

Friends of Niagara University Theater

For those who love and support theater at Niagara University

Spring/Summer 2008



For the second year in a row, gala auction chairs William LeCuyer, center, and Pamela LeCuyer, right, are spearheading the collection of gift items for the Friends of Niagara University Theater's 23rd Annual Gala and Auction.

Posing with the LeCuyers is Adair Saviola, '73, president of the Friends of Niagara University Theater. The three Friends display just a few of the gift baskets and prints that have been donated for the event.

An exciting array of goods and certificates from local businesses, entertainment legends, friends and a posh Chicago hotel will highlight the 23rd Annual Friends of Niagara University Theater Gala and Auction this spring.

Gala co-chairs Kenneth and Mary Tirohn of Cheektowaga, N.Y., and Ryan and Tara Erwin of Tonawanda, N.Y., have planned a fun-filled evening along with auction chairs William and Pamela LeCuyer of Getzville, N.Y. The event will be held on campus on Saturday, April 26.

This year's gala will begin with a 4 p.m. matinee of the hit Kander and Ebb musical, "Cabaret," at the Leary Theater on NU's campus. Guests will then proceed to the Castellani Art Museum for a cocktail hour, silent auction, dinner, live auction and a visit from the cast and crew of "Cabaret." Auction items include a travel package, paintings, posters, entertainment and sports memorabilia, gift baskets, gift certificates and more.

Anyone can bid on the silent and live auction items, which range in value from \$50 to more than

What Good Is Sitting Alone in Your Room? Come to the Gala and Auction!

By Ann Heuer, '78

\$1,500. Here's a sneak preview of just a few of the many items that will be available at this year's gala auction.

Collectibles – Gregory Fletcher, director of NU Theater, is close friends with the celebrated comedy team Stiller and Meara. He has donated a number of fun collectibles representing their work and the work of their son, comedian Ben Stiller. The treasure trove includes autographed collector edition books, autographed theater, film and television scripts (e.g., Anne Meara's play "After-Play," "A Night at the Museum," "The King of Queens" and "Seinfeld") and even a "Latke Larry Doll," with the voice of Jerry Stiller — the world's only talking action Chanukah gift. The doll is signed by Jerry Stiller.

Also, NU alumnus Bob Renna, '72, an assistant prop master, on-set dresser, buyer and draper who lives and works in California, donated several feature film and TV scripts including "The Fallen Woman" episode of NBC Universal's "Life," by Rand Ravich, NBC Studios, 2007.

Dining – Great restaurant certificates from a variety of restaurants located in Erie and Niagara Counties.

Entertainment – A walk-on role in next spring's Niagara University Theater gala musical, Blockbuster gift certificates and more!

Home and Office Décor – A rug from Markarian Carpets; artwork from Calvins Furniture & Leather Gallery, Williamsville, N.Y.; artwork

from Poster Art of Elmwood Ave., Buffalo.

Physical Fitness – Two fitness memberships from Planet Fitness, Williamsville, N.Y.; and a variety of sporting good certificates.

Travel Package – A five-course

dinner for two and a luxurious two-night stay in one of the apartment suites at The James Hotel of Chicago (pictured right). This package is

valued at \$1,600! The James Hotel is located at 55 West Ontario St., Chicago, just minutes away from Michigan Avenue's "Magnificent Mile," a shopping and dining hotspot, and such cultural attractions as Millennium Park, Chicago's Historic Water Tower, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Navy Pier, and The Smith Museum of Stained Glass, to name a few.

Travel Accessories – Luggage from AAA of Williamsville, N.Y.

For tickets or information about the gala, please contact Peg Lacki at (716) 286-8483 or Ann Heuer at (716) 286-8480. The auction committee welcomes donations of collectibles, artwork, antiques, gift baskets or gift certificates valued at \$50 or more. Please contact Lacki or Heuer if you would like to donate an item to the gala.





What's New at NU:

By the editor-in-chief, Gregory Fletcher

My family and friends are surprised to hear how much I am enjoying the winter here in

Niagara Falls. Each season has been so very different; I love such variety. It is this variety that I hope to incorporate into our very own upcoming theater season, which will be publicly announced during our final production of "Cabaret."

As of this writing, over one and a half million dollars have been raised for the upcoming renovation of the Leary Theater, which is scheduled for a major face-lift in a year from June. At a recent meeting with the architects, a computer drawing of the intimate proscenium theater was generated. The new stage will be less wide than our current stage but much deeper, and the dozen rows that make up the 150 seats, raking up to a second-level tech booth, promises a perfect view from every seat, not to mention enough room for legs and arms. Along with a new air conditioning system, we will actually be able to control the temperature. And there will be an easily accessible lobby with elevator access to the top seats. I've been here only a mere nine months and I am ecstatic with anticipation — I can only imagine how the rest of you must feel.

I am also happy to report that currently \$30,000 has been raised in Julie Burdick's name, the annual interest of which will soon become the Julie Burdick Scholarship Fund. For those of you who did not know Julie, she was a graduate from the Class of 2003 who suddenly passed away in January 2007 at the young age of 25. When I hear people speak of Julie, it becomes quickly apparent how special she was, not only because of her star-making talent but because of her heart of gold. It is, therefore,

very meaningful for all of us here at NU to have Julie's name perpetually in the department as a vibrant, loving, supportive role model for our current and future students.

Speaking of another beloved member of Niagara University Theater, a scholarship fund has also been established in Tim Ward's memory. The former associate director and professor of theater at Niagara, Tim passed away in 2006. His son, Zak Ward, '04, created the following Web site that exhibits many photos of Tim as well as music samples of a few rare performances. Please visit www.myspace.com/whatwouldtimwarddo.

If you would like to contribute to either scholarship fund, please mail your check (made out to the Julie Burdick Scholarship Fund or the Timothy Ward Scholarship Fund) to Peg Lacki, P.O. Box 1913, Niagara University, NY 14109-1913.

Certainly, it is not the level of membership you pledge but rather the annual act of support to which I am appealing.

Recently, it has come to my attention that many of you who are reading this "Friends of Niagara University Theater Newsletter" are not actually Friends. You may be "friends" but not Friends with a capital F. Certainly, it is not the level of membership you pledge but rather the annual act of support to which I am appealing. To prove it, we are creating two new levels of membership as well as perks:

- 1) "Production Assistant — First Year Graduate": Entitles current theater graduates to a year of complimentary membership.
- 2) "Rising Star" (with membership

dues of \$25 a year): Eligible for anyone in their 20s — although whenever your budget allows for it, we hope that you will choose a higher membership when possible.


As president of Friends Adair Saviola, '73, explains: "The Friends were established to be a support organization, devoted to helping and enhancing our beloved theater department. Only with ongoing philanthropy and increasing membership will we be able to continue assisting this program that absolutely deserves our efforts and attention."

As incentives for membership, we offer three new perks:

1) Theater ticket discounts: We are now offering Friends the same discount that NU faculty, staff and senior citizens receive.

2) Friends bring friends: entitles a Friend to bring a guest for 50 percent off the general admission ticket price — only one guest discount per performance.

3) Complimentary NU Arts calendar: consisting of production photos, theater season schedule, class schedule, Castellani Art Museum exhibits, and Live Music events (available each summer).

In my youth, I distinctly remember the TV commercial for the Hair Club for Men. (Maybe it was a sign — see photo.) The president for the Hair Club for Men would make his membership plug, so to speak, and then end by taking off his hairpiece and stating, "I am not just the President of Hair Club for Men, I am also a client." As I look at our newsletter going to print and gaze upon the subheading, which reads: "For those who love and support Niagara University Theater," let me end by saying: "I am not just the director of Niagara University Theater, I am also a Friend." 

NU Students Impress Producers at UPTA Auditions

By Ann Heuer, '78

The lines of people waiting to audition at the United Professional Theatre Auditions in Memphis this winter weren't as long as those for "American Idol," but the atmosphere was just as electric.

This year, over 800 professional actors, production personnel and theater studies seniors from across the nation auditioned there for national performance contracts and production jobs. This conference is highly respected in the industry and is praised by theater producers and actors alike. In fact, 116 companies were represented at the UPTAs this year. Clearly, producers know they will see top-notch talent there — and actors can trust that they will audition for respected, reputable producers.

This February, nine of NU's theater studies seniors flew or drove south to attend the UPTAs. According to Lisa LeCuyer, '08, "a lot of companies that I talked to made a comment on how impressed they were with the Niagara University talent. I received about 30 callbacks, and many of those companies have worked with NU grads and said they would like to continue to work with us because of the success they've had with our alumni."


Kevin Craig, '08, also attended this year's UPTAs and accepted an offer for a paid internship with Mill Mountain Theater Co. in Roanoke, Va., where a number of NU grads have worked in the past.

Charles Wahl, '08, was offered and accepted a job with Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Va., to play a role in its production of "Sweeney Todd." Lia Sumerano, '08, was offered a job working in an amusement park and learned that most of the companies that she and her fellow students auditioned for would be calling in mid-March regarding job offers since they had other auditions to conduct. Sumerano added, "Attending the UPTAs was a great experience."

NU alumna Kristen Smiley, '07, also attended this year's auditions, along with Tara Lawton, '07, M. Joseph Fratello, '07, Patrick Moyer, '07, and Gregory Prigel, '04, among others.

"I ran into a few of the seniors at my callbacks and I can't tell you how many companies had wonderful things to say about the students from NU after they noticed the same school listed on my resume," Smiley wrote in an e-mail to Dr. Sharon Watkinson,

chair of NU's department of theater and fine arts. "I have no doubt they're all going to come out with many job offers from the conference! LCT actually talked to quite a few of them. It made me proud of our theater department at NU!" Smiley landed an acting and teaching job with Lexington Children's Theatre when she attended last winter's UPTAs.

NU seniors can participate in the preprofessional auditions at the UPTAs as long as they will receive their undergraduate degree during the current year. Actors with post-graduate degrees participate in regular auditions and individuals with undergraduate theater degrees are welcome to participate in production interviews. A variety of well-known entertainment venues are represented each year at the UPTAs, such as Busch Gardens Europe and Tampa, Holland American Cruise Lines and Universal Studios. Also, a wide array of renowned regional dinner theaters, summer playhouses, children's theater, repertory theaters, Shakespearean theaters, renaissance faires and theme parks also participate. For more information, visit www.upta.org. 

Each summer, Niagara University theater students and students from other disciplines have the opportunity to participate in a summer study abroad program at Schiller International University in London. This year, at least a dozen theater majors will participate in study abroad at Schiller. Among the theater students who studied in London during the summer of 2007 were, from left, Charlotte Colby, '08, Lisa LeCuyer, '08, and Kevin Craig, '08. Here the three pose at Stonehenge.



Advice From the Great White Way

By Ann Heuer, '78

Actor David Hyde Pierce, best known for his role as Niles Crane on the television series "Frasier," was among four theater personalities who were honored by Niagara University at a special convocation on Nov. 19. The convocation, a celebration of excellence in theater, also honored actors Debra Monk and Karen Ziemba and director Scott Ellis. The four honorees have been working together for a year on "Curtains," a popular Broadway musical featuring music by celebrated composer John Kander, who also attended the convocation.

Before the convocation, the four honorees and Kander graciously provided an intimate 90-minute question-and-answer session attended by Niagara University Theater students, staff, faculty and journalists. If ever there was an "Inside the Actors' Studio" moment in the Leary Theater, this was it! The five stage veterans answered dozens of questions, shared stories about their work together on "Curtains," and offered tried and true advice to the young actors.

Q. Mr. Kander, you've worked with many of the students at NU when they've staged your musicals, such as "Chicago," "Flora, the Red Menace," or "The Happy Time." Any advice for the students as they seek work in musical theater?

A. "Karen Ziemba has an enormous voice and range today, but when we started working together 18 years ago, her range was much smaller. Performers must realize that their voice is going to be their meal ticket." — John Kander

"When I was doing "And the World Goes Round" with Kander, I did the show eight times a week and needed more strength and technique. I contacted a great voice teacher and

speech and vocal therapist and learned that my singing voice was an extension of my speaking voice. I also had to learn how to breathe. You really have to get out there and risk looking or sounding like an ass to get better." — Karen Ziemba

Q. How do you stay well and healthy and not get stressed out when you're in a production?

"When you're younger, you have to do everything. But our obligation is the show, and for me, there's a lot of singing and dancing, so you have to preserve your health and not go out at night. You have to preserve your health by sometimes not having fun outside the show." — David Hyde Pierce



From left, Debra Monk, David Hyde Pierce and Karen Ziemba cracked each other up several times during the question and answer session held in the Leary Theater for the theater studies students.

Q. You've all achieved great success in the entertainment industry. How do you handle failure?

"I ask the press and they will say reviews are great, mixed or not so great. I found that phones don't ring if the reviews aren't good. It's hard but you get stronger and move ahead after failures. A friend at a high school reunion said to me, 'you're so successful. You're still doing what you love to do.'" — Scott Ellis



After the convocation, the four honorees thanked the university for their honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degrees and mingled with nearly 100 Friends of NU Theater, members of the university's administration, faculty and staff, and a number of theater studies students. Here, David Hyde Pierce, left, meets theater studies student Kevin Craig, '08.



Scott Ellis enjoyed his chat with theater lover and Friends of NU theater member Elizabeth Ann Clune.



After the question and answer session, NU theater students met with the honorees. When a student asked David Hyde Pierce about the people he has worked with and roles he has played, he said, "As young actors and directors, you don't get to have choices. You will be able to absorb a lot about working with a butthead, the sweetest people in the world who aren't talented or prickly geniuses, but you can't find a gentler, greater talent than composer John Kander." Clockwise from left: Kelly Mackowiak, '11, Whitney Walker, '08, Hyde Pierce, and Erin Daley, '11.

"My failures have taught me a lot more than my successes. Overcoming adversity has given me great confidence to know that I can go out there (and succeed)." — Debra Monk

Q. Is there ever a point when you feel you've perfected your craft?

"No!" — John Kander

"You always feel like you're growing and expanding. The longer you're in the field, you know more and you know the risks. You've got to keep pushing." — Scott Ellis

"A show changes every night. You give yourself new goals for the role you play in each performance." — Debra Monk

"You never stop learning, studying, and always emulating the people you admire." — Karen Ziemba

At the convocation reception, David Hyde Pierce, right, enjoyed visiting with over 100 members of the Friends of Niagara University Theater, administrators, faculty and students.



Karen Ziemba, third from left, shares a group hug with theater studies students Preston Cuer, '09, left, and Lisa LeCuyer, '08, Emily Boudreau, '09, and Caitlin Holland, '10.

Theater studies student Matthew Chavez, '08, right, chats with award-winning Broadway, film and television composer John Kander, whom he worked with when he played lawyer Billy Flynn in NU Theater's production of Kander and Ebb's "Chicago" in 2006.



Debra Monk, center, enjoyed chatting with NU alumnus and vice president of the Friends of Niagara University Theater, Russell Papia, left, and William LeCuyer, right, a Friends board member and co-chair of this year's gala auction.

Our Very Own Atticus Finch

By Gregory Fletcher

Doug Zschiegner remembers always wanting to be an actor. Even his eighth-grade yearbook reports that acting would be his intended career. So it wasn't a surprise to anyone when Doug signed up as a theater major as an undergraduate at Illinois Wesleyan University. Nor was it a surprise after graduating in 1982 that, like so many theater graduates before and after him, he headed to New York City. Over the next eight years, Doug studied at the National Shakespeare Conservatory, worked at several off-off-Broadway theaters for little to no pay, earned money doing survival jobs, and performed in many regional theaters and children's theater tours.

In 1989, Doug wanted more classical theater training and applied to the highly competitive Professional Theater Training Program at The University of Delaware and thereafter earned an MFA in Acting. His days began at 9 a.m. and ended at 11 p.m., and this strenuous classical theater boot camp continued six days a week for three years.

After graduating, instead of heading back to New York City, now a member of Actors Equity (the professional union for actors and stage managers), Doug explored the regional theater scene. Cast by a variety of theaters, Doug spent time onstage at the American Player's Theatre in Spring Green, Wis., at the Wayside Theatre in Middletown, Va., and in Kansas City, Mo., Doug performed with the Missouri Repertory Theatre, the Heart of American Shakespeare Festival, and the American Heartland Theatre. In Cedar City, Utah, Doug performed three summers with the Utah Shakespearean Festival. Then in Roanoke, Va., Doug's life changed.

Cast in a smaller role in "Romeo and Juliet" at Mill Mountain Theatre, Doug expressed an interest in directing and asked if, in addition to his role, he could be the assistant director. The stars lined up, artistic leadership

shifted, and by the time Romeo and Juliet died in each other's arms for the last time, Doug was asked to be the resident director of Mill Mountain Theatre as well as director of education and outreach. During his following eight-year residency, Doug directed 30 productions and, needless to say, his acting chops were put on a back burner.

When Doug felt that he had conquered Mill Mountain, he continued to guest direct at various theaters and universities, and began to teach at Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, and Virginia Tech. When Doug interviewed for his job at Niagara University, it was just after the recent distressing tragedy on campus at Virginia Tech.

While Doug was getting to know the professional theater community here in Buffalo, both Scott Behrend of Road Less Traveled Productions and Kathy Gaffney of Studio Arena took notice of Doug's acting credits and asked him to audition for their co-production of "To Kill A Mockingbird." A week later, they offered him the lead role of Atticus Finch. Doug panicked, feeling the pressure of such a large role, a Buffalo acting debut,



Doug Zschiegner, associate director of Niagara University Theater, reveled in his opportunity to play the role of Atticus Finch in Buffalo's Studio Arena Theater production of "To Kill a Mockingbird." From left, Robert Rutland (Judge Taylor), Zschiegner (Atticus Finch), and NU theater studies student Cassie Gorniewicz, '08 (Mayella Ewell).

publicly representing NU's theater faculty, and rearranging some of his school responsibilities, not to mention the fact that Doug had not acted in 10 years. Did he still have the chops? Memorizing dialogue is like using a muscle and, clearly, Doug's memory muscle had not been exercised in a while. Yet, in the end, there was no reason to panic; everything worked out beautifully. Doug's Buffalo acting debut was as strong and impressive as his recent directing debut with NU's production of Sondheim's "Company."

Not to be overlooked, our very own Cassie Gorniewicz, '08, was cast in the role of Mayella Ewell. Her small but pivotal role was as memorable as her role of Amy in "Company" when she sang the show-stopping, "I'm Not Getting Married Today." Having worked with Doug in the director/actor capacity, this time she was playing opposite him in an intense dramatic scene where Atticus expertly pushes Mayella into breaking down on the witness stand. Like Doug, her Buffalo acting debut was strong, impressive, and we are all so very proud of Cassie and all that she has achieved. 🏆

Sharon Watkinson: Her Professional Runway

By Mary E. Furlong

Summer-weight Chanel-style tweed suit in beige with flecks of lime green/ cerulean blue; lime green shell with floral appliqué.

I know. Sharon Onevelo Watkinson is far more than a clothes horse in residence. But admit it; you were dying to hear all the sartorial details. Dressiness is part of what makes Sharon Sharon.

Yet Sharon is even sharper than her famous wardrobe. From the very beginning, she's shown that she can get a challenging job done in style — high style.

The Very Beginning — 1962 BB (i.e. Before Bro): Father Joseph Ganley directed the Players back then. Sharon — *slim Capris, ballet flats* — was an English education major, looking forward to a teaching career. Acting was just an exciting sideline.

With Brother Augustine's arrival in 1963, NU Theater became a new creation — a mustard seed of a thing that would grow into something wonderful. Cast in the title role of "The Diary of Anne Frank" — *school-girl cardigan, pleated skirt* — Sharon was in on the ground floor. ("Mustard seed," "ground floor." Mix-and-match metaphors — so-o- fashionable.)



Faster than you can say "Mary Quant," theater became Sharon's focus. After graduation, she entered Catholic University's master's degree program in speech and drama. She loved CU, loved Washington, D.C., and degree in hand, loved her first job with NBC-TV.

Soon, however, Bro called to tell her of a teaching opportunity at NU. "English 101" was the inauspicious class title, but sly Bro had other plans as well. Sharon came home to play many roles in a developing NU Theater: producer, publicist, director, and, most happily, actress (*furs, feathers, farthingales — clothes horse heaven!*). *

When Bro left temporarily to pursue a Ph.D. at New York University, Sharon donned leadership shoes (*high heels, of course*). With the administration's approval, she lay claim to an abandoned gym on Clet Hall's second floor and, with the help of some enthusiastic undergraduates, built a stage and installed seats (*sweatshirt and blue jeans, but really, really neat ones*). Then, fashionably spiffy once again, she directed "J.B.," the first production in this first dedicated theater space — a new ground floor, so to speak. Later, renamed the Leary Theater, it's still the department's main theater.

Subsequently, Sharon earned her own Ph.D. at NYU. Thus, "Miss O" became "Dr. Sharon," an impressive soubriquet, reflective of the theater's ongoing progression from extra-curricular fun stuff to independent degree program.

Fashion forward to 2007-2008. As

At the November 2007 convocation honoring four theater personalities, Dr. Sharon Watkinson, center, chair of NU's department of theater and fine arts, enjoyed catching up with celebrated composer John Kander, right, and Doug Zschiegner, left, associate director of Niagara University Theater.

chair of the department of theater and fine arts, Sharon




oversees the entire academic program. She's "Marge-in-Charge" of an administrative assistant, a seasonal secretary, six full-time and 13 adjunct theater studies faculty, 12 fine arts adjunct faculty, and one director emeritus (sh-sh-sh! He doesn't know he has a boss). She also teaches two courses each semester; takes on ad hoc projects, like Niagara's 150th anniversary committee; and facilitates new theater studies options, like the study-abroad program at Schiller International Institute in London.

Sharon herself once studied in England, at Royal Holloway College near London. While there, she met her husband, Andrew Watkinson. On a commuter train! Imagine! A chance encounter, just like in the movies.

Picture it: Their eyes meet. He speaks — *darling* English accent. She speaks — *mahvelous* vowel sounds. The English countryside streams by. They don't see it. A bell clangs. They don't hear it. A porter cries, "Mind the gap." They don't mind *him*. Is this romantic, or what! Thirty-one years later, the idyll continues in an island hideaway with a glorious view of the west Niagara River and tons of closet space.

That's one thing our new theater is sure to have in Sharon's honor — tons of closet space. Some fine day, they may even put a plaque on the wardrobe room door: "The Sharon Onevelo Watkinson Testimonial Closet."

*For an awesome list of Sharon's acting/directing credits, visit www.niagara.edu/theater. 

Backstage Broadway!

By Marilyn Deighton and Ann Heuer

Flying monkeys, movie monsters, Muppets and wicked witch costumes! These are just a few of the exciting creations that highlighted a backstage Broadway tour in January for 13 NU theater studies majors, five additional NU students, NU costume designer Maureen Stevens and costume technologist, Marilyn Deighton.

Deighton coordinated this four-day field trip to expose students to the many job opportunities available in design/tech for the theater, film and television industry. The behind-the-scenes visit was so successful that Stevens and Deighton hope to offer the tour for theater studies students every two years.



At the party held to acquaint NU theater students with Niagara's theater alumni who live and work in New York City, Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., director emeritus, second from left, dropped by to catch up with some of his students from the last three decades. Clockwise from left: Jill Ann Almindinger Dugan, '91, Brother Augustine, Tim Gallagher, '82, Natalie Slipko, '93, Michael Gilbert, '92, and Kevin Henderson, '89.

The trip began with a pizza party arranged by Stevens for the students and NU theater alumni who live and work in the New York City area. Nearly 35 alumni attended, delighting in the chance to catch up with one another and to mingle with and offer advice to the newest generation of NU theater students. Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., director emeritus, joined the festivities, too.



Left: Backstage at the Broadway musical "Wicked," veteran wardrobe supervisor Alyce Gilbert provided a fascinating "show and tell" about the production's props and costumes. Here she shows how the flying monkey wings expand.

Below: Ms. Gilbert shows the students one of many flying monkey masks used in "Wicked."

The following day was packed with fascinating behind-the-scenes tours. The group toured Izquierdo Studio, which creates costumes and props for theater, film, television and advertising, including the enormous wings worn by Victoria's Secret models for TV commercials and magazine ads. The next stop was a 90-minute backstage tour of the Broadway musical, "Wicked," guided by one of Broadway's renowned wardrobe supervisors, Alyce Gilbert. The group saw a close-up viewing of the scenery and props and toured most of the dressing rooms, learning about the intricately detailed costumes. Next stop, the IATSE (Stagehands' Union) headquarters where a panel of union members presented a discussion on "Alternative Careers in Theater." The day was capped off with a performance of "Wicked," a fantastical "untold story" about the witches of Oz.

On the third day, the group toured Carelli Costumes, one of the major costume houses in New York. The students were able to see some of the costumes under construction for the Metropolitan



Opera, the Broadway musical, "Young Frankenstein," and a new musical scheduled to open in Japan. Free time was built in for the students to attend matinee and evening performances or to explore the city.

For several of the university's design/tech students who had grown up watching "Sesame Street" and "Fraggle Rock," it was thrilling to tour the Jim Henson Co. Studio on the last day of the trip, while the other students took dance classes or shopped. At the Jim Henson Studio in the "Big Apple" (one of three Jim



At Izquierdo Studio, the students learned about Fashion Week props and examined mock-ups of monsters created for writer/director M. Night Shyamalan's 2004 horror film, "The Village." The studio not only created the mock-ups, but the actual monsters for the movie.

From left, Niagara University design/tech theater studies students Kelly Konecko, '09, Amanda Serio, '09, and Jessica Oney, '10, pose with their "Sesame Street" friend, "Oscar the Grouch," at the Jim Henson Co. Studio in New York.



Henson Co. Studios in the United States), the students were able to see some of the archival characters Henson created such as "Oscar the Grouch" and "Elmo." They also observed some of the puppet creators working on several new Muppet characters.

The final stop for the group was CBS Studios, where Doug Towey, Brother Augustine's sibling, arranged for a studio tour. The students visited the CBS News studio where two of the directors explained what their fast-paced jobs entailed. Next, the group visited the wardrobe room where contemporary fashions for several on-air personalities are stored. A network wardrobe supervisor explained the scope of her job, as did Towey, who provided a fun, informative tour where he produces the CBS Sports show.



NU theater student Amber Dawn Hohman, '09, was one of several students on the trip who were given a backstage tour at Broadway's "Young Frankenstein." Here, she poses with the monster, played by Shuler Hensley.



A costume designer at Izquierdo Studio discusses a mock-up of a costume designed for New York's annual Fashion Week.

Friends of Niagara University Theater Newsletter

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Deadline for submissions for the fall issue is Oct. 1, 2008.

Updates!

Editorial Note: In each issue of the Friends of NU Theater newsletter, we will feature current news from alumni, faculty and staff in this column.

Brianna Bailey, '07, joined the Columbus Children's Theatre for the 2007–2008 touring season.

Victoria Buda, '98, is director of summer programs at The Play Group Theatre in Westchester, N.Y. This winter she traveled upstate to direct shows at her theater company, "Miss Vic's Drama Room."

Cyndi Argona Burnett, '98, is a lecturer in creativity at SUNY at Buffalo College and **Karen Colville, '98**, is a WAO Literacy Specialist for Save the Children in Mesa, Ariz.

Derek Campbell, adjunct theater professor, will direct Shakespeare in Delaware Park's production of "King Lear" this summer in Buffalo.

Edward Cheetham, '87, is producing director of Powerhouse Theater and assistant director of college relations at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Joseph Christopher, '06, spent last summer in Washington, D.C., producing a world premiere drama for the city's Fringe Festival, while simultaneously developing an independent film. Joe is the coordinator of theater programming at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

Terri Filips, associate professor/choreographer, has created a new work for the Zodiaque Dance Co. of SUNY at Buffalo's department of theatre and dance. Her work explores inventive partnering and rhythm layering in a stylized tap work, "Break Thru." This work was featured in the dance company's spring concert, Feb. 22–March 2.

Gregory Fletcher, director of NU Theater, presented playwriting classes in January as a guest teacher for an on-campus residency at Wilkes

University in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. The lectures were part of the university's graduate creative writing program. In February, his short play "Stairway to Heaven" was produced in Tacoma, Wash., by the Northwest Playwright's Association at the Broadway Center for Performing Arts.

Tim Gallagher, '82, a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre, has been an actor, director, playwright and production manager. He has assisted in the production and development of over 80 new American plays. His film "15 Films About Madonna" aired on A&E (visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoXfNaISykk). He has also worked on the prop crew at "One Life To Live."

Adriano Gatto, '06, is working in an acting fellowship for the Shakespeare Theatre Co. in Washington, D.C. He performed in "Tamburlaine the Great" (starring Avery Brooks) and "Edward II," "Major Barbara," "Antony and Cleopatra" and "Julius Caesar."

Steve Hasley, '87, performed in the comedy "Dead Bride Running" last fall at the Underground Theater in Hollywood.

Stacy Janusz, adjunct dance professor, held a Western New York Performing Arts Convention in Buffalo in February. Guest instructors included Lauren Gottlieb from TV's "So You Think You Can



Alumnus Brendan Powers, '96, portrayed Father Flynn in Florida Repertory Theatre's production of the Tony-Award winning play, "Doubt: A Parable" this winter. Set in a Catholic school in the Bronx in 1964, the thought-provoking drama revolves around a principal who — without proof — suspects a priest of molesting a young boy. Here, Father Flynn talks to Sister James, played by Rachel Burttram. In the Fort Myers Florida Weekly, reviewer Nancy Stetson wrote, "Powers shows the hell of the man struggling both internally and externally, all the while claiming his innocence ... though he is not above using the pulpit as a means to fight back ... this is as good as theater gets."

Dance;" Broadway dancer Elizabeth Polito; hip hop dancer Richard Ashworth; and actors Margo Wilburn and Marlo Witorski.

Matt Knight, '02, is doing a lot of voice-over spots. For some of Matt's current work, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TmWYqjFE7Y and <http://link.brightcove.com/services/link/bcpid1078541425/bctid1113465305>.

For more about Matt, see the feature story on him in this issue.

Kevin Kreczko, '05, served as assistant director for Buffalo's Irish Classical Theatre Co.'s production of "Moon for the Misbegotten" and as stage manager for Leonard Bernstein's "Mass." Both productions were directed by **Brother Augustine Towey, C.M.**, director emeritus of NU Theater. Kreczko recently stage-managed and company-managed "Blue Shade" and worked with Universal Studios in California. Kreczko completes his master's of fine arts degree in June.

Carl Krickmire, '04, was in "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change" at the Down Stairs Cabaret

Theatre in Rochester, N.Y. He has also performed in "Death Trap," "Enchanted April," and "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown."

Gary Marino, adjunct dance professor, performed in the "Nutcracker" for Lockport City Ballet at The Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda, N.Y.

Susan Mele, '89, created a comedy for the Baltimore Theatre Project entitled "Woman on the Rag," which was staged in Baltimore, in September. Visit Susan's blog at www.trekibikes.com and click on "Women and on Women Who Ride."

Patrick Moyer, '07, is in the Iowa Old Creamery Theater Co. He just finished a kids' tour and "A Christmas Carol."

Ryan Murphy, '04, is assistant production manager for Trioka Entertainment in Maryland, producing up to 10 national and international tours a year. He's also working with The Bethesda Theatre in Washington, D.C., currently producing a 20-week run of "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change."

Actress and aerial artist **Mara Neimanis, '85**, was profiled in the Washington Post for her one-woman show, "Air Heart," about Amelia Earhart: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/16/AR2007071601914.html?referrer=emailarticle.

Portia (Litha Portiaeyne Johnson when she was an NU theater student in the early 1980s) was recently on the London stage playing Berenice in Carson McCullers' "The Member of the Wedding." The production was staged at the Young Vic. A review in the Oct. 5, 2007, Times Literary Supplement noted, "Berenice is superbly played by the American actress Portia (bereft of a surname)."

Brendan Powers, '96, played Father Flynn in "Doubt: A Parable" this winter at Florida Repertory

Theatre and was cast in the theater's current production, "Breaking Legs."

Patrick Riviere, '88, artistic director of Cliffside Park, N.J.'s All Seasons Theatre Co., starred in "Mass Appeal" and "It's A Wonderful Life." He also

performs on the pre-Broadway demo CD for the new musical, "The Really BIG Pirate Show!" Visit www.thereallybigpirateshow.com. Riviere adapted Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" to create "Old Mr. Scrooge," published by Cliffside Small Press. Visit www.lulu.com/parplaywright.

Michele Marie Roberts (Benzin), '99, played Shelley in "Bat Boy" at Buffalo's Studio Arena Theatre and Shelby in "Steel Magnolias" at O'Connell and Company in Buffalo. Later this season she will play the young Judy Garland in MusicalFare Theatre's production of "Beyond the Rainbow, the Judy Garland Story."

Lauren Sale, '06, performed in "Siskel and Ebert Save Chicago," works as a travel agent, and auditions for Chicago area productions.

Nicholas Santasier, '04, starred in the musical "Admit Impediments," worked in the ensemble for Three Legged Dog's new multimedia project, "Fire Island", and fight-choreographed and played the roles of the Captain, Priests, Officer, and Valentine in "Twelfth Night" for Holla-Holla Productions.

Kristen Smiley, '07, works at Lexington Children's Theatre in Lexington, Ky. She performs the roles of six characters and does mask work for "Hanna's Suitcase," about the




Last fall, Buffalo's Studio Arena Theatre presented a MusicalFare Theatre production of the award-winning "Bat Boy: The Musical," about a feral half-boy, half-bat. From left, Loraine O'Donnell as Meredith, Louis Colaiacovo, '99, as Bat Boy, and Michele Marie Roberts, '99, as Shelley.

Holocaust and starred in "Laura Ingalls Wilder's Christmas." She is teaching three theater classes for children, ages 6 through 16, and is rehearsing for "The Big Friendly Giant," in which she'll play the title character.

Katie Swimm, '06, works at a financial firm by day and auditions by night and on weekends. She's having fun and finding Chicago colder than Buffalo and Niagara Falls. "For all you Niagara folk, you know this means business!"

Damian Vanore, '02, appeared in the film "Chicago Overcoat," starring Frank Vincent of "The Sopranos" and Mike Starr (visit [Imdb.com](http://www.Imdb.com)). Vanore also starred in a short film, "Eastland Ghosts" (visit www.YouTube.com.) Vanore's Chicago sketch troupe, Money in the Pants, is doing many shows in Chicago and Los Angeles. His smaller sketch troupe, Rub A Dub Dub, is also doing well. Vanore has recently performed in "Happy End," "Moon Over Buffalo," "Whirlybirds" and "Children of the Night."

Steve Vaughan, artist-in-residence and combat instructor, will direct Shakespeare in Delaware Park's production of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" this summer in Buffalo. He and theater student **Liz Warden, '08**, provided stage combat instruction for Grand Island High School's production of "The Hobbit." 

The Voice of a Knight: Matt Knight, Class of 2002

By Gregory Fletcher

In his junior year of high school in Rochester, N.Y., Matt Knight's voice dropped to a lower register and his entire future became clear. No, wait a second, a few details are missing. Yes, this tall, thin, gangly boy now spoke lower than any of his friends, but college and future plans were anything but clear. As late as his senior year, Matt assumed he would be going to Bowling Green State University to be a business major. Then one night, his father came home from work and reported how much his friend's son (Derek Roland, Class of 2000) was enjoying Niagara University as a theater major. "Which sounded a whole lot better than being a business major," remembers Matt, since he had been onstage in many of his high school productions. So Matt visited Niagara's campus and auditioned for a theater scholarship.

Chair Sharon Watkinson enthusiastically recalls, "Sure, I remember Matt Knight's audition — that voice, we had to have that voice!" And Niagara University Theater got the voice. Looking back, Sharon continues: "And we got much more than a voice. We got a genuine human being, with a passion for the department, for his

classmates, for life itself."

"My voice was a distinct feature, and many people said I should work in radio, but I had no idea how to go about it." Then in Matt's final year at NU, the day before the opening of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," alumnus Army Schultz, '81, was brought up from New York City to lead a voice-over workshop. "Army told me that I should think about doing voice-over work." After graduation, Matt moved to Brooklyn, and Army arranged a meeting for Matt with CESD, a talent agency for commercial work. But Matt quickly realized, "it's not just about having a low voice or even a distinct voice that gets you work in voice-overs." CESD passed on Matt and suggested that he take some one-on-one classes and make a voice demo. His voice-over coach helped him with style, breathing, relaxing, and pulling back. "After working on so many shows in venues like the Leary Theater and Artpark, your instinct is to project and enunciate, but in voice-overs you have to make the words seem so effortless and conversational; it took me a few sessions to understand the keys to a

good read." A few months later, along with a thousand dollar demo, CESD reconsidered Matt and signed him to an exclusive contract.

Auditions were erratic: sometimes once a week, some weeks — three to five times a

day. And for the first year of auditions — no bookings. Was he worried? "Well, of course I was, but CESD seemed very optimistic for my future and assured me that things would start to click soon. Besides, I was young, inexperienced, getting to know casting directors, and learning how to audition." In the meantime, Matt took advantage of the abundance of survival jobs that New York City offers, working as a valet, a commercial mover, a data-entry processor, and he worked corporate events, after-school programs, and children's birthday parties. Then along came McDonalds — an on-camera national commercial. "That helped my confidence a lot. Not to mention my bank account." From then on, Matt started booking more and more — "although I'd still say, on an average, I book about one out of every 30 to 50 auditions."

Recently, Matt made an invaluable decision. "I was being sent out for my age range, but I was always being told that I sounded older. So I asked CESD to start sending me out for older job requests. Here I was, this kid, surrounded by experienced veterans in their 30s and 40s, but the great thing about the microphone is it only hears what it hears and could care less with your looks. And I started booking more auditions ever since."

Matt's many voice-over credits include MTV/MTV2, FUSE, Travel Channel, McDonald's, Cingular, AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, Subway, The Hartford, Snapple, UPS, Domino's, Miller, GM, and many more. Does he miss doing theater? "The few things I've done off-off-Broadway or in the New York Fringe Festival were fun, but not as enjoyable as my theater experiences at NU. In contrast, the voice-over world is easygoing, casual, less competitive, less stressed out, no cattle calls, a much smaller com-

Matt Knight, as Hysterium, right, shared the stage with Aaron Randolph as Erronius in NU Theater's production of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" in 2001.





A recent shot of Matt Knight and his girlfriend, Kimberly Tomas.

munity, the fit feels right; I like where I am." Matt is paying his bills, saving a little here and there, and only rarely working a survival job. "And this is only the beginning. There are national network voice-overs, PSAs, on-camera jobs, animation voice-overs, books-on-tape, much to be conquered."

Ironically enough, Matt is now housemates with Derek Roland! And Army Schultz continues to send nice gestures Matt's way. (Most recently, an invitation to play on the "Frost/Nixon" team for the Broadway Softball League in Central Park. "It was a blast; our final ranking wasn't great, but we had some good games in the consolation bracket.") And there are many other sustained friendships from NU: Damian Vanore, '02, Candy Lawrence, '02, Gerry Miller, '01, Josh Fast, '01, Pascal Frisina, '00, Justin Dimieri, '03, Andy Starr, Paul Mahoney, '02. And there are other NU alums for whom Matt is very grateful. "Heather Adair, '04, invited me to her birthday party where another alum, Brandon Sierra, '04, brought a friend — Kimberly Tomas, a nursing student from NYU. "We've been dating two years now, and Kimberly is planning to go to grad school at Columbia in the fall." Maybe our knight is turning into a prince? Matt smiles, "This is the one."



Looking for News About NU Theater Alumni?

It's easy to stay in touch with alumni through our updated Niagara University Theater Web site.

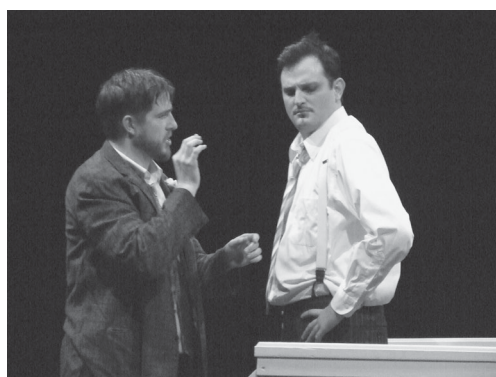
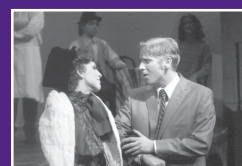
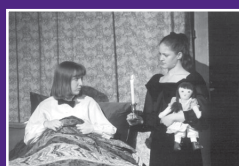
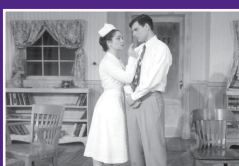
Visit us at www.niagara.edu/theater and click on "NU Family" and "Alumni" to read all about your friends.

If your bio is not yet listed, we'd love to add you to this ever-growing chorus line of theater graduates!

Please e-mail your bio/news/and high quality digital photos of shows you've recently worked on to Gregory Fletcher, Director of Niagara University Theater, at fletcher@niagara.edu.

And be sure to let us know if it's okay to publish your e-mail address so fellow alumni can get in touch.

Thanks so much. We hope to hear from you soon!



At left, top: Alumnus Brian Mysliwy, '96, left, played the servant Truffaldino in Buffalo's Irish Classical Theatre Co.'s production of Carlo Goldoni's "The Servant of Two Masters." Here, he shares the stage with Joseph Weins, '04, who played Florindo. Buffalo News reviewer Colin Dabkowski wrote, "Every casting choice in this show is spot-on ... Mysliwy is a comic force to be reckoned with ... the sort of lovable, Chaplinesque actor who is less clown than comedic master." Photo by Lawrence Rowsell.



At left, bottom: In The ICTC's production of "The Servant of Two Masters," alumnus Brian Mysliwy, '96, left, also shared the stage with Sarielys Matos, '04, right, who played Smeraldina, and Todd Benzin, center, who played Lombardi. Artvoice reviewer Anthony Chase wrote, "Special mention is due to Sarielys Matos, who is a standout as the voluptuous and irrepressible servant." NU artist-in-residence Steve Vaughan provided fight choreography and alumna Susan Drozd, '02, provided hair and makeup. Photo by Lawrence Rowsell.

In the Spotlight



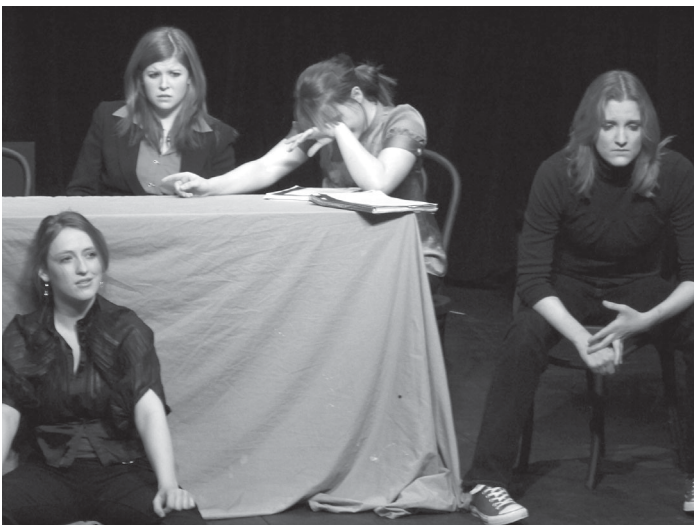
Playwright Tina Howe (fourth from left) visited NU Theater's students in December to work with them on their production of her wildly comic play, "Birth and After Birth." She noted, "Birth and After Birth" was born in the early 70's when the divide between women who stayed home to have babies and those who left it in favor of having careers was intense. It was either all or nothing. Mercifully, times have changed and women have come to expect that they can have it all." Here, the cast and some of the crew work with Ms. Howe. Back row from left, stage manager Cassie Gorniewicz, '08; Charlotte Colby, '08; Kevin Craig, '08; Howe; Will Vaughan, '09; Brendan Cataldo, '08; and director Steve Vaughan. Front row from left, Holly Lowden, '08; and assistant stage manager Peter Andres, '09.



How outlandish can a four-year-old's birthday party get? In playwright Tina Howe's comedy, "Birth and After Birth," the birthday boy's insatiable appetite for attention and play tests the limits of his parents' good humor. Here, the doting parents enjoy their son's antics, while visiting friends aren't amused. From left, Brendan Cataldo, '08 (Jeffrey Freed), Charlotte Colby, '08, (Sandy Apple), Will Vaughan, '09, (four-year-old Nicky wearing a Richard Nixon mask), Kevin Craig, '08 (Bill Apple) and Holly Lowden, '08 (Mia Freed).



Niagara University theater studies seniors presented 21 ten-minute plays during the department's annual Short Play Festival held from Jan. 25 – Feb. 3. In playwright Vincent Delaney's short drama "Kuwait," Trevor Hibbard, '10, portrays Kelsey, a troubled American soldier. His detainee is Rachel, an American journalist played by Adrienne Lewis, '09. Here, Kelsey pins Rachel down, nearly suffocating her. The play was directed by Candice Kogut, '08.



NU Theater presented a readers' theater production of Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls" at the Church in Lewiston in February. Here, in a dream sequence, several historic characters share stories of their private joys, sorrows and tragedies with Marlene, a troubled British career woman. From left: Noelle Wright, '09 (Marlene), Jessica Bill, '10 (Lady Nijo), Maria Held, '11 (Dull Gret) and Paige Mingus, '09 (Isabella Bird). The production was directed by adjunct theater professor Lawrence G. Smith.

In the Spotlight



Above: In Pedro Calderon de La Barca's drama "Life's A Dream," Prince Sigismund (Trevor Hibbard, '10), left, is imprisoned for much of his young life. At the moment when he first tastes freedom, Duke Astolfo (Brendan Cataldo, '08), right, steps in to object to his beastly manner. The production was directed by Gregory Fletcher, director of Niagara University Theater.

Below: In the closing scene of "Life's A Dream," a journey comes to an end when Rosaura (Candice Kogut, '08), second from right, is reunited with her fiancée, Duke Astolfo, (Brendan Cataldo, '08), second from left, as Prince Sigismund (Trevor Hibbard, '10), center, looks on. At left is Clotaldo (Jared Hoyt, '09). At right is a servant/rebel soldier (Ralph Donatelli III).



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Professional auctioneer Christopher Blake has volunteered to conduct this year's live auction at the 23rd Annual Friends of Niagara University Theater Gala on April 26. Here is a scene from last year's gala where Blake, center, auctions off a signed Buffalo Bills jersey with the help of former artistic director of NU Theater, Brendan Powers, second from right. Students Nick Lama, '10, left, and Jared Hoyt, '09, right, helped spot bidders during the live auction.



This year's gala chairs are planning a fun-filled evening that includes delicious food, cocktails, an array of desserts, and exciting silent and live auctions. From left, gala co-chairs Tara and Ryan Erwin and Mary and Kenneth Tirohn pose with auction chairs William and Pamela LeCuyer.



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