

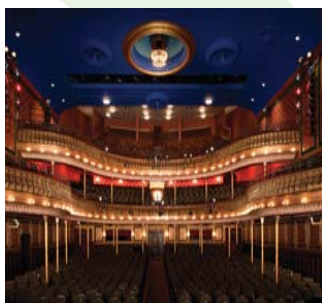
Mississippi Theatre Association

Notes & News



2011 Festival/Convention

If you love theatre, Meridian, MS is the place to be January 13-16, 2011. The Mississippi State University Riley Center, home of the historic grand opera house, will serve as the host facility for the 2011 theatre festival. Members of Company of Angels Theatre, Meridian Community College and Meridian High School are planning festival activities and preparing for thespians from all over the state to make their way to downtown Meridian.



We hope that you will make plans early to spend the weekend in Meridian and enjoy some wonderful productions, workshops and fellowship. The festival has something for everyone from high school students, college students, community theatre members and college/university theatre faculty. Workshops will be offered to enhance your knowledge of theatre. You'll be able to see high school, community theatre productions and even some youth oriented productions during the theatre for youth festival and much more.

Community Theatre Festival: With this being an AACTFest year, we anticipate having another record year for theatres wanting to participate in the festival. With this in mind, we sent out registration information through the U.S. Mail on October 15. Registration for community theatres will open on November 1. All theatres will be required to complete the registration spreadsheet, as you did last year, submit the form along with your cast/crew's registration forms by December 1, 2010 in order to hold a place in the festival.

High School Festival: Registration information for the high school division will be available online by November 1. Teachers will need to complete a registration form/spreadsheet and submit it online in order to register for the festival.

The festival website is now online and provides information about the host facility, hotel information and registration for people not attending with a theatre production. Registration is now open for festival so don't waste time. Register today! If you can't attend the festival, please renew your membership or consider making a donation. Your membership helps sustain MTA and allows us to continue to provide more services. We hope to see you in January in Meridian at the historic Grand Opera House of Meridian!

Stephen Cunetto, Executive Director

SETC State Auditions

The Mississippi Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) State Screening Auditions will be held on Saturday, December 4th (for Mississippi auditionees in the morning & the first part of the out-of-region auditionees in the afternoon) and Sunday, December 5th (for the rest of the out-of-region auditionees) in Brooks Theatre on the main campus of Hinds Community College in Raymond, MS. The MS screening auditions are the LAST qualifying auditions for the SETC to be held in Atlanta in March of 2011. So don't miss your chance to have your 60 or 90 seconds in the spotlight!

Here's something you may not know: just about ANYONE CAN APPLY TO AUDITION!!! You don't have to be a college student majoring in theatre or performance to participate! Anyone and everyone who is interested is STRONGLY encouraged to apply! The one restriction is that you must be at least 18 yrs. old to apply.

APPLYING IS VERY EASY TO DO! IT'S ALL DONE ONLINE--no tedious paper work to fill out and send through snail mail! The online application registration system opened on Wednesday Sept. 15, 2010. Interested auditionees can go to the SETC Website (www.setc.org/auditions/screening.php) to download, save, & print the "SETC Auditionee Handbook & Instructions."

Actors who audition in MS have the advantage of having longer than anyone else to submit their applications. The deadline for submitting all completed online applications is Wednesday, November 17, 2010 11:59pm CST.

Application fees are only \$25 for out-of-region applicants and \$35 for Mississippi applicants. Please contact Alison Stafford, State Auditions Coordinator & Director of Theatre at Hinds Community College (AStafford@hindsc.edu) (601-857-3267) for further information or visit the MTA website and click on the College/University Division link.

From The President



Procrastinate – to put off till another day or time; defer; delay. I am not the best at procrastination. I like to have deadlines completed a week ahead of time, and to double and triple check the assignment to make sure that everything is covered. But this last presidential letter has been the epitomy of procrastination. It is always

hard to close that last curtain, to say our goodbyes, and to let theatre depression set in. But.... Before I work to re-adapt my life to the real world, the MTA board has an incredible festival in the works for MTA 2011.

When I was in high school, I was a part of The Merrystreet Players, whose home was at The Grand Opera House of Mississippi. We were a group of students from several of the local public and private, city and county schools. We worked to produce the plays “I Will” and “Top Ten” and we toured to schools and churches in and around the Meridian area. We learned to create, to get along, to travel and experience things that we would never have had the opportunity to experience without our common bond of theatre. From learning about William Shakespeare, to the areas on a stage, to

memorizing, learning choreography, putting together a summer theatre program, as well as giving us our best friends, confidants, and allowing us to have our first loves and heartbreaks, it was all under the roof of what is now known as The Riley Entertainment Center.

The Riley Center is also the site where in January, you will compete, experience, and stand in awe of a theatre that is frozen in time. From the adjudicators who are gifted in the various areas of theatre; to the workshops for the actor, board member, teacher, set designers and more; to the socials where we can enjoy the company of others who support our mission and love of theatre; and to escape into each of the shows that come onto the stages, there are many opportunities to be had.

It is ironic that the building and the people who helped me to understand what theatre is, is the place and many of the same people that we come back to in January. I wish that this not just be a festival, but an experience that you will remember and will impact you, in much the same way that this building and The Merrystreet Players have impacted me. I am eternally grateful to my past, as well as my present MTA family, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds. Break-a-leg and we will see you in January!!!

~ Stacy Howell, President

**Support your state
association!**

**Renew your
membership today**

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

Silent Auction for Scholarship

MTA is implementing an MTA Silent Auction as part of the MTA 2011 Festival with proceeds going to college scholarships for our high school students. We're asking all MTA members and theatres to look around their homes for framed art, sculpture, quilts, jewelry, and other similar items---valued at a minimum of \$25--or books, gift items, even gift cards, theatre or concert tickets---or theatrical items such as costumes (in good condition, please!) wigs, props, headpieces---to bring to the festival for the auction. The more inventory at the auction, the larger the scholarships for our high school students planning to major in theatre! Please help make this a success by looking around your house or theatre, or by purchasing something for the auction. Please e-mail Auction Chair Debbie Craig if you any questions at dmc drama@yahoo.com.

MTA Provides \$2,000 Theatre Scholarship

This summer the MTA Scholarship Committee revised the MTA Theatre Scholarship guidelines. The revised guidelines, approved by the MTA Board of Directors this summer, called for the establishment of a \$2000 scholarship that will be awarded annually to a deserving student who plans to attend a Mississippi college or university and pursue a degree in theatre (performance, technical or design). The scholarship will be paid in increments--\$250 for fall semester and \$250 for spring semester--for up to four years.

Scholarship recipients are required to take theatre-related courses and maintain at least a 2.5 grade point average (GPA) taking a minimum of twelve (12) hours per semester. In order to fully apply for the scholarship participants MUST audition for the scholarship during the MTA Statewide Theatre Festival held in January. The auditions will be in conjunction with the College/University Auditions held Thursday, January 13, 2011. For more information and to submit an application visit <http://www.mta-online.org/awards/mta-scholarship>.

Open Call for 2011 Festival Workshop Presenters

Are you a theatre artist? Are you trained in a specific area of theatre? Are you willing to share your talent with others so that we may continue the tradition of theatre excellence in Mississippi?

This is an open call for presenters for the 2011 Mississippi Theatre Association's annual festival. We are looking for knowledgeable, talented, and enthusiastic presenters to share their craft with Mississippi's Theatre

artists and educators. This is a very valuable opportunity to learn, to network, and to share and we want you to be a part of this experience. The workshop can consist of you teaching participants about a particular skill or it could be a roundtable discussion or a panel discussion. The workshop can be geared toward students or adults.

Workshops will be held on Friday and Saturday, January 14 & 15, 2011 at the MSU Riley Center.

So, do you have something special that you could teach us? We would love to learn more about acting, design, playwrighting, leadership, and more to better our productions and craft!

If you are interested in presenting, know someone who could present, or are interesting in a specific topic, please complete the Call for Workshop Presenters form on the MTA Festival website.

High School and Community Theatre Adjudicators Announced

MTA is very excited about the outstanding panel of adjudicators that we have this year. Adjudicating the Community Theatre productions are Beth Harvey, Chris Rich, and Robert Walters. Beth Harvey is Director of the Wilson Center for the Arts at Florida State College at Jacksonville. Additionally, she produces musical theatre for high school community outreach and develops multidisciplinary partnerships with smaller arts organizations. Chris Rich is Production Manager and Designer for Troy University. His design work has received national recognition in lighting and sound and regional recognition for scene design from KCACTF. Robert Walters received his M.F.A in Dramatic Writing at the Tisch School of the Arts, Tulsa Community College Tulsa, OK where he teaches speech and is a debate coach.

Secondary Division adjudicators will be Jack Benjamin, Dawn Larsen, and Sue Ellen Gerrells. Jack Benjamin is Chair of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at the University of South Carolina Aiken. He has directed over 60 productions while at USCA and has directed over 130 productions since graduating from college. Dawn Larsen is Associate Professor of Theatre at Francis Marion University in Florence, South Carolina where she teaches Theatre History and Criticism, as well as Voice and Diction. She is the previous owner and operator of the last traveling tent show in the world, the Hard Corn Players. Sue Ellen Gerrells, the Executive Director of the Alabama Conference of Theatre, wears several theatrical hats. She's a board member for the American Association of Community Theatres (AACT), a theatre educator, and an award-winning director/actor, whose forty year theatrical career spans three continents: North America, Asia, and Europe.

Theatre For Youth will have Tim Matheny and Keri Horn adjudicating this year. Tim Matheny received his Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Louisville. He is currently the chair of the Theatre and Communications Department at William Carey University. Keri Grayson Horn is an actress, writer and puppeteer. A graduate USM with a BFA in theatre, she has appeared at New Stage Theatre and performs on such television shows as Between the Lions and Lomax, the Hound of Music.

MTA is very excited to have such a wide variety of adjudicators who enjoy all aspects of theatre and are so supportive of our state festival.

Theatre for Youth Festival Registration Increases

Registration for the Theatre for Youth Festival has closed. We are very pleased to announce that this year we have 11 theatres currently signed up to produce a show in the Theatre for Youth Festival being held in January at the MSU Riley Center. Chair and Vice Chair Wiliam Rester, Picayune Memorial High School and Daisha Walker, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community

College – Perkinston, are currently working on the festival schedule and lining up schools to see these productions. We are very pleased that we new theatres participating in this event. The Theatre for Youth Festival schedule will be posted on the MTA website by November 15.

Nominations Sought for New Spotlight Awards

MTA is very excited to announce a brand new award that will be given out to help recognize the hard work of some of our members. The MTA's Outstanding Contribution to Theatre in Mississippi. This new award is to honor outstanding members to our organization. Each major division may have one recipient. The divisions are Member, Secondary, Community, Theatre for Youth, and College and University. The nomination of members should be based upon their service to the organization and field. If you are a

member of MTA, you are entitled to nominate a candidate (s) for this award. The nominee must be a member of MTA as well. A master ballot will be compiled and presented to the MTA Board of Directors for the final selections from each division. This award does not have to be given annually. The Board of Directors holds the right to only give out this award if there is an outstanding nominee. The nomination forms are on the MTA website, www.mta-online.org, so go on and nominate someone who has made a difference in the



organization. We hope that this award will help shine a light on our many supporters and workers who work tirelessly to benefit the arts and MTA.

Individual Events? What Are These? (a.k.a. Mississippi's Got Talent)

Can you believe that we are only 90 days away from the 2011 MTA Festival? I am so excited about our venue this year- The Riley Center in Meridian holds wonderful memories and echoes from the past on its stage and we will get the chance to add our voices to that.

Have you ever had a scene in a play that was so emotional, delightful or even evil that you wanted it to go on and on? Well bring that scene to the MTA Individual Events for adults (anyone over 18) at the festival. These are great if you are not attending with a production. Individual Events are great for college students to hone their auditioning skills!

We can't let the scene go on and on, but we can give you 5 minutes to blow the judges away with your talent. If you have been a part of our Individual Events in the past, or avoided that category for some reason, I encourage you to try this year. We have made some minor changes to the IE categories- there are only 4 now- so hopefully you can find a place to show your acting or singing skills. It's just \$10 per event slot you enter, and what few rules there are, (very few) are on the MTA site. Please take a just a few minutes and look it over before you sign up. We are hoping for a large crowd with a variety of offerings so don't delay. Feel free to drop us a line if you have any questions or concerns. See you in January!

Sherri Marengo, Individual Events Vice Chair

Community Theatre Summit to Focus on Resources

The Community Theatre Summit at the 2011 Mississippi Theatre Association Festival will provide a meeting place for theatres from across the state to share ideas, network, and pool resources in an effort to encourage and promote theatre in Mississippi. The Summit will again be held on Friday so make plans to attend.

As Mississippi community theatres gather for the 2011 MTA Festival, they will have an opportunity to meet with other groups from around the state. The Summit provides an official time for representatives from each group to come together in one place.

This year's summit will focus on the excellent resources that are available to community theatres in the state. MTA provides several on its website such as the Swap and Sell section and the statewide calendar of events. And MTA continues to grow, it is important to provide these needed resources to both developing and existing theatres. Whether a theatre has been established for years or a group is just getting started, MTA is here to help.

With the years of theatre experience that will be present at this year's festival, no question is off-limits. Nightmares and success stories abound in all areas from fundraising, to board meetings, to play selection, to technical design, and everything in between. Sharing these experiences with peers is a great way to help others prevent disasters and find promising solutions.

The MTA Festival always promises to be an exciting weekend of theatre and workshops, and it can be hard to find time to stop and connect with those around you. The Community Theatre Summit is an excellent time to connect, share, and discuss theatre with peers. Any questions and suggestions can be sent to the Community Theatre Division Chair, Thomas La Foe, at tlafoe@gmail.com.

Theatre Milestones

Vicksburg Theatre Guild's 75th Season & Guinness record



Vicksburg Theatre Guild, Mississippi's oldest chartered community theatre, celebrates two diamond anniversaries during its upcoming season:

VTG turns 75 on March 3, 2011 followed by the 75th birthday of Gold in the Hills on March 28, 2011. The season will feature three comedies, two dramas, a ten-minute play project, plus Gold in the Hills and Fairy Tale Theatre. Two of the comedies are by local playwrights.

Vicksburg Theatre Guild's beloved Guinness Book of World Records' longest-running show will have eight performances this month to bring its 75th season to a conclusion. Having opened in 1936, Gold in the Hills is in good company among Guinness record holders, with A Chorus Line's Broadway record of 15 years, The Fantasticks' off-Broadway record of 31 years, and the

ongoing 57-year run in London of The Mousetrap by Dame Agatha Christie.

Gold in the Hills shows are July 9-10, 16-17, 23-24, and 30-31 at 7:30 p.m. at the Parkside Playhouse, 101 Iowa Avenue. The box office opens at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children (12 & under), no reservations, and tickets may be purchased at the door. Group rates are available. For more information, call 601-636-0471 or visit www.e-vtg.com.

Tupelo Community Theatre Celebrates 40 Years

Forty years ago, sixteen visionary leaders founded Tupelo Community Theatre to "develop, promote,



teach and stimulate interest in the dramatic arts." Over the past four decades, TCT has presented more than 250 productions to tens of thousands of theatre

patrons. On September 16, TCT celebrated its 40 years of excellence in community theatre in Tupelo at a gala

MTA Receives \$13,000 in Funding From MAC

The Mississippi Theatre Association has been awarded \$13,050 grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC). This grant is a portion of the \$1.64 million in grants the commission will award in 2010-11 and will be used to help sponsor the Mississippi Theatre Association's annual festival. The grants are made possible by continued funding from the Mississippi State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"Organizations across the state who receive grants from the Mississippi Arts Commission continue to prove that arts programs are vital to the success of their community. The grants awarded by the commission provide funding for the staging of festivals, theater performances and many other arts-related activities," said Malcolm White, executive director of



MAC. "The arts provide a positive environment for learning, both in the classroom and in communities. Arts funding has a significant multiplier and for every dollar spent in the creative sector, \$8 are realized in the local economy. That's a good investment for any business."

The Mississippi Theatre Association, is a statewide (501c3) nonprofit organization registered with the Mississippi Secretary of State whose mission is to foster appreciation of and participation in children's, college, community, high school, professional, and university

theatre in Mississippi.

The Mississippi Arts Commission, a state agency, serves the residents of the state by providing grants that support programs to enhance communities; assist artists and arts organizations; promote the arts in education and celebrate Mississippi's cultural heritage.

Established in 1968, the Mississippi Arts Commission is funded by the Mississippi Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation of Greater Jackson and other private sources. The agency serves as an active supporter and promoter of arts in community life and in arts education. For information from the Mississippi Arts Commission, contact Susan Dobbs at 601-359-6031 or sdobbs@arts.state.ms.us.

Mississippi Writers Guild Partners with MTA, Offers Grant

The Mississippi Theatre Association (MTA) will be working with a new partner at their 2011 Festival and Play Writing Competition at Meridian's MSU Riley Center come January, according to MTA Executive Director Stephen Cunetto.

"The Mississippi Theatre Association is very pleased and excited to be partnering with the Mississippi Writers Guild (MWG). Through our partnership we have identified ways that these two statewide organizations can work together to promote programs and services as well as provide additional support and recognition to Mississippi playwrights.

We were very pleased and honored to receive a grant from the Mississippi Writers Guild in support of the MTA Playwriting Competition. We greatly appreciate these funds as they will assist MTA in providing awards to two outstanding playwrights."

MWG President Ralph Gordon said. "We are looking forward to working with the MTA. I can see where the two organizations can complement each other in advancing their agendas. This partnership will extend beyond the Festival as we have other projects and goals for 2011.

The Guild's mission is "Advancing and Preserving the Literary Arts in Mississippi" and what better way to accomplish this than partnering with other organizations with similar goals."



Unions and Living Wages: A Conversation with Biddy & Reynolds

The following is a conversation between William (Peppy) Biddy, Mississippi University for Women and Francine Thomas Reynolds, New Stage Theatre.

Peppy: What about unions? Does the use of union contracts draw the dividing line between professional and non professional organizations?

Francine: It can't be, because if you only have one union contract for your whole organization and nobody else is paid, that doesn't make you a professional organization. Besides, I don't think the union determines whether an individual artist is a professional or not. The union is a choice and I don't think a union can say you're not professional because you don't belong to us. It defies the American spirit. I think the professional has to make a living wage working in their field, and I think you are a professional even if you're not making all of your money as an actor or director. So that is a tricky line.

Peppy: So let's say that an individual makes a living wage at a theatre, then that individual is a professional artist even if the organization for which they work is not a professional company, meaning that the whole staff is not paid a living wage.

Francine: Right. I think you have to go back TCG definition, using the percentage of time spent in rehearsal and where all actors are paid AND all personnel are paid. I think that is a professional. You can have volunteers but if the larger percentage of your staff is unpaid volunteers, then that is not a professional organization.

Peppy: And by "pay" you mean a living wage, not a stipend?

Francine: Yes, a percentage of your people must earn a living wage. At New Stage our non-union actors generally make minimum wage which in some cases isn't really a living wage. (Editor's note: but the full-time staff is paid, as well as a designated percent of the actors per TCG definition mentioned earlier.)

Peppy: Yes, and even if you are making the union scale, it is really only a living wage if you can make that amount every week of the year. Sadly it's not a living wage if you are not in a show all year long, and who does that? In Jackson, at least?

Francine: When New Stage applied for the rights to (a particular unnamed show) the licensing house questioned us about the salary range for (particular roles) in the show.

Peppy: Because their assumption was if you were not

paying more than a certain amount you're not going to have the skill to do this piece.

Francine: Which I think is valid because if you do not respect your actors enough to pay them a living wage, then what does that say about you as an organization? But for a lot of actors, it's their choice to have full time job. It's a tricky thing.

"Summer Stock, Community and Educational Theatre"

Peppy: What about the summer stock?

Francine: I think that summer stock is (or can be) professional. If you just do summer shows or you do one show and you pay people for that one show then you're a professional theatre.

Peppy: And Community Theatres?

Francine: Again I think it goes to the number of people getting a living wage in an organization compared to the number of productions and programs that you're doing.

Peppy: But there are community theatres that are professionally managed community theatres.

Francine: But according to TCG, if you're not paying your actors and if you're not rehearsing a certain number of hours per week, you're not professional. Peppy, you've done a lot of work at New Stage theatre which of course I consider to be professional theatre. So what do you think about the theatre as a professional theatre?

Peppy: Well I consider it a professional theatre because it is. It has status with unions and with TCG and has had it for 30 years. Switching gears here: What do you think is the distinction between educational theatre/education professionals and theatre professionals/professional theatre?

Francine: I think it has to do with the mission. Is the mission of the organization to educate, or to produce theatre full time? A professional theatre can include "education" as part of the theatre's mission; but if the primary focus of your organization is education as opposed to presentation and production, that's an educational entity.

Peppy: In terms of funding, let's say the National Endowment of the Arts, what is their mission?

Francine: For excellence in the arts and they have a whole education initiative that they do fund

Peppy: But that funding is separate from the funds that go to professional organizations? So in Mississippi where there aren't as many

companies in each individual category, the separation of funding gets blurred because then it would be only 2 or 3 people getting professional funding.

Francine: Yes. I believe that a symphony orchestra in a university should be in a different category than professional symphony orchestra but yet I think it's funded the same way.

Peppy: What about the individual/professional artists in our state? Do you think there is any confusion about who is and who is not a professional?

Francine: I think there is confusion about that.

Peppy: Do you think an individual must earn a certain percent of their annual income through art to be considered a professional? percent of their annual income through art to be considered a professional?

Francine: A professional working artist, yes.

Peppy: I know that when one is doing their taxes, (I would have to look this up), but if you earn less than a certain amount then you cannot claim deductions against your earnings.

Francine: You'll have to call the IRS on that one.

Peppy: But in that case the IRS is determining if you are "a professional."

Francine: But it has nothing to do with the quality of the art or the quality of the performance, it has to do with choice. It has to do with choices that an organization an individual makes. That's why I have a problem with a union saying whether or not you are a professional because a person may choose not to be a member of the union but may still make more money than someone who is a member of the union.

on the roof top at Park Heights in the Fairpark District of Downtown Tupelo. A special presentation was made to honor the 16 founding members, as well as 147 other volunteers who have ever served on the TCT board of directors. These volunteer board members have committed almost 800 years of service to the theatre and our community. This festive occasion was also a way to thank all TCT patrons who have helped make the theatre the outstanding, award-winning organization it is today. A historic plaque was unveiled that will be placed on the southeast corner of the Lyric Theatre, TCT's home for the last 26 years. The Lyric is completing a renovation to the front of the building with a new five-color facade. The Lyric's marquee is also being restored with matching colors and neon thanks to funding from the Carpenter Foundation and the Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association. A grand relighting of the marquee celebration is planned in the near future.