



History of Towson University's M.F.A. in Theatre Arts Program

The MFA Program in Theatre Arts at Towson University started in 1994 under the leadership of Juanita Rockwell. In its 20-year history, the program has engaged in a number of ambitious projects (originated by both students and faculty), presented over 60 theatre projects and performance pieces and received a

number of outside accolades for these endeavors. Students and alumni have worked with a variety of professional artists and have also gone on to create theatre companies of their own. They have also taught at a number of colleges and universities, and have embarked on successful professional careers at institutions around the country.



Tours

MFA productions have toured to international festivals in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Egypt, Poland and Hungary. National tours of shows have included trips to Boston, New York City, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago, and Austin, Texas.

In the summer of 2009, a group of MFA students did a Study Abroad Program to Wroclaw, Poland. There they attended the Grotowski Institute's festival, "The World as a Place of Truth," a celebration of the life and work of the famous Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. The students also participated in a five-day, six-hours-a-day workshop with Teatr ZAR, the in-house theatre company at the Grotowski Institute.

In the summer of 2011, the program presented a showcase at the ToRoNaDa Space in New York City. The two-week showcase, entitled *Modicums*, includes *The Natasha Plays*; *Return to Sender* by Shannon McPhee; *The Title Sounded Better in French* by Lola B. Pierson; *GIRLS F/M* by Julia M. Smith; *Apartment 213* by Joseph Ritsch.

Conferences

In 1995, the program organized and sponsored a conference in 1995 for what eventually became the Network of Ensemble Theatres (NET). Participating companies included Cornerstone, Touchstone, Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble Independent Eye, and Teatro Pregones.

In 2000, then-MFA director Juanita Rockwell and Philip Arnoult of the Center for International Theatre Development co-directed "International Origins for New Theatre Practice." Approximately 150 artists and educators from 37 countries attended, with speakers including Richard Armstrong (his first visit), Tamas Fodor (Studio K, Budapest), Anne Wanjugu (Nairobi), Marijke Hoogenboom (das Arts, Amsterdam), Putu Wijaya

Towson University: College of Fine Arts and Communication
M.F.A. in Theatre Arts

(Jakarta) and many more, and US artists Norman Frisch, Ruth Malezcech, Molly Smith and Anne Bogart.

In the fall of 2008 the program hosted *Critic!* a theatre artist and critic symposium. Participants included *Time Out New York* theatre editor David Cote; Jim O'Quinn of *American Theatre Magazine*; Andy Probst of *American Theatre Web*; John Freedman of *The Moscow Times*; and Judy Rousuck of WYPR and *The Baltimore Sun*. Marc Steiner of WEAA (Morgan State University radio) officiated.

The 2009-10 academic year saw the involvement and participation in (along with the entire Towson Theatre Department) Towson University's "New Russian Drama" project in the 2009-10 academic year. Students performed in a number of productions in the year-long project.

In the spring of 2010, the program hosted the "Contemporary Natya" conference, organized by student Shobha Subramanian.



Awards

Two students received Fulbright Scholar awards upon graduation from the program:

- Rob Clingan, Japan
- Barbara Lanciers, Hungary

"Best of Baltimore" Awards from the *Baltimore CityPaper*:

- Guest artist Shozo Sato's *Iago's Plot* a Noh adaptation of *Othello* (inaugural production of the program, 1993)
- Gabriel Shanks and Denise Kumani Gantt's *Three Stories to the Ground* (original play, 1998)
- Faculty member Naoko Maeshiba/Kibism's *Paraffin* (2009)
- Joseph Ritsch's *Apartment 213*, co-produced with Iron Crow Theatre (original performance piece, 2011)
- Lola B. Pierson's *Office Ladies*, co-produced with The Acme Corporation (original play, 2012)

Two alumni have received OBIE Awards:

- Barbara Lanciers
- Gabriel Shanks

Fup Duck by Caroline Reck ('10), presented at Salvage Vanguard Theater in Austin, TX, 2010 and 2012 was the winner of two B. Iden Payne Awards (2012).

Towson University: College of Fine Arts and Communication
M.F.A. in Theatre Arts

Articles

Towson MFA theatre projects have been written about in a number of journals, newspapers, and magazines, including:

- *American Theatre Magazine*
- *Yale Theater*
- *Slavic and East European Performance*
- *Baltimore CityPaper*
- *The Baltimore Sun*

Professional Accomplishments

Among the theatre artists that students and alumni have worked with on a professional basis are Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson, Lee Breuer and Squonk Opera.

Student and alumni work has been produced at a variety of New York venues including The Kitchen; Mabou Mines/Suite; The Ontological at St. Marks; HERE; New York Musical Theatre Festival; P.S. 122; The Culture Project; The Public Theatre; Arts at St. Anne's; Joe's Pub; and La Mama ETC.

Alumni have leadership positions in a number of cultural institutions including: The Trust for Mutual Understanding (New York); the Drama League (New York); Center Stage (Baltimore); The Smithsonian's Discovery Theatre (Washington, D.C.); The Maryland Ensemble Theatre (Frederick, MD); Irondale Ensemble Project (Brooklyn, NY); Rep Stage (Columbia, MD).

Alumni have held professorships or full-time teaching positions at such institutions as: Old Dominion University; University of Micronesia; Kuala Lumpur University; National Theatre School of Canada; Illinois Wesleyan University; Salem State University; Cedar Crest College; Towson University; McDaniel College; Southwestern Oregon Community College; Morgan State University.

Alumni are currently chairs of theatre departments at Gallaudet University, Stevenson University and Ohio Wesleyan University.