

ABCDE FOCUS NEWSLETTER



April 2017

President's Report

Colin Plant

Greetings everyone. It's been awhile since we've published a newsletter but we are back with lots of great info in this issue. Thanks to our new editor Caroline Mackenzie for putting together this issue! First off thank YOU for being a member of the ABCDE. By working together we are strong and the fact we were able to speak to the province AND PERSUADE THEM TO CHANGE THEIR COURSE about our concerns about the lack of a diverse Drama curriculum is the proof that our collective voice matters.

So what's new? A new executive has been installed after our excellent conference this past October in Kelowna and I'd like to thank both those executive members who put their name forward and to those who finished their terms. Another Youthwrite contest has just successfully wrapped up. Planning is underway for the 2017 provincial drama festival, we're reaching out to post-secondary institutions to see how they are preparing future Drama educators, we're monitoring the new curriculum as it rolls out, our scholarship is being offered again and our big bash is starting to come together. What big bash you ask?

We're turning 50! It is hard to believe but our organization is having a special birthday in 2017 and we will have a big party this coming October at our conference in the lower mainland to celebrate. If you know anyone who has ever been a member of the ABCDE or someone who should join, we are going to hopefully have a big celebration of our organization this October. Details will come but book October 21/22 for this year's conference.

So as you turn through this newsletter we would ask you to please consider renewing your membership in the ABCDE. Our newsletter is currently made available for free to our list-serv but a vast majority of people on our list-serv are NOT members of the ABCDE. If you want to renew (or join), it takes 2 minutes to sign up and can be done online. Here is the link: <https://bctf.ca/psa/join.aspx>

So as we enter the last few days before a short Easter Break, I'd like to thank you all for the hard work you do in BC classrooms to promote Drama education. Happy Easter! I hope you find some chocolate and rest this weekend!

Best,
COLIN PLANT
colinplant@shaw.ca

SEARS DRAMA FESTIVAL

The **SEARS B.C. DRAMA FESTIVAL** is happening from Thurs. Apr. 27 to Sun. Apr. 30 at Douglas College in New Westminster. We have 255 delegates registered from 14 schools around the province. The students and teachers will see 9 shows over the evenings of Apr. 27, 28 & 29, and participate in 6 workshops over two days.

They have 17 workshops from which to choose that cover all aspects of theatre, both performing and technical. In addition to the workshops and shows, the delegates will have their lunches catered by four food trucks and treated to a dinner at the Old Spaghetti Factory. Late in the evening after the shows, the students gather for arranged social events, one of which is a Steampunk themed dance on the final night. Our adjudicator is Scott Bellis, renowned Canadian actor, director and educator.

Scott is a co-founder of Bard on the Beach and head instructor in the Actor's Intensive Program at the Arts Club Theatre. He has decades of experience working in theatre and film and we are thrilled to have him at the Festival.

Special Thanks to Mr. Wayne Fairhead, Executive Director of Sears Canada Drama Festivals for the ongoing major sponsorship of this festival. We are so grateful for the support!

Also, during the festival, ABCDE teacher delegates will attend a delicious dinner at the Boathouse Restaurant sponsored by Christie Lites.

The Shows:

Youthwright

Just a Phase by Keara Parsons, Robert Bateman Sec., Abbotsford

Broken by Kiannah Lloyd, North Surrey Sec.

Just Friends by Ally Ray, Brookwood Sec., Langley

Zone Shows

Aunt Leaf, Carihi Sec., Campbell River

Sweep Under Rug, Hazelton Sec.

Donuts and Bagels, Mission Sec.

That's Not How I Remember it, North Surrey Sec.

bittergirl, Terry Fox Sec., Port Coquitlam

Handcuffed, West Coast Christian School, Vancouver

All shows take place in the Laura C. Muir Theatre on the fourth floor of the North Tower at Douglas College. Parking is available on the street or in the underground parkade.

Curtain time is 6:30 p.m. each evening and admission is \$10.00 per person at the door. No reservations necessary. The exact running order of the shows will appear under the "schedule" section on searsbcdramafest.com website in mid-April.

We hope to see you at the shows!

For more info contact Sharon Conrad at theatre.garden@yahoo.ca

ASHLAND OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

In October of this school year, students from WL Seaton Secondary School in Vernon and Okanagan Mission Secondary in Kelowna joined forces with their teachers, Lana O'Brien, Kayleigh Mace and Ryan Grenier on a road trip to the world class OSF - the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. It is a 14 hour drive from the Okanagan, so we stop near Seattle On the way down and back.

When we finally arrive in Ashland, we hit the ground running and head straight to a matinee (via a quick traditional sip at the Lithia fountain known to improve health - the sulphurous water isn't very tasty which makes for some great photos). Our first show was **Great Expectations**, on a stunning representative set that was a gorgeous poetic backdrop to the classic Dickens story. That evening we saw **Hamlet** in the always glorious open air Elizabethan stage. Their hard rock version of Hamlet was edgy and fresh.

The following day brought us Gilbert and Sullivan's **Yeoman of the Guard** updated as a Country and Western musical complete with a Dolly Parton-esque sheriff. It was staged in a Promenade style with the audience sitting on the stage, among the set, and having to move when directed to get out of the way for the performers as they moved through the story. The bar was open - on stage - throughout the show if one so desired. (wink, wink). The audience had a blast!! The show was dynamic and colourful and hysterical. In the evening, we were back in the Elizabethan which had been transformed for the all black cast production of **The Wiz**. This gospel revival re-telling of the Wizard of Oz story had us dancing and clapping and singing along. This show was made even more exciting because the students had a workshop with one of the actors in the afternoon before the show and they fell in love with him, of course! So, when he entered the kids went nuts and their energy spread through the whole audience. Following the show, the actors told us that we were the best audience they had had all season!

We closed our 5 shows in three day whirlwind tour by splitting up to see either the all Asian cast of the new **Vietgone** or **Timon of Athens**. It was extremely interesting to listen to the kids describe the show they had seen to their friends who saw the other show. Both productions pushed envelopes, created artistic discomfort and inspired lots of questions. Exactly what great art should do!!





What I love about going to Ashland is that the theatre is of the same (or better) calibre than that of New York or London, but the small town with it's small town vibe where we literally hung out with the actors at the local Starbucks or restaurant after a show, is a crazy surreal experience. The festival is also an excellent educational experience. I highly recommend ALL schools try it out. You have to book your tickets a full year in advance, and be sure to also book the amazing Prologues, Talkbacks, Workshops and Discussions. The talent are always so excited to talk to the students, and to share their experiences of life on the stage.

We attended every Prologue we could get. It is a fabulous way to get the audience ready to see a show



17TH GOODWILL SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL



After 16 incredibly successful years in Summerland, under the direction of Linda Beaven, the Goodwill Shakespeare festival has moved to Vernon!

Our new digs will be the lovely Vernon and District Performing Arts Centre, with workshops in a variety of churches, dance studios, art galleries and schools within a 15 minutes walk of the theatre. The student delegates choose to do either the 9 workshop drama rotation or one of the 5 intensives (Acting, Vocal, Art, Writing or Make-Up).

18 schools from across BC, and 300 student delegates will converge in Vernon April 6,7 and 8. Morning keynote addresses will be given by the amazingly talented Catherine Lough Haggquist and Alan Marriott. Students rotate through three workshops per day and share a BBQ lunch together on the first 2 days. The first two evenings are filled with Shakespearian, or Shakespeare inspired, pieces of a maximum of 25 minutes per school. Saturday evening is the Gala Performance where the Intensive Workshop groups present their always INCREDIBLE performances that they have worked on over the 3 days of the festival.

This is a non-competitive festival where the only goal is to create GOOD WILL with like-minded theatre friends. We are looking forward to many more successful years together.

The Goodwill Shakespeare Festival in a nutshell:

- **APRIL 6, 7 & 8 , 2017**
- Cost per delegate \$90
- Home base - the beautiful Vernon and District Performing Arts Centre.
 - Workshops take place within a 15 min walk from the theatre.
- * 2 BBQ lunches provided.
- * T-shirt & swag bag
- 9 Workshops
- Evening performances

- 18 schools registered
 - WL Seaton
 - Vernon Secondary
 - Kalamalka
 - Charles Bloom
 - Fulton

- Crawford Bay
 - Okanagan Mission
 - Pemberton
 - Pine tree
 - Trafalgar Middle
 - Penticton
 - Rossland
 - LVR
 - JV Humphries
 - Salmon Arm
 - Pleasant Valley
 - Rossland
 - Wildflower Middle
- 270 student delegates
- 9 Drama rotation workshops
 - Pick Up Your Sword and Fight- Mike Panian
 - Building Character Through Movement - Mik Byskov
 - Audition for Film/TV - Cat Haggquist
 - Improv - Alan Marriott
 - Music and Mood: An Improvisational Creative Symposium - Tim Osborne
 - Swing Dancing - City Dance team
 - Cha Cha Cha - City Dance team
 - Movement and Play - Chloe Richardson
 - Clay Mask making - Bob Kingsmill.
 - 5 Intensive workshops - will present at the Gala Performance on Saturday evening.
 - Acting - Tanya Laing-Gahr
 - Vocal - Brian Tate
 - Make-Up - Gordon Hamilton
 - Art - Kayleigh Mace
 - Writing - Keyanna Burgher



CURRICULUM UPDATE

While the K-9 curriculum is now implemented, the 10-12 curricula is now in draft form and available for testing for the next 18 months. You can read the Draft Drama curriculum at <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/10-12#ae> and provide feedback to curriculum@gov.bc.ca. Our President Colin Plant is on the Fine Arts Curriculum Writing team, so you can also CC him on your email at colinplant@shaw.ca If you have questions you can also email Colin and he'll try to get you an answer. Overall the changes are positive and the increase in courses is a win for our teaching area.

Most important thing to note: these draft curricula at the 10-12 level are OPTIONAL right now and will not become mandatory until **September 2018**. If your principal is requiring you to teach the new curriculum, please talk to your local president about this.

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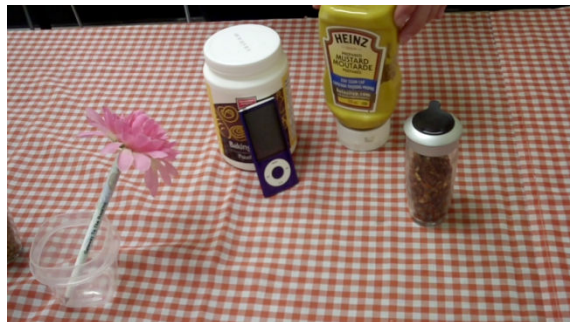
SKETCHES FROM THE HIGH COUNTRY

Teaching Drama Education in the Rockies,

British Columbia, Canada.

Virtual Stories 1

Table Top Theatre



(Konrad) Lorenz split a large clutch of Greylag goose eggs into 2 groups. One was allowed to hatch normally and the goslings followed their mother around. Lorenz had the second group of eggs incubated and then arranged it so that he was the first thing the goslings saw when they hatched. From then on they followed him everywhere. The goslings had formed a picture (imprint) of the object they were to follow. When he marked the goslings as to which group of eggs they had hatched from and then let them out together from an upturned box, each gosling went straight to its 'mother figure'. Lorenz' goslings showed no recognition of their real mother.

Theories of Attachment

www.integratedsociopsychology.net/.../imprintinginducks&geese-KonradLorenz1935...

I discovered how important it is for the audience to connect with the objects and to believe in them. In this way I became acutely aware of my objects, where they were staged, how they were placed, ensuring they had some movement, whether it be slowly sliding across the stage or turning to empathize with Suzi, the protagonist. I was amazed how these objects transformed into the characters from the story and how the weight of the message still carried through.

Rosie Webster, drama student

The search for new ways to dramatize stories for and by students is an important part of our drama education coursework. These notes describe how we took a minimalist storytelling idea and used it to make a novel and engaging virtual story project suitable for younger students.

To begin at the beginning. One Christmas in England, over fifty years ago, I was given a model theatre that my Dad had made secretly. My brother and I were forbidden to go into the garage while he built the theatre from scratch. It featured framed, hand painted backdrops (he was a fine draughtsman), English pantomime and Mother Goose card characters with sticks to move them on and off stage, all in a cabinet maker's dove-tailed theatre structure with the miracle of 1.5 volt electric light. On reflection, this was my own Citizen Kane/Marcel Proust, 'Rosebud' sled/ madeleine pastry evocative moment that was to stay with me. Last summer (2016) I saw basically the same creation in Covent Garden in London in a very upmarket toy store just a stone's throw from the historic theatre district of Drury Lane and where the theatre facades look just the same as my maquette all those years ago. Creative ideas, like treasure ships, may get buried but they can also stay surprisingly intact. In due course, and in my career as a drama teacher, I had used the idea of miniature theatre with Intermediate students exploring blocking ideas for big musicals using Lego figures on school desk stages. Many students could not easily visualize their stage blocking without these toy figures to help them. Now, most recently, I re-discovered table top theatre (aka object theatre) through Sheffield, England's Forced Entertainment Company and their original production of all of Shakespeare's thirty six plays performed with household objects as characters on one meter square tables. See:

<http://www.forcedentertainment.com/project/complete-works-table-top-shakespeare/> 1. For me, the scale was the same as ever. In performance, the narrators simply told the plays' stories in their own words as they manipulated the character-objects, as I had. Four narrated plays ran simultaneously with the audience free to move from one show to another. The production was first streamed over a five night cycle at a Berlin arts festival in 2015, and subsequently repeated in London in March of 2016. [And here is a happy review that neatly introduces the idea: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQGIG2rhXUE](#) 2.

As director, Tim Etchells explains, the technique is a way for a described story to be schematized to its simplest form, like 'taking the engine out of the car using lo-fi puppets...to see the story as a working drawing...it is as vivid as it is strange.'¹

In our course work we hoped that as a story is unpacked, everyday objects, pepper pots, sauce bottles and the like, would gradually draw 'character' empathy. And, in truth, we found this magic usually happened, albeit in flashes, and even in rehearsal, as the audience started to connect with the objects. Any story could either be learned by heart or cued from notes.

Key to the whole process, I think, is that first naming, that first connection between the character object and the audience; just like Lorenz's goslings which can't be 'unlearned' to follow their 'mother,' and in the same way that literate people can't choose not to read, say, public signs. Try it. See if you can consciously not decode and make sense of the next sentence.

We found in rehearsal that objects had to be sufficiently different to help identification; for example, using coins could be confusing for an audience since their shape, never mind size or inscriptions are too alike to be readily identified. The objects also tended to be uniformly ugly. I think that remains a part of the Forced Entertainment philosophy about exploring the relationship between objects and characters. We discovered, though, that casting visually appealing objects, like exotic fruit, to tell a story engaged a younger audience better through this visual novelty, and without changing the essence of the minimalist table top theatre or the story itself.

Again, it is worth repeating that these objects really can make a true theatrical experience:

‘Romeo and Juliet (20:00, July 2nd, 2016)

Have you ever heard of the stopped clock illusion? You look at a clock, and sometimes it seems as if a few full moments pass before the second hand seems to jerk back into life. Our brain lies to us, as it tries to make sense of what it sees, and what it knows. In Act 1 scene 5, Terry O’Connor puts more ‘characters’ on her tabletop stage than I’ve seen so far in the Complete Works. She builds up the Capulet party with triangles of servants and dancing ladies, green Capulets, and red Montague interlopers. And then she tells us that Romeo catches sight of Juliet for the first time, and it’s as if the room stands still. And it’s a few full moments before I realize that it always was. That the green-tinged plastic glasses were not dancing in ball gowns, and the little glass cups were never bustling around serving vol-au-vents. But the effect of that stillness outlives the stopped-clock moment, and Terry pushes red torch Romeo toward lime marmalade Juliet. I’m holding my breath. The cluttered table is muted background noise compared to the sharp focus of Romeo, half an inch from Juliet, and their smart words about saints and pilgrims and sinful kisses sweetly urged. Smash cut to a near-empty table with a jar of lime marmalade on its side. For a second, alone, lying in state. Actually dead, in a way that an actor never could be dead onstage. Soon a red torch stands over her, and the bodies of her cousin and her fiancé, both slain by his hand. We do not see it, but we know that he is holding a vial of poison. Imagine that in a few moments the lime marmalade will stand straight up again, and find herself a widow, the altar candle’s brilliant scheme foiled – alive in a crypt, surrounded by the dead bodies of her most loved men. No wonder she calls the dagger ‘happy’. 3

So, we found well-known stories could be enjoyed more as the audience’s focus easily settled on the character objects and their motivations and needs, while requiring that less detail be kept in the mind’s story frame. Imagination could do the rest. And, as someone once said of the virtues of human imagination and radio plays over filmed work, ‘well, the scenery’s better.’

‘Landscape’ rather than ‘portrait’ shaped stages were preferred, though proximity to the camera or audience for characters could prove powerful, regardless of the stage orientation. We learned it was too easy to have objects crowding together. More experienced storytellers simply invented reasons for non-essential characters to exit. Unexpectedly, stage coverings could also help give a simple theme, for example, a check tablecloth for a country and western ‘Cinderella’ story, Richard Thompson’s ‘The Gas Tank of My Heart’, or plastic sheet for Chris Van Allsburg’s ‘The Polar Express’.

As with traditional oral story telling, practiced personalized narratives were always much stronger than a story read directly from a text. Truth to tell, students need to be aware of the problems that come with stories that may be poorly written or transcribed directly from a screenplay. Without editing, though, too much continuous action can confuse a younger audience.

We also learned that rather like working puppets, character objects had to be kept 'alive' through small, slow movements; for example, moving in to talk to each other, or downstage (downtable?) for a soliloquy; that the small size of the objects dictate that all movement needs to be in slow motion; that an 'injured' object should not be upright; that there was sometimes a temptation to leave characters static throughout a scene; that stage positioning carried the same weighting, table or stage; and that the same power may be placed on a downstage speech by a ketchup bottle as from an actor. As pre-service teacher, Rosie Webster, writes:

'At the beginning, I would move my objects too quickly on the stage and then leave them there sitting motionless for long periods of time...the objects looked dull and lifeless and did not match the narration of my voice. When I went back to watch my practice footage, I realized that these movements needed to be slower and more noticeable...I also noticed that even placing my hand on an object when the character was talking was a great way to show the audience who was speaking at a particular moment...I found these small changes allowed for the audience to become much more engaged in the story and to suspend disbelief more easily.'[4year-of-the-jungle-suzan#878394](#)

The end of a scene was simply signaled by removing all objects from the table. The following scene might be naturally announced as, for example, 'Meanwhile, in a wood near Athens...'

We came to the conclusion that voice characterizations should be joyfully explored. The focus is on the object, not the actor (especially in video) so new storytellers can enjoy their happy anonymity, in the same way guaranteed by mask work. And after all, who can say what a mustard bottle character should sound like? We would take more time to let future productions unfold; audiences were on occasion still getting used to the concept and identifying with the characters while the plot still rattled along regardless. This was likely due to lack of experience in telling and re-telling a particular story to best deliver its tension and resolutions. We did not explore a voice-over approach and I would judge it might be a challenge matching story and object movement without a significant number of playbacks. The careful use of music to set a mood can be just as powerful as in any drama when it is nicely matched to the plot. Sonic backgrounds, for example, the insect hum of the Vietnamese bush used in Rosie Webster's performance of 'The Year of the Jungle' by Suzanne Collins, are especially effective. Short bursts of song can also be enjoyed as a character accomplishment. I don't think music's use necessarily compromises the minimalist nature of the work, either. Just as in musical theatre, it acts as a reflective pause in the story and emphasizes a situation mood or emotion; but in scale.

Video versions were perfect for younger student production teams; cameras just needed to be set up to cover the stage area, ideally with a monitor for the story tellers to ensure blocking and sight lines stayed true. The video work teaches reflectivity in the nicest way since performers can critique and update their work either on their own or as part of their group. Auto generated subtitles are a neat addition to video work, especially when presenting new stories and characters.

We became convinced that table top theatre can serve as a meaningful story medium right across the years. However, it does need to be taken into classrooms at this point and have the students play with the objects and their own stories. As in everyday drama classes, they will have many contemporary insights that adults might never have even considered and, of course, the happy, fresh approach of young artists. 'Vivid and strange' it may be, but I hope some of the professional pointers above will help with the justification of the work and the production notes we shared will make the approach more your own.

And, really, I still don't understand why it works so well...

References

1. Tim Etchells from <http://www.forcedentertainment.com/project/complete-works-table-top-shakespeare/>
2. Barbican Young Reviewers - Episode #2(Rhys) - Forced Entertainment's Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare, March, 2016
3. David Ralf from Exeunt Magazine, July, 2016
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