



STAGES

The University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater Alumni Newsletter

Spring 2009

After 25 years, Julian Olf takes his leave

by GIL MCCAULEY

It can be difficult to say goodbye to a colleague who has selflessly given an amazing amount of his time, expertise and resources to the place and people around him. It is even more difficult when that colleague has also been a mentor and a friend. Such is the case for me in bidding farewell to Julian Olf.

Julian has been a caretaker, orchestrator and motivator in the Department since coming to it in 1983. The students, the faculty and Gil's piece continues on page 6. You will find more about Julian and his time in the department on pages 6-8 of this issue.



Katie Lynch and Evan Fuller in *The Chairs*, the last piece Julian directed here. (photo by Jon Crispin)

Megan Cannon's Santaland Diaries

by MEGAN CANNON

I've had a lot of interesting jobs in the last few years. I got to drive the Batmobile and blow things up, make monsters, dance back-up for a well-known rock band (ok, ok, it was Dorothy the Dinosaur for the Wiggles, but to the 5-year-olds, they are like Metallica!) and generally make a fool of myself at Six Flags New England. Currently I work

This spring, we were saddened to learn of the passing of Van Farrier, a beloved member of the local theater community who often graced our stages. We were devastated anew several weeks later to learn that one of our talented alumni, Greg Egan, had also passed. Tributes to both men begin on page 4.

for FoodPlay, a national touring theater company that teaches kids about healthy living through theater and juggling. So when I saw an ad for Santaland Manager at Macy's on Backstagejobs.com, who was I to say no?

What qualifies a person to be Santa's boss? Apparently everything on my resume. I was called in for an interview almost immediately, and it didn't seem to take a lot of convincing to get a job offer. In fact, my assortment of strange jobs convinced them that I could manage Santa during the week and then manage the puppet theatre on the weekends. (Did I mention that I also puppeteered and helped to direct and manage the puppet theater at Six Flags?) It seemed an ideal match. Now came the tough part – to pick myself up and find a place to live in ... The City... duh duh

dunnnnn....

So I did what all people do when looking for digs. Or anything really. I went on Craigslist. Several trips to the city and lots of scary shared apartment situations later and I had secured a beautiful room in large apartment on a charming street in Harlem! With a two month partial leave of absence from FoodPlay, the help of my excellent Assistant Production Manager, and my suitcases packed, I was ready to go.

My first impression of Santaland was, "This place is going to burn down!" I'll explain: The singing tree was creepy, and the snowglobe looked like something out of a Harry Potter movie. I was disappointed that there was no big staircase and slide to kick the kids down, but the mice running around were rather

continued on page 5

Alumni, students, faculty, and staff updates

Do you know what never gets old? Receiving updates from alumni and friends, that's what. Send us your news (at umasstheater@theater.umass.edu).

Alumni

■ **Naomi Bennett '01** attended the Professional Track Circus program at the New England Center for Circus Arts in Brattleboro, VT. This past December, she left her job at the Performance Project to become the Theater and Movement Specialist at the Community Art Center, an arts-based after school program that serves high risk youth in Cambridge. "I love it!" she writes.

■ A **Rob Corddry '93** update for those who like their hospital drama with a healthy dose of satire: check out the WB's web series *Children's Hospital*, written, directed, starring AND executive produced by Rob.

■ **Jane Cox** is among those featured in an extensive article on the John Weidman-Stephen Sondheim musical, *Road Show*, in *Lighting & Sound America's* January issue.

■ Alumnus **Roy Drew**, who attended UMass Amherst as a theater major from 88-91, wrote in to let us know that he

is living in the Providence, RI area and working as a puppeteer and storyteller, performing for day care centers, schools and festivals. He is getting back into acting and recently took an acting class at Trinity Repertory. He's taken some voice-over classes and is pursuing that as well. "I have great memories of UMass having done *Playboy of the Western World* with Ed Golden and Jeffrey Donovan (among many talented others). I also lost several roles to Rob Corddry. (Not to drop names, but whatever!)" he writes.

■ **Sharon Hart** is currently performing with the Gold Dust Orphans in Boston. The group's newest show *of Mice and Mink*, ran in February and March. This was her 7th show with this theatrical troupe and very often she is the only (actual) female in the cast! The group's website is www.golddustorphans.com

■ **Jeannette Esther (Trombley) Hawley '81** filled us in on what she's been doing for the past 28 years — welcome back! Jeannette is currently costume shop manager at American Repertory Theatre and is married, no kids, with "one lovely doggie named Willie." Before that, from 1983- 1990, she ran her own business doing custom clothing design in a studio in Northampton, and from 1985-1990, she was a member of Syllepsis Performance Ensemble with director Katherine Sanderson. After a brief stint running the shop at Stagewest in Springfield, from 1991-1996, she lived in Spokane, WA where she worked at Spokane Civic Theater. Jeannette was politically active during her time in Spokane, becoming involved in starting and/or running: Pride March, Papillon Transgender Support Group, Rainbow Alano Club, Hands Off Washington, 2BWUTUR GLBT conference and retreat, Dyke-O-Rama, Women's Words, Women's Cultural Exchange, Spokane Gay and Lesbian Community For Dignity and Human Rights, and Lavender Rag newspaper, to name a few. Moving to Boston, she chaired the family and friends section of the first Female-

to-Male Transgender Conference in 1997. She ran the costume department for Boston Lyric Opera, then ran the costume shop and taught costume at Emerson College before moving to her current position.

■ **Ari Jacobsen** came to campus in the fall as part of the American Shakespeare Center's production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. He continues to tour with the group, then will be in residence at the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton VA until June 14. He invites everyone to check out his Facebook page, where he has posted his music.

■ **Rafael Jordan** received a positive mention in a *New York Times* review of the Resonance Ensemble production of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

■ **Lucas Maloney '04** has kept busy in Washington, DC since the fall edition of *Stages*. In November, he directed the psychological thriller *Closet Land* with his company Molotov Theatre Group (www.molotovtheatre.org). The company hopes to take the show to Brazil in 2010 as a featured performance in an international Grand Guignol festival. Lucas directed a new musical called *Dream Date* for the Madcap Winter Carnival of New Works and assistant directed *The Cherry Orchard* with Washington Shakespeare Company. Lucas and the other co-founders of Molotov are looking forward to teaching their first Grand Guignol workshop for actors in March and will attempt to defend their 2008 Best Overall Production award in the 2009 Capital Fringe Festival this summer.

■ **Toks Olagundoye** had a small role on *Ugly Betty* during the fall.

■ **Gary Trahan '82** has co-written two screenplays since he was last in touch. One of these, *Divine Intervention*, was filmed in Ware Massachusetts and the surrounding areas. For the past two years, "Gare" has been working at Thirteen/WNET (Public Television) in New York City.

■ **Michael Walker's** new play,

If you have an update for us, please e-mail us at umasstheater@theater.umass.edu or amgoossens@verizon.net. You can also call 413.545.3490 or 413.545.6808.

If that doesn't work for you, send your carrier pigeon to:

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Amherst, MA 01003*

Please include contact information and the year you graduated.

*We'll post your news online at www.umass.edu/theater/ or run it in the next issue of *Stages*.*

continued on page 3

More theater updates

continued from page 2

Aftershock, had a staged reading at Boston Playwrights' Theatre. The cast included Peter Haydu, Dee Nelson, Frank Aronson and Elise Manning.

Faculty

■ Technical director **Michael Cottom** was the Technical Director for NYC's Classical Theater of Harlem's production of *Three Sisters* this winter (UMass Amherst alumnus **Troy Hourie '97G** designed the scenery). He involved several theater students in this professional production. He is scheduled to perform the same role in the next CTH production this spring with plans of offering another professional opportunity to more students. His work in the shop and with CTH was the subject of a cover story in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette's* weekend magazine, *Hampshire Life*, this past March. Michael is also working on a year-long CAD (computer-aided drawing) project with the Mullins Center.

■ **Milan Dragicevich** enjoyed a sold-out run of *Milosevic at the Hague*, a production he wrote and co-directed with Sheryl Stoodley at Northampton's Serious Play. A number of department students were involved in the production

as actors and backstage, including **Adrienne Paquin**, **Dan McNamara**, **Anna Dynarski** and **Eric Rehm**. The group has been invited to restage the production at an international arts festival in Serbia in the fall.

■ **Rob Kaplowitz** designed *Fela!* for Bill T. Jones at 37 Arts (Off B'way) to wide-spread acclaim. Student **Jack O'Brien** was an intern on the show. Rob designed Tarrel Alvin McCraney's *Wig Out* for director Tina Landau at the Vineyard (off B'way), *Time Flies* for director Roger Danforth at Mt. Holyoke with student co-designer Alyse Knox, and designed and wrote music for Lemon Anderson's *County Of Kings* for director Elise Theron in the Under the Radar Festival at the Public (off-Broadway). Currently, he is co-designing *Cuentos De Eva Luna* at Smith with student designer Amber Tanudjaja for director/adaptor Ellen Kaplan, Charles Fuller's *Zooman and the Sign* for director Stephen Henderson at the Signature Theater (Off-Broadway), and David Adjmi's *Stunning* for director Anne Kauffman at Lincoln Center (Off-Broadway).

■ **Julie Nelson** was cast as Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mrs. Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice* at Playmakers Repertory Theatre in Chapel Hill, North Carolina this spring.

■ Professor Emeritus **Dick Trousdell** emailed to tell us that a piece he wrote on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, "Tragedy and Transformation," was the lead article in the Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche, vol. 2, no. 3 (Summer, 2008), 5-38, published by the University of California Press. He gave another paper on the *Oresteia*, "The Wisdom of the Furies," first to the National Conference of Jungian Analysts and Trainees at the Sebago Harbor Resort in Maine, and again for the Connecticut Association for Jungian Psychology in Hartford. Finally, he has been invited by the Petros M. Nomikos Foundation to be one of eight seminar presenters at the "Ancient Greece/Modern Psyche Conference" to be held on Santorini in Greece in

September. His seminar topic will be "Surviving Trauma, Becoming Human: Hero and Victim Roles in Libation Bearers of Aeschylus."

Students

■ **Dora Arreola**, directing MFA candidate, will travel to Poland this summer to teach a Practical seminar, "Meetings with Remarkable Women," for The Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw. The seminar is part of a laboratory of creative research and explores the artistic journeys of women who share a connection to Grotowski's legacy through their participation in the various periods of his life-long practical research. In New York, she is directing the play *UFUF-91/9*, written & performed by Zoe Mavroudi (from Greek), at the Under St. Marks Theater.

■ **Heather Crocker** designed costumes for New Century Theatre's *Well* last summer, as well as Chester Theatre's *Almost, Maine*. She was make-up artist on a domestic violence training video for the Massachusetts Police academy.

■ Last summer, MFA dramaturgy candidate **Emily Denison** was a Literary Intern at Actors Theatre of Louisville where she wrote for the *Pride and Prejudice* and *43 Plays for 43 Presidents* study guides, and the newsletters for *Pride and Prejudice* and *43 Plays for 43 Presidents*.

■ **Thad Kramer** will be Master Electrician at the Utah Shakespearean Festival's Adams Shakespeare Theater in the summer.

■ Directing MFA candidate **Shawn LaCount** was just nominated for a couple of Boston Theatre Awards. The Independent Reviewers of New England (IRNE's) nominated his production of *Assassins* (last summer at the BCA) for the year's "best musical" and Shawn for "best director." "It is kind of funny because I had never directed a musical before and my time at UMass gave me the courage to tackle it," Shawn writes.

— compiled and edited by
Anna-Maria Goossens

STAGES

The University of Massachusetts Amherst
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Stages welcomes articles from students, alumni, faculty and staff. If you have a story you'd like to suggest, call (413) 545-6808 or e-mail <amgoossens@verizon.net>.

Greg Egan (1976-2009)

Don't you love sitting in a crowded theatre as the lights dim and audience chatter subsides knowing we're all going to witness something magnificent? That time is going to slow when the actor we all came to see makes his entrance? We'll fall into his hands, and allow him to work his alchemy, to alter our perspective, reignite our humanity, and enliven our sense of purpose and wonder. We won't want it to ever end, but plays inevitably must. Slowly, we'll put on our coats, dreamily walk to our cars, and go home inspired, a little awestruck, maybe a bit smitten, certain we'll never forget how alive we felt this one special night.

Greg Egan made me feel that way every time I saw him perform. He was a sight to behold, devastatingly handsome and fiercely talented. But he inspired me more in daily life than he ever did on stage. Be it drinking a cup of tea or poring over poetry, browsing a wine aisle at the market or bragging about his little sister, clambering up an impossibly high tree or listening to his friends tell jokes and stories, Greg's love and meditative study of daily life made life itself so much more the wonder.

After college, Greg moved to New York, turned his attention to writing, and fell in love with his gorgeous and vivacious wife, Rachel. They moved to California where he joined the Navy and sailed the seas. Is that an incongruous trajectory for us anti-establishment liberal artsy types to get our minds around? I hope not. Greg lived many full lives in his too short time with us. He was a champion gymnast, an occasional ascetic, a focused scholar, a brave actor, a charismatic entertainer, a skilled writer, an impulsive risk taker, a wine aficionado, a devoted husband, an honorable son,

a proud brother, a true friend. To add courageous seaman and world traveler to that list is hardly a stretch. Had he been any one of these things we'd be grief-stricken. But to have lost a man who lived each of these lives so completely as to become a master of them all is an incomprehensible tragedy. Our world heaves and sobs, and we will forever ache for the kindness and passion and excellence he displayed and inspired.

Of course, the irony is that Greg was never terribly interested in himself, or aware of how special he was. He was so conscientiously observant and intrigued by other people, he barely noticed what we were most interested in was him. He'd simply give us his attention, and we'd let him because the fondness and fascination that washed over his beautiful face when he listened to the people he loved felt like a miracle to be savored once in a lifetime. That so many of us were able to have his eyes emphatically trained on us, and watch his perpetual half smile explode into the full, radiant, real thing on a daily basis ... now that just feels like pure indulgence on God's part.

— Bryn Manion '97



Greg Egan, at top, in a publicity photo from the Department's 1999 production of *The Mandrake*. (UMass Photo Services)

Van Farrier and Verbal Décor

I met Van Farrier in the early 1990's through my colleagues in Sleeveless Theatre, Lisa Channer '89 and Maureen Futtner '89. In 1997, after a bad breakup that left me homeless, Van and his husband, David, took me in. I lived in the mother-in-law apartment over the garage; every night at dinner time my phone would ring with Van on the other end exclaiming, "Mama Rose is cooking – we're gonna eat!"

Van had just come off the road from a nine-month tour of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* as the dresser for the star, Sam Harris. Van wanted a life at home, so he enrolled in nursing school and took a job at the Department of Theater costume shop. But all the while his first love in the theater, acting, was crying, "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

Van's comeback occurred at Hallie Flanagan Theater at Smith College in the spring of 1998, at a reading of Joe Salvatore '97G's play, *full of grace...* Van went on to play the Friar in a department production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1999; he directed my play *The Mad Dad Show* at Hamden Theater that same year; and he acted in the first ever *Play in a Day* Festival in 2004.

Romeo and Juliet, directed by James Vesce '99G, was an extravaganza of stage combat, Pat Metheny music and hip-hop dance. We were teaching the play in Theater 100 (I was T.A.ing under Joe Salvatore, who had taken over for Professor Harley Erdman that semester), and I remember struggling with the concept of "verbal décor", a technique that Shakespeare used to have the characters describe the scene, as sets were minimal in those days. When Van entered as the Friar and began his first speech, I suddenly understood what we had been teaching:

The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,

Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks

continued on page 5

Megan Cannon's Santaland Diaries

continued from page 1

festive. Santaland is in a corner of Macy's on the eighth floor that is only occupied for two months out of the year. Therefore, the upkeep and maintenance is sparse. It's heated to stifling and cooled by opening vents to the outside. My first tasks at my new job were to light the trees and make it snow. Though Buddy the Elf managed to do this in an evening, it took us a bit longer.

First, lighting the trees. There didn't seem to be a lot of outlets, so like Ralphie's dad, we just plugged them all in on top of each other. Sure there were some sparks, but they didn't last long. That left us with large piles of green cord and long rods of connected plugs. We did what comes naturally to those trying to bring Christmas cheer to the world and covered them all up with layers of synthetic snow. On top of the blankets of snow we piled different kinds of glittery confetti. It was quite pretty, and not at all flammable (ahem).

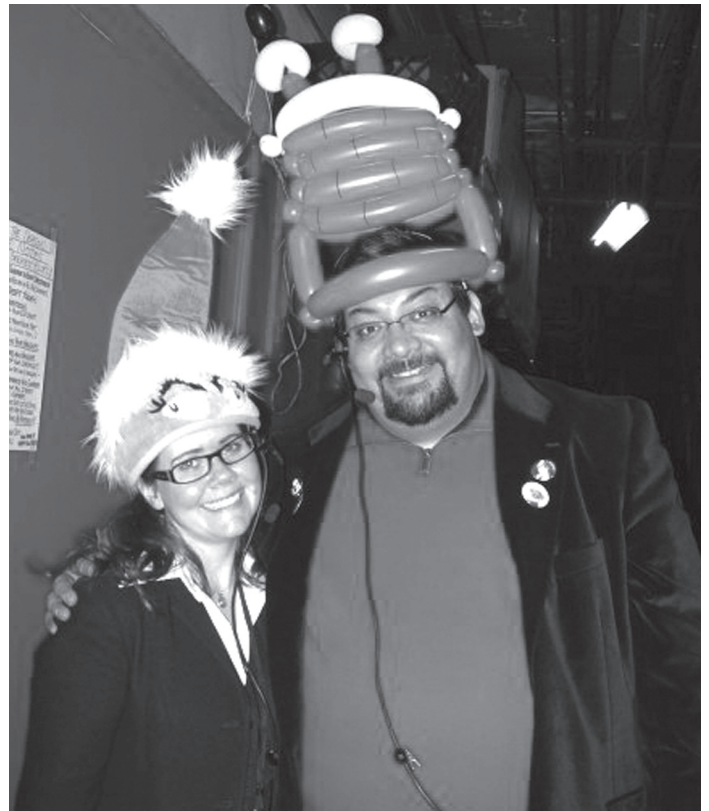
With Santaland sparkly (and sparking) and ready to go, we invited the elves in for their training. I figured the training would include making etch-a-sketches, eating from the major food groups (candy, candy canes, candy corns and syrup) and discouraging tiny people from becoming dentists. Imagine my surprise when the elves were full size people made up of out-of-work actors and actors who don't have jobs. It made for quite a bit of drama.

Training finished, we were ready to open. The day after Thanksgiving came and went in a flurry of children big and small waiting in lines to see the one and only Santa. It was then that the potential fires and difficult elves and loose mice all faded into the background, outshined by smiling faces and the hopes of people believing in the magic of the season.

Running between Santaland and the Puppet Theatre, the month of December flew by. I was charged with troubleshooting electrical problems, front of house issues and cast conflicts. I dealt with biological hazards (it's difficult for Santa to tell kids they'll shoot their eyes out when he is being distracted by the fact that his lap is wet...) We created a festive illusion for the public and kept it going all season. My shows were five

minute visits with Santa and 30-minute puppet shows. We saw a thousand "audience" members an hour, and dealt with costumes, lighting, and unruly cast members.

The season ended with Christmas carols and poor mice who didn't survive the many layers of snow they tried to burrow in. We cleaned up in a few short days, and it was back to reality. I confess that as I left I felt a good deal of nostalgia for this amazing and enduring icon. My holiday seasons in the future will have more dimension as I remember my funny and bickering elves, the army of Santas (including Santa Santa a la David Sedaris of course), and my fellow managers trying to hold together this unusual show.



Megan Cannon and one of her Santaland compatriots pose for a snapshot behind the scenes at Macy's. (photo courtesy Megan Cannon)

Van Farrier remembered

continued from page 4

of light...

*Now, ere the sun advance his burning eye,
The day to cheer and night's dank dew to dry,*

*I must up-fill this osier cage of ours
With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers.*

Against the backdrop of a complex, modern set, Van was painting Shakespeare's words. He was doing what

Hamlet (and through him, Shakespeare) ordered his players to do: Suit the action to the word, the word to the action. And it felt generous, like he really wanted us to see what he saw, the way he saw it. I'll never forget it. I've been in Van's audiences many times since then, and I've always felt the audience sit up straighter when he enters, the better to receive that energy and generosity.

I have a photo of Van in his Friar

makeup, at home between matinee and evening shows, sweeping the dining room floor and readying the house for out-of-town guests. He is vamping for the camera, with his sprayed-on gray hair and darkened cheekbones, hanging over his broom like a harangued housewife. I love this picture because it is Van as actor, comedian, host and always, always, full of life.

— Kate Nugent

An advisor who listens and observes

by JAMES VESCE

I first met Julian as a graduate directing student in 1996. His reputation preceded him — mainly those legendary stories about his mythical and bizarre taste for really weird theater — perhaps the result of his work at LaMama as a young theater artist in New York in the 1960's. But if you chose to negotiate your way through his oft-worn Western attire or impressive mane of carefully-coiffed hair, you found a master teacher, a dedicated artist, and a lifelong mentor.

As a first-year director the path was lonely and uncertain. Frequently I considered moving on to a more comfortable profession and way of life. It was Julian's steady observation that I was "probably in the right place" which validated my

fledgling career.

Three years later, while applying for a university teaching position, I asked for his recommendation. In another understated moment of advice, he suggested I consider my own potential for academic administration. Now, ten years later, I serve as a departmental chair in an undergraduate theater program of 80 students and 20 full and part-time faculty.

I have a great deal of appreciation for his knowledge and expertise, and value greatly the intensity of learning in his classroom. But I most remember his ability to listen to his students, his compassion, and his example as an artist as I constantly seek to emulate that commitment to my own students.

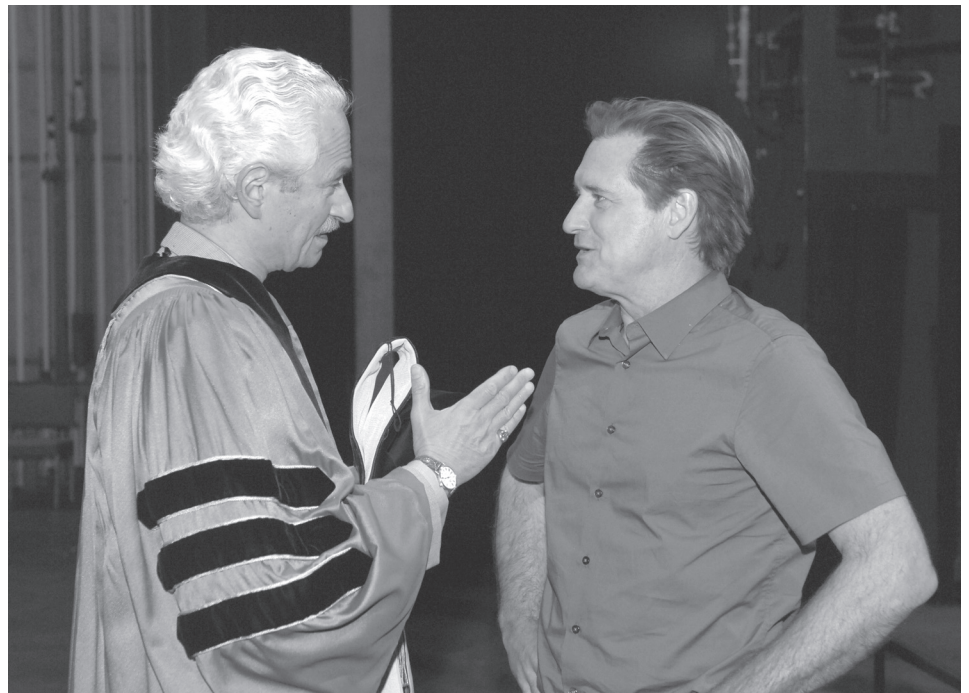
Farewell to a valued colleague

continued from page 1

the campus community have benefited immeasurably from his keen and adventurous theatrical mind. The former students who write in these pages speak to some of Julian's strengths as a mentor — he listens attentively, and just as importantly, he follows that with the right questions, questions that nudge, prod, push toward revelations and better work.

As an artist, too, Julian pushed students to do their best when they worked with him. Actors, dramaturgs, designers and technical personnel all recalled their time working on productions he helmed as particularly exciting and challenging, bringing them to a new understanding of theater.

In recent years, he has pushed beyond his long-time roles in the department. To a resume that already included teaching, mentoring, administrating, directing, and of course dramaturgy, he added screen- and playwriting and even, last year, acting, in the self-penned (... *people almost always smell good in the art museum*), a benefit performance. His writings have received awards, and our students have received, once again, the benefit of his generosity as an artist, taking courses in screenwriting and playwriting with him and being cast in



Julian's support for the department extends beyond his presence at all department mainstage productions — he is always on hand for special events and fundraisers, including a celebration of honorary degree recipients Bill Pullman, Michael Haley and Peter Tolan after last year's commencement ceremony. (photo by Jon Crispin)

productions based on those works. One of the department's early fundraising activities was a benefit reading of his award-winning screenplay *Anthony*, a mobster re-imagining of *Hamlet* (a piece that eventually received a reading in Los Angeles, too). Donating his skills and resources to various special events has

made Julian a constant presence when the department needed to put its best foot forward.

We will miss his reserved but indomitable spirit, his sharp and encouraging wit, and his brilliant blending of his roles as thinker, teacher and artist.

An alumna says thank you to Julian Olf

continued from page 8

human interaction, Julian only nods and smiles when the student finally says “A-ha!” Yes, he’s done his job – helped the student find his/her own way into the play, into the magical place of incredible possibility.

He challenged us to think by posing questions, never suggesting he had “the” answer. He asked us to consider unthinkable questions from our own subconscious – smells, sounds, sensations, imagery – to illuminate a three-dimensional world of dramaturgy and text analysis.

My journey through grad school was at times arduous and frustrating, and I often sought refuge and guidance in Julian’s office. He calmly listened to my rants, and when I was done, he would point out a simple, yet not so simple obstacle that I had to face and resolve. Inevitably, I left feeling less overwhelmed or enraged, and I could gather myself together to do my work. That was what I had come here for, and Julian patiently kept reminding me of that.

I seemed to always “be in trouble.” Julian never chastised me for this. He stood by me, watched, listened, and, I think, chuckled inside. At times, Julian would accidentally reveal himself – a snicker or passing remark that let me glimpse within, where Julian enjoyed the ruckus I caused. He often defended me, too, understanding my intentions of experimentation, deconstruction and interdisciplinary work.

Julian mentored me through my

first big undertaking – a production of Heiner Mueller’s *Hamletmachine*. I had really wanted to direct *MacBeth*, so I picked *Hamletmachine* as a back-up, thinking that the play was so far out, the Committee would *have* to let me direct *MacBeth*. My plan back-fired, and I was suddenly stuck with the daunting task of taking on a text I had always admired and been drawn to, but felt completely inadequate as an artist to take on. The play is incomprehensible, and any attempts to make it “comprehensible” diminish the intent of the play.

I remember the first production meeting, down in the basement, with the student designers and mentoring faculty sitting around, waiting to hear about our collective intent for this production. Professor Penny Remsen was to be the lighting designer. She turned to me and said, “So, tell us about the character of Hamlet – who is he?” Like a deer in the headlights, I gasped, “I have no idea who Hamlet is, I have no idea if there are 20 Hamlets or none at all. How I am supposed to answer a question like that?” My answer didn’t satisfy her, and the meeting dissolved into chaos and conflict. No, this was not one of my best moments (though, certainly not my worst either). We had to try again.

A week later, the student designers and I re-arranged the basement meeting room into a type of living-sculpture gallery space. We placed the faculty purposely throughout the space, and then we began a performance art piece that included snippets from the text and

contemporary classical music. When it was all over, Julian, who was seated high up on a chair that was on top of the center table pronounced, “Yes, now we understand” and continued to talk about performance art, experimental theatre, etc. Meeting adjourned, back to work!

When, a year later, I had completed my thesis project, and mangled my project report, I got a job offer for a full-time faculty position in the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance at California State University, Los Angeles. Julian generously advised me on each step of the negotiation. I was under strict orders to not “accept” any part of the proposed offer without first running it past Julian, who then gave me the exact language for my counter-offer. It was a terrifying experience. I had no background in any of this. I truly could not have done it without him holding my hand through every step of that process.

And though I moved across the country, far from the lushness and beauty of the Happy Valley, Julian and I have not only stayed in touch, but have become friends. He has continued to advise me and console me through the politics of Tenure (finally achieved), and has trusted me to read his new works. We have visited each other on both coasts, sharing a deep commitment to our students, and laughing at life’s trials. I feel so incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to find a mentor like Julian — and to become his friend.

With immense gratitude: Thank You, Julian!

My first memories of meeting Julian Olf are not from the UMass Department of Theater, but at the Office of University Relations and Development (now the Office of University Advancement) in the Whitmore Administration Building, where I worked from 1986-1991 in the Vice Chancellor’s office as Secretary and Receptionist. I recall a tall, regal and distinguished gentleman who occasionally stopped by and always greeted me kindly.

Little did I know back then that in May of 1991 I’d be sitting in the Conference Room within the Main Office of the Theater Department, being interviewed by this tall, regal and distinguished looking Department Chair. Shortly thereafter,

Julian Olf called me at home to offer me the position of Secretary for the Department of Theater. I answered “yes” without hesitation.

Now, almost 18 years later, I’m still here in 112 FAC. Julian is a friend, not an acquaintance, and the fact that he is tall and I’m not makes no difference at all—as a matter of fact, when he is sitting down, I am exactly the same height. What I treasure the most is the mutual respect and friendship that evolved from that first hello until now (he always let me make suggestions and “heard me out”). Thanks for the phone call, Julian, and all best wishes and congratulations on your retirement!

— Denise Wagner

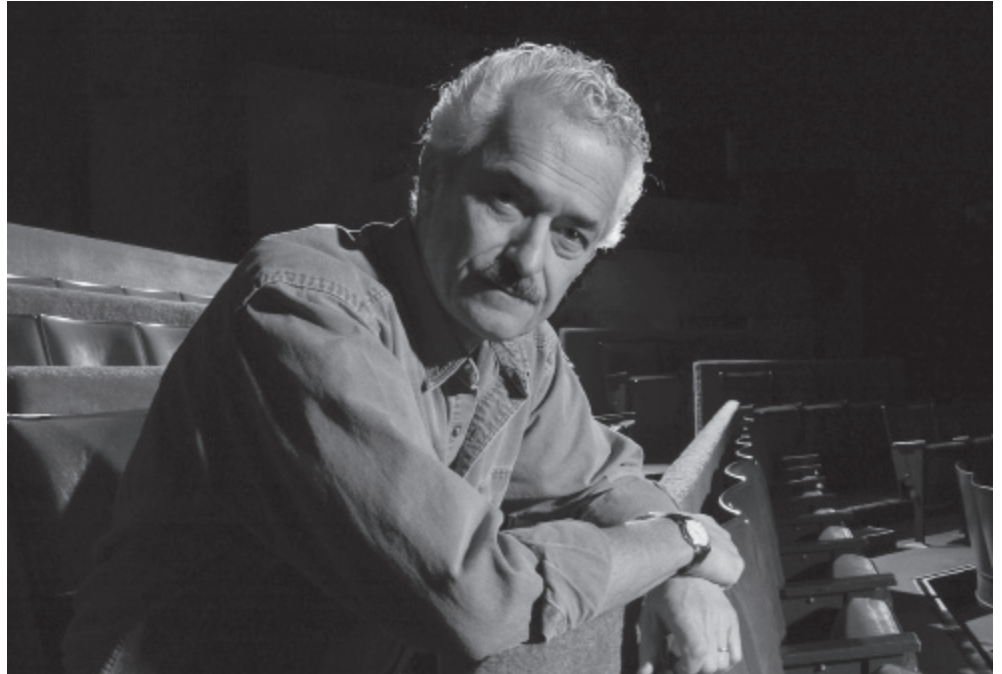
To “Papa Julian”

by Tanya Kane-Parry '01G

Julian played a huge role in my studies, artistic development, and personal growth while I was a directing grad student in the Theatre Department (1999-2001). Since then, he has continued to be my mentor and become my dear friend.

On first impression, his tall stature and refined demeanor belies the cynical, wry wit that fuels Julian’s creativity and his passion for teaching. Meticulous in the classroom, gently urging the students to delve deeper into the text, into the language, beyond the language, into the darker realms of

continued on page 7



Julian Olf (photo by Ben Barnhart)

We're going paperless! The print edition of *Stages* will be replaced with an emailed version as of next school year.
Email amgoossens@verizon.net to sign up for the email version.

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