The
Department of Theater
Year in Review
2010-2011
# Table of Contents

## 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Season</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Enhancement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Achievements</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Looking ahead to 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Season</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Season

What a fantastic year we had!

As I looked through the photo archives to select images for our online gallery, the experience made me remember and appreciate, not just how successful, but how absolutely beautiful our productions were.

The quality is no different than that of commercial productions, and it brought home to me a sense of what amazing talent exists here in the department — students, staff, and faculty alike. Audiences loved the work, as did our special guests: we entertained deans, vice-provosts, provosts, vice-chancellors, the chancellor, and a large group of Commonwealth College alumni this year.

Box office results for 2010-2011

The 2010-2011 was a good one for us. Noteworthy among the numbers was the Spelling Bee Matinee — we welcomed most of the 7th and 8th-grade class of Longmeadow’s Glengrook Middle School, selling more than double the amount of tickets we anticipated.

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<th># Tix sold:</th>
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About 35 alumni and friends of Commonwealth College attended our production of *Twelfth Night* in April, 2010. (Photo by Alexander Chan)
Notes about our productions

The Department of Theater tackled an ambitious slate of 7 productions during the 2010-2011 school year. Six of them were produced in-house, including one from a completely original script and one brand-new translation/English-language premiere. Our students, faculty, and staff—with the assistance of some amazingly talented guest artists—rose ably to the challenge.

Unruly Mujeres — This original piece of theater was written by Dramaturgy MFA student Megan McClain and examines four cloistered women living in Spain and its Latin American colonial empire in the Renaissance Era. Their ranks include a self-taught scholar, a devout prankster, an audacious playwright, and a cross-dressing rogue who served as a soldier.

Professor of Theater Harley Erdman has been researching and translating the writings by these and other women writers of the time for several years, and it is his immersion in the subject that prompted McClain’s work.

Erdman knows Professor Nieves Romero-Diaz, organizer of the GEMELA Conference, which examines “women’s cultural production in medieval and early modern Spain and colonial Latin America,” and was hosted by Mount Holyoke College and UMass this year. When he spoke to Romero-Diaz, Erdman suggested, “Why don’t we do something that showcases in a theatrical way the work of these women?” That led to the creation of the piece, which, in addition to its three shows for the general public, had a special performance for the conference goers as well.

It was McClain who found the subjects of the piece: Catalina De Erauso, known as The Bloody Nun for her military prowess, and Sor Marcela de San Felix, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and Sor Ursula Suarez, all three of them writers who spent their adult lives as cloistered nuns.

The House of Bernarda Alba — UMass Amherst Theater Department continued its 2010-2011 season with Federico Garcia Lorca’s The House of Bernarda Alba, directed by third year MFA directing student Toby Bercovici in the Curtain Theater.

The play calls for a virtuosic cast and demanded an emotionally mature actress in the title role of Bernarda. Jeannine Haas, professional local actress with whom Bercovici had wanted to work for some time, assumed the lead role.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee — UMass Theater graduate directing student Dawn Monique Williams directed this well-received musical, which enjoyed big audiences not only during its regular performances, but during its school matinee as well. (Read more about school matinees in the Outreach section.)

This musical drew upon the skills of several guest artists, including the musical director Andrew Lichtenberg, who is an alumnus of the department, Music and Dance faculty member Paul Dennis as the choreographer, and pianist Meagan Reilly, who is an alumna. Scott MacArthur was the sound designer.

The House of Bernarda Alba (photo by Jon Crispin)
Swimming to Spalding — The result of two years of research and development, *Swimming to Spalding*, by Lián Amaris ’02, received its area premiere at her alma mater this past winter.

The original 2009 production enjoyed a successful run at the HERE Arts Center and was favorably reviewed by a number of publications and blogs, including the New York Times and Backstage.

Amaris traces several elements of the project back to her time at UMass as a theater major: “Professor Julian Olf, my mentor and advisor, was the person who directed me toward the Performance Studies Department at NYU, where I would eventually meet Richard, who was Julian’s former professor... Additionally, it was in Julian’s Theater 120 class that I first learned of Spalding Gray.... I went to see Spalding at the Jones Library in the center of Amherst and was amazed by the simplicity of the work: one man sitting at a table, telling a story.”

We were thrilled to welcome one of our accomplished alumna back to our theaters; in addition to her two performances, Amaris worked with our students in a two-part workshop that had them creating and performing their own pieces. She also participated in two Q&A sessions with students and attended a dinner in her honor with UMass officials.

Night on the Galactic Railroad — The UMass Amherst Department of Theater presented the English world premiere of the stage adaptation of *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, a beloved children’s classic in Japan.

Our version of *Night on the Galactic Railroad* was born in a translation class where Tyran Grillo, then a UMass student in Languages, Literatures and Cultures, translated the Japanese play into the English language for the first time. Originally, the play had been adapted by Sô Kitamura in 1986 from the classic Japanese novel written around 1927 by Kenji Miyazawa, which is still very popular among Japanese readers of all ages. Grillo made one change from both Japanese versions at Bercovici’s request: he changed one of the main characters, originally written as a boy, into a girl.

A number of free special events were held in conjunction with *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, including a panel featuring members of the production and Professor Bruce Baird from Asian Languages and Literature and a performance workshop. In addition, there was a keynote speech by Dr. Sarah Strong, Professor of Japanese Language and Literature at Bates College, and translator of the original novel version of Night on the Galactic Railroad.

Scarcity — The UMass Department of Theater brought *Scarcity*, a play set in Russell, Massachusetts and written by playwright Lucy Thurber, who hails from these environs, back to its roots. Audience members who grew up around here recognized and even identified with some of these people from their own lives.

The production’s authenticity and local resonance was reflected in the universally rapturous reviews from audience members and local critics. For Kara-Lynn Vaeni, the director of the play and a guest instructor in the department during the spring semester, and for Lucy Thurber, the playwright, this production carries an added emotional
weight. Thurber, a friend of Vaeni’s, told her it was a dream come true having a play she wrote about her community performed here in Amherst. Thurber came to campus to take part in several special events. There was a post-show discussion with Lucy Thurber, a reading of Thurber’s play, Where We’re Born, and a class visit with the artist.

Twelfth Night — The UMass Department of Theater concluded its 2010-2011 season with an engaging production of Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare, which also enjoyed a successful matinee performance for local schools.

The production drew on the talents of Nick Keenan ‘01, the sound designer for the play and founding member of Chicago’s New Leaf Theatre, who created bluesy textures to underlie the song lyrics provided by Shakespeare. Adam Zucker, Assistant Professor in the Department of English, participated in a Q&A event after one of the performances.

The production also drew attention from UMass officials. We were pleased to welcome an alumni group from the Commonwealth College, the Chancellor and his special guests, as well as a group from CHFA that included the Dean.
People

Familiar faces, new roles

The 2010-2011 brought new honors and challenges for some members of our faculty and staff, and we welcomed several new members to the department.

We were excited to announce that Milan Dragicevich will be teaching students to stomp for many years to come; Milan was tenured over the summer. Meanwhile, costume design professor June Gaeke was rewarded for her excellent work here with a promotion to full professorship. Penny Remsen agreed to stay on as chair for three more years, while Julie Nelson continued as Undergraduate Program Director. They were joined by Graduate Program Director Harley Erdman.

The great Denise Wagner, our beloved secretary, retired last year and while we missed her, we found a capable successor to the secretarial throne in Diane Muller, who joined us at the beginning of the summer of 2010.

Students and recent alumni were already familiar with Chris Baker, who has handled a number of dramaturgy classes and production assignments for us in the past few years on an adjunct basis, but we were pleased that he stepped into a full-time lecturer position as of this year. Aside from his skills as a teacher, Chris brought us a valuable professional contact due to his continuing association with Hartford Stage. In fact, he was instrumental in setting up a new internship opportunity for graduate students with that company.

Guest Artists

We were joined by a number of guest artists and instructors this year. Some worked in the classroom, others in the theater — but all of them offered students additional opportunities to work with some of the best and brightest in the field of theater.

Alumnus Matthew Richards returned to the department to teach lighting design. Miguel Ringler taught performance classes and assisted in Theater 100.

We were lucky to have secured Tony Simotes of Shakespeare and Co. to teach stage combat classes. Kara Lynn Vaeni, who directed Life Is A Dream some years ago for us, returned as a performance instructor and to direct Scarcity.

Another familiar face in the season was guest artist Lián Amaris ’02, creator and performer of Swimming to Spalding, a special presentation in our season. She also led workshops for students and spoke to them about being a creator, performer,
and producer of art in New York City.

Our students worked with a number of special guest theater artists on our season productions. They included: Tyran Grillo, translator and composer, *Night on the Galactic Railroad*; Nick Keenan ’01, sound designer, *Twelfth Night*; Andrew Lichtenberg ‘80, musical director, *The 25th Annuals Putnam County Spelling Bee*; Paul Dennis, choreographer, *The 25th Annuals Putnam County Spelling Bee*; Nora Mally, stage manager, *The House of Bernarda Alba*; Sarah Nelson ’09G, costume designer, *Night on the Galactic Railroad*; and David Wiggall, who was sound design advisor on several projects.

Lucy Thurber, who wrote *Scarcity*, attended a performance of the piece and attended the post-show Q&A, as well as a class, to engage with audience members and students about her work. As stated elsewhere, Sarah Strong, an expert of *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, delivered a talk on that work.
Outreach

Matinee Performances

Matinees for local school children are our biggest outreach events, encompassing not only the performances but additional resources like study guides, pre-show visits, post-show Q&A’s and backstage tours. This year, we organized two matinees.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee

The first of our two matinees was a performance of The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee. The musical was popular with schools, drawing one group of over 200 students as well as several others. The members of that large group, from Glenbrook Middle School in Longmeadow, wrote thank you letters to outreach liaison Anna-Maria Goossens, our public relations director, to share with the cast and crew. A sampling of these letters is included in this section. In addition to hosting these groups, we also traveled to school drama classes in Deerfield and Ludlow to do pre-show workshops with the students there, including giving them an opportunity to interact with one of our cast members in a mock spelling bee similar to the one that happens during the show. We also created a study guide and hosted a post-show Q&A with cast and crew for students.

Twelfth Night

Our matinee of Twelfth Night was attended by a smaller but no less enthusiastic group of schools. As before, we created a study guide that teachers told us was very helpful, and our Q&A was marked by probing questions from the students. Among the groups were several dozen members of the fledgling Springfield Tech drama club. These students had little exposure to theater prior to the formation of the group and for many, this matinee was a first experience with live theater.

A Field Trip From Holyoke

We hosted a group of students from Holyoke’s Connections After School Program. This is an enrichment program that aims, among other goals, to help students envision their way to a college education. A trio of our students guided the middle-schoolers on a tour around the department, talked to them about the many career options a theater degree offered, and played some theater games with the students to wrap up the afternoon. The Holyoke Sun newspaper ran an article about the day which is appending to this section.
Every year, we offer local middle and school students an opportunity to experience live theater through weekday matinee performances just for school groups. Some of the teachers become repeat customers, and occasionally, we have the chance to give their students more than just this one-time theater-going experience. In December, one teacher, Jo Ann Valle of Frontier Regional School in Deerfield, asked if we had any lighting designers who'd be willing to talk to her theater production class. Luckily, we did; Jonathan Hicks ’11G described his visits to the class for us below:

I recently had the privilege to join the drama class at Frontier High School in South Deerfield. A small class of 10 or so students sat down around a table to explore the theatrical world of lighting. But theater doesn't happen around a table, theater happens on a stage, so Frontier theater teacher Jo Ann Valle and I took a journey to the school's auditorium where a stage is set. This would be the playing ground where Ms. Valle and I would tag back and forth with questions and answers as I explained to the students my experience as a lighting designer.

We got up on stage, laid out a lighting plot, a lighting designer's paperwork, and some basic equipment (pencil, eraser, architectural ruler, protractor, and a light template). This simple set-up was the foundation for telling the designer's story to these students, giving them an opportunity to see what materials are used to create an atmosphere on stage. We talked about the role of a lighting designer being one in which collaboration with the director and other designers is key to finding the images and metaphors in the text that will help to guide the creation of a world the characters of a play can inhabit, transform, and impact. We talked about the process from text to inspiration, conversation and experimentation, and concluded with implementation and presentation.

At the end of the day, we set up an opportunity for me to come back and explore the lighting instruments with one of the students interested in lighting. On that return trip, we explored the light board, the instruments, and a few of the challenges any space may hold for the theater artist. It was a fantastic opportunity to engage a young mind in the craft that I have so recently learned to harness during my time as a graduate student at UMass, Amherst.

— Jonathan Hicks
**Curriculum Enhancement**

*Career Advice*

Our Undergraduate Advisory Council continues to offer invaluable assistance to both prospective and current students. Among the council’s undertakings this year was the organization of a Career and Internships Panel, at which select students, faculty, and staff disseminated information about various summer employment and learning opportunities, as well as advice about what opportunities await after graduation.

*Grants*

Our students are motivated and talented not only in the artistic aspects of theater but in the administrative side as well. To supplement the budgets of season productions as well as their own independent pieces, both graduate and undergraduate students applied successfully for grants from the UMass Arts Council. Those grants paid production costs for independent student work and special events related to our season productions such as guest artists/speakers.

The list of grants:

*Equus* - Alexandria Chilton || Studio 204 || Nov 3-5, 2011 || $650 grant
*Reservoir Dogs* - Sam Perry || Studio 204 || Nov 17-19, 2011 || $800 grant
*Night on the Galactic Railroad* Colloquium - Sarah Brew || Supplementary Season Programming || $500 grant
Lucy Thurber Visit - Emily Denison || Supplementary Season Programming || $600 grant
Festival of New Plays by American Women - Emily Denison || Supplementary Season Programming || Apr 15 || $1,500 grant
*Recent Tragic Events* - Andrew Ferlo || Studio 204 || May 2-4 || $400 grant
*Revolutionary Road* - Paul Condacurri || Studio 204 || May 2 || $320 grant

*Night on the Galactic Railroad* (photo by Jon Crispin)
Development

As our 2009-2010 “Pennies for Drama Nerds” campaign — which used Rob Corddry’s text and video to solicit funds for an upgrade of the Upper Rand Lobby — reached its end, the Department of Theater looked ahead to its development plans for the 2010-2011 season and realized that a shift in focus was in order. Instead of drawing people in to us, we wanted to reach out to them. We wanted to connect with our friends and alumni, and in particular with those who have graduated within the past 10 years, to remind them of their ties to us and how important they are to us.

Our two-pronged approach, dubbed People and Presence, consisted of a series of donor profiles meant to bring home the fact that our supporters are “just like you,” as well as a series of events meant to draw alumni together in various locations.

People

We quickly identified 4 donors who represented a cross section of our alumni and friends: Irmarie (Scheuneman) Jones ’45, Gabrielle Capolupo ’86, Alan Jaffe (parent of Caitlin Jaffe ’05) and Justin McClintock ’01.

Below are excerpts of the profiles on each of these department supporters:

Irmarie (Scheuneman) Jones (writer, columnist for the Greenfield Recorder)
Graduating year: 1945
Major: English
Favorite UMass Theater memory: Although Irmarie “wished I was Shirley Temple” and was the manager of the Roister Doisters, an extracurricular theater group overseen Professor Frank Prentice Rand in the days before there was a theater major, she hadn’t been onstage much. “My senior year, I found a play that had been on Broadway (Letters to Lucerne) and I showed it to Prof. Rand. He decided to do it. The girl he was planning to have play the lead never showed up, so I asked, ‘Can I try out?’ and I got the part! Tryouts were in the basement of Memorial Hall and I was living in Draper. I floated from Mem Hall to Draper, I was so excited.”
Why do you donate to the Department of Theater: to keep the Rand Theater going. I would hope that anyone who has any memories or feelings about (Prof.) Rand or theater at UMass would give to the Rand Theater.

Gabrielle Capolupo (information technology, JUNOS/Juniper)
Graduating year: 1986
Major: Theater
Favorite UMass Theater memory: Gabrielle fondly remembered two of her teachers, the late Doris Abramson and Harry Mahnken, for reaching out to her in different ways when she was a student. “(Prof. Abramson) was wonderful for a girl who never got a major part in anything. She always remembered me.” Prof. Mahnken, on the other hand, she remembered for trying to draw her out of her shell — he would tease her if he ran into her crossing the campus. “I never knew why, but you don’t go out of your way to tease a person you don’t like.”
Why do you donate to the Department of Theater? I never ended up working in theater, but I don’t regret a minute of what I learned. It’s so much more valuable than I could put a price tag on — that’s why I keep contributing.
Alan Jaffe (real estate appraiser)
Affiliation: Alumni parent of the Department of Theater (Caitlin Jaffe ’05)
Favorite UMass Theater memory: “When (Caitlin) had a production, I’d go up and spend time, stay overnight on the couch (at her apartment) or at the hotel.” When possible, they’d make a weekend of it, catch a football game, too, and even after he had a stroke that rendered him unable to drive, he looked forward to taking the bus up for his visits.
Why do you donate to the UMass Amherst Department of Theater? “I think … it’s the right thing to do. Someone, somewhere in the past donated money so your child could have a good experience. As long as I can do it, I’ll donate the money so someone else’s child can have a good experience.”

Justin McClintock (New York City theater electrician)
Graduating Year: 2001
Major: Theater
Favorite UMass Theater memory: “I came in with a plan to be an actor, and I shifted to a plan to be a director, but the last two years, I worked in the electrics shop.” McClintock remembers his disbelief at his good luck when he was hired for a job in the department, which would allow him to work in the building where he had the majority of his classes. “I get $6 an hour?! They’ll pay me?!”
Why do you donate to the UMass Amherst Department of Theater? Because it is valuable to me — the only thing I have ever done for a living is theater. After the second year in New York City, when I had disposable income, I gave. I give so I can tell other UMass people I did it. If you think this is important, if you had a good experience, you should give. And, I had a telemarketing job (in Memorial Hall). That job sucked, so I will help them out any way I can; that factors into it a little bit.

Presence

Over the course of the year, Chair Penny Remsen and assorted faculty and staff traveled near and far to connect with our alumni for the presence aspect of our development plan; the idea was to be there to celebrate our alumni and current department members in their achievements. The trips included big events in Los Angeles and Washington DC, as well as smaller events in New York City, where Remsen honored lighting designers Ben Stanton and Justin Townsend, as well as a number of other lighting designers, for their recent high-profile openings (see more in our News and Achievements section). Here in Amherst, she held a celebratory dinner to welcome home alumna Lían Amaris for a special performance and workshops.

Excerpts from her Stages newsletter accounts of the LA and DC trips follow:

Los Angeles

Earlier this year, we got an email from alumnus Michael Walton ’01 that he was putting together his dream project: a production of Suzan-Lori Parks' Pulitzer-winning Topdog/Underdog. It was the kick in the pants we needed to set in motion a plan that was long overdue: Chair Penny Remsen and performance faculty member Julie Nelson traveled to Los Angeles to catch up with the alumni who’d made the West Coast their home.

The itinerary was a busy one: stops at the Geffen Playhouse, Bill Pullman’s home, the legendary Formosa Cafe, and the Lillian Theatre.
Penny tells us what happened:

Julie and I arrived bright-eyed and bushy-tailed — well, maybe not so bushy-tailed, having gotten up at 3 in the morning to travel to LA — got our rental car and took off to meet with Amy Levinson ’94, ’97G at the Geffen Playhouse, where she is the literary manager/dramaturg.

On Thursday, Julie had made plans to catch up with Keith Stone ’05. Keith was recently in Some Boys Don’t Leave with Jesse Eisenberg and Copperhead, a western that was filmed in Bulgaria.

That evening, one of the department’s best friends, Bill Pullman, was gracious enough to open his home to a group of UMass alumni for a dinner party. On the guest list were production designer — and erstwhile Pullman apartment-mate — Doug Kraner, Amy Levinson, Rob and and Sandy Corddry, and Bart Rosenblatt, who received his degree in engineering but is now head of CODE entertainment, a production company in LA. Bart and Bill, coincidentally enough, worked together on the film You Kill Me.

As I expressed to the group, my reason for traveling to LA and my reason for asking Bill to host this dinner party was to bring alumni and friends of our department together again, to let them know that we’re alive and well in Amherst and to tell them that they’re important to us.

Thanks to Nora Maroulis and the former dean of the college, Joel Martin, the department was able to host a gathering of alumni and friends at the legendary Formosa Cafe in LA, a venerated gathering spot for show business folks for decades.

Again, the theme of the evening was about connecting our department to the alumni in LA, getting those people to meet each other, and developing a contact list.

It was wonderful to behold the array of alumni, ranging from Jack Knight from the 1960s to Dolph Paulsen, who graduated in 2006. As with the previous evening, we spoke about the importance of UMass Theater connections and raised a glass to the department, including a moment of silence for Doris Abramson.

Then, it was on to the play!

It was a full house at the Lillian Theatre. Besides the group who'd come over from Formosa, several alumni who hadn’t been able to attend the reception joined us at the theater. Michael Walton’s parents and his high school drama teacher were there. They had flown out from the east coast to witness with us his longtime dream coming to fruition.

Michael’s performance was superb. It was so great to be able to support one of our own in this way. A number of people stayed on for a smaller reception to congratulate Michael and reveled in the success of one of their own.

**Washington DC**

Penny Remsen also traveled to Washington DC:

I was privileged to celebrate the achievement of one of our faculty members, Assistant Professor of African-American Theater and Playwriting, Marcus Gardley.

Marcus’s *Every Tongue Confess* was one of two productions chosen by Washington DC’s Arena Stage to inaugurate the company’s two new performance spaces. It was an auspicious event that garnered much media attention, including a review in *The New Yorker.*
I marked the occasion, together with a number of UMass officials and alumni who traveled to see the show and meet Marcus and the cast.

That evening, the festivities truly commenced as Harley and I were joined at dinner by alumni and long-time theater friends Susan and Larry Benedict, as well as the man of the hour himself. Larry and Susan and I saw Marcus’ beautiful, poetic, awe-inspiring play at the Kogod Cradle.

Saturday was another spectacular day in our nation’s capital. Vice Provost for Academic Personnel (and former CHFA Dean) Joel Martin joined the UMass team, as did former Department of Theater faculty member Patricia Warner. Pat, Dean Julie Hayes and Marcus took in the Saturday matinee.

Following the matinee performance, we all had an in-between shows buffet dinner with members of the cast and crew of Every Tongue Confess. It was during this dinner that we were joined by longtime friends of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, David Briggs and John Bennett. All of us met the actors and had a wonderful meal together.

That night, it was David, John and Joel’s turn to see the work, and following the play, they were introduced to actress Phylicia Rashad. Meanwhile, Sunday, Harley and I got a chance to see the show and dine with another friend of the college, Richard Harland, and then, sadly, it was time to board the plane for our return journey.
Facility

The Upper Rand Lobby

The Upper Rand Lobby, the focus of our fundraising efforts in 2009-2010, is now the Upper Rand Studio, and it is beautiful.

Thanks go once again to everyone who was a part of making this upgrade a reality (the fantastic video Rob Corddry made for us is still up on our site anytime you need a laugh, by the way), but special praise most go to a trio of people who, over the summer of 2010, helped bring the project from almost there to finished.

Alumnus Stephen Driscoll, a supporter of this endeavor through the year, gave $1000 at the end of the year. As if that wasn't already generous enough, he went beyond the call of duty in reaching out to a UMass Amherst fraternity brother, Ed Rudner, who added in a sizable donation of his own. Ed's gift of $4000 brought the total amount raised to $25,000, which enabled us to create a space with new lighting, sound-proofed walls, and a new floor to accommodate movement classes.

Rudner is not a theater alumnus, but in a note to Stephen that included his reason for the donation, he put it like this:

“I was really happy to do it. Your performances and my involvement through you in the theater department opened my limited perspectives and allowed me to enjoy the arts for a lifetime.”

In addition to Ed and Stephen, alumnus Chris Darland ’87, who works for Artec Consultants Inc., a design firm that specializes in performing arts facilities, had the enviable task of helping us figure out how to spend what we raised. He donated hours of time and his expertise to design the space's upgrade for us. With Chris's talent, the lobby was transformed from its dim concrete bunker look into a sleek, bright, welcoming studio.

The Rand Rigging System

Thanks to our former Dean, now Vice Provost for Academic Personnel, Joel Martin, we received the funds to upgrade the Rand’s rigging system this school year.

In March, a crew from Sapsis, the country’s premier rigger, worked with a small crew of our students and staff to disassemble and remove the old system. Once it was gone, the Sapsis crew installed a state-of-the-art J. R. Clancy PowerLift, Columbus-McKinnon Lode Star half-ton chain hoists, and a Sure Target motorized rigging control system.

This new state-of-the-art motorized winch replaces
the original 35-year-old automated system long in disrepair. This new winch and aluminum truss, which we installed on lineset #4 in support of our first electric, along with our two new 1/2 ton chain hoists, offer the students the very same technology they will find in the professional world.

The constant updating and repairing/Replacing of our theater technology keeps our facilities operating with safety and function as our primary concerns. Within the last 6 years, we have been able to install some new technology into both of our theaters. This reinforces our commitment to our students to provide them with a professional training ground, as well as a safe place in which to explore, experience, and understand the function and creative applications of technology in today's world.

This is a tremendously exciting development for us — upgrades to the Rand stage are sorely needed and long-overdue, and we are looking forward to the more sophisticated rigging ability this new system will give us!

**The Curtain Theater Dimming System**

We also turned our attention to the Curtain Theater, specifically, to dimming system and seating.

Dimming systems are unseen and unnoticed by the audience, but they are the backbone of the infrastructure behind standard theatrical lighting. The flexibility of a modern dimming system will better facilitate the often complex lighting designs expected in the modern Theatre. Thanks to the support of Dean Julie Hayes and Vice Provost Joel Martin, our students now have access to a dimming system that operates in the same manner as the rest of the modern lighting world, and safety and reliability have been improved by replacing electrical equipment that is thirty five years old.

Although we were able to keep the old dimming system in working order, dimmer per-circuit lighting systems have been the standard since the mid 1980s. Analog dimming systems like the one that was replaced are nearly nonexistent in the industry today.

The original rack of thirty six analog dimmers and telephone operator-style patch panel was replaced with over one hundred and seventy digitally controlled dimmers from Electronic Theatre Controls. ETC is the gold standard of live entertainment lighting manufacturers and the Sensor series dimmers that were installed in the Curtain are their top line dimming product.

New house-light circuits for audience seating illumination and work-light circuits for rehearsal lighting were added. These essential systems were never adequately addressed in the original building design. The house-light and work-light can now be controlled from new wall mounted button stations, or through the existing computer lighting control console that runs the theatrical lighting.

Forty eight circuits of Socapex compatible multiplex cable outlets were installed to allow flexible relocation of lighting circuits. This type of cable is the industry standard circuit distribution product for this, and was not supported in the Curtain Theater prior to the upgrade.

We also replaced the seating. The black and chrome chairs used in the Curtain have been showing signs of wear for some time, with tears in the padding and unevenness in the legs. We replaced those chairs with brand-new chairs that offer a wider, more comfortable seating surface that is much appreciated by our patrons.
News and Achievements

Justin Townsend ’97 makes a presidential Broadway debut

Thirteen was a lucky number for one UMass Theater alumnus this fall — Oct. 13 marked the official opening night of Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson, warmly-reviewed Broadway show that featured the lighting design work of Justin Townsend ’97.

The show has been attracting attention and rave reviews in New York since its time at the Public Theatre in spring 2009, where Townsend first got involved with the project.

Townsend and Alex Timbers, BBAJ’s writer and director, had collaborated on a project some years back. BBAJ was developed first at Williamstown Theatre Festival and then in LA with a different lighting designer on the team. When it came time to move the project to New York, Timbers called on Townsend to give the project what Townsend termed a “style change.”

Townsend enjoyed his working relationship with Timbers. “Alex is very specific about light, but at the same time, he likes to be surprised,” he explained. “I like to take the note, and run past it.”

The musical, Townsend said, “is about putting together things that don’t necessarily belong, and we wanted to do the same thing with the design.”

At UMass, Townsend especially prized the joint influences of lighting design faculty member Penny Remsen and scenic design professor Miguel Romero and made full use of the Five College theater opportunities. Afterward, he worked with professionals in New York and eventually made his way to CalArts for a master’s in lighting design; since then, he’s been back on the East Coast designing theater, opera, dance, and more.

In the months since his work on this show, Townsend has been much in demand, designing lights for Juan and John, a new work created and performed by Roger Gueneveur Smith at the CTG/Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City, CA, Unnatural Acts, playing at Classic Stage Company this summer, and One Night with Janis Joplin at Portland Center Stage, among other projects.

Ben Stanton ’99 designs the revival of Tony Kushner’s classic play

In the late 1990s, Ben Stanton ’99 was a theater major, Rent was the musical of the moment, and Harley Erdman was handing out Tony Kushner’s Angels in America to his students to read.

This fall, Stanton spent hours in the theater with Michael Greif — Rent’s original director — and Kushner, as they mounted the first New York City revival of both parts of Angels at the Signature Theatre, to a great review from the
“Twelve years ago, I was dreaming of this… When I got the job, I was flabbergasted,” Stanton admitted.

Stanton had crossed paths with Greif throughout his time in New York City and had always found him to be a very kind and supportive. However, they had never worked together directly, and so, he said, “I was astonished when I learned I was on the list of people being considered.”

As he started his work, he realized that not only would he be lighting a Kushner play, he’d be working directly with the playwright. Kushner, he learned, was planning to be extremely involved in the production. “In a weird way, it’s probably even more stressful than a new play,” he said of the process of remounting a hallowed classic.

“It’s an exciting and terrifying process. I’ve never worked harder on a show,” Stanton said.

Stanton’s work on Angels stretched longer than originally anticipated, overlapping with several other assignments. In addition to Angels, Stanton designed lights for Amy Herzog’s After the Revolution, being directed by Carolyn Cantor at Playwrights Horizons, as well as Nick Jones’ The Coward, at The Duke.

Although the Angels project is a hold-held dream achieved, Stanton notes that he needed the experience he’s accrued in order to be successful at it.

“I would not have been ready to design Angels after coming out of UMass,” he said. He does not have a graduate degree, citing instead experiences interning at the Williamstown Theatre Festival and assisting renowned designers around the country as providing the training that put him where he is today.

That said, he credits UMass, and lighting design professor Penny Remsen specifically, for providing “the foundation” from which her students can build successful graduate school or professional experiences. “She was so great at the proper training; not just the technical skills, but in the mind set she instills to succeed,” Stanton explained.

Since Angels, Stanton has worked on a number of New York and regional theater shows. Most prominent among them was The Whipping Man by Matthew Lopez and directed by Doug Hughes, at the Manhattan Theater Club, for which he received the Lucille Lortel Award for his lighting designs. Plans are also full-steam ahead for the Broadway revival of Godspell at Circle in the Square Theatre. Previews for the production, begin on October 13, and opening night is scheduled for November 7.

Other alumni, student and faculty achievements

Juliana Agosto ’89 was appointed Development Consultant for TV Azteca Television, the second largest television station in Latino America. She has been living in Mexico since 2004 where she has been Manager of Programming and a Creative Executive at TV Azteca.

Rob Corddry ’93 was in Cedar Rapids and recently guest-starred on Community. His show, Children’s Hospital, is a cult hit that attracts some of the coolest actors in comedy working today.

Christopher S. Darland ’87, who helped us out with our Upper Rand Studio upgrade, is “closing in on 13 years as a Theater Planning consultant at Artec Consultants Inc. in New York. He is working on performing arts facility projects in Reykjavik, Iceland, and Hong Kong (amongst others), and just started a new project with Zaha Hadid Architects in Amman, Jordan.

Airline Intyrath ’06 is making a career for himself on TV and in clubs as Jujubee, the drag queen featured on RuPaul’s Drag Race. The title of an article about him in the Boston Globe says it all: How a UMass Theater Major Became One
of the Country’s Hottest Drag Queens.

Alumna Jane Cox got great reviews for her work in Bathsheba Doran’s *Kin*, which ran at Playwrights Horizons earlier this spring. She also spent time with the Houston Grand Opera to light *Lucia di Lammermoor* for the British director John Doyle, which she was “rather excited about.” The opera went on to La Fenice in Venice and Sydney Opera House. She spent spring break with us, when we hosted dancer/choreographer Monica Bill Barnes, who used the Rand Theater as a rehearsal space for a new piece, which Jane is lighting.

Jeffrey Donovan ‘91 has been cast as Robert F. Kennedy in Clint Eastwood’s latest oeuvre, *J. Edgar*. He’s got a busy spring so far: He just directed Bruce Campbell in *Burn Notice: The Fall of Sam Axe*, a prequel to his successful show *Burn Notice*, on USA, and he started production on the fifth season of the USA Network series in March.

The ink was still drying on his diploma when Jonathan Hicks ‘11G accepted an Assistant Professor position in the Theater Arts department at Huntington University in Huntington, IN. He will be starting this August.

Professor Gina Kaufmann directed *The Odd Couple* for the Majestic Theatre in West Springfield. The show was well-reviewed and warmly received — its run was extended by several weeks.

David Korins ‘99 received a Drama Desk Award nomination for his set design for the Broadway production, *Lombar-dí*. He also provided scenic consultation for the Public Theater and 3-Legged Dog’s production of *The Human Scale*, which traveled to Israel, and scenic design for the Goodman Theater’s production of David Henry Hwang’s *Chinglish*. He was featured in the *New York Post* talking about his designs for *Pee Wee Herman’s Play House*. He got great reviews for his work on *Little Miss Sunshine* at La Jolla Playhouse. He was scheduled to visit the department in April, but that was pre-empted because he was asked to design for Kanye West’s new tour.

Shawn LaCount ‘09G, artistic director of Company One, a Boston-based non-profit theater company, was featured in a Theatre Communications Group video entitled *Stage Matters*. The piece featured interviews with artistic directors, theater artists, politicians, teachers, and people on the street gauging the state of theater in America and thinking ahead to its future. In addition, in October 2010, Company One was one of 10 recipients of a $10,000 grant given by American Theatre Wing to emerging theater companies.

Virginia Scott, Professor Emerita, has been very busy. Her new book, *Women on the Stage in Early Modern France*, was published in July by Cambridge University Press. This past April she spoke at the Renaissance Society of American conference in Venice and in May for a scholarly group at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

MFA directing candidate Dawn Monique Williams has been offered a place in the New York Fall Directing Program of the New York Drama League. The Fall Director’s Project is a directing fellowship. Between May 17 and Dec. 14, Dawn will spend a week in New York, participate in a retreat with a master director, and then complete two assistant-director assignments at a Regional Theater. The fellowship culminates with the Fall Director’s Fest, where she will direct a one-act at off-Broadway Theater in December. Only 4 people were accepted this year out of over 100 applicants. (Professor Gil McCauley is a director’s project alumnus.) In addition, she directs Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* for Hampshire Shakespeare Company this summer.
Looking ahead to 2011-2012

Our Season

Theater is not a one-man show. We believe in collaboration, in pairing the freshest minds and newest ideas with wisdom and experience. Students work with faculty mentors, cutting-edge artists with renowned scholars. Our productions work, because we work together. Come see for yourself!

Love the Doctor
by Tirso de Molina, in a new translation by Sarah Brew and Josephine Hardman
She was born in the mind of a 17th-Century Spaniard, but Jeronima is a heroine for any age. Ambitious, clever, and unwilling to be bound by notions of what’s proper for a woman, she sets out to become a learned woman and a doctor, and employs her considerable skills at subterfuge and disguise to achieve her ends. This quick-witted comedy from one of Spain’s great, iconoclastic playwrights has never been performed in English; two UMass-Amherst graduate students, one from Theater and one from English, created this translation/adaptation to show the English-speaking world what it’s been missing.

Hell in High Water
by Marcus Gardley
Set on a levee mound in Greenville Mississippi, Hell in High Water is a play that uproots the almost forgotten story of the Mississippi flood of 1927, the worst in U.S. history. At the heart of the story are two fathers and sons: LeRoy Percy, a white cotton farmer and his son Will, who grapple with preserving their farm and labor force and Joe Goodin, an African-American bootblack and his son James. Stranded on the levee with 180,000 other black folk, Joe tries to preserve his way of life while James hopes to inspire change for his people. To capitalize on this remarkable opportunity to showcase the work of one of the country’s rising playwriting stars, we have invited Molly Smith to deliver the Rand Lecture in conjunction with the play’s opening. Smith, who is artistic director of Arena Stage, is an admirer of Gardley’s work and commissioned him to write Every Tongue Confess, which inaugurated the company’s brand new Kogod Cradle space.

Solstice
a puppetry piece devised by Miguel Romero and students
Many cultures share a holiday in late December — a return to the light, whether symbolic or literal, after months of shrinking days. Puppeteer and scenic design professor Miguel Romero takes this impetus for revelry and combines the traditions into a delightful, carnival-esque atmosphere in his new puppetry piece, Solstice. Created by Romero with students from the UMass Department of Theater and new music by Amherst College music professor Eric Sawyer, is intended as a celebration for the whole family.

The publicity image for Solstice (istockphoto)
The Tailor of Inverness
created and performed by Matthew Zajac
A touring production presented by The Edinburgh Fringe Summer Program, the Dean of HFA, and 5 College Performance Studies, and hosted by the Department of Theater

The Tailor of Inverness is a story of journeys, of how a boy who grew up on a farm in Galicia (Eastern Poland, now Western Ukraine) came to be a tailor in Inverness. His life spanned most of the 20th century. His story is not straightforward. He was taken prisoner by the Soviets in 1939 and forced to work east of the Urals, then freed in an amnesty after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. He then joined the thousands of Poles who travelled to Tehran, then Egypt, to be integrated into the British Army, fighting in North Africa and Italy. He was then resettled in Britain in 1948, joining his brother in Glasgow. This is the story he told.

“...a beautifully realised tale of the reality of survival in war-torn Eastern Europe...Matthew Zajac’s moving performance is a triumph of evocative staging and storytelling.” The Observer

Urinetown
music by Mark Hollmann, lyrics by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis, and book by Greg Kotis
What if we stressed our natural resources to the point where people had to line up to pay for the privilege of using the privy? That's what happens in the world described in Urinetown the Musical, a smart Broadway hit that takes the serious environmental issues we face today and approaches them from a playfully self-aware, absurdist — not to mention very funny — perspective. Director Gina Kaufmann and Composer Mark Hollman worked together early in their careers at The Unusual Cabaret developing new musical work, and Urinetown has a cabaret influence despite its epic-sized cast. The story pits the haves of Urine Good Company, owners of the public potties, against the rebellious have-nots who don't want to pay any longer, but are the right and wrong sides really so clear as they seem at first?

Beyond the Horizon Festival
Addressing the Dean’s Theme of “The Gulf Oil Spill Crisis: Lessons for the Future” with original theater pieces to be created and performed by members of the Department of Theater and special guests.
In the wake of the devastating 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, officials at UMass Amherst issued a challenge to all departments to respond to the issues raised by the crisis. The Department of Theater’s response is a festival of devised theater, organized under the artistic direction of dramaturgy MFA student Megan McClain. She will guide several groups of artists, both students and professionals, as they create a handful of new pieces that offer different perspectives on the theme and the questions it raises about how technology effects our relationship to the physical world, our responsibility to repair what we harm, and our place in the community and our ecosystem.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
by William Shakespeare
In 1978, Tony Simotes, Artistic Director of the Berkshire’s world-renowned Shakespeare & Co., played the part of Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. It was his inaugural role with the company, and so the play holds a special place in his heart. The UMass Department of Theater is thrilled to have Simotes aboard as he returns to his theatrical roots with a new production of this play. Follow Simotes and his cast on a journey to a Greece where magic still happens and love is in the air.
Next year, we will be joined by two new full-time, permanent faculty and staff members, as well as a number of adjunct faculty and guest artists, who will teach our students and to help us mount our productions. Their contributions will give our students an additional exposure to the best and brightest in the field.

We are pleased to welcome Megan Lewis, Assistant Professor or Theater History and Criticism, as well as Kristin Jensen, Costume Shop Manager.

Please see their biographies below:

Megan Lewis
Assistant Professor, Theater History & Criticism
BA Kenyon College
MA Johns Hopkins University
PhD University of Minnesota

Dr. Megan Lewis is a South African-American theatre, performance, & film scholar concerned with the staging of national identity, gender, and race in a variety of performance media—including monuments and public pageants, traditional staged texts, and documentary and narrative films. She is currently working on her first book on stagings of the Afrikaner in theatrical and public life, a study of the manner in which Afrikaner whiteness, masculinity, and national identity are staged and enacted before and during the apartheid era and within contemporary, democratic South Africa.

Prof. Lewis is a multidisciplinary educator with a passion for inspiring intellectual curiosity and advocating for the performing arts as a powerful force for social change. Her teaching passions include African film, the politics of performance, non-Western performance traditions, performance of race (particularly whiteness), and genderplay.

Lewis has published on South African performance in Theatre Journal, Performing Arts Journal and Text & Performance and currently has articles under review in Theatre Topics and The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism. She taught theatre, media, and film courses at the University of Minnesota (2006-2011) before joining the faculty at UMass Amherst. Lewis balances her scholarly life with a professional career as a documentary filmmaker, videographer, producer, and director.

Kristin Jensen
BS Miami University
MA University of Kentucky
MFA University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Kristin Jensen comes to UMass Amherst after nine years as Costume Shop Supervisor in the Undergraduate Drama Department of NYU Tisch School of the Arts, where she also taught draping, pattern making, advanced costume techniques, and fundamentals of stagecraft.

Before moving to academia, Kristin spent six years as a draper at Carelli Costumes, a prominent Broadway costume house, creating costumes for theatre and opera productions in New York and across the country. She also worked as draper, craftsperson, and dyer at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago and at Chicago’s Costume Exchange (Steppenwolf), and as a first hand for several seasons
at the Santa Fe Opera. Outside the theatre, she executed several projects for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

In addition to her technical experience, she was the assistant designer to celebrated costume designers William Ivy Long and Martin Pakledinaz on productions from Broadway to Europe. Her own design work earned her a Joseph Jefferson Citation nomination and an ACTF National Award.

Kristin earned an MFA in costume design and technology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, an MA in textiles and clothing from the University of Kentucky, and a BS in education from Miami University.

Her fascination with costumes has been fed by her extensive travels, from Asia to North Africa. Outside of work, she enjoys hiking and the outdoors with her husband and eight-year-old son.
Outreach

The 2011-2012 season will include two matinees for local school groups. Student matinees help teachers meet requirements of the state’s Arts Curriculum Frameworks by introducing children to live performance and serving as a springboard to the kind of critical thinking about the arts that the frameworks wants every child to learn. We keep them affordable so the greatest possible number of students can go: $8 per student, only $6 per student for groups of 20 or more. Chaperones are FREE, a courtesy we extend to schools to ensure that they can afford to send a full complement of teachers with their students.

Urinetown

music by Mark Hollmann, lyrics by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis, and book by Greg Kotis
The Rand Theater
School matinee March 7 at 10 a.m.

What if we stressed our natural resources to the point where people had to line up to pay for the privilege of using the privy? That’s what happens in the world described in Urinetown the Musical, a smart Broadway hit that takes the serious environmental issues we face today and approaches them from a playfully self-aware, absurdist — not to mention very funny — perspective. Director Gina Kaufmann and Composer Mark Hollman worked together early in their careers at The Unusual Cabaret developing new musical work, and Urinetown has a cabaret influence despite its epic-sized cast. The story pits the haves of Urine Good Company, owners of the public potties, against the rebellious have-nots who don't want to pay any longer, but are the right and wrong sides really so clear as they seem at first?

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
by William Shakespeare
The Rand Theater
School matinee April 25 at 10 a.m.

In 1978, Tony Simotes, Artistic Director of the Berkshire’s world-renowned Shakespeare & Co., played the part of Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. It was his inaugural role with the company, and so the play holds a special place in his heart. The UMass Department of Theater is thrilled to have Simotes aboard as he returns to his theatrical roots with a new production of this play. Follow Simotes and his cast on a journey to a Greece where magic still happens and love is in the air.
2011-2012 will bring a continuation of our People and Presence theme as we seek to continue to connect with our alumni. We are already in the process of interviewing donors for our next series of donor profiles, and we are pleased to announce that we will be organizing a series of events around the premiere of Marcus Gardley’s *Hell In High Water*, including a Rand Lecture featuring Arena Stage’s Molly Smith.

Elements of the set design for *High In High Water* (image by Miguel Romero)
Facility

Curtain Renovation

An exciting and unique performance space is currently being created within The Curtain Theater, one of two main stages within the Department of Theater at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. The Curtain Theater has been used for over three decades as a “black box” type of space. But today, live performance facilities require adaptability and effective technical support. With seating risers and stair units welded in place and a precarious out-of-date lighting grid, the ability to change the Curtain’s space to suit each production’s needs was severely limited.

Now, in support of the bold new vision of the Department of Theater, The Curtain Theater renovation will reshape the facility into a truly flexible performance space. The old, substandard lighting grid is being replaced with a state-of-the-art wire-tension grid; complete with all new lighting positions, electrical raceways, and circuits. The permanent seating risers and stair units have been removed and will be replaced with an attractive flexible seating system, allowing the Department to alter the space more effectively for each production. In addition, several of the mezzanine walls are being removed to add even more flexibility and excitement to the space. The new performance space will maintain its current capacity of nearly 100 patrons, but will now meet all building codes and conditions. The Curtain can soon be ranked as one of the most exciting live performance venues in the region.

With great support from CHFA Dean Julie Hayes and Vice-Provost Joel Martin, The Department of Theater will continue to provide the New England region an ever-increasing selection of creative work in a unique performance space rich with possibilities.