

Illinois Theatre Association

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ITA UPDATES

ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE FESTIVAL:

Search for 2020 IHSTF Executive Director.

The ITA is currently accepting applications for the 2020 Illinois High School Theatre Festival (IHSTF) Executive Director.

For details, [click here](#).

Are you interested in serving on a future IHSTF Planning

eFOLLOWSPOT April, 2017

TAKING A RISK ON THE RIGHT THING

By Don Shandrow, Artistic Director,
New Route Theatre



New Route Theatre's Her*Story: Connecting Women in Communities

New Route Theatre's *Her*Story*, is an is an example of a theatre saying yes to the right people, for the right reasons and for the right project. A recurring question that I was asked, as Artistic Director of New Route Theatre, was if I was ever concerned about putting so much trust in an unproven and unscripted project. There was never any doubt that we, as a theatre, had made the right choice.

The cast of six ethnically and socially diverse women assembled by Heather Carnahan and Rachel Lewis, the Co-creators of *Her*Story*, refined their personal stories into powerful and personal and emotionally satisfying dramatic pieces that had the audience in laughter and in tears in the same story.

Because of the power of this piece and its positive affect on our theatre Company, I've asked Heather to share the process of developing *Her*Story* and provide a means of offering other theaters in Illinois a way of presenting this project to their theatres.

Following is Heather Carnahan's story.
*Her*Story: Connecting Women in Communities*
Heather Carnahan, Creator of Her*Story

Committee, or directing an All-State production?

[Click here](#) to fill out our IHSTF Planning Committee Interest Form.

[Click here](#) to fill out our All-State Director Interest Form.

ITA EVENTS

Join AACT for: AACTFest MAKE IT CHAMPAIGN! A Toast to Theatre Excellence 4/27-4/30
Parkland College

Champaign, IL
at Parkland College in Champaign

For registration and details, [click here](#).

August 26, 2017

ITA Gala

Harper College, Wojcik Center, Palatine, IL

August 27, 2017

ITA Annual Meeting

Wyndham Gardens Schaumburg, IL

Submit an Event

On March 24, 2017, six women entered a room and told audiences stories from their lives. While this sounds like a basic premise, what became of the piece was so much more. Throughout the weekend and the previous six weeks of rehearsals, these women shared more than memories of their past; they shared their laughter, tears, anger, frustration, and camaraderie.

This devised project started one night in January when co-creators Rachel Lewis and Heather Carnahan discussed a news article about needs for women in shelters due to a lack of donations. As they considered various options, theatre as a fundraising opportunity became the forefront of the project. At the end of January, Heather reached out to Don Shandrow, Artistic Director of New Route Theatre and pitched their project: a devised piece that had many requirements including a donated space, an admission price of feminine hygiene products, child care (if required by any of those participating)...and it had to go up in March for Women's History Month. Don agreed to the terms and thus, *Her*Story* was born.

It was incredibly important that the actors (from hereto forward known as the Collective) recognized, trusted in, and respected the rehearsal and performance spaces, both physically and emotionally. Over six weeks of Sunday only rehearsals, the Collective shared stories and memories from their lives. As the process continued, these oral histories were written down and molded to what the audiences saw onstage. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, including "this is what I have been looking for in the Bloomington-Normal community." The results of the performances included enough products to donate to three local shelters as well as over \$200 in additional donations.

The inaugural Collective consisted of: Lauren Raquel, Kat Gregory, Diane Walker, Genevieve Pilon, Jajwanica Brockington-Johnson, and Elaine Hill, co-produced by Irene Taylor and Lauren Raquel. Currently, the stories are in the process of being published for purchase.

If you are interested in bringing this project to your theatre, please contact Heather Carnahan at hmcarnahan@gmail.com or Rachel Lewis at rachel.n.lewis@gmail.com.

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JOB POSTINGS

Old Orchard Junior High School has a full-time drama teacher position (to cover a one-year leave of absence).

ITA AUDITIONS SHOWCASE TREMENDOUS TALENT POOL

By Joan McGrath

Two hundred ninety-nine eager actors, singers and dancers put their hopes center stage at the 38th Annual ITA Statewide Auditions, held February 25 and 26 at the University of Illinois/Chicago.

2nd Act Players is looking for individuals who want to grow this theater company by joining its board of directors for 2017.

The Latin School of Chicago has a technical theatre position open for the 2017-2018 school year.

Timber Lake Playhouse is hiring an Artistic Director. Centennial High School is looking for a full time drama teacher/director for the 2017-2018 school year.

The Latin School of Chicago announces an opening for a Technical Theatre position.

Carmel Catholic High School is hunting for a part-time tech director for Fine Arts events. Lighting and sound only.

Click here to visit the ITA's Job Board for details and more postings!

Submit a Job Posting

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lewis University Philip Lynch Theatre
Young Frankenstein
May 30 or 31 at 7:00p
Callbacks: June 1 at 7:00p
Performances: July 21-23 & July 27-30

Click here to visit the ITA's Audition Announcements for more details.

Submit an Audition

Casting Directors settled into auditorium seats over the 2 days to witness, evaluate and - in the future - hire the aspiring talent. Often called a "cattle call", this type of audition is an efficient way to see a huge range of available performers. ITA does all the "heavy lifting": providing the venue, assembling resumes and headshots into a convenient binder, and, incidentally, hosting the artistic directors and talent agents for breakfast and lunch.

This year, Casting Directors representing 30 professional, storefront and community theatres and talent agencies were registered. The distinguished roster included Metropolis Performing Arts, Oak Park Theatre Festival, Shirley Hamilton Inc. and Teatro Vista.

"We are thrilled to be able to provide this type of casting opportunity both for the actors and for the representatives who come from Illinois and surrounding states," according to Aimee-Lynn Newlan, ITA Executive Director. "Several of the attending reps told me they are using the ITA audition as the sole source for their casting!"

"The ITAs," as it is affectionately called, is the largest and most prestigious combined audition in Illinois

Auditionees are required to present two performance pieces, totaling 90-seconds in length. Musical Theatre actors perform a musical selection (16 bars minimum) and a monologue that demonstrate their range. Non-Musical Theatre actors present two contrasting monologues.

The nearly 300 aspirants this year included veteran actors, new-to-Illinois performers and recent college graduates, all of whom regard "The ITAs" as an invaluable source of career momentum.

Kearstyn Keller, who is currently featured as Jill in "Equus" at The Skokie Theatre, was enthusiastic about her experience. "I went to the ITA auditions because I recently moved here and I wanted the opportunity to audition for a wide array of Chicago theatre industry professionals. Since doing ITA's I have gotten interest from film and theatre opportunities around the city. " Nice return on a 90-second showcase!

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A NEW MAJOR IN THEATRE AT UIS

By John Curran

I chose to be an ITA board member for a very selfish reason: I wanted to be more involved with other theatre programs in the state. Like most of us in higher education, I have spent so many years walled up in my own theatre obsessing over every penny while consistently trying to make the "magic" every year. That usually doesn't leave a lot of time for learning about what my peers are doing.

This time I was introduced to a real gem. A very new kid in terms of theatre majors (their new BA in

FEATURED PERFORMANCES

Northern Illinois University

The Good Woman of Szechwan

4/20/17 - 4/23/17

Thur. - Sat. at 7:30p

Sat. & Sun. at 2p
Region 2: DeKalb

Harper College

Doubt: A Parable

4/21/17 - 4/30/17

Fri. & Sat. at 8p

Sun. at 2p

Region 2: Palatine

Lewis University Philip Lynch Theatre

A Midsummer Night's Dream

4/21/17 - 4/30/17

Thurs. - Sat. at 8p

Sun. at 2:30p

Region 2: Romeoville

DLO Musical Theatre

The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas

4/22/17 - 4/23/17

Sat. at 7:30p & Sun. at 2p

Region 5: Danville

Want your performance to be featured here?
Visit the [ITA Performance Calendar](#) for details.



A Streetcar Named Desire, 2015

Theatre will launch next year), but a program that already has a great reputation for quality theatre in our state capital: The University of Illinois Springfield.

The UIS Theatre program officially started in 2002 when Eric Thibodeaux-Thompson was hired to develop it. The faculty continued to expand after national searches in 2006 and 2012 when Missy Thibodeaux-Thompson and Dathan Powell joined the program. The theatre minor was introduced in 2010 and in 2012 the University merged the arts together to form the Department of Art, Music, and Theatre. After a two year development and approval process, the program was granted a BA in Theatre in September. Considering the current financial difficulties in the state, it is wonderful to see colleges and universities still committing to new arts programs.



How I Learned to Drive, 2014



The Importance of Being Earnest, 2015

The program offers two productions each year in the UIS Studio Theatre, an intimate flexible space that is considered one of the finest venues in the Springfield area. This year's

productions were Macbeth and Almost Maine. The productions draw student performers and crew from all over campus and also feature several guest theatre artists working directly with the students. Their mission emphasizes theatre as a vital artistic event that brings people together to respond to one another's experiences/stories and to the world in which we live. To me, looking over their course offering and productions, it seems like that mission is thriving in their program every day. We should all wish the faculty and students a wonderful journey as they continue to grow and develop this program. I'm so happy I had a chance to share some of their story.



ITA Links:

For more information about theatre at UIS, [click here](#), or contact one of their wonderful faculty members [click here](#).

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THEATRE: THE NEXUS FOR ALL EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLINES

By Father Domonic

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Last year for our production of Shrek at Saint Bede Academy, we rented the Pinocchio growing nose apparatus. My director took the lead on this endeavor, so I honestly couldn't tell you where we got it. But although the design concept for the apparatus was sound, the actual construction left a lot to be desired. In short, it never worked, not even once. So I decided to use the telescoping nose portion of what we rented, and build an all-new apparatus using a bicycle brake cable. It required a couple of tries, but in the end what we developed worked without mishap for the run of the show. I reconstructed the rented piece and sent it back, thinking I might get around to finding a similar telescoping nose piece to add to our mechanism.

[Performance Calendar](#)

This year, Deerpath Middle School in Lake Forest was doing Shrek, and they were in search of a growing nose for Pinocchio as well. Director Chris Arnold posted a plea on our ITA Secondary Division Facebook page, and I responded. We had several conversations over the phone about what was needed for their production and what I had on hand. Fortunately our spring musical was Godspell (all platforms and props, with no special effects) and I had some free time, so I told Chris that one way another he was going to get his growing Pinocchio nose.

[Submit an Announcement](#)

Join the ITA on Facebook:

ITA Fan Page

IHSTF Fan Page

College/University Group Discussion

Community Theatre Group Discussion

Creative Drama Group Discussion

Professional Theatre Group Discussion

Secondary School Theatre Group Discussion

Theatre for Young Audiences Group Discussion

On the advice of one of my fellow teachers, I worked with an Academy sophomore to design the piece we wanted, and he translated it into a template to make a 3D printed nose in four sections. He even printed out three of them so I had some room to make mistakes! A plastic mask, JB Weld Epoxy Putty and duct tape provided everything else I needed to add to our apparatus to make a working prop. Luckily, we are just down the street from the UPS store and I could overnight it in time for the production! We even posted a short video on YouTube so they could see how it operated.

Here's what Chris had to say: "The nose was such a hit of the show. The audience (kids and adults) marveled as it grew, and asked, 'How did you do that?' It was a great experience for the actor getting to work with such a specialized prop. It presented a challenge for the crew. This was a wonderful experience in collaboration."



FOLLOW OUR TWEETS:

Illinois Theatre Association

IHSTF

**Illinois
Theatre
Association**

The ITA is a network of dedicated theatre artists and educators advocating quality theatre throughout Illinois. Please join us!

123 Mill Pond Dr.
Glendale Heights, IL
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This last comment is the real reason for sharing this story. Think of all the elements that came together for this one prop: social media, problem-solving, cross-curricular learning, 3D printing, modern materials and old-fashioned trial-and-error. A monk and a science geek in a rural downstate school collaborating with a middle school cast and crew in the suburbs. Facebook Messenger, Microsoft Outlook, CAD, the UPS app and YouTube. Further proof (as if we needed it) that theatre can be the nexus of all the educational disciplines described in Common Core and NCLB and ESSA and ISTE and whatever else they come up with next week in Springfield. We Theatre educators rock---don't let anybody tell you any different.

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DRAMA STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

By Beth Ann Barber

I have been teaching drama to students with special needs for three years now. It has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my 33 year career. While special education students have always been in our drama classes, we did not offer drama to the special needs population specifically until three years ago. I reached out to colleagues at other schools that taught a course in their schools for guidance. Their advice was extremely helpful as I wrote the curriculum for my amazing students with autism and downs syndrome. It has been a gift that I cherish to work with these students. If this is something that interests you, I encourage you to go for it. It will definitely be worth it. Here is an article by Arts on the Move with ideas for working with students with special needs in drama.

Drama and Students with Special Needs

Drama is often about collaboration and negotiation, and when it is used in mixed-ability groups it can act as a bridge between children with special needs and others in their peer group. It can enable students with particular difficulties, and provides an ideal environment to encourage students to work together and to develop trust and friendships.

ARTS
on the move

There is, however, a danger of assuming that drama is 'the inclusion subject'. This can lead to:

- A devaluation of the contribution of theatre to academic work
- A devaluation of the achievements of all drama students
- The mis-teaching of drama as always accessible
- The perception of the arts as easy or not requiring basic skills
- The reduced perception of a subject at which some students with special needs can excel
- The alienation of special needs students who do not find drama lessons automatically accessible

None of these issues serve the student with special needs.

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The Illinois Theatre Association is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

What if drama is difficult?

There are some students, and not only those with special needs, who will find some form of drama activities, or even the drama space itself, challenging. Non-classroom environments, group or pair work, performance, touch, open space, dialogues and self-expression can all present challenges. All of the well known 'accessibility' techniques apply equally to drama: displays on the wall; a welcoming environment; a variety of activities and methods; art-based activities; writing together on large sheets of paper; employing costume, props and multimedia to support the work, and using both teacher and student-led exercises.

Think about which activities will be challenging for students with special needs and aim to structure them tightly, in terms of classroom management and space, and also of transition into and out of them. It also helps not to present too many challenges at once, so try not to combine, for example, challenging group structures with work on a difficult issue. If an activity is difficult for some students, you can create safety nets or cushions, using drama techniques to help. These are discussed below.

Open space and the circle

Structure and careful classroom management can remedy some of the immediate shock of being in the open drama space. Working in a circle sets up a structure which can be constantly referred to and even maintained throughout the lesson. Or, in a traditional classroom, making a particular organised space by rearranging desks and chairs can help.

The use of the circle as a controlling device, although obviously much easier in a dedicated drama studio, is particularly good when members of a class have challenging behaviour or problems with social skills. It is also useful for students with a range of special needs. It occasionally presents a problem if one or two students are especially withdrawn, because everyone can be seen easily, so group trust needs to be developed at the same time as establishing the space, or the benefits of circle work will be stunted.

Some SEN students respond positively to the very open drama space and the possibilities it presents, so that the circle can be useful as a structured introduction to the opening out of space.

Developing the circle: a practical example

- Start the lesson in the circle and use games to establish both the circle space and turn-taking. If appropriate, talk about the use of the circle as a performance space and the history of the circle in theatre.
- Work on a whole group exercise, such as mime or rhythm, in which the idea of the circle and of turn-taking can be practised.

- Do some work in pairs or threes in the circle, seated or standing, re-establishing the circle at the end of each short activity.
- For demonstrations of work, go around the circle.
- Once students have passed to less tightly structured work, the circle can still be useful:
- Use the circle to sit down in moments of confusion or noise.
- If you want to extend this and move into the rest of the drama space, establish the circle as a space to come back to and go away from for performance, discussion and demos.
- Introduce the use of other spaces gradually. Open up the space and make it available by starting with the circle.
- Experiment with other theatre spaces: traverse, end-on, open space, and so on.

'Now get into pairs!'

Another practical way in which some of these challenges can be met is through structured (rather than informal) group work. For example, use sustained pair work then join pairs together into groups, or play a game which 'lands' students in pairs or groups. In a mixed-ability group, allow students to develop scenes which can be verbal or non-verbal and which can be developed to different levels by high-ability students and less able students.

Some group-work safety nets

- Regularly work in threes as well as in pairs, so that being in a group of three doesn't become stigmatised.
- Establish early on that the maths won't always work, so some people will be in a group of a larger or smaller number than that suggested, again to avoid stigma. (Depending on how the class is working together, it can be those who aren't as confident in the drama environment that end up in a group of three when the others are in pairs).
- Use and value working individually as well as group work. Don't always end with group work.
- Allow observers, narrators, journalists, note-takers or cartoonists in some activities.
- Allow miming and gesture instead of dialogue in some activities.
- Use mixed-ability pairs, to allow the more able students to help their peers.
- Use activities where the roles in the group or pair are equally valued but unevenly weighted. For instance, in hotseating activities, some students may find it easier to ask the questions, especially if they have been prepared beforehand. If the more able student plays the character during hotseating, it gives less able students an excellent demonstration of how the activity works.

Reading cushions

If basic skills are required in an activity, you can again use safety nets or cushions. Here are some reading cushions:

- Teach a line of dialogue using repetition and gesture before reading it.
- Read two lines of dialogue together as an introduction before going on to group work.
- Read a whole piece of text in mixed ability pairs or threes so that students can help each other.
- Create a wall display and an improvisation based on an aspect of the text before reading it. For instance, use a display of a street scene showing antagonism between two families, before learning two lines of the prologue to Romeo and Juliet using gestures and repetition, as an introduction to the play.
- Introduce other activities where students who find reading difficult will have their particular strengths championed and match these to reading activities.

The obvious benefit of drama is that it presents a chance for the student who struggles with literacy to flourish, though there shouldn't be a complete avoidance of reading and writing in favour of speaking and listening, especially as some students with special needs may be inclined to opt for the subject at GCSE, and from Key Stage 4, written work will be assessed. Care should be taken when introducing reading and writing activities if you have not experienced your students' level of literacy before.

Challenges that provide opportunities: self-expression and communication

Another important function of drama for students with special needs is in fostering the twin aims of self-expression and confidence-building; these are important tools in literacy-building, and a confident student is more likely to learn well and to enjoy learning in general. For students with challenging behaviour or problems interacting, drama provides an opportunity to let off energy within the boundaries of the lesson itself.

Drama also boosts the communication skills of students with special needs. Group negotiation and communication skills developed through drama can feed back into other subjects. It's worth bearing in mind that some students will find 'untaught' group work and communication skills hard, so don't make assumptions that certain things will come automatically. Drama makes an important contribution to the 'how to' of these skills.

Build the class up slowly in a structured way, gradually getting more complex, and practise communication techniques over several lessons. For instance, start with individual mime work, and move on to turn-taking games in pairs and in a whole group. Then try specific role-plays before using a freer kind of group impro. If these methods are repeated, the drama lesson will provide an opportunity to teach communication skills and group work rather than making certain students afraid of them.

Creating a group for students with special needs

A drama club or group especially for students with special needs will help you to concentrate on key activities and skills. It may prove better to have this club in the SENCO-run area rather than the drama studio, so that the environment is appropriate, classroom assistants are on hand to help and the SENCO can help set the agenda.

You may well have a specific aim in mind, but will probably also need to consider prioritising between group work, communication skills and confidence-building. An understanding of how to work on the basic drama skills should also be the focus, which can be taken away from the club and into the mixed-ability drama lesson. There are some key drama skills which need to be practised, for example: standing still (freezes and tableaux); sitting still and listening; watching; turn-taking; entering dialogues with confidence; making shapes; negotiating pairs and groups and building trust.

For further information from Arts on the Move [click here](#).

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THE SCOOP ON SKYLINE THEATRE CHICAGO

By Susan Antman, Creative Drama

As a board member of the ITA, we're always looking for ways to describe the benefits of joining our organization. The weekly Friday Finds, and the monthly E-Followspot both constantly update members with opportunities to network with a wide variety of theatre professionals, and to connect with job prospects and promote their theatre activities.



I personally reconnected with Jacqui Siegel and subsequently joined her Skyline Studios team through a notice in the E-Followspot. Teaching with her amazing group of theatre artists at the Winnetka Community House has given me a whole new way of supporting my students and community

members. Skyline provides fantastic support and resources for my directing, through their musical theater program. They have grown exponentially, and I was quite curious about the secrets of their success, so I asked Jacqui and Erica, and they answered.

You started 14 years ago, right? How did you two meet? You were roommates, yes? How did you decide to start a theater company?

Yes, Skyline Studios has been in business for 14 years. We met at Bradley University, and were sorority sisters and roommates. After college, Erica was working as a kindergarten teacher in Chicago Public Schools with a class of 35 students and Jacqui was working at a large Advertising agency in Chicago. We were both freshly out of school,

learning about the 'real world' and all the challenges of working for big corporations.

We went to dinner one night and both said "wouldn't it be so FUN to teach children dance and theatre?" We reminisced about our childhood days of doing show after show. We talked about how important our experiences in theater were to our life and the skills we gained from the stage. From there, Skyline was born!

What was your mission when you began, and how has it evolved over time?

We are proud to say that our mission has remained the same as when we began Skyline 14 years ago. Skyline Studios, Inc. offers a unique theatre experience where students meet new people, develop interpersonal skills, confidence building, and enhance self-esteem while creatively challenging their bodies, voices and hearts! We believe every student who has the desire should feel confident performing on stage. Our shows involve every actor in every single song, scene, and dance. We are 'untraditional' in that sense but Skyline believes in this ensemble approach.

How does your partnership work? Do you have complementary strengths? What advice do you have for entrepreneurs?

We had skeptics who warned us that being in business with friends and family doesn't work. This has not been the case for us. We acknowledge that we wouldn't be able to do this without each other. We both bring different strengths to Skyline. For example, Jacqui is an amazing 'people person' and Erica is super tech savvy. We appreciate the talents the other person brings to the table. At the end of the day, we are friends over business partners. Our goal is to make sure we are taking care of each other first.

Our advice is to follow your passion, whether you are 10 or 99! Sometimes doing a job that you may NOT love propels you to do something that you do love and find your strengths. Take every opportunity to learn from your endeavors and grow as a person.

Can you describe the business model that you're following?

Business model...what business model? If you could call it a 'business model' we make every decision based on what is best for kids.

Your company has grown dramatically over the past few years, how do you manage the growth?

ORGANIZATION and TEAM! We have a fabulous team of teachers who make Skyline what it is today. Our teachers are inspiring students from many communities every single day. Both of us taught for Skyline 5 days a week for the first several years. Now we spend out time managing the business end. We miss the teaching and hope to get back to it one day!

What are some lessons or insights from your experience that have surprised you?

We have learned to let go, trust and delegate! We joke that Skyline is our baby that never grows up. We spent many years being protective of the company and managing everything! Skyline Studios was growing as we grew. We are both full time public school teachers and mothers. We were terrified to let go of what we had always been doing. For example, we used to

spend hours choreographing the show. Now, one of our teachers choreographs. Once we relied on other people we realized that everyone brings a different gift and talent to Skyline. We truly are better together!

What are some of your greatest challenges as educators and theater folk?

Lately, we've been having conversations about growth mindset. It's difficult to see children and parents disappointed in their role or struggling in school. How do we instill a growth mindset in these young students? The research of



Dr. Carol Dweck on mindset is helping guide these conversations both at school and Skyline. Theatre is a great way to develop growth mindset. Students who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others) have a growth mindset. They tend to achieve more than those with a more fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts). We are working with our team on how to praise and give feedback to actors to promote growth mindset. We let our students know that it is okay to make mistakes and theatre is a great place to explore that in a safe space. We model that for our actors and explain that attitude is most important!

What do you hope for your legacy in Chicago theater?



Wow, hard question! Our hope is that we enable children who are confident, willing to take risks, and who understand that teamwork is vital to success. We want Skyline Studios to remain innovative and continue to grow. We are always exploring ways to give back to the communities we are in. If our legacy is as a hard working, fair company that gives

back to the community and makes people smile- that would be incredible.

How the heck do you manage to balance so many successful endeavors - jobs, families and a theater business?

Teamwork! We realize that we each bring our own talents and then we rely on our staff to bring their abilities to the table. We also rely on our families and husbands! We have an amazing support system that believes in us and hold down the fort.

At the end of the day, we aren't just business partners we are friends. The priority is that we are both healthy and happy. We are each other's biggest cheerleader and support.

We have the best teaching team! Our teachers also manage hectic lifestyles. They are working actors, voice coaches, students, parents, educators, and wear many other hats. We appreciate that they give everything to Skyline and their students. We are always looking to grow our team. If you're interested, please click here to send your resume.

Thanks for sharing your story with me, and the readers of the eFollowspot.

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CONTENT ADVISORY

By Stacy Deemar

Have you ever attended a theatrical performance and found yourself feeling uncomfortable? It's not the chair that's too hard, the temperature in the theatre that is brisk, or the person next to you doused in perfume. What is jarring are the explicit sex scenes less than ten feet away from where you are seated and there is no advance notice. Theatre artists should not be censored but theatres have a responsibility to their patrons to be fully transparent about the content of their shows prior to patrons entering the theatre.

There was no acknowledgement of the sexual content at the theatre entrance, in the lobby, or in the program prior to a performance of *The Scene* by Theresa Rebeck at the Writer's Theatre. A brief summary of the play could be found on the theatre's website. The advisory was situated directly below the concise description that read in italicized writing, "use of profanity, sexual situations, partial nudity, and brief violence."

Seated in the second row of the intimate Writer's Theatre 250 seat three-quarter thrust stage can be overwhelming for a patron being exposed to explicit content without warning. A patron might feel slighted without an advisory which could negatively impact the theatre via social media or word of mouth by the patron.

Linda Vista by Tracy Letts at Steppenwolf Theatre is also provocative due to simulated sex scenes. Like many of Lett's plays, this new work is dark, hilarious, acerbic, and clever; however, there was no advanced warning of the lurid content. Similar to Writer's Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre did not post any information in regards to the content in the lobby, on the entrance door of the theatre, or in the program. The content advisory was only posted on their website which was not accessible from an iPhone.

When a production uses gun shots and strobe lights, there is usually a notice posted on the entrance door into the theatre. Furthermore, ushers also announce the advisory to patrons while distributing programs and assisting patrons to their seats. Why are theatres then not more transparent with their patrons about content? Should theatre goers make it a common practice to search for content advisories on a theatre's website prior to purchasing tickets? Has going to the theatre become the adage caveat emptor - let the buyer beware?

Theatres should also have an age restriction policy regarding minors when there is simulating sex in a play. According to a box office attendant at Steppenwolf Theatre, as long as a parent accompanies his/her minor throughout the duration of the performance of *Linda Vista*, the minor can attend the performance. There is a strong argument that the simulated sex is pornographic; therefore, having a child/minor present is illegal. Thus, the theatre should be obligated to dismiss minors.

If a student informed a teacher that she/he had seen Linda Vista, the teacher would be responsible for reporting the information to the school psychologist and/or social worker.

The school psychologist would investigate further to assess whether the exposure to simulated sex is isolated or a regular occurrence. Furthermore, exposure to these types of graphic images can have long-term damaging effects on a child.

No one can "unsee" what they have seen, especially a child. Preventive measures must be taken by the theatre to inform patrons of the content advisory in addition to safe guarding children by prohibiting their attendance. Live theatre does not need to be rated nor does it need to be censored. Theatres should follow Benjamin Franklin maxim, "Honesty is the best policy."

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