

# WT

WRITERS' THEATRE

**THE BRIEF CHRONICLE**

ISSUE SIXTEEN MARCH 2007

**THE PUPPETMASTER OF LODZ**

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**Michael Halberstam**  
*Artistic Director*

Dear Friends:

I'd like to begin by welcoming our new Executive Director, Kate Lipuma, to Writers' Theatre. Kate joins us after nine years at Signature Theatre Company in New York. More on Kate will follow this letter and I can guarantee you that you will be hearing and seeing a lot of her in the years to come as she partners with me in leading Writers' Theatre into another 15 years of dramatic adventures. She has the opportunity to build upon the wonderful managerial legacy created by former Executive Director Jennifer Bielstein, who left Writers' Theatre in the fall to join Actor's Theatre of Louisville. Also, Kate's role has been marvelously primed by Rachel Weinstein, who valiantly stepped off of our Board and into the breach to support the company in the wake of Jennifer's departure. Rachel has brilliantly managed the transition between leadership and added a few very welcome innovations of her own. In fact, I think I must be one of the luckiest artistic directors in the country! In a 12-month period, I will have had the fortune to partner with three of the finest women working in the industry.

In other news, I am simply bursting with excitement over the 2007/08 season we are preparing for you. As this magazine goes to print, we are still a week or so away from announcing it, but I will give you a few tidbits to tide you over. It is highly possible that we'll be introducing you to a modern revival, a stunning literary adaptation, a charming classical comedy and a thought-provoking world premiere comedy. As usual, we will welcome back a host of favorite artists and introduce you to some of the hottest new talents on the scene. Also in the coming months, we hope to share with you news about some expanded programming that we are currently exploring.

The pages of this magazine, as usual, are filled with doorways into the world of a most exciting drama that is about to explode onto our stage at the bookstore. In keeping with our tradition of introducing you to new talent from within the Chicago theatre community, I am pleased to welcome Jimmy McDermott to our family of directors. Some of you have already had the pleasure of seeing snippets of his fiery taste and talent in his excellent programs prepared for our Annual Garden Party and for a number of commissioned entertainments. The more adventurous of you theatregoers may have caught his excellent production of *Salome* at the side project theatre company in Rogers Park last year. For his Writers' Theatre debut, Jimmy has collaborated with another remarkable artist, puppetry designer Michael Montenegro. You enjoyed just a shade of Michael's work in *The Duchess of Malfi* last season. He has a very specific and visceral gift for animating his puppets that, in turn, become magical sculptural vessels into which you can pour your dreams and waking imaginations. This production is going to be a very unique and deeply moving experience. I hope you enjoy reading about it.

So, I'll stop chattering on and invite you in. See you at the bookstore very soon!

Yours,



Michael Halberstam  
Artistic Director

## Welcome Kate!



Kathryn M. Lipuma  
Executive Director

The Board of Trustees, staff and artists of Writers' Theatre would like to welcome Kate Lipuma as our Executive Director.

*"I am so excited to be returning to Chicago as the new Executive Director of Writers' Theatre. I am deeply grateful and honored by this appointment and I am especially thrilled to partner with Michael Halberstam, the Board of Trustees and Writers' incredible staff and artists. I look forward to re-immersing myself in this vibrant, very generous Chicago arts community and being a part of Writers' exciting future."*

KATE LIPUMA

Kate joins Writers' Theatre from the award-winning Signature Theatre Company in New York where she served as Executive Director. In her nine seasons with the company, she worked with such acclaimed writers as Edward Albee, Lee Blessing, Horton Foote, Maria Irene Fornes, John Guare, Bill Irwin, Romulus Linney, Paula Vogel, August Wilson and Lanford Wilson and produced 28 productions, including this year's award-winning revivals of Horton Foote's *The Trip to Bountiful* and August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*.

As Signature's chief operating and administrative officer, Lipuma directed the company through several milestones during her tenure, and its numerous awards

and accolades include recognition as Outstanding National Theatre of the Year in 2003. Most recently, Lipuma was responsible for overseeing Signature's strategic business and operations plans for the creation of a new, multi-venue performing arts center located at the redeveloped World Trade Center site, designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry. Out of more than 120 finalists, Signature was the only theatre company in the world selected to participate in this historic project.

This year, in partnership with Signature Artistic Director James Houghton, she co-created Signature's *15th Anniversary \$15 Ticket Program*, a groundbreaking ticket initiative that reduced full-price tickets to every performance by 70%. In the ongoing effort to increase accessibility to the arts, the \$15 Program has seen rewarding results, with its productions playing to 107% capacity, with more than 50% of audiences identified as first-time ticket buyers.

Lipuma has consulted with not-for-profit theatres, hosted fundraising seminars for development professionals from across the country and has been a guest lecturer on arts management in the graduate programs at New York University and at Marymount Manhattan College. She has served on numerous arts and funding panels, including the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the Philadelphia Theatre Institute for the Pew Charitable Trust.

Prior to moving to New York City, she spent six years with the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. She is a graduate of the George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where she received her B.A. in radio and television broadcasting.

**March 13 – July 8, 2007**

*Performed at 664 Vernon Avenue*

After escaping from Auschwitz, Finkelbaum, a once-revered puppetmaster, has barricaded himself in an attic. Now 1950, he is not convinced that the war is over and sees any attempt to lure him out as merely a ruse to recapture him. In an attempt to bring back his lost family, he prepares for his greatest puppet show ever – the story of his life. Ultimately hopeful, moving and eminently theatrical, this beautifully articulated story will enjoy heightened poignancy upon our stage.

# THE PUPPETMASTER OF LODZ

BY GILLES SÉGAL TRANSLATED BY SARA O'CONNOR DIRECTED BY JIMMY McDERMOTT

THE CAST

**Jennifer Avery**  
**John Hoogenakker**  
**Larry Neumann, Jr.**  
**Steve Ratcliff**

SCENIC DESIGN

**Keith Pitts**

COSTUME DESIGN

**Debbie Baer**

LIGHTING DESIGN

**Ben Spicer**

PUPPETRY DESIGN

**Michael Montenegro**

SOUND DESIGN

**Josh Schmidt**

PROPERTIES DESIGN

**Lara Musard**

DRAMATURGY

**Martha Wade Steketee**

STAGE MANAGEMENT

**Rose Marie Packer**

*"They say if you want to,  
you can. If you absolutely  
want to believe, you can  
always find a way."*

FINKELBAUM

THE PUPPETMASTER OF LODZ

# ARTISTIC CONVERSATION



Reverend Tonen O'Connor

*Reverend Tonen O'Connor translated Gilles Ségala's The Puppetmaster of Lodz from the original French nearly two decades ago. She was then known as Sara O'Connor, Managing Director of Milwaukee Repertory Theater (MRT). Director and Writers' Theatre Artistic Associate Jimmy McDermott recently spoke with Reverend O'Connor at Milwaukee Zen Center where she serves as the resident priest. She graciously agreed to a rare interview about the play, her career in the arts and her spiritual path.*

**Jimmy McDermott:** How did your first encounter with Gilles Ségala's *Le Marionnettiste de Lodz*? Was it in print or in performance?

**Reverend Tonen O'Connor:** I had translated *The Workroom* by Jean Claude Grumberg for production at the MRT and was working on a translation of a couple of his short plays. On a visit to Paris, Grumberg gave me a copy of *Le Marionnettiste de Lodz* and I was

enthralled. I asked if I could meet Gilles and was so impressed with his play that I was nervous about doing so. The long and short of it is that we met and I received his permission to translate his play and, over time, we became friends and I translated more of his work.

**JM:** What was it about the play that compelled you to bring it to an English-speaking audience?

**RTO:** Its understanding of how artists and we ourselves try to change actuality by creating a fictional world that tells our story as we wish it to be. How suffering does not impede humor - the play is so rich with humor. Heartbreaking, yes. Heavy, no.

**JM:** That's an excellent note to take into rehearsal. In the act of translating this work, what was your chief priority?

**RTO:** To accurately translate a voice from another language into my own, while injecting as little of myself into it as possible. In this case, it seemed

said, "I don't understand what it means, but it sounds funny, so go ahead." I also had the advantage of working directly with a director and a fine cast of actors, so it helped me hear how things sounded when actually said, not just in my head.

**JM:** When this play premiered in the U.S. at MRT in 1988, you were the organization's Managing Director. A translator/producer must have an uncommonly vested interest in the play's success. How did you balance this unique dynamic?

## ITS UNDERSTANDING OF HOW ARTISTS AND WE OURSELVES TRY TO CHANGE ACTUALITY BY CREATING A FICTIONAL WORLD THAT TELLS OUR STORY AS WE WISH IT TO BE

easy because I felt such an affinity with Finkelbaum and his project to challenge God.

**JM:** How do you address certain idiomatic expressions that may not translate directly between the languages or even the cultures?

**RTO:** In the case of working with Gilles, this was eased by his reasonable understanding of English, which allowed me to check my choices with him. I remember on one occasion, while working with another of his plays, he

**RTO:** The play was chosen for production by the Artistic Director. I had a vested interest only in its success in reaching and moving an audience. The issue of success in terms of financial success did not enter into the choice. As a Managing Director, my philosophy was always to support the choices of the Artistic Director and try to interest the audience in seeing what we thought was worth producing, rather than producing what we thought they'd like just to be assured that they would come. In fact, this latter is unpredictable and a silly way to proceed. We were chasing art,

### LODZ FACT:

Lodz, the second largest city in Poland, was chartered in 1423 and has had a Jewish presence since 1780. By 1939, it had the second largest Jewish population in Europe.

### LODZ FACT:

The Polish pronunciation is "wootch." The city is also known as Lodzh (in Yiddish), Lodsch (in German) and was renamed Litzmannstadt by the Germans from 1939 until 1945.

### LODZ FACT:

Poland was invaded by Germany on September 1, 1939, leading to the French and British declarations of war against Germany. On September 17, 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east.

not bucks, although of course one needs bucks to chase art. I just worried about getting the words right. (And the play drew packed houses.)

**JM:** In 1994, you were ordained a Zen Buddhist priest. What led you from a 40-year career in arts administration to your current vocation?

**RTO:** Zen has few tenets but it embraces the attitude that we are all in this together. My work with the prison groups began eight years ago when an inmate wrote to the Milwaukee Zen Center with some questions. I visited him and the rest is history. I now serve Buddhist groups in nine state prisons on a monthly basis. Buddhism is for

## THERE IS NO “US” OR “THEM.” IT’S ALL WE.

**RTO:** The external event was the MRT’s active exchange program with Japanese theater companies that often took me to Japan, where I stumbled upon Zen Buddhism, something about which I had no previous knowledge. The link between the two is empathy. I spent 40 years in the theater trying to encourage audiences to feel empathy for situations that were often outside their direct personal experience and yet spoke of the human condition. I once titled an evening of Jean-Claude Grumberg’s short plays, *Them*, because it spoke of those most dangerous of all words: “us” and “them.” Buddhism speaks of the interdependence of all beings and reminds us that there is no “us” or “them.” It’s all WE. So the transition was completely natural and only mysterious to those who have the mistaken idea that Zen Buddhism is exotic, unknowable to Western minds and too Asian to be understood. This is simply not true.

**JM:** I have read that you spend a good deal of time visiting with inmates in prison. Is this a tenet of Zen practice or more of a personal calling?

people. Those outside the walls and those inside the walls are people.

**JM:** Finkelbaum, in a sense, lives in a self-imposed prison even after presumably escaping Birkenau. Do you draw any similarities between the prisoners you regularly encounter and Finkelbaum?

**RTO:** No more than I draw similarities between Finkelbaum and any of us who live imprisoned by our own illusions, inside the cage of our mind. Whether physically incarcerated or not, the highest prison walls may be those that keep us from seeing reality as it is.

**JM:** Of your time in creating and facilitating art, what would you mark as your greatest achievement?

**RTO:** It was all satisfying, as is any creation. I don’t think in terms of greater or lesser.

## THE SURVIVORS’ STORIES: ART OF THE HOLOCAUST

BY MARTHA STEKETEE

Arts of all kinds survived and even thrived in the concentration camps created and managed by Germany’s Third Reich. As early as 1941, Curt Daniel wrote of this in an article for *Theatre Arts* entitled “Theatre in the German Concentration Camps.” “The nature and extent of this theatre,” he writes, “varies in direct relation to the conditions prevailing in a particular camp.” A range of theatre existed – formal to illicit, political to non-political and even cabaret performances. As Daniel noted in 1941, “When at some future but unknowable date not too far distant the ghastly system of Hitler and his several hundred thousand hangmen has been destroyed, the great art of the Concentration Camps will come out into full daylight and be recorded as one of man’s great achievements in adversity.”

That future date has come. In 2002, an important archive, repository and exhibition containing images and essays was created by and displayed at Northwestern University’s Block Museum of Art before traveling to other museums. Luckily for the world, the riches of this exhibit remain as an online visual and intellectual resource titled *The Last Expression: Art and Auschwitz* at <http://lastexpression.northwestern.edu/>.

## WHAT’S MOST MOVING ABOUT IT IS THE UNEMOTIONAL DAILYNESSE OF ITS REPORTING

*The New York Times* reviewer Grace Guleck noted, “What’s most moving about it is the unemotional dailyness of its reporting, the fact that the artists who experienced the camps’ indignities and atrocities firsthand indulged in few polemics (unless satire qualifies). Usually, they simply recorded what they saw.”

# INDIVIDUALS USED ART TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN LIVES,

The major concentration camps developed a complex structure of subsidiary camps (e.g., Buchenwald had at least 133 subsidiary camps, Dachau 168). Auschwitz grew into the largest German concentration camp. Across the camps, individuals used art to express their own lives, their own pain, their own humanity either voluntarily (those fine artists who scavenged scraps to sketch their neighbors) or involuntarily (forced into theatrical performances or musical groups). Essays in *The Last Expression: Art from Auschwitz* outline art, artists, a museum at Auschwitz, music and theatre among other topics. Auschwitz functions as a symbolic and historical focus for this exhibition, the website and the exhibit catalog, providing a focal theme to connect individuals of many nationalities and backgrounds. The art presented was created primarily at Auschwitz, but also includes other sites, such as Theresienstadt, Buchenwald, Gurs and the Lodz Ghetto.

# THEIR OWN PAIN,

More than 200 artists of all nationalities were imprisoned at Auschwitz with more than 150 being Polish artists arrested for resistance activities (see Sybil Milton's essay "Artists at Auschwitz"). Guido Fackler's "'This music is infernal...': Music in Auschwitz" essay chillingly illustrates how music was exploited to terrorize prisoners as part of camp arrival and departure rituals, confronting every resident of the camps. Prisoners were forced to sing on command, organized singing groups were assembled and prisoner bands and orchestras were convened. The orchestra in the women's camp at Birkenau has been publicized from Fania Fenelon's memoirs, translated to the screen as the 1980 movie *Playing for Time*. As noted above, as early as 1941, commentators remarked on the existence of theatre in the concentration camps. Rebecca Rovit adds to this literature with her essay "Theatrical Performance at Auschwitz-Birkenau."

Artistic expression in the camps was on its surface perhaps absurd and cruel to the prisoners, yet it could also have been the one means to express the yearnings of the human spirit.

# THEIR OWN HUMANITY

## ART AND LOSS

*Samuel Finkelbaum, the title character in The Puppetmaster of Lodz, retreats from the painful reality of his past into his artistic vocation. His grief is the direct inspiration for his puppetry. In turn, we asked our gifted cast to share some of their thoughts on the relationship between personal loss and their own process.*

### Larry Neumann, Jr.

We had our second rehearsal for *They all Fall Down: The Richard Nickel Story* on 9/11 and I vividly remember how the cast and production team, after watching the news reports, collectively decided to end the rehearsal day and start again tomorrow. And, as the enormity of this tragedy overwhelmed us, this story of one lonely man's struggle to preserve the great architecture of his city took on a resonance and a spirit within myself that continues with me today...the spirit to continue.



### John Hoogenakker

Seldom have I used anything as specific as the substitution of a real-life occurrence to help flesh out a role, but I have certainly drawn solace from the fact that, more often than not, the roles we play on stage are those of human beings in crisis. Through the realization and performing of these roles, we are ourselves reminded of certain bonds that all human beings share: those of pain and joy. It is my hope that the trials of my personal life inform the trials of the lives I bring to the stage and that they, in turn, strike a chord with the viewer. The shared experience of pain, and of joy, throughout all humankind has always been a comfort to me where other remedies have failed.





### Jennifer Avery

For me, the theatre has always served as a safe place to express and release emotion both as an actor and an audience member. I think, at its best, the theatre can be a place where we as audience and performers can collectively share a story, and, through that shared theatrical event, experience a kind of emotional catharsis.

Many years ago, I was in the midst of performing a show in Chicago, while in Florida, my grandfather was very sick and in the hospital. I was flying back and forth, as time allowed, although having committed to the play made it hard for me to get there as much as I wanted. I felt torn and really guilty about not visiting more. As my grandfather's health declined, it became clear that

every trip was potentially the last, which put me in a heightened emotional state. I battled with a lot of issues during this time – should I quit the play and spend more time in Florida? Is it selfish for me to stay in Chicago and remain in the production? Can I put the feelings that I'm having into my performance or is that self-indulgent? I did stay in Chicago to do the play, at the urging of my family, and I made a conscious decision to put those feelings into my work, which afforded me an opportunity to deepen and strengthen my performance and to dedicate my work to a man who has had a profound impact on my life. I am so grateful that I had a safe haven in which to put all these feelings and am looking forward to exploring the theme as we work on *The Puppetmaster of Lodz*.



### Steve Ratcliff

Fourteen years ago, my girlfriend at the time died suddenly from complications related to breast cancer treatment. We had planned to spend the rest of our lives together. It was the most devastating thing that had happened to me in my life. At the time, I was working in the corporate world – I had not yet made the leap into acting. On a sweltering June day, I sat on my front stoop waiting for my sister to pick me up and drive me to Paula's funeral. I was totally adrift. I had just lost my best friend and the love of my life. I did not understand all the emotions swirling around inside me. I felt so inadequate, unable to express what I was experiencing. As I sat there trying to make sense of life, I came to a realization – artists have a unique gift in that they have the ability to translate personal emotion into public art. They have the gift to express feelings. Whether the artist is a sculptor, a writer, a musician, a painter or an actor. At that moment I longed to be an artist, so I could find an outlet to express my sadness, my loss, my grief.

A sudden death does not afford you the opportunity to say goodbye. And the ritualized structure of the funeral did not meet my need to say goodbye to Paula. So I embarked on my own

personal journey to honor the Paula that I knew and loved, and to say goodbye to her. I edited and published a book of memories. I put together 50 handmade books, each unique, with letters, pictures, artwork, poetry, song lyrics and anecdotes – words and pictures that expressed our love and the grief I felt as a result of my loss. Nine months to the day of Paula's death, I bound the first book. After sitting down and reading the first book cover to cover, I realized that I was an artist. I had found a way of outwardly expressing the emotions I felt inside. I had become the person that I envied nine months earlier. Little did I realize that my journey had only begun.

Over the next four years, I would search for my passion. Passion was one of the many things Paula taught me. I finally found my passion in acting. Standing in front of my bathroom mirror on a January morning in 1999, I looked deep into my eyes and said out loud for the first time, "I am an actor." The journey from that hot summer day sitting on my front stoop trying to come to grips with the grief of losing Paula to the day I declared my passion for acting was a long journey. But it was a very rewarding journey that has enriched my life. And it is not yet over.

#### LODZ FACT:

German occupiers closed high schools and universities, plundered Polish cultural treasures, began mass arrests and executions and established a network of concentration camps composed of work camps and execution camps. Some three million Polish Jews perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka death camps.

#### LODZ FACT:

Lodz (the province and its capital city) is located in the center of Europe and the center of Poland. At the outbreak of World War II, the city population was nearly 700,000, with an estimated 230,000 Jewish citizens, the second largest Jewish population in Poland at that time.

#### LODZ FACT:

A Jewish ghetto was created by secret memorandum on December 10, 1939, to concentrate the otherwise scattered Jewish citizens of Lodz, and the order was announced February 8, 1940. The area was fenced in April 1940, and on May 1, the ghetto was officially sealed and became the longest existing Polish Ghetto.

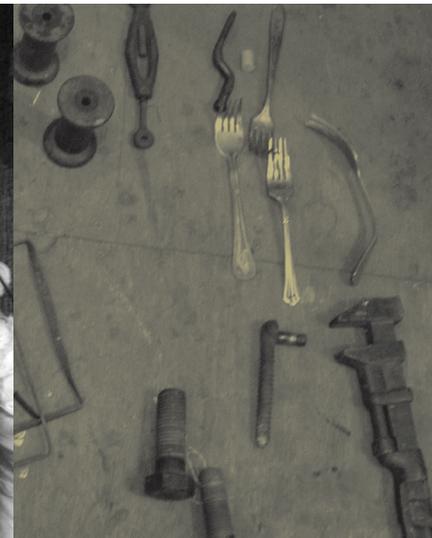


# DESIGNER INSIGHT: THE PUPPETMASTER'S WORKSHOP

*The puppetry of painter, sculptor and puppeteer Michael Montenegro most recently appeared onstage in Argonautika at Lookingglass Theatre under the direction of Tony Award-winner Mary Zimmerman. Last season, he designed and built figures for The Long Christmas Ride Home at Next Theatre and The Duchess of Malfi on our own stage. The theatrical demands of The Puppetmaster of Lodz naturally provided Writers' Theatre with an opportunity for a much more specific collaboration with this most particular artist. Michael recently invited Director Jimmy McDermott into his Evanston studio to share some works in progress, the materials he selects to construct them and the philosophy that holds them together, as photographed here by Artistic Director Michael Halberstam.*

Early on in my life I was interested in three different art forms. I felt like I was being a jack-of-all-trades by not committing myself to only one form. But eventually I decided that this was my particular character. The different aspects of each art form satisfied different parts of me. Now I am beginning to see that it's all one voice. I find it very

When I was seven or eight years old, I had the passionate desire to build a steam engine. I had noticed a picture in a book or something. And I would have been very happy if I had been able to build a working steam engine. But since I didn't have the technical ability, I settled for the appearance of a steam engine in its crazy contraption quality,



interesting – the relationship – because when I am developing puppet theatre, I am also thinking as a painter, and obviously as a sculptor. Puppets are, after all, kinetic sculptures. In painting, there is something about the icon, or the tableau, that has an influence on my work in puppet theatre. As far as puppet theatre influencing my painting, I really don't know. I'm sure it does.

and I think I fell in love with the idea of building things out of whatever I could find. As a child, I just remember a real passion for making things and I think I never lost that. At a certain point, in my late teens or early twenties, I began to build puppets and was very interested in what you might call "realism." But I was never attracted to the quality of refinement because, personally, I think things lose a sense of their aliveness, their richness, when they're too polished.

So, to a certain degree, I have always been comfortable with a certain crude quality that you might see in folk art, outsider art. In those early years, I really wasn't aware of any art movements so much as I was happy to use what I had around locally to build what I wanted to build. And I guess as I got older, I began to realize the artistic value in that. Found objects could perform metaphorically for other things.

I began to collect little objects that had a certain numinous quality, as I understand it. Numinous, to me, means something that has an otherworldly quality that, perhaps, we project upon the object. I find these objects, sometimes in the street, run over by

cars mostly. They often have a dreamlike quality, especially in combination with each other; little pieces of metal that have been twisted and flattened. They are flattened-out pieces of our culture and make a strange statement. Simply, the shape and the color attract me. Like little pieces of accidental jewelry. Some of these objects make their way into puppet anatomy.

Often, puppets are made to be beautiful but end up being ineffective as moving figures. Or they're built to do everything and, consequently, they can't do anything very well. I think, essentially, in terms of puppet theatre, these fail. To me, the essence of puppetry is movement first. That means you can pick up a piece of



cloth, an old rag, and imitate life with that old rag, and create beautiful puppetry. One of my endeavors in this production is to build a puppet that, without even moving, possesses an innate quality of "aliveness." That's pretty tricky.

From childhood on, I've experienced the phenomenon of walking into a dark room or waking up in a dark room, noticing, out of the corner of my eye, a coat thrown over a chair in such a way that it suggests a human being. It's very startling. I think this is pretty much a universal experience. This form is lifelike and you are really frightened in the semi-dark. Your eyes very quickly discern the fact that it is only a coat. The strange thing is that once you calm down from that experience, you play with the idea and actually recreate the phenomenon, which has almost the same stimulating, frightening effect, although you know that it's just a coat.

So, that phenomenon is a human game, a psychological game, that we play related to puppet theatre.

In reading this play, there's something kind of sad about the fact that Finkelbaum, as a human being, has to resort to recreating his life the way he does. He's surviving, which is a remarkable thing, and he's surviving by being creative, but there's something incredibly tragic in that he has to do it in a secondhand way as opposed to living the life that he lost. You might compare it to Van Gogh. Here was a man who had been cut off, or cut himself off, from life. By doing that, or because of it, he poured all of his incredible vitality into an artificial life, into a two-dimensional life: paintings. Even in his letters, he sometimes lamented the fact that his life had boiled down to this. In a way, it's a two-edged sword. There's something desperately wonderful, yet surely tragic about it.

– MICHAEL MONTENEGRO



**DIRECTOR'S SIDEBAR**  
JIMMY MCDERMOTT, DIRECTOR  
THE PUPPETMASTER OF LODZ



Jimmy McDermott most recently directed our 11th annual production of *A Christmas Carol*, performed by Michael Halberstam. He joined the Writers' Theatre staff as the Artistic Assistant in 2005. Prior to then, Jimmy worked in healthcare by day while moonlighting as a director. He is a company member with the side project theatre company in Chicago, where his directing credits include *The 4th Graders Present an Unnamed Love-Suicide*, *The Elephant Man*, *Salome*, *Sweet Pretty Love Jam* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*,

adapted from the Stephen Crane novella by Adam Webster. Other credits include productions for The Hypocrites and Collaboraction's annual Sketchbook festival of short plays, which has featured his work five times since its inception in 2000.

Upcoming projects include overseeing seven plays by Suzan-Lori Parks at Writers' Theatre as part of the *365 Days/365 Plays* experiment. In 2002, Ms. Parks wrote one play a day for a full year. Writers' Theatre will present a week's worth of these short plays in October of 2007.

A native Chicagoan, Jimmy spent most of his youth in Florida. He returned a decade ago to obtain his M.F.A. in directing from The Theatre School at DePaul University where Michael Halberstam was one of his instructors. He lives in Chicago with his wife, Marsha.

**LODZ FACT:**

On January 6, 1942, the first deportation summonses were delivered for the new Chelmo death camp. By the first week of April, almost 45,000 deportations occurred. The final liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto was ordered by Heinrich Himmler on June 10, 1944 – and the order was complete by August 1944.

**LODZ FACT:**

Five months later, January 19, 1945, Soviets liberated the ghetto and found only 877 of the 255,000 Jews and imported individuals who resided there during the war.

**LODZ FACT:**

Today, 1.2 million people live in the Lodz province and almost 70% live in the capital city.

# WHAT'S HAPPENING BACKSTAGE AT WRITERS' THEATRE

# EDUCATION

## BRING WRITERS' THEATRE TO YOUR SCHOOL!



*Writers' Theatre created an environment that stimulated the imagination, promoted self-expression and nurtured an appreciation and love of literature. Their unique literature-based program used stories as a launching point for creative drama. Students were challenged to retain information and use it in new ways. The feedback from students, parents and staff was tremendous.*

LAUREN BONDY, PARENT,  
MEADOWBROOK SCHOOL

### The Writers' Theatre In-School Residency Program

Offered to schools and Parent Teacher Organizations, the Writers' Theatre Residency Program is an in-school educational program where subjects covered in English, History and the Social Sciences are further explored in a theatrical context. Through a combination of writing, performance and team-building exercises, the Residency Program illustrates to students that:

- clearly organized, well-articulated ideas have the power to change communities;
- creative thinking leads to a deeper understanding of the world around them; and
- trust, tolerance, cooperation and the acceptance of others are vital components in the success of any project.

Our teaching artists work directly with the school's faculty to create lesson plans that complement the existing curriculum. Residencies can last anywhere from a few days to several months.

### Recent Residencies

#### Glencoe District 35 After-School Program

This fall, Writers' Theatre offered four classes in the Glencoe District 35 school system – one class each at South and West School and two classes at Central. Students learned theatre techniques and storytelling by playing theatre games and studying improvisation and creative writing. Each class included a final presentation for parents, where the students presented their original works. Support was provided by the Glencoe District 35 PTO.

#### Northbrook District 28 After-School Kid Care

In collaboration with the District 28 Kid Care program, Writers' Theatre offers after-school creative drama classes focusing on reading, imagination and performance. We currently serve students in 1st-5th grade at Meadowbrook, Westmoor and Greenbriar Schools in Northbrook.

#### Exploring Myth At New Trier High School, Winnetka

After studying Homer's *The Odyssey* in English class, members of the freshman class participated as actors, writers, assistant directors and technicians for an original piece, *Journey into a Dream: A Hero's Journey for the 21st Century*. Support was provided by parents of the New Trier Fine Arts Association.

#### Time Travelling At Glencoe's West School

Using people and events from Illinois's history, each 3rd grade classroom wrote a short play in the style of a specific historical era. More than 120 students used drama to illustrate their knowledge of Illinois's past, thanks to the support of West School's Parent Teacher Organization.

**To start a Residency Program at your school, please contact Director of Education LaRonika Thomas at 847-242-6007 or [lthomas@writerstheatre.org](mailto:lthomas@writerstheatre.org).**



*Thank you for spending time with our class on making our Illinois play. It was very fun to do those cool exercises. I would love to do these kinds of plays every year!*

THANK YOU LETTER FROM A 3RD GRADE STUDENT, WEST SCHOOL

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

# EVENTS

## The Carol Marks Jacobsohn Foundation



*Glencoe School Administrators were very impressed with the array of classes that Writers' Theatre can offer our students. Thank you for your patience, good humor and creative planning. You're promoting the best drama education anyone could possibly offer! Thanks for your good work.*

JAY HOWE, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF CURRICULUM AT GLENCOE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

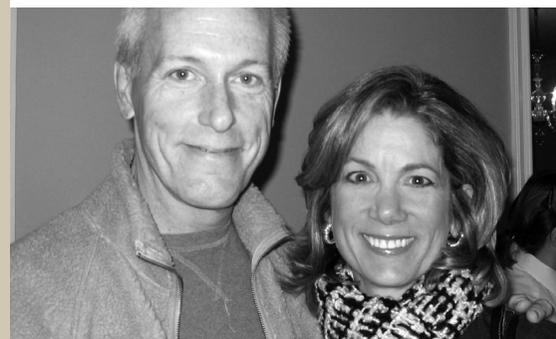
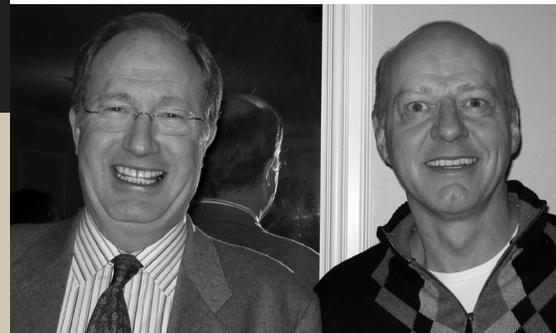
The beautiful, bronze sculpture in the inner-lobby of the Tudor Court Theatre is entitled "Circle of Life." It was created by the late Carol Marks Jacobsohn, a long-time supporter of Writers' Theatre. Carol was an accomplished artist and believed strongly that children benefit greatly from the self expression that arts encourage. With this in mind, the Foundation named in Carol's honor provided Writers' Theatre with the necessary resources to launch our arts education programming initiative. Writers' Theatre is profoundly grateful to the Carol Marks Jacobsohn Foundation for its role as the largest contributor to our arts education programming, with gifts totaling \$50,000.

Writers' Theatre educational programs help bring to life important ideas that are being discussed in class and complement the curriculum already being used by teachers. Writers' Theatre has already held 19 residencies, serving

more than 1,350 students. Eight additional residencies are scheduled for this spring.

Through their interaction, teaching artists and participants experience firsthand the transformative power of theatre and self-expression, gaining a deeper appreciation of literature and improving their collaborative skills.

Through these programs and the launch of *The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights* – a program aimed to give the civil rights movement relevance to today's youth – we hope to make an impact on the communities that have made an impact on us. We believe, like Carol did, that arts education programming makes a positive difference in the lives of children. We are grateful for the significant support the Carol Marks Jacobsohn Foundation has provided, and it is our hope that our partnership will continue well into the future.



## Caviar & Conversation

On January 10, 2007, Writers' Theatre presented the 3rd Annual Caviar & Conversation. More than 80 members of the Director's Society joined the evening's guests of honor, the director and cast of *Bach at Leipzig*, for a champagne and caviar reception, offering this dedicated group of patrons the unique opportunity to talk to the artists one on one. Following the reception, Artistic Director Michael Halberstam led a lively conversation about the ephemeral nature of comedy. *Bach at Leipzig* cast members Ross Lehman, Rob Lindley, John Reeger, Tim Rock, Jonathan Weir, Larry Yando and director Nick Bowling shared their thoughts about what it takes to make an audience laugh. These gifted comedians gave the audience an early glimpse into the creation and challenges of *Bach at Leipzig*.

For more information about the Director's Society and to learn how you can join us for other upcoming exclusive behind-the-scenes events, please contact Development Manager Lindsey Becker at 847-242-6012.

*From top to bottom: 1. Trustee Lorel McMillan, Nancy & Ronald Semerdjian and Gail Hodges; 2. Board of Trustees President Chris Knight and Bach at Leipzig actor Jonathan Weir; 3. Jean London, Jan Tranen and Trustee Bruce Tranen; 4. Bach at Leipzig actor Larry Yando and Trustee Carol Dawley*

# EVENTS

## The 2006/07 London Tour



Joan Copeland and actor Jeffery Dench.  
PHOTO BY MICHAEL HALBERSTAM.



Artistic Director Michael Halberstam, actor Frank Langella and Richard Christensen, former Chief Theatre Critic for the Chicago Tribune. PHOTO BY LINDSEY BECKER.



View of the London Eye from the north bank of the Thames. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HALBERSTAM.

For eight nights, the Waldorf Hotel London became home to the 33 globe trekkers on the annual Writers' Theatre New Year's London Tour. The group set out to take in the latest offerings of the London stage scene, including Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon*, a dramatization of the David Frost and Richard Nixon interviews, which almost everyone agreed was the best of the six productions seen on the tour. Other highlights included the new Tom Stoppard play *Rock 'n' Roll* and the edgy *Don Juan in Soho*, a contemporary take on the Molière classic, written by Patrick Marber.

The theatre-goers were able to delve deeper into their experience

through seminars, discussions and exclusive meetings with artists. The tour's opening-day seminar was led by London's Chief Theatre Critic from *The Guardian*, Michael Billington. Mr. Billington discussed trends he has observed in London theatre and gave the group a preview of the performances they would be attending. The remaining seminars were show-focused, led by our own theatre experts, Richard Christensen, the former Chief Theatre Critic of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Writers' Theatre Artistic Director Michael Halberstam.

The group was very fortunate to meet with Frank Langella, accomplished actor of stage and screen, who is

currently starring as Nixon in *Frost/Nixon*. Participants also enjoyed a conversation with Jeffrey Dench who is currently playing in *The Merry Wives of Windsor: the Musical* with his sister, famed actress Judi Dench. While the group gave mixed reviews to the musical, all agreed that the conversation with Mr. Dench was a wonderful and enriching experience.

## Tour to The Stratford Festival

June 28 – July 1, 2007

Join artistic director Michael Halberstam and *Chicago Tribune* former Chief Theatre Critic Richard Christiansen on a delightful and exhilarating trip to The Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada.

A former Stratford Festival company member himself (1990, 1991), Michael invites you on this magnificent Shakespearean adventure, which continues Writers' Theatre's 12-year tradition of excellent performing arts tours around the world.

The trip includes airfare, all transfers, accommodations at The Queen's Inn, gourmet meals at three award-winning restaurants, visits with the stars, seminars and best available tickets to *Shakespeare's Will*;, *The Blonde Brunette* and *the Vengeful Redhead*; *King Lear*; and *The Merchant of Venice*.

For reservations, please call Development Manager Lindsey Becker at 847-242-6012. Only 22 places available – reservations must be received by March 31!

## Upcoming Events

Please mark your calendar for these upcoming special events. For more information about these events, please contact Development Manager Lindsey Becker at 847-242-6012.

May 8, 2007

Open Rehearsal: *Othello*  
*Director's Society & 100% Club*

July 15, 2007

Annual Garden Party  
*Director's Society*

# CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE WORD AND THE ARTIST

## 15 PLAYWRIGHTS OF WRITERS' THEATRE

A wonderfully eclectic list, the following represent playwrights who have made a contribution to the success of Writers' Theatre in many capacities, including direct involvement with the company, the shaping of the art form as a whole and building the future of theatre. We have enjoyed our experiences with these playwrights and look forward to future collaborations with them and more of yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's great playwrights.

### ANTON CHEKHOV

We opened the theatre with three adapted short stories in *Love & Lunacy* and returned to the master to adapt three of his vaudevilles in *Marriage & Bears*, and, finally, the world premiere of Curt Columbus's acclaimed translation of *Seagull*.

### G.B. SHAW

Perhaps our most produced and most successful playwright at the Box Office. Productions have included *Arms and the Man*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Misalliance* and *Candida*.

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*Richard II* was performed in our fifth season and *Othello* will soon be in rehearsal. As his canon lives at the center of the literary universe, it is only proper to celebrate him now.

### CURT COLUMBUS & MARILYN CAMPBELL

With the realization of our first commission, this award-winning team brought us one of our most successful productions to date in *Crime and Punishment*. Marilyn has alone been responsible for a prolific output of adaptations seen in every area of our programming.

### NOEL COWARD

*Private Lives* directed by Michael Halberstam was a turning point for Writers' Theatre and brought William Brown and Shannon Cochran to our stage for the first time.

### TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

*The Glass Menagerie* exploded the success of Writers' Theatre (as started by *Private Lives*) into a whole new realm. Scott Parkinson, Susan Hart, P. J. Powers and Jenny Friedmann triumphed under William Brown's superb and revelatory direction.

### BRETT NEVEU

This local lad is gently achieving international renown and we are proud to acknowledge him as the recipient of the first commission from our newly defined Literary Development Initiative.

### JOHN OSBORNE

*Look Back in Anger* seared onto our stage in a gripping revival directed by Michael Halberstam. Actors Jenn Dede and Tom Clarke fell in love during the production and married soon after.

### JOE ORTON

Internationally acclaimed and award-winning director Gary Griffin directed the revival of *Loot*, which made then-retiring *Chicago Tribune* Theatre Critic Richard Christiansen's pick of top theatre experiences of all time.

## ARTHUR MILLER

William Brown's direction of the rarely seen classic *Incident at Vichy* created an unprecedented demand for tickets. David Cromer later directed an award-winning production of *The Price*. During the run of *Incident at Vichy*, a fax was received from Miller reading, "Congratulations and thank you. Looks like you got it right!"

## AUSTIN PENDLETON

Austin was featured in his own play *Booth* about legendary father and son actors Junius and Edwin Booth, directed by David Cromer just prior to his off-broadway triumph with Pendleton's magnificent work, *Orson's Shadow*.

## TOM STOPPARD

Only one Stoppard play has made it to our stages so far, with our bright and cheery production of *Rough Crossing*, a respite from the invasion of Iraq that was in full swing in every other area of the media. We hope to visit the masterful wordsmith again, but his casts tend to be epic – a challenge in our theatres. He's still one of our favorites.

## WILLIAM INGE

Writers' Theatre revived the highly acclaimed *Bus Stop*, directed by Steppenwolf ensemble member Rick Snyder, which initiated the revival of two more Inge plays around Chicago the following season.

## EVAN SMITH

*The Uneasy Chair* is easily one of the wittiest contemporary scripts ever written. Look for more from Smith on our stage in the near future. He is alive and kicking and brimming with ideas.

## CHAIM POTOK & AARON POSNER

We were thrilled with Shade Murray's production of *The Chosen*, which broke all Writers' Theatre box office records and extended for four weeks, currently the highest-grossing and longest-running production in Writers' Theatre history.

# IN BRIEF



## FROM PAGE TO STAGE



### Mark Your Calendars! From Page To Stage - *Othello*

In the Writers' Theatre tradition of bringing our patrons closer to the arts, we will again be partnering with numerous North Shore libraries for our second annual "From Page to Stage" program. Through the presentation of *Othello*, special receptions, discussions, give-aways and more, the program will enhance your experience and allow exclusive access to the art. Presentations will be held at libraries throughout the North Shore every Thursday beginning May 3rd and will continue throughout the run of *Othello*.

**On May 3, please join us for a special kick-off event at our theatre at 325 Tudor Court in partnership with the Glencoe Public Library. Join Artistic Director Michael Halberstam and actors James Vincent Meredith (*Othello*) and John Judd (*Iago*) for a look at the process of bringing the play to life. The presentation will begin at 7:30 p.m.**

For more information about all the events, please visit [www.frompagetostage.org](http://www.frompagetostage.org).

# IN BRIEF

## Welcome New Board Members!

### Larry B. Kugler

Larry Lives in Glencoe with his wife Tracie and their three children, Erica, David and Zak. Since January 1, 1995, he has been President and CEO of The Millard Group, Inc., a company he acquired from his family on January 1, 1997, continuing more than 90 years of Kugler ownership. The Millard Group cleans in excess of 100 million square feet daily for more than 500 clients. The company employs more than 4,700 people in 32 states. The Millard Group serves office high-rises, apartment buildings, industrial clients, shopping malls, healthcare facilities, laboratories and educational and financial institutions.

Larry did his undergraduate work at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, where he graduated in 1988 with a degree in Political Science. He is a former member of the Jewish Council for Youth Services (formerly Young Men's Jewish Council), where he served for five years, three of those years on the executive committee. He is a former member of Inspired Partnerships, where he served on the Board of Directors, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science (ACWIS). He is

a member of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Young Presidents Organization (YPO) Chicago Chapter, International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA) and the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association (GNMA).

### David McGranahan

David lives in Winnetka with his wife Leslie and his three children, Jack, Libby and Nathaniel. He is a Director in the Sales and Trading Division of Credit Suisse and is also an active board member of The Springboard Foundation, whose mission is to improve the quality of life in Chicago's economically challenged neighborhoods through the support of grassroots after-school programs for children. Originally from Virginia, David graduated from Princeton in 1991 and completed a Masters in Management from Northwestern University's Kellogg School in 1998. He and his family relocated back to the Chicago area in 2004 after four years in London.

### Stanford R. Slovin

A native to the Chicago area, Stan lives in Northbrook with his wife Jodi and their two children, Josh and Abby. He was born and raised in Skokie, attended Niles North High School, graduated with a B.S. in Finance from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and a J.D. from the John Marshall Law School. Stan has been

in the financial services industry for more than 15 years and is currently a Vice President of Investments and Retirement Planning Consultant with UBS Financial Services, Inc.

Stan has been involved with the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Northbrook Board of Directors, Children's Memorial Hospital Annual Summer Raffle, Juvenile Diabetes and the Five Seasons Board of Governors

in Northbrook. His love for theater started as a young child when his parents brought him to shows, plays and musicals. Stan was in high school theatre, university musicals and can be seen annually in the Chicago Bar Association's Christmas Spirits Show. He and Jodi enjoy attending the theatre and Stan is very honored and excited to be part of the Board of Trustees.

## Community Partners

Please join the Writers' Theatre artists, staff and Board of Trustees in thanking our current community partners for their continued support by visiting their establishments and telling them we sent you. Let them know that their support means as much to you as it does to everyone at the theatre.



### Restaurant Partner

317 Park Avenue  
Glencoe, IL 60022  
847-835-2620



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1919 Skokie Valley Rd.  
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samswine.com

## Correction

In the last issue of *The Brief Chronicle* (issue 15, *Bach at Leipzig*) it was stated as part of the "Donor Spotlight" on Elly Thaviu (Page 20) that tickets were free of charge to the Sam Thaviu Memorial Concert on May 6 at 1 p.m. at the North Shore Senior Center (NSSC). Tickets are, in fact, \$10 for NSSC members and \$12 for non-members.

The afternoon will feature a concert by the Orion String Quartet and readings from Writers' Theatre's upcoming production of *Othello*. Reservations are strongly encouraged and can be made by calling 847-784-6000.

# IN MEMORIAM

## Joseph Sullivan (1933 – 2006)

There has long been a guiding philosophy to the philanthropy of Joe and Jeanne Sullivan: support dreams, venture where others fear to tread, back innovators. In Writers' Theatre, the Sullivans found a grateful home for their financial support and strategic leadership. Joe and Jeanne were among our early supporters and were always there at times of greatest need.

Writers' Theatre lost a great friend when Joe passed away last September after a long battle with cancer. The Theatre's bond with the Sullivans stretches back to 1994, when the Sullivans' ties to actor Nicholas Pennell of the Stratford Festival led them to underwrite a Writers' Theatre co-production of *Not About Heroes*. At Pennell's untimely passing in 1995, the Sullivans sponsored two productions in commemoration of his artistic legacy and began their annual support of Artistic Director Michael Halberstam.

Joe was born into a lower middle-class neighborhood in Boston and went on to become a highly successful business executive. He never forgot the tales of immigrant struggles among his neighbors and became an ardent supporter of human and civil rights in the U.S. and abroad. He was a founding board member of the American Refugee Committee, which helps meet the basic needs of refugees in war-ravaged areas around



the world. The arts have always been a centerpiece of the Sullivans' love and attention and they have backed projects from a teenage theatre troupe in Santa Fe to dramatic innovators around the country, including Moisés Kaufman (*The Laramie Project, I Am My Own Wife*). These are the "dreamers" – poets, writers, artists – that have benefited from their relationships with the Sullivans.

"At every pivotal point of growth and intensive need, the Sullivans have spontaneously and miraculously come calling," says Halberstam. "Their support at exactly the right moment has been uncanny and almost mystical. However, the more I have learned about the people and the projects they have supported, the more I have realized that this astonishing gift has been quite simply their way of being."

Thank you, Joe, for your trust, support and, most of all, your unwavering belief in what we do.

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