The Department of Theater
Year In Review 2014-2015
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## 2014-2015

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## Looking ahead to 2015-2016

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## Appendices:

- 2014-2015 Season Survey Analysis
- UMass Gateway article on Stage Combat and Tony Simotes
- UMass Magazine article on A New Brain production process
2014-2015

Our Season

This season was one in which we focused on new work. We also took a creative risk and produced our musical in our smaller theater. The compromise was that our box office numbers were not as strong as they've been in years past.

We are proud of the work we did in the past season because audience members who visited our spaces came away offering near-universal acclaim for our work. We were also pleased to welcome an appreciative crowd of local high school students to the theater for our performance of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE SHOW</th>
<th>SPACE</th>
<th>EST #</th>
<th>ACTUAL</th>
<th>+/-</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Merchant of Venice</td>
<td>Rand</td>
<td>$7,000.00</td>
<td>$5,973.11</td>
<td>$(1,026.89)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A New Brain</td>
<td>Curtain</td>
<td>$7,500.00</td>
<td>$3,408.91</td>
<td>$(4,091.09)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cat On a Hot Tin Roof</td>
<td>Rand</td>
<td>$6,000.00</td>
<td>$4,904.14</td>
<td>$(1,095.86)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cat - student matinee</td>
<td>Rand</td>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
<td>$650.00</td>
<td>$(350.00)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play Lab</td>
<td>Curtain</td>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
<td>$585.42</td>
<td>$(414.58)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dead Man’s Cell Phone</td>
<td>Rand</td>
<td>$3,500.00</td>
<td>$3,051.66</td>
<td>$(448.34)</td>
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<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$26,000.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>$18,573.24</strong></td>
<td><strong>$(7,426.76)</strong></td>
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<td>Less 7.9%</td>
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<td><strong>$2,054.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,337.27</strong></td>
<td><strong>$(716.73)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$23,946.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>$17,235.97</strong></td>
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Audience Survey

We expanded our audience survey this year so that we could learn more about who is in our seats and what matters to them when they come see a show in our spaces.

We're pleased to note that when asked to give three words to describe our shows, we get words like “professional,” “thought-provoking,” “funny,” “entertaining,” “intense,” “emotional,” and “powerful.” We're proud that when asked if they'd recommend our production to a friend, the answer is overwhelmingly “yes.”

We learned that by a ratio of nearly 10 to 1, patrons prefer our new evening start time of 7:30 over the old 8 p.m. start.

The full survey results, which also include data on how folks find us and what they look for in a theater experience, are appended to this document.
Notes about our productions

We instituted some changes this year in response to the survey responses we received last year.

One was the above-mentioned change in start times — a 7:30 start time puts us in line with many professional theaters in New York and around the country, which are switching at least their weekday shows, if not all, to accommodate people’s desire for an earlier evening.

We also changed the production schedule to include a Thursday preview night. This change was made for pedagogic reasons — the experience of putting the show in front of a crowd offered valuable information that was then incorporated into a Friday rehearsal, before the official Saturday opening of the show. Students, staff, faculty and guest artists alike found the opportunity of extreme value and plans are to continue to offer this opportunity. This show is offered at half price to encourage attendance by local theater buffs.

Dramaturgs shifted away from their First Friday Talkback and expanded their audience engagement efforts. Audiences learn about the shows and engage in conversations with members of the production as well as community experts who spoke to issues raised in the plays.

_The Merchant of Venice_

by William Shakespeare

Directed by Tony Simotes

October 23, 25, 29, 30 and Nov. 1

The Rand Theater

To fund his friend’s efforts to court the resourceful lady Portia, Venetian merchant Antonio borrows money from the much-abused Shylock. When Antonio defaults on his loan, Shylock demands his due: a pound of the merchant’s flesh. Shakespeare’s provocative comedy asks tough questions about mercy, justice, and belonging that resonate today. Tony Simotes, artistic director of Shakespeare & Company, returns to UMass to direct alumnus Stephen Driscoll ’73 as Shylock in this production.

Our opening performance was a fundraiser for the Department of Theater. Stephen Driscoll, who is well-connected politically, invited many of his illustrious friends to attend or donate, helping us raise money to finish the theater lobby renovation. We celebrated at a post-opening gala, at which College Humanities and Fine Arts Dean Julie Hayes also announced that Driscoll would be creating
a scholarship to send our students to study at the British American Drama Academy’s summer program.

Dramaturgs offered three events to offer audiences a chance to discuss this often problematic play:
“If you tickle us, do we not laugh?”: Comedy in The Merchant of Venice
“Which is the Merchant here, and which the Jew?”: Jewish Representation in The Merchant of Venice
“The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind”: Forced Conversion in The Merchant of Venice

We enticed patrons to attend our show by offering a 5% discount to Bruno’s Pizza with their ticket stubs.

A New Brain
Music and lyrics by William Finn, book by William Finn & James Lapine
Directed by Glenn Proud
November 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
The Curtain Theater
Who says death can’t be funny? Certainly not William Finn and James Lapine, whose bittersweet comic musical A New Brain strikes chords of exaltation and despair in turn. When blocked songwriter Gordon Schwinn is diagnosed with arteriovenous malformation, the prospect of high-risk brain surgery propels him into a frenzy of composing—but will this newfound creative zeal see him safely through the ordeal he faces? A New Brain treads the tenuous boundaries of life and death with charm, gusto, and a breath of spring in its step.

This show was proposed by undergrads Ben Finn and Conor Dennin, who went on to provide their talents to the show as lead actor and dramaturg, respectively, offering a great example of the ways our undergrads step up and take ownership of projects in our season.

The show was the focus of an exhaustive and wonderful photo and text spread in UMass Magazine (see appendix).

Post-show question conversations for this show included: The Challenges of Performing Musical Theater, Designing for the Musical Theater, New Brain in the History of Musical Theater

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
by Tennessee Williams
Directed by Jared Culverhouse
February 26, 28 and March 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
The Rand Theater
Sixty years after its premiere, Tennessee
Williams’s thundering masterpiece has lost none of its impact. An American classic, Cat serves up an explosive Southern cocktail of sex, death, and revelation in the form of its unforgettable heroine, Maggie, and her struggle for dominance on the “hot tin roof” of her marriage bed. As the embattled Pollitt clan gathers to celebrate its dying patriarch’s birthday, will Maggie emerge victorious?

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof offered our audiences the first-ever opportunity to see performance faculty Julie Nelson and Milan Dragicevich together on the same stage. Our student actors benefited from the opportunity to work alongside their mentors.

In addition to post-show talks, dramaturg Amy Brooks used this show as a jumping-off point for a symposium, entitled “Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond” on February 15 in the Curtain Theater. Panelists included Broadway director Michael Wilson; Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival Curator and Co-Founder David Kaplan; former Hartford Stage Senior Dramaturg and UMass Professor of Theater Chris Baker; and Smith College Professor and theater activist Ellen Kaplan. The production also had a student matinee, attended by a number of high schools from around the area.

UMass New Play Lab
Now in its second year, the UMass New Play Lab exists to develop exceptional new plays in collaboration with visionary playwrights. This nationally-recognized playwriting festival will showcase two innovative, challenging new works in staged readings that follow ten intensive days of rehearsal with the authors in residence. Raw, unpredictable, and fun, the UMass New Play Lab will redefine how you experience theater.

We produced two plays in the second year of PlayLab. Started by a group of graduate students, Play Lab’s creative team included new graduate students coming on board to be a part of the event and preparing to take over from the founders next year.

The Sabine Play
by Michael Yates Crowley
directed by Christina Pellegrini
March 25, 27, April 2, 4

Michael Yates Crowley’s The Sabine Play asks: How far can—and should—our imaginations bend to shape our own narratives of trauma or triumph? When dreamy outcast Grace (“Fat Grace”) Matthias accuses Jeff, the school football hero, of rape, their community wastes no time alternately crucifying and martyrizing her. But Grace has bigger ambitions. Smoldering with irreverent wit and anger, The Sabine Play triangulates past, present, and future to frame a startlingly honest portrait of young people who must decide whether to burn their world in order to remake it in the image of their desires.

Michael Yates Crowley is a Brooklyn-based playwright and performer. His work has been produced in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Berlin, and Edinburgh, among other cities. His plays include Evanston: A Rare Comedy (selected for the 2013 O’Neill National Playwrights Conference); The Tourists (2013 NNPN/ Kennedy Center workshop); Righteous Money (3-Legged-Dog, 59E59 Theaters, Edinburgh Fringe); and The Ted Haggard Monologues (published by S. Fischer Verlag; filmed by HBO and adapted for feature film by Harmonium Films & Music).
**Sagittarius Ponderosa**  
by MJ Kaufman  
directed by Jared Culverhouse  
March 26, 28, April 1, 3  
A meditation on the natural and cosmic cycles of the world around us, MJ Kaufmann's *Sagittarius Ponderosa* tells the story of a family in flux. Archer (still Angela to his family) returns home to Central Oregon to care for his dying father. At night under an old Ponderosa Pine he meets Owen, a graduate student looking back to the past to right the environmental imbalances of the present. In the wake of his father's death, Archer (like his astrological namesake, Sagittarius) hunts for a way forward amidst the confusion of loss and the inexorable tide of change it brings. Delicately rendered and gently funny, *Sagittarius Ponderosa* is an honest, distinctive portrait of individual growth and familial renewal.  
MJ Kaufman is a playwright. Originally from Portland, Oregon, MJ attended Wesleyan University and recently received an MFA in playwriting from the Yale School of Drama. They* have received awards and commissions from the Program for Women in Theater, the Playwrights Foundation, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, Young Playwrights Inc., New Harmony Project, and the Huntington Theatre, where they are also a playwriting fellow. (*MJ Kaufman is trans-identified and genderqueer. Preferred pronouns: they/them or He/Him/His.)

**Dead Man's Cell Phone**  
by Sarah Ruhl  
Directed by Glenn Proud  
April 16, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25  
The Rand Theater

A ringing cell phone, an empty bowl of lobster bisque, and a dead man one table over—so begins Sarah Ruhl's wildly imaginative *Dead Man's Cell Phone*. When Jean answers the phone of a recently deceased stranger, she unwittingly embarks on a transformational journey of family deception, international intrigue, and romantic discovery. By turns touching and harrowing, Ruhl's play is a whimsical and whip-smart meditation on the pleasures and pains of love in an increasingly digitized world.

We finished our season with a special offer for students: dorm night discounts intended to bring people from different living areas to our show! Students were excited by this special offer and we plan to repeat it next year. We again offered post-show talks after several performances.
Miguel Romero retires

This year, one of our department mainstays moved on to other things — scenic design professor Miguel Romero retired after over two decades with the department.

He was feted by colleagues, students, friends and alumni alike including these four lovely encomiums in our May issue of Stages:

BRAVO MIGUEL!
Congratulations and thanks to Miguel Romero, a brilliant designer-teacher and fine colleague we were lucky enough to have with us all these years. Miguel and his work often reminded me of an artist he admires and knows, Ming Cho Lee. Like Ming, Miguel's work is elegant, intelligent, and filled with meaning. And like Ming again, Miguel knows how to share his work with students as fellow designers. He takes them and their potential seriously. No wonder, then, that so many of them are now successful scenic artists in New York and regional theater.

My favorite memory of working with Miguel was on The Tempest that we did together. It was a long time ago now, but here is what I remember of its spirit. Miguel's design transformed the Curtain Theater into a magic space like one of those snow globes where even the air seemed to come alive. Ropes, sails, and sailors spun down from above, a huge wave of silk wave swept up to fill the entire floor, and at the center, a mound curled up and around itself like a nautilus shell. The space suggested ship, island, and ocean all in one until finally, just as Prospero predicted; it vanished into thin air, like a dream. It was so beautiful, easy to work with, and integral to the play.

How did we do it? Who knows? It took lots of input and hard work from everyone. But what I remember most is how we began: we decided not to talk about a concept for the play, but just to talk about magic. Prospero's magic, but also ours. What was magic for us, and what gave us that feeling? So many images came from that talk: the magic of falling in love, magic in Judy Garland/ Marlene Dietrich/ Carmen Miranda, magic of carnival time, magic in being alive. Best of all was Miguel's memory of the magic that came from the way his
grandmother told him stories when he was a boy in Cuba. Imagine what that memory felt like and gave us: the magic of storytelling, the magic of childhood, the magic of a loving family and what it is to lose it. We tried to bring those feelings alive in Shakespeare's play and I think we did. That's a bit of what it was like to work with Miguel, a very fine designer and a wonderful man.
—Dick Trousdell, professor emeritus

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Sometimes in life the stars align and you meet a person with the tools to set you on a path you didn't know existed. Before I met Miguel I had no idea how to approach building a career as a set designer. He showed me both the practical skills I needed to develop and gave me the concrete steps I needed to take to become one. He afforded me every opportunity at his disposal, challenged me in all the right ways, and remains supportive today - I would not be where I am today without his wisdom and guidance in the early steps of my career.
—David Korins '99

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I was the first masters student that Miguel admitted to UMASS back in 1994. It is hard to believe that that is now twenty-one years ago...
I am eternally grateful to Miguel for his mentorship, and our continued friendship has brought me a great sense of contentment. This past summer I achieved a long-time goal in collaborating with Francesca Zambello, and it was wonderful to have Miguel and Paul in the opening night audience.
When I entered the program, I pretty much knew absolutely nothing about theatre. I had completed training in interior design and spent a summer at New York Stage and Film, but he had the insight to know that I could become what I am today. He saw a diamond in the rough, and I recall him telling me my lack of theatre experience allowed me to see the work I was doing with unencumbered eyes. There were no preconceptions of how a play should be designed but instilled in me the importance of dramaturgy and research in finding a creative design approach to each show I design.
I credit Miguel for my sense of confidence, determination and passion to be as creative as I can be. He instilled that in me at UMASS. We did have our fair share of disagreement—sometimes ending in tears—but I quickly learned that the competitive nature of our discipline meant it was necessary to build a thick skin.
Through his encouragement, I also found my affinity for teaching. I learned how to learn from Miguel. I observed and drew from many of his teaching methods in building my own teaching style. I am an excellent teacher because I learned how to listen. Over the years he has written me several letters of recommendation, each of them filled with personal sentiments that have made great impressions on their readers. They were undeniably a central factor in my success as I built an academic component to my career. I am a performance designer, a scenic painter, a draftsman, a model builder, a collage artist, a teacher and a storyteller. All these things began with my mentorship with Miguel.
Congratulations on your retirement! You deserve to rest on your laurels.
—Troy Hourie '97G

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I wish I could be there to celebrate with you all. Miguel had such a positive influence on my UMass experience, and what I learned with Miguel has guided me through everything I've been doing since.
—Madeleine Maggio ‘12
Department Guest Artists

The department’s talented and dedicated faculty and staff happily carry most of the weight when it comes to teaching, mentoring, and inspiring students. However, we are fortunate to have a wide-ranging network of artists and scholars who join us to augment our curriculum. Below is a list of the individuals, some of them alumni, others friends or associates of our faculty and staff, who joined us over the past year. All of them boast impressive credentials and talent that improved the academic and artistic experiences of our students. Some guests joined us for the entire year or semester as instructors, while others worked with students on a short-term basis, either as part of a production or as participants in a workshop or talk. Many were associated with Fridays at Four a new career outreach series we began this year.

Gregory Boover ’13, actor with Shakespeare & Co., musician, composer — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about how he has made his way as a working artist

Michelle Bossy, Director/Producer/Associate Artistic Director of Primary Stages in New York City — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about her career journey and particular challenges facing women in theater

Marcy Braidman ’08, Associate Program Director for Stories without Roofs theater company — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about her career journey and non-profit theater/theater for social change

Margo Caddell ’06G, lighting designer — taught and advised lighting design classes at graduate and undergraduate levels

Carly Cioffi, Associate Conservatory Director at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about ACT’s programs for actors and about auditioning for theater

Michael Yates Crowley, playwright — worked as resident playwright with New Play Lab

Stephen Driscoll ’73, Actors Equity Association member, actor — performed in The Merchant of Venice

Kim Euell, playwright, new play development professional, multi-cultural theater scholar — taught and advised playwriting, development and multi-cultural theater classes at graduate and undergraduate levels, advised the New Play Lab

Luke Flood, musician, music director — musical director of A New Brain

Morgan Jenness, dramaturg, teacher, and literary manager — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference

David Kaplan, Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival Curator and Co-Founder — panelist for “Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond” symposium

Ellen Kaplan, Smith College Professor and theater activist —
panelist for “Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond” symposium

**MJ Kaufmann**, playwright — worked as resident playwright with New Play Lab

**Andrea Lauer**, NYC-based costume designer — taught and advised costume design classes at graduate and undergraduate levels

**Kevin Maroney**, Special Assistant to the Managing Directors at Center Stage — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about Center Stage internship series, as well as offering insights into the benefits of internships in general

**Tom Miller**, education representative of Actors Equity Association — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about AEA membership

**Will Nallett ’12** — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about networking and making one’s way as a working technician in New York City and on tours

**Melissa Cleary Pearson ’10**, director, choreographer, audience services specialist for Fine Arts Center — choreographer for *A New Brain*

**Luke Reed ’12**, actor with Shakespeare & Co., musician, composer — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about how he has made his way as a working artist

**Amrita Ramanan**, Double Edge Theater Associate Producer and dramaturg — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference

**Magda Romanska**, Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas chairperson and Arts Emerson professor — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference

**Rebecca Rugg**, Red Moon Theater Company’s Director of the Center for Civic Art and Design — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference

**Diana Schoenborn**, dialect coach — trained actors for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

**Tony Simotes**, director, managing director and artistic associate at Berkshire Theatre Group, stage combat instructor — directed *The Merchant of Venice* and taught stage combat (photos on this and following page are by UMass photographer John Solem from a web article on the stage combat class)

**Sheila Siragusa ’00, ’03G**, director, performer, Shakespeare scholar — taught performance and Shakespeare First Folio classes

**Dinora Walcott**, actress and acting instructor — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about acting on TV in LA

**Beth Whitaker**, Associate Artistic Director of Signature Theatre in New York — spoke at Fridays at Four career series about her career journey and particular challenges facing women in theater

**Talvin Wilks**, playwright, director,
dramaturg, and multicultural theater activist — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference

**Elizabeth Williamson**, Hartford Stage Senior Dramaturg and Director of New Play Development — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference

**Michael Wilson**, Broadway director — panelist for “Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond” symposium

**Diane Wondisford**, Producing Director of Music-Theatre Group — panelist, Northeastern Dramaturgy Conference
Megan Lewis wins the Distinguished Teaching Award

We were thrilled in March when dramaturg Megan Lewis won the university’s Distinguished Teaching Award.

Here’s the announcement we sent out about Megan’s achievement:

The Department of Theater at UMass Amherst is proud to announce that Professor Megan Lewis has received the UMass Distinguished Teaching Award, a university-wide honor granted to only a select handful of faculty members annually. Lewis is the first member of the theater faculty to receive the award since the late Doris Abramson, a department founding member, received it in 1978.

Lewis, who joined the department in the 2011-2012 school year, received the award on the strength of her passion and skill for teaching both general education and advanced theater courses, her embrace of modern technologies to engage students, and a breadth of course topics that ranges from the arts in South Africa to drama and the media. Student reviews of her classes consistently speak to her enthusiasm and also mention the way Lewis successfully encourages students to engage with potentially intimidating or hot-button topics. “Professor Lewis made this class of 80 feel like a class of 20,” one student said.

Megan is a consummate teacher, an inspiration in her classrooms who is always committed to honing her skills so that she can impact each new generation of students. She has curricular vision and has developed some thrilling new courses for our department and this university. It is an incredible honor for a pre-tenure faculty member like Professor Lewis receive this award. I believe it stands as an exemplar of how faculty in the arts can make a significant and impactful difference in the lives of the students on this campus and I offer her my congratulations.

Lewis originally hails from South Africa but has lived in the US for many years. She came to the Department of Theater by way of Minnesota; she received her PhD in theater from the University of Minnesota, where she also taught theater, media and film courses for several years. Lewis's areas of interest as a teacher and scholar include 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. Her book *Magnet Theatre: Three Decades of Making Space*, a collection of essays and interviews about Cape Town-based Magnet Theatre's 25 years of theatremaking in South Africa she is co-editing with Anton Krueger of Rhodes University, is due out in early 2016 from Intellect Books and UNISA (Univ of South Africa). Her monograph, *A Whitley Nation: Performing and Reforming the Afrikaner in South African Theatrical and Public Life*, is currently in review.

Harley Erdman is a Fulbright US Scholar

Elsewhere in the dramaturgy department, Harley Erdman learned that his application had been accepted to become a Fulbright US Scholar for a project he plans to take on during his sabbatical next year. Here is the announcement about his upcoming work:

UMass Department of Theater Professor Harley Erdman has received a Fulbright award that will take him all the way to Sri Lanka next year to teach dramaturgy courses to students at the University of Peradeniya. Erdman, who teaches dramaturgy to graduate and undergraduate students and serves as the Graduate Program Director, is the second current faculty member in the department to be named a Fulbright Scholar. (The other is performance faculty member Judyie Al-Bilali.) Erdman will do his Fulbright work during his Spring 2016 sabbatical and anticipates spending about four months in Sri Lanka.

“The courses I teach will not only give students the tools to produce new works of theater but, I hope, inspire them to produce such works,” Erdman said.

“We are thrilled that one of our faculty members has received this prestigious award. I know that his work will have a great impact in Sri Lanka and on the work he does at UMass,” said Theater Chair Penny Remsen.

Erdman’s successful proposal was to teach two “playwriting-related” courses, one in adaptation and one in documentary theater, to “address a substantial gap in Peradeniya’s curriculum.” Although the
university has a theater major, the faculty currently has only one active theater instructor, and no one is teaching playwriting or dramaturgy. Adaptation is both an old dramatic tradition and a leading edge of current theater, Erdman explained. It is particularly significant in the recent history of Sri Lankan theater, which includes a number of significant re-imaginings of European classics into a Sri Lankan context. Furthermore, many of those works were produced by artists with ties for the University of Peradeniya. Documentary theater, meanwhile, combines journalistic interview techniques with theater to dramatize current events or issues. It, too, is at the forefront of current theater practice and has prominent Sri Lankan practitioners.

Professor Erdman's intention with these courses is not only to impart theoretical knowledge. “...These courses will expose students to outstanding texts, models, ideas, and exercises in adaptation and documentary theater, giving them tools that will allow them to create plays and shape performances specific to their own Sri Lankan reality,” he said.

While this will be Erdman's first collaboration with theater professionals in Sri Lanka, it is hardly his first cross-cultural undertaking. Erdman speaks Spanish and is well-known for his work as a translator/adaptor of Spanish-language theater. Erdman's translations of Tirso de Molina's Jealous of Herself and Marta the Divine were published in 2012 in companion volumes by Aris & Phillips. He has a forthcoming collection of translations of ten plays by 17th-century Spanish women and is a winner of the Association for Hispanic Classic Theater's Translation Prize. Erdman has taught and traveled extensively in Latin America, has traveled to Macedonia to attend presentations of his opera by a Macedonian/Albanian theater company, and leads a study abroad course of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland each year. Erdman has served as Editor of the journal Theatre Topics, and received the Outstanding Teacher Award from the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. He chaired the UMass Department of Theater, 2002-2007.

Other faculty achievements

Professors Judyie Al-Bilali and Megan Lewis received the Student Choice Award from the Residential First-Year Experience (RFYE) for their teaching. Lewis and Al-Bilali also led students to South Africa for the first-ever Grahamstown Festival Course.

This January, faculty sound designer Amy Altadonna designed The Other Place at Virginia Stage Company. It was directed by AD Chris Hanna, with sets by Tim Mackabee, ML Geiger on lights, Tricia Barsamian on costumes, and projection design by Shawn Duan. She started the school year in New York, where she opened two new plays: “The first, called Bastards of Strindberg, was produced by the Scandinavian American Theater Company at The Lion Theater at Theater Row. It was an evening of four new one-acts playing on themes of class and gender in Miss Julie. The plays are woven together by dance pieces with music composed by Altadonna and her collaborator, Danish recording artist Anette Norgaard. The second play was the world premiere of Dry Land, playing on the main stage at HERE Arts Center in the west village. It tackles themes of sexuality, pregnancy and abortion and was directed by Adrienne Campbell-Holt with her company Colt Coeur, where Altadonna is an artistic associate.

In performance, professor Milan Dragicevich got news that he has received a 2015 Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation Fellowship. This fellowship supports Milan's participation at the International Shakespeare Theater Festival in Serbia, where he has been invited to lead Shakespeare performance workshops.


Harley also anticipated the upcoming publication of his book: “A book I'm co-editing on Spanish theater in adaptation has been contracted by Tamesis Press (UK) and will appear in July 2015. It will feature an essay by Gina Kaufmann about our UMass production of Marta the Divine, as well as one by me about our production of Suitors. My anthology of plays by 17th century plays by Spanish women is coming along, and is slated for
publication by the University of Toronto’s Other Voice series — likely to appear 2016.” Harley is also working on a new opera with Amherst College music faculty member Eric Sawyer, based on local author Barry Werth’s widely known biography The Scarlet Professor, about Newton Arvin, Smith college professor who was prosecuted for possessing homosexual “pornography” in 1960.

Costume shop manager Kristin Jensen advised students for Opera On The Air, a Music Department Opera Workshop that was directed by Sheila Siragusa ’00, ’03G with work by student costumers Bethany Eddy, Stacie St. Louis and Megan Fusco; lighting and props by Michael Seavey, and stage management and props by Peter Vaiknoris.

Performance faculty member Gina Kaufmann opened her production of The Last Five Years at the Majestic to good reviews: http://www.masslive.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2015/04/majestic_theater_ends_season_o.html

Priscilla Page ’01G was a scholar-in-residence with the playwrights for the 2014 México/U.S. Playwright Exchange Program at the Lark Play Development Center in New York City. She has been asked to write about the work and the program and will also provide dramaturgical support to the writers as needed during the exchange. “It’s an honor to be asked to participate and more specifically to re-connect with Jorge Ignacio Cortinas, who has been a guest in my classes in years past and was affiliated with New WORLD through New WORKS for a New WORLD and Project 2050,” Page wrote. “I am also going to take this opportunity to begin a conversation with Andrea Thome, head of this program, about internship opportunities for students enrolled in the Multicultural Theater certificate.” More about the program at http://www.larktheatre.org/the-2014-mexicou-s-playwright-exchange-program/
Outreach

Audience Engagement

As ever, outreach was a significant priority for the Department of Theater in the 2014-2015 school year.

Sensing that the First Friday Talkback format had reached the end of its usefulness, the dramaturgy area reconfigured its community engagement work and chose instead to institute a series of talks. Rather than a traditional Q&A with artists, we opted for a series of conversations with community and department experts on some of the questions — artistic, scholarly, and societal — that surrounded the productions.

Speakers and audiences tackled the difficulties surrounding elements of *The Merchant of Venice*, the medical issues that prompted William Finn to create *A New Brain*, the history of musicals, and more. Our New Play Lab was the exception to this new format, as the creators of the festival hosted Q&As designed to elicit feedback on the new plays with an eye to their further development.

In addition to the regular Q&As, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* dramaturg Amy Brooks organized a symposium around the work and its author on Feb. 15, *Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond*. Panelists included Broadway director Michael Wilson; Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival Curator and Co-Founder David Kaplan; former Hartford Stage Senior Dramaturg and UMass Professor of Theater Chris Baker; and Smith College Professor and theater activist Ellen Kaplan. The evening concluded with a screening of Richard Brooks's 1958 film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This event was free and open to the public and local bookstore Amherst Books was on hand with a selection of Williams’ literature.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was also an opportunity for local high schoolers to have an experience with live theater through our student matinee. Students from a half-dozen highschools and local groups attended the show, received study guides, and participated in a post-show Q&A with members of the production.

The Northeastern Dramaturgy Retreat

The UMass Amherst MFA Dramaturgy program welcomed theater students and professionals in dramaturgy and related fields to campus this year as it played host to the Northeastern Dramaturgy Retreat.

The Northeastern Dramaturgy Retreat, which took place January 30th and 31st, was the third annual conference for Master’s students in Dramaturgy from UMass, Harvard/A.R.T., Columbia, and Yale. Nearly 50 students and faculty converged from Cambridge, New Haven, New York, and Amherst to discuss professional strategies for communication and innovation in the field of dramaturgy—a job that spans many areas of the theater world, from literary management to production work. UMass dramaturgs Paul Adolphsen, Amy Brooks, Samantha Doolittle, and Finn Lefevre coordinated this year's event at every stage from grant-writing to event planning; this spirit of industriousness was reflected in the retreat's theme, “The Dramaturg as Change-Maker.”

This year's panelists and guests included dramaturg, teacher, and literary manager Morgan Jenness; Double Edge Theater Associate Producer and dramaturg Amrita Ramanan; Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas chairperson and Arts Emerson professor Magda Romanska; Red Moon Theater Company's Director of the Center for Civic Art and Design Rebecca Rugg; Hartford Stage Senior Dramaturg and Director of New Play Development Elizabeth Williamson; Producing Director of Music-Theatre Group Diane Wondisford; and keynote speaker Talvin Wilks, an eminent playwright, director, dramaturg, and multicultural theater activist.

Fridays at Four

In response to the need for career preparation resources, the Undergraduate Committee created a new series of professional development seminars, called ‘Fridays at Four’, to complement the one-on-one mentoring our undergraduates receive. In the 2014-15 academic year, the inaugural series of these seminars
offered career advice, networking opportunities, and exposure to the experiences of working professionals in the theater. All events are free and open to the public including the Five Colleges and greater Pioneer Valley community.

Speakers included:

- Greg Boover (UMass Alum, Actor and Musician at Shakespeare & Co.)
- Michelle Bossy (Associate Artistic Director of Primary Stages in NYC)
- Marcy Braidman (UMass Alum, Associate Program Director for Stories without Roofs)
- Carly Cioffi (Associate Conservatory Director at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco)
- Kevin Maroney (Special Assistant to the Managing Directors at Center Stage in Baltimore)
- Tom Miller (Director of Education and Outreach at Actors' Equity Association)
- Will Nallett (UMass Alum, Electrician, and IATSE member)
- Luke Reed (UMass Alum, Actor and Musician at Shakespeare & Co.)
- Dinora Walcott (UMass Alum, Actor with recurring role on Scandal, Voiceover Artist, and Entrepreneur)
- Beth Whitaker (Associate Artistic Director of Signature Theater in NYC)

These seminars were a great opportunity to build valuable professional connections and to learn about the business of theater.

Student Carrie Radigan said, “I met Michelle Bossy from Primary Stages at one of the Fridays at Four events. I really liked hearing her talk about the theater company she worked for, so out of curiosity I looked it up and noticed there was an opening for an artistic intern. I asked her if it was at all possible to meet up over coffee during Spring Break in NYC, applied for the position and she interviewed me! We talked for a bit and she remembered me from Fridays at Four and offered the position to me on the spot.”

We look forward to another successful year of Fridays at Four events in 2015-16. These events also provide a forum for UMass students past and present to exchange insights, advice, and stories. We are lining up brilliant and impactful speakers who can provide students with fresh insights into the world of theater. The kickoff speaker for the 2015-16 season will be Carey Perloff, Artistic Director of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, on October 28, 2015 at 4pm.
Grants, Professional Development and Scholarship Awards

Faculty, staff and students are able to extend the resources of the department by pursuing grants, professional development funds and scholarships that go to fund projects directly related to coursework as well as independent and extra-curricular projects. Below are lists of the awards secured by department members during this school year.

Faculty and Staff 2014-2015

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Development

Mark Your Spot

The department stayed the course in terms of its main fundraising effort: we continued with our Mark Your Spot campaign for one more year.

To help raise funds necessary to complete the Rand Lobby upgrade, the Department of Theater is offering patrons a chance to buy one of our freshly upgraded Rand Theater seats! Purchase a seat, and we’ll mark it with a plaque bearing your name, or dedicate it to a loved one—your choice. If you don’t wish to purchase a seat, we are grateful for any support you can provide.

- Orchestra seat: $400
- Loge or balcony seat: $200

Your gift may be paid in full or pledged over two years. The Department will contact you about the plaque inscription.

For information about our programs, productions, and more, please visit our website at umass.edu/theater

When you buy a seat you are contributing toward:

- A greener and safer theater, as we install energy-efficient lighting
- A more accessible theater, through the creation of bathrooms that are accessible to all our patrons
- A better patron experience, through the construction of a new, state-of-the-art box office
Our amazing alumnus Stephen Driscoll ’73 threw his weight behind the effort when we threw a gala for the opening of *The Merchant of Venice* to which we invited many state and local officials. The event was a joyful occasion which drew an enthusiastic crowd to a post-show reception and raised thousands for the cause.

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**Penny Remsen,**
Chair of the UMass-Amherst Department of Theater,
cordially invites you to join her
for a performance to benefit UMass Theater

### The Merchant of Venice
by William Shakespeare
directed by Tony Simotes,
Artistic Director of
the nationally-renowned Shakespeare & Co.
and featuring
Hon. Stephen Driscoll ’73,
member, Actors Equity Association,
as Shylock

To be followed by a post-show reception
on the Rand Theater stage
with members of the production

**Curtain:** Saturday, October 25, at 3 p.m.
in the Rand Theater, Fine Arts Center, UMass
Reception to follow immediately

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**Honorary Host Committee**
US Senator Edward Markey
Governor Deval L. Patrick
State Treasurer Steve Grossman
State Auditor Suzanne Bump
Senate President Therese Murray
Senator Stan Rosenberg
Senator Marc Pacheco
Representative Ellen Story
Representative Kate Hogan
Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse
Hon. Barney Frank
Hon. Phil Johnston

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*Please return the enclosed RSVP card to reserve your tickets
or make a donation.

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College of Humanities & Fine Arts
Donor Profiles

We also continued our tradition of donor profiles, featuring two women whose lives had intersected with the Department of Theater in very different ways, and who continue to remember the department in their annual giving.

Anna Norcross

Graduating Year: 2009  
Major: Theater and History

A favorite UMass Theater memory:  
I remember that my greatest triumph, academically, might’ve been when (former faculty member) Paul Walsh gave me a 99 on a paper—he doesn’t give 100s, he’ll only give up to a 99. It was a short piece I’d written for the first dramaturgy course, and it was on empathy and the idea that theater is about fostering empathy among different people. I’ve always felt like the role of theater is not just to expose people to different lifestyles or people different from themselves but is about encouraging an emotional connection, not just an intellectual understanding.

Why do you donate to the Department of Theater? I donate to UMass because I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunities the theater department gave me—from training on big department shows, to supporting small productions we created on our own, to helping me grow as a person. I take the UMass community with me wherever I go, and I hope many generations of UMass Theater will join this wonderful community in the years to come.
Patricia Warner

Theater affiliation: Professor Emerita
A favorite UMass Theater memory: I loved teaching my classes. I loved the people. I loved the creativity, the energy, and the wonderful relationships between the students and the faculty. I haven’t seen that anywhere else.

Why do you donate to the Department of Theater? For all those reasons above. I think what the theater department does is worthy of being supported. And no matter how much money comes into the Department of Theater from the university and wherever, in the natural setting of a department like theater, in a university like UMass, you ALWAYS need more money. Theater is expensive, even when you’re doing it by the seat of your pants, on a shoestring. And so, if I can add a few more bucks into the coffers, that makes me feel good.
Funding Students for the British American Drama Academy

Among his many acts of generosity toward the Department of Theater this year, Stephen Driscoll ’73 announced a scholarship for the British American Drama Academy. In preparation for re-entering the life of an actor, Driscoll had spent a summer studying at BADA in Oxford, England, and came away awed by the experience and what he learned. He wanted to share that experience and created a scholarship that would pay half the tuition plus airfare for a qualified UMass student.

Actress Marielle O’Malley, who appeared in *The Merchant of Venice* with Driscoll in the fall, was the recipient in this inaugural year.

Meanwhile, a number of other UMass students also auditioned and were accepted to the prestigious program. In helping them with their financial need, we had an opportunity to try UMass’ new MinuteFund program, which is a crowdfunding platform that enables departments and organizations on campus to raise money for specific projects. Using the platform, we raised $6,275 toward the tuition for Slave Tchoul, John McPhee and Alex Salazar-Greenstein.

All three will be joining O’Malley in Oxford this summer.
Student and Alumni Achievements

Our students and alumni were high achievers just like our faculty and staff. For one, our just-graduated dramaturgy MFA ranks also included a Fulbright awardee!

Paul Adolphsen ‘15G Receives Fulbright Student Grant

Department of Theater graduate student Paul Adolphsen has received a prestigious Fulbright Student Grant. Adolphsen, who is due to receive his MFA in dramaturgy this spring, will be working with students and faculty at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa to develop theater courses that will offer students an opportunity to explore some of the unique issues young South Africans face.

The Department of Theater is thrilled to add another Fulbright winner to its ranks. Other winners include faculty members Harley Erdman (who was named a Fulbright US Scholar last month) and Judyie Al-Bilali (who is a past recipient). We are proud to have the high caliber of scholarship, creativity, and teaching of department members acknowledged at such a high level.

Adolphsen’s project is the result of an interest in South Africa and the mentorship of two faculty members with strong connections to the country, dramaturg Megan Lewis and Al-Bilali, who spent several years at the University of the Western Cape as a Fulbright Scholar in Cape Town. The project is in line with current initiatives at UWC that seek to develop a sustainable, multi-disciplinary arts program. It’s also Adolphsen’s hope that this project will open up more opportunities for exchange between UWC and UMass in the future.

Adolphsen’s Fulbright project has two components. For the first part he will partner with Dr. Miki Flockeman and other professors at UWC to develop a series of workshops where humanities students will engage with course content through collaborative theatre-making and writing. Students will explore issues of civic responsibility and reflect on their experience of democracy as members of the “born free generation” – a generation who did not grow up under apartheid but who still navigate its legacy daily.

The second part of the project involves developing a playwriting workshop for both undergraduate and graduate students at UWC. This workshop will include guided play reading, discussion, and writing exercises led by Cape Town playwrights. Participants will write short plays reflecting on their position as members of the “born free” generation that will go through a development process culminating in a public script-in-hand performance at various Cape Town venues.

“The goal of my project is to explore how a dramaturgical sensibility and collaborative theatre-making methods can create space in traditional humanities classrooms for larger conversations about freedom and civic responsibility,” Adolphsen said.

Doug Kraner ‘79G creates Gotham

Easily the most buzzed-about new television series of this fall is Gotham, the before-Bruce-was-Batman take on the classic comic book universe of the Dark Knight. If you caught the premiere on Sept. 22 or watched the trailer online, you’ve gotten a glimpse of the rich visual universe of this new Gotham, and it’s a gritty, shadowy place brightened with splashes of theatrical opulence. That striking look, which has been remarked upon favorably in a number of reviews, is thanks to UMass alumnus Doug Kraner ’79G.

Kraner is a production designer, the person who establishes the visual tone of a film or television series. What a show’s color palette is, what the architecture looks like, what period-specific details a show has — these are all questions tackled by the production designer. Kraner comes to the field through a career path that has moved from scenic design in theater to film and television art direction, and then into production design for features and television. His successful collaborations with director/producer Danny Cannon lured him into the Batworld. And although he is now decades out from his time in the department and in a different—albeit related—field, Kraner still calls on his UMass experience for his work.
Kraner came to UMass to study design as a graduate student. After UMass, he taught at SUNY Stonybrook, then worked on and off-Broadway in New York for several years. Then he was invited to work as an art director on a PBS program about Mark Twain and, he said, “fell in love with the process.” For a half-dozen years, he worked as art director or set decorator. Kraner said he had the good fortune to work with talented production designers “who took me along for the ride” on films like *The Untouchables*, which he art-directed. His first solo production design venture was *Dominic and Eugene*.

Kraner’s committed to *Gotham* for its run. Though a long-time Los Angeles resident, he has uprooted himself to the East Coast while he works on *Gotham*. He lives in Manhattan, but he skyped in from his office at Steiner Studios, overlooking the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Creating the world of Gotham was about acknowledging the existing Batman mythology while offering a fresh take on it. Gotham is a prequel that tracks James Gordon, described by Kraner as “the only good, non-corrupt cop on the Gotham police force” before he becomes Commissioner Gordon. Along the way, the show introduces viewers to Gotham’s underworld, which includes among its colorful characters some who will grow into Batman’s most powerful adversaries.

“Gotham City is a world that is corrupt, that is sort of falling apart at the seams, that is disintegrating because of the corruption and the bad leadership. ... The representation in a metaphorical sense is a city that is dark, a city where the sun seldom if ever shines, that is always bleak, and that is saturated with dark colors,” Kraner said. “Danny as the most influential person on the team strongly felt that *Gotham* should not subscribe to any period, that it’s a city where period is subjective and never clearly identified. However, in many ways Gotham is rather like New York City was in the mid-70s, when the city was really struggling with some of the same issues that I’ve just described.” Accordingly, the production borrows elements from the mid-70s to late-80s. As Kraner outlined, that means there are cell phones but no Smart phones, computers but no laptops, TVs but no flatscreens.

Though many years removed from his time at UMass, Kraner remains grateful for what he learned there.

“The training that I got at UMass made for an amazing groundwork that I still come back to with virtually every design decision that I make,” Kraner said. “And even more so, in the process that I use to get to those decision. What I learned at UMass was that none of these choices about the direction that one takes a given project in are choices that come out of thin air. They’re choices that are made in a step-by-step manner, about how the project is conceived and researched and interpreted and what the dramatic goals are, and out of the dramatic goals, what the visual goals are that will facilitate that.”

UMass taught him how to create a framework for making thoughtful artistic decisions, and how to do so in collaboration with all the other artistic disciplines within the project.

Gotham’s pilot episode actually had two UMass alumni working on it — set dresser Tim Joliat ’87 posed for a photo with Doug Kraner in the police station set for the show. (photo courtesy of Tim Joliat)

His professional experience, he said, taught him the management, time and budget skills to implement it successfully, but the groundwork came from UMass.
Other Student and Alumni Achievements

**Melanie Armer ‘90** presented classes and productions with her company The Nerve Tank.

**Meg Bashwiner ‘08** is the actress in one of the hottest podcasts and live shows in the world, *Welcome to Night Vale*. They are just wrapped a very successful world tour and she will be returning to act with the New York NeoFuturists this summer.

**Rob Corddry ‘93** is part of Mark Duplass’ new indie web series, *Wedlock*, which will be available on a number of video-on-demand platforms.

Alumna **Jane Cox** emailed us: “I’m sure you’ll get a kick out of hearing that I will be presenting (fellow alumnus **Justin Townsend ‘97**) with his Hewes award at the ceremony in October!! It’s an All Penny Remsen World.”

**Tanya Kane-Parry ‘01G** spent her sabbatical traveling the world and worked as Assistant Director for Joan Font at L’Opera National de Bordeaux to remount his production of *Il Barbiere*, the latest in a five-year working relationship with the internationally-acclaimed director.

**Karen Kessler ‘88** is a part of A Red Orchid Theatre Ensemble in Chicago. In the fall of 2012 she directed the world premier of *The Opponent* at A Red Orchid. In July of 2014 she and her company mates moved the show Off-Broadway to 59E59 Theaters in New York.

**David Korins ‘99** received a Drama Desk nomination for his work as a scenic designer on *Hamilton*, which is THE buzzed-over darling of the season.

**Keith Langsdale ‘07G** let us know that the feature film, *The God Question*, in which he plays the lead, Stephen Kendrick, played the Northampton Film Festival. The film was shot in the Pioneer Valley and much of it centers around the University of Massachusetts here in Amherst. The film also recently played at the Woods Hole Film Festival.

Student **Erin Mabee ‘15** was the student speaker at this year’s commencement ceremonies!

**Madeleine Maggio ‘12** has spent the past two years in Paris, studying at LeCoq, the internationally-renowned school for clown, mime, mystere, bouffon and other movement styles.

**Mark O’Malley ‘07** was appointed to the faculty in the theater and dance dept. at the University of Colorado Boulder where he is teaching lighting and video design for dance in the BA, BFA, and MFA programs.

**Bill Pullman ‘80G** appeared with Holly Hunter and Richard Chamberlain in the New Group’s production of David Rabe’s *Sticks and Bones*, receiving Lucille Lortel and Drama Desk nominations for his work. And its release date is still a ways off, but *Independence Day 2* will include Pullman as well.

**Katherine Scarborough ‘05** was a resident artist with the renowned Mabou Mines, developing a new piece about her father and family history.

**Leslie Stainton ‘85** published a new book, *Staging Ground: An American Theater and Its Ghosts* (Penn State Press, 2014), which, she explains, “tells the story of one of the country’s oldest and most haunted of theaters, the Fulton Theatre in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The UMass Theatre Department even makes an appearance!”

Lighting designer **Ben Stanton ‘00** received an OBIE award for “sustained excellence of lighting design”. He was nominated for a Lucille Lortel award for his work on *The Nether*, he has also been nominated for a Drama Desk Award for *Our Lady of Kibeho* and he has a Tony nomination for best lighting design of a musical for *Fun Home*.
Looking ahead to 2015-2016

Our Season

Come imagine
Come enjoy
Come laugh
Come learn
Come think
Come connect
Come (to a) play

Theater is about connection.

We come together in a darkened room, united by the spectacle we see before us. We have a good time, we get inspired, we learn things we might've never known otherwise. We get a chance to think about what it must be like to live lives that are different from ours. We think about what it means to be creative, to be alive, to be citizens of the world together.

Come imagine, enjoy, laugh.
Come CONNECT.
Come to a play at UMass Theater.

MARIE ANTOINETTE
By David Adjmi
Directed by Christina Pellegrini
Rand Theater

11/5/15 Half-price Preview at 7:30
11/14/15 at 2:00 & at 7:30
Morning Matinee 11/10/15 at 10

“"I was built to be this thing; and now they're killing me for it.” In Adjmi's poetic modern text, Marie is imagined as a celebrity at once celebrated and scorned for her excesses, simultaneously a trapped girl and a vapid power-broker. She is watched at all moments, and we eat it up—and then we eat her up.

DONNY JOHNS
By Harley Erdman, Aaron Jones, and Gina Kaufmann
Directed by Gina Kaufmann, Musical Direction by Mark Swanson
Curtain Theater

12/5/15 at 2 pm

How does Don Juan's notorious modus operandi fare when it's deployed on a contemporary college campus? Darkly comic and set to a propulsive rock beat, the new musical Donny Johns explores the legend from the perspective of the women targeted for seduction. This story, developed here at UMass, digs irreverently into issues of consent, sex, love, and romance, examining the consequences, good and bad, of hook-up culture and shifting sexual mores.
**LOVE AND INFORMATION**
By Caryl Churchill
Directed by Nikoo Mamdoohi
Rand Theater

2/25/16 Half-Price Preview at 7:30
2/27/16, 3/1/16, 3/2/16, 3/3/16, 3/4/16 at 7:30
3/5/16 at 2:00 & at 7:30

In acquiring the gadgets we use to connect, have we lost the reason for our communication: how to share our feelings, care for others, and love? **Love and Information** prompts us to see ourselves, our lives, our concerns, and all our longings in surprising new ways. Churchill's dazzling language draws us into brief encounters with a series of characters, until the story that emerges is not about individuals, but about humanity and connection.

**UMASS NEW PLAY LAB**
By Kim Euell and TBA
Directed by Christina Pellegrini and TBA
Curtain Theater

3/24/16, 3/31/16 Show #1 at 7:30
4/2 Show #1 at 2:00
3/25/16, 4/1/16, 4/2/16 Show #2 at 7:30

It isn't every day you get to be so intimately a part of creating new work. In Play Lab, playwrights (Kim Euell and another yet to be announced) work with a dedicated team to mount staged readings of two brand-new works, followed by a lively conversation between audience and artists. Those performances and discussions will transform not just how audiences see and experience the act of artistic creation, it will shape the future of the plays that are performed!

**COLLIDSCOPE: ADVENTURES IN PRE AND POST RACIAL AMERICA**
Created and directed by Ping Chong and Talvin Wilks
Produced in association with Ping Chong + Company
Rand Theater

4/14/16 Half-Price Preview at 7:30
4/16/16, 4/20/16, 4/21/16, 4/22/16 at 7:30
4/23/16 at 2:00 & at 7:30
Morning Matinee 4/15/16 at 10

What would visitors from another world think if they looked at the race history of America? In **Collidescpe**, an alien species attempts to make sense of a subject fraught with inherent misperceptions, ironies and contradictions. **Collidescpe**, a devised piece originally created by the world-renowned Ping Chong + Company, will be re-envisioned to inject unique events from Amherst's history into the bigger picture of race, racism, and citizenship in America, moving back and forth in time from the 1700's to present day, to connect the dots between America's troubled racial history and its on-going consequences.

*This piece is the culmination of the Art, Legacy, and Community project, a two-year investigation into local African-American history, and uses theater as a powerful means to interrogate where we have come from and where we are going as a society. Art, Legacy & Community is supported by the UMass Department of Theater, the WEB DuBois Dept. of Afro American Studies, the Commonwealth Honors College, the President's Creative Economy Fund, a Public Service Endowment Grant, Arts at Amherst and MOSAIC (Five College Multicultural Theater Committee).*
People

Jessica Ford is hired as costume design professor

After June Gaeke left us last year we knew we'd have some big shoes to fill, but this year, we found someone wonderfully capable to take the reins of our costume design program. After a thorough search, the Department of Theater appointed Jessica Ford as its new Assistant Professor in Costume Design. She will join us in the fall to teach costume design at the graduate and undergraduate levels and will advise student designers working on mainstage productions.

Ford comes to UMass with impressive credentials locally and nationally and is familiar with the Five Colleges from numerous successful stints as a guest artist and instructor with Mount Holyoke College.

She has a thriving career in regional theater as well as in New York. Design credits include Jacuzzi (Ars Nova Theatre, NYC), The Jammer (Atlantic Theater Company, NYC), Other Desert Cities (Alley Theatre, Houston), A Doll's House (Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven), and several designs for productions in the 2008 Humana Festival of New Plays (Actors Theatre of Louisville, Louisville) among others.

As an instructor, most recently at Mount Holyoke College but also at Maryland Institute College of Art, Ford has taught Costume Design, Costume History Through the Nineteenth Century, and Garment Design and Production Workshop.

Her design for These Paper Bullets at Yale Repertory Theatre in 2014 won the Connecticut Critics Circle Award for Best Costume Design.

Other Personnel Actions

We hope to begin a search in the coming year to find a scenic designer to step into the position vacated by Miguel Romero upon his retirement. In the interim, we have invited designer Ed Check to create the scenic designs for Marie Antoinette and Love and Information. From Ed's online bio: “Ed Check teaches set and production design for theatre and film, and regularly designs for the Smith College Theatre Department at Smith College. ... He designed the set for The Garden of Martyrs - a new opera that premiered at The Academy of Music in Northampton. ... During previous summers he has designed sets for Shakespeare & Company.”

Mimi Lien will be the set designer for Collidescpe. An excerpt of Mimi’s bio: “A New York-based designer of sets and environments for theater, dance, and opera. Having arrived at set design from a background in architecture, her work often focuses on the interaction between audience/environment and object/performer.” She received an OBIE Award for Sustained Excellence in set design in 2012.

Several faculty members will be on sabbatical this coming year: Harley Erdman will be away in the spring semester (teaching in Sri Lanka as a Fulbright US Scholar). Julie Nelson will be away for the entire year.

Composer Aaron Jones and musical director Mark Swanson will be part of the creative team for Donny Johns.

We will be joined, as in years past, by a number of guests. Kim Euell will serve another year as the department’s Visiting Artist in Playwriting. Sheila Siragusa will be teaching performance classes for our students. And the Fridays at Four team has already begun to line up speakers for the career series, including Carey Perloff of ACT.
Outreach

The Department of Theater will continue to offer different groups in the community the opportunity to engage with us.

The dramaturgs are using the positive feedback to the 2014-2015 series of post-show conversations to continue to innovate with the format so that our audiences will have an opportunity to learn about the art and craft of theater and the questions that intrigue them about our world and how we live in it.

Our matinees, traditionally open to schools and youth organizations, are being opened to life-long learning groups and organizations like senior centers. Study guide, post-show Q&As, and pre-show workshops will be made available, free, to those who want them. This year, Marie Antoinette and Art, Legacy and Community will have morning matinee shows.
Development

The Department of Theater’s Mark Your Spot campaign has run its course. While it will remain on the books for those who are interested in purchasing a seat, next year will be a quieter year for the department as we think about new directions.

We will continue with our Donor Profile series, highlighting and lives and motivations of those who remember the department in their giving.

We also look forward to participating in another of the University’s MinuteFund campaigns — we are hoping to set up a nest egg to help us fund some of the speakers and activities we have planned for Fridays at Four.