

New Visions / New Voices 2002

Process. Plays. Playwrights.

Since 1991, The Kennedy Center has provided a biennial home for the development of new plays for young, family, and inter-generational audiences through their unique program, New Visions/New Voices. And it is an apt title for this event, where process and exploration are celebrated in works ranging from traditional to cutting-edge, for young people from pre-K through high school. From the obscure to the renowned, big budget to struggling, experienced to neophyte, all have been welcomed to the Kennedy Center. As anyone who has attended this event knows, diversity in all its forms is an integral part of their mission.

Theatres submit proposals consisting of: a playwright, composer (if a musical or opera), director and either a draft of the script or a treatment/scenario of the proposed project or idea. Projects may be at any stage of the development process, but it is understood that the play will be a part of the theatre's future plans. An initial, blind screening of the proposals (typically 45-50) is done by outside readers. A committee of Kennedy Center staff, primarily in the Education Department, makes the final selections, with information about the actual theatres and artists revealed only at the end of the process. Projects are invited to participate based on a number of criteria, with quality being at the top of the list. Other factors include potential future of the script, ability of the creative team to realize their project, age range, as well as stylistic, geographic, and cultural diversity.

Proposals will again be due in the fall of 2003, for New Visions/New Voices, which will be in May of 2004. Playwrights, composers, directors, educators – theatre workers of all shapes and sizes – are encouraged to attend this nationally acclaimed new play development program. Theatres large and small are encouraged to submit proposals.

New Visions is about process, and there's a particular buzz to the week because of the energy of writers and directors working on plays that are actually going to be produced – The Kennedy Center's contribution to the field – assisting in the cultivation of innovative work for the next generation.

THE PLAYS AND THE PLAYERS

POWER PLAY

Blue Shift Theatre Ensemble, Asheville, NC and Actor's Company of Pennsylvania, Lancaster, PA
Playwright: Barry Kornhauser
Composer: Ron Barnett
Director: Eric Johnson

An exploration of bullying in schools and neighborhoods through words, gestures, music, video, and physical comedy.

SACAGAWEA

Oregon Children's Theatre, Portland
Playwright: Eric Coble
Director: Stan Foote
Composer: Marv Ross

Tracing the steps of Lewis and Clark's expedition from Sacagawea's point of view.

THE BULLY SHOW

Omaha Theater Company for Young People
Playwright: Brian Guehring
Director: Kevin Ehrhart

A collaboration with students at two Omaha schools, geared to challenge students to think about, discuss, and hopefully examine their own behavior and attitudes towards bullying.

COLOR ME DARK

The Kennedy Center
Playwright: Jerome Hairston
Director: Ricardo Khan

Adapted from the novel by Patricia C. McKissack, the tumultuous experience of a young African-American girl who, amidst fierce racial prejudice in the South, moves with her family to Chicago during the 1919 Great Migration.

THE SELFISH GIANT

Theatre Reaching Young People and Schools (TRYPS), Columbia, MO
Playwright: Music, book, and lyrics by Russ Brown
Orchestrator: Justin Nabors
Director: Jill Womack

A musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's short story by the same name. Set in Ireland, a selfish giant learns the joy of sharing his garden with the children who love it.

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Seattle Children's Theatre
Playwright: Joe Sutton
Director: Linda Hartzell

A new adaptation of Stephen Crane's historic novel, the story of a young soldier's coming of age during the Civil War.

STORIES MY MOTHER TOLD ME: THE ODYSSEY OF TELEMACHA

Childsplay, Tempe, AZ
Playwright: Book and Lyrics by Mary Hall Surface and David Maddox
Composer: David Maddox
Directors: David Saar and José Cruz González

A musical inspired by Homer's *The Odyssey*, is set in a Hispanic world of magic realism, depicting the journey of a brave heroine who finds faith and hope along the way.

DIS/TROY

Honolulu Theatre for Youth
Playwright: Yokanaan Kearns
Director: Mark Lutwak

A contemporary adaptation of Homer's *The Iliad* for four actors playing multiple roles incorporating aspects of rhythm, chant, martial arts and dance.

86 total: 21 writers, composers, directors; 42 total actors - 29 actors appearing in 55 roles; eight stage managers; two festival dramaturges; one show dramaturg; two musicians; one music director/accompanist; one production coordinator; one discussion leader; Kennedy Center staff - five from Youth and Family Programs, three from production.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE

Journal by Megan Gilbride

Observations by
Deirdre Kelly Lavrakas and Kim Peter Kovac

Day 1: Monday, May 13th

Monday at New Visions is, in a sense, a culmination of anticipation. The writers, composers, directors have been working on these projects in some form for months. Some have done mostly research, some multiple drafts, some figuring out what their piece really needs to be about. They've been working harder and harder as time gets shorter, and all are here for an intensive week of work.

Team New Visions (both administration and production) has been working since September when the first proposals came in, through adjudication, selection, notification, working with theatres on contracts and PR, working with directors on casting and dealing with scheduling, logistics, hospitality and security.

All of us – artistic teams and NV staff – are cautiously optimistic that all the proper tools will have been assembled – the right rehearsal space, information, logistics, actors.

Starting at 9:15 AM are short meetings of introduction and orientation for the playwrights, composers, directors and stage managers of four projects rehearsing in the morning.

10:00 AM: The Theater Lab

The room is jolted awake with the arrival of some 35 morning shift actors. For anybody who's never been to NV/NV, it's a real family atmosphere, very warm and vibrant, as many of the folk have worked together before. New Visions staff is busy greeting everyone and introduc-

ing cast members to directors. Throughout the intro, it's emphasized that the week is all about the development of the plays. "The Kennedy Center's only agenda is that the artistic teams make the play better or learn something about the play."

Some general procedural stuff follows – specific yet informally presented – with the group of actors as a whole. And they're off, stage managers leading their charges off to their rehearsal rooms scattered throughout the building . . .

1:00 PM: Rehearsal Room 7 (*Sacagawea*)

The men have, like ducks to water, taken to "Riding on a Donkey," a song from the show, which sounds just as raucous and jovial as a post-colonial bar.

1:30 PM: Theater Lab (*The Bully Show*)

Ian LeValley, playing a kid, improvises with Michael Jerome Johnson, playing the host of the TV show-within-the-play. *The Bully Show* involves interacting with and working off the audience, so improvisation has been a big part of this first rehearsal.

This will be a play for the schools, so the artistic team is faced with focusing on the interactive portion of the piece while keeping in the back of their minds there won't be any real live kids for the staged reading.

2:12 PM: Theater Lab, break between shifts

After rehearsal, Mark Lutwak of Team *Dis/Troy* comments on the fine casting, how flexible the actors are, and how the process is such a marvelous springboard



Ken Arthur, David Maddox and Graham Whitehead.

for the re-writing process. "It's giving us a place to go with the script." Mark notes that he and writer Yokanaan Kearns are focused on their own concerns and are pleased that one of the actors is "asking the two or three questions that break it wide open."

2:30 PM: Youth and Family Programming Office

Team *PowerPlay*, a potentially exciting media mish-mash combining video projection, music, live actors, comic books and clowning – and the second of two shows about bullying in middle schools - has arrived in the building. Director Eric Johnson and Playwright Barry Kornhauser continue to discuss how to work on the script and what the reading will be like without the video technology, which is an essential part of what their play will be.

3:10 PM: Theater Lab (*Red Badge*)

The afternoon begins as the morning did with the second group arriving. Of the eight NV/NV plays, four are rehearsed in the morning, four in the afternoon. The artistic teams spend a few moments introducing themselves and their plays to the rest of the NV/NV family. Linda Hartzell, the directing half of Team *Red Badge*, describes deciding to work with playwright Joe Sutton as a 'blind date'. They only met for the first time last night, but had a wonderfully stimulating meeting on the script.

3:45 PM: YFP Office

The afternoon group of "newbie newbies" has been greeted and debriefed, and have begun their various rehearsals. An eerie calm settles over the office.

4:11 PM: Rehearsal Room 6 (*Red Badge*)

The play is over two hours long in this first draft, and one of the major goals Linda and Joe wish to accomplish is cutting about 30% to fit the theatre's ideal running time. Additionally, they must decide what will be read for the hour-long presentation. Through the reading, Linda listens and watches, looking up from her script to study the interplay between actors.



Essential rehearsal tools:
water bottle and script.



(clockwise from left) *Selfish Giant* orchestrator Justin Nabors with actors Eric Lee Johnson, Giuseppe De Bartolo, R. Scott Thompson and Rob McQuay.

10:50 AM: YFP Office

Selfish Giant director Jill Womack pokes her head in the office and asks: “Can I take all these actors back to Missouri?”

12:13 PM: Rehearsal Room 2 (*Dis/Troy*)

Mark Lutwak makes a point about what rehearsal means for their rewriting process: “Yokanaan can listen with big ears.”

12:59 PM: Rehearsal Room 7 (*Sacagawea*)

It seems actor Timothy Getman’s boisterous Charbonneau (Sacagawea’s fur-trapping husband) has a French accent that is – to put it mildly – a bit over-the-top. Someone suggests the play become a musical called “Charbonneau!” The room quickly erupts into a mock-Disney musical extravaganza.

2:00-3:00 PM: Theater Lab Artistic Teams Luncheon

Each year The Kennedy Center hosts an inter-session luncheon so the morning artistic teams can meet and mingle with the afternoon teams. New Visions/New Voices projects are submitted by theatres, selecting the writers, composers, directors, either from the theatre’s staff or free-lancers, so each of the eight teams is an existing entity. Here they spend a few moments talking about their projects. Mary Hall Surface of Team *Telemeca* announces they have five new scenes hot off the Xerox machine and everyone nods and laughs in understanding. The room turns into several little island chains as people trickle in from rehearsal. It’s NV/NV’s theatrical archipelago for an hour or so. Then, time to clear the tables and get back to work.

3:20 PM: Theater Lab, (*Color Me Dark*)

Jerome Hairston comes to rehearsal with fifteen newly rewritten pages for the top of the show. The space goes quiet while the actors look through the new material.

Director Ricardo Kahn is off to the side with reeds player Charlie Young, talking about music of 1919, the differences between Southern blues/jazz and Chicago jazz, and how to incorporate both into the play to chart the family’s move.

4:15 PM: Rehearsal Room 7

The Kennedy Center is in the midst of the six play Sondheim Celebration and the Washington Opera is in residence, so space is a serious commodity in a building with only eight rehearsal rooms. Unfortunately, there’s no second room for *Telemeca* but we’re at least able to use the small Education Department conference room so the five members of the artistic team can meet while music rehearsals continue.

4:57 PM: YFP Office

Russ Brown and Justin Nabors have been at the counter in the office for over an hour rewriting *Selfish Giant* music. As they leave they are offered restaurant and sightseeing recommendations, but decline – back to the hotel for carryout pizza and more rewrites.

5:20 PM: Rehearsal Room 6 (*Red Badge*)

Carlos Gonzales, playing the ‘Old Man’, misses a line, discovering a chain of flipped pages in the script. The tone of the room is somber, as dictated by the play, and nobody lets go of the mood while they sift through the pages to get back on track.

5:37 PM: Rehearsal Room 6 – (*Red Badge*)

An historical joke catches the cast off guard and laughter breaks out. “That’ll be in the Study Guide,” Linda responds.

6:49 PM: YFP Office – Conversations on *Color Me Dark*

Jerome has a request for some historical research. What was the role of black soldiers in WWI? What did they call underwear in Tennessee in 1919? In the hallway, Ric Kahn lays out his blocking/technical needs and Deirdre expresses her concern that those choices don’t detract from the process of the play. An agreement is reached and both walk away pleased. As Ric leaves he comments on the casting of *Color Me Dark*, “Oh, I get it, you’re not casting a show, you’re casting a process.” Deirdre smiles.

Day 3: Wednesday, May 15th

In NV/NV each show is in its own stage of development, so everybody has a different process, determined by the writers and directors. Since the week’s about writing, there are also two consulting dramaturges. This year Michael Lupu and Michael Rupert are each working with several artistic teams offering advice on both this week and the future.

Equity staged reading guidelines are followed, limiting the number of hours allowable to 15 for a play and 20 for a musical, so planning has to embrace both the limitations of time and the joys of discovery. The amount of rewriting from past festivals runs the gamut from minimal to rewriting and restructuring an entire piece more than once.

The Kennedy Center is large, full of marble and red carpets, and can be imposing, chilly, and occasionally intimidating. Rehearsal rooms are tucked away down largely unmarked corridors that are negotiated from the same elevator that leads to the canteen in the basement. Command central – the YFP office, refreshingly non-corporate in ambiance – is in the Theater Lab. It’s easy to get lost.

As always, the major job of Team New Visions is to anticipate needs and create bubbles around each project, so that the artists are supported, protected, and able to do their work.

9:55 AM: Outside the Lab (*Sacagawea*)

A discussion begun at nine o’clock in the Cuppa Cuppa coffee shop next door continues. Dramaturg Michael Lupu discusses historical accuracy. “Are you writing a documentary or a play?” Answer: Oregon – the theatre – is concerned about historical accuracy in the context of the balance between political correctness and theatrical values.

10:55 AM: Rehearsal Room 7 (*Sacagawea*)

A sign hung from the *Sacagawea* rehearsal table settles the ongoing confusion: “Sah – cah – gah – wei – ah”. Apparently there’s no soft “g” in the Shoshone language.

12:01 PM: Rehearsal Room 2 (*The Bully Show*)

Brian Guehring was up most of the night finishing the first draft, following a nine-page Monday and a thirty-page Tuesday. The ending, based on actor improvises, works well. Discussion with the actors has been an integral part of Omaha’s process and now they discuss the media/entertainment value of violence, and experience a strong back and forth with dramaturg Michael Rupert. Famous bullies in history are mentioned: Genghis Khan, Lyndon Johnson, Martha Stewart. One of the actors brings the room back to the play by asking about the section “on page 29, which I call 34. . .” calling attention to the page-numbering challenges inherent in all new play workshops.

1:35 PM: Overheard:

“In the Zen of theatre, all is perfect.”

2:12 PM: Outside the Lab

Yokanaan relays part of his discussion with dramaturg Michael Lupu about the particulars of the language of *Dis/Troy*. Where on the poetic to colloquial continuum should the language of the piece be?

2:57 PM: YFP Office

Jerome is going to spend today’s *Color Me* rehearsal rewriting. He heads out for the Tidal Basin for a brief walk with the requested research material: a dog-eared chronicle of WWI and printouts from www.vintageskivvies.com.

3:41 PM: Rehearsal Room 7 (*Telemeca*)

Mary Hall Surface and David Maddox bring much new material, including a song in Spanish.

5:24 PM: Lab (*Red Badge*)

The actors perform a battle scene. Confined to chairs and with music stands in front of them, the scene plays beautifully and is positively chilling. Linda switches gears to today’s new pages. Joe calls them “provisional pages. Don’t insert them yet, we’ll just try ‘em and see how we like ‘em.”

5:30 PM: Rehearsal Room 6 (*PowerPlay*)

Midway through an energetic read, Director Eric Johnson is up and about helping the actors create the space where their giant video projection screens will be. The ensemble makes two-dimensional movements when they’re on-screen and moves freely in the space when their characters have emerged on stage.

5:45 PM: Rehearsal Room 7 (*Telemeca*)

Colette Williams, *Telemeca* herself, gets a little lost in the new material. “I can’t sing this right now, it’s too much paper.” Composer David Maddox helps sort the pages and Colette’s right back into the song. The group hasn’t learned the Spanish song yet, and, for the first go around, Colette just speaks the words as music director

Debbie Wicks LaPuma plays. David speaks just after her, quieter, translating into English for the cast. The rehearsal necessity makes for a lovely moment of bilingual poetry.

Day 4: Thursday, May 16th

Thursday marks a palpable shift in the vibe at NV/NV. The YFP staff is gearing up for tomorrow’s onslaught of registrants, and the artistic teams have the performances knocking at their respective rehearsal room doors. It’s not that NV/NV isn’t serious the first three days, but there’s always a marked attitude shift that sets in on Thursday and is in full effect by Friday. Everybody appreciates that NV/NV is about the process and the discoveries that are made in the rehearsal room. As much as the staff calls them presentations, the artistic teams are also theatre people, and they want to be sure that the reading itself goes well.

The presentations are limited to one hour, due to severe time constraints in performance space, the Theater Lab, which YFP shares with the comic murder mystery Shear Madness. Creative teams can work on any portion of a longer script during the week, but choose what to present for the reading. This has attracted some controversy in the past, but the Center has always felt it better to have eight projects with one-hour presentations rather than fewer projects with longer presentations.

9:50 AM: Lab, (*Selfish Giant*)

Quiet discussion regarding whether or not to use Irish accents. While they’d be part of the ultimate performance of this piece, the present inconsistency may distract the audience. A consensus is reached, and rehearsal becomes an accent-free zone.



Actors Silinea Hilliard and Ted Feldman can’t resist a bit of mugging.



Brian Guehring, *Home Alone*.

11:38 AM: The Atrium

Justin Nabors has made a home for himself in a quiet corner of the 120 foot long by 40 foot wide by 20 foot high Atrium, just to the left of a gold pillar. His laptop and many pages from multiple older versions of the score surround him as he works on orchestrations for *Selfish Giant*. He’s near the spot that actor Ted Feldman has staked out for lunchtime naps. Ted’s one of a number of actors appearing in readings in both the morning and afternoon shifts.

1:34 PM: YFP Office

Discussion Leader Todd London arrives and begins his debriefing (about how the week has been going) and briefing (about where things should be going vis a vis rehearsal visits) with Deirdre and Kim. They talk about the projects, where they seem to be, what the artistic teams are working on, and prep a game plan to get Todd into rehearsals of each of the shows.

2:36 PM: YFP Office

Overheard: “enough rewriting” and a request for directions to Adams Morgan, DC’s coolest enclave of ethnic restaurants.

2:53 PM: The Atrium

Todd is only in the building for a few hours, as he has to zip up to Baltimore for the evening. He speaks with Dramaturg Michael Rupert about *PowerPlay*, which is test-driving a working relationship as well as a play. The collaborators and their theatres had never worked together before, and came to NV/NV straight from an intense two-week workshop that saw the true beginnings of their project.

Todd will speak with each of the artistic teams about the post-show discussion so that comments can be as focused as possible on what they need to learn about their projects.

3:16 PM: YFP Office

Jerome comes in with 25 new pages. He's following his normal working method after Monday's first read, which is to start at the top rewriting page by page. Xeroxed rewrites in hand, he's asked where rehearsal is, so he can be shuttled there: "Somewhere in the basement." It's actually in Rehearsal Room Two, on the second floor, more or less halfway between Roof Terrace Level (where the Theater Lab is) and the basement (loading dock and canteen), further evidence of the goofy spatial relationships of the building and how hard it is to know where you are.

4:40 PM: Lab (Telemeca)

Rehearsal is visible (peeking through the house left curtains) from the hall right outside the YFP Office. A line of nine actors sits in chairs at music stands on stage. In the front row of the house and at the piano, in a line, are the stage manager, music director, and the five member artistic team. A pretty big gang for a NV/NV project. Everyone is intense, concentrating because there are so many new pages. Even so, Mary Hall says they still have some "type-type-typing" to do.

5:48 PM: Rehearsal Room 7

NV/NV has always been blessed with actors who throw themselves into the projects and believe in giving their all in the name of developing new work. Turns out that one of the *PowerPlay* actors has a serious clown phobia, a big problem because the play's a clown show. We're impressed and moved at her professionalism in choosing to remain with the project without complaint, keeping the information in the rehearsal room until today because the show, as they say, must go on.



(above) Dramaturg Michael Lupu and playwright Joe Sutton.

(right) *Sacagawea* rehearsal: Stan Foote, Jewel Robinson, Kevin Reese, Cleo Pizano, Mando Alvarado.

Day 5: Friday, May 17th

The gears for the staff have pretty much shifted from taking-care-of-artist mode to taking-care-of-audience mode. Discussion leader Todd London is making sure he's seeing a bit of each project in rehearsal.

The mood of the artistic teams is generally relaxed, which is a good thing, considering the number of new pages that keep appearing. There seems to be a larger number of projects than usual in early stages of development. No one's feeling competitive (as has happened in the past), but there's a level of electricity that grows gradually as the day progresses. Each team has an individual ambiance – quiet and determined, eager, jolly, thoughtful – a morph of the personalities of the writer-composer-director combined with the spirit of the play itself, with a dash of working process and the spice of actor energy.

10:14 AM: Theater Lab

The stage has been cleared for the morning session while Jeff, Michael, and the crew are focusing lights (cherry-picker style) for the performances. The minimal stage plots (detailing music stands, chairs, cubes, and the occasional microphone) have been turned in and are being spiked. It's the quietest the stage has been all week. Any talk is being done solely over headset.

12:14 PM: overheard:

"Process, process, process." – the New Visions mantra.

3:08 PM: North Gallery

The registrants for the festival start arriving – publishers, teachers, artistic directors, students, actors. Many have been here before and/or know each other. It's old home week.

4:06 PM: Theater Lab (Power Play)

Playwright Barry Kornhauser and director Eric Johnson meet with discussion leader Todd London and New Visions uber-wrangler Kim Peter Kovac. *Power Play* is very much a work in progress, in keeping with the spirit of NV/NV, so only brand new excerpts will be presented. There's some last minute figuring of how to combine the

scenes with explanations from Barry and Eric so that it's clear and clean.

Todd runs New Dramatists, has a deep and broad familiarity with development of plays, and seems always to be able to focus on the writer's needs.

4:19 PM: Roof Terrace

Across the Potomac River you can see the Pentagon, where on the morning of September 11th, KC staffers saw the smoke and flames where the hijacked plane crashed. It's been a rough year for everyone, both personally and professionally, and it seems fitting to mark the end of the season with a major gathering of colleagues from all over the country, celebrating plays of the future for audiences of the future.

4:28 PM: Theater Lab

While the performances and talk-backs are essential to the New Visions process, the real work has happened in the rehearsal rooms, at laptops, in conversations. In the house there is a general feeling of excitement and the actors for the first reading are waiting in the wings.

4:34 PM:

Opening remarks from Derek Gordon, the Center's Vice President for Education, include the following:

"This is the seventh time we've produced New Visions/New Voices. Including the current year, this project has assisted in the development of 53 new plays from 35 theatres in 23 states, working with 46 playwrights, 25 composers and 49 directors. We have hosted writers who've won the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony award, as well as writers still in college, finishing one of their first plays. We have worked with theatres large and small from Connecticut to Hawaii, from Florida to Washington State. And we are honored to be associated with each and every one of these projects."

4:34 PM: Theater Lab

The lights dim, the actors enter, and *Power Play*, Act One of the eight-act play called New Visions 2002 begins.

6:30 PM: SACAGAWEA, discussion

8:30 PM: The Brasserie, Watergate Building
Opening Reception. Heavy hors d' oeuvres and adult beverages.

Day 6: Saturday, May 18th

9:00 AM: THE BULLY SHOW, discussion

11:00 AM: COLOR ME DARK, discussion

12:30 PM: Lunch, ASSITEJ/USA membership meeting

1:30 PM: THE SELFISH GIANT, discussion

3:30 PM: THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE, discussion

Day 7: Sunday, May 19th

10:00 AM: STORIES MY MOTHER TOLD ME: THE ODYSSEY OF TELEMCA, discussion

12:00 PM: DISTROY, discussion

1:38 PM: Theater Lab

The last reading and discussion have ended. The schedule says 'Closing remarks', but the New Visions folk have never been big on speeches. Mostly, folk are thanked – staff, artistic teams, actors, audience. There's an observation made today (or was it yesterday?) that the plays seem to have been about violence, journeys and reconciliation, beginning with a clown show and ending with adaptations of early works in Western literature.

In the front of the auditorium house left, near the curtain to the dressing rooms hall, stands music director Debbie Wicks LaPuma with her baby. Diagonally across the theatre, on the landing at the back of house left, stands registrant Allison Belknap, recently graduated from BYU, with her baby. It somehow seems an appropriate way to end this year's New Visions, book-ended by children. ■

Megan Gilbride has been an actor in three New Visions and Production Coordinator in 2000 and 2002.

Deirdre Kelly Lavrakas and Kim Peter Kovac are co-founders of New Visions/New Voices and have wrangled the festival jointly since 1991.



Discussion leader Todd London and director Jill Womack.

Ecstatic and Nervous

I am a children's theatre geek. I admit it. I have no driving ambition to be on Broadway or direct a blockbuster or write a bestseller. I am totally into children's theatre. As a graduate student at the University of Texas, we studied great writers in the field like Aurand Harris, Suzan Zeder and James Still. In my first few years in the field, I have come to admire the work of Jeff Church, Peter Brosius, Laurie Brooks and Linda Hartzell. I look up to these great artists and challenge myself to keep doing the best job I can. These are the artists in the field who do their work at The Kennedy Center.

So I readily admit that I was ecstatic and extremely nervous when my project was accepted to New Visions/New Voices. What an incredible opportunity to focus on developing one script for the entire week! What in the world will all of these amazing artists think of my work? How cool to get to work alongside other great projects and artists! Is my writing good enough to be accepted to this workshop? Are they going to be mad I don't have a first draft? Is it okay that my play has taken a different turn in tone from my proposal?

After meeting everyone and starting work that first day, I was able to calm down those nagging neurotic voices in my head. The actors were excited to work on a new script that was being written that week. The Kennedy Center staff was welcoming and supportive. Nobody judged how many pages were written before I arrived. Other writers were at similar stages. This big conference in the huge Kennedy Center really boiled down to a small group of three actors, my director, the stage manager, and a dramaturg rehearsing and developing a play. When that realization finally sunk into my brain, I was able to relax and really write, and I accomplished more than I expected.

I'd be lying if I said those nagging doubts and voices didn't return before the reading on Saturday. But hey, I'll work on that next time.

Brian Guehring, Playwright of THE BULLY SHOW, Omaha Theatre Company for Young People.

Poster Child

I've been around New Visions/New Voices from the beginning – as a director, a “dueling dramaturg” with Lenora Inez Brown for two seasons, and then in 2002, as a playwright. Our project, *Stories My Mother Told Me: The Odyssey of Telemeca*, could be the poster child for what NV/NV does so well – bringing together a team who has collaborated in a host of different combinations in theatres across the country but never all in the same room on the same play. And while David Maddox and I have written six music theatre pieces for family audiences, we have always directed them ourselves. NV/NV gave us the chance to pressure-cook a new creation with a room full of theatre folks, all of whom were tossing in essential ingredients and wonderful spice. Our *Telemeca* will forever owe her first steps to the vibrant dynamics of rehearsal room seven.

Equally exciting for me, however, was the dynamic of the weekend of readings. Many of Washington's actors have participated in NV/NV year after year. And this year, they were there in force at the discussions – not just of their own play, but of all of the plays – raising questions, weighing in on the plays.

More than ever before, this year the Theatre Lab was a world where actors and even stage managers raised their hands, Kennedy Center staff members and apprentices were actors and stage direction-readers and all the artistic teams were there, rooting for their colleagues. In a room like that you can take those baby steps out into the world with a brand new play.

Mary Hall Surface is a Washington, D.C. based playwright and director and mother of Malinda.

Off the IV Drip

In the Suicide Mountains was close to dead. We had done three drafts and we weren't getting very close to anything like a production draft. The drafts were too close to the book and hadn't found a style or a method for telling the story that lifted it off the page. It was rather traditional in its structure. I knew that there was something to be found in these characters, and that James was a great talent and completely driven to find it. The theatre that I worked at had lost interest in the project and I thought that being invited to NV/NV might keep the IV drip going long enough to do what we needed to do.

James did extraordinary work at NV/NV – day one we read the play and then he and Michael Keck (composer) and I talked for three hours and then he took a nap and worked all night. He completely rewrote the first half of the play that first night. Day two we read it again and then the three of us talked for three hours, and James took another nap and worked all night and rewrote the second half of the play. The next day he did other major internal work, but truly, essentially the play was created in those first two all-nighters. It was very thrilling, and James was amazing.

Peter Brosius, Artistic Director, Children's Theatre Company, Minneapolis.

Color Blind

I had submitted only fifteen pages of an idea to *New Visions/New Voices*, hoping to develop it into a play. Never even hoping to be chosen, imagine my surprise when the Kennedy Center folks said, “Come and do this thing called creating a play...”

I wrote and completed an 85-page script in about four days' time, a new record for me. Being a part of New Visions/New Voices pushed me to accomplish some things and do them well, in a very short period of time.

Deirdre Lavrakas was doing the casting. She made it quite clear in the beginning that the casting would be color blind or multicultural. Normally I have absolutely no problem with that, except this particular show, I felt needed to be an all black cast. The policy for the readings, which I thought was limiting to this play, turned out to be something that not only greatly enhanced the script, but also expanded the world from which my characters told their story. Another factor that I initially saw as a something less than desirable, was the time limit. In Minnesota, some plays for youth actually run from 90 minutes to 2 hours. My play came in at the 2-hour mark. The presentation at *New Visions/New Voices* had to be an hour, and we either had to present a portion of the play or edit it down to one hour. Wow! But by being forced to edit, I was quickly able to rid my play of several extraneous scenes that did not move the action of the piece. Essentially I got right down to the story without losing the essence of the play. It made the piece very tight with very little padding.

Some of the techniques I learned from my dramaturg at *New Visions/New Voices* (I had a great dramaturg) I've continued to use writing other scripts. All in all, I couldn't have asked for more.

Kim Hines is a playwright, actress, and director based in Minneapolis.

A Welcoming Home

New Visions/New Voices provides a uniquely welcoming home for its artists. This wouldn't be as much of a surprise if this home weren't located at the center of one of the nation's largest arts institutions at the heart of our nation's Byzantine governmental bureaucracy. Somehow the staff at NV/NV knows how to boil the process - and everything there supports process- down to human size. It's equally striking that the artists they make a home for are such a diverse lot. The creative teams, the actors, the directors, reflect a world of cultural, ethnic and racial mix. While the theatre community was busy debating the notion of color-blind casting, New Visions just did it. Many years later, we just take it as a beautiful given. I know that as the father of a 7-year-old (who's loved coming to the past two gatherings), this is the world I want children to see.

Another kind of inclusion happened with the post-play discussions. There were a couple of years when New Visions used a panel format for these follow-up talkbacks, in which a group of experts from the field of children's theatre commented on the works-in-progress shows. Typical of the event's spirit, the staff changed the format, opting instead for a supportive, facilitated discussion among all participants, because, in fact, everyone at the conference is an expert in the field. It's a great spirit - everyone feels welcomed, included and valued.

Todd London, Artistic Director, New Dramatists, New York.

New Visions/New Voices Playwrights and Plays, 1991-2002

(in alphabetical order, including writers who also composed their own work)

Lynn Alvarez. *And Now Miguel*, composed by Mauricio Beltran (1995) • Sandra Fenichel Asher. *Across the Plains: The Journey of the Palace Wagon Family* (1995) • Ric Averill. *T-Money and Wolf*, with Kevin Willmott (1993); *The Emperor's New Clothes: An Opera for Children*, music and libretto (2000) • Cherie Bennett. *Cyra and Rocky* (1996); *Searching for David's Heart* (1998) • Laurie Brooks. *Imaginary Friends* (1993); *Selkie* (1995); *The Wrestling Season* (1998) • Carlyle Brown. *The Beggar's Strike* (2000) • Russ Brown. *The Selfish Giant*, book, music and lyrics; orchestration by Justin Nabors (2002) • Alma Elena Cervantes, Sandra C. Muñoz, Marisela Norte. *Black Butterfly, Jaguar Girl, Pinata Woman and Other Super Hero Girls Like Me* (1998) • Eric Coble. *Lake of Panthers* (2000); *Sacagawea*, music by Marv Ross (2002) • Doug Cooney. *Beeswax*, composed by Craig Ames and Carlos Moran (1996) • John B. Davidson. *Victoria's Christmas*, book, lyrics; composed by Roberta Carlson and John B. Davidson (1993) • David F. Eliet. *The Sun's Musicians*, composed by Nancy Rosenberg (1993) • José Cruz González. *The Highest Heaven* (1996); *Salt & Pepper* (2000) • Silvia Gonzalez S. *I Can't Eat Goat Head* (Later called *Alicia in Wonder Tierra*) (1993) • Allison Gregory. *Even Steven Goes to War*, composed by David Maddox (1998) • Brian Guehring. *The Bully Show* (2002) • Karen Yamamoto Hackler. *Song of Rice, Song of Life*, music by Kenny Endo (1996) • Jerome Hairston. *Color Me Dark* (2002) • Philip Hall. *The First Family of Africa* (later called *The Very First Family*) music, lyrics, book (1993) • Maria Dahvana Headley. *The Incredible Disappearing Lady*, composed by Michael Keck (1998) • Kim Hines. *I Believe I'll Run On and See What the End's Gonna Be* (1996) • Velina Hasu Houston. *The Matsuyama Mirror* (1993) • Doug Kaback. *Shim Ch'ong Chon: A Korean Folk Tale*, composed by Hi-za Yoo (2000) • Yokanaan Kearns. *Dis/Troy* (2002) • Wendy Kesselman. *A Tale of Two Cities*, music, book, and lyrics (1991) • Jon Klein. *Bunnica*, composed by Chris Jeffries (1996) • Barry Kornhauser. *Power Play*, music by Ron Barnett (2002) • Carol Korty. *Maryushka and Baba Yaga*, composed by Scott Wheeler (1995) • Paul Lavrakas. *White Sails, Dark Seas* (1991) • Kevin Lawler. *The Tales of Wost* (1998) • Quincy Long. *Quinley Agonistes* (AKA *A Por Quinley Christmas*), composed by Michael Silversher (1996) • Saundra McClain. *Caribe*, music by Kysia Bostic (1998) • Mark Medoff. *Tommy J and Sally* (2000) • N. Scott Momaday. *Children of the Sun*, composed by Fabian Obispo (1996) • Gary Race. *Angels Voices*, book and lyrics; composed by Noa Ain (1995) • David Saar. *The Yellow Boat* (1991) • Robert Schenkan. *The Dream Thief* (1998) • Deborah Sims-Wood. *Skeegee*, music by Howard Kenney (1991) • James Still. *The Secret History of the Future* (1991); *In the Suicide Mountains*, music by Michael Keck (1995) • Mary Hall Surface and David Maddox. *Stories My Mother Told Me: The Odyssey of Telemeca*, book, lyrics and music by David Maddox (2002) • Joe Sutton. *The Red Badge of Courage* (2002) • Mac Wellman. *Tigertigtiger*, composed by Michael Roth (1995) • Kevin Willmott. *T-Money and Wolf*, with Ric Averill (1993) • Eric L. Wilson. *Solid Gold*, music by Chris Limber (1995) • Laurence Yep. *Dragonwings* (1991) • Y York. *Afternoon of the Elves* (1993) • Suzan L. Zeder. *Do Not Go Gentle* (1991) ■



New Visions/New Voices Participating Theatres, 1991-2002

(in alphabetical order)

Actors' Company of Pennsylvania, Lancaster, PA; A.S.K. Theater Projects, Los Angeles, CA; Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Berkeley, CA; Blue Shift Theater Ensemble, Asheville, NC; Birmingham Children's Theater, Birmingham, AL; Body Politic Theatre, Chicago, IL; California State University Northridge Dept of Theatre, Los Angeles, CA; The Children's Theatre Company, Minneapolis, MN; Childsplay, Inc, Tempe, AZ; City Lights Youth Theatre, NY, NY; The Cleveland Play House, Cleveland, OH; The Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, MO; East West Players, Los Angeles, CA; Emerson Stage, Boston, MA; First Stage Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI; Hartford Children's Theater, Hartford, CT; Honolulu Theatre for Youth, Honolulu, HI; Idaho Theater for Youth, Boise, ID; Illusion Theater, Minneapolis, MN; Kennedy Center Youth and Family Programs, Washington, DC; Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education, New York, NY; Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, CT; Mark Taper Forum P.L.A.Y, Los Angeles, CA; Metro Theater Company, St. Louis, MO; MUNY Student Theatre, St. Louis, MO; New York University Program in Educational Theater, Omaha Theatre Company for Young People, Omaha, NE; Oregon Children's Theatre, Portland, OR; San Jose Repertory Theatre, San Jose, CA; Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle, WA; Seem-To-Be Players, Lawrence, KS; Stage One: The Louisville Children's Theatre, Louisville, KY; Sundance Children's Theatre, Salt Lake City, UT; TADA!, New York, NY; TRYPS (Theatre Reaching Young People and Schools), Columbia, MO; Troupe NY, New York, NY ■

Welcome to the Club House

I came to my first New Visions festival with no knowledge of theatre for youth outside of the saccharine and simplistic children's plays that often tour elementary schools and insult young people. I was to work on many plays, but a Kennedy Center commission written by N. Scott Momaday and directed by Tazewell Thompson led me to think, "Hey, this is great. Children's theatre is changing, and I want to play a part."

Boy, was I wrong. First, what I naively considered "children's theatre" had changed a long time before I came to the party. When I arrived, I discovered scripts and artists with visions of theatre often more complex and exciting than those dedicated to "adult theatre." Second, only an uninformed person refers to plays dealing with life issues with speed, focus, clarity and artistry as "children's theatre."

I've never been so happy to be so wrong. Each time I return to New Visions (and I've been to three festivals now as a dramaturg), I am continually impressed and amazed by how many truths one can tell in 60 minutes. I also go away with more dramaturgical skills designed to get to the heart with efficiency and grace.

So, I can't point to one specific moment, but I do have a lot of wonderful memories. Perhaps the greatest is of an e-mail from Ric Averill. During the 2000 New Visions, Ric revised his opera of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. He asked for dramaturgical comments and, as often happens, he got a bit more than he bargained for. He received notes on where to shape, cut and embellish the story. No significant changes occurred during the workshop, even though it seemed possible to accomplish a few. I began to question whether I should provide more dramaturgical input on this project? Was my presence even wanted?

Months passed. A few months more. Then I received an e-mail from Ric telling me how he'd changed the libretto and score to reflect my suggestions. He went on to tell of the piece's success—which has more to do with his vision than my notes of this I'm certain—and explained his initial hesitancy as wanting to hear what he'd written before exploring new options.

What more is there to say? We do what we do because it changes lives. We don't know when and we don't know how, but it does. But every once in a while we get a note telling us we're on the right track. New Visions reminds me that I'm on the right track.

Lenora Inez Brown is an associate editor for American Theatre magazine and a freelance dramaturg.

Buzz in Rehearsal and Restaurants

My favorite memories of New Visions/New Voices are all about actors and playwrights and the incredibly focused intensity that each brought to the four projects that we have work-shopped there. Egos got parked at the doorway (or got lost during the maze walk to rehearsal hall?), and we all became creative contributors to whatever the playwright needed—even if he or she didn't always know what that was!

Each project was in a different stage, and I have always marveled at the Center's superb casting which invariably matched the play's needs with what Deirdre called "David-type" actors—one's that she knew could quickly form the resident ensemble "feel" that I am used to at home. Washington D.C. has a deep acting pool, and the Kennedy Center fishes it well. As an Artistic Director, it is such a gift to be allowed the time to focus on only one project, for one week's time, and I have been continually amazed at the incredible journeys that we all take with each play in only seventeen hours.

At New Visions/New Voices 2002, our whole creative team was huddled around a table in a little Lebanese restaurant in Adams Morgan, deeply engrossed in some plot twist or the other—when in walked two Secret Service men followed by Bill and Hillary! And then five minutes later in came Helen Thomas from the White House press corps. Now that doesn't happen every day in Tempe! The "buzz" that greeted the Clintons is akin to the creative "buzz" that has characterized each NV/NV I have attended, enabling extraordinary results from extraordinary artists.

David Saar is Artistic Director of Childsplay in Tempe, AZ.

Two Tales of Dramaturgy

NV/NV did several important things for me. Gave me time uninterrupted to create, linked me with two incredible dramaturges and let me see what I was doing through the talented interpretation of some wonderful actor/singers.

First tale: Finger food and forward motion. T-Money and Wolf. Co-director co-playwright Kevin Willmott, dramaturg Bob Small and I sat outside at the Red Sea Ethiopian restaurant, eating with our fingers, Bob talking a hundred miles an hour, Kevin nodding and me wondering if we really, really should totally tear the script apart and put it back together.

'Fuse the stories. If you're going to fuse the stories, fuse them.' Dipping into very spicy lamb with spongy bread, the idea seemed possible and perhaps even tasty. Stories and characters overlapped the next two days and became inseparable and compelling. Fused.

Second tale: A hiatus for hubris. My dramaturg is Lenora Brown? To myself thinking, 'what is this?' She absolutely loved a piece at the previous New Visions that I thought was all-over-the-place. Was she right? Was I? If she liked that piece, what can she give to my piece? Isn't it all about me? Should I listen? I'll be cautious.

A week busily teaching music. Small changes, big changes, lines, intentions, listening to director Graham Whitehead, and cautiously to Lenora. Week's end; a nice reading, and afterwards, Lenora hands me a typed piece of paper: 'Some notes on where you might think of going.' I pocket the thoughts, hubris certain that I'll keep them though never use them.

A year passes. Working with Graham. Thoughts, suggestions, changes. Then the sheet from Lenora comes out. I read and realize that almost every suggestion has found its way into the score and libretto one way or another. Belated thanks, Lenora, and love and trust.

Ric Averill is a playwright/composer whose day job is Artistic Director of the national touring company, the Seem-To-Be Players, Lawrence, KS.

Growing up

I like to tell people that I "grew up" at The Kennedy Center. Well, maybe I was never actually there as a child, but NV/NV educated me in the art of working on a play.

Attending in 1991, the year of David Saar's *The Yellow Boat* and Suzan Zeder's *Do Not Go Gentle*, sitting in the audience, more than anything I wanted to have a play developed in this rich artistic community. I dreamed of sitting at the table, talking theatre with those who had the deep experience I longed for. And sure enough, in 1993, when an invitation was extended to join the party, it felt like a miracle, the first of three to follow.

It was also a disaster. The play that was read at the end of the week had too much staging. More importantly, I had been so eager and willing to cut and paste and rewrite to everyone else's idea of what the play should be that I hardly recognized the work. But never, before or since, have I learned more from an experience. I also met many of the people who I now rely upon for wise counsel and friendship.

In 1995, working on *Selkie*, it was brilliant non-traditional casting that asked me to look deeper into the play, for it was casting not by appearance but by depth of ability, intelligence and human understanding. Since then I look for the "smartest" actor rather than a particular type. Thank you, Deirdre.

There was also a moment when an actor asked about the character Ellen Jean, "How come she asks Tam to promise her but then he never does?" "Sure he does," I replied. "Where?" asked the determined young actress. And sure enough, no amount of searching would yield up that moment in the text, a moment imagined, but left out of the actual script. Since then I ask for actors' help—their eyes and ears and hearts—and prevail upon them not to hold anything back, no matter how small.

In 1998, *The Wrestling Season* presented the challenge of how to accomplish a reading of a play that is, as dramaturg Mary Hall Surface exclaimed, "...essentially a dance piece." Finding a way to suggest the movement while retaining the essence of a reading was the challenge for director Jeff Church. Jeff managed to explore the theatrical conventions of the script through finding ways to theatricalize the reading. That experience reminded me that space and silence are as effective as spoken word, and my playwriting style is forever changed because of it.

Newwie Newwie is a precious space where professionals come together to develop new plays. But it is also a training ground where artistic sensibilities are nurtured by the experiences that visit there. It is a lovely place to grow up.

Laurie Brooks is a playwright who also teaches at New York University.

New Visions/New Voices Directors, Dramaturges, Discussion Leaders, Discussion Panelists, 1991-2002

(in alphabetical order)

Abigail Adams, Luis Alfaro, Stephanie Anderson, Ric Averill, Amie Brockway, Peter C. Brosius, Lenora Inez Brown, Jeff Church, Robert W. Colby, Roger T. Danforth, Sandra Deer, Liz Diamond, Kathleen Dimmick, Kevin Ehrhart, Stan Foote, Rita Giomi, Gary Gisselman, Moses Goldberg, Rob Goodman, José Cruz González, Jim Hancock, James Hanes, Linda Hartzell, Tomas Hernandez, William Hoffman, Eric Johnson, Bob Devin Jones, Derek Anson Jones, Ricardo Khan, Kim Peter Kovac, Deirdre Kelly Lavrakas, Yvonne Joyner Levette, Alan Levy, Regge Life, Todd London, Phyllis S.K. Look, Michael Lupu, Mark Lutwak, John McCluggage, Brian Nelson, Deborah S. Nitzberg, Carol North, Albert Peralion, Lisa Peterson, Gary Race, Michael Robins, Dale AJ Rose, Michael Rupert, David Saar, Robert Graham Small, Pamela Sterling, Mary Hall Surface, Nancy Swortzell, Tazewell Thompson, Janine Nina Trevens, Susana Tubert, John Vreeke, Leanne Tintori Wells, Graham Whitehead, Kevin Willmott, Jill Womack, Suzan L. Zeder, Milton R. Zoth ■