As the holiday season fades into memory, I have some unhappy news to share with you all. Brother Augustine Towey, C.M. — beloved co-founder of the Niagara University theatre program, friend, colleague, poet, playwright, teacher, and mentor — passed away and began his life in heaven on Nov. 22. As we received the news on Thanksgiving, I would venture a safe guess that many of his former students and collaborators took a moment or two to give thanks for his contribution to their lives, education and careers. I, myself, never having had the privilege to meet Bro, gave thanks for his tremendous legacy to the department, and for my own opportunity to be a small part of NU Theatre.

As this newsletter was being written at the time of Brother Augustine’s passing, we felt that rushing to honor him in print would never do justice to your memories of him or his achievements at NU. Therefore, we will issue a special edition of the newsletter, to be mailed by spring. This will give us all time to appropriately commemorate the life of the man who touched so many of yours. Many faculty, staff, Friends, alumni, patrons, students and Bro’s family have contributed to share their thoughts about Bro for our upcoming tribute newsletter.

As difficult as it is to believe that Bro has passed, it’s likewise hard to fathom that we’re in the midst of another spring semester. I guess the old maxim really does hold true: “Time flies!” And how could it not, with the tremendous amount of activity we’ve seen since the academic year ended last May! I’d like to think Brother Augustine would be proud.

Summer audiences, already used to the energetic story-theatre stylings of the annual N.U.R.T. troupe, were treated to an additional offering in July. Thanks to the generosity of the Friends of NU Theatre, we staged a fully mounted musical production for young audiences and their families in the Leary Theatre. Faculty members Terri Filips Vaughan (director/choreographer), Maureen Stevens and Marilyn Deighton (costumes), and Jason Bravo (music director), lent their considerable talents to ensure a good time for all involved. A no-brainer in an election year, *Duck for President*, based on the award-winning barnyard books by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin, thrilled and charmed Niagara County audiences, and all for free! We hope to continue the tradition, building a foundation of local young theatre-goers who will keep on enjoying the art form as they grow. And of course, N.U.R.T. performed weekly in the theatre throughout the summer and toured Niagara and Erie counties from early July through late August. I’m continued on page 2
pleased to announce that N.U.R.T. was excitedly received back at Artpark in Lewiston as part of its family Saturday series; we’ll be back in the summer of 2013 as well.

Almost before we knew it, September was upon us, upperclassmen had returned and we welcomed our exceptionally talented incoming class of freshmen theatre majors! Auditions immediately ensued, casting and crew assignments were meted out and we were off and running … or, well, flying.

The first production of the 2012-2013 season, The Rimmers of Eldritch, a challenging and engaging piece, showcased the talents of an insightful and intuitive ensemble of 17. As their director, I was awed and humbled by their generous spirit and willingness to dive headfirst into such difficult material. In the end, the journey was full of discovery, and we faculty were privileged to witness some really phenomenal individual and collective growth in our actors.

November came quickly, and Lanford Wilson’s dark and disjointed play gave way to Neil Simon’s ferociously frenetic farce, Rumors. Director Amanda Lytle Sharpe really put her cast of 10 young comedians through their paces, as Simon’s script requires precise, pinpoint timing. The payoff was worth the work, and the cast was rewarded with a run filled with gales of laughter that punctuated two hours of door slamming, staircase running, floor crawling, outlandish situations.

Our December musical, Urinetown, was described a decade ago by one of the original cast members as “a love letter to the American Musical … in the form of a grenade.” I feel I can safely state that if the audiences had even half as much fun watching it as we had in the rehearsal hall, they might have wet their pants laughing, an apt tribute to the show’s title. My artistic collaborators — choreographer Terri Filips Vaughan and music director Jason Bravo, set design by David Dwyer, and lighting design and costumes by alumni Jayson D. Clark and Andrea Gollhardt, respectively. This Tony Award-winning production is an irreverent homage to the Great American musical theatre tradition.

Our December musical, Urinetown, was described a decade ago by one of the original cast members as “a love letter to the American Musical … in the form of a grenade.” I feel I can safely state that if the audiences had even half as much fun watching it as we had in the rehearsal hall, they might have wet their pants laughing, an apt tribute to the show’s title. My artistic collaborators — choreographer Terri Filips Vaughan and music director Jason Bravo — and I, as well as our lively cast, reveled in the Tony Award-winning script and score’s tongue-in-cheek references to famous musicals and its thinly veiled indictments of corporate greed, politics, and America’s challenges with creating a sustainable society.

Just when we thought the NU Players had as much on their plate as any student organization could handle, they surprised us by stepping up to another level. This year’s board, adroitly led by Michael Wachowiak,
Nine Alumni Nominated for Artie Awards

By Ann Heuer, Office & Media Coordinator

Nine NU theatre program alumni and former students were nominated for Buffalo’s prestigious Artie Awards this summer.

The nominees include Stephanie Bax, ’93, for Killer Joe, and Maureen Ann Porter, ’86, for A Delicate Balance (Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Play); Louis Colaiacovo, ’99, for A Class Act and Marc Sacco, ’00, for Avenue Q (Outstanding Actor in a Musical); J. R. Finan, ’05, for Floyd Collins (Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Musical); Adriano Gatto, ’06, for Emperor and Galilean, and Brian Mysliwy, ’96, for La Bete (Outstanding Actor in a Play); Cassie Gorniewicz, ’08 for Oliver! (Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Musical); and former NU Theatre student David Lundy for Emperor and Galilean (Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Play). Congratulations to one and all on this honor, and kudos to Mysliwy and Porter, who each received an Artie Award at the annual award ceremony celebrating excellence in Buffalo area theater on June 4.

Kudos are also extended to Steven E. Sitzman, ’10, who won an outstanding debut Artie Award this year. His fellow cast members from ART’s Floyd Collins also won Outstanding Ensemble in a Musical award.

Also, congratulations to Mysliwy for also being selected as Best Actor for his work in La Bete at the Irish Classical Theatre Co. for Buffalo Spree Magazine’s “Best of WNY 2012” contest.

Maureen Ann Porter emailed a copy of her Artie Awards acceptance speech to the faculty at NU, in which she thanks NU adjunct theatre professor Derek Campbell, director, and the cast of A Delicate Balance. She also thanks her beloved mother, Mary, and partner, Michelle, and many colleagues in the theatre, including several current and former professors in NU’s Department of Theatre and Fine Arts.

Porter wrote, “I accept this award with the humility that was instilled in me by some of the greatest acting teachers, mentors, and incredible lifelong friends who helped me see that theatre is about touching souls and stimulating dialogue — not entertaining the masses. These great people, who taught and trained me, are Dr. Sharon Watkinson, who taught me to always read the play before seeing the show; Naomi Neimanis, who taught me not to dismiss the idea of technique; Beverly Fletcher, who taught me that actors can ‘move well’; Rachel Lewis and Pat Yanello, who taught me that singing is a musical monologue; Tim Ward, who taught me that an actor’s job is to tell the story; Brother Martin Schneider, C.M., who taught me that theatre people can and should be humble; and of course, Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., who told me many times ‘to those that much is given, much is expected.’ I hold Brother’s sentiment close to my heart and try to heartily aspire to do the work of the theatre in a spiritual, Vincentian way.”

The 28th annual Friends of Niagara University Theatre Gala will be held on Saturday, April 27, 2013. The event begins with a 4 p.m. matinee of the musical Into the Woods in the William P. and Marie Leary Theatre within the Elizabeth Ann Clune Center for Theatre. After the production, guests will proceed to the Niagara Falls Country Club for a cocktail hour, silent auction, dinner, and live auction. Funds raised will benefit the theatre program and its students, from needed theatre equipment and supplies to workshops and mentoring by guest artists. Tickets for the Gala are $150 per person. Corporate tables are available. For tickets and information, or to donate gift baskets, certificates, paintings, antiques or collectibles valued at $100 or more, please call NU’s Department of Theatre and Fine Arts at 716.286.8483.

Niagara University Theatre Newsletter
Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., director emeritus of Niagara University Theatre and one of the co-founders of NU’s prestigious undergraduate theatre studies program, died on Nov. 22, 2012 — Thanksgiving Day — after a long illness. He was 75. A spring edition of this newsletter will strive to pay homage to him for his magnificent life and legacy.

He was born Denis Joseph Towey on June 30, 1937, in Hempstead on Long Island and was ordained a member of the Vincentian Order in October 1961, celebrating his 50th anniversary as a Vincentian this past June with family, friends and confreres.

Dr. Sharon Watkinson, chair of Niagara’s Department of Theatre and Fine Arts and co-founder of the theatre program, noted that Brother Augustine, or “Bro” as he was affectionately known at Niagara, laid the groundwork for the theatre program. “We’re all still reaping the benefits of his vision,” she said, adding that “our beloved friend Brother Augustine will always be in our hearts.”

Brother Augustine began teaching at Niagara University in 1964 at age 27. He earned his Ph.D. in theatre from New York University, a certificate in Shakespeare and Elizabethan theatre from the University of Birmingham (Stratford-upon-Avon, England) and a master’s in dramatic literature from St. John’s University (New York).

He directed more than 135 plays over a 45-year period at Niagara University and many others in professional venues such as Artpark, The Irish Classical Theatre Co., Opera Sacra, and The Irish Repertory Theatre. He wrote 12 plays for the stage and for television, including The Guardian for the NBC-TV network.

Seven volumes of his poetry have been published, including his latest collection in 2012, Jesus, Mary and Joseph — Pieces for the Holy Family. A few years ago a collection of his poetry, The Poem You Asked For, was published and a CD recording of many of the poems was made available, featuring 23 Western New York actors. Brother Augustine has given poetry readings throughout the state, including several sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts.

At Artpark, where he was director for numerous stage productions for several years, he was also associate artistic director for theatre programs and the director and founder of The Artpark Repertory Theatre since its inception in 1975 until 2003, at which time it was renamed The Niagara University Repertory Theatre. He wrote and directed the opera A Beggar’s Christmas. Artpark and Company honored him for his contributions to Artpark and the arts in Western New York by naming a chair after him.

He was awarded an honorary doctor of fine arts degree from St. John’s University and a medal of honor by Niagara University, both in 1989. In 1997, he was awarded the Career Achievement Award from Artvoice.

For 13 years he served as a member of the board of trustees of St. John’s University. In 2004, he was awarded a Brotherhood-Sisterhood Award from the Western New York Region of the National Conference for Community and Justice for his work in the arts. Among other honors, he received in 2006 the outstanding artist award from the Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County.

Bro was predeceased by his parents and brother, Douglas. He is survived by sisters, Anne Towey and Brenda Romanski; sister-in-law, Helen Towey; nephew, Scott Romanski; and niece, Helen Tostaine (Gregory). A Mass of Christian Burial was held at St. John’s University, in Jamaica, N.Y., with internment at the Vincentian Community Cemetery in Princeton, N.J.
A new book of poetry by the late Brother Augustine Denis Towey, C.M., entitled *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Pieces for the Holy Family*, was published last summer. The book includes a foreword by his friend and confrere, Fr. Dennis Holtschneider, C.M., president of DePaul University.

Brother Augustine's latest volume contains his reflections on the Holy Family, written in his customary warm and human style. The subjects of his poems are shown in the settings and circumstances of their earthly lives. For example, one poem speaks of Joseph seeing the Blessed Virgin for the first time and being stunned by her “shining” beauty and extraordinary blue eyes. Another paints imagery of Mary and Joseph secretly watching their young son from a distance as he raises the sun and later pulls down the moon at the water’s edge.

These poems were written by Brother Augustine after his move from Niagara University to St. Vincent’s Seminary in Philadelphia. The book may be ordered at: amcpub.com/toweyhf. It is $9.95 including first-class postage. This is the third book of Brother Augustine’s poetry published by Arthur McAllister Publishers. All three books are now available at a special price at: amcpub.com/towey.

Dr. Sharon Watkinson, chair of the Department of Theatre and Fine Arts, and one of Brother Augustine’s lifelong friends, said that this summer when he marked his 50th anniversary as a Vincentian and his 75th birthday, his sisters, Anne Towey and Brenda Romanski, established the Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., Scholarship for Theatre Studies in celebration of these major events.

The scholarship fund will benefit Niagara University’s theatre studies students. Dr. Watkinson noted that anyone who wishes to contribute to this fund in Brother Augustine’s memory is asked to send their contribution to Leslie K. Wise, director of planned giving, Office of Institutional Advancement, P.O. Box 2008, Niagara University, N.Y. 14109.
Celebrated Actress Offers Advice to Theatre Students

By Ann Heuer, Office & Media Coordinator

She’s a familiar face and local success story. A native of East Aurora, N.Y., Christine Estabrook has worked with such celebrated performers as Al Pacino and William H. Macy, among other notables. Her career has ranged from stage to screen — from Much Ado About Nothing with Meryl Streep at Yale to Spiderman II. From Desperate Housewives to Spring Awakening. From American Horror Story to Mad Men. From Frasier to Bones.

With about 35 years’ experience under her belt, she candidly shared her wisdom and wisecracks with NU’s theatre studies students and professors during an open forum and special workshop for seniors held in the Leary Theatre in May.

“A lot of people asked me why I wanted to speak here,” she said. “I met Dr. Sharon Watkinson, Doug Zschiegner, and Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., about a year and a half ago and had such a wonderful feeling about these people. You just know when you meet people who will nurture students.”

Estabrook appreciates that a caring educational environment is an ideal training ground for actors — where students are appreciated not only for their talents as performers, but as well-rounded individuals. As an accomplished actor, she’s seen actors treated in good, bad and ugly ways. “This is a mean business,” she said. “They eat actors for lunch. But when you have a good self-navigator, you’ll be all right. I don’t know how you’ll keep your heart, but I hope you do.”

What are the first orders of business for a recent theatre graduate? “Once you graduate, you’re responsible for your own training,” she noted. “You should find classes you’re comfortable with and keep up with your singing. And you need to get an agent. I’ve had the same one for 30 years. Find someone you can relate to, who’s sympathetic and interested in developing you as an actor. And trust me, agents may say things that are hard to hear, like fix your teeth or lose weight. Listen to them. It will get you further in the business.

“Also,” she warned, “don’t put anything on Facebook that will put you in a compromising position. I think YouTube is Pandora’s box. These things will follow you throughout your career. And please, try to relate to people firsthand instead of always through a cell phone. And never burn your bridges. Be direct but kind.”

When asked if she preferred television over the stage, Estabrook said, “I don’t know. TV suits me. I like being fast making choices. Theatre seemed so slow to me when I was younger. But now, theatre appeals to me.

“I think you want different things at different times in your career,” she added. “If you want to have a family, go to Los Angeles. There is more money in television, it’s easier living, and you can get vested after 10 years, which means you’ll get a bigger pension.”

Has there been anything she didn’t like about TV? It’s never easy having your character killed off, which is what happened to her character in Desperate Housewives. And then there’s the ultra-tight undergarments she had to wear for Mad Men, set in the 1960s. But she really liked being in Desperate Housewives, American Horror Story and Cupid Inc. for the Hallmark Channel, among other shows and made-for-TV films.

“If you want to learn to be an actor, go to New York,” she continued. “The
best TV people I know are theatre people. In New York, you need to support yourself and pursue acting on top of that. It’s a heavy schedule, but it’s worth it. And you need to remember that the most important person in the theatre is the playwright. We are lucky to have the opportunity to do homage to his or her work because every actor is expendable.”

When asked about the differences between acting for stage and screen, Estabrook said, “In theatre, you have to be collaborative and supportive. Your will is secondary to what the director wants. In TV, you act at each other. The actor has no control. And the producer and director put things together pictorially. Actually, there are some wonderful TV directors, but some of the worst TV directors are like traffic cops.”

Knowing this, how does an actor decide which roles to play? “If I were you,” Estabrook continued, “I would keep in mind the roles I wanted to play and then I’d make sure I play them somewhere. In my career, I’ve done a funny role, then a serious role, or a role with a director I was eager to work with.”

But what does a student do if he or she doesn’t feel confident at an audition? “Don’t think about competing,” Estabrook advised. “And when you’re in the waiting room, stay away from the overtly confident actors. Go to another area of the room. And watch out for some of the women. On some rare occasions, you’ll meet some who are very competitive. They talk and talk and play mind games to screw you up. When I go to auditions, I just quietly do my homework while I wait. In TV, there will be five people who decide if you have the part, so you just do the best you can and then shake it off if you don’t get the role you wanted. Theatre auditions are more actor-friendly, but TV auditions can be nice if you know the casting person. “One of the most important things I have to tell you is that whether you want to be a celebrity, a star, or a good actor who is recognized by your peers, just stay true to what you want,” she concluded. “You’ll never regret this. You know intuitively what you should do when hard decisions come your way — like deciding whether you want a leading role in a regional theatre production or a small role on Broadway.”

Following the open forum, Estabrook conducted a workshop on auditioning specifically for senior theatre studies majors. Mary Boatman, ’12, said, “Christine Estabrook was hysterically funny as she shared behind-the-scenes stories about her work in TV and film. I really liked that what she told us paralleled what we learned in class. It’s good to know there won’t be too many surprises in the real world, and that we are well-prepared, thanks to our professors.”

Mike Van Dyke, ’12, concurred. “She didn’t sugarcoat her advice to us to make us believe it’s an easy career. During the audition workshop she really focused on bringing out as much of the character we were playing as possible. She worked with us on how to make an audition memorable because of the broad range of emotions we could add to the role.”

And Meghan Deanna Smith, ’12, observed, “Christine Estabrook’s workshop gave me a different outlook on the television and film world. Her advice was a nice addition to what we had previously learned in our on-screen workshop with the wonderful theatre adjunct Josie DiVincenzo. When I worked one-on-one with Christine, she pushed me to try some things I was initially uncomfortable with in order to expand as an actress. This was very beneficial.”

Christine Estabrook has built an impressive portfolio of roles on stage and in front of the camera. She has been featured in several motion pictures mostly in supporting roles. Her more recent films include Grind, Spider-Man 2 and Catch That Kid.

She had a recurring role on the popular ABC television series Desperate Housewives, playing Martha Huber. Other appearances include a 2002 episode of the HBO original series, Six Feet Under, where she played Emily Previn. Estabrook has also guest starred on 7th Heaven, Dharma and Greg, The Guardian, Veronica Mars and NYPD Blue. In 2009 she guest starred in two episodes of the hit CBS drama Ghost Whisperer as Evelyn James, Eli’s mom.

Christine attended the Yale School of Drama in the 1970s. Known for her comic abilities, she was Lidia in the student production of Durang’s Titanic, and played a radical feminist in Durang and Wendy Wasserstein’s When Dinah Shore Ruled the Earth. At Yale Repertory Theatre she was in a number of productions, including Durang-Innurato’s The Idiots Karamazov, and Shakespeare’s Much Ado About Nothing with Meryl Streep. She also received critical praise for her moving portrayal of a troubled girl in Robert Auletta’s Walk the Dog, Willie, also at Yale Rep.

At the O’Neill National Playwrights Conference, she created the role of the young daughter in Kevin O’Morrison’s Ladyhouse Blues, which then moved to off-Broadway. On Broadway she was in The Inspector General and Andrei Serban’s production of The Cherry Orchard. She won an Obie award for her performance in Deborah Eisenberg’s Pastoreale at the Second

See Estabrook, continued on page 21
Standing on the Shoulders of Alumni

By Doug Zschiegner, Associate Director of NU Theatre/Associate Professor

So, here you are, 22 years old and graduating from NU Theatre with a bachelor of fine arts degree. You've spent four years putting in more hours in class, crew and rehearsal than most any student on campus. What's next? What do you do the day after graduation when, for the first time in 18 years, nobody gives you a syllabus? What will life with a theatre degree be like?

NU Theatre alumni have been helping to answer those challenging questions.

Seniors with a performance emphasis take two semesters of Acting: Synthesis and the Profession and the “business” aspect of that course has been expanded in recent years. Pictures, résumés, agents, unions, auditions, contacts and the cold, hard statistics of making a living as an actor are addressed directly. A professional showcase in downtown Buffalo introduces the students to local directors. In a Why Acting? paper, motivations and goals are articulated and developed.

But for many, their future looks daunting. Did they make the right choice to focus so much of their education on acting?

In the weeks before leaving, seniors hear the voices of those who have been where they are now. They're reminded they're not alone, but rather standing on the shoulders of nearly 50 years of NU Theatre alumni. In “The Shoulders Project,” each graduating senior is assigned a graduate. They do a phone interview, write a summary and then report back to the rest of the class. They hear stories about what could be their future. Suddenly, they aren’t alone climbing this ladder, but joining a long line of people who are eager to reach down and give them a hand up.

And our grads certainly have a lot of stories to tell!

So many are succeeding at exactly what they set out to do and there’s great comfort in talking with working actors. Alums like Michele Ragusa, '87, Carmen Ruby Floyd Calloway, '00, Neil Casey, '91, and Patrick Riviere, '88, prove there is a path leading from Monteagle Ridge to acting success in New York and across the country. Their up-to-date accounts of life on the front lines of the industry are hugely helpful.

Many others share that, at NU or after, they discovered opportunities in theatre outside the spotlight. Last year, the student calling Thom Gates, '95, had to schedule their talk around his considerable responsibilities as production stage manager opening the Broadway hit, Disney’s Newsies. Joseph Christopher described his meteoric rise from NU graduation in 2006 to coordinator of theatre programming at the Kennedy Center. Kevin Kreczko, '05, shared his rich career combining production and stage management with fight choreography and directing. Sometimes actors think of teaching as just a “fallback” job, but alums like Bill Patti, '05, Diane DiBernardo Blenk, '89, and Shaun Sheley, '96, reported great lives that included teaching theatre. Acting may be the initial lure, but the students hear of real satisfaction (and real paychecks) standing somewhere beyond center stage.

Theatre training can translate to success in business. Robert Apsland, '74, plays with the big boys in the Hong Kong and New York corporate worlds, but also told great stories of producing and rubbing shoulders with Hollywood’s and Broadway’s biggest names. John Overbeck, '75, credits getting tricked into auditioning by Brother Augustine with opening a whole world of theatre to him. His journey from theatre management to corporate success at IBM and Ford Motor Co., then back to NU to teach, is inspiring indeed. David Granville, '92, balanced a position in Buffalo city government with local theatre opportunities, and Adair Saviola, '73, finds time after her duties as director of development and marketing at the Buffalo Zoo to serve as president of The Friends of NU Theatre. Career choices may not be “theatre or ______” but “theatre and ______.”

Equally important — and perhaps most surprising to some seniors — is hearing that people can live quite happily outside the entertainment business. Today, their sights may be firmly fixed on a Tony Award by 30, but they gain great insight from reports of rich lives selling insurance or owning a small business. A focus on nurturing a marriage and raising children may eclipse the appeal of applause. In five years of this project, there have been virtually no regrets expressed by NU alumni. Certainly they acknowledge struggles, but all can credit Bro, Dr. Sharon, Tim Ward or something they got in college for making their lives significantly better. All are eager to offer advice or lend a hand to someone standing where they once were.

If you’re an NU Theatre alum and want to share a little of yourself with a senior, please contact Doug Zschiegner at dougz@niagara.edu. In May, another crop of graduates will be starting down the road. You can let them know what they might expect along the way.
Andrea Andolina, ’07, was in Anne Nelson’s The Guys for Buffalo’s American Repertory Theater of WNY this fall.

Peter Andres, ’09, was in the dark comedy The Shape of Things for Buffalo’s Francis Bacon Experiment Theatre Co. in September.

Maria Arena and Michael Arena, ’77, members of the board of the Friends of Niagara University Theatre, were among three families who were honored by the Buffalo Diocese in October for their extraordinary support of Christ the King Seminary. Also honored was Monseigneur Frederick Leising, a former president-rector of the seminary. The Arena family was honored with a Cure of Ars Award for “touching the lives of the young and the old with their support of the seminary, the diocese and education initiatives. The Cure of Ars Award is presented annually to persons or organizations whose qualities include a particular attention to healing those in need of God’s reconciling love, a willingness to contribute their gifts towards pastoral care, especially for the needy and poor, and a commitment to the Church as a primary instrument of the divine-human encounter.”

David Autovino, ’03, and Renee Landrigan, ’13, were in the cast of the musical Next to Normal at Buffalo’s Irish Classical Theatre Co. this fall. Adjunct lecturer Katie Mallinson, ’05, served as assistant stage manager for the production, and adjunct voice lecturer Jason Bravo was musical director. In addition, NU artist-in-residence/recruiter Adriano Gatto, ’06, assisted with a struggling sequence in the production, and Susan Drozd, ’02, provided wigs and make-up. Drozd starred in The Devil’s Castle, a series of exploratory soundpainting performances presented by the New Phoenix Theatre and the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble in May. Drozd, former NU theatre student David Lundy, and Adriano Gatto participated in a reading of Shakespeare’s bloodiest play, Titus Andronicus, in November for a Shakespeare in Delaware Park fundraiser.

Above, from left, alumnus David Autovino and Jason Watson in Buffalo’s Irish Classical Theatre Co. production of Next to Normal. Watson was in the first national tour of the musical.

Below, NU theatre performance senior Renee Landrigan in Buffalo’s Irish Classical Theatre Co. production of Next to Normal. Photos by Gene Withkowski courtesy of Irish Classical Theatre Co.

Updates!

Edited by Ann Heuer, Office & Media Coordinator

Derek Campbell directed Buffalo’s Irish Classical Theatre Co.’s production of Joyicity. From Feb. 14–March 10, Campbell will direct Dancing at Lughnasa for the ICTC, featuring alumni Andrea Gollhardt, ’12, and Elizabeth Oddy, ’03. From March 21–April 14, the ICTC will present Being Behan, with alumnus Joe Liolos, ’11. From April 25–May 19, the theatre will spotlight American Buffalo, featuring alumnus Brian Mysliwy, ’96, and from June 6–30, the cast of A Life will include alumni Joe Liolos and Jamie Nablo, ’12.

Liolos appeared in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead for Buffalo Laboratory Theatre in September.
Stephanie Bax, ’93, was in the world premiere of the comedy, Roadkill, by Karen J. P. Howes this fall for Buffalo’s Alleyway Theatre.

Sound lecturer/sound designer Glenn Bernardis reports that his business, GB Audio, is recording CDs for Vocalis Chamber Choir and Harmony Chamber Singers and is also presenting a seminar on audio for theatre at the New York State School Music Association and the Erie County Music Educators Association. (www.gbaudioonline.com). Glenn’s group, Stone Row, which includes NU alumnus Jayson D. Clark, ’12, has performed at several major music festivals and is currently working on its second CD (www.stonerow.com). Glenn is currently working on his own solo CD project.

Kelly M. Beuth, ’96, Jenny Gembka, ’04, and Maria Nicole Held, ’11, were featured in the bawdy parody Ramona and Juliet in May and June for the Brazen-Faced Varlets at Buffalo’s Rust Belt Books. This fall, Beuth and Gembka were also in the group’s production of Way Wicked Women! a performance piece by Lara D. Haberberger.

Mary Boatman, ’12, set sail for a job with Disney Cruise Lines in its youth entertainment department this summer. Devan Corcoran, ’11, landed a job with Disney’s Dream Cruise this fall and will sail with fellow alumna Boatman from February–September 2013. Boatman is working as an entertainment hostess for Disney and Corcoran will be portraying such characters as Mickey and Minnie Mouse, “any character five feet tall and under.”

Joshua Bradley, ’00, and his brother, Chris, were fight captains and choreography assistants for Florida Grand Opera’s Romeo and Juliette. Joshua is currently working at Universal Studio Hollywood’s T2-3D attraction as John Connor. He also stunt coordinates a variety of student films and assists his brother in special effects jobs.

Virginia Brannon, ’04, is in the cast of Angels in America: Perestroika for Buffalo’s Subversive Theatre and the Manny Fried Playhouse in the Great Arrow Building from Jan. 17–Feb. 16. This production is directed by Christopher Brandjes. Alumna Susan Drozd, ’02, is also in the cast. The theatre will also be presenting Angels in America: Millennium Approaches, directed by Christopher Standart, from Jan. 10–Feb. 16. For more information, visit the theatre’s website: www.subversivetheatre.org.

Alicia Burning, ’12, is now completing her five-month internship in Disney World’s costume department.

Callie Bush, ’12, Melissa Seifert-Leventhal, ’01, former NU Theatre student Tim Stuff, and Jess Hall, ’15, were in Seussical the Musical for Lewiston, N.Y.’s Theatre in the Mist this fall.

Annise Celano, ’12, directed a one-man show, The Rabbit Lesson, starring Patrick J. Tighe, ’14, for Buffalo’s Subversive Shorts 2012 Festival. She also served as Artpark’s transportation director for Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella.

Jayson D. Clark, ’12 (lighting design), Leo DiBello, ’11 (Sergeant), Jamie Nablo, ’12 (Maggie Flanagan, sound design), Emily Pedersen, ’11 (fight choreography), Tony Rajewski, ’13 (set design, props), and Victoria Wolcott, ’10 (stage manager) were all involved in Buffalo’s Subversive Theatre production of Danger Police At Work by Nobel Prize-winning playwright Dario Fo in September at Buffalo’s Manny Fried Playhouse. Clark was hired this fall as the 2013 short play festival production manager/light designer for NU Theatre.

Kevin Craig, ’08, was in He Who Gets Slapped for Buffalo’s Torn Space Theater this summer.

Diane DiBarnardo Blenk, ’89, was in Bernard Slade’s comedy, Same Time, Next Year for Rocking Horse Productions at the Lancaster Opera House in September.

Erica Miranda Diederich, ’12, works for the Teaching Artists for Youth Program at the Springville Center for the Arts, Springville, N.Y.

Aaron Doolittle, ’05, has created a 48-hour film project. To view a trailer, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eXuob4NYt-4.

Kurt Erb, ’09, and former NU theatre studies student Adam Rath were featured in Charlotte’s Web for Buffalo’s Theatre of Youth in May and June. Erb and fellow alumni Brian Mysliwy, ’96, Michele Marie Roberts Benzin, ’99, Marc Sacco, ’00, Alan Trina, ’13, and former NU theatre student Nick Lama were in The
Mystery of Edwin Drood, a musical by Rupert Holmes, for Buffalo’s Kavinoky Theatre this fall. Sacco was in Buffalo United Artists’ 10-Minute Play Festival during the summer.

Buffalo’s MusicalFare Theatre presented Hair this summer. At right (l-r): a tribe hug featuring Jonathan Young, Sarah Blewett, alumnus Kurt Erb, ’09, Christina Golab, Maria Graham, Dudney Joseph Jr., and Frankie Compofelice.

Below: Alumna Cassie Gorniewicz, ’08, played a member of the “tribe” in Buffalo’s MusicalFare Theatre production of Hair this summer. From left, Dudney Joseph Jr. and Gorniewicz. Photos by Chris Cavanagh courtesy of MusicalFare Theatre.

Adriano Gatto, ’06, artist-in-residence/recruiter, was in 33 Variations with former NU theatre studies student David Oliver this fall for Buffalo’s MusicalFare Theatre. He also appeared in A Midsummer Night’s Dream for Buffalo’s Shakespeare in Delaware Park. Former adjunct faculty member Lawrence Smith (Egeus) was also in the cast this past summer.

Gatto did fight direction for Richard III for the Rochester Shakespeare Players this summer, plus for shows at Irish Classical Theatre Co., Torn Space Theatre, Road Less Traveled Productions and the New Phoenix Theatre in Buffalo. He also has assisted fight master Daniel Levinson of Fight Directors of Canada.

Lona Geiser, ’93, appeared in Ken Ludwig’s comedy, The Fox on the Fairway, for Buffalo’s Kaleidoscope Theatre Productions this fall.

J. R. Finan, ’05, was in Kander and Ebb’s And The World Goes Round for Buffalo’s O’Connell & Company this fall.

Gregory Fletcher, former director of NU Theatre, is currently director of theatre arts and associate professor at CUNY/Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, N.Y. Also, in July, his new full-length play Uploaded was included in Whitley-Mosier Foundation’s Summer Readings 2012, featuring June Gable and Michael Learned.

M. Joseph Fratello, ’07, starred with veteran local newspaper reporter Doug Smith in Tuesdays with Morrie this fall for Niagara Regional Theatre.

(Courtesy photo)

Cassie Gorniewicz, ’08, and former NU theatre student David Lundy participated in a reading of Eurydice for a benefit for Buffalo’s Emanuel Fried New Play Workshop in August.

Cristen Gregory, adjunct voice professor, is hosting Everything Real Estate with Cristen Gregory, a radio show on Buffalo’s FM 102.9 and AM 1230 “The Breeze” on Saturday mornings from 9-10 a.m. She was a soprano soloist for the Vivaldi Gloria with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in November and was a soprano soloist for Messiah performances with the Western New York Chamber Orchestra in November and December.

Adjunct professors Terry Judd and Robin Patterson report that their company, Theatre Beyond Words, in collaboration with Tottering Biped Theatre, developed a new piece based on the graphic novel The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch, text by Neil Gaiman and images by Dave McKean, copyright 1994. The three-week workshop was held at the Lyric Theatre in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in November and used masks, puppets, projections and live music.
Sara Kovacci, ’06, appeared in the musical The Marvelous Wonderettes for Buffalo’s O’Connell & Company in April and May.

Nicholas Lama (Rivers), David Lundy (Hastings) and Adam Rath (Richmond), all former NU theatre studies students, performed in the Shakespeare in Delaware Park production of Richard III in June and July. Former artist-in-residence Steve Vaughan provided fight choreography for this production, which was hailed by theatre critic Ted Hadley as “devilishly well done.”

Billy Leonard, ’12, is working on his master’s degree in secondary education at NU.

Brittany T. Metz, ’12, returned to NU Theatre this fall to design the costumes for the first production of the season, The Rimer of Eldritch.

Maureen Stevens, associate professor design-technology/costume designer, and Metz collaborated this fall on Buffalo’s Jewish Repertory Theatre production of The Whipping Man by Matthew Lopez and directed by Saul Elkin. Stevens designed the costumes and make-up for the production and Metz was make-up artist.

Meagan (Kurilovitch) Millar, ’12, toured the Midwest this summer with Prairie Fire Children’s Theatre of Barrett, Minn. She and her tour partner visited a new town every week. On Mondays, they auditioned children and cast their show, Jack and the Beanstalk. Each Tuesday through Thursday, they taught the children and rehearsed the show, which was performed on Fridays and Saturdays. She worked as a director, teacher, set builder, sound and light assistant, costumer, and actor, playing two roles in the production. She said, “I love it immensely and am so glad NU gave me the skills to perform well at my job!”

Nathan Andrew Miller, ’14, was in the hit Broadway musical Baby for Kaleidoscope Theatre Productions in Buffalo in June.

Aaron Moseley, ’12, is busy writing a manuscript for a potential book and working as an IRA specialist for People, Inc., where he provides direct care to individuals with various needs.

Jamie Nablo, ’12, performed in Subversive Shorts at Buffalo’s Manny Fried Playhouse with fellow alumni Leanne Troutman, ’12, and Annise Celano, ’12, during June and July. Nablo also performed in The Gong Show Live in June with the Fearless Players and in Accidental Death of an Anarchist for Buffalo’s Subversive Theatre for Curtain Up in September, along with alumnus Leo DiBello, ’11. She and Troutman and former NU theatre studies student Nick Lama appeared in The Gong Show in January. In December, Nablo returned to the Lancaster Opera House production of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

Alison Nusbaum, ’03, won a 2012 Mac-Award (Manhattan Association of Cabarets and Clubs) this spring for her outstanding work in the category of piano bar/restaurant singing entertainment. The Mac-Awards honor the best in NYC cabaret, comedy and jazz. A performer at New York’s Don’t Tell Mama, in April Nusbaum presented the show, Ladies, which emulates the zaniness of a Mel Brook’s production, starting with a Russian introduction to her entrance.

Rachel M. Olszewski, ’12, is the co-founder of the WNY entertainment business, Deep Roots. She coordinated the Old Falls Street Kids Camp and Niagara Falls Hard Rock Café concerts this past summer, and was an arts counselor for the Parkside Summer Arts Camp. She also attended the NYU Boot Camp. Olszewski and her fellow 2012 alumni Olivina Coloton, Billy Leonard, Jamie Lynn Nablo and Leanne Troutman performed as clowns on Old Falls Street, Niagara Falls, for the thousands of tourists who came to town to see Nik Wallenda’s daring tightrope walk at Niagara Falls on June 15.

Michele Ragusa, ’87, starred in Houston’s Theater Under the Stars production of Annie and in Company at Rochester’s Geva Theatre this spring. This spring, she will return to the Buffalo Philharmonic to appear in the concert version of Cole Porter’s Kiss Me Kate.

Patrick Riviere, ’88, reports that one of his plays was recently chosen for The Ten Minute Play Workshop.com, an online source for workshopping short plays. He recently played El Gallo in the Gilbert Theatre production of The Fantasticks and was nominated for a Pryer Award for Best Actor in a Musical. He was a guest teacher for the Gilbert Theater Conservatory and a guest lecturer at Fayetteville State University this fall. He also filmed an independent film, Esai’s Crossing, and a pilot for a Web series, 50 Stars. Also, his long-awaited PIE Holiday Stories and Carols CD is available. It will also be available on iTunes and Amazon. For more information, visit www.cdbaby.com/cd/pieholidaystoriesandcaro

Ellie Seib, adjunct voice professor, was the chorus master for the Nickel City Opera last June. The company performed La Boheme at the Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda, N.Y., and featured Metropolitan Opera singers and local talent.

Meghan Deanna Smith, ’12, participated in the International Modeling and Talent Association in New York City in July, attended by hundreds of agencies across the nation and actors and models from around the world. She competed with actors of all ages and was named “overall actor of the year.” Not only that —- she was also selected as the winner for best monologue, best cold read, and best entertainment host, and reports that she was contacted by 10 agencies from New York and Los Angeles who were at the event. This summer, she moved to Kingston, where she will be close to three of the agencies she has made contact with through the IMTA.

Lia Sumerano, ’08, starred as Vanessa in In The Heights for Cohoes Music Hall this fall.

Patrick J. Tighe, ’14, was in You Can’t Take It With You for Hamburg
Theatre Under the Stars this past summer.

Mike Van Dyke, '12, was in Chicago at the Cider Mill Playhouse in Endicott, N.Y., right after graduation. He also played Hortensio in The Taming of the Shrew for Binghamton’s Shakespeare in the Park. This fall, he choreographed Dracula: The Musical for Binghamton’s Half-Light Theatre, and he choreographed a music video for the band Peaches and Crime.

Michael Vargovich, ’07, and his band, Avalon Landing, have relocated from Buffalo to Las Vegas. The five musicians are finding plenty of gigs and are finishing their second album this fall. For more information, visit www.avalonlandingmusic.com.

Terri Filips Vaughan, associate professor, dance, and choreographer, presented a workshop entitled “Teaching Tap Dance through a Historical Perspective” at the 2012 National Dance Education Organization’s conference, “Focus on Dance Education: Many Cultures, Strength through Diversity” in Los Angeles in October. Terri and alumnus/licenturer Ian Tweedie, ’05, co-directed/co-choreographed the show Nunsense — the Mega Musical at Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart in December. The show has been named a finalist for Buffalo’s Kenny Awards.

Stacy Zawadzki-Janusz, adjunct dance professor, and her dance company ZPAC, were nominated in the categories of Best Dancer and Best Dance Company for Buffalo’s Artvoice newspaper’s “Best of Buffalo 2012” contest in May. Stacy and her ZPAC Company have been asked to perform its own show on the Carnival Cruise Line to the Bahamas in December 2013. NU performance majors who will participate include Kelsey Anderson, ‘14, and Mackenzie Gillemeyer, ‘15. Janusz will also be choreographing Once on this Island for Orchard Park High School. She choreographs for The Lancaster Colorguard and reports that they just won first place in their division in states competition. She will also be one of the new directors/choreographers for the Red Carpet Production Company.

Doug Zschiegner, associate professor and associate director of NU Theatre, directed and produced a staged reading of The Normal Heart for the Niagara AIDS Taskforce in Niagara Falls last December. He also led an audition workshop at St. Joseph’s Collegiate Institute in Buffalo at that time, and at the Springville Arts Center, Springville, N.Y., in April. He has led introductory theatre workshops for NU’s marketing students in the spring and fall of this year, and he facilitated the open forum with stage/screen actress Christine Estabrook for NU theatre studies students in May. In November, he and NU Theatre director, Steven Braddock, coordinated the one-man show, Charles Dickens Presents: A Christmas Carol, starring Buffalo’s WKBW-TV meteorologist, Mike Randall. The holiday event was a fundraiser hosted by The Friends of Niagara University Theatre.

Please share your news!

If it seems to you that we feature more news about theatre studies alumni who live in the Western New York area, you’re right — and that’s only because these alumni have the chance to visit us more often and we gather news about them from local media outlets and the alumni office. However, we’d love to print just as much news about our alumni living across the U.S. and around the world. So if you have any news about your career or continuing education, or if you’ve gotten married or have had a baby, please let us know. Your fellow theatre studies graduates and all our faculty and staff can’t wait to hear your news! Please email your news to Ann Heuer, managing editor of the newsletter, at arlb@niagara.edu.

Best Wishes One and All!

Former adjunct physical theatre professor Renee Baillargeon and her husband, Don, have become first-time grandparents. Their son, Andre-Paul, and his wife, Thida, welcomed Arielle Madeleine Baillargeon-Smith on June 5.

Joshua Bradley, ’00, married Clemence Merot du Barre on Aug. 28 at the Old Zoo in Griffith Park, Los Angeles. Prior to the wedding, the couple travelled to France to visit Clemence’s family.

Liz Campbell, ’04, and her wife, Alison Mills, had a baby girl, Magdelynn Elizabeth Mills, on June 26, 2012.


Former office coordinator/box office supervisor Peg Lacki and her husband, Mike, are first-time grandparents. Their son, Jonathan, and daughter-in-law, Erin, welcomed Brenna Katherine on June 11. Theatre studies/French alumnna Mary Beth Lacki, ’09, is also delighted to be an aunt to this new member of the Lacki family. Peg Lacki accepted a job with Catholic Health Systems in November after 18 wonderful years of service to NU’s Department of Theatre and Fine Arts. She looks forward to having more time to spend with her granddaughter and family.

Patrick Moyer, ’07, and Elaine Montgomery of NU’s Student Records and Financial Services Office, have set the date. They will marry in Broken Arrow, Okla., this spring on April 27.
Theatrical Super Hero: The Two Worlds of Kevin Craig, Theater Guy

By Mary E. Furlong, Author/Contributing Writer

You know the drill: By day, Kevin Craig, 2004 Niagara University theatre studies grad, is a mild-mannered corporate type — a respected member of the team at Ingram Micro, a Fortune 100 company located in Williamsville, N.Y. His job is to present an Ingram Micro image, commit to memory the ever-evolving official Ingram Micro script, wear an Ingram Micro-type wardrobe, and deliver the Ingram Micro message to an audience of independent resale vendors of Ingram Micro products (mostly technology items).

By night, he’s Theater Guy, a kind of artistic crusader, a guy who lives and works in the so-called real world, but whose x-ray vision gives him a broader perspective and a knack for saving civilization one theatrical performance at a time. In play after play, he creates an image, memorizes lines, sports the appropriate wardrobe, and delivers a playwright’s singular message to whomever it may delight. Sometimes, he even wears a cape. Sounds a little bit like the stuff he does by day, only much grander and more exciting. Holy parallel universe, as Batman’s sidekick, Robin, might say.

Okay. Okay. Maybe it’s a stretch. But work with me here.

While Kevin may not actually be a super hero, given his super talent, he could certainly play one on TV. Or in a film. Or on a stage. To be dramatic about it (and why not?), the role of Theatre Guy requires a pretty tricky balancing act. And Kevin has that particular act down pat. Holy equilibrium, to anticipate Robin’s reaction once again.

So? I hear you saying. Doesn’t every actor have a day job? Ah, yes. But here’s the difference. Kevin actually likes his day job. It’s fast-paced and thrilling, and he feels like a valued, contributing member of an important company.

“I’m lucky enough to have two careers I can be proud of,” he says, “and that would not be the case without the education I got at NU.” He admits that immediately after graduation, he experienced a “now what?” feeling, but even before he achieved his present satisfying status at Ingram Micro, he had begun to enjoy the busyness and purpose of the whole day job/night job lifestyle.

While Kevin likes his day job, he loves his night job — his acting career. So far, he’s racked up a couple of dozen credits in professional theatres across the country. A favorite out-of-town experience was with the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, whose charms included a breathtaking outdoor venue on the lake at Sand Harbor; the opportunity to perform in Richard III, his favorite Shakespeare play, as well as in a world premiere musical; and the “wonderful experience of mixing with union actors who [had] been in the business for years.”

Kevin learned a great deal from those union actors and from the other professional performers he has met at various regional theaters. Among the nuggets of insight that stay with him are these:

• Just about everyone in the theater has a day job. Not just beginners. Not just the not-so-talented (as in “Don’t quit your day job”). Everyone. Even successful Broadway actors. All actors aren’t necessarily crazy about their day jobs. But they have them. And if they’re lucky, they get satisfaction from them.

• New York and L.A. are not the “be-all-and-end-all of the performing arts.” There are plenty of regional theaters that produce excellent theater. These relatively small markets offer more interesting opportunities to developing actors than do Broadway and Hollywood.

Buffalo is a prime example of one of those smaller markets. The city offers great theatre in the short term, together with a long-term potential for further growth. “It’s a unique community that’s big and small at the same time,” says Kevin. “The quality of productions here is very high.” An added attraction: Buffalo theaters regularly sell out, a sign that audiences appreciate the fine work being done on its many stages. Furthermore, as a result of his wide network of fellow Niagara graduates and other theater professionals in the area, it’s almost a given that Kevin will never get lost in
the shuffle in this city, whose shuffle is a matter of legend. He feels that he's “right where I should be” at this point in his career.

In late September, when this article was being written, it was impossible to miss the contentment and quiet pride in Kevin’s voice as he outlined his upcoming theater schedule.

He had been asked to read for a Kavinoky Theater production of *Noises Off*, an old-fashioned farce cum comedy of theatrical manners. He had a confirmed role in *Give and Take*, a film commentary on Disney Land-type theme parks, whose award-winning screenplay was written by Buffalo actress and director Gail Golden (she plays Mrs. Claus in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade — a once-a-year gig that might almost qualify as a day job, thus proving Kevin’s point). The film was to be shot at Fantasy Island, and its cast included a cross section of the most talented Buffalo-area actors.

Kevin was also performing in the Buffalo United Arts production of *The Irish Curse*. "Never heard of it," I told him. "What’s it about?"

“What’s it about?” he echoed. “Well, it’s R-rated. Maybe you shouldn’t put it in.” I could see his rosy blush even though we were talking on the phone. Then, after a moment of thought, he added, “It’s about these Irish guys with a problem, so they have a support group.”

Ah. Enough said.

All in all, Kevin is a pretty happy guy. But he admits to an occasional “itch to go out of town,” as well as an ambition to someday direct, and even to run his own theater company. Pursuing his MFA is another strong possibility. And he confesses to fantasies of returning to NU to pass on the legacy of the fine professional training and the encouraging communal atmosphere he himself found there.

Holy happy ending, Theater Guy.

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**Graduate Accepted into Prestigious MFA Program**

By Ann Heuer, Office & Media Coordinator

Emily Aguilar, ’12, has three outstanding reasons to celebrate. On May 12, she graduated summa cum laude from Niagara University after majoring in theatre performance and English and minoring in fine arts. Secondly, she recently married her fiancé, Eric Thomas. And, drum roll please, she is now enrolled in the prestigious University of Texas at Austin’s master of fine arts in drama and theatre for youth and communities graduate program.

Hundreds of students annually apply for this graduate program. This year, eight or nine were selected to interview, and of those students, only four were selected for the program.

“It is the most prestigious graduate program for my field, as it is the only one that offers a Master of Fine Arts, which is a terminal degree in this field, as opposed to a Master of Arts, which is not,” Emily explained. “In the academic world, this is the highest you need to go to be eligible for jobs at the professional level. To the best of my knowledge, I am the youngest person to have ever been accepted into this MFA program, as these types of heavy research and field-based programs typically want someone much older who has completed a great deal of professional work. I think that my work ethic and eagerness helped tremendously in being accepted.”

The program takes three years to complete. Currently, Emily is a graduate research assistant on a theatre-for-young-audiences play, *And Then Came Tango*. The play tells the story of two male penguins who raise a baby penguin together, promoting diversity and alternate family dynamics for young elementary school students.

In the future, Emily hopes to work with under-represented youth, especially those who are minority and inner-city youth. “I want to help them utilize theatre as a positive creative outlet as opposed to turning to potentially destructive ones,” she said. “I will also focus on using theatre as a means for youth to confront critical social issues, such as bullying, racism and violence. My goal is to become a ‘teaching artist’ who comes into schools, theatres and communities, rather than a certified school teacher.”

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**In August, a 36th birthday dinner was held on campus for Elizabeth Ann Clune, center, front row. Here, she celebrates with family and friends. If Elizabeth’s name sounds familiar, on May 1, 2010, Niagara University officially opened the $3.1 million Elizabeth Ann Clune Center for Theatre and renovated William P. and Marie Leary Theatre with a blessing, dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony. The new center is named after Miss Clune, the daughter of Niagara alumnus Robert J. Clune, Esq., a member of the university’s board of trustees, and his wife JoAnn G. Clune, both members of NU’s Class of 1958. George A. Wiegers, a classmate of theirs, donated $850,000 to the capital campaign for the theater renovation. Wiegers asked that the new theater complex be named for Elizabeth, an ardent fan of Niagara University Theatre and Broadway.**

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According to Dr. Sharon Watkinson, chair of Niagara’s Department of Theatre and Fine Arts, for alumna Lauren Arena-McCann, ’04, and the 10 NU theatre students who participated in the university’s study-abroad trip to London this past summer, the experience was a celebration from beginning to end. It was thrilling for the students to witness the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, attend the Jubilee Concert with Sir Elton John, Sir Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder, and see preparations made for the Summer Olympics. And it was especially exciting to be “across the pond” in London for a spectacular summer theatre season, for visits to historical landmarks, and for the opportunity to give back to others through live performance and applied theatre activities.

“Since the summer of 2001, I have been blessed with the opportunity to escort theatre students to London, England for their study-abroad experience. This past summer I escorted 10 theatre students to London, where they lived and studied from May 15 to July 7. I spent the first two weeks with them.

“While the eyes of the world for summer 2012 were on the Olympics, the eyes of theatre-goers were on theatre, which turned out to be an Olympic season ranging from modern, original works at the National Theatre (Collaborators by John Hodge and Traveling Light by Nicholas Wright) to classic Shakespearean tragedies at the Festival Theatre in Stratford-Upon-Avon (Richard III and King John) and the entire Shakespeare canon at the New Globe Theatre performed by theatre companies from around the world, ‘Globe to Globe’ as the season was called. At the Globe, we were able to see As You Like It performed by the Georgian (Russian) Marjanishvili Theatre. This was the first experience our students had of the new Globe.

“And while none of us understood the Georgian language, we all understood the production, which was alive, vibrant, enormously entertaining and incredibly well-acted.

“Another wonderful experience we all had at the new Globe was to attend a two-day symposium on Inter-cultural Shakespearean Performance at the Nancy W. Knowles Lecture Theatre. The focus of the symposium was on Shakespeare in translation and it engaged attendees in interdisciplinary discussion of contemporary Shakespeare performance by international companies spoken in their own languages.

“Perhaps the most outstanding theatrical experience during my time in London with the students was seeing a revival of a modern American, Pulitzer Prize-winning drama by Eugene O’Neill titled Long Day’s Journey Into Night at the Apollo Theatre in the West End (London’s Broadway). The students were excited about seeing this play as they had read it in my American Drama class just months before. The production starred David Suchet, known by American audiences as Poirot in the Agatha Christie PBS series Poirot. We were very fortunate to be able to go backstage after the show and meet David Suchet. He was gracious and kind to all of us, answering questions and even allowing us to pose with him for a photograph.

“Alas, for me, two weeks went too fast. However, our students remained for another five and a half weeks and had the opportunity to see and experience many more productions, not to mention the sites of London, including the Queen’s Jubilee.”

Sharon Watkinson, Ph.D.

“All of these experiences were in addition to the already life-changing experience of just being in London itself. As a history buff, I delighted in visiting Anne Boleyn’s gate at Hampton Court, Jane Austen’s house in Bath, and the Nell Gwynn pub across from the Drury Lane theatre. I also loved going to the many monuments to my favorite actress, Vivien Leigh. We saw a different show nearly every day of the first two weeks, and then a different show daily for the next five and a half weeks.”

“Every year, students rave about their summer in London, but I don’t think any other summer could possibly compare with this one. Not only was London preparing for the Olympics, which included the Cultural Olympiad, but it was Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee. We found ourselves in the midst of history being made everywhere we went. We lined up along the bank of the Thames, in front of the Tate Modern, to watch the Royal Flotilla pass. We watched the historic concert with performers like Elton John, Paul McCartney, and Stevie Wonder in Hyde Park. Thanks to the Cultural Olympiad, an arts initiative that accompanies hosting the Olympics, we got to see a magnificent company from Georgia, the country, perform such a blissful and beautiful production of As You Like It that regardless of the fact that we did not understand a word of their language, it was one of our favorite pieces of the summer. We also got to see the Olympic park in person before the games had even commenced.
With the global financial crises and everything felt like it was on the brink. To be out in the world, really, because European identity, and its desire to avoid places like Greece, whose financial crisis makes it a dangerous destination. Who knows how much longer trips like this will be possible? I am so grateful that I had a chance to go this summer.”

Megan Kemple, '13

“My summer study-abroad experience in London was truly amazing. Never have I heard of such a specialized program for theatre students to study their craft, see so many outstanding professional shows, talk one-on-one with professional actors, and gain confidence in the vibrant and international city of London. This program is truly one of a kind and has endowed me with a greater knowledge and appreciation of British theatre, Shakespeare especially, which will give me a definite step-up in the professional world.

“I especially loved seeing several Shakespeare plays in the ‘Wooden O,’ the New Globe Theatre, which truly brings Shakespeare’s words to life and allows the actors to interact with the audience. I also loved the tour and workshop in the Royal Court Theatre and performing at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which gave us the opportunity to see all the awe-inspiring exhibits. Though I did not particularly enjoy the London weather, I was so impressed daily by all the history that surrounded me. By just walking down the street, I was greeted by Kings Cross Station, St. Pancras Hotel, and the British Library. A short tube stop away was the Tate Modern, St. Paul’s Cathedral, the Thames River, and Westminster Abbey. These historical landmarks, which most people may only experience once in their life on their vacation, were the background of my two-month study-abroad experience. I feel so lucky that Niagara has given me the opportunity to have such unique experiences and wonderful memories that will last me a lifetime.”

Grace Turner, '13

“The London trip was definitely an experience. Looking back, this trip has taught me that you only have one chance in life to get things right. We either take that opportunity seriously as it comes or we let it pass us by. We need to live in the moment because who knows how our life will change as radically as one day to the next. We need to cherish and take advantage of the moments in our lives before they are gone. My time overseas was an opportunity for me to work on my craft and what is better than enjoying every second of it with people you really care about? I was able to study what I love while in London. It is still a surreal experience to me and one I will never forget.”

Andrew Adolf, '13

“The greatest satisfaction I achieved through my London study-abroad experience came from the invaluable knowledge gained from Cornwall concerning the wide range of benefits that applied theatre possesses. After this experience, I felt like I finally gained some concept of what I am ultimately intended to do with my life. Planning and researching how to execute a workshop we created and then finally acting on it and seeing it help others was an amazing feeling — one that I would love to have in my life every day. When the workshop was over, all I could think about was how Tara Laurie, '05, would have absolutely loved this experience and how I wouldn’t have been able to experience everything I did without her. Every time I passed by a pink rose I thought of her, took it and seeing it help others was an amazing feeling.”

Brianna Lanoye, '13

(Recipient of the 2012 Tara Laurie Memorial Scholarship)

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(Editor’s note: Tara Laurie, a senior theatre performance student from Ransomville, N.Y., passed away suddenly in October 2004, a few months after participating in the London study-abroad program. Her parents accepted a bachelor’s degree in her honor at Niagara University’s undergraduate commencement ceremony on May 22, 2005, and established the Tara Laurie Memorial Scholarship, describing it as “our way of keeping our daughter’s song alive and her spirit of joy and love soaring. It is our hope that her legacy will live on and the recipient of this award will realize all of their dreams, hopes and aspirations through participation in Niagara University Theatre’s study-abroad program.”)

“Visiting outside of London was one of my main goals during this trip, and we were extremely fortunate to visit Stratford-Upon-Avon. While I consider myself to be a city girl, I was so grateful to venture into the country and take a break from the busy life of London. Stratford-Upon-Avon was absolutely beautiful and I felt as if I could breathe there. The small-town feeling was something that I adored and I loved being able to walk around and explore the different corners of the town.

“Not only is Stratford-Upon-Avon a fun little getaway, but the theatre there was very entertaining. Seeing Shakespeare performed in the Swan Theatre, as well as the Globe Theatre in London, was something that will stay with me for the rest of my life. The two performances that we saw in Stratford-Upon-Avon had more contemporary concepts, while the performances in London were more traditional (although they did have more of a modern design than a traditional Shakespeare performance). King John and Richard III were performed at the Swan Theatre, which was an indoor thrust/proscenium stage theatre with different levels of dress circle seating and ground floor seating. The set was plain compared to other designs I’d seen, yet you could see a distinct contemporary look throughout the set as well as costuming.

Viewing Shakespeare in the Globe Theatre was very different than in Stratford-Upon-Avon. While both places offered wonderful performances, standing in the Globe Theatre, right up against the stage in the open-air theatre that is a replica of where so many performances had taken place over hundreds of years, was an incomparable feeling. I cried the moment I walked in and saw the stage adorned with its traditional painting of the heavens surrounded by the many viewing balconies. While the original Globe Theatre was destroyed in a fire and its replacement was torn down about 50 years later, being able to stand in its replica not very far from the original site was a humbling experience. The performances were impeccable and I was thoroughly entertained the entire time, even during some of the longer performances, such as Hamlet.

“Looking back on my study-abroad experience, I know that this program gave me a new sense of independence — one that I don’t think I would’ve been able to know in any other way.

“Riding the tube on my own and walking back and forth from Nido Student Living to Anglo-American University, I discovered a sense of strength. I feel more capable of taking the reins of my life now. And I also have found a deeper appreciation of my own country.

“As much as I love England and enjoyed the time I spent there, there is definite truth in the saying ‘there’s no place like home.’ Spending America’s Independence Day in Cornwall, England, was quite an experience. My fellow students and I sang our national anthem at the top of our lungs while watching our American flag waving in the wind. At that moment, I think I finally understood the weight of every word I was saying.”

Keirsten Lynne Greifenstein, ’13

In July, 10 NU theatre performance students came to spend a week with Arts for Health Cornwall to learn about the benefits of creativity for health and well-being. The students, all members of the Class of 2013, participated in an arts response group in Truro, led musical theatre and singing sessions at two memory cafes, took part in the breakdown cover workshops and danced in a session for adults with learning disabilities.

Back row from left: Brianna Lanoye, Andrew Adolf, Celine Keefe, Sarah Hunt, project coordinator for AFHC, Michael Wachowiak, Jayne Howard, director of AFHC, Steven Foote, Grace Turner, Dave Spychalski and Megan Kemple. From row from left: Renee Landrigan, Keirsten Lynne Greifenstein, and tutor Lauren Arena-McCann, ’04.
Students Bring Theatrical Enrichment to Cornwall

By Lauren Arena-McCann, '04

Editor's note: Lauren Arena McCann graduated from NU's B.F.A. theatre program in 2004 and fondly recalls participating in NU's stimulating theatre summer-abroad program in the United Kingdom. In 2009, she received an M.A. in applied drama at University of Exeter with a specialty in arts in education and arts in therapeutic sectors. She currently resides with her husband and son in the U.K.

Throughout my time in the U.K., I have both researched and experienced all arts educational sectors. From young children to the elderly, I have seen first-hand that arts enrichment helps marginalized groups to not only establish roles for themselves, but aid them in their daily routine.

So, when I was asked to teach the last leg of the 2012 summer study-abroad program in Cornwall, I jumped at the opportunity.

Ten NU theatre studies students came down to Cornwall in July. We met in Falmouth, a coastal sailing town situated on the southwest coast of the country. I wanted them to see that the method of applied drama/theatre exists outside the commercial heart of London. I wanted to show them that singing, rhythm and music are prevalent throughout the English countryside as a way for at-risk children and adults to build relationships, explore new ways of emotional expression and learn how to fit in their own environment.

We teamed up with Arts for Health Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. AFHC is a charity that works with volunteers of all artistic disciplines to bring the arts out into the community and help bring about change. Our students worked with a local theatre practitioner and learned how to use improvisation to explore and understand stress and anxiety. They participated in an Arts Response Visual arts session that is designed to help build confidence and self-esteem and allow people to develop new friendships or support anyone through a difficult time. Our students also led part of a “Zumbatronic” class that focuses on getting young children to move to rhythm and feel comfortable with their own bodies.

One group of students attended a “Wake up and Wiggle” session. The sessions are delivered by Gill Sadler in conjunction with AFHC and they help adults in the community with mental and physical disabilities. Whilst channeling a bit of Lady Gaga, our NU students were able to get the class up to embrace energy and funky dance movements through warm-up games and creative activities. This gave the participants a boost of confidence, a shot of self-esteem, improved recognition of the emotions of others and it helped improve their skills for following directions.

Our students were also given the chance to lead a “Dementia Memory Café” session hosted by the AFHC. According to its website, AFHC explains: “A Memory Café is somewhere that people with dementia and their care givers can visit to support each other and share information. The cafés offer a perfect opportunity to connect with people who have dementia and their families. Arts for Health Cornwall teamed up with local Memory Cafés to offer meaningful creative activities.” Our students completed the mission with overwhelming success. They managed to create quite an impression through their enthusiastic guitar playing and motivating Cornish dance moves.

Enhancing Niagara’s U.K. summer study-abroad program this July to include applied drama/theatre was a decision that not only enriched one day in the lives of the Cornish people, but gave the students an undeniably real and rich experience in how facilitating the arts through role playing, storytelling, and even a little Lady Gaga can truly make an unforgettable moment for someone.
Through the generosity of alumnus Ed Cheetham, ’87, the Friends of Niagara University Theatre, and The Vassar College and New York Stage and Film’s Powerhouse Theater Program, one NU theatre studies student is able to spend six weeks at the Powerhouse Theater Training Program each summer. Since 2009, five NU theatre studies majors or minors have participated in this unique apprentice program founded by Cheetham. This past summer, NU theatre performance major John Woodley, ’13, and alumna Brittany Gabryel, ’12, were thrilled to be able to attend Powerhouse. Here’s what they had to say.

“Powerhouse is like a magical land, where you are surrounded by people with extraordinary talent and a desire and respect for theatre. My teachers were some of the most intelligent and talented people in the business.

“The best part about Powerhouse was the environment. Everyone wanted you to succeed. All the students pushed each other to realize their maximum potential. Teachers and directors were honest in assessing our skills and showed us how to work hard and achieve our true potential. I had always feared that I was not good enough. Powerhouse taught me to believe in myself, reject the fear and embrace their advice, ‘you are enough.’

“The schedule was very hard but fulfilling. We never stopped. Classes were followed by rehearsals that lasted into the night. There were shadow assignments, crew assignments, and workshops held with actors, writers, and directors from the NYSAF professional productions. We observed new works by great writers brought to life with well-known directors and actors.

“My most memorable experience was working with my company, both on our production of Shakespeare’s The Comedy of Errors, directed by Brian McManamon, and our own devised piece, based on Charles L. Mee’s Requiem for the Dead, directed by Jessi Hill. These pieces showed me how skills learned in required NU courses, such as physical theatre, stage combat, dance, and speech, are just as important to a role as is the acting. Those skills were indispensable in my role as Dromio of Ephesus in the The Comedy of Errors. This role underscored that the lines are only one aspect of the character. To be successful, you must also address the physicality and nonverbal aspects of the character.

“I would like to thank NU alumnus Ed Cheetham for this opportunity. I am extremely proud of my summer at Powerhouse. I cannot adequately relate how this summer has affected me, as a performer and a person. However, I know that every minute will forever remain a part of me. I found a family and a home at Powerhouse. Everyone should be given that same opportunity. When it is time to apply for the scholarship, I encourage NU theatre students to put their heart and soul into their applications. There is nothing like a Powerhouse summer!”

Brittany Gabryel, ’12

Below: A scene from the Powerhouse production of Shakespeare’s The Comedy of Errors. From left: Claudia Givings as Adriana, Cole Critchell as Antipholus of Ephesus, NU’s Brittany Gabryel as Dromio of Ephesus, Ian Emerson as Doctor Pinch, and Josh Coleman as The Officer. Photo by Buck Lewis.

“It was late winter, the time of year when the Powerhouse Theatre internship applications were due. After hearing what incredible experiences fellow students Michael Wachowiak, ’13, and Meghan Smith, ’12, had at Powerhouse Theatre, how could I not want to attend?

“If I was accepted, I felt that this experience would propel me in a direction that would exceed all expectations. And I was right.

“I could write pages and pages of what I learned and gained from my time at Powerhouse but the most important thing would have to be fearlessness. After all, isn’t it an actor’s job to throw fear out the window?

“Whether it came down to tackling a character like Brutus in Julius Caesar, or just letting the eagerness of learning something like soundpainting take you to a place you never thought you could go, fear was never an option. The entire experience definitely expanded my artistic and creative outlet. I learned so much about myself as an actor and perhaps more importantly, myself as a person. Pushing myself out of that comfort zone and onto the edge of the unknown was absolutely incredible because the more I put into my six weeks at Powerhouse, the more I gained.

“The most gratifying experience I had during the internship was playing the role of Brutus in Julius Caesar. This was my first Shakespearean production and I would be lying if I said I wasn’t scared of taking the character on. This was the first production to be performed and in a short time, 72 hours to be exact, everyone involved presented an incredible show. In this brief time, I truly felt that I grasped Shakespeare. You can’t fight through the language; rather, you have to let the language move you. Let your body be the instrument that makes the music.”
“I would like to thank NU alumnus Ed Cheetam, producing director, and the Friends of Niagara University Theatre for giving me the experience of a lifetime. I will use everything I learned at Vassar College and New York Stage and Film’s Powerhouse Theatre Internship in future productions and in life. This winter, when the 2013 internship is offered, I’ll tell my fellow theatre students, ‘don’t even contemplate whether or not you should apply. You have to apply!’”

John Woodley, ’12

Below: From left to right, Maxwell Hegley as Cassius and John Woodley, ’13, as Brutus in the Powerhouse production of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. Photo by Buck Lewis.

Estabrook, continued from page 7

Stage, off-Broadway. She also created the role of Helen opposite William H. Macy in Durang’s Baby with the Bathwater at Playwrights Horizons. And on Broadway she took over the role of Feni in Wendy Wasserstein’s The Sisters Rosensweig. In the fall of 2006, she returned to Broadway in the musical Spring Awakening playing all the adult female roles.

Since the 1990s, she has mostly done TV and movies. Some of her movies include Second Sight, Sea of Love, and Presumed Innocent. In 2011 she appeared as Marcy on the first season FX series American Horror Story. Most recently, she has been seen on the AMC cable television series Mad Men, playing Joan Harris’s mother, Gail Holloway.

(excerpted from Wikipedia)

A Change in Focus Leads to Cinematic Success for Scott Poiley, ’00

By Lisa McMahon, Associate Director for Alumni and Development Communications

It seemed as if Scott Poiley’s destiny was to perform. He discovered a love of dancing while in preschool, and by the age of seven he was dancing professionally. In 1996, as a senior at Dr. Phillips High School in Orlando, Fla., he was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts, the highest scholastic honor available to graduating high school seniors.

But a heart condition, discovered while he was 19 and a student in Niagara University’s theatre program, drastically changed his professional aspirations and led him to a career behind the camera.

“The doctor said that I had to stop dancing or it will kill me,” Scott, a Class of 2000 alumnus, explains. “It was hard to give up something I had such passion for and I floundered for a little bit. I contemplated the whole acting thing for a while but I decided to go back to school and stay creative. Instead of being in front of the camera or on the stage, I decided to create the stuff that goes in front of the camera, and finance it, and create projects.”

In October 2011, Scott debuted his first feature film, Cassadaga, at the Screamfest Horror Film Festival in Hollywood (the launching pad of numerous horror and science fiction films including Paranormal Activity), a project he developed with a business partner he met while in the MFA program at the University of Miami. The two had been working on a romantic comedy, but when they discovered investors were more interested in a horror screenplay they were writing, they turned their attention to completing the supernatural thriller, which tells the chilling tale of a young woman named Lily who seeks solace at the spiritualist community of Cassadaga after the death of her younger sister.

Directed by Anthony DiBlasi (Dread, Midnight Meat Train) and featuring Kelen Coleman (Children of the Corn: Genesis), Kevin Alejandro (True Blood) and Academy Award-winner Louise Fletcher (One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest), the film made the festival rounds, premiering in the United States, the United Kingdom and in France, receiving positive reviews from audiences and critics alike.

Scott completed his second independent film, Missionary, in November 2011. The film stars Dawn Olivieri (Vampire Diaries), Kip Pardue (Remember the Titans) and Mitch Ryan (One Tree Hill), and is again directed by DiBlasi. He is also working on the financing for a three-picture deal.

Producing films often requires long hours, and 18-hour days can be the norm. But with the encouragement of his family (wife, Mary, and daughters Skyler and Kyra) Scott has been able to do what it takes to complete his work. “None of this would be possible without their support,” Scott says.

Although his current focus is behind the scenes, Scott says that he still loves the idea of performing. “In every film, I have a bit of a cameo. It’s not a speaking part, but you’ll see me in the background somewhere.”
A Passion for Global Service

By Ann Heuer, Office & Media Coordinator

Brianna “Bri” Lanoye was profiled last spring in Niagara University’s student magazine, Random, as the “number one most intriguing student on campus,” out of a list of 20 nominated students and a pool of nearly 2,900 undergraduates.

To say she was honored is an understatement. She was characteristically humbled, yet effervescent and joyful to hear the news.

“Intriguing” is a perfect way to describe Bri’s accomplishments and sparkling personality. A resident of West Seneca, N.Y., she’s a senior with a theatre studies performance and English double major. An outstanding scholar, dynamic lead community advisor in one of the campus’s dormitories, and a member and officer of many campus clubs, she has been inducted into Delta Epsilon Sigma, Sigma Alpha Sigma and the President’s Honor Society. On stage, she’s a truly gifted comedic and dramatic performer, with over 10 dialects at her command.

Intriguing? Without a doubt. But there’s another word that even more accurately depicts Bri’s remarkable spirit: inspiring. Extraordinarily compassionate, her future plans include helping the world’s marginalized, abused and forgotten children and adults through her craft.

You could say that Bri has something in common with legendary actress Audrey Hepburn, who was a Unicef Goodwill Ambassador from 1988 until her passing in 1993.

Hepburn once said, “The ‘Third World’ is a term I don’t like very much, because we’re all one world. I want people to know that the largest part of humanity is suffering … and I was brought up with that wonderful old-fashioned idea that others come first and you come second …. so don’t fuss dear, get on with it.”

Like Hepburn and many other performers with heart, Brianna chooses to be a light in the darkness.

“I think anything is possible,” Bri said. “I have a lot of dreams and they aren’t just dreams to better myself, but to better other people. I want to understand other cultures and give back as much as I can. And I am passionate about theatre, so I’d love to use my training and talent to use performing to create positive changes in the world.”

“They were so full of life and didn’t know they were poor … ”

To expand her world view, last winter Bri participated in Niagara University’s seventh BASIC trip to the Vincentian Missions in Panama, sponsored by the Campus Ministry Office.

Campus minister Monica Saltarelli said, “The mission of the trip is primarily to understand the Vincentians’ global mission, to be in solidarity with the people of Panama in understanding their economic and political plight. As a cultural immersion trip, our BASIC participants are able to see different types of poverty as they visit the various regions in the country. Since missions are not always about doing, our students quickly learn that the Panamanians have much to teach us, whether it be about generosity, faith, patience, or simply about love.

“Brianna and her fellow students made a marvelous contribution to the Panama trip,” Saltarelli continued. “They raised over $400 to send back to the Vincentian mission in Solvay, a mountainous region of Panama.”

Today, Panama is a land of stark contrasts. The Latin American Business Chronicle has predicted that Panama will continue to be the fastest growing economy in Latin America through 2014 due in part to the expansion of the Panama Canal and the conclusion of a free trade agreement with the U.S. At the same time, however, over one-third of the Panamanian population lived in poverty in 2008, and 14 percent were said to live in extreme poverty. Bri and her fellow students saw this dichotomy firsthand on their trip.

“We travelled coast to coast in Panama, and as a result, we saw the poorest regions and the richest,” Bri explained. “Panama City, a hub for banking and commerce, was prosperous with no signs of poverty. We spent much of the time, however, in Colon, the nation’s second-largest city, which has the highest rates of poverty and crime. Families of five lived in houses the size of a living room, and there was no running water. Conditions were absolutely awful. Unemployment is high, drug use is rampant, and because families are so poor, school is rarely an option for children, who must help make money for their families by selling fruit or other items in the streets or helping to raise crops.

“Every day I was fortunate to meet beautiful people with inspiring stories. I wanted to participate in this two-
week trip to attempt to change other’s lives for the better, which I believe I accomplished, but I didn’t realize how much my life would be radically altered forever.

“You see, I am so used to having my life planned out — every minute of every day — but I soon realized that in Panama, time doesn’t function in the same manner. Itineraries are merely guidelines, and quality is stressed over quantity. In Panama, happiness is commensurate to time spent with others. Just being with others, breathing the same air, smiling, attempting to communicate, playing games, all these things were timeless.

“Music was constantly blaring in the poorest areas, and people would sing and dance in the streets. That became my fondest memory of Panama — dancing with the children in the streets. They were so full of life and didn’t know they were poor because their lives were so enriched by the love of their families and friends.

“We conversed with the children, shared our culture, and they shared theirs. I taught them games and let them take pictures with my camera, which absolutely captivated them. Everywhere I went, I spent time with children because their laughter and outlook is so beautiful. Many told me that their parents couldn’t give them as much attention as they wanted since they had to try to earn money to feed them. The children didn’t have new clothes or shoes, but they had smiles that were worth more than any material possessions.”

“I know what it’s like to feel alone”

“Our group also visited assisted living homes in Panama where residents were ill but had so much life and so much left to say,” Bri continued. “We talked with them, hugged them, and most importantly, made them smile. We reminded them that they were important, even if they feel forgotten.

“We also spent time at orphanages where we played with children who longed to be held so badly that they would cry and cling to our legs when we had to leave — the most difficult part of the trip for me. I also visited the AIDS wing of one orphanage. Some of the group remained outside, but I was the first one in. I know what it is like to feel alone and I couldn’t even imagine everything these children had been through. They asked me to take them outside, but this was not allowed as their immune systems were so delicate, so instead, we made the inside the outside, pretending that the overhead light was the sun.

“We also went to a home for battered and abused women and children, as well as a drug rehabilitation center. The residents were so happy that we visited and cooked us a beautiful meal. And I was fortunate enough to meet an angel there. She had two children, had taught herself English, and she took care of the neighborhood children. She spent an entire week planning a party for those children who did not receive Christmas presents, and she works tirelessly all year raising money so she can afford the presents for all of them. We attended the party and luckily, I had colorful stickers for the children, which my sister had given me to take to Panama. The children’s reactions were incredible. Each was allowed to choose the sticker they wanted, and each one’s face lit up immediately. I wondered how a tiny sticker could be such a treasure, but realized it was because I had given them the ability to choose — a freedom many poorer people do not enjoy due to financial circumstances and availability of resources.

“Looking back, I realize that Panama was breathtaking and brutally eye-opening. I will not forget what I learned, or who I met and will always do more.”

Giving Back From Guatemala to London

“This past summer, before I participated in NU’s study-abroad program for its theatre majors in London,” Bri continued, “I backpacked through Guatemala to study Mayan culture. While there, my friends and I purchased 100 bracelets. This fall, we hope to sell them through our ‘Giving Back to Guatemala’ campaign at NU so that we can send money to the village of Tzununa, where we visited a school that needs to raise funds to improve its classrooms and library.

“Now, after seeing other parts of the world, I’ve realized that my great passion for the stage can coincide with helping others. There’s a beautiful connection between the two. Theatre is all about giving ... giving to your partner, giving to the audience ... and now I am keenly interested in applied theatre: theatre for those whose voices have been muted by the majority who deem them unimportant. Whether I will reach out to marginalized people through performing or facilitating workshops I can’t say, but I’ve seen for myself how powerful and versatile theatre can be.

“In Panama, I participated in a workshop with a theatre company which presents theatrical productions to tell the untold stories of families struggling through poverty. And while I was in London, we traveled to Cornwall where my fellow theatre majors and I executed our own applied theatre workshops. Everywhere I go, theatre is a positive force for awareness and healing.

“There is a quote I read which resonates with me: ‘Everything will be okay in the end ... and if it’s not okay, it’s not the end.’ I realize that I have so much time to help make life better for others ... so I need to take life moment by moment and every day do something that I’m scared of and help someone who needs it. I want to give back more than anything, to share the beauty I have been blessed to experience and allow everyone a chance to see that this world, amidst corruption and crime, is a wonderful place.”
In the Spotlight: Urinetown

In December, NU Theatre presented Urinetown the Musical by Greg Kotis and Mark Hollman, directed by Steven Braddock, director of Niagara University Theatre. Choreography was by Terri Filips Vaughan, while music direction was by Jason Bravo. Set design was by David Dwyer and lighting design and costumes were by alumni Jayson D. Clark and Andrea Gollhardt, respectively. This Tony Award-winning production is an irreverent homage to the Great American musical theatre tradition.

CEO Caldwell B. Cladwell, played by Kyle Baran, '15, right, with his office staff in the musical number, Don't Be The Bunny in Urinetown the Musical. From left, Celine Keefe, '13, Bobby Hall, '14, Matt Gilbert, '15, Matt DiVita, '16, Kathleen Macari, '16, Bradeen Walders, '16, Arianne Davidow, '16, Lauren Parrow, '15, and Baran.

Seniors Renee Landrigan as Little Sally and Alan Trinca as Officer Lockstock.

The cast, crew and a number of faculty members and musicians who worked together to create a delightfully irreverent production of Urinetown the Musical, presented by NU Theatre from Dec. 6 - 16, 2012.

From left, Marina Raquel Laurendi, '16, as Hope Cladwell, and Kyle Baran, '15, as her father, Caldwell B. Cladwell.

Penelope Pennywise, played by Celine Keefe, '13, surrounded by members of Urinetown's poor ensemble and hostage Hope Cladwell. Background from left, Marina Raquel Laurendi, '16, Steven Sass, '16, Keirsten Lynne Greifenstein, '13, Phoebe Wright, '15, and Renee Landrigan, '13.


Alex Garcia, '14, as Bobby Strong, and Marina Raquel Laurendi, '16, as Hope Cladwell.
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At left: The large cast and crew of NU Theatre’s production of The Rimers of Eldritch pose with their director, Steven Braddock.

At right: The cast of NU Theatre’s production of Rumors pose together at a dress rehearsal. Missing is the director, Amanda Lytle Sharpe, adjunct speech professor, and the crew of the production.