

Center Stage

WINTER 2012

Newsletter of UW Theatre & Dance

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Profile



A scene from FROM THE ASHES: A CINDERELLA BALLET



A CINDERELLA STORY

Winter has snuck up on us here in Laramie after one of the mildest falls on record. The students, faculty, and staff of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Wyoming wish you and yours the warmest and brightest of holiday seasons.

Each year, when setting our production season, we weigh first the needs of students in producing a wide range of contemporary, classical, and new or experimental works and in offering as many performance opportunities as possible, and also the needs of our faculty in producing meaningful artistic work. We balance these priorities against the realities of the calendar and the production resources we have available before making our final season choices.

This fall production season has been ambitious in scope, but it has resulted in some truly fine work from all involved.

The season opened with *BLITHE SPIRIT*, Noel Coward's classic drawing room comedy about an urbane couple who get more than they bargained for when an uninvited guest from the great beyond crashes their light-hearted after-dinner séance. Directed by **Lee Hodgson**, the play was well-received by audiences, and featured the costume designs of senior **Sarah Varca** and the scenic designs of senior **Derek Epstein**. Designing for a main stage production is no small feat and a capstone experience for those students who merit the opportunity, and Sarah and Derek and their faculty mentors **Lee Hogson** and **Casey Kearns** handled the challenge with considerable aplomb.

Nearly concurrent with *BLITHE SPIRIT*, a children's dance production exploring the mythology and evolution of whales entitled, *EVOCETE:THE BIG BLUE JOURNEY*, was produced for area schools and the public over several performances. Initially created by **CiCi Aragon's** Theatre for Young Audiences students, the dance

cont. on page 2



UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND DANCE

A CINDERELLA STORY (cont.)

production of EVO-CETE was a collaboration of faculty and guest artists in the UW Departments of Theatre & Dance and Geology and Geophysics and the Program in Ecology (PiE), as well as Wendy De La Harpe and Dare to Dance, Landee Lockhart, and the Laramie High School Dance Team.

Next up in the regular season was MARAT/SADE, Peter Weiss' unyielding and extraordinary exploration of madness and revolution. Directed by **Dr. Rebecca Hilliker** and playing to sold-out audiences, MARAT/SADE is a historically important work that presents unique demands on our student performers, who must grapple not only with the asylum inmates that they play, but also the characters these inmates portray in the on-site theatrical production.

Our student playwrights and directors produced a series of short plays and student-directed one acts with assistance from **William Missouri Downs**, **Rebecca Hilliker**, and **John O'Hagan** in mid-November, while the Peter Koi Simpson family joined us November 16 for a special presentation of JOHN BROWN'S BODY (please see JOHN BROWN'S BODY Features Pete & Lynne Simpson Family, p. 9). The Musical Theatre Workshop class also produced MY JO under the direction of visiting musical theatre faculty member **Joey West** at the end of the month.

We have just wrapped our production of Jennifer Deckert's original evening-length ballet, FROM THE ASHES: A CINDERELLA BALLET. A modern take on the classic fairy tale, FROM THE ASHES was a visually stunning and sophisticated presentation that showcased the many talents of not only choreographer/director Deckert, but also design faculty **Lee Hodgson**, **Casey Kearns**, **Sharon Huizinga**, and technical faculty and staff **Shaun Sorensen**, **Don Turner**, and **Steve Hodder** (please see Behind the Scenes on p. 4). The show will soon be touring at selected locations throughout the state.

We will hit the ground running this spring, beginning with the farce BOEING, BOEING in February, directed by **Leigh Selfing**. This high style, knee-slapping romp through the age of glamorous, jet-setting air travel follows vintage 1960's playboy Bernard as he juggles and fumbles romances with three gorgeous "air hostesses."



Charlotte Corday (Kat Cordes) and Duperret (James Wagner) in a scene from MARAT/SADE

As soon as the set is struck our students and faculty will leave for Region VII Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) at American River College in Sacramento, CA, where they will compete in several performance and technical categories.

The spring dance show, VARIEGATIONS, will run in early March and feature contemporary ballet, modern, and jazz pieces by dance faculty **Lawrence Jackson**, **Marsha Knight**, and visiting faculty member **Rachael Shaw**, as well as guest artist **Andre Mergedichian**.

In mid March, our technical and design students and faculty will head to the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) annual conference in Milwaukee, WI, while our dance students and faculty will attend the American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA) festival at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah.

Closing out the 2012-2013 season will be one of Shakespeare's funniest comedies, TWELFTH NIGHT, OR WHAT YOU WILL. Directed by **John O'Hagan**, this tale of mistaken identities, unrequited desire, and miraculous discoveries will have a fun setting and concept that you won't want to miss!

Before the summer theatre and dance season can get underway in June, we should be breaking ground on the long-anticipated renovation and expansion of the Fine Arts Center (see Fine Arts Center Building Update, page 9). The multi-year process is moving forward to the construction phase and it appears that we will have construction news to report to you soon!

Please watch for news of our spring guest artists and upcoming summer season, as well as construction progress and departmental goings-on. We encourage you to send us your news, and please feel welcome to stop by and visit us at any time.

Thank you for your interest in and our support of our programs, our production season, and our students! We wish all good things for you and yours this holiday season.



Cinderella and the Stepsisters in Jennifer Deckert's FROM THE ASHES: A CINDERELLA BALLET.

FALL 2012

GUEST ARTIST FOCUS: JOHN EZELL

This fall, UW Theatre & Dance's Guest Artists Series — which is sponsored by the Wyoming State Legislature through the Excellence in Higher Education Endowment — hosted several artists, most notably, Scenic Designer John Ezell, whose work *Bold Strokes and Finesse: The Stage Designs of John Ezell*, was exhibited at the University of Wyoming Art Museum.

Events associated with the exhibition included workshops with students, an Art Talk featuring Ezell on October 15, and a Gallery Walk Through on October 16.

John Ezell has created stage designs for notable American dramatists, including Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, and George Abbott. His productions have been seen in such prestigious venues as the New York Shakespeare Festival, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, the Royal Danish Ballet in Copenhagen, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Ezell is known for his experimental use of polystyrenes and vacuum-formed thermoplastics, and designs that respect the playwright's textual components while infusing Ezell's own sense of eclecticism, scholarship, and art history.

Ezell is the recipient of nine Critics' Circle Awards, the Award for Experimental Television Art at the International Non-Commercial Television Festival in Milan, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Award for Excellence. Ezell is the Hall Family Foundation Professor of Design at the University of Missouri, Kansas City.

Bold Strokes and Finesse was originally curated by Gene Emerson Friedman, assistant professor of scenic design at the University of Missouri and debuted at the 2007 State Expo in Phoenix.

The exhibit and associated events were sponsored in part by FMC Corporation, UW Theatre & Dance's Guest Artist Series, and the UW Art Museum Gala Funds.

John Ezell (American) *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

By Rupert Holmes based on the novel by Charles Dickens, 2004-2005, directed by Victoria Bussert, choreographed by Janet Watson, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, courtesy of the artist





BEHIND THE SCENES: THE MAKING OF FROM THE ASHES

Performing live is exciting for actors and dancers not only because of the immediacy of the experience, but also because of the relationship of the performers and the audience. Each night, the performance changes as those on stage take in the reactions of those off, and this interaction makes the art piece what it is. But what goes on before the curtain rises is usually an unknown to most of our patrons.

On the following pages is an overview of the inspiration behind Jennifer Deckert's original work, *FROM THE ASHES*, and the creative visions of our designers that helped to bring this Cinderella ballet to life. *This material has been adapted from the student study guide prepared by Cici Aragón's Theatre for Young Audiences class (Anna Burr, Brooke Benson, Jessica Elder, Ashley Postma, Jodi States, and Kaila Mills).*

This edgy, sophisticated reframing of the Cinderella story offered both creative opportunities and challenges to the design team, especially as Deckert had several distinct conceptual spaces she wanted to portray in the ballet, including:

- The Internal World, or Cinderella's reality and existence from her own perspective,
- The World of Court and Ball, a decadent but conformist world that disintegrates under the pressure of Cinderella's and the Prince's rejection of it, and
- The World of Divinity meets Divinity, Cinderella's encounter with her spiritual/intellectual soul mate, the Prince.



THE INSPIRATION: Notes from the Director and Choreographer, Jennifer Deckert

As a young girl, I grew up in a ballet world steeped in the traditions of fairytales, most of them ending with a handsome prince sweeping the princess off her feet and, of course, living happily ever after. I still believe in fairy tale endings, but see that the journey getting there

might be a bit more complex than putting on a glass slipper.

As I began research for this project, I spent much of my time dissecting the stereotypes and questioning the expectations created by the western version of Cinderella. I discovered that the story I truly wanted to tell was not that of being saved by a prince, but rather a story of mutual exploration, self-discovery, and, above all, risk.

FROM THE ASHES is the story of everywoman as she struggles to find her true voice, daring her prince to meet her in a place beyond expectations. This is a story about loving with full disclosure and I present this work as my vision of a truth wrapped in a fairy tale.

"What if we stopped to question, what if we allowed ourselves to take a risk, what if we had the courage to remove our layers and expose our true selves? Who would stand by us?"



COSTUME DESIGN: Lee Hodgson

The World of the Court and the Ball in Deckert's reimagined Cinderella story is superficially conformist, decadent, and off-kilter.

To evoke this world, costume designer Lee Hodgson first began with the idea of a richly hued masquerade ball, in which different couples in the court correspond roughly to the seven deadly sins, which are very attractive to

Cinderella, but also potentially dangerous. The characters are masked and wear many layers as a sign of their social pretension; all refuse to reveal their true selves.

This "world" has a very different look and feel from Cinderella's very restricted, oppressive internal world, which was inspired by the image of a glass house. The asymmetrical shapes of the garments throughout evoke shards of glass, and the color palette of the internal world is subdued and congruent with the glass house itself. Layers of dress peel away to a simple undergarments for the "divine" world of the story's end, where Cinderella and the Prince face each other openly.



Hodgson's favorite design was that of Wrath for the ball, because the colors were outrageous and flamboyant, which gave the costume an edgy feeling.

The most challenging aspect of the design for Hodgson was completing the work in time because of the difficulty in constructing asymmetrical garments, while the easiest part was creating the original renderings.



Original costume renderings by designer Lee Hodgson for FROM THE ASHES: A CINDERELLA BALLET.



SCENIC DESIGN: Casey Kearns

The goal of the scenic designer is to create a dynamic visual design that invokes the emotional and physical environment of the play or dance piece.

In Kearns' conversations with Deckert, she referred to the idea of a glass house. From here, Kearns' creative process began to evolve. Their shared vision was

to communicate elements that created images of translucence and transparency. Deckert wanted jagged edges, while Kearns

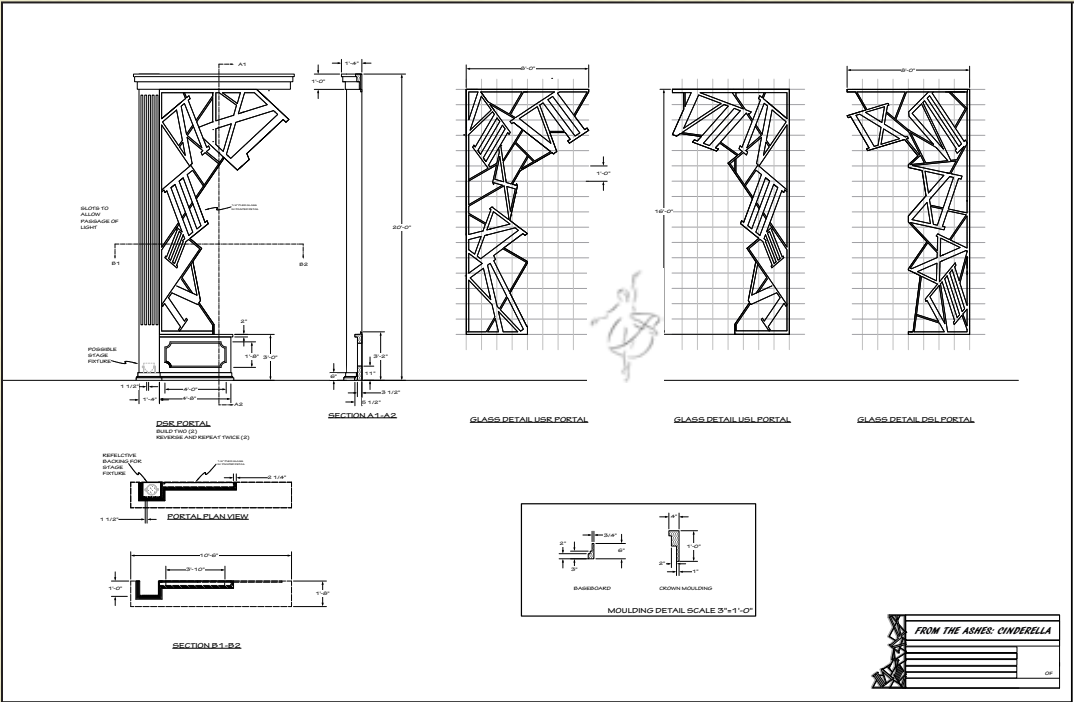
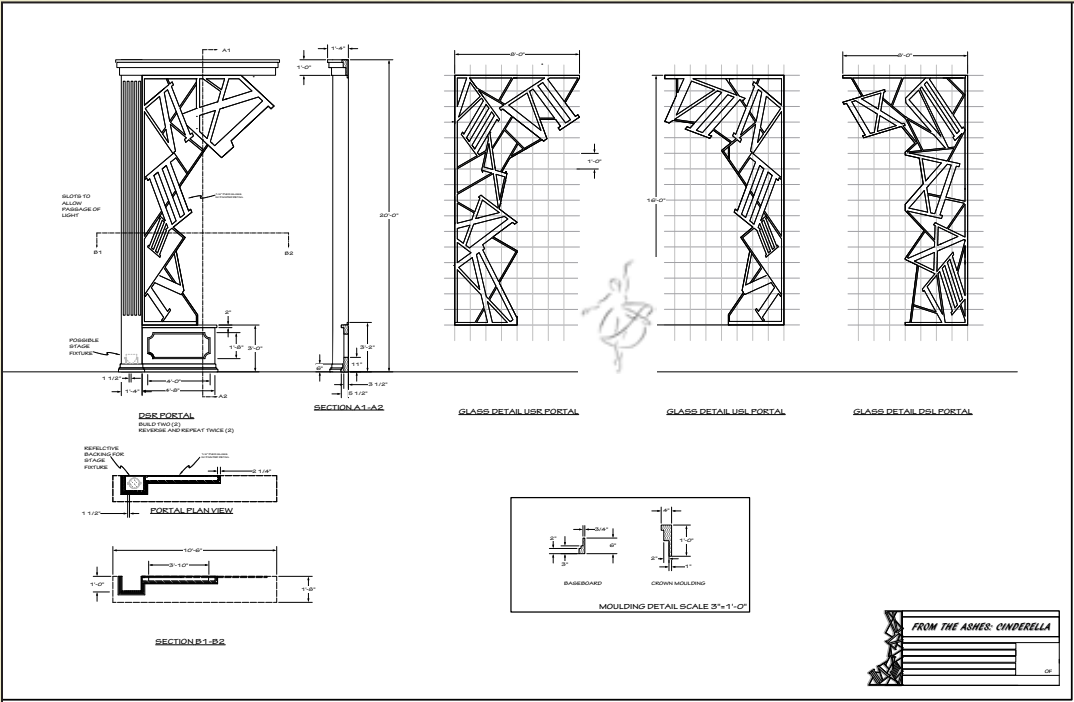
had the vision of soft and graceful, so determining how to incorporate those two different dynamics on stage was challenging.

Kearns began with the idea of a glass box in which Cinderella lives and watches the world outside with longing to join it. The box was fashioned from styrofoam and plexiglass, among many other materials, which presented unique construction challenges.

Part of this world had to disappear in subsequent scenes as Cinderella moved outside her limited sphere, so creating mobility and flexibility in the set was extremely important.

For example, the stairs had to move during the action and were operated by wireless and stage hands pulling them with ropes.

Kearns also incorporated the idea of a "shattered clock" into the design, which was translated into the disoriented Roman numerals seen on the columns in the set. This element reflected the off-kilter world of the court and the ball, and also Cinderella's initial awkwardness and confusion in engaging with it.



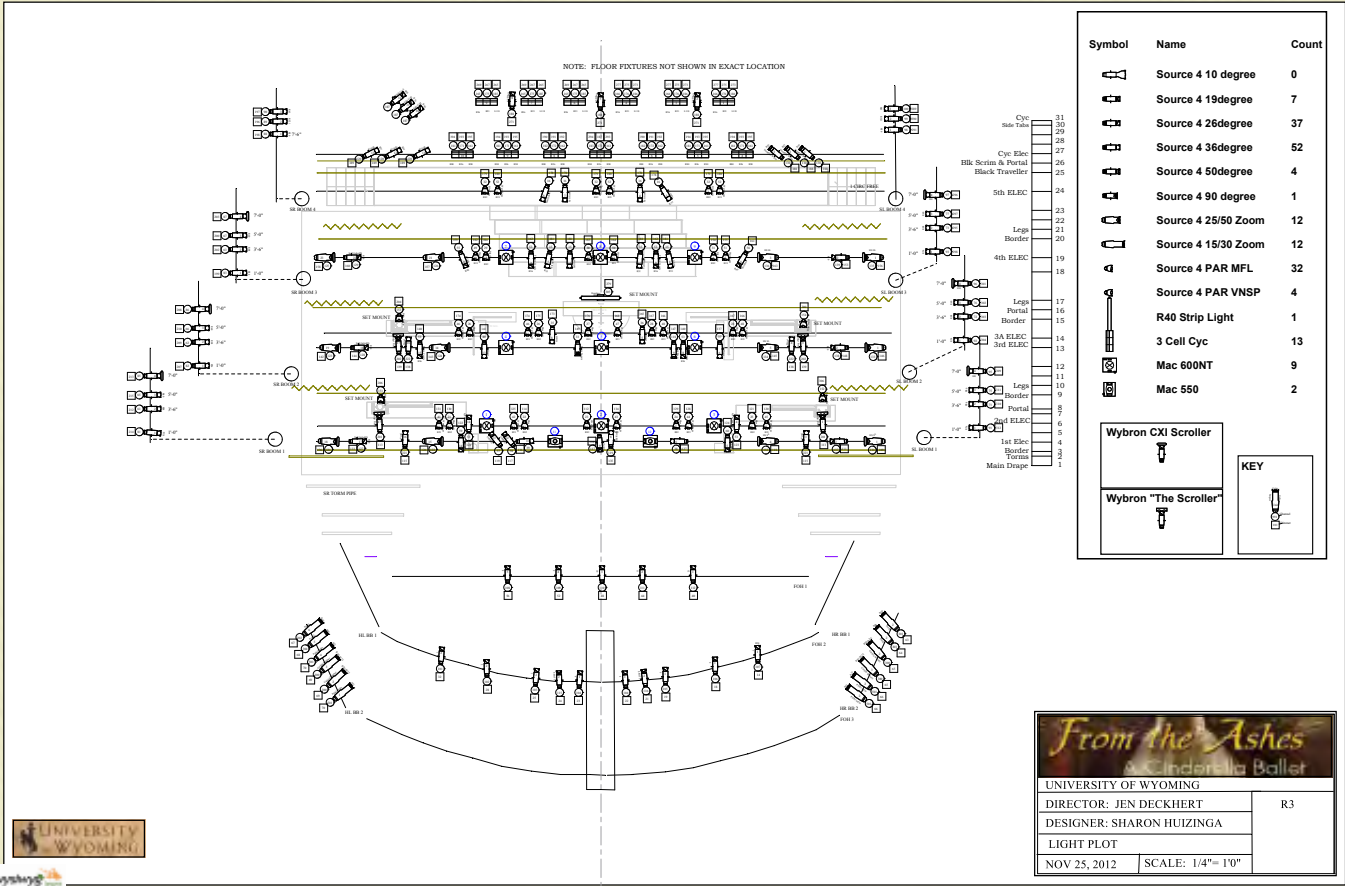
Original scenic design by Casey Kearns for FROM THE ASHES: A CINDERELLA BALLET.



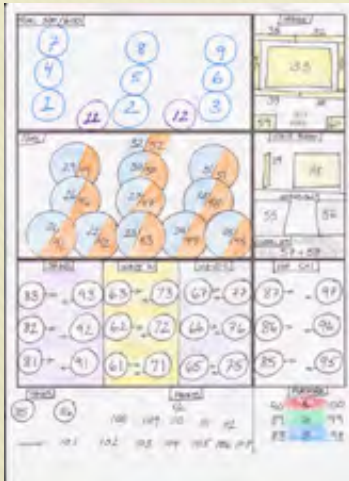
LIGHTING DESIGN: Sharon Huizinga

Huizinga also began her design process through sharing ideas with the director/choreographer. Huizinga's foremost purpose was to create a unified look and feel for the production, which incorporated a new interpretation of the "Cinderella" myth/story.

By working with videos of dancers and through continued discussions with Deckert, Huizinga wanted to use the the subtle and powerful medium of light to visualize a variety of locations within the three worlds of the ballet; to evoke the appropriate mood in a given scene, and to support and reinforce the style of the dance. Huizinga strongly believes that "lighting is the most malleable of all the visual design elements."



FROM THE ASHES - Light Plot



FROM THE ASHES- Magic Sheet

WELCOME TO OUR NEW & VISITING FACULTY/STAFF!

There are some new faces around the department! Please join us in welcoming new faculty/staff members Ginger K Robertson and Steve Hodder and visiting faculty Sharon Huizinga, Rachael Shaw, and Joey West.



Ginger K. Robertson (M.F.A., Costume Technology, North Carolina School of the Arts) is our new Costume Director and Assistant Academic Professional Lecturer. Ginger served as the Costume Director in the Theatre Department at Louisiana State University and Swine Palace Productions for six years. She has spent the last several years as a freelance Costume Draper in New York City and around the country,

working with companies such as The Guthrie Theatre, Paper Mill Playhouse, The Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, John Kristiansen New York, and a variety of Shakespeare festivals.

Steven Hodder has a B.A. in Physics from Whitman College and continued to graduate school at University of Wyoming. He has worked at UW for 35+ years designing, building, and repairing research equipment. He is married to Donna, and has a daughter, Aundrea, at the high school. Donna and Steve own Earth, Wind & Fire Gallery in downtown Laramie. They participate in Square and Round Dancing, where Steve previously had been a cuer and instructor for Round Dancing. They live in the mountains east of Laramie.



Sharon Huizinga (M.F.A. University of British Columbia) joins UW Theatre and Dance this fall as a Temporary Assistant Lecturer in Lighting Design. A departmental alumna, Sharon has been a Lighting Designer and Programmer for over 15 years, working around the world and in many genres, from theatre and live music to corporate events and television. Her U.S. credits range from lighting design for Oberon Theatre Ensemble in NYC to lighting programmer

for *Shrek: The Musical*, to Lighting Director for the Home States Ball at the 2009 Presidential Inauguration (Washington, D.C.). Canadian credits range from lighting design for numerous professional theatres to serving as Lighting Director for the Cultural Olympiad of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games and Lighting Programmer for the 2010 Paralympic Games Opening Ceremonies, to the closing production of the 2005 Canada Games in Regina. Touring Credits include lighting design for

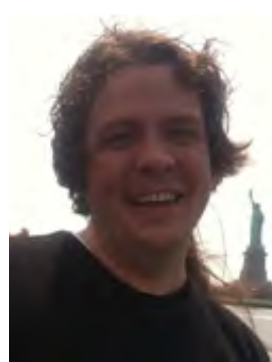
Diana Krall's "From This Moment On" Tour to serving as Asst. Head of Lighting for Cirque Du Soleil's "Dralion," to serving as lighting director for Norah Jones' Summer 2003 Tour, to a production manager and technical director stint for Dance Arts Vancouver's "Fire, Where There's Smoke" Canadian Tour. Sharon is a certified Jivamukti yoga teacher and a recreational mountain climber. She believes that the entertainment world is really fun most of the time.

Rachael L. Shaw is an independent dancer, choreographer, and educator who joins UW Theatre and Dance this year as temporary faculty teaching technique and Bartenieff Fundamentals while Margaret Wilson is on sabbatical.



Rachael received her M.F.A. at the University of Utah, where she also received the Screendance Certificate. She also studied with Peggy Hackney and Janice Meaden in the Integrated Movement Studies program, receiving her certification (CLMA) in Laban Movement Analysis in 2010. She is currently dancing professionally for inFluxdance, as well as working on a documentary for the company.

Before returning to graduate school, Shaw danced professionally with many companies, including Ground Zero Dance Company, Miki Liszt Dance Company, and Starr Foster Dance Group. In 2006, Rachael co-founded and choreographed for R Squared Dance Company. Her live work has been shown at the University of Utah, Virginia Commonwealth University, Sugar Space in Salt Lake City, UT, LiveArts in Charlottesville, VA, and at Performatica in Puebla, Mexico. Her dance for camera work has been shown at the University of Utah and selected for dance dance (a screendance festival screened in conjunction with Sundance) in Salt Lake City.



Joey West (M.F.A. Acting, Minnesota State-Mankato; M.A. Acting, The Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts) joins us this year as a Temporary Lecturer in musical theatre while Patrick Newell is on sabbatical.

Joey hails from Green River, WY, and has served as an adjunct instructor at Western Wyoming Community College, a private vocal coach, and an intern at Treehouse Shakers in NYC, where he worked as a company member in the development of *Hatch*, the first Baby Drama to be produced in the United States. This fall, Joey directed *MY JO* for the Musical Theatre Workshop class at UW.

JOHN BROWN'S BODY FEATURES PETE & LYNNE SIMPSON FAMILY

UW Theatre & Dance was pleased to help present the November 16 performance of Spontaneous Theatre Productions' **JOHN BROWN'S BODY**, the Pulitzer Prize-winning epic Civil War poem by Stephen Vincent Benet.

This one-time event recognized the 150th anniversary of the Civil War and featured all members of the Pete Simpson family, including **Pete, Sr., Lynne, Milward, Maggie** and **Pete, Jr.**

This readers' theatre presentation toured throughout Wyoming in mid-November, including Cody, Casper, Cheyenne, and, finally, Laramie.

In each locale, a local choir performed the music originally written for the Broadway production of **JOHN BROWN'S BODY**.

Spontaneous Theater Productions was co-founded by Pete and Lynne Simpson, and has a reputation for choosing plays that are celebratory in nature. The directors were raised with a love

of history, literature, and the art of great story-telling. **JOHN BROWN'S BODY** fulfilled those criteria. Like STP's former productions of **OLIVER, 1776, CYRANO DE BERGERAC, BELLE OF AMHERST**, and **OUR TOWN**, this play had a magic of its own, augmented by **Larry Hazlett's** lighting and sound design and the chorus from each locale to create an uplifting and moving evening of theater.

Added all together, the Pete Simpson Family has over 200

years of stage experience -- yet this production was the first time they ever all acted together, on the same stage, in the same theatrical presentation.



FINE ARTS BUILDING UPDATE

During this past year, the long process of envisioning, planning, revising, and contracting for an expanded and renovated Fine Arts Center has finally run its course.

We are excited to have received final approval for this project and to be breaking ground likely in May 2013, after the end of the spring semester.

Once we have a better understanding of how construction will proceed and how our summer and academic production seasons will be affected, we will share this information with you.

Please watch for updates on our website and also in our E-newsletter (please E-mail kirisk@uwyo.edu with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line to be added to this list.)



Artist's rendering of the main entrance to the expanded and renovated Fine Arts Building.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR DECEMBER 2012 GRADUATES!

Brianna Boyle
Elisa Campbell
Shannon Coyle
Derek Epstein
Aaron Hampton
Francesca Mintowt-Czyz
Jason Niedbalski



ALUMNI NEWS

Anne Mason, BFA, '11, received two nominations for the 2012 Broadway World Awards for "Best Featured Actress in a Musical" for her work as Tzeitel in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF and for "Person to Watch." Anne notes that "...the awards lie in the hands of voters and I would love your support. Voting is incredibly easy, all you need is an email address. The link for voting is here: <http://sanfrancisco.broadwayworld.com/vote2012region.cfm#sthash.cSb6EyZ1.ZXTBoIsB.dpbs>"

Anne also recently opened her first Equity show at Capital Stage Company: MISTAKES WERE MADE. She is currently an Acting and Artistic Director Apprentice at Capital Stage, and very proud to be associated with a professional company that is truly passionate about the work that is done. For more information, visit the Capital Stage website: <http://capstage.org/thePlaysMistakesWereMade.html>.

Katrina Despain, BFA, '10, has a fun, small role in the beginning of the movie trailer for PITCH PERFECT (2012), shot in Baton Rouge, where she has been working on an MFA in Acting at LSU. You can check the movie trailer out here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siEHekc-1oE>.

You can check out the new commercial from **Jimmie Galaites, BFA, '99**, here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0S1wUw6TcSw&sns=em>.

Martha Slater, BTD, '92, was named Best Actor out of 60+ films submitted for the Cincinnati 48-hour film festival in 2012, which she said was "a huge and complete surprise, but it made me feel really good!" Martha spent last July in Spain walking the Camino Compostela de Santiago pilgrimage (of several hundred miles!) across the northern coast.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

William Missouri Downs is the 2012-2013 winner of a rolling opening from the National New Play Network; he is one of only 30 playwrights in the last 20 years to win this honor. Bill's new play THE EXIT INTERVIEW has the additional distinction of having the largest rolling opening in the history of the New Play Network. His plays have been produced by the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, the Wisdom Bridge Theatre in Chicago, the New York City Fringe Festival, The InterAct Theatre in Philadelphia, The San Diego Rep, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (as part of the AT&T Performing Arts Festival), The Berkeley Repertory Theatre, the Salt Lake City Acting Company, the Actors Theatre of Charlotte, the International Theatre Festival in Israel, the Stadt Theater Walfischgasse in Austria, the Detroit Rep, the Durban Performing Arts Center in South Africa, and over 100 other theatres worldwide.

Dr. Rebecca Hilliker is serving her last year as National Chair for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. This fall, she directed BUFFALO GAL at Bas Bleu Theatre in Fort Collins, and also MARAT/SADE at UW, for which she received a KCACTF Meritorious Achievement Award in Directing, her 12th such award.

Congratulations to **Lawrence Jackson**, who received a College of A&S Extraordinary Merit in Teaching Award.

Marsha Knight received an Individual Artist Grant from the Wyoming Arts Council to help support a week-long trip in October to conduct further research at Ellis Island Immigration Museum for a potential revision and main stage performance and tour of SIX SONGS FROM ELLIS.

Leigh Selting was elected to serve a three-year term as national member-at-large for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre festival.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2012-2013 FRIENDS OF THEATRE & DANCE!

We'd like to say a sincere "Thank you!" to all our faithful supporters in the 2012-2013 *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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Happy Holidays from UW Theatre & Dance!

BEST WISHES FOR A JOYOUS HOLIDAY SEASON AND OUR SINCERE THANKS
FOR YOUR SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. WE'LL SEE YOU IN 2013!