



Notes & News

CELEBRATING THEATRE IN MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi Theatre Association

<http://www.mta-online.org>

Spring 2006

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings to all!

Well, Mississippi Theatre Association Festival 2006 is behind us, but what a great time we had! Starkville Community Theatre worked hard to make the festival a success, and it really showed. Thanks!

Wow, what a weekend! We had record attendance at this year's festival, due largely to the addition of the Individual Events Festival. Thanks to all the members who worked hard to make it possible. There were also some great workshops presented by talented individuals from all aspects of theatre arts. Thanks to all our adjudicators and guests.

A special thanks goes to our special guest speakers, professional designer Myrna Colley-Lee and to Sam Haskell III, former executive vice president and worldwide head of television for the William Morris Agency and the founder of Stars Over Mississippi. I hope their inspiring stories encourage you all.

And congratulations to our dear friend Shannon Robert, the recipient of this year's Cowboy Maloney Award.

Again, much gratitude goes out to all the individuals and organizations that have made ways for those in need to be able to attend the festival this year.

Just as we all rested from MTA, we began preparing for SETC!

Our parent organization held the festival in Orlando, Fla., this year. The weather was great and so was MTA!

Mississippi was represented in the Secondary Division by Hattiesburg High School's "The Katrina Project:

■ See President, page 6

Record Crowds Attend MTA Festival

The 2006 festival brought record crowds with over 500 people to the MTA festival. Not only did we have a record number of people attending, we had 18 high schools participating in one of the five festivals that ran throughout the weekend and at least nine community theatres attending the festival.

We certainly cannot write a story about 2006 without first thanking Starkville Community Theatre, Theatre MSU and Starkville High School for their hard work, countless hours and commitment to making this year's festival a huge success. A round of applause for these groups!

This year's festival saw the addition of



two new events — the Individual Events Festival and the guest speakers. For those of you who did not attend the festival, you missed a treat when we heard MJ talking with Myrna Colley-Lee about her career in the theatre, as well as Sam Haskell's inspiring speech about getting involved and

making a difference by using your God-given talents. Did you know that Sam Haskell, an Amory, Miss., native, won a best acting award at the North High School Drama Festival?

This year Hattiesburg High School and Delta Center Stage represented Mississippi at the Southeastern Theatre Conference. These theatres did exceptionally well at the regional festival.



The Casts of "The Katrina Project: Hell and High Water" and "A Woman Called Truth" show off their plaques and trophies after the SETC awards ceremony. The regional festival took place in Orlando, Fla.

Mississippi Takes Home Hardware at SETC

Congratulations to Hattiesburg High School and Delta Center Stage for their fine productions at SETC. Not only did they represent their communities and theatre programs, they represented the State of Mississippi at the regional Festival.

This year both productions brought

home the Runner-Up Best Production Award.

MJ Etua, MTA president, said their success is a testament to the excellent theatre in Mississippi.

"MTA is very proud of these theatre programs!" she said.

Delta Center Stage was also awarded Best Costumes, Excellence in

Ensemble and Excellence in Acting. Hattiesburg High School took home two all-star cast members: Parin Patel and Cathy Yu. Krishana Donaldson was named Best Supporting Actress. The production also received the Best Set and Best Emotional Integrity Awards.

Congratulations to these productions!



Hattiesburg High School takes the stage in "The Katrina Project: Hell and High Water."



Pillow Academy performs "I Never Saw Another Butterfly."



Students take part in a workshop.

MTA Festival Results in Secondary Division

Dominic J. Cunetto Award for Best Production

Hattiesburg High School
"The Katrina Project: Hell and High Water" by Michael Marks and Mackenzie Westmoreland

Runner-Up Best Production

Picayune Memorial High School
"Home" by Samm-Art Williams

Best Supporting Actress

Krishana Donaldson, Hattiesburg High School

Best Supporting Actor

Chase Anderson, Oak Grove High School

Best Actress

Carley Beesley, Hancock High School

Best Actor

Josh Means, Picayune Memorial High School

Best Costume Design

Oak Grove High School

Best Scenic Design

Brandon High School

Overall Technical Excellence

Hattiesburg High School

Best Director

Michael Marks and Mackenzie Westmoreland, Hattiesburg High School

All-Star Cast

Rachel Foley, Starkville High School
Chris Dunnells, Biloxi High School
Shelby Cade, Pillow Academy
Cody Jarrell, Hancock High School
Zachary Greenwood, Hattiesburg High School
Rashard Smith, Hattiesburg High School
Arlise Fletcher, Picayune Memorial High School
Sydney Blackwell, Brandon High School
Tim Burkhead, Oxford High School
Charlie Davis, Oxford High School

Individual Event and 10-Minute Festival Results

Individual Events Festival

Scene Design

1. Kelsey Stephens, Desoto Central
2. Jessica Veazey, Desoto Central

Costume Design

1. Esther Smith, Oak Grove High School
2. Grant Stephens, Purvis High School

Poster Design

1. Arden Jenner, WINGS
2. Kristi Masters, Purvis High School

Scene Acting

1. Laurel High School
2. St. Martin High School

Duet Acting

1. Amy Barnes and Sara Linger, St. Martin High School
2. Daniel Clarke and Kelsey Stephens, Desoto Central

Male Monologue

1. Melvin Richardson, Laurel High School
2. Josh Means, Picayune Memorial High School

Female Monologue

1. Jessica Boyd, Laurel High School
2. Lindsey Bristol, Biloxi High School

10-Minute Festival

Best Overall Comedy: "Dirty Pop"

Best Writer: April Zogaib, Picayune Memorial High School

Best Director: Sara Cohen, Pearl River Central High School

Best Assistant Director/Technical: Audrey Kim, WINGS

Best Actor: Jey Ulmer, Washington High School

Best Actress: Rachel Walker, Pearl River Central High School

Best Overall Drama:

"The Melancholiness of a Single Frozen Banana"

Best Writer: Zac Evans, Purvis High School

Best Director: Christine Lopez, Biloxi High School

Best Assistant Director/Technical: Molly Glover, Desoto Central High School

Best Actor: Bobby Bodenhamer, Pearl River Central High School

Best Actress: Erin Hurry, Biloxi High School and Rachel Williams, WINGS



Successful Mississippians Inspire MTA Festival Participants

On two separate stages at the 2006 MTA Festival, two successful Mississippians inspired festival participants with their advice about the theatre business and life in general.

In an informal question-and-answer time, professional costume designer Myrna Colley-Lee, a resident of Charleston, Miss., gave some insight into how she succeeded in her career.

"I don't know if I see obstacles," she said.

After obtaining a bachelor's degree in Art Education and a master's degree in Scenic and Costume Design, Colley-Lee has designed both costumes and sets for numerous productions around the country. She now adds house design and production design to her list of credentials.

Colley-Lee offered advice to festival participants aspiring to become a designer.

"You need to look at a lot of theatre and visualize art and see dramatic moments out in the world so you can bring that back to the stage," she said. "It's your imagination that makes it live for other people. Read-

ing a script and making it visual for other people is the whole challenge of design."

Along with her work in design, Colley-Lee also spoke about her work as a commissioner for the Mississippi Arts Commission.

"From a commission standpoint, we have kind of a mission statement to feature the artists in Mississippi, to encourage arts in Mississippi and to connect Mississippi's image with its artists so that people have a reason to come to Mississippi and see what we do and who we are."

With a crowd full of young Mississippi artists, or thespians, in the auditorium, Colley-Lee expressed her delight about the amount of theatre in the state.

"It's heartening to see that there's so much theatre in Mississippi," she said.

Sam Haskell III would probably agree.

In his address to festival participants, Haskell, former world-wide head of television for the William Morris Agency in Los Angeles, expressed his own thoughts about the importance of theatre.

"Theatre people have an understanding

that goes beyond normal understanding because you look at all parts of life when you're in the theatre," he said. "You understand all kinds of characters."

Haskell, an Amory native and former award winner at a Mississippi theatre festival, gave advice to the young people in the audience. He spoke about how persistence and hard work in the mail room and other positions boosted him to one of the most powerful positions at the William Morris Agency.

Haskell also shared his thoughts on success.

"I believe that success is not luck. I believe that it comes from opportunity and preparation meeting at the crossroads," he said.

Haskell believes that part of that preparation comes from relying on relationships with friends, parents and teachers, especially those involved with theatre. He said that people in theatre understand life and the potential it holds.

He added, "The only way that you can have that understanding is to have done something yesterday to prepare for understanding today that will give you better understanding tomorrow."

With such advice from both Haskell and Colley-Lee, festival participants gained more knowledge of how to succeed in whatever avenue the future may take them.



Colley-Lee poses for a snapshot after speaking at the festival.



Haskell addresses festival participants.

Renew Your MTA Membership!

If you did not attend the MTA Festival in January, not only did you miss an excellent festival, but you also missed an opportunity to renew your Mississippi Theatre Association membership.

As you know, MTA is supported in part by a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission and from your membership. The dues are very reasonable and go to an excellent cause...supporting your statewide theatre association!

To renew your membership, please visit www.mta-online.org.

Northwest Rankin Senior Receives MTA Scholarship

MTA awarded its 2006 scholarship to Neill Kelly of Northwest Rankin High School. Kelly has dedicated almost 2,000 hours of his time to one of the loves of his life – theatre.

"Theatre is what I love to do, to breathe, to be," Kelly said.

Kelly has earned several awards, including Thespian of the Year at his high school and second place in the solo pantomime division at the Church of God Mississippi Teen Talent Competition.

Kelly has also helped his high school theatre

group earn a superior rating at the Mississippi State Thespian Conference. As part of the Northwest Rankin High School Thespian Troupe 5727, he received second place at the Tennessee Williams Student Acting Competition in the scene division.

Kelly has served as vice president and scribe of his high school's theatre group. He has also worked with the Black Rose Theatre in Brandon and the Cobblestone Church of God Drama Team.

With the MTA scholarship, Kelly said he plans to

attend Ole Miss where he will pursue a degree in theatre education.

"I am planning on studying theatre education to provide other students with the same opportunities that I have had and have achieved so much personal growth with," he said.

As a testament to his dedication to theatre, Kelly recently became inducted into the Mississippi Thespian Hall of Fame.

"Theatre has truly changed my life," he said. "I would not trade the experiences I have had in theatre for the world."



MTA Festival Results for Community Theatre Division

Warren McDaniel Award for Best Production

Delta Center Stage (Greenville)
"A Woman Called Truth" by Sandra Fenichel Asher

Runner-Up Best Production

Center Players (Madison)
"Laundry and Bourbon" by James McLure

Best Supporting Actress

Margaret Carey-McCray,
Delta Center Stage

Best Supporting Actor

William Murphy, Delta Center Stage

Best Actress

Alison Stafford, Center Players

Best Actor

Wade Chambers, Delta Center Stage

Best Costume Design

Delta Center Stage

Best Scenic Design

Center Players

Overall Technical Excellence

Center Players

Best Director

Willie Anderson, Center Players

All-Star Cast

Starkville Community Theatre - Madeline Golden and Natalie Kern
Tallahatchie River Players - Mary Stanton and Rick Robbins
Delta Center Stage - Jacqueline Smith, Robin Kelly and Tim Bixler
Just Over the Rainbow Theatre - Rachelle Fortenberry
Center Players - Emily Wright



Delta Center Stage



Center Players

Robert Receives 2006 Cowboy Maloney Award

MTA named Shannon Robert as the recipient of the 2006 Cowboy Maloney Award.

For the award, the MTA Board of Directors selects an individual who has significantly added to the successful



Robert

operation of MTA and someone who has promoted theatre throughout Mississippi. The board looks at actions that reflect a positive image, regional recognition, long tenure, program establishment and administrative service.

MTA Executive Director Stephen CUNETTO said the board of directors voted unanimously to bestow MTA's highest award on Robert.

"The board recognized how much Shannon has given to theatre in Mississippi and that she embodies all of the qualities of the past recipients of this prestigious award," he said. "She is a very talented individual who genuinely cares about her students, her peers and her

craft."

Robert currently works as scenic designer, director and associate professor of theatre and communication at William Carey College.

Denise Halbach, former MTA president and current president of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, said Robert deserves the award for her work with the KCACTF, SETC and MTA.

"Shannon has brought regional and national recognition to college and university theatre in Mississippi," she said. "More importantly, Shannon is a dedicated and brilliant teacher who has inspired her students to become theatre artists in their own rights."

Robert has designed for several universities and theatre groups in Mississippi. She has performed, choreographed, directed and designed costumes, lights, sets, make-up and hair for 17 seasons of Carey Dinner Theatre.

Robert serves as vice chair of the American College Theatre Festival Region IV and serves on the KCACTF national committee. She also served as the Mississippi representative for SETC and as past chair of MTA's college and university division.

Summer Workshop for Theatres Set for July

Don't miss out. Mark your calendar now for July 22, 2006. Plans are being made for the annual MTA Community Theatre Summer Workshop to be held in Jackson.

Lynn Nelson, community theatre chair, and Kenneth McDade, community theatre vice chair, are hard at work planning the day-long event that will bring you up to date on what's new in theatre, let you network with fellow thespians from all over the state and teach you new and exciting things to help your theatre be its best.

If there is a particular topic you would like to see covered or with which you need help, please let Lynn Nelson know so she can try to incorporate it into the workshop. E-mail your request to Lynn Nelson at lynn_nelson@hotmail.com.

Watch the newsletter and Listserv e-mails for further information soon.

Subscribe to the MTA Listserv by sending a request to the following e-mail address:

mississippi theatre-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Theatre Groups Receive Help from MTA and Others

With the amount of devastation in the southern part of our state, MTA 2006 was even more special to some of the students attending. Due to the financial implications of Hurricane Katrina, several of the schools lacked funding to attend the annual conference. This did not stop them from making the journey to Starkville. However, without the aid and support of many individuals, their journey may not have been possible.

MTA assisted theatres by offering 10 scholarships to attend the festival, finding free lodging and raising funds totaling more than \$3,000 from individuals and corporations. Some of the corporations included Barbizon Lighting Company, Mainstage Theatre Lighting and Theatrical Lighting Systems.

Besides finding ways to attend festivals, coast theatre groups are also finding ways to mount productions in the face of great devastation.

Theatres continue to struggle to find scripts to read or set pieces and costumes for production. According to Michelle Kessler of Bay St. Louis Little Theatre, coast theatres still need help.

"We will need set pieces, costumes and funding for the shows we'd like to produce," she said. "The directors will be able to come up with lists of resources needed as soon as we know where we'll be performing."

In an effort to assist those theatres in need, MTA opened a Katrina Relief Fund. To date, almost \$3,000 has been raised, and the money will soon be made available to the theatres in need.

Support for the fund has not just come from local theatres in Mississippi. MTA has received funding from theatres all



over the country that want to give a little to help with ongoing expenses and rebuilding efforts.

Most recently, MTA received a check from the Winston-Salem Theatre Alliance. To raise the funding, theatre members sold confetti, party noise makers, glow sticks, toilet paper and so forth for their October production of "The Rocky Horror Show."

KNS Theatre on the Mississippi Gulf Coast made a sizeable donation after doing a benefit performance as did Actor's Playhouse from Pearl, Miss.

What can your theatre do to raise funding for these theatres in need? It does not have to be a benefit performance. Ask for an extra \$1 at the window or take up donations at a production. Be creative and find a way to make a contribution to the MTA Katrina Relief Fund.

Visit the MTA Web site to make a donation.

Mississippi Theatre Performs Well at KCACTF

The Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for Region IV was held Feb. 7-12 in Jacksonville, Fla., and Mississippi was well represented.

Two pairs of students made it to the semi-final round of the Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship Awards: Brad Oxnam and Lee Crouse of the University of Southern Mississippi and Vickie Hall and Laura Jackson of William Carey College. Additionally, two pairs of students made it to the final round: Kathy Newman and Hallie Sootin of USM and Joe Styron and Chad Martin of USM. Kathy Newman, a student at USM, received the NAPAT Classical Acting Award, and Ben Wheeler, also of USM, received an Honorable

Mention from Barbizon for lighting design. Joel King of William Carey College received an Honorable Mention from Barbizon for scenic design, and Wesley Guthrie, also a student at WCC, received an Honorable Mention from the Alcone National Festival Fellow/Mehron/MUC Makeup Design Nominations. Melissa Sparks from Mississippi State University received a nomination for stage management.

Mississippi's college and university faculty were an integral part of this year's regional festival. Stephen Judd of USM served as the mentor for Design Storm. Obra Quave of WCC was the coordinator of the Director's Project with USM's Robin Aronson serving as

a mentor. Monica Hayes of USM was the coordinator for Faculty Splash with Peppy Bidy of the Mississippi University for Women and Charles Bosworth of WCC as participants. Scott Mann of USM, Monica Hayes, Peppy Bidy and Charles Bosworth served as Irene Ryan judges.

Faculty that received recognition included Scott Mann for his direction of "Scapin," which was held for consideration by the National Committee, and Charles Bosworth, director of "Not Waving..."

Congratulations to all who received awards and recognition. Thanks to Mississippi's faculty members who volunteer their time to help make the regional festival successful!

College Summer Events

Although college campuses will have many empty classrooms this summer, their theaters will see plenty of action. College and university theatre departments will provide entertainment during the summer through repertory programs and other events.

At Ole Miss, the tradition of summer theatre continues with the Oxford Shakespeare Festival from June 16 until July 2. This year's festival, "Season of Adventure," will include productions of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Shakespeare's Fight Scenes" adapted by Brian Evans and "The Pirates of Penzance" by Gilbert and Sullivan.

William Carey College will also bring theatre to the community this summer through its 31st anniversary season of Carey Dinner Theatre.

For more information about these summer theatre programs, please contact the following:

For Oxford Shakespeare Festival: Visit <http://shakespeare.olemiss.edu> or call 662-915-7411

For Carey Dinner Theatre: E-mail - thecom@wmcarey.edu or 601-318-6218



"President," continued from page 1

Hell and High Water." The Community Theatre Division was represented by "A Woman Called Truth" from Delta Center Stage. Congratulations to them both!

Mississippi has three more reasons to be especially proud at SETC this year. For the first time, SETC offered four awards to honor high school students who show great promise as future artists of the theatre. The award is called the Keynote Emerging Artists of Promise. Three of the four awards were given to Mississippians: Louisville High School junior Kelsey Johnson, Picayune Memorial High School sophomore Joshua Means and WINGS member,

junior Haley Moon. The fourth recipient was Joshua Berry from Alabama. Each recipient met the keynote speakers during the festival, along with other privileges. They were also honored at the Saturday night banquet. Congratulations to our honorees!

Congratulations again to all our Mississippians who traveled to Orlando. You made us proud!

As of this month, we have not yet decided on a location for MTA 2007, but keep an eye on the Web site for progress and updates.

Blessings to all,
MJ Etua

**Find out what productions
are playing in Mississippi by
checking out the calendar on
the MTA Web site at
<http://www.mta-online.org>**

MTA has created an online calendar for Mississippi theatres to post their productions. This online calendar will provide theatres with additional publicity and provide a resource that theatre-goers can consult when traveling.

MTA hopes this resource will facilitate theatres attending each others' productions.

Each Mississippi theatre can request a username to post productions to the calendar. Please only request one username per theatre. Only productions should be added to the online calendar. Meetings, auditions, etc. should not be posted.

To post your events to the calendar, request a username by going to http://www.mta-online.org/divisions/theatre_login.htm.

Editors for Spring 2006 MTA Newsletter:

Stephen Cunetto, MTA Executive Director and Stacey Wilson, MTA Intern