voice and speech coach for the winning entry of the Telluride Rep’s Playwriting contest.

For the Department of Theatre and Dance, Lou Anne was voice and speech coach for CRIMES OF THE HEART, HAMLET and ERNESTINE SHUSWAP GETS HER TROUT.

Lou Anne is currently working on the third edition of her textbook The Art of Theatre Then and Now, published by Wadsworth.
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UW Theatre & Dance extends to you our best wishes for a joyous holiday season and our sincere thanks for your support throughout the year.

We’ll see you in 2011!