

# Behind the Scene

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## Life Stories: The Drama of Healing

In the film, we see a teenager running in slow motion toward the blood-soaked body of his brother, gunned down by police in a drug raid. When he gets there, it's too late—there's no last word, no final touch, no time for a goodbye.

This is Joel's real life story and it's playing out pretty much like it did the first time, except now the young man he's running toward is not his brother, but a classmate who is acting the role.

You'd think that watching your darkest hour

replayed on screen would be almost too much to bear. But here's Joel, looking intently at the television, nodding slightly with a hint of a smile on his face. The video ends and the room at the Potomac Job Corps Center, filled with participants in Theatre Lab's groundbreaking Life Stories drama program for incarcerated and at-risk youth, bursts into applause as Joel yells out, "That was so *good*."

Not the memory, of course. The day his brother was killed will

always be the worst day of his life, he says. But the ability to transform that moment into art and to move a whole room full of people with the power of his story—that was something he never anticipated. And it felt surprisingly good. Even more than that, it brought him to a new place in his life.

"Telling my story helped me to let go. It's been two years and I never accepted it," he says of his brother's death. "Now I finally accept it. I have to."

## Rebecca Gilman Readings a Hit!

What is it like to act in the Washington premiere of works by one of the world's hottest playwrights, alongside some of the area's best actors, under the direction of DC's most acclaimed directors? Well, a group of Theatre Lab students recently found out when they took part in a highly successful and rewarding series of full-length readings at MetroStage as part of our innovative Acting in a Professional Production class. The course, led by Theatre Lab Director Buzz Mauro earlier this

summer, trained students in the business of the professional business (including understanding directors' expectations, researching the character, and making strong acting choices in a reading setting) and culminated in public readings of three plays by Rebecca Gilman, a phenomenal playwright whose work for some reason had not been seen in the DC area before. And three appreciative audiences were happy for the introduction! The readings were directed by top-notch

professional directors—Jeremy Skidmore, Marcia Gardner and Lofty Durham—and starred top-notch professional actors—Holly Twyford, Kim Schraf and Deb Gottesman—so the ensemble of student actors underwent a truly demanding and inspiring experience, and the result was a body of work to be proud of.

Thanks to all who auditioned, and congratulations to the participants: Andrew Brownstein, William Hensel, Deborah Kieffer, Craig Klein, Bill Leaman, JoAnn Man-

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| New course offerings    | 2 |
| Linowes Award           | 3 |
| Where are they now?     | 3 |
| Rehearsals and your job | 3 |



Joel will continue his theatre and film studies with Theatre Lab instructor Quique Aviles when he leaves Potomac Job Corps, a GED and vocational training program for troubled youth in Anacostia. He now wants to tell more stories through

*(Continued on page 4)*

**Register  
today for  
classes!**

*gione, Jerry Oshinsky, Samantha Peller, and Charles St. Charles.*

*For students interested in similar experiences, keep an eye out for the next installment of Acting in a Professional Production, or check out the New Play Workshop coming this fall (see article on the next page). Ω*

## New Class Offerings and Some of Special Interest

### Early Fall Classes

#### **16 Bars of Hell**

Don't let the name scare you off: this class is heaven for anyone who's struggled with the musical theatre audition, and it's one of those courses you won't find anywhere else. The incomparable Jane Pesci-Townsend (ask anybody, they'll tell you she's incomparable) will pass on her incomparable wisdom on one of the trickiest aspects of musical theatre performance—how to sell yourself in a 16-bar audition. It may seem like hell—What does 16 bars really mean? Which 16 bars should I use? How can I possibly, in such a short time, make those people behind the desk understand the wonderful variety of musical talent that adds up to *moi?*—but with a little faith, a lot of practice, and a good dose of incomparable advice, you can experience that heavenly feeling of getting call-back after callback and role after role. This is the musical theatre auditioning class you've been looking for, whether you're a seasoned pro or out to snag your very first role. One of Jane's great talents is helping people at all levels to learn from each other as well as from her.

#### **New Play Workshop**

If you have some scene study under your belt, it may be time to try out another aspect of the work of real actors: developing a role that has never been played before. Playing Blanche Dubois I zxs one thing—she's almost part of our collective consciousness. Playing a character in a new play that's undergoing re-writes, where your work on the character can actually be incorporated into the script through discussions with a living, breathing playwright—that's a different experience, and an important skill for modern actors to develop. In the New Play Workshop, popular in-

structor Michael Kramer will lead students through the skills required in this unfamiliar realm, while working closely with a local playwright on a full-length play that will receive its first public reading at the end of the course. Each student will have at least one substantial role and will understudy another. This double-session course gives students the necessary time to delve deeply into the character and structure of the emerging dramatic work, and to develop characters that are truly their own. An added perk: students will also receive monologue coaching at the beginning of every class.

#### **Playwriting for Actors**

Well, it's not really just for actors, but it's a course many an actor could benefit from. Paul Donnelly, one of Washington's most popular playwrights and congenial instructors, takes students through the steps of creating a complete ten-minute play from scratch. If you've ever wanted to write for the stage but weren't sure how to get started, this class is a gentle introduction that will lead you to a completed project in just six weeks. If you're an actor, the class is sure to provide unexpected insights into what makes a play work and how best to incorporate the work of the playwright into the creation of any character you bring to life onstage.

### Later Fall Classes

#### **Conquering the Dance Audition (a.k.a. 16 Steps in Hell)**

For many a musical theatre performer, the dance audition is something to dread. If you're in that situation, it's not because you don't have the talent to handle it, it's because you don't have the right preparation. The best preparation, of course, is decades of intensive dance classes, but let's say you don't have those on your resume.

Welcome to the crash course. Choreographer (and patient teacher) Sherry Chriss will teach you the vocabulary, help you with the moves, and lead you through plenty of fun practice in remembering and executing a series of steps. The skills are broken down into simple units, and you'll finish the class with a "tool belt" that will make your next movement audition a lot more manageable.

#### **Producing a Film**

Here's another introductory class in a topic plenty of theatre students have toyed with getting into. Since no previous film experience is required, this is a great way to find out what goes on behind the camera—as well as before shooting begins and after it ends. This is invaluable information for actors, of course, and a great supplement to scene study work, as well as a thorough introduction to filmmaking in its own right. The instructor is Jeanette Buck, whose feature film *Out of Season* was honored at the Reel Affirmations Film Festival and then went on to receive a national theatrical release. She knows whereof she speaks and, in six weeks time, you will, too.

#### **Voice and Speech for Teens**

For high school kids who want to improve their acting and self-presentation skills and have fun at the same time, this class can't be beat. Students will find greater comfort and power in the use of the voice through instructor Michael Rodgers' careful and encouraging training in posture, breathing, body awareness, stress reduction, and self-confidence. The course stresses the development of the "natural voice." Communication skills are the key to all social interactions, and the voice is central to all communication, so this course has far-reaching applications in all areas of life. Ω

The Theatre Lab's annual  
***Cabaret Extravaganza***  
will be held on Monday, November 10.  
Save the date!

## Where Are They Now?

*News and recent sightings of Theatre Lab students and alumni...*

**Mayo Best** and **Catherine Deadman** appeared in *Polaroid Stories* at Studio Theatre's Second Stage; **Monica Carpio** took part in the DC 48-hour film project, taking home the "Best of DC" and "Audience" awards for *Junk Male*; **Darryl Grady** appeared in *Fires in the Mirror* with Silver Spring Stage; **Jerry Oshinsky** made his professional debut in *The Dotted Line* with Sundial Theatre Company earlier this month, a production that also featured Theatre Lab alumni **Michael Dudzik**, **Cody Jones**, and **Steve Rosenthal**; **Nicole Stankofsky** was a featured dancer in *Kiss Me, Kate* with the Act III Theatre Company in Virginia; **Sarah Toppins** appeared this summer in *Equus*, the maiden production of the Heritage Theatre Company, and can be seen hanging out at the bar on HBO's *The Wire*; and **Colleen Estep**, **Bea Judge**, and **Cody Jones** will be appearing in Quotidian Theatre Company's *September 11<sup>th</sup> was a Tuesday* in mid-September. Ω

Where are YOU now?  
Contact us about your theatre exploits and we'll include you in the next *Behind the Scene*.  
[contact@theatrelab.org](mailto:contact@theatrelab.org)



Theatre Lab Directors Deb, Michael, and Buzz (center) receive the prestigious Linowes Leadership Award from the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region for making the excitement and life-affirming benefits of dramatic self-expression accessible to the entire metropolitan community.

## FAQ: Will Theater Rehearsals Conflict With My Job?

Just as with automobiles, there's a theater rehearsal schedule to fit every lifestyle. Community theater schedules are designed to accommodate people who work full-time jobs. If you're cast in a community theater show, you can count on being called only for night and weekend rehearsals, and most performances are limited to short runs over a period of several weekends. Many of Washington's small professional theater companies—like Cherry Red Productions, Quotidian Theatre, Washington Shakespeare Company, and Project Y—employ mostly non-union actors and have day-job-friendly, evening/weekend rehearsal schedules comparable to those of community theaters. The larger professional theaters, however, like Woolly Mammoth, Signature, Studio, Ford's, Arena, Round House, and the Shakespeare

Theatre, work on an Equity (actor's union) timeline, meaning they can call actors for up to 36 hours of rehearsal each week, day or night. Each theater has its own set of preferences when it comes to developing a rehearsal schedule, and schedules within a theater company sometimes vary from show to show depending on the needs of the director and cast and the availability of rehearsal space. The theaters with the largest union contracts, like Arena, often have eight shows a week: night time performances Tuesday through Sunday, with matinees on weekends and one weekday. So if you're auditioning for a show dominated by union contracts, you'll need to have some flexibility in your day job routine. When in doubt, ask the theatre's production manager what the time commitment will entail. Ω

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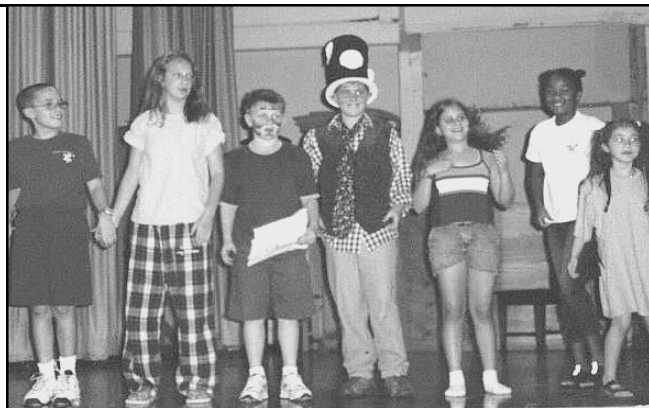
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**PO Box 21400  
Washington, DC  
20009**

Kids from our 2003 Summer Acting Camp hamming it up! Nearly 125 young people between the ages of 8 and 18 participated in our summer acting and musical theatre programs!

*If interested in these programs, please call us to get your name on our mailing list for next summer!*



## Life Stories

*(Continued from page 1)*

his art—not just about what has happened to him, but what he sees in his community and in the lives of his friends. And he's not the only recent graduate of Life Stories to suggest he's been transformed by the program. According to Michael, who so convincingly portrayed Joel's brother in the film, acting is something he now feels compelled to pursue. "When I watched the movie I saw potential. I have talent. I didn't know I had that."

*The Theatre Lab's Life Stories programs serve more than 100 incarcerated and severely at-risk youth each year in partnership with City Lights School, Community Bridges, the Montgomery County Department of Corrections' Youthful Offender Unit, the Oak Hill youth corrections facility, and Potomac Job Corps. We also offer similar Life Stories programs for seniors in independent and assisted living facilities and people living with HIV/AIDS. Ω*

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# Fall Course Update Inside