Queen of King

Julie Taymor visits the Arena to discuss her work on The Lion King and Titus

Tony-Award-winning director and designer Julie Taymor stopped by the Balch Arena Theater last September, discussing her varied career and the adventures that led her to work in theater and film before an audience of students and faculty.

Taymor spoke at length about her experiences in Bali after college, where she extended a trip of a few months into a few years, learning the traditions and folklore associated with Balinese performance. She told a particularly life-changing story: a year into her stay, she hid herself to see a ceremonial dance that was only to be viewed by the Balinese tribesmen who danced it.

"We think that theater must always have an audience—and it does, but not in the way we think of an audience. These guys performed the most elaborate, detailed dance I had ever seen," she reflected, "and they did it only for each other and for the spirits."

Taymor explained that the experience changed her ideas about the nature of performance. "Ultimately, if there’s no sense of fulfillment inside you, I say why bother."

Throughout her career, Taymor has taken material that has been declared unworkable or dismissed as too commercial and has transformed it into works of striking originality. She turned The Lion King, an ambitious Disney venture, into a critically acclaimed, prize-winning musical. The show continues to play to capacity on Broadway, and has launched multiple national tours and international productions.

Disney was surprisingly supportive of her vision, Taymor claimed.

"They had no idea how The Lion King could be done, so they gave me the freedom I needed to realize it," she said. "Once they expressed reservations about my mask system, so I gave them a demonstration. I played a scene first with my masks, then with a shortened system of the masks, and third with Cats-esque make-up. Michael Eisner came up to me and asked, ‘which one costs the most?’"

Department news from the Chair

Dear Drama and Dance Alumni and Friends,

After a year’s hiatus, the alumni newsletter is back! It strikes me that we should rename it, too. We have Prologue for our Arena productions but somehow Epilogue doesn’t seem like the right choice for this publication. If you have any creative ideas, let me know.

I’m pleased to tell you that the department is busy and thriving. Our students are engaged and there’s constant activity in Aidekman. Last fall, Associate Professor Downing Cless directed a compelling Doctor Faustus. November brought us a memorable visit by playwright and director Robert O’Hara (A92). In December, dance faculty member Danny McCusker delighted audiences with the lyrical and evocative piece he created for the Performance Ensemble. Bare Bodkin, a new student theater company, staged a rollicking 24-hour play festival, as well as a moving production of Suzan-Lori Parks’ In the Blood.

This semester, we look forward to Shirley Lauren’s A Piece of My Heart, directed by faculty member Sheridan Thomas. 3P’s will present Terrence McNally’s Corpus Christi, while Torn Ticket tackles The Rocky Horror Show. Luke Jorgensen (G01) has just assembled a wonderful cast for Michael Frayn’s Noises Off, which will close our department’s season in April.

Stay connected with us! Send us your news, and if you’re in the area, stop by to say hello. If you’re looking for more substantive ways to engage with the department, I’d love to explore them with you.

With best wishes,
Barbara W. Grossman, Chair
In Memoriam: Remembering "Doc"
Alumni and Faculty share memories of the former professor and Chair

I don't even know how to capture all the special places in my memories he occupies. I see him looking over his glasses, his head pointed down with a look of incredulity mixed with a wry smile. He could never be truly mad or serious. There was always room for one more person he would embrace, counsel and adopt. He loved students and their passion. He shared his with equal fervor. He was a counselor when times were rough and no matter what time it was, he would make himself available. He was giving and generous. He was a surrogate father to those of us in need of advice outside the department. He welcomed you with a smile and an incredible ability to listen. He just knew how to make you feel welcome. He was a wonderful teacher with a love of his craft. I loved Doc Collins and will miss him. He will live on in all those he touched, and by any count that is impressive. He was one of those special teachers that taught you more than a subject. He taught you about life, understanding and learning while he inspired respect and passion. I miss him and that wonderful, warm voice.

Dan Cohen (A74)

Sherwood "Jerry" Collins, 1924-2003

Doc was more than a teacher to me. Yes, he taught me dramatic literature as a freshman and many other courses. But more importantly, he was the gateway to my lifelong commitment to theater. He was demanding and stern, comforting and encouraging—and a twinkle of mischief was never far from his eyes. I am forever indebted to him, for he showed me that great joy was to be found just inside the entrance to the Arena, and inside the stage door of every theater I have entered since. I will miss him.

Lynn Torgove (T79)

Jerry Collins is uniquely the reason I became connected with Tufts University. I was speaking at a theatre conference at a hotel in Oxford in the fall of 1967. Also speaking was James Forsyth who, I discovered, was the director of the newly devised Tufts Junior Year Abroad Program. At a dinner afterwards I sat next to Jerry and Julie. I was told by Jerry, who was the first faculty resident, that he wanted me to address the Tufts group in London. I did. Second semester I became an acting teacher in the program. Each year I became more involved until Jerry invited me to be Artist-in-Residence in 1970/71. I can only be thankful for Jerry’s support from the moment I met him which led to a 20-year association with Tufts.

Anthony Cornish, former Artist-in-Resident

Pen, Paint and Pretzels update

One of Pen, Paint and Pretzels’ distinguishing characteristics is that it is the oldest student-run organization on campus, a self-sustained group, dependent only on its own initiative. With the help and support of the Department and an ever-growing membership, 3P’s is able to provide an abundance of opportunities for students interested in every aspect of theater.

Pen, Paint and Pretzels serves as the umbrella organization for a variety of performing arts groups on campus. At the weekly Monday meetings, students are informed about ways to become involved in these groups that range from Hype!, a mime troupe, to the improv comedy troupe Cheap Sox, to a number of dance groups such as Sarabande and Tufts Dance Collective. The newest addition is Bare Bodkin, a group specializing in producing original works by students.

First semester, 3P’s had great success with its major production of Ring ’Round the Moon, while Torn Ticket II performed Little Shop of Horrors to sold-out crowds. 3P’s is steadily working to raise the budgets for shows in order to continue the strong tradition of student-produced theater on campus. After 90 great years, 3P’s is still striving to produce the same great caliber of performances for the next 90 years and beyond.

One of Tufts’ most colorful individuals is now gone. Undoubtedly, with his characteristic modesty, he never fully realized just how many hundreds of lives he touched, helped and improved. But there is great comfort in knowing that Jerry will certainly live on in the hearts and minds of the generations of students and colleagues who were lucky enough to have known this extraordinary man.

Joanne Barnett, Balch Arena Theater Manager

A Lisa Birnbaum (A04), as Mephistopheles, torments Graham Outerbridge (A04) as Doctor Faustus in the department’s fall production of Christopher Marlowe’s haunting tragedy. Directed by Downing Cless, this contemporary Faustus featured a giant “Hell Mouth,” which welcomed audiences into the Arena. Photo by Richard Feldman.
Alumni Class Notes

Henry Akina (A79) was appointed general and artistic director of the Hawaii Opera Theatre in 2001. His productions there included Tosca and Verdi’s Macbeth.

Catherine Arnott Smith (J81) just moved again, having completed a 5-year NIH fellowship in biomedical informatics at the University of Pittsburgh and successfully defended her dissertation on September 27, 2002. Catherine would love to hear from old friends at casmith07@syrc.edu.

Donald Byrd (A73) closed his New York-based dance company The Group, which he started in 1978, and now serves as artistic director for Spectrum Dance Theatre in Seattle, where he choreographed the world premiere of his latest work A Cruel New World/the new normal, a reflection on 9/11.

Hillary Casper (J02) will next design lighting in LA for a production of Art, directed by Aaron Kleven (A99) and starring Julie Fulton (J99), Tracey Erickson (J99) and Jackie Bell (J99).

Charles Cermela (A80) performed cabaret songs for Teddycare at the West Bank Cafe in New York last December.

Allison Clear (J02) was most recently seen in the Huntington Theater Company’s production of Butley, alongside Nathan Lane, in Boston. Other recent productions include the world premiere of Highway Ulysses and Andre Serban’s production of Pericles, both at the American Repertory Theatre, and This is Our Youth, which featured fellow alum Chris Walters (A03) and was directed by another Jumbo, Justin Waldman (A00).

David Costabile (A89) was one of a trio of actors who performed Shakespeare’s Clowns and Fools for the New York Shakespeare Society, September 2003.


Chiara De Luca (J01) is a member of the New York theatre company Red Metal Mailbox and took classes at the Atlantic Theatre Company. She had worked for over a year at the Performance Space 122, with performers such as Eric Bogosian and Spalding Gray.

J.C. DeVore (A97) has a recurring role as “Gordon” on One Life to Live.

Tommy Finkelstein (A95) was co-producer of the independent documentary Risk/Reward (2003) about career women.

Brian Finkelstein (A01) has worked with a variety of producers in the Boston area. Most recently, he worked on Zeitgeist Stage’s Far Away at the Boston Center for the Arts and with the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge.

Jeremy Goldstein (A01), along with the participation of many fellow alumni, premiered two original one-act plays at the Boston Center for the Arts: Pope and Anti-Pope and The Confession of Emmanuel. His short play Mary’s Letter to the Corinthians was part of SlamBoston at the Boston Playwrights’ Theatre last October.

Kazunori Ishizuka (A00) is working as Associate Producer of the award-winning Ridge Theatre in New York.

Stan Kmiec (A82) writes: “I had been on another national tour of Fiddler on the Roof, and have missed those wonderful reunion meetings in NYC. I am back in NYC and am currently a semi-finalist in the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers’ Dancebreak competition.”

Stephen Kunken (A93) has the lead role in The Journals of Mikhail Sebastian, the most recent work by Pulitzer Prize-winner David Auburn. He also appeared in the Broadway production of Auburn’s Proof, opposite Anne Heche.

Tom Mallan (A89) moved to San Jose, Costa Rica, to teach at one of the American International Schools there for the next two school years. He will be teaching and directing Drama for grades pre-K through 12, as well as giving teacher workshops and, as always, looking for projects and collaborators in the professional theater scene, which is one of the strongest in Latin America, and actually home to more than one bilingual venue!

Corin Nelson (J86) is a television producer living in New York City. She’s currently working on several series at VH1.

Robert O’Hara (A92) has been appointed artistic director of Partial Comfort in New York. Their web site is www.partialcomfort.org.

Oliver Platt (A83) most recently appeared in Pieces of April (United Artists) with Sean Hayes and Katie Holmes.

Andrew Polk (A84) recently appeared at the Long Wharf Theater in A New War by Gip Hoppe, directed by Gordon Edelstein. Andrew is directing the world premiere of Emil, a comedy by Ben Bettenbender at The New Jersey Rep, in Long Branch. The show runs from February 26 to April 4.

Amy Rhodes (J97) performed a one-woman show, I Enjoy Being A Girl (September-October 2003) at the Upright Citizen’s Brigade Theatre in New York.

Stephanie Routman (J90) began an MFA in Directing program at Cal State Fullerton last year. This year she is directing two mainstage shows: Sarah Daniels’ Gut Girls and a west coast premiere of a new translation by Michael Feingold of Max Frisch’s Andorra.

Kalinda Vazquez (A01) has been living in the Los Angeles area for the past two years. She was recently working as an assistant to producer Brian Grazer. She has just secured a job working with screenwriter Michael McCullers, whose credits include Austin Powers 2 and 3, and Undercover Brother.

Aury Wallington (A91) is currently a writer on the HBO show Sex and the City.

Jeremy Wang-Iverson (A02) produced a short film by fellow alum Tom Keefe (A02), entitled Pretender’s Dance, for their company Vesto Productions. The film was recently previewed at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, and will be submitted to festivals for 2004.

Chris Walters (A03) appeared in a production of This is Our Youth by Kenneth Lonergan at the Nantucket Theater Workshop last August, alongside alumni Allison Clear (J02).

Faculty News

Downing Cless recently directed Doctor Faustus, the first major production of the Tufts season, in a style that mixed Gothic “then and now.” He still teaches the two-course sequence in directing.

Virginia Johnson designed costumes for the NOVA special on Typhoid Mary for PBS. She also costumed OperaBoston’s production of Candide this past November. Virginia is currently designing They Made America for PBS’s The American Experience and The Percy Julian Project for NOVA/WGBH.

Laurence Senelick recently published articles on Russian theatre in Theatre Survey, Theatre Research International, and Slavic and East European Performance; on German theatre in Western European Performance; and on Klaus Mann in Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide. This fall, he spoke at the Tribute Symposium for Don Wilmeth at Brown University; the American Society of Literary Scholars and Critics in Atlanta, and the Jewish Studies Conference in Boston. He is currently translating and editing the new Norton Critical Edition of Chekhov’s plays.

Judy Stacker took her advanced lighting class to Prague in June for the Prague Quadrennial, an international exhibit of stage design that happens every 4 years in Prague, considered “the Olympics of stage design,” where they presented a moving lights project they had created in class using. Judy also designed the lighting for Stones in His Pockets by Brian Friel at the National Theatre of Scotland in Edinburgh, and a co-production of Cape Breton and Stoneham Theatre, this fall.

Alice Trexler of the Dance Program was in the local cast of Bread and Puppet’s Victory Over Everything Circus last November in Cambridge. This past year, she co-founded “ONLY fooling,” an intergenerational physical theater collective for women. Their December 2003 show, Out of Line, was performed in Brookline.

Got news to share? Email your alumni news to jumbodramalumni@hotmail.com!
Sondheim to visit Tufts

On April 12, legendary musical theatre artist Stephen Sondheim will hold an informal conversation with members of the Tufts community. Thanks to the efforts of Tufts trustee Marty Granoff and the support of President Bacow, the prolific composer and lyricist will speak about his illustrious career in the theatre. Over the past five decades, Sondheim has created such landmark shows as Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, Sweeney Todd, Into the Woods, Assassins, and Passion. His remarkable talent has transformed the American musical stage in the process. The event is currently expected to be held in the Balch Arena Theater, but the location is subject to change. We look forward to a memorable afternoon.

Tickets are now on sale for Spring shows at Tufts!

The Rocky Horror Show
presented by Torn Ticket II in Cohen Auditorium
April 9 - 11
all performances at 8pm

Noises Off
presented by the Department of Drama and Dance
in the Balch Arena Theater
April 15-17, 22-24 at 8pm
April 18 at 2pm

To purchase tickets call the Balch Arena Box Office at 617-627-3493!