

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER

LEWIS AND CLARK COLLEGE

FIR ACRES THEATRE



Photo by Owen Carey. Passion Play.



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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Stepan Simek

In my previous "Letter from the Chair" in the Spring 21 edition of our Newsletter, I wrote: "

"Cleary, the Spring Semester was a success. We have once again proved to the world, that the theatre is alive and well, and that – no matter what the obstacles may be – the show must and will go on! We're looking forward to the Fall when everyone will be vaccinated and life will return to as much normal as is only possible. We have a fantastic season lined up, all of our Fall classes appear to be filled to capacity and the Department remains as strong as it ever was."

And here we are, at the end of the Fall, and I'm happy to report that my not-so-guarded optimism was entirely justified. The Fall semester at the Department was everything we were hoping it would be. Everyone is indeed vaccinated, and while we're still teaching and rehearsing in masks, we are performing mask-less; we have seen an unprecedented number of students in our classes and productions – by my count, we filled more than two-hundred-and-fifty seats in our classrooms, we had more than seventy students directly participating in our public performances, we welcomed more than a thousand audiences for our theatre and dance productions; and there is a sense of energy, engagement, and joy in the life of the Department.

The semester started with a bit of a shock as we found out that a major construction of a new roof will be happening while we teach, rehearse and perform. Some of our classes



relocated to other spaces on campus, and others continued to be held in the building under a barrage of sounds of hammers, drills, scrapers from above. But we managed (as we always do), and the good news is that the Fir Acres Theatre now has a new, leak-less roof, and that we're staying dry.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR CONTINUED

As is always the case, the highlights of each semester are our productions. This Fall, we presented a truly monumental mainstage production of *The Passion Play* by Sarah Ruhl, directed by Prof. Rebecca Lingafelter. The play, a three-part intimate epic centered on a community of players rehearsing their annual staging of the Easter Passion in three different eras: 1575 Northern England, just before Queen Elizabeth outlaws the ritual; 1934 Oberammergau, Bavaria, as Hitler is rising to power; and Spearfish, South Dakota, from the time of Vietnam through Reagan's presidency. In each period, the players grapple with the transformative nature of art, and politics are never far in the background. We performed each individual play of the trilogy on different evenings during the week, and we did a "marathon performance" of all three plays in one day over the weekend. The production was – as is always the case in the Department – an audacious undertaking complete with wonderful ensemble work, significant individual roles, creative set and costumes, and a number of interdisciplinary post-play panel discussions and lectures.

After a two-year break, we have also presented a set of wonderfully realized student directed One-Act Festival. We produced three plays: *Great Falls* by Lee Blessing directed by Gabe Reyes, *Play* by Samuel Beckett directed by Patrick Lee, and *Sasha and Carlyle Make a Tik-Tok* written and directed by Niels Truman, and each play – in its own way – dealt with the immediate issues of isolation, and the feeling of being "stuck."

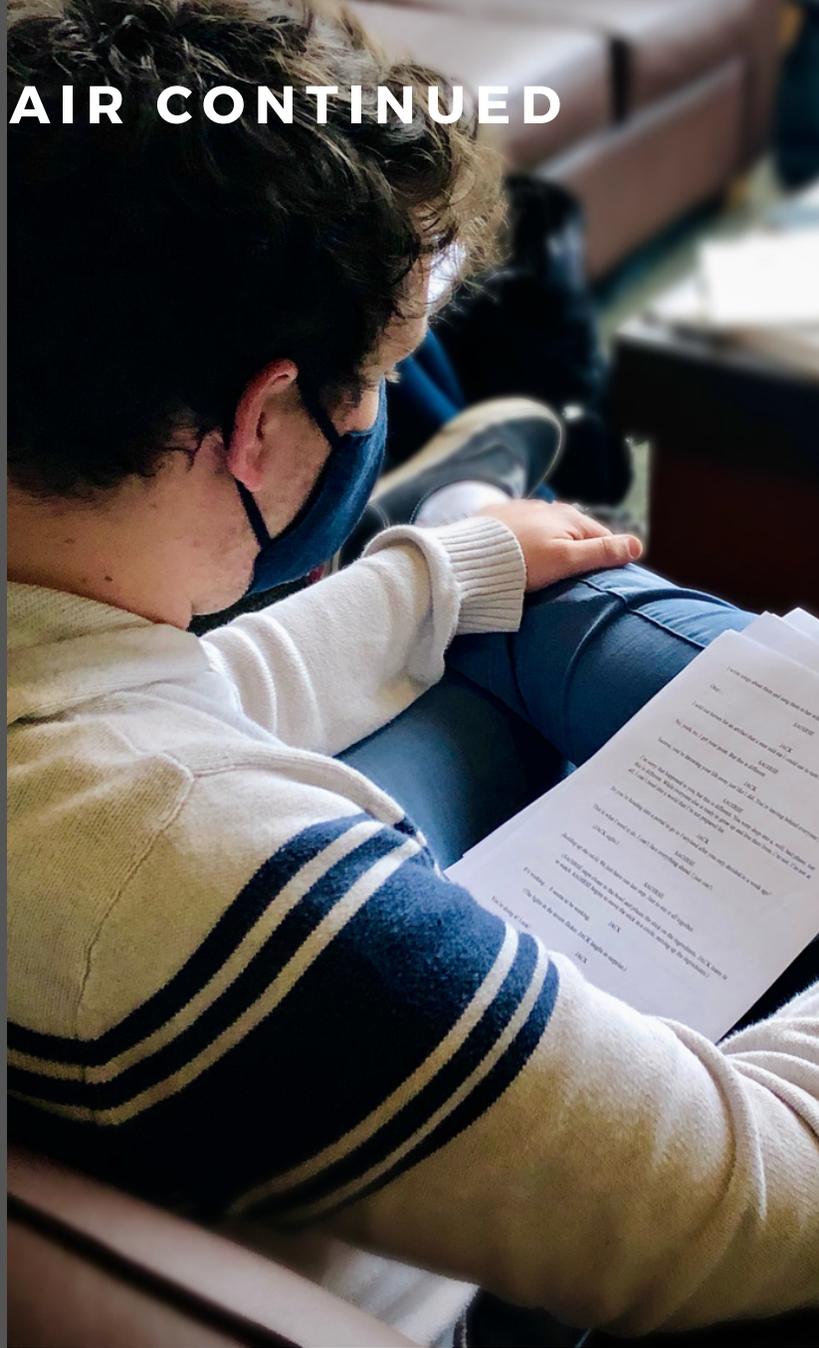


As usual, we also presented a host of smaller performance events such as the the Once Upon A Weekend festival of short plays, a Playwriting Festival featuring a whopping twenty-five original plays by the students in the Playwriting class, the Devised Performance final projects, an audacious student-generated production of *The Play that Goes Wrong* (it did...), and the annual Dance Extravaganza featuring both professional and student choreographers and dancers - this time live on stage rather than on film as was the case last year.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR CONTINUED

We also welcomed a number of new faces in the Department. Our beloved long-time Administrative Specialist, Joyce Beeny retired after more than forty years at the College, and we were extremely lucky to find an unbelievably fantastic replacement for her, Chelsea Bushnell. Chelsea, who has extensive background in arts administration, started in the new position in the summer, and by the beginning of the semester in September, she has already perfectly mastered the many intricacies of our operation. In addition, she introduced number of innovations to the way we're "doing business," thus bringing the administration of the Department into the 21st Century. Our long-time design professor and designer, Michael Olich also retired at the end of the last academic year, and we welcomed Miranda Hardy, an accomplished designer who worked with just about every professional company in Portland and beyond as a Visiting Faculty in Design for the academic year (and hopefully beyond). And finally, Cristi Miles, a founding member of the Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble joined us as an adjunct instructor in Acting.

Coming back – fully clad - to the theatre, to the classroom, and to the rehearsal studios after more than a year of "hybrid" instruction, hundreds if not thousands of Zoom hours sitting in front of computer screens in pajamas, and who knows what other outfits was a blessing. The entire Fall semester seemed to have been filled with a kind of pent-up creative energy, and a feeling of giddiness (as well as bit of a trepidation) about returning to as close to "normal" as possible, and needless to say, we are all hoping for even more "normal" in the next semester. In the Spring, we'll present a main stage production of Medea, set in the suburban world of the 1950s, a large Senior Theses Festival (we're graduating our largest class since 2001), and other projects yet to be determined. The show must go on, and it will!



- Štěpán Šimek

MEET THE FACULTY/STAFF



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One Act Festival

STUCK!

Written, Directed, and Acted by Students

Fir Acres Theatre - Black Box
September 30th, October 1st & 2nd, 2021



Sasha & Carlyle Make a TikTok

Written and Directed by Niels Truman

Cast: Skylar Vayda & Julia Starkey

"From the start, life during the pandemic felt transitional, and so the scenes I wrote took place during moments of transitions, as the characters attempted to cope with their uncertainty and dread. They craved resolution, but the world in which they were living was not one willing to give them the answers they desired."

Niels Truman, Writer and Director





Great Falls

by Lee Blessing

Directed by Gabe Reyes

Cast: Evelyn Jane Wohlbier & Nathaniel Panitch Daughton

"From the moment I read this play I knew I needed to direct it. The emotional core of the play, the big hammy hits you like a semi-truck.moment."

Gabe Reyes, Director

Play

by Samuel Beckett

Directed by Patrick Lee

Cast: Alexandra Gische, Dylan Blanchard & Emily McNicholas

"When I was younger, I tended to personify virtually every inanimate object. Then, one way or another, I'd find a way to feel bad for it. Play is the result of Samuel Beckett revisiting this way of thinking as an adult. Do the characters in the play get tired of living out what is likely the most stressful period of their lives, night after night, day after day?"

Patrick Lee, Director



Mainstage Production: **PASSION PLAY**

Fir Acres Theatre - Main Stage
October 27, 28, 29, 30, November 3, 4, 5, 6, 2021



Written by Sarah Ruhl
Directed by Rebecca Lingafelter

Award winning playwright Sarah Ruhl's three-part *Passion Play* explored, through a behind-the-scenes look at three community-staged productions of the traditional religious play, themes of identity and community, the inevitable intersection of religion and politics throughout the centuries, and the timelessness of the interplay between performer and role.

A courageous undertaking, the *LC Theatre department* encouraged us to come together, LIVE, for a shared experience and ask ourselves the questions of, "what are the stories that a community tells to itself about itself?" and "how do those narratives both oppress us and free us?"



PASSION PLAY: Directors Note



In her introduction to Passion Play, Sarah Ruhl emphasizes that theatre makers are particularly good at organizing people to come together into one room.

**And here we are together in one room,
after a long time away.**

**Our bodies are sharing space with
each other; with story, movement, song
and imagination. Live. Unmediated by
screens or distance. Together.**

Can you believe it?



When I was looking for plays to do this fall, I was really drawn to medieval plays, or plays with medieval resonances (plague years and all that), but I think my interest in these plays had more to do with the communal aspects of medieval theatrical traditions. In the staging of the Medieval Mystery Plays, the whole community would come together to make a play for itself; the carpenters would build the crosses and the bakers would bake the bread for loaves and fishes. Those same craftspeople would also conceive and act in the plays and make up it's audience. The whole event was a community coming together to dream a story of itself. A play produced at a college can often have a similar kind of feeling. Many of the students you see onstage tonight had a hand in building the sets, hanging the lights or sewing the costumes. They also may not be so different from you. Young people searching for a way to live a meaningful life in a precarious and uncertain world.



PASSION PLAY: Directors Note continued

Sarah Ruhl is exploring this dynamic in *Passion Play*; what are the stories that a community tells to itself about itself, and how do those narratives both oppress us and free us? She was writing this play at the height of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the aftermath of 9/11. She was thinking about politics and history and both the power and danger of populism and religion. What are the stories we tell about ourselves and who do they oppress and who do they free? And how do those cycles repeat?

Because the play is, in fact, a cycle. Three plays spanning 500 years and 3-4 hour of stage time. It weaves a tapestry of over 30 characters into stories that explore themes of spirituality, ethics, love, sexuality, authenticity, tyranny, community... it all. But in it's size, it's duration, we have been reaching for a kind of presence. In making the play, we could not hold the whole, it is too big, so we moved moment to moment to address the thing that was in front of us and connect it to the next event.

And that is what we will do with you now. We invite you into the space of the theatre to move moment to moment with us through dream, memory, imagination and story with the hope of coming to a deeper understanding of what it means for us all to be in the same room.

Rebecca Lingafelter, Director



Photos by Owen Carey

DANCE EXTRAVAGANZA

Fir Acres Theatre - Main Stage

December 3, 4, 2021

Dance Extravaganza, commonly referred to as Dance X, offers students the opportunity to have their choreography fully staged for large audiences. The Lewis & Clark Dance Program believes in empowering students to create and produce dance at the highest possible level.

This year's Dance X showcase featured new works by student choreographers Emma Bryan, Jinju Hurley, Katrina Kuzmina, Ally Rose, Lauren Satterwhite, and guest choreographer Tiffany Mills.



Photos by Ernesto Monge Marin

FEATURING GUEST CHOREOGRAPHER TIFFANY MILLS

Each time Tiffany Mills works with students to create a piece, she provides an in-depth exploration into partnering, improvisation, and the Tiffany Mills Company's creative process. Students at Lewis & Clark College will dive into weight, space, gravity, and momentum as tools to fly. Together with Mills, they will push boundaries, test extremes, and enjoy falling, in pursuit of finding a rich language and meaningful journey.

Mills will create a work titled "Crown shyness" on the Lewis & Clark College students. This 10-minute work is based on the notion of crown shyness—a phenomenon observed in some tree species, in which the crowns of fully stocked trees do not touch each other, forming a canopy with channel-like gaps, where sun can penetrate to the wooded floor.

Mills grew up in Oregon, but has resided in New York City for the last 20+ years. She often looks to nature as inspiration for her creative process.



OTHER EVENTS:

PAUSE: ONCE UPON A WEEKEND "Un-Stuck"

Fir Acres Theatre - Black Box
October 16, 2021

Each semester, the campus community packs the Black Box for rough-and-ready theatre in which original plays are cast, rehearsed, and performed in just 24 hours. This year was no exception with record turnout.

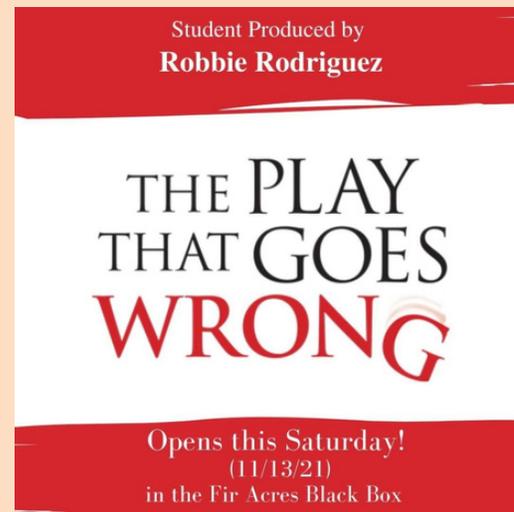


STUDENT PRODUCED WORK "The Play That Goes Wrong"

Fir Acres Theatre - Black Box
November 13, 2021

An unconscious leading lady, a corpse that can't play dead, and actors who trip over everything (including their lines), *The Play That Goes Wrong* has been noted as one of Broadway's smash hits.

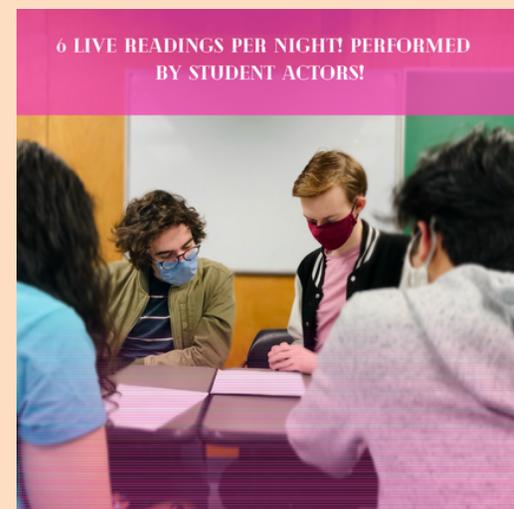
The SSAC: Student Script Advisory Committee reviewed and selected work this Fall for the Student Produced SLOT. This year's work was produced by Robbie Rodriguez!



PLAYWRITING FESTIVAL

Fir Acres Theatre - Main Stage
December 7, 8, 9, 10, 2021

This Fall, TH275, Introduction to Playwriting, class presented staged readings ranging from dramatic adaptations of short stories and fairytales, to contemporary comedies, to family dramas, and everything in between. This year's festival featured twenty-five student written plays featuring close to a hundred characters!



DEVISED PERFORMANCE

Fir Acres Theatre - Black Box
December 12, 2021

TH356, Devised Performance class explored creating newly constructed works culminating with their final presentations in the Black Box Theatre.

- *Dear Self*: Created by Emma Greene, Sylvia Jane Krueger, Mae Marger, Julia Starkey, Evelyn Wohlbier
- *Breakfast Club Live*: Created by Zoe Brouwer, Keshav Eldurakar, Ruby Silberstein
- *Convergence*: Created by Abby Jacquin, Gabe Reyes, Linden Warling, Victoria Winn



IN THE COMMUNITY

PETE - Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble Festival de Fronterizas

Portland Playhouse
July, 2021

Co-conceived and wholly organized by la fabulosa, Anaïs Isiria Gurrola, PETE took over Portland Playhouse's courtyard and community space on July 3, 2021 for our ¡Festival de Fronterizas! Our celebration of all things de nuestra gente, we gathered food, artistas, y cultura from gente rooted aquí in Portland.



IN THE COMMUNITY continued

Danse Macabre: The Testament of Francois Villon Directed by Stepan Simek

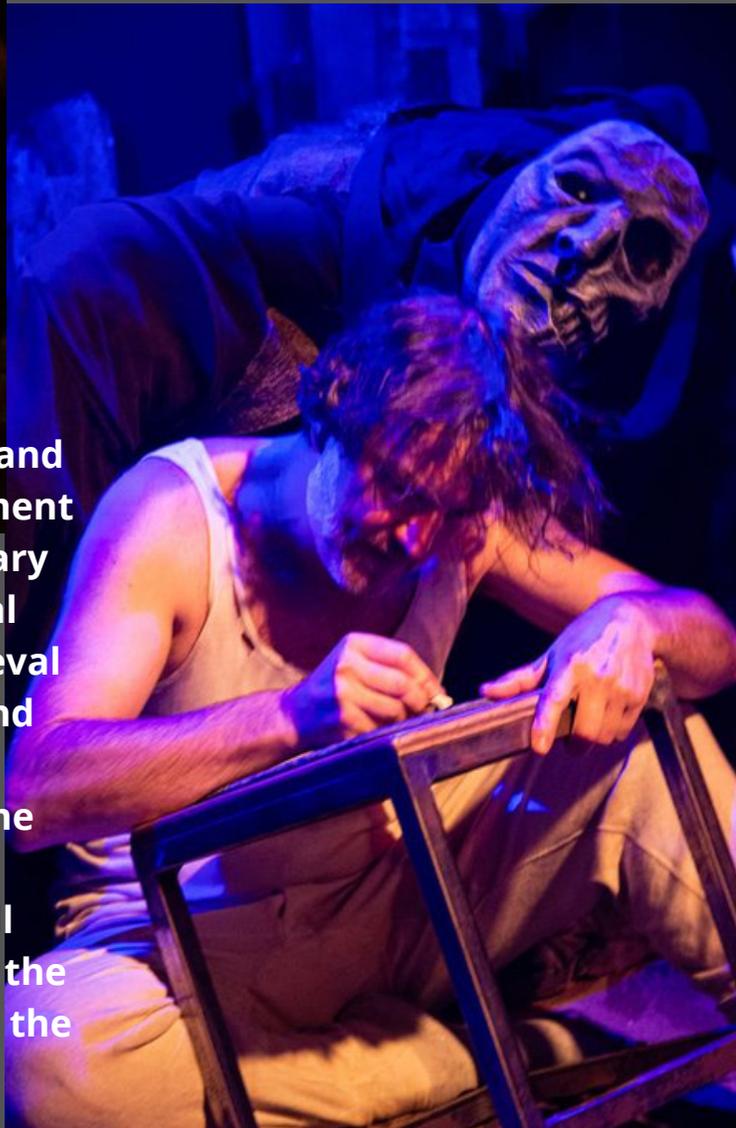
Shoebox Theatre, Portland, OR
September, October, November 2021



Danse Macabre: The Testament of François Villon is a one-person show with music and puppetry based on the surprisingly modern and relevant autobiographical poem, The Testament by the 15th century French poet, revolutionary rabble-rouser, balladeer, thief, a prototypical “protest singer,” and a something of a medieval “rock star,” François Villon. Villon’s poetry and his wild lifestyle became an inspiration for several generations of poets, and he’s become something of a patron saint for countless counter-cultural young artists and singers all over the world, most notably Bob Dylan and the underground dissident artists and singers in the former Eastern Europe.

"In these times, when something as simple as gathering together to watch a show is a rare and even risky thing, it's especially bracing to see a play that reminds us that theater really can be — at least, in a certain poetic and thematic sense — a matter of life and death."

-Marty Hughley, Oregon Arts Watch



FACULTY UPDATES

Jenny Ampersand **Costume Shop Manager/Instructor**

This fall, Jenny designed costumes for Passion Play which she thinks may rival any production in her career for most costumes. She is thrilled by all the amazing work the students have been able to accomplish this term in the costume shop with One Acts Fest, the mainstage, and DanceX. During winter break, she'll be working with lots of fur and spandex for PETE's production of the Cherry Orchard which opens late January.

Rebecca Lingafelter **Associate Professor of Theatre**

Rebecca is thrilled to have had the opportunity to direct the epic Passion Play by Sarah Ruhl as part of the fall mainstage season. She is deeply grateful to the whole department for everyone's work in making this Covid-safe production possible. In terms of her creative work, she is thankful for the slow reopening of live performance and is looking forward to performing as Varya in PETE's upcoming production of The Cherry Orchard translated by Stepan Simek starting in January!

Stepan Simek **Professor of Theatre/Department Chair**

Stepan had a busy semester. He taught close to eighty students in his three classes, read lots of papers, exams, and student plays, but since everyone was so happy to be fully back in the classroom, all that teaching was a blast, especially the Playwriting class, which he taught for the first time in his career. In September, he finally opened his long-delayed production of Danse Macabre, a devised piece with music, dance, and puppetry based on a long autobiographical poem by the 14th century French poet, balladeer, rabble rouser, and something of a "medieval rock-star" François Villon, for a four-week run at the Shoebox Theatre in Portland. Because of popular demand, the show was extended by two weeks in November, and it will be touring in Europe next summer. The Fall was an exhausting as well as exhilarating semester; the students were fantastic, and the Department was buzzing with activity and excitement.

Jenna Tamimi **Adjunct Professor**

Jenna has missed Lewis and Clark's Theatre Department and is very excited to be returning in the Spring! She will teach Global Theatre and direct Medea on the mainstage. She's looking forward to creating this 1950s rendition of Medea with an all student design team! The production will also be a featured event in the Gender Studies Symposium.

HAPPY RETIREMENT!

After 43 years at Lewis & Clark, Administrative Assistant for the Theatre Department Joyce Beeny retired on June 15, 2021.

"Throughout her time at Lewis & Clark, she has been the soul, the brain, and the 'commander in chief' of the department" Professor of Theatre and Department Chair Stepan Simek said. "Her humanity, her love for everyone that she distributed freely and widely, and her palpable joy of being at her desk every single day have made her into a true icon not only for the Theatre department, but for the College as a whole. We're all indebted to her; she is irreplaceable, and she will be missed by all of us."



COMING UP!

SPRING MAIN STAGE - "MEDEA" by Euripides

March 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 2022

Adjunct Instructor, Jenna Tamimi, directs a 1950's inspired "Medea" by Euripides. Come for the era inspired music and aesthetic.

ONCE UPON A WEEKEND

February 26, 2022

PAUSE presents another 24 hours of student produced and performed work. One Weekend. Dozens of Artists. Hundreds of Audience Members. Memories for a lifetime...

THEATRE THESIS FESTIVAL

April 20, 21, 22, 2022

Twenty graduating Seniors present their Final Thesis Projects over three evenings.

DANCE Y

Date TBD

Student produced, choreographed and performed work.