



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

NEARTS

A GREAT NATION DESERVES GREAT ART

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The Theatrical Arts

Artistic Excellence and Commitment to Communities

In the recently published *Culture Track 2007*, an ongoing study of the cultural market in the nation, “dramatic theater” and “musical theater” are listed as being the second and third most frequently attended cultural activities in the nation. There is more live professional theater being presented in more places today than there has ever been in our nation’s history. The question then becomes this: Exactly what is the nature, quality, and character of the theatrical art that is being carried forth throughout all of this geographic expansion?

More than 400 theater and musical theater applications are reviewed by NEA panels each year, offering unique perspectives into the inspirations, artistic processes, and civic commitments driving the projects being put forward in the nation’s theatrical arts. Applica-

tions that receive the strongest recommendations from our panelists also reveal trends that are taking root in the most capable programs across the country. Some of these trends include projects that balance artistic excellence with a deepened institutional commitment to the communities served



Theater and Musical Theater Director Bill O'Brien. Photo by Kevin Allen.

by our theaters, efforts to create new works that more accurately reflect the true nature and diversity of the nation’s population, and musical theater works that test and expand the boundaries of the form.

The civic and social concerns that are emerging in some of these projects reveal a field that is populated with maturing institutions who continue to reassert and refine the commitments of service that they have made to their communities. It is important to remember, however, that the primary concern of the Arts Endowment is to provide grant support to the most artistically excellent project submissions we receive. An application that demonstrates high artistic potential, regardless of whether or not it is driven by any implied or expressed social ambition, will typically win support. A project that reveals an admirable social conscience without the assurance of artistic excellence typically will not.

In the following pages, we introduce you to some theatrical projects from across the nation that have recently won funding from the NEA and represent some of the best of today’s theater companies.

Bill O'Brien
Director, Theater and Musical Theater



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ON THE COVER:

Taifa Harris as Annie Abrams educating a Harlem reporter (played by Destan Owens) about her Little Rock community in 1957 in Arkansas Repertory Theatre’s production of *The Legacy Project: It Happened in Little Rock*. Photo by Benjamin Krain.

The Play's The Thing

The NEA Sets the Stage for American Theater

When the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established in 1965, there were only seven professional, nonprofit theater companies in the United States. Since FY 1966, when the Arts Endowment gave the first grants to “encourage the artistic development of . . . theatres by enabling them to increase actors’ salaries and engage guest directors, performers, and technical personnel,” that number has grown to nearly 2,000. In FY 2007 alone, 249 theater and musical theater projects received more than \$5 million in NEA grant support. These projects included the 31st Humana Festival of New American Plays in Kentucky, Childsplay’s adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* in Arizona, and North Shore Music Theater’s production of the classic musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* in Massachusetts.

This year the NEA also celebrated classic musical theater works as part of its American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius national initiative, which supports projects that make the artistic accomplishments of great American artists better known to all Americans. Seminal musicals supported by this initiative ranged from Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim’s modern take on *Romeo and Juliet*—*West Side Story*—to *Caroline, or Change* by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner and composer Jeanine Tesori. Twenty-nine theater companies nationwide received more than \$1.2 million in NEA American Masterpieces support.

The NEA also has made theater accessible to more Americans with its Shakespeare in American Communities initiative. Since 2003 this program has brought performances of Shakespeare to more than one million Americans, including military personnel and their families. For many of those individuals, this expansive tour has provided their first exposure to live professional theater. Shakespeare for a New Generation, the second

phase of the initiative, has focused on the nation’s youth and their families, reaching more than 3,000 schools and 800,000 students. Both phases of the program have involved more than 65 of the nation’s premier theater companies, including the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Trinity Repertory Company, and Perseverance Theater.



Tia Speros and Julia Nixon in the Studio Theatre production of *Caroline, or Change*, supported by an American Masterpieces: Musical Theater grant. Photo by Scott Suchman.

In the recent American Masterpieces issue of *NEA Arts*, Theater and Musical Theater Director Bill O’Brien said, “The [funded projects] offer a number of very vivid snapshots of what lies at the heart of the American experience.” The statement is no less apt when it comes to the projects presented on the following pages: Center Theater Group’s premiere of Tanya Barfield’s *Of Equal Measure*; Steppenwolf Theatre Company’s world premiere of *August: Osage County*; Signature Theatre’s revival of August Wilson’s *King Hedley II*; Artists Repertory Theatre’s production of *The Ghosts of Celilo*; Folger Theatre’s reimagining of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; and Arkansas Repertory Theatre’s presentation of *The Legacy Project: It Happened in Little Rock*.

From Page to Stage

Center Theatre Group Presents *Of Equal Measure*

Commissioning a play and mounting a new theater work onstage are two very different endeavors. In 2005, Michael Ritchie, artistic director of Center Theatre Group (CTG), commissioned a new work from up-and-coming playwright Tanya Barfield. The commission was a milestone for two reasons. It is the first script Ritchie ordered via his New Play Production Program after taking over the Los Angeles theater consortium from its founder, former National Council on the Arts member Gordon Davidson. And second, Ritchie was backing only an idea in Barfield's head: a play about segregated federal offices in the Wilson administration.

"Once CTG decided to commission me, they let me develop my own structure for working on the piece," Barfield said. "They let me lead my development and agreed to produce it before it was finished. That's rare."



Playwright Tanya Barfield, whose play *Of Equal Measure* is being produced by the Center Theatre Group with support from the NEA. Photo by Bjorg Magnea.

But such an open arrangement can make fundraising for a new production difficult because so many questions remain unanswered: How long will it take the playwright to craft a script? What if the new play needs five workshops before it's ready for a full production? When will the finished product best fit into the theater's season?

By March 2007, Ritchie had a first draft of Barfield's play sitting on his desk. He liked what he saw and was convinced that *Of Equal Measure* could be ready for CTG's 2007–2008 season. He decided to seek grant funding to mount the show, and last fall, received word that CTG would receive NEA grant support to stage the play in the summer of 2008. The grant will cover roughly one-tenth of the total production costs, including a final workshop scheduled for February 2008 and salaries for 10 actors.

Two sets of characters will share the stage in *Of Equal Measure*. While Woodrow Wilson and his cabinet wrestle with how to integrate the United States into fractious global politics, African-American federal workers prepare to serve the war effort in newly segregated offices. The protagonist, Jade, is a White House stenographer torn between her duty to family, country, and the Civil Rights cause.

"During the Wilson era, things took a step backwards for blacks," Barfield said. "I find underexplored issues of African-American history particularly compelling, especially the dichotomy of Wilson, because he was so forward-looking in terms of his vision for the free world, but so retrograde in terms of many domestic policies."

Ritchie agrees that this lapse of judgment by Wilson, the president lauded for laboring in vain to establish the League of Nations, should make for a compelling play that addresses an African-American issue but intrigues a broad audience. The show is scheduled to premiere June 29 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City, California.

The Windy City to the Great White Way

Steppenwolf Theatre's *August: Osage County* Takes On Broadway

The December 5 *New York Times* review of Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* raved, "It is, flat-out, no asterisks and without qualifications, the most exciting new American play Broadway has seen in years." A greater compliment couldn't be paid to a new play, but the accolades also go to Steppenwolf Theatre, where the play first found a home.

The Chicago-based, Tony Award-winning theater produced *August* in its 2006–2007 season as part of the New Plays Initiative, a program designed to support playwrights at every stage of their careers. The play's world premiere was supported, in part, by an FY 07 NEA Access to Artistic Excellence grant. Steppenwolf Executive Director David Hawkanson acknowledged that the NEA's early support meant a lot to the company, especially since the grant was awarded through the NEA's panel system. According to Hawkanson, being vetted by the NEA meant that the theater's peers had recognized the importance of Letts's play, despite it being a difficult and unusual one to produce.

Structured in three acts, running nearly three hours, and featuring a large cast of 13 actors, the classical scope of Letts's darkly comic take on family dysfunction is unusual in today's budget-conscious theater world. *August* was, however, the perfect undertaking for Steppenwolf, where the collaborative atmosphere allows for such artistic risk. Tracy Letts, director Anna D. Shapiro, and seven of the 13 cast members are all part of Steppenwolf's permanent ensemble of 41 members.

"Having gained both the artistic and personal maturity to give voice to the play, Tracy was met by a network of artistic colleagues who gave vision and voice to the characters living in his head," said Steppenwolf Artistic Director Martha Lavey. "Knowing that he had both an



Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble members Rondi Reed and Amy Morton in *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts, directed by Anna D. Shapiro. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

artistic home . . . and a field of ensemble actors whom he could trust to create the complex and intimate relationships of his play allowed *August: Osage County* to emerge as it did."

A nearly sold-out run of *August*, which premiered in Steppenwolf's Chicago home on June 28, garnered six Jeff Awards, the city's top theater accolades. Prior even to that debut, the play was generating interest among Broadway producers. More impressive, the production moved to Broadway with 11 of its original 13 cast members, an unusual move when name recognition in a cast can help sell Broadway tickets.

The play's anticipated opening at New York's Imperial Theater might have been delayed until early December due to the stagehands' strike, but it's expected to attract nearly 300,000 theatergoers during its 16-week run. When the *Chicago Tribune* dubbed *August: Osage County* "staggeringly ambitious [and] staggeringly successful," it was presciently describing the play's winning ways on the Great White Way.

American Storyteller

Signature Theatre Applauds August Wilson

Over nearly three decades of work, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson made an indelible mark on American theater. Signature Theatre honored that legacy by celebrating Wilson's work for its 15th-anniversary season. James Houghton, the theater's artistic director, said Wilson was an obvious choice. "I think August Wilson's contribution to the American literary canon, not just theatrical canon but literary canon, is profound."

The New York-based theater hosts a resident playwright each season. Wilson's residency was planned to coincide with the end of his seminal ten-play cycle on 20th-century African-American life. According to Houghton, Wilson was planning new work for the residency. "As much of a blessing as [the ten-play cycle] was for him, it was also a huge responsibility and burden that he was carrying for nearly 25 years. He was very anxious to move on from that cycle to these other stories he had to tell."

After Wilson's death from cancer in October 2005, it was uncertain if the season could go forward. With the support of Wilson's widow Constanza Romero and other of the playwright's collaborators, however, Signature reconceived the season as a tribute to the author, featuring *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, and *King Hedley II*. Wilson's "bookend" plays, *Gem of the Ocean* and *Radio Golf*, already were scheduled for New York runs, and Houghton thought that those three plays filled in the gaps.

Houghton said the NEA's support for *King Hedley II* was crucial to the production. "It takes a lot of support to make any of these projects come to life or this mission come to life, and to get a grant of that scale and size for a particular production . . . made it possible to even occur."

Mounting a season of a late playwright's work was a departure for Signature, which prides itself on working with the playwright in the room. Houghton explained, however, that in some ways, "the presence of the play-



Cherise Booth and Russell Hornsby in Signature Theatre's production of August Wilson's *King Hedley II*. Photo by Carol Rosegg.

wright was never felt more deeply. We felt that burden that we were there to shine light on [August Wilson] and his work and to celebrate him completely."

At the same time, Signature also launched the Signature Ticket Initiative, primarily underwritten by Time Warner, which enabled the theater to offer tickets for only \$15 and make a live theater experience accessible to more people. To make the program a success, Signature concentrated on reaching underserved communities by participating in neighborhood events and inviting community members to visit the theater.

The season may have been bittersweet, but Houghton called it worth the effort. "I think we were able to take all of the grieving and the complete loss of August that we were feeling . . . and channel that into a very proactive celebration of his work and his life."

Facing the Water

Artists Repertory Theatre's Production of *The Ghosts of Celilo*

Marv Ross had never been so nervous in his life. The former member of the 1980s rock band Quarterflash was standing before an audience of Native-American leaders, all members of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. He was seeking the blessing of the tribe for a new project of his: writing a musical to commemorate Native-American ways that were lost when the Dalles Dam flooded the Columbia River in 1957.

He expected criticism. What he got, instead, were memories. The commission members recognized many relatives in the historic photos he displayed. "That's my grandfather," one elder said. "That's my aunt," pointed out another.

Many of those same tribal leaders found themselves in the audience in Portland, Oregon, when the musical Ross wrote, *The Ghosts of Celilo*, opened in September 2007. Artists Repertory Theatre produced the show at the Newmark Theatre at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts. For Ross, the premiere capped roughly 10 years of researching a story that's become a scourge in the Pacific Northwest. In order to build the Dalles Dam, an unprecedented source of hydroelectric power, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers displaced a band of about 200 mid-Columbia Indians, known as the River People.

The Ghosts of Celilo, directed by Greg Tamblyn, was created by Ross, Thomas Morning Owl, and Tom Hampson based on their research and interviews. Ross, Mel Kubik, and Native musicians Chenoa Egawa and Arlie Neskahi collaboratively composed the score. The plot focuses on Chokey Jim and Train, two Indian boys kidnapped to be raised in a Christian boarding school, and their quest to escape the boarding school and return to Celilo Falls to catch their ceremonial first salmon before the Dalles Dam floods their village. Four ghosts trapped at the bottom of the Columbia River narrate the story.

"Profoundly moving" is how *Oregonian* newspaper critic Marty Hughley summed up the show. Audience

members agreed. In the weeks that followed the show's opening, Ross received mail from a cross-section of community members, including letters of praise from older Native Americans who were raised in boarding schools like Chokey Jim's.

Jill Baum, the theater's managing director, said that receiving the NEA grant was instrumental in helping Artists Rep secure additional grants from the Oregon Cultural Trust and the Regional Arts and Culture Council. Altogether, civic and philanthropic groups donated more than \$150,000 to the theater's production costs for the play. *The Ghosts of Celilo* also proved to be an unexpected boon at the box office, taking in three times Artists Rep's normal ticket revenue. The show represents musical theater in its rarest and finest form: entertaining, profit-making, and socially redeeming.



Chenoa Egawa portrays one of the ghost narrators in Artists Repertory Theatre's production of *The Ghosts of Celilo*. Photo by Owen Carey.

A Brave New World

Folger Shakespeare Library's 21st-Century *Tempest*

Tackling one of Shakespeare's masterpieces is a challenge in itself, but creating a production that takes a classic text and approaches it from a new angle is daring indeed. Folger Shakespeare Library did just that with its production of *The Tempest*. As Shakespeare wrote this late-career romance, 17th-century Britain was in the midst of its exploration of the “new” world. *Tempest* director Aaron Posner was able to bring his own distinctly 21st-century sense of exploration to the Bard's work.



Caliban (Todd Scofield) has a conversation with his imaginary friends, Trinculo and Stephano, in Folger Theatre's production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Photo by Carol Pratt.

Technology played an important role in Posner's reimagining of the classic, and the NEA's grant support played an important role in realizing that vision. Janet Griffin, the Folger's director of public programs, said that Posner's retelling was “technically, a more challenging, ambitious production than we might have been able to accomplish had we not had this grant.”

While bringing the current century into classic theater can sometimes be distracting, Posner's careful use of technology deepened and enhanced themes already

in the work. For example, in his treatment of Ariel, the director imprisoned the character in a space above the stage, making her invisible to the audience. He then indicated the character's movements through the actor's voice, literally making her voice fly around the theater by using a new sound system. The use of this technology allowed Posner to show the character's physical isolation while reinforcing her qualities as a spirit.

In a similar gesture, as Prospero revealed to his daughter Miranda the treachery that had ultimately marooned them—that his brother Antonio deposed him and set him adrift with his daughter—images from the character's past were projected onto a screen above the stage. As Griffin explained, the projections “helped the audience realize how awful it was. When you actually visualize what it must have been like in a small boat with a three-year-old, you know that [his brother] intended him to die.”

While Posner creatively embraced technology in this production, it's important to note that he wasn't entirely dependent on it. One of the play's most powerful characterizations resulted from the use of good old-fashioned props. Focusing on Shakespeare's description of Caliban as “hissed into madness,” the director reinforced the character's insanity and isolation by having the actor also portray the characters Stephano and Trinculo with whom Caliban often trades lines. Usually portrayed by other actors, the characters were instead indicated by a rag wrapped around one of Caliban's hands and an empty bottle in his other.

Between May 9 and June 17 more than 10,000 people saw Posner's version of *The Tempest*, which mined the past and the present to create a production that was—to borrow a phrase from Prospero—“such stuff as dreams are made on.”

Conversations and Catharsis

Arkansas Repertory Theatre's *The Legacy Project*

Good things happen when NEA theater panels convene. Not only are highly artistic projects rewarded with funding, highly artistic partnerships are formed.

Such was the case in 2002, when Bob Hupp, artistic director of Arkansas Repertory Theatre (ART), and Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj, a young African-American playwright and director, found themselves sitting at the same panelists' table. Between sessions, they chatted and brainstormed potential projects. Two years later, Maharaj was in Little Rock directing *Dreamgirls*. He felt a strong connection with the community and began to talk about a possible collaboration with greater significance: a new theatrical work commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Little Rock Nine's resolve to desegregate Central High School.

The Legacy Project: It Happened in Little Rock premiered last fall to national acclaim. ART brought the project to the stage with help from an NEA grant. Six of the nine former students attended the show on September 25, the day of the anniversary, and sang with the cast at the curtain call. Two more of the former classmates eventually came to the theater, and all eight lavished nothing but praise on the play. And while their endorsement meant much to Hupp, he was more concerned about how members of the Little Rock community would react to seeing history reenacted live.

After each performance, Just Communities of Central Arkansas, a social advocacy consortium, encouraged people to remain in the theater and discuss what they'd seen onstage. Audiences stayed for up to 90 minutes, venting, remembering, and reconciling.

"We really were interested in making a theater piece where the ideas—the issues that had been just below the surface—were addressed in raw and open ways," Hupp said. "The play was the catalyst for these discussions."

In developing the show, Maharaj took his cues from



Hate mail written in the late 1950s regarding desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School is projected over actresses Mary-Pat Green and Gia McGlone in Arkansas Repertory Theatre's production of *The Legacy Project: It Happened in Little Rock*. Photo by Benjamin Krain.

the creators of *The Laramie Project*, the 2000 play about a small Wyoming town where tensions mounted after a gay college student was brutally murdered. Just as Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project based their play on interviews with Laramie residents, Maharaj spoke with nearly 100 present and former members of the Little Rock community. From those transcripts and archival media accounts, he compiled an account of September 1957 that was historically accurate, dramatically compelling, and profoundly moving.

The Legacy Project may never be staged with quite the same poignancy as the premiere, but Hupp is confident that the show will have a life of its own at theaters across the country.

"The issues of 1957 are still very much a part of this community," Hupp said. "We knew we were taking a risk, but the play was so well received, and so thoughtfully responded to, it made me proud to be a member of this community."

The Play House

The NEA Talks With Todd London of New Dramatists

For nearly six decades, New York's New Dramatists has gifted the nation's playwrights with time and space to develop new work. In this interview excerpt, NEA Director of Theater and Musical Theater Bill O'Brien spoke with New Dramatists Artistic Director Todd London about the organization's mission and the current challenges to producing new plays. Read the full interview at www.arts.gov/features/index.html.

NEA: What's the mission of New Dramatists?

TODD LONDON: The mission is both simple and idealistic: to provide space and time for writers to develop their craft in the company of other gifted writers so that they can make lasting contributions to the theater. Programmatically, "space and time" translates into seven-year, free residencies for five to eight writers a year. This year alone, our current writers have more than 150 productions slated in at least 22 states and 11 countries internationally.

NEA: How does funding from the NEA support your mission?

LONDON: The NEA supports... the laboratory that's at the heart of our writers' self-directed work. Because the writers choose what they need to work on and when they need to work on it, and because they design and control their own developmental processes, this program has to stay flexible and respond to immediate artistic needs and impulses. It's always immensely important when the Arts Endowment, reflecting the understanding of our peers in the field, funds this pure research. It's like getting a letter (and check) in the mail that says: "Your colleagues across the country get what you do, value what you do, and share in the fruits of your labor."



Todd London, artistic director of New Dramatists. Photo courtesy of New Dramatists.

NEA: What do you see as some of the challenges facing new plays today, especially in terms of reaching full production?

LONDON: There are so many challenges: widespread fear of the new, conservatism about planning the untried, shrinking audiences and shrinking seasons (both of which make opportunities for new work by less-well-known writers scarcer and more risky), the lack of money for true long-term development of work, and diminished expectations about the scale of new plays... On top of this, playwrights have a terribly hard time making a living, and, so, they must spend more and more of their creative time either doing other jobs, especially teaching, or writing for TV and film.

Moreover, plays can take a long time to reach full bloom. They need heat and light, productive collaboration, and the kind of space and time rarely available in producing theaters working at full tilt to get seasons on stage.

NEA: Do you sense any emerging developments that might provide better support for new plays?

LONDON: Producing theaters and labs like [New Dramatists] are beginning to pioneer partnerships for moving plays from idea to production. And more and more

artists and funders are beginning to explore ways of thinking about production as part of the development process—how new play production differs from that of established plays, how necessary second and third productions are to the evolution of a play.

Bringing Shakespeare to a New Generation



When the NEA inaugurated Shakespeare in American Communities in 2003 the agency aimed to “revitalize the longstanding American theatrical tradition of touring.” Since then, the NEA has brought Shakespeare to more than 1,700 communities in all 50 states, introducing a new generation of Americans to the English-language’s greatest writer. But the Shakespeare program has had more than a cultural impact; the initiative also has provided employment to more than 1,200 of the nation’s actors. Add the numerous other theater artists employed on these NEA-supported productions, such as directors,

The Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of *Pericles* in Washington, DC, as part of the NEA’s Shakespeare for a New Generation initiative. Photo by Richard Termine.

scenic artists, costume designers, and stage managers, and it’s safe to double, if not triple, that number. It’s also safe to say that some of the nearly one million students who have come to know Shakespeare through these actors and theater artists will join their ranks in the future, introducing yet another generation to the Bard and to the transformative vitality of live theater.

Making Space

NEA Partners with Arena Stage for NEA New Play Development Project



Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith presents the design for its new Mead Center for American Theater. Photo by Scott Suchman, courtesy of Arena Stage.

Unlike most writers, the playwright's work isn't done once his vision has emerged on the page. The next step is to move that vision from the page and onto a stage where it can be realized by actors, directors, and other theater artists. In support of that process, the Arts Endowment recently announced the NEA New Play Development Project (NPDP). Arena Stage, a decades-old Washington, DC-based theater, will administer the project, a partnership the theater's Artistic Director Molly Smith called "one of the most important partnerships in Arena's history."

The NEA New Play Development Project will focus on selecting exceptional new theater projects from across the country to receive development support. Two projects selected as NEA Outstanding New American Plays will receive up to \$90,000 each to support advanced development, including at least one full production. Five projects selected as NEA Distinguished New Play Development Projects will receive up to \$20,000 each to support the early stages of development

for a new play with strong potential to merit a full production. Each of the projects, expected to be announced in fall 2008, will be developed in close collaboration with the playwrights.

An additional component of NPDP will actively encourage the national study of and dialogue around existing and new models for new play development. It may seem unusual for a regional theater to take on this kind of national facilitation role, but David Dower, the theater's producing artistic associate who will manage the new program, sees the program as an opening

up of conversations already taking place at Arena on how best to develop and produce new plays. According to Dower, many of those conversations, for which the project aims to create a national forum, focus on the use of resources in regard to new plays. "There have been more resources and more focus on the opportunity to commission and develop work and less focus on how do we move the play from development to production. This program with the NEA is really about understanding where are the best practices, where are the most promising initiatives and directions in the field that would [present to theaters] some options for taking the risk out and connecting new plays to their missions in a more robust way."

The NEA partnership follows Arena's recent announcement regarding construction of its new Mead Center for American Theater, an expanded theater campus that reflects Arena's revisioning of itself as a site to study as well as produce theater. Even amidst this growth spurt, Arena is committed to working with its peers on projects that will take place at theaters across the country.

For more information about the NEA New Play Development Project, please go to www.arenastage.org/npdp.

Exploring Ideas of Theater

The NEA/TCG Career Development Program

While studying drama in college, aspiring director Kate Whoriskey became fascinated with experimental theater. In graduate school, she was enthralled with the classics. After earning her master's degree from Harvard, she wasn't ready to look for work as a professional director just yet. She needed time to synthesize. The NEA/TCG Career Development Program for directors gave her that extra time, and built up her resume in the process.

"The young directors program was vital to my development as a director," Whoriskey said. "It gave me a chance to just explore my own ideas of theater before heading out in the professional world. That's something that many young directors miss. There is so much

program offers support for residencies at theaters by directors and designers.

Nearly a decade after participating in the NEA/TCG Career Development Program, Whoriskey has matured into one of American theater's most visible and versatile young directors. She has worked at major regional theaters across the country and, most recently, earned praise in the *New Yorker* for directing *The Piano Teacher* at the Vineyard Theater. Her 2008 commitments include directing a new play by Lynn Nottage at Chicago's Goodman Theatre and the American premiere of *Oroonoko* at The Duke in New York.

But for all her big city success, Whoriskey hasn't

lost sight of the early mentorships that were so pivotal in her career. In 1998, the NEA/TCG program allowed her to complete three mini-residencies. In Berlin, Germany, she studied with contemporary choreographer Pina Bausch. She also spent time closer to home at the Watermill Center, the Long Island multidisciplinary art retreat founded by avant-garde designer Robert Wilson. And she flew north to Juneau, Alaska, where she assisted Peter DuBois with a production at Perseverance Theatre. Whoriskey went on to receive a second career development grant from TCG, this time spending two years at Seattle's Intiman Theatre seated at the right hand of director Bartlett Sher.



A scene from Vineyard Theater's *The Piano Teacher*, the highly lauded play directed by Kate Whoriskey, an alumni of the NEA/TCG Career Development Program. Photo by Carol Rosegg.

emphasis on how to get ahead. But at the age of 21 or 22, you should be trying to figure out what work you like and who you are, not trying to produce and get good reviews."

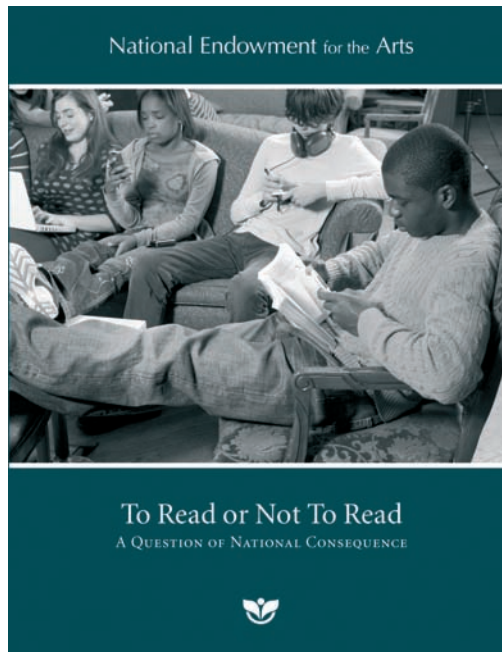
The NEA/TCG Career Development Program began through a partnership between the NEA and the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for American theater, in 1987. The pro-

Mentorships like these are critical to the future of American theater, explained Teresa Eyring, executive director of TCG. "It is crucial for there to be a transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next." Many of the 200 grant recipients have gone on to become resident directors and designers or launched successful freelance careers, such as Eric Rosen (director, 2001–2003), who was named artistic director of Kansas City Repertory Theatre in December 2007, and Kevin Adams (designer 1992–1993), who won a Tony Award in May for lighting design in *Spring Awakening*.

In the News

NEA's New Study on Reading Habits

According to the numbers, Americans are not only reading less, but we're reading less well. This was the story reported by the newly released NEA research report, *To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence*, a comprehensive analysis of more than 40 studies on the reading habits of Americans. Expanding on the agency's landmark 2004 report, *Reading at Risk*, the new publication surveys the reading habits and skills of children, teenagers, and adults around all types of reading in various formats. Drawing on a range of national studies published since 2004, from sources including the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education and the Conference Board, *To Read or Not To Read* also shows a distinct correlation between lower reading rates and decreased economic, civic, and social opportunities for Americans.



NEA Chairman Gioia characterizes *To Read or Not To Read* as a wake-up call for the nation to the importance of reading and “what the consequences of doing it well or doing it badly are.” In an interview with the *Seattle Times* published shortly after the study's release, Chairman Gioia said, “[This is a] call to action not only for parents, teachers, librarians, writers, and publishers, but also for politicians, business leaders, economists, and social activists. . . . It is now time to become more committed to solving [the decline in reading]

or face the consequences. The nation needs to focus more attention and resources on an activity both fundamental and irreplaceable for democracy.”

To Read or Not To Read is available for free on the NEA web site at www.arts.gov/pub/pubLit.php and is also accessible as a PDF.

Tony Chauveaux Trades Pennsylvania Ave for Presidential Archive

There's a lot more Diet Coke in the vending machine these days at the NEA since Deputy Chairman for Grants and Awards Tony Chauveaux departed for a new opportunity in California. Chauveaux, who came to the agency from the Texas Arts Commission in 2003, is now the new Deputy Director for the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California. At the NEA, Chauveaux oversaw all direct discipline grants, earning deep respect from the NEA's discipline directors as well as from arts and service



NEA Deputy Chairman for Grants and Awards Tony Chauveaux.
Photo by Kevin Allen.

organizations across the country. He also spearheaded the agency's Challenge America: Reaching Every Community effort, which has awarded a direct NEA grant in every Congressional district since 2005—a historic achievement for the agency. “Tony brought experience and vigor to a project vital to making the NEA truly national in scope,” said Chairman Dana Gioia. “He is an exemplary public servant who has the admiration of all his NEA colleagues. We wish him great success—and plenty of Diet Coke—with his newest venture.”



The 2007 National Medal of Arts was awarded to theater director R. Craig Noel and presented by President Bush on November 15, 2007, in an East Room ceremony. Photo by Michael Stewart.

Craig Noel receives National Medal of Arts

R. Craig Noel, founding director of San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, received the National Medal of Arts from President George W. Bush at a White House ceremony on November 15. The National Medal of Arts, awarded by the President and managed by the NEA, is the nation's highest award for artists and arts patrons. Mark Hofflund, National Council on the Arts member and Idaho Shakespeare Festival managing director, offered these words of appreciation for Noel's leadership in the theater field: "Craig Noel is ineffably us. Delighting in community. Devoted to colleagues. Dedicated to inspiring the young. Finding joy in work, laughter in hardship, care and compassion at every juncture. That he checked hats near the replica of an Elizabethan playhouse, went from directing in this Old Globe to fighting in the Pacific, to running Tokyo's largest theater, to bringing Marilyn Monroe to the screen, to building an iconic American theater in San Diego—these are but pieces in the art of his life. Craig Noel's masterworks are among all who honor this brilliant and humble man, and 'to greatness dedicate themselves.'"

November National Council on the Arts Meeting



Representative Luis G. Fortuno of Puerto Rico (left) meets with Miguel Campaneria—currently artistic director of Balleateatro Nacional de Puerto Rico—the newest member of the National Council on the Arts and the first from a Puerto Rican arts organization. Photo by Shana Chase.



Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island (right) addresses the National Council on the Arts meeting in November, with NCA member Ben Donenberg, founder of Shakespeare Festival/LA, to his left. Photo by Sally Gifford.



Senator Robert Bennett of Utah (right) chats with Fred C. Adams, founder of the Utah Shakespearean Festival, at a NCA dinner meeting in November. Photo by Sally Gifford.

Critics in the Spotlight

The NEA Arts Journalism Institute in Theater and Musical Theater

Hollywood may be the movie capital of the world, but Los Angeles is a theater town. With nearly 200 professional theaters, it's actually easier to spot a star onstage than on a street corner. Add the presence of one of the nation's top journalism schools—the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California—and you have the perfect location for journalists to come together and study theater.

Since 2004, the NEA Arts Journalism Institute in Theater and Musical Theater—one of three discipline-specific institutes supported by the NEA—has brought together 25 writers, editors, and producers to spend 10 days in sunny LA, immersed in theatrical study. Primarily targeted to journalists in the nation's small to medium media markets, the NEA developed the institutes because the “vitality of the arts depends on lively and informed criticism, especially local reviews and coverage from their own communities,” according to NEA Chairman Dana Gioia.

Under the guidance of Program Director Sasha Anawalt, the theater and musical theater fellows take acting classes, visit theaters, and write reviews that are, in turn, edited by critics from major news outlets. In 2007, visiting workshop leaders included Misha Berson of *The Seattle Times*, Michael Phillips of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Steven Leigh Morris of *LA Weekly*. The 25 fellows hailed from 21 states and wrote for publications of all persuasions and sizes. They returned home better equipped to write about theatrical happenings in their own communities. Here's what two of the 2007 fellows had to say about their experiences.



The 2007 class of the NEA Arts Journalism Institute in Theater and Musical Theater at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Ritzel.

I was reassured to learn that theater critics in big and small cities alike face the same challenges. We all have to be tough and fair and honest, and write for a varied readership. The NEA institute also gave me more credibility. I could return home, certificate in hand, and say “You know what? I know what I’m talking about.” I may not be a full-on theater genius, but at least I can distinguish between a good play and one that’s really great—and I can articulate the difference.

Michael Morain
Arts Reporter
Des Moines Register

It’s no exaggeration to say that things I learned during the fellowship pop into my head every day... Since returning from LA, I have made a conscious effort to make myself more approachable. I’ve had conversations with directors during intermission and I’ve made it a point to get out to shows that I’m not reviewing myself just to see them. And I’ve noticed a shift in the way that I’m received—more folks are coming up to me at shows and chatting, and I’ve gotten a lot of stories that I might have missed out on because of that.

Deborah Martin
Assistant Arts and Entertainment Editor
San Antonio Express-News



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