



The Kennedy Center

OPENING STAGES

**A Quarterly Newsletter for People with Disabilities Pursuing Careers in the
Performing Arts**

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FROM THE EDITOR: A FONDNESS FOR ACTORS

I like actors. I like them because they are courageous. While I can have a play produced and remain anonymous in the audience or not even go, an actor's instrument is his body. So, they can never hide. They must publicly endure the risk of disapproval and rejection.

I like actors because they appreciate good writing. They are happy when you give them a good part to play. And it's gratifying to have the gift of your words appreciated.

I like actors because they work so hard and so sincerely to honor the writing with their best performance. They struggle and stumble in rehearsal. It's an enormous task to memorize all the lines and actions in a play and then internalize them in order to seem natural on stage. Sure, there are egos. But everybody knows that in theater you succeed or fail together.

I like actors for that very camaraderie. Working with them dispels the loneliness of writing. They join their creativity to mine and make me a stronger person for having to trust them with my words and intentions.

I like actors because what they do is mysterious and wonderful. They make words on a page come alive. They are able to forget about themselves enough to simply "be" in the face of a mass scrutiny that would terrify me. They are able to imagine and embody another consciousness.

I like actors because they challenge me. When they ask me questions about what a line means, I'd better have a good answer. And I'd better be able to phrase that answer in terms of playable actions. They make me a better playwright.

But I think the biggest reason I like actors is that I never get from them the kinds of attitudinal garbage about my disability that I too often get from other people -- the pity and fear, the lowered expectations, the assumption that I'm either a saint or a moron. If actors are working on a play of mine, they've seen into my soul. So, they know I'm simply a human being, no different from them. Also, an actor's necessary attribute is open-minded curiosity about other people, an eager empathy. So, they're not afraid of knowing me. And it's comforting to be known.

In a sense everything one writes is autobiographical. All my characters are aspects of me. Those courageous, hard-working, appreciative, challenging, open-minded actors strut them forth, earning us all the pleasure of applause. And I still get to hide! Can you wonder that I like them so much?

Paul Kahn

PERSPECTIVES

THE AUTHENTIC DISABLED VOICE

by Susan Nussbaum

Actress and playwright Susan Nussbaum presented these remarks at the conference "Casting Tradition to the Wind: Disability and Theater in the 21st Century" held this past November in New York City.

The dominant culture is obsessed with disability. Think of Quasimodo, Richard III, the munchkins, Ahab, the X-Men, Mini-Me, Rain Man. And then there is the latest outpouring of depictions – Million Dollar Baby and Ray on film (both Oscar winners). And on TV we have Monk, about a detective who supposedly has obsessive compulsive disorder, and Blind Justice, about a detective who is blind. Then there's the doctor on ER who walks around with one crutch. Here's how I imagine the writer's meeting where they came up with the idea: "Hey, let's give her a crutch!"

Three-dimensional disabled people in our culture remain invisible. Even the "real life" images of disability that successfully engage the media are creepy and unreal, with a quality of flattened-out, easily digestible religious metaphor about them – Christopher Reeve and his crusade to become normal again, Terri Schiavo as the latest obsession of the fundamentalist Christians, and the yearly, long-suffering Jerry Lewis poster child.

There are some profound problems with all of this. These images perpetuate backward notions about real disabled people. One could also argue that this approach to the portrayal of disability is boring. It's worn itself out. It's exhausting to watch story after story about disabled people committing suicide or climbing a mountain with no legs or ranting about their lost sexuality (the lie I hate most of all), or any of those familiar scenarios imagined by non-disabled writers. Authenticity, attention to the details of real human experience, is always more challenging, more riveting, funnier, more illuminating than bullshit.

About 15 years ago I was asked to audition for a Michael Apted movie. At that time I had an agent who would send me out to audition about once a year for whatever role came along for a wheelchair-user. I read the script, and it was so vile I told my agent I simply would not audition. The next day, who should call but Michael Apted himself. He wanted to know what my objection to his depiction of disability was. I tried to explain that being a member of a secret society of spinal cord injured people who were involved

in kidnapping homeless people and having them experimented on, then killed, in an effort to find a cure for paralysis just didn't seem viable to me. And I'd have lines like "every minute of my life in this wheelchair prison is hell." Michael Apted could not grasp the possibility that someone with a disability might have no real interest in being cured. He was really miffed. The movie somehow got made without me, with Hugh Grant as the doctor hero.

As long as the writers of disabled characters are not themselves disabled, disabled characters will be written largely as metaphors – to symbolize, rather than behave and interact. Even great writers stoop to using disability as a device, as religious metaphors or ciphers. There are so many examples: Tiny Tim, Laura Wingfield, Boo Radley, Tom Hanks' characters in Philadelphia and Forrest Gump (Oscars for both, of course), Dr. No, Capt. Hook, etc. I'm haunted by these saints and devils in my daily reality. On any given day I'll be meandering around the city streets, and strangers are likely to smile extra warmly at me, or say "good to see you out," or in some way betray their heartfelt belief that disabled people are around to help the non-disabled feel better about themselves. There but for the grace of god...

Another time I was brought in to read for a role in a new sitcom set in an office. My job was to be the woman who brought the donuts and coffee through the office every morning on a cart attached to my wheelchair. I remember my only line was "Donuts!" This is a whole other subcategory of disabled characters, like Mr. Magoo and Porky Pig.

We do finally have a few disabled writers who actually write about disability. But very few disabled people have the opportunity to give it a try, to find venues that are open to hearing the authentic disabled voice.

And although it would be great to cast disabled characters with real disabled actors from time to time, there are precious few of those either. In much the same way that white actors smeared burnt cork on their faces and appeared in minstrel shows, non-disabled actors, who have internalized the same biases and shorthand logic as the rest of the culture, are unable to approach a disabled character as a three-dimensional human being. They think the character is the disability. They study the external mannerisms of real people with disabilities, like Al Pacino did in *Scent of a Woman*, which was not a movie about a blind man, but about Al Pacino being blind. And when they have the stutter down, or the quirks and mannerisms -- the smorgasbord of weirdnesses that make us such an actor's wet dream -- they go on talk shows and discuss how they prepared. "I spent time in a mental institution. I talked to all the doctors..." There can be only one response to this -- Oscar.

It could be so it easy to change all this. But to do so artistic directors and TV and movie producers must make a commitment to the authentic voice of disabled characters. And the authentic voice will only come from writers with disabilities. And these authentic disabled voices must challenge the public to a new perception, a new debate – not the simplistic, scent of a womany, million dollar babyish garbage that insults our intelligence and drowns us all in cheap shots and cheap sentiment.

NEW YORK TROUPE GOES TO THEATRE FESTIVAL OF THE BLIND by George Ashiotis

The Fourth International Theatre Festival of the Blind and Visually Impaired was held in Zagreb, Croatia, from October 7 through 14, 2005. For the third year Theater By The Blind, for which I serve as co-artistic director, attended and participated, an opportunity that has become increasingly important to us as we strive to define ourselves as vision-impaired artists and provide our vision-impaired audience members with a theater they are proud to call "home."

At this year's festival we had the opportunity to meet and mingle with artists from Bulgaria, Croatia, England, France, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain. In addition to Theater By The Blind, the United States was also represented by Lynn Manning from Los Angeles, who was noted this past season for his work as a consultant on the ABC TV series *Blind Justice*.

This year, for the first time we brought two shows to the festival: Our critically acclaimed production of Ted Hughes's adaptation of Seneca's *Oedipus* and a second show, *Cruisin' To Croatia*, an original piece written by our own company member Pete Mikochik. These two pieces -- one a well-polished classic and the other a developmental and untried musical -- showed off our ability to handle extremely contrasting material well. *Cruisin' To Croatia* also provided us with the unique opportunity of learning how to take a show from inception to performance, including dramaturgy, casting, rehearsing, staging, arranging and directing music, marketing, making on-the-fly adjustments to unanticipated conditions and, finally, presenting. The two productions were well received and appreciated despite language barriers.

Lynn Manning also presented two pieces: his unflinching, one-man, autobiographical *Weights*, which was selected to inaugurate this year's festivities, and two of his short one-acts; *Shoot* and *Before The Drive To Oakwood Station*. The host company, New Life, presented Hristo Boytchev's *Hannibal From The Netherworld*, an absurdist play, and Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu*, done in a presentational style. England's Extant Theatre for the first time ever presented a fully mounted production, *Resistance*, adapted by its artistic director, Maria Oshodi. Teatro Comunale Di Antella, Florence, Italy, ran a workshop entitled *Theatre Of The Senses*, in which the sighted were blindfolded and invited to walk on and touch differently textured surfaces. Les Yeux Dans Les Oreilles from Paris, France, showed a documentary, *Discovering The Traces Of The Blind Actor In The Poetic Space Of The City*, which involved blind actors making paintbrush strokes on the pavement to express emotions felt while moving to and reciting the lines of a poem. We were also treated to a performance by young, blind Croatian students of a fairy tale, under the direction of one of the host company's vision-impaired actresses.

As always we were inspired by the work of the other participants; each company had grown in its work. As plays, however, are reliant on language to tell their stories, and as

language is the least common denominator at these festivals, appreciating the work of our fellow vision-impaired artists from other countries remains a challenge. A suggestion was made at the last festival to provide synopses of the plays being presented in the various languages of the participants. These synopses, coupled with some description of the action on the stage, brought us closer this time as audience members to the spirit of each production. A suggestion put forth at this year's gathering, that each company work up a scene from a play known to all and present it in a workshop at the next festival, may help narrow the gap even further. This idea, if it works, would not only afford us the opportunity to have a closer look at how other companies work, but would give us insight into an individual artist's interpretation, style, and nuance of performance.

In addition to sharing our art, we shared the ways art is supported and the ways we manage the business of running a theater. Ike Schambelan, my co-artistic director, recently turned 65 and is concerned about succession and who is going to run Theater By The Blind when he is gone. He raised the questions: How is paperwork handled by personnel who cannot read print? How are forms filled out? What is available in terms of grant applications "on line?" How much does a blind administrator need to rely on a sighted reader?

First of all, Ike doesn't know this, but we have no intention of letting him go. Second, the mere fact that this conversation could take place anywhere on this planet and that vision-impaired people from various cultures were managing their theaters' affairs was encouraging and very reassuring. Vojin Peric (New Life's artistic director), Lynn Manning (representing the Firehouse Theater Company), and Maria Oshodi (executive director of Extant), all reported that they, as blind administrators, were able to handle a good bit of the paperwork, but there came a point when sighted assistance was inevitable. Maria was able to fill out grant applications made available on-line, but when it came to fitting text to specific margins or other formatting restraints, she had to turn to her sighted assistant. Since returning to New York City, Theater By The Blind has hired an administrative assistant who can take on some of the grant writing and also get me started on writing some myself.

It was astounding to learn that in Croatia actors who are disabled can never attain professional status, i.e. become members of a performers' union. And that most of their funding comes from their local and national governments. We have always been impressed with the number of politicians (including the Mayor of Zagreb and the Minister of Culture) who appear and make speeches at the opening ceremonies of the festival. By contrast we get proportionately little support from our government.

Each time we go to one of these incomparable events we come away with ideas for future productions. The first year, based on a Brecht-like piece performed by the host company, we came home and mounted a production of *Brecht On Brecht*. The second time we were there two things happened. We saw our host company's production of Sophocles' *Oedipus* and, once again inspired by them, we mounted Seneca's *Oedipus*

in New York in June 2005. Also, we witnessed Lynn Manning's *Weights* the first time he performed it there and instantly committed to presenting it to a New York audience, which we did in January 2004. On the strength of a favorable review of *Weights* in The New York Times, Extant Theatre brought it to the United Kingdom.

We do not yet know what this year's festival will inspire, but a couple of possibilities are already brewing. Maria Oshodi and Extant Theatre are talking about sponsoring a workshop to be held in Brighton, England, and Laurent Roussel, a director from France, is getting us the contacts to try to perform at the Disabled In Theatre Festival held in Versailles.

What we do know is that we performed for each other and applauded each other. We cared about each others' concern for moving on an unfamiliar stage and jointly contributed to making the stage and moves secure and comfortable. We found that the concerns of the sighted performers are not much different from those of the vision-impaired ones--they want security and comfort, too. And, cross-language, cross-culture, cross-ethnicity, cross-race and cross-everything else, we all share a dream to present excellent art and to entertain.

PEOPLE

SIMI LINTON, PH.D.
AUTHOR, PROFESSOR, ARTS CONSULTANT
Interviewed by Paul Kahn

KAHN: What is your doctorate in?

LINTON: It's in psychology.

KAHN: Were you a practicing psychologist at one time?

LINTON: I trained to do clinical work, but when I completed my doctorate I made the decision that I really liked to teach. I taught at Hunter College and Baruch College for I think about 14 years. Both are part of the City University of New York. I taught courses in psychology for many years. In the last several years that I taught there I developed a course in disability studies. I had a year sabbatical and I had a fellowship, which is when I wrote my first book called *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. It was a basic overview of the field of disability studies and its history. It's used in the academic curriculum.

KAHN: Do you have academic positions now?

LINTON: I left Hunter College in 1998 to be an independent scholar and to be a consultant to arts organizations. I'm on the lecture circuit a great deal. I go to colleges and universities to talk about disability studies and about disabilities and the arts. Currently my only academic affiliation is that I am co-director of the disability seminar at Columbia University.

KAHN: And you have a new book?

LINTON: It's a memoir -- just out, actually last week. It's called *My Body Politic*. In essence it's the story of my life. But it is more specifically the story of the ways that our ideas about disabilities have shifted over time and how that influenced how I saw my own disability and how I grew into the identity of "disabled woman," which is now how I primarily identify myself, but which wasn't always the case. I entered the state of disability at age 23. I didn't really identify as a disabled woman for many, many years. It took my alliance with the disability community, the growth of the disability rights movement and the growth of the idea of disability identity for me to really gravitate to that identity and to really claim it.

KAHN: Can I ask what your disability is?

LINTON: I have spinal cord injury due to an automobile accident in 1971.

KAHN: Your timing was pretty good because it was in the early 70s when the disability rights movement really started to take hold.

LINTON: Right.

KAHN: Have the arts figured in claiming your identity as a disabled woman?

LINTON: I think the arts figure very much in my life. We can express through the arts the various aspects of our experience and make visual the things that are hidden, socially hidden. I think we can use the arts as a way to excite people about some of the ideas about disability that are increasingly part of our vocabulary and our way of talking about our experience.

KAHN: Tell me a little more about that.

LINTON: For instance, theater. Through theater there are ways to put ideas and issues out in a way that makes them interesting to people and makes it possible for non-disabled people or outsiders to the disability experience to get some of what we've been putting out about the social construction of disability, about social justice issues, about the civil rights issues that so much shape our lives. The arts can be used to counter the medical ideas about disability that dominated our discourse for a long time.

KAHN: Do you think we can manifest a culture analogous to the creative output of other minorities? I'm thinking, for instance, of the rich expression coming out of the AIDS experience or the Black American experience.

LINTON: First of all, I think the cultural production that focuses on AIDS is part of the disability narrative. I am asked sometimes whether I think there is such a thing as a disability culture, and indeed, I do. I think it's not as well known. People with disabilities haven't been given the kind of creative opportunities to explore the many ways that disability can be expressed through the arts. I think that often, when disabled people make art, it's considered therapeutic. Or, it's part of rehabilitation for our troubled lives, rather than a creative expression that has merit, that has excitement informed by ideas, by cultural experience and by community. The African-American experience is analogous but not the same.

KAHN: African-Americans and people with disabilities are both oppressed minorities. I always wonder why artistic expressions of the disability experience haven't attained the same level of significance or reception in the broader culture, yet we have so much to communicate that is universal.

LINTON: Well, we have had very little control over the way our experience has been described in the press, in cultural criticism and even in scholarship. So, I think we need to seize control over those images, and I think very slowly we are getting some foothold in the way that we are talked about in the press and ideas being put forth in films and theater and in writing. Some days I'm optimistic, and some days I think we haven't moved the world an inch. But I think this is a critical time. I think this coming year or two will show a critical change.

KAHN: What do you think will be responsible for that change?

LINTON: There are a few things going on. Maybe they don't amount to a hill of beans, but maybe they mean something. Let me see if I can think of all of them. Since the movie *Murderball* came out I've noticed a slight shift in attitude, in language and ideas in the papers. In the reviews of *Murderball* and some of the subsequent cultural criticism about disability stuff the critics seem a little bit more on their toes.

KAHN: What I've noticed about the reviews of *Murderball* is that the critics have sort of got it. It's like a revelation to them: "These are regular guys."

LINTON: Exactly. So, I think that really helped. Then Chicago is having a disability and cultural arts weeklong, citywide event, involving many different venues and sectors of the cultural community. That's very exciting. The Theater Initiative that we are working on in New York has gotten a wonderful response from the New York theater community. We've been very excited about that. And we have others in the works that we are planning. The New York theater community seems interested, seems to know that this is worthwhile. And we have a number of wonderful disabled artists who are getting a little more attention. Some casting decisions in movies and in plays are giving more opportunities to disabled actors. And some of the playwrights that I cherish are getting recognition and getting productions.

I think it's slow. It's not going to be tomorrow, but there are going to be some shifts. I also think the huge number of returning disabled Iraqi vets are going to constitute an entity and a force in the same way disabled vets coming back from Vietnam participated in the genesis of a disability rights movement. Please don't get me wrong. I know the realities. I know how horrible it is. I know the unemployment rates. I know the amount of homelessness. I know the amount of disregard. I know the amount of incarceration in facilities of disabled people. I'm not whitewashing that. I, in no way, think we are home free. I'm just saying I think there are some cultural shifts that are important to emphasize, and I think we have an opportunity to do that. I am looking at every opportunity I can to take disability public and make some of these things happen.

KAHN: Let me ask you about your organization, Disability/Arts. How did you come to found it and what does it do?

LINTON: Disability/Arts is basically me. It's not like you come to an office, and you see a bunch of us here. I do consulting with some arts organizations and theater projects. I formed Disability/Arts when I left my academic position in order to have an umbrella under which to do my work and to collaborate with other organizations. So, it's not an office [chuckles]. We don't have a staff. But within Disability/Arts, we were able to co-produce these disability theater events this year, along with the Columbia seminar in disability studies and the Non-Traditional Casting Project.

KAHN: Tell me a little about the events that happened this past year in New York.

LINTON: In the spring we did one event at Columbia University as part of a seminar on disability and theater. And it was, I think, quite successful. And then at the end everyone said, "This is just the beginning. We have to do more." So, we created two events for November. One was at the Public Theater, which was by invitation only. We invited significant figures in the New York theater community to come together with playwrights and actors and other disabled people who pursue the idea of disability in their work -- John Belluso, Susan Nussbaum, Lynn Manning, Troy Kotsur and Carrie Sandahl, who is a professor at Florida State in the theater department. So, it was a robust panel. And in our audience we had New York theater people who were really enormously enthusiastic. And we had a write up in *American Theatre Magazine*. And, based on that, we have been asked to do a couple more events, which until they're in better shape I can't really talk about.

KAHN: Do you have artistic practice yourself?

LINTON: Well, writing. In writing the memoir I used the opportunity to explore a more creative kind of writing than I had done in the past, and I enjoyed that very much. I do paint on weekends, but I'm hardly a painter.

KAHN: It sounds like you think this may be a good time to be an artist with a disability.

LINTON: Well, I think that schools cannot reject disabled people as easily as they used to. I don't mean that it doesn't still happen, but I think there are more training schools and conservatories and colleges and universities that have theater programs and film and acting programs and painting programs and so forth. We've made it harder for them to reject disabled people. That is a positive thing. I think that high schools and elementary schools are still suffering enormously, particularly in city schools, from cutbacks in funding to the arts, and that affects both disabled and non-disabled people. Although, I think there are more restricted opportunities for disabled kids to explore artistic expression in really creative ways, not just through therapeutic endeavors, than there are for non-disabled kids. But I can't really document that.

KAHN: The arts are a hugely difficult field for anybody, full of rejection. What would you say to artists with disabilities who are feeling really discouraged because they can't get their work out and don't have opportunities?

LINTON: I don't want to give simple kinds of encouragement that are empty. I think that we have to work simultaneously, that all of us have to work as a community to seize better control over cultural criticism, to keep working at issues of equity and finding ways to communicate our messages, ways where we do not compromise our messages

but where they are theatrically important and interesting in and of themselves. I don't have words of wisdom or anything like that, except that we have to work together at breaking down the barriers.

RESEARCH

IT'S ABOUT THE WORK: RESEARCHING CAREERS IN THE ARTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES by Terri Thrower

Pursuing a career in the arts is a formidable task, requiring a great deal of perseverance, determination, and self-confidence. Add to that the social, attitudinal, and environmental barriers faced by artists with disabilities, and you have the makings of an inspirational movie.

The artists I have encountered on this project, however, couldn't care less about being "inspirational." For them, it is about the work. It's about making great art. Sometimes, too, it's about shattering myths and misconceptions that people have about what life is like with impairment and disability.

Since early fall, 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts has funded "Experiences of Individuals Pursuing Careers in the Arts," a research project designed to provide a broad but substantial picture of the barriers and facilitators people with disabilities experience when seeking employment in the arts. This mixed methods research project, which includes both qualitative and quantitative measures, explores these two main research questions:

One: What are the barriers and facilitators mediating access to careers in the arts for Americans with disabilities?

Two: What are the social, personal, and economic outcomes of training and work in the arts for Americans with disabilities?

Leading this task are principal investigators Carol J. Gill, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago, and Carrie Sandahl, Ph.D., Florida State University. Professor Gill brings years of experience and expertise with disability research to this project, and Professor Sandahl provides extensive work as an artist and a scholar of the performing arts. The other members of the team include Larry Voss, project coordinator, and Sarah Rothberger, project assistant. I am the graduate research assistant, and fortunate to work with and learn from such a powerful team.

We began with the daunting task of choosing our "big list": all of the major players in disability arts. Our list was inclusive of successful disabled performers, visual artists, writers, behind-the-scenes staff, and design experts. It also involved anyone, disabled or non-disabled, who plays a significant role in helping people with disabilities pursue artistic careers. Our "big list" was diverse and somewhat overwhelming. We tried to

narrow it down to only 20 key informants, which swelled to around 30. Simultaneously, the team finalized its list of project advisors, many serving dual roles as key informants. The knowledge and talent out there is thrilling.

With informants in place, we were ready to begin the research. We developed individual interview questions that reflected the study's scope. Questions related to the participants' current work, background and training, funding and marketing issues, social support, and disability culture. The interview process seeks to get a full picture of the artists and career facilitators, especially what they identify as specific barriers and the strategies they used to deal with them. The interview questions also ask how structures of this field can be made more nurturing and welcoming for disabled artists and others.

While completing interviews, the team planned for a working meeting to be held at the University of Illinois at Chicago. All of our key informants were invited, and an impressive 15 attended. The meeting employed the energies of research team members, plus several graduate students and two on-site advisors. It was both exhausting and exhilarating.

When the working meeting began, the energy in the room was palpable. Some of the best-known disabled artists in the country assembled in one room. They were excited to be there, we were excited, and that energy sustained everyone involved throughout the long hours. Although we are still processing the information from the meeting, I can report that these artists and administrators had volumes to say about the critical issues they face pursuing careers in the arts. Some of these issues included having work shown, lack of role models, and the political and social justice aspects of disability arts. Participants also felt that building a stronger network for information and support for each others' career efforts would be a good strategy to deal with many of the barriers they face.

Currently, the NEA research team is preparing for the next phases of the project. In the near future, we will be conducting a web-based "virtual focus group" that will invite input from across the country. Participation in the online focus group will be available to a broader number of people with disabilities pursuing careers in the arts, and others in the arts that work with them.

In the final phase of research, we will distribute questions to a nation-wide group of identified artists and others with disabilities that have committed themselves to arts careers. Once all of these data are collected and analyzed, the researchers will make this information publicly available in the form of a database. Providing a national portrait of careers in the arts for people with disabilities, this database should be a powerful resource for all people with disabilities who pursue arts careers, as well as for anyone who facilitates that process.

If you are interested in participating in our upcoming virtual focus group or national information gathering, please contact me at: territhrower@yahoo.com, or call the Chicago Center for Disability Research at UIC, 312-355-0550.

Terri Thrower is a Ph.D. Candidate in Disability Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago.

NEWS AND NOTES

PLAYWRIGHT JOHN BELLUSO DIES

Disabled playwright John Belluso died on February 10 in New York City. At the time of his death he was working on a play about Iraq, commissioned by the Public Theater. It was to be produced in the upcoming season.

City Theatre of Pittsburgh is currently presenting Belluso's drama *Pyretown*. It was originally commissioned by the Geva Theater and ran Off Broadway. The Pittsburgh premiere will be directed by Diane Rodriguez, Associate Producer/Director of New Play Production at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles.

Belluso's other plays include *A Nervous Smile* (produced by the Actor's Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival of New Plays); *The Body of Bourne* (produced by the Mark Taper Forum); *Henry Flamethrower* (produced by Trinity Repertory Company, Victory Gardens Theatre, and Studio Dante); *The Rules of Charity* (produced by the Magic Theatre); *Body Songs*, created with legendary theatre director Joseph Chaikin (developed at the Eugene O'Neill Center National Playwrights Conference, workshoped at the Public Theater); *Gretty Good Time* (produced by the Ensemble Studio Theatre, Perishable Theatre, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Falcon Theatre). Awards and honors include a National Endowment for the Arts/Theatre Communications Group Playwright-in-Residence Grant for a residency at the Atlantic Theatre in New York, the AT&T On-Stage Award, the Mark Taper Forum's Sherwood Award, as well as grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Berrilla Kerr Foundation Award, and honorable mention for the Kesselring Prize.

Belluso was born in Warwick, RI and had been living in Los Angeles. He received his Bachelors and Masters degrees from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts Dramatic Writing Program, where he studied with Tony Kushner, John Guare, Tina Howe, and Eve Ensler, among others. From 1999 to June 2005 he served as the director of the Mark Taper Forum's Other Voice Project for Disabled Theatre Artists, one of the nation's only professional developmental labs for theatre artists with disabilities. He was in his final year of a seven-year residency at New Dramatists. Several of his plays will be published in forthcoming editions by Dramatists Play Service.



SCHOLARSHIPS FOR BLIND POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS

Scholarships for post-secondary students who are legally blind are available from the National Federation of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind. The Council's deadline is March 1. Visit their website at <http://www.acb.org/scholarship-info2006.html> for additional information.

The deadline for the Federation grants is March 31. Visit their website at http://nfb.org/sch_intro.htm for additional information.

TORONTO DEAF FILM AND ARTS FESTIVAL

The First Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival will take place May 10-14 in Toronto, Ontario. For more information visit www.tidfaf.ca.

BODIES OF WORK

The Chicago Festival of Disability Arts & Culture will be held April 20-30, 2006. Bodies of Work is Chicago's first festival showcasing disability artists and their work. Bodies of Work will explore and celebrate the contributions of artists with disabilities, the contemporary contexts of disabled lives, and works that illuminate disability experiences. Join us for this exciting celebration! For more information visit: <http://www.bodiesofwork.org/>

INTERNATIONAL CARIBBEAN EVENT ANNOUNCED

DeafVision Filmworks announces this year's Millennium International Caribbean Africa (MICA) Runway 2006, June 17 at Crobar Night Club at 530 West 28th Street in New York City. MICA Runway 2006 celebrates and recognizes diversity of all colors, shapes, sizes and backgrounds. Visual, performing, and literary artworks will be displayed by artists who are deaf and hard of hearing. The event includes a fashion showcase by renowned designers and sponsoring boutiques.

Part of the Runway will be a Cinema Showcase. Filmmakers from around the world are invited to submit their films –submission deadline is May 20. Films should contain deafness related subjects or topics or be produced or directed by deaf and hard of hearing persons. No ASL/Storytelling videos will be accepted. Eligible categories are drama, animation, music video, documentary or experimental. Films must be between 3-15 minutes long.

Download screening form, flyer and/or purchase tickets at: www.micarunway2006.com

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