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## The Season Ticket, Fall 1998

Columbia College Chicago

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# The Season Ticket

Columbia College Theater Department

Fall 1998

## Inside this Edition of The Season Ticket...

- Find out what's happening with the theater department faculty
- Meet the new addition to the theater department, the director of AV, Peter Lukidis
- Look at the poetry of *An Evening With Langston Hughes* with director Chuck Smith
- Listen to Brian Shaw try to describe the undecipherable Plasticene ensemble piece, *Have Not Hold*
- Straight from the horse's mouth, director David Cromer tells it all about *Dead End*
- Take a sneak peak into *Your Own Thing* as Susan Padveen, director, shakes her groove thing

And much, much more!!!!!!!

### Meet Peter...

On staff this semester, we have a new director of AV (Audio/Visual) in the theater department. His name is Peter Lukidis. Peter was born here in Chicago, and then moved around with his family until he found himself back here after college. When he came back, he left only twice: once to go to graduate school at American Repertory Theater (Harvard University), and another time to live in New York for two years.

Peter got into Audio/Visual work to support himself as an actor. He did freelance work in Chicago for many

years. "With freelance work it's easy because if you need to you can turn down a job to do a play, and hopefully you'll have enough cash stored away to last the run of the show," Peter explained. He still acts in trade show work, and industrials. We are very excited to have Peter on staff with us this year.



## Theater Department Semester Opens with Two Different Looks at Ensemble Theater

The two first shows at Columbia College's Theater Department this semester were exciting workshops that approached the art of theater from two very different angles. The Plasticene ensemble, with faculty member Brian Shaw and Columbia students, formed a physical theater piece, *Have Not Hold*, which used very little text. Faculty member Chuck Smith directed a piece entitled *A Poetry Evening with Langston Hughes*, which was text based. Both of these shows were entertaining and were unique shows that took a different look at drama than the standard play would.

### **Educating About a Great Poet**

#### An interview with Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith was directing a play at The Goodman Theatre during the spring semester that alluded frequently to the great poet, Langston Hughes. Upon seeing performances of this show, many students approached Chuck asking who Langston Hughes was. That was when Chuck realized that he wanted to teach the student body about Langston Hughes by having them perform his work. He had been given a skeleton of a show fifteen years ago based on Langston Hughes' work, and using this as a starting point, Chuck decided to put together a show. He tried to cast everyone who auditioned, which gave him a sixteen-person cast because he really wanted to use as many people as he could. "The difference between directing this and a regular play is that this was always a work in progress," Chuck told me. "We were always making changes, and if someone ever wanted to try something, I let them go nuts and try it. It differs from when a director has an idea of what it's going to look like. I had no idea until the week before we went into performances."

*An Evening with Langston Hughes* was an ensemble piece with high energy and commitment. They decided as a group what order the pieces would go in, and they all had input into the direction that the piece took. And in seeing the performance, it was easy to tell what Chuck confirmed: "We had a great time."

### *Acting No Words Can Describe*

#### An interview with Brian Shaw

How do you explain something with no words? When Dexter Bullard, Brian Shaw and the rest of Plasticene came together, they had a concept of non-text based theater in mind. Their shows are put together by ensemble work. They start with a resource, Brian Shaw tells us, and that usually means set pieces and/or props. *Have Not Hold*, which was recently staged in our own New Studio Theater, used five scrims, which could be moved back and forth. Other Plasticene shows started in similar ways; *Doorslam* began with three doors, *Refuge* with four carts, and *Volume XII* started with two staircases, a platform, and 45 encyclopedias. Then they use an idea. "Don't think story, think theme," Brian tells us. "*Have Not Hold* was based in ideas about ambition and the supernatural or fate. *Doorslam* was paranoia, *Refuge* was-- well-- refuge, and *Volume XII* was love triangles. Then, we play! Literally, we get the set done immediately so we can play with what it does, how it can be manipulated, how the body reacts to it, and how it creates space. We use the plasticity of it." He went on to explain that the curtains in *Have Not Hold* were different than other sets because there was less physical interaction with them. They played more with chairs and poles in the beginning.

Those of you who have not seen a Plasticene performance are probably confused by now. So Brian tried to explain their shows to anyone who has

working actors in the cast. David has been very happy with the work of these students. "I am getting more out of the



actors than I was expecting, a complexity of observation." That shows him what skills these students are learning at Columbia. Also, technically, the play is difficult because there is swimming being done on stage, which David tells us we have to come and see to find out how it's done. "The simple magic of theater is employed" he tells us. This play is definitely a challenge but David really believes that it is a good experience for the actors. "So many graduating students are starting theater companies, and they should learn that it's a good idea to try something big and impossible instead of settling. Making a big splash and doing something that no one has done for a while can get them a

lot of good attention."

And final words from the director, "It's just a really cool play."

### Is It Laugh-In or Your Own Thing?

An interview with director,  
Susan Padveen

*Your Own Thing* originally opened off-Broadway at the Orpheum Theater on January 13, 1968, and continued in performances for a 933 performance run. During that time, the show won the New York Drama Critics Circle Prize and had wonderful reviews. But somehow this musical has been overlooked and seldom performed since it closed at the Orpheum Theater. Also, so few of today's theater generation have even heard of it because it was never made into a movie and the soundtrack never got updated past 8-track form. So how did Columbia College find this groovy 60's rock and roll musical? Susan Padveen, the director, gave the answer: "We wanted to do two versions of a Shakespeare play. A faculty member suggested *Your Own Thing*, so I then wrote Ken Mandelbaum, who writes for *Playbill*, and asked him for a list of musicals based on Shakespearean plays." After going through the list and looking into the plays, *Your Own Thing* was chosen partially because the 60's genre music would make it more interesting for the audience and the actors. But Susan



not seen one, "It's hard to describe. It's a very few simple elements explored with a 'story' in a theater-based context. There are scenes and characters, but it's more an exploration of the elements. There are few words, so the work is mysterious and open to interpretation as to what is happening. It should be experienced through the body responding to physical action on stage. It's creepy and often dark." Plasticene is a truly intense experience that should not be missed... so if you missed it, then next time be sure that you make it to the show on time!

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### **The Bad Boys of the East River**

An interview with David Cromer,  
director

*Dead End*, set in the 1930s at the height of the great Depression, is the story of children who live on a tenement street in New York City and the choices that they make to survive. The truest words about the play come right from the director, David Cromer, who when asked about why he chose this play replied, "For the same reason I choose any play, because it's about the simple act of surviving, because it's a heightened version of life. It's interesting because it is full of beautiful slang and language of its time. It is exciting for actors because if they're working sloppily or carelessly, it could seem like an irrelevant old chestnut, but if they dig into that chestnut, every action is immediately recognizable, in that the struggle is timeless. Pompous as this sounds, it's a window into our common humanity, which is the only good reason for art."

Many people know of *Dead End* because of the classic Warner Brothers movie based on the play. For those of us who have seen this movie, David wanted to stress the differences that separate the play from its on-screen

version: "The movie had to be softened because of the production code. The play is more violent, sexual, and dirty. It's ultimately truer to the experiences that the characters are having. It's a great movie, but the play is the original version, bigger than life, and these characters are in the same room as you, and that's more exciting than a movie." David goes on to explain that there are also Hollywood differences that separate the play from the movie: "In the play, the character Gimpty has a tangible scar, his leg is shriveled by rickets (which is an illness from a Vitamin D deficiency due to malnutrition). As a kid he didn't get enough to eat, and he has to carry that forever. In the movie he's hunky Joel McCrae, so the only thing he has against him is unemployment, which is still a challenge but it's not as severe. Also, the thing that breaks Baby Face Martin's heart in the play had to be completely eviscerated for the movie for puritanical reasons. That robs the character of the truth of what happened to him and what he did."

Although the situations and circumstances are probably more severe than those most of us deal with in today's society, there is still truth that we can find through the characters portrayed in *Dead End*. "The Depression was a desperate time; half of the country was out of work, which means that half of the country didn't know where their next meal would come from. And on top of that, these people were living in the biggest, richest city in the world. If you hit somebody long enough, they'll hit back." Unfortunately, the large cast and technical difficulty of the play make it done less than it used to be. In the thirties, actor salaries were lower and *Dead End* has a huge cast, which in its original production used no doubling of actors. Although there is some double casting in Columbia's production, there are still 30 hard-

also liked the themes this play explores. Very similar to *Twelfth Night*, one of the central themes of *Your Own Thing* is to be yourself. It also puts more consideration toward exploring sexual identity by defying impediments to falling in love such as age differences and sexual orientation. Susan said that she thought it would be "interesting to do a play that looks at identity, because one of the things you figure out in school, is who you are."

The play only uses the main plot of *Twelfth Night*, the love triangle between Orsino, Viola, and Olivia. Although there are bits of Shakespeare left in the text, most of the text is prose. "The challenge is where it all comes together." The major difference between *Your Own Thing* and *Twelfth Night* is the setting. *Your Own Thing* takes place in New York City in the 60's. There is a band called The Apocalypse, which, as the clowns in *Twelfth Night* did, keeps things moving. Olivia owns a hip New York discotheque, and Viola dresses as a man to join The Apocalypse, of which the manager is Orsino.

The setting is a major influence in *Your Own Thing*. There are references to 60's politics throughout the play, and the U.S. had such a different flavor to it that the era needs to be very clear, as does the New York City setting. So how are they going to bring the city and the 60's to the stage? Well, the original production used slides to demonstrate different commentators, such as Shakespeare and God, who interject their observations periodically. In the Columbia production, the commentators will be puppets, designed in different examples of 60's art. The design team, consisting of student set designer Wendy Hansen, costume designer Tom Kieffer, and lighting designer Mary McDonald Badger, will have their artistic work cut out for them. And with the direction team of Susan Padveen, choreographer Wilfredo

Rivera, and musical director Joe Cerqua, *Your Own Thing* will prove to be a far-out time.

Be sure to come shake your groove thing with *Your Own Thing*, which starts previews in the New Studio at the 72 East 11<sup>th</sup> St. Building Wednesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm, December 10 at 4 pm, December 11 and 12 at 7:30. Opening night is Sunday, December 13 at 7 pm, and it runs Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup> at 11 am, December 16 at 2 pm, December 17, 18, and 19 at 7:30, and December 20<sup>th</sup> at 3 pm.

## Theater Department Faculty/Staff Comings and Goings - Fall 1998

*Have you been wondering what the faculty at Columbia's Theater Department have been doing but been too afraid to ask? Well, now you can hear the scoop...*

### **Mary McDonald Badger**

Designed the lighting for JellyEye Drum Theater and three pieces in the Dance Chicago Festival. She will be designing lights for the mainstage Columbia College show *Your Own Thing* in December.

### **David Cromer**

Acted and directed *Angels in America Parts I & II* with the Journeymen Theater Company. The production received five Jeff Awards: best production, best direction, best ensemble, best sound design, and best performance by an actress in a supporting role for Annabel Armour. He is just directed the mainstage Columbia College production of *Dead End*.

### **Martin de Maat**

Martin was just awarded a Ph.D. in communication arts from the Advanced

Studies Institute. He also directed, *Tell Me That You Love Me*, *Junie Moon* at the Bailiwick Arts Center and *Sleeping Beauty* at the Theatre Building. He is currently working on expanding the Second City Training Center to New York.

#### **Jeff Ginsberg**

Jeff spent the summer directing Sam Shepard's *True West* at Stage Left Theater, and acting in *Shopping and F\*\*king* at Bailiwick Repertory.

#### **Henry Godinez**

Directed *Straight As a Line*, a world premiere, at The Goodman Studio Theatre, and played Don Quixote in Dale Calandra's new adaptation of *The Adventures of Don Quixote* at Oak Park Festival Theater this past summer. He is directing *A Christmas Carol* for the third time at The Goodman Theatre this year. He will be co-directing Columbia's production of *Twelfth Night* this spring.

#### **Cecilie O'Reilly**

Cecilie was the accent coach last summer for *The Playboy of the Western World* at Steppenwolf Theatre and for *Straight as a Line* at the Goodman Theatre. She was also the dialect coach for the ABC-TV series *Cupid*. This fall she directed and acted in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* at The Chicago Humanities Festival, at the Goodman Studio Theatre, which went up November 7th.

#### **Susan Padveen**

Susan is directing a workshop of a new musical at Stage Left Theater entitled *Prairie Lights*, which goes up in December. Also in December, she is directing the Mainstage Columbia College production of *Your Own Thing*.

#### **Sheldon Patinkin**

Sheldon helped organize and teach at a new training center at the Steppenwolf Theatre over the summer. He also

staged concert versions of *Carmen* and *Eugene Onegin* with The Lyric Opera Center for the Grant Park summer concerts. He will be co-directing Columbia's production of *Twelfth Night* this spring as well as Trapdoor Theater's production of Ionesco's *Killing Game*.

#### **Susan Philpot**

Worked on the Columbia College Mainstage production *Dead End* as the dialect coach, and appeared in a cameo in the same production as Baby Face Martin's mother.

#### **Brian Posen**

Brian recently performed in a production of *3 Musketeers* and in the Jeff recommended production of *The Art of Dining* at The Theater Building. He is appearing at the Second City Skybox Theater in a production entitled *Piano Bar*, and in a production called *It's a Mediocre Life*.

#### **Holly Quinn**

Holly has been busy working with XSIGHT! Performance Group, MASS Ensemble, and doing independent projects. In August she performed with MASS ensemble in San Francisco, Minneapolis, and here in Chicago for the Around the Coyote Festival. In October, she will be going to Alaska for a teaching and performance residency at the University of Anchorage. Holly and collaborator Julia Rhoads were nominated for a Ruth Page Award for choreography and performance for their piece, *Royal Flush*.

#### **Tom Mula**

Tom Mula spent the summer acting at Peninsula Players in Door County, WI. On November 27th, Mula begins the world-premiere performance of his one-man show based on his best-selling book, *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol*, which runs November 27 to December 27 in the Goodman Studio Theatre.

This season, NPR will re-broadcast the radio version; also, the audio version will be carried in the "Wireless" audio catalog. He will be guest artist at Columbia this spring, playing Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*.

#### **Brian Shaw**

In July, in conjunction with Plasticene, Brian conducted two one-week workshops in physical theater techniques. In August, he presented a paper on ethics in community-based theater at the Association for Theater in Higher Education Conference in San Antonio. Brian recently worked on and performed in *Have Not Hold*, a new Plasticene show created in collaboration with students from the Theater Department. Brian and his wife Stephanie are expecting their second and third child in late April 1999.

#### **Chuck Smith**

Chuck recently directed *A Poetry Evening with Langston Hughes*, which performed in the Classic Theater at Columbia, and at the ETA Theatre production of *Looking for a Good Thing* written by Von Washington.

#### **David Woolley**

David is co-creator of *Dirk & Guido: The Swordsmen!* which is in its ninth national tour. He is also playing Smee in *Peter Pan* at the new American in December and January. His latest fight directing work is for the Columbia College Mainstage, *Dead End*, and for ART at the Royal George Theater.

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### **STUDENT DIRECTING PROJECTS**

Each semester, a group of student directors each direct a play with actors

from the Department. Come and see these new talents on stage!

#### *Macdougall St. Blues*

By Jack Kerouac, adapted for the stage and directed by Ryan Greer  
November 17-20

#### *The Boys Next Door*

By Tom Griffin  
Directed By Jay Fontanetta  
November 23-25

#### *Anything For You*

By Carol Celesia  
Directed By Maureen O'Brien  
December 1-3

#### *Postcards*

By Carol K. Mack  
Directed By Bob Kuper  
December 1-3

#### *The Lesson*

By Eugene Ionesco  
Directed By Tom Vencil  
December 7-10

#### *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/The Rainbow Is Enuf*

By Ntozake Shange  
Directed By Michael Matthews  
December 14-17

#### *Rosalie Pritchett*

By Carlton W. Molette III and Barbara J. Molette  
Directed By Jesse Jackson  
December 14-17

#### *Words, Words, Words*

By David Ives  
Directed By Jaime Jennings  
January 11-14

#### *The Bear*

By Anton Chekhov  
Directed By Joanie Schultz  
January 11-14

#### *The Voice of the Turtle*



By John van Druten  
Directed by Kevin Hanna  
January 11-14

*Don't Drink the Water*  
By Woody Allen  
Directed By Beth Bruins  
January 11-14

*Private Lives*  
By Noel Coward  
Directed by Matt Fontaine  
January 19-21

*The Heidi Chronicles*  
By Wendy Wasserstein  
Directed By Ryan Keller  
January 19-21

**Mark Your Calendars!**  
**Don't Miss Columbia College Theater**  
**Department's Upcoming Productions!!**

**The Theodore Ward African-American Playwriting  
Contest Winner,**

**Fable of the Grandmama Tree**

By Benard Cummings

Directed by Artist-in-Residence Chuck Smith

February 24-March 7

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***Twelfth Night***

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Artist-in Residence Henry Godinez and

Department Chair Sheldon Patinkin

Featuring Artist-in-Residence Tom Mula as Malvolio

March 18-28

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***Roundheads and Peakheads***

By Bertolt Brecht

Directed by Faculty member Joann Shapiro

April 21- May 2