



# Notes & News

CELEBRATING THEATRE IN MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi Theatre Association

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

April 2005

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a year we've had so far!

We had a successful festival in January, thanks to Ronnie Miller and the crew at Meridian Community Theatre for their help and hospitality. A big thanks also goes out to Mississippi State University – Meridian Campus for their generosity. They all worked hard to make the 2005 festival a success.

It was impressive to see the quality of shows in all divisions. MTA served the Meridian community well by providing some awesome children's theatre. During the children's festival, over 1,400 students were bussed in to see these productions. On the high school level nine dynamic shows, plus the 10-Minute Festival proved that high school theatre in Mississippi is alive and kicking! Mississippi community theatre work showed why we have some of the strongest theatres in the South!

Congratulations to Oak Grove High School and Delta Center Stage on advancing to SETC. Oak Grove made us proud with a number of technical awards at SETC, while Delta Center Stage was chosen as one of the two theatres representing the South at AACT Fest (The American Association of Community Theatres Festival). Congratulations again!

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## Delta Center Stage; Oak Grove Represent MS at SETC

Delta Center Stage's production of *The Glider*, written by Katherine Snodgrass and directed by

Tim Bixler, was selected as "Best Production" during the Southeastern Theatre Conference's (SETC) regional

festival held in Greensboro, North Carolina, March 2 – 6, 2005. The Greenville, MS, community theatre represented Mississippi at the regional festival after being selected as the winner of the Mississippi Theatre Association's annual festival in January. As the winner of the SETC festival the group will compete at the national level in June in Kalamazoo, Michigan, at the American Association of Community Theatre's (AACT) Annual Festival.

Delta Center Stage also took home the Best Set Design and Best Technical Crew; Sonya Bixler was selected as SETC's Best Actress; and Deanna Harper was selected as an All Star Cast Member.



"It's a great honor for us and for Mississippi to be the south's representative at the national festival. It is most

exciting to be a part of a new, unpublished script from Katherine Snodgrass," said Tim Bixler, director of Delta Center Stage's production.

Bixler adds, "The real trick to preparation for level after level of these festivals is NOT to over rehearse...the lines are all memorized; the actors know their place within the story, and everyone is already familiar with making the play happen. Theatre is about immediacy and honesty of emotion and contact with the audience. Too much rehearsal after the lines are memorized can make the play stale."

"We are very proud of Delta Center Stage's production, cast and crew. Their production shined at the state festival and again at the regional festival. I am sure

they will do well, at the national festival as well" said Stephen Cunetto, Executive Director, Mississippi Theatre Association.

Also attending the festival was Oak Grove High School who performed their production of *Crow and Weasel* at SETC in the Secondary School festival and represented Mississippi very well. According to Suzanne Allmon, Oak Grove High School director, "We won three All Star Casts (Marcus Cooper, Chase Anderson, Kaitlyn Curtis), Best Overall Production Crew and Creativity and Imagination in Directing." Allmon noted that the adjudicators were so impressed with our technical

crew that they created an award for them as best crew! This was indeed an honor."

When

asked about the SETC experience, All Star Cast member from Oak Grove Kaitlyn Curtis replied,

■ See Delta Center Stage, page 6



## Robert Chairs KC-ACTF Region IV

Shannon Robert, William Carey College, has been named as the Chair of Region IV for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KC-ACTF). Robert who has been associated with KCACTF since 1996 has served as vice chair for Region IV for two years and served as the design chair for 2000-2003 and the state festival coordinator for Mississippi since 1996. She served on the board of the Mississippi

Theatre Association as the College/University Division Chair from 1996 – 2005 and served as the SETC State Representative from 1999 – 2005.

As a part of her new responsibilities as the Chair for Region IV she will be working with the colleges and universities in Region IV to encourage, recognize, and celebrate the work produced in university and college theatre

■ See Robert, page 5



## SECONDARY THEATRE DIVISION

### Winner of the Dominic J. Cunetto Award for Best Production:

Oak Grove High School

### Runner-Up Best Production

Laurel High School

### Best Supporting Actress

Cadie Calhoun, Oak Grove High School

### Best Supporting Actor

Eric Palos, Olive Branch High School

### Best Actor

Marcus Cooper, Oak Grove High School

### Best Actress

Jackie Merlau, Ocean Springs High School

### Best Costume Design

Brandon High School

### Best Scenic Design

Laurel High School

### Overall Technical Excellence

Oak Grove High School

### Best Director

Suzanne Allmon

Oak Grove High School

### All Star Cast

- Florida Levidiotis, Oxford High School
- Kaitlyn Curtis, Oak Grove High School
- Kyle Bellinger, Ocean Springs High School
- Matt Canno, Hancock High School
- Jessica Boyd, Laurel High School
- Chase Hairston, Olive Branch High School
- Lucious Daughtry, Lawrence County High School
- Elaina Walker, Brandon High School
- Cast of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Ridgeland High School

## 10-MINUTE PLAY FESTIVAL

### Best Production

*Real World: Saucier*

Director:	Dusty Ballard
Writer:	Melissa Fowler
Asst. Director:	David Siccone
Cast:	Jessie Yoste, Tim Burkhead, Brandi Hopkins, Alex Craig

<b>Best Actor:</b>	Josh Mohon
<b>Best Actress:</b>	Sara Field
<b>Best Director:</b>	Dusty Ballard
<b>Best Asst. Director:</b>	Keagan Mitchell
<b>Best Writer:</b>	Matt Clark

### All Star Cast:

- Bobby Bodenhamer
- Joseph Amacker
- Tim Burkhead
- Melissa Whitfield

## Did You Know?

Arts in the schools increase test scores and lower dropout rates.

Longitudinal data of 25,000 students demonstrates that involvement in the arts is linked to higher academic performance, increased standardized test scores, more community service and lower dropout rates.

—Source: Dr. James S Catterall, Graduate School of Education and Information Students, UCLA.

For more information go to Americans for the Arts at <http://www.americansForTheArts.org>





## COMMUNITY THEATRE DIVISION

**Winner of the Warren McDaniel Award for Best Production**

Delta Center Stage, Greenville

**Runner-Up Best Production:**

Just Over the Rainbow Theatre, Hattiesburg

**Best Supporting Actress**

Deanna Harper, Delta Center Stage

**Best Supporting Actor**

Otis Tims, Tupelo Community Theatre

**Best Actress**

Sonya Bixler, Delta Center Stage

**Best Actor**

Gabe Smith, Starkville Community Theatre

**Best Director**

Tim Bixler, Delta Center Stage, Greenville

**Best Costume Design**

Just Over the Rainbow Theatre, Hattiesburg

**Best Scenic Design**

Delta Center Stage, Greenville

**Overall Technical Excellence**

Delta Center Stage, Greenville

**All Star Cast Members:**

Jaymee Vowell, Black Rose

JC Patterson, Black Rose

Lisa Ganaway, Tupelo Community Theatre

Susan Tims, Tupelo Community Theatre

Dianne Brown, Center Players

Laura Kutcher, Center Players

Penny Byler, Delta Center Stage, Greenville

Deanna Dye, Starkville Community Theatre

Rachelle Fortenberry, JOTR



### Community Theatre Summer Workshop

Mississippi Theatre Association's Community Theatre Division invites any and all community theatre individuals to our Summer Workshop. This year it will be held at Starkville Community Theatre, host of the 2006 MTA Festival, on Saturday, July 9, 2005 from 8:00 am - 4:00 pm.

While at the summer workshop, attendees will have sessions on why and how to become a member of MTA and SETC, rules of competition, writing / cutting scripts for theatre, makeup / technical effects, how to increase ticket sales, theatre legal issues (eg. copywrite laws, script changing, etc..), and we will also take a "field trip" to the site of the 2006 MTA Festival.

The goal of this workshop is to network with fellow thespians, learn the tricks of the trade, and to get an idea of the theatre facilities for the 2006 competition. If you are just starting up a community theatre group, or if you have been in the business for ages, we would love to have you!

As we grow and learn from one another, our groups become stronger, and as our groups become stronger, so does our competition, on both the state and the national level.

Also, if you have any stories of your community theatre that you would like to share, please e-mail them to me. We are always looking for stories for the MTA newsletter!

Thanks for all of your help, and if you have any questions, please let me know.

Stacy Howell [stacy@apt101.com](mailto:stacy@apt101.com)  
Chairman, MTA Community Theatre Division



## MTA members elect new officers, chairs to lead the organization in 2005

### 2005 OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### President

MJ Etua, Louisville High School, mjmetua@yahoo.com

#### Past President

Tonya Hays, Gulfport tshays777@aol.com

#### Vice President

Tom Booth, Tupelo 1tb@bellsouth.net

#### Treasurer

Chris Wooten, Laurel cwooten@sandersonfarms.com

#### Secretary

Ronnie Miller, Meridian rmiller@mcc.cc.ms.us

#### Executive Director

Stephen Cunetto, Starkville scunetto@bellsouth.net

#### Division chairs and vice chairs

##### Children's Festival

Ben Allmon, Hattiesburg ben@megagate.com

##### Children's Vice Chair

Parker McMullan, Purvis parker@purvisdrama.com

##### College/University/ SETC State Rep

Charles Bosworth, MGCCC-Perk, cbos124@yahoo.com

##### College/University Vice Chair

Peppy Bidy, MUW wbiddy@muw.edu

#### Community Theatre Chair

Stacy Howell, Ridgeland stacy@apt101.com

#### Community Vice Chair

Lynn Nelson, Tupelo lnelson@nmhs.net

#### High School Chair

Suz Allmon, Hattiesburg suz@megagate.com

#### High School Vice Chair

John Davenport, Oxford johnpaul@dixie-net.com

#### Professional Chair

David Hawkins, Jackson davidh@meta3.net

#### Professional Vice Chair

Patrick Benton, Newstage

#### 10-Minute Play Festival

Melanie Harris, Starkville mlharris2@aol.com

#### 10-Minute Festival Vice Chair

Shonda Davis, Picayune counselordavis@mail.com

#### State Auditions Coordinator

Denise Halbach, Jackson deniseh@netdoor.com

#### SETC Representative

Sam Sparks, Jackson production@newstagetheatre.com

## News from the MTA College and University Theatre Chair

I want to take a few moments to update you on Mississippi's participation at the Regional Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Many of our students participated at the regional festival, and some deserve special recognition.

**Kristin Miller** of William Carey College received an Honorable Mention for Scenic Design from Barbizon and **Wesley Guthrie**, also from William Carey College, received an Honorable Mention in Alcone National Festival Fellow Mehron/MUC Make-up Design. First Place in the KCACTF Sound Design Award went to William Carey College's **Armin Abdihodzic** and **B.G. Johnson** from the Mississippi University for Women won the award for Crafts and Technology.

Many of our state's faculty were recognized at the festival. Most notable was **Obra Quave**, Professor Emeritus at William Carey College, recipient of the Kennedy Center Gold Medallion for Excellence for directing. Faculty members receiving Certificates of Merit for directing included **Robin Aronson** of University of Southern Mississippi,

**Charles Bosworth** of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, **Dr. Nancy Clark** of Delta State University, and **Jo Durst** of Mississippi State University. **Wayne Durst**, also from Mississippi State University, received a Certificate of Merit for Scenic Design.

Faculty participation at the regional festival was varied. **Robin Aronson**, **Peppy Bidy** of Mississippi University for Women, **Charles Bosworth**, and **Scot Mann** of University of Southern Mississippi, served as Irene Ryan Preliminary Round Judges or Respondents.

The Director's Project was spearheaded by **Obra Quave** with **Robin Aronson** serving as a mentor and **Stephen Judd** of University of Southern Mississippi served as the Faculty Mentor for Design Storm. Additionally, **Scot Mann** presented a series of stage combat workshops.

**Congratulations** to all Mississippi college and university students who were nominated to go to the regional festival as well as those receiving regional recognition. In addition, I would like to extend a big 'thank you' to

those faculty who mentor and coach students, affording them the opportunity for their work to be seen.

Charles Bosworth, Chair  
College/University Division  
Mississippi Theatre Association

### Dates set for Mississippi's 2005 KC ACTF Festival

Plans are underway for Mississippi's 2005 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Mississippi University for Women will host the festival November 2 - November 6, 2005. For more information contact Charles Bosworth.



## ARTS FUNDING

Like many theatres around the state, MTA receives funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission for which we are very grateful. This funding is crucial to continuing the offerings of our association. Anything you can do to encourage your legislative members to continue funding the arts and especially the Mississippi Arts Commission would be appreciated.

All of us need to be in constant contact with our legislative members throughout the year. If you don't already, we encourage you to make personal contact with your legislative members and invite them to your productions and special events. Be sure to welcome them and impress upon them the importance of the arts. By making this contact throughout the year, you will build a relationship and assist them in recognizing the importance of the arts. Hopefully, when they return to the legislature they will remember the impact of your theatre program and the value of the arts to our state.

## Quave receives Kennedy Center Honor

Obra Quave, retired chair, director and professor of theatre at William Carey College, has received the John F. Kennedy Center Gold Medallion of Excellence. The award was presented at the Region IV Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) held recently in West Palm Beach, Florida. The Gold Medallion is a prestigious honor bestowed by the Kennedy Center on rare occasions to a recipient who shows excellence in teaching theatre.

Quave, who retired in 2002 after a 42-year career at Carey, served as director for the Fall 2004 WCC production of *The Balkan Women* which was a KCACTF participating production. Most recently he directed the docu-drama *In His Shoes*, an original play about the life of William Carey written by WCC theatre faculty member Shannon Robert, for Carey's Homecoming.

"The person we are awarding is a selfless, tireless individual. He has contributed to our art and his

love, the theatre, for almost fifty years," said Dan LaRocque of Auburn University, presenter of the award. "If you ask him what in his career or life has made the most positive impact, he would say, without hesitation, his students. Most of his former students would respond to the same question with his name, Obra Quave."



Since Carey began participating in KCACTF in 1995, eight productions have either been selected to perform at the regional festival or received strong recommendations to perform. *And David Danced* in 2001 was selected to perform at the regional festival and the national festival in Washington D.C. All of these performances were directed by Quave.

Mark Charney of Clemson University in South Carolina and former chair of Region IV KCACTF, said, "Obra Quave must be one of the most gifted directors in our region. He allows the script to breathe through his actors, and he obviously trains them well."

## Renew Your MTA Membership!

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

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

To renew your membership, visit the MTA website today. <http://www.mta-online.org>

**Photos from the MTA Festival  
are online at  
<http://www.mta-online.org>.**

*Robert, continued from page 1*

programs and provide opportunities at the regional festival for participants to develop their theatre skills. She will serve as a central contact for theatres participating in the American College Theatre Festival in the region and assist in planning the Region IV annual festival.

Having worked with her through the Mississippi Theatre Association for a number of years, Stephen Cunetto, Executive Director, said, "It is certainly MTA's loss in that she will no

longer serve on the MTA Board, but it is KC-ACTF Region IV's gain. We are very proud of Shannon, and I know that she will do an excellent job for Region IV." Cunetto added, "Mississippi is well-represented regionally through the leadership she will be providing to the region. MTA is very proud that two of its own, Shannon as Chair of Region IV for KC-ACTF and Denise Halbach, President, Southeastern Theatre Conference, are leading two of the largest theatre organizations."



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## Notes & News: Celebrating Theatre in Mississippi

### President, continued from page 1

As a part of my presidency, I want to focus on education and how we, as MTA, service our communities with educational opportunities in all the divisions. We continue to do great things in children's theatre; our high school division continues to expand; and (to quote a past adjudicator) our community theatres "set the bar." While we already offered some educational opportunities with workshops outside of the festival for educators and community theaters, there is still room to grow. MTA must continue to offer more learning opportunities for our members as well as for others across the state. MTA needs to focus on the underserved in our schools and communities and insure that the many facets of theatre are represented. MTA needs to establish long-term goals in order to grow strengthening the organization. As we continue to grow, we need to expand our vision and our mission.

I am proud of the membership of this organization. I am proud of our continued success. I am proud of our desire to move forward. And I am especially proud to be in the company of people who value the arts, love theatre, and are committed to keeping theatre alive and strong in our state. — MJ Etua

### Delta Center Stage, continued from page 1

"Theatre is what gets me out of bed in the morning. To be given the opportunity to share my love for theatre at a prestigious convention like SETC is such an honor. It's unbelievable how over those few short days my eyes were opened to numerous new theatrical aspects."

### Did You Know?

When governments reduce their support for the arts, they are not cutting frills. Rather, they are undercutting an industry that is a cornerstone of tourism, economic development and the revitalization of many downtowns. When governments increase their support for the arts, they are generating tax revenues, jobs and a creativity-based economy.

Data collected from 40,000 attendees at a range of arts events reveal an average spending of \$22.87 per person, not including the price of admission. This spending generates an estimated \$80.8 billion on valuable revenue annually for local merchants and their communities.

—Source: Americans for the Arts. 2002.

For more information go to Americans for the Arts at <http://www.americansForTheArts.org>