Seven Guitars by August Wilson
Directed by Cameron Knight
Welcome to our Fall 2014 Newsletter.

Once again our fall activities generated a lot of excitement both within and without the university community. The school’s annual play season opened with a powerful production of August Wilson’s Hill District play, Seven Guitars. Cameron Knight, our acting faculty member, directed Wilson’s searing piece about acceptance, love and the perennial search for identity, with enormous skill and sensitivity. The play provided the cast, crew and creative ensemble with a memorable exploration of August Wilson’s cannon, his home town setting and the lives of Pittsburgh’s African Americans in the 1940’s.

Jed Allen Harris’ production of Charles L. Mee’s Trojan Women: A Love Story followed Seven Guitars in the Philip Chosky Theater. Jed’s production examined the after effects of war, power abuse, brutality and calamity in a way that brought this epic work seamlessly into our current consciousness. Given that the aim of the school is to educate knowledgeable, compassionate and skilled artists across our many majors focused on theater making, these two works were good examples of the diligent research, creative spirit, flair and daring that characterizes a CMU Drama student and alum.

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In November I hosted the National Theater Heads and Chairs conference here in Pittsburgh. This annual get-together is a time when Heads and Chairs meet to collaboratively discuss issues and challenges facing some of the country’s leading Drama schools. The openness of my colleagues to talk over issues, share discoveries and inspire and support each other represents all that is best about the academy.

Enjoy your theater going, the restorative energy of spring and the bliss of summer beyond.

Peter Cooke OAM PhD
Professor and Head

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“To paraphrase Jay-Z, you’re not a businessman, You’re a business, man. And it’s in your best interest to understand the theater industry.”
-Kristoffer Diaz
Pulitzer-prize nominated playwright

“I haven’t worked in years... because it doesn’t feel like [work].”
-Louis Henry Mitchell
Creative director of character design for Sesame Workshop, the non-profit behind Sesame Street.

“Pretend is so essential, especially because we’re losing the distinction between what is real and what is not.”
-Julia Scher
Visual and Performance Artist, Professor at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, Germany

“Your everyday life is worthy of theater.”
-Shawn Sides
Co-producing Artistic Director of The Rude Mechanicals, Austin, Texas

“The idea is developing a language in which directors can talk with each other about their work.”
-Linda Chapman
Associate Artistic Director New York Theatre Workshop

**FALL 2014 VISITORS TO THE SCHOOL OF DRAMA**

- Devon Allen
  Lighting Designer
- Denee Benton (A ’14)
  Actress
- Pamela Berlin
  Director
- Judy Bowman
  Casting Director
- Linda Chapman
  Associate Artistic Director, New York Theater Workshop
- Corey Cott (A ’12)
  Actor
- Kristoffer Diaz
  Playwright
- Neal Dodson (A ’00)
  Producer, Before the Door
- Michael Finkle (A ’08)
  Agent, The William Morris Endeavor
- Marc Janowitz
  Concert Lighting Designer

- David Larsen (A ’02)
  Actor
- Andrew Lippa
  Composer and Lyricist
- Louis Henry Mitchell
  Creative Director of Character Design, Sesame Workshop
- Carol Scheffic
  Jewelry Designer
- Julia Scher
  Visual and Performance Artist
- Jackie Gartner Schmidt
  Associate Director
  University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Voice Center
- Shawn Sides
  Co-Producing Artistic Director, The Rude Mechanicals
- Ryan Tanker
  Lighting Designer
- Victoria Wytcherley
  Digital Marketing Manager, Philips
Carnegie Mellon’s School of Drama has provided a lot of talent for the hit Broadway production *The Book of Mormon*. And last fall, *The Book of Mormon* returned the favor.

Since it premiered in 2011 with three School of Drama grads originating principal and ensemble roles, several more alumni have joined the cast. In late September, when the national tour rolled into Pittsburgh, the New York producers invited current Carnegie Mellon students to attend a performance at Heinz Hall.

Denee Benton (A’14) and her co-star, David Larsen (A’02), gave a post-performance talkback for Carnegie Mellon alumni moderated by Professor and Head of the School of Drama Peter Cooke on Sept. 29.

During the conversation Cooke asked Larsen what he thought distinguished the School of Drama from other conservatory training programs. Larsen replied that it was the strong foundation in acting theory that set School of Drama alumni apart in the musical theater world.

“To tell the story of the song is more important than hitting the notes,” Larsen said. “I mean, you’ve gotta hit the notes but I would rather see a story told.”

Before their two weeks in Pittsburgh were over, Larsen and Benton made their way back to Oakland for a visit to the Purnell Center for the Arts, where they spoke to current School of Drama students about their work in *The Book of Mormon*.

Larsen offered up some wisdom from his 12 years as a working actor.

“You should never need to take extra classes if you continue to apply what you learned here,” he said. “It’s those who stick around, those that persevere, that’s who makes it.”

**’BOOK OF MORMON’ GIVES BACK TO SCHOOL OF DRAMA**

By Erin Keane Scott

Carnegie Mellon’s School of Drama has provided a lot of talent for the hit Broadway production *The Book of Mormon*.

And last fall, *The Book of Mormon* returned the favor.

Critically acclaimed lyricist and composer Andrew Lippa accompanied the junior Music Theater ensemble in a cabaret event called “Be the Hero,” Sunday, Oct. 26.

Lippa, best known for *The Addams Family* and *Big Fish*, arrived in Pittsburgh on Oct. 24, and spent the weekend working with students. He remarked that the students of the School of Drama were living up to the reputation they’ve gained in New York City.

Not only did he work with Music Theater students, but also, with Dramatic Writing graduate students.

“One thing he told us was if you are willing to put the ugly side of yourself out there in your work, if you’re willing to take that risk, you can be deeply rewarded,” Amy Gijsbers van Wijk, a first year dramatic writing student, said.

On Sunday, the students performed over a dozen songs from Lippa’s repertoire and, at the end of the evening, the artist himself sang three songs, including new material.

Held at the Cabaret at Theater Square, an audience of about 150 patrons sipped wine and enjoyed appetizers while taking in the various tunes.

As the evening drew to an end, Lippa shared some of his best advice with students. He suggested they hold each other close, because they would be together throughout their careers and personal lives.

“If you are willing to put the ugly side of yourself out there in your work, if you’re willing to take that risk, you can be deeply rewarded.”

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**NATIONAL THEATER HEADS & CHAIRS MEET IN PITTSBURGH**

By Erin Keane Scott

On the weekend of Oct. 31, 2014 eight heads and chairs of theater departments from Carnegie Mellon School of Drama, University of Maryland, University of California at Irvine, University of Washington, Penn State University and Webster University gathered in Pittsburgh at the Hilton Garden Inn to discuss matters from curriculum to budgets and everything in between.

The weekend included a tour of the School of Drama’s facilities at Purnell Center for the Arts and a dinner at Lydia’s in the Strip District.

“I find the gatherings invigorating and very helpful to my thinking on a raft of subjects,” said Peter Cooke, head of the School of Drama at CMU. “The other heads all speak so openly and passionately about their experiences, concerns, planning, strategizing and future needs.”

“The weekend was like a new chair master class for me,” says Todd London, Executive Director of the University of Washington School of Drama. “I appreciated the wisdom and honesty of my colleagues.”

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REMEMBERING WILSON'S PITTSBURGH

THE SCHOOL OF DRAMA PRESENTS

By Amy Gijsbers van Wijk

ON "THE HILL"

The Hill District serves as the location for nine of Wilson's 10 Pittsburgh Cycle plays. Often referred to simply as "the Hill," the neighborhood contained much of the cultural life of African-Americans in Pittsburgh from the 1930s through the 1950s. To further their understanding of the play, the creative team, along with the cast, paid a visit to Wilson's home in the Hill.

"We went to Bedford Avenue in the Hill District," says Dan Daly, scenic designer. "You could actually see Hedley's door and the bricked-in windows. You could see all the points in buildings that were actually in Wilson's script."

"The Hill District had such a bad reputation," Knight says. "When we were at August Wilson's house, people started driving by and slowing down, and asking us questions or telling us what they knew about the neighborhood. The community was so supportive."

"It was very important to us that we showed the vibrancy of the 1940s Hill District, because it's been diminished by redevelopment projects of the 1950s—many of which weren't completed," says dramaturg Rachel Abrams.

THE MAKING OF MEMORY

The creative team felt that the theme of memory was central to the play, which works backward in time from the funeral of its protagonist. The changes in the Hill District serve as a reminder of how people remember places that no longer look as they once did, or as they do in someone's memory.

Daly found himself captivated by differences in the play's description of Wilson's actual home and the reality of the structure, which influenced his design choices.

"The set is very real, but it's not true," Daly explains. "I went back to the Hill by myself, and you could see the ghosts of buildings. There was this tar paper everywhere, because after the great Pittsburgh Fire, the buildings had to be brick or covered wood to avoid everything burning down again."

The play's focus on memory means that an element of misremembering also exists.

"Some of the most interesting things are the discrepancies in the script in terms of history. Muddy Waters didn't have an electric guitar in 1947, but this is mentioned in the script," Abrams says.

Personal memory also served as an important factor for each member of the creative team.

"I focused a lot on how my own memory of my childhood home is," Daly says. "So in the design process, I heightened colors, I focused on the idea of there being so many telephone and electrical wires, too, as that's something that stuck out in my memory."

Gross says, "Photographs tell me a lot more than simply doing an Internet search of something, and I used those and family photographs from that time period to give me an idea of what the ordinary person looked like, what they were wearing."

Once the show opened, many folks from the Carnegie Mellon community and city communities attended, enjoyed and praised the production.

"People in the audience would come up and talk to me about what they remembered and what stories the production brought out in them," Knight says. "We built a small community during this production and that's true for every Wilson play I've ever done."

FILLING IN THE BLANKS

Teenie Harris, a photographer and another artist who served as inspiration for the team, helped them understand visual parts of the world they could not have seen otherwise.

"Teenie Harris was really helpful," costume designer Jamie
The Dramaturgy behind the School of Drama’s Trojan Women: A Love Story
By Eugenie Carabatsos

Producing a unique take on Euripides’ Greek tragedy, Trojan Women was an exciting challenge for director and Associate Teaching Professor at the School of Drama, Jed Allen Harris and adaptor and Associate Professor of Dramaturgy, Megan Monaghan Rivas. The collaborators, along with co-dramaturg, Kate Robinson, re-envisioned Charles L. Mee’s Trojan Women: A Love Story, integrating texts from the first known English translation of Euripides’ Trojan Women by James Bannister in 1781, along with new material written by Monaghan Rivas. The result, produced on the stage of the Philip Chosky Theater in November, was a modern take on a classic tale that pulled the relationship of the conquering and the conquered into focus.

This particular production also highlights the relationship between director and dramaturg. Monaghan Rivas acted primarily as adapter and Robinson acted primarily as production dramaturg.

Having three minds on the project made for an exciting collaboration surrounding a foundational piece of theater.

In fact, this is Harris’ third Greek drama in the past decade. “I have a love for Greek drama,” he explains. “It’s so beautifully elemental and poetic. They’re language oriented plays, created for a society who knew how to listen.”

Monaghan Rivas echoes his excitement: “To reach all the way back to the foundations of western drama and counter it, match up, dance with it, wrestle with it, in this very contemporary context… was immensely artistically valuable and valuable to me as an educator,” she says.

WHAT’S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Although Euripides wrote Trojan Women in 415 B.C.E., its central themes ring true today, which is what drew the collaborators to this specific work.

“The play is an extraordinary contemplation written by a victor culture about the culture they had vanquished,” Monaghan Rivas says. “[Trojan Women] is culturally appropriate to our moment, as [the U.S.] is presently an aggressor nation in some places around the world.”

When Euripides wrote Trojan Women, The actual Trojan War had been fought 800 years prior. “Known for challenging his audiences, Euripides wrote plays that commented on the current events and issues of his society,” Robinson says. “Euripides knew the story would reverberate with his audience of soldiers [who were at that time fighting the Peloponnesian War].”

This spirit of using an old story to engage a modern audience is partly what compelled the collaborators to use Mee’s version of Trojan Women.

“What drew us to his adaptation was the fact that it incorporated a lot of material that wasn’t just Trojan Women by Euripides. It brought in material from…1994 when Chuck Mee wrote and produced the play,” Robinson explains. Mee is famous for his collage style of play writing. He encourages adaptation of his own work, stating on his website: “Please feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely as a resource for your own work.”

CREATING OUR VERSION

The collaborators found Mee’s instructions liberating. This freedom offered a unique opportunity for the dramaturgs to adapt their own version of Trojan Women: A Love Story.

“To work with an existing script and do whatever you want with it… if you aren’t working with a Chuck Mee script, there aren’t many other plays you can do that with,” Robinson notes.

In the spirit of Mee, Monaghan Rivas and Robinson created new elements for the School of Drama production. One such quality was the use of language as a way to underline the differences between the two cultures: Greek and Trojan.

“We settled on having the Trojans this contemporary text, and the Greeks speak in this very classical way,” Robinson explains. “That’s a unique element of our adaptation,” Monaghan Rivas adds. “Using the metered heroic verse, 18th century translation for the Greeks and the equally poetic but unmetered Chuck Mee text for the Trojans, lets the audience’s ears recognize the clash of cultures in a way we were excited by.”

The collaboration between director and co-dramaturgs proved to be fruitful for all involved. Not only was it a chance to revisit and re-envision a classic text, it also provided students with a model for an effective and respectful director/dramaturg relationship.

Meet A Dramaturg:
Megan Monaghan Rivas

Megan Monaghan Rivas, associate professor of dramaturgy at the School of Drama, joined the faculty in Fall 2013. Prior to her arrival at Carnegie Mellon, she served as literary manager of South Coast Repertory Theatre; led the literary departments of the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta and Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre in Austin; and oversaw the artistic programming at the Lark Play Development Center in New York and the Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis.

Monaghan Rivas’ journey to dramaturgy actually began with an interest in directing. She earned an MFA in directing from the University of Texas at Austin. She discovered dramaturgy in her third year at Texas when she enrolled in a new play dramaturgy course. At the same time, she volunteered at a theater company, reading new play scripts the management was considering for future productions. The combination of these experiences opened her eyes to dramaturgy, and she decided that dramaturgical work highlighted her strengths and piqued her interest.

“Dramaturgy is the wine in the spaghetti sauce,” Monaghan Rivas explains, “You don’t want to taste the wine, but its presence makes everything else taste better.”
SEVEN GUITARS
AUGUST WILSON
Directed by Cameron Knight

TROJAN WOMEN: A LOVE STORY
CHARLES L. MEE AND
THOMAS BANNISTER
Adapted by Megan Monaghan Rivas
Directed by Jed Allen Harris
BLISS
MIKHAIL BULGAKOV
Directed by Margo Gray

FOOL FOR LOVE
SAM SHEPARD
Directed by Ian-Julian Williams

NEW WORKS SERIES
THE RECLUSE
STEPHEN WEBB
Directed by Andrew Smith

MILKMILKLEMONADE
JOSHUA CONKEL
Directed by Alex Tobey
I took Sound Design I and really enjoyed it. I enjoyed the technical side and the challenge. After junior year, I went to Williamstown as a sound intern, which was basically like sound boot camp. The supervisor there said, “You obviously have an aptitude for this. I think you could be very successful at it.” That was the little push I needed.

How did your time at the School of Drama prepare you for what you’re doing now?

The program makes you focus and taught me to work intelligently and manage my time. It created the drive that I needed to get myself established. Establishing yourself as a freelancer is a lot of work and requires persistence, perseverance and dedication. The program makes you focus and lay a foundation for when you leave. CMU also creates a sense of creative problem solving, which is incredibly helpful in theater.

What was the biggest adjustment after you graduated?

You go from CMU—a really full schedule and working all the time—and move to New York with no real job prospects and a little bit of money. Most of my graduating class moved to New York as well, so we were all adjusting together. I spent a lot of time scouring Craigslist for jobs that would pay the bills. And slowly but surely, I started finding theater work.

Did any faculty or mentors that shaped your education and lay a foundation for when you left CMU?

I did work study for Joe Pino that turned into “special topics with Joe.” I remember we had speakers that had to be altered, and I wasn’t exactly sure how to do it. I said, “What if I break it?” And Joe said, “If you break it, we’ll get new ones. How are you going to learn if you don’t do?” That’s absolutely the way it is. Fear of making a mistake is so intense, but Joe supported and pushed me. The rest of the faculty was inspiring too. It’s really the most supportive environment.

Several alumni were featured in Playbill’s Fall 2014 Preview: Kyle Beltran (A ’09) was featured for his role in the Off-Broadway musical adaptation of Jonathan Lethem’s THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE. Tina Benko (A ’94) starred in New York Theatre Workshop’s SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE and Holly Hunter (A ’80) played in the New Group’s production of STICKS AND BONES.

Matt Bomer (A ’00) won a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor in a Series, Mini-Series or TV Movie for his work on HBO original movie THE NORMAL HEART.

The program... created the drive that I needed to get myself established.”

How did you get become interested in sound design?

I actually came to the School of Drama as a set designer, but I had a musical life. I sang and played the cello.
Natalie Baker-Shirer, Associate Professor of Voice and Speech, was the dialect coach on the film THE WITCH HUNTER to be released in Oct. 2015. She also did audiobook narration for the titles Who Was That Lady?: Craig Rice: The Queen of Screwball Mystery by Jeffrey Marks and Real Like Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940 by Wendy Smith. Finally, she acted as keynote speaker for New Leadership Pennsylvania where she presented the benefits of clear, unaccented American English Speech as the first step to encourage college women to become politically active and to take on leadership roles.

Kenneth Chu, Costume Shop Manager, designed costumes for PARADE produced by Front Porch Theatricals at the New Hazlett Theater in Pittsburgh. He is currently working with the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation to realize a project called THE DANISH WIDOW. The project will be representing the Heinz Theater Heads & Chairs Conference in Pittsburgh. He also did talk backs with the National touring cast of THE BOOK OF MORMON and the Broadway cast of PIPPIN in New York City.

Tomé Cousin, Assistant Professor of Dance, directed CONTACT at the New Hazlett Theater. He also did design work on the devised workshop presentation of a comic science fiction opera with music by Peter Farmer. This production in 1995 with a set from the Prague Quadrennial this year. She also started design work on the devised production of ALL THE NAMES with David Lakey, a participating artist in the Prague Quadrennial.

Janet Madelle Feindel, Professor of Voice and Alexander Technique and ’02 alumna, wrote a chapter "Alexander Technique and Vocal Strategies" for the newly revised Young Actors' TALE for the Playhouse Repertory Company.

Gary Kline, Teaching Professor of Music Theater Voice, Assistant Option Coordinator for Acting/ Music Theater is lining up a busy summer schedule that includes serving as Artistic Director for the ArtsBridge summer training program housed at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, as well as teaching at the Torggler Vocal Institute at Newport University alongside scheduled faculty Kelli O'Hara and Bobby McFerrin.

Nataisie Bakeshier, Associate Professor of Voice and Speech, was the dialect coach for THE DANISH WIDOW, written and directed by John Patrick Shanley, for the New York Stage and Film season. She also designed the sets and costumes as executed by the Australian Ballet. It was his first time designing for the company since finishing his 12-year run of Quantum Theatre and Sheila Callaghan’s EVERYTHING YOU TOUCH and the premiere of Stephen Dietz’s ON CLOVER ROAD for Contemporary American Theatre Festival.

Narelle Sissons, Associate Professor of Design, designed sets for THE DANISH WIDOW, written and directed by Kristin Davis, for Quantum Theatre. She also designed costumes for the National touring cast of TAMARA, for Quantum Theatre, which was named best production of the year by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Kristi Good, Adjunct Faculty, had two articles published: “Marilyn Monroe: Soldier in Greasepaint” in Theatre History Studies, Volume 33 and “Testimony for the Forgotten: Sebastian Barry’s The Pride of Parnell Street as Celtic Tiger Critique” in Etudes, Volume 1, Issue 1.

Rob Handel, Associate Professor of Dramatic Writing, will have a workshop presentation of a comic science fiction opera with music by Peter Farmer. This production in 1995 with a set from the Prague Quadrennial.

Anthony McKay, Associate Professor of Acting, will see the premier of his play ENDLESS LAWNS produced at Pittsburgh Playhouse this spring with Gregory Lehane, Professor of Drama and Music, directing.

Tina Shackelford, Assistant Teaching Professor of Stage Management, recently stage-managed Dael Orlandersmith’s STOOP STORIES for Weston Playhouse this spring with Gregory Lehane, Professor of Drama and Music, directing.

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SUBSCRIPTION SERIES

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PACKAGE PLUS

BLISS
MICHAEL BULGAKOV

When engineer Rein invents a time machine that transports her to the part of Moscow called Bliss in the year 2222, her troubles seem to be over. But this utopian world may not be as welcoming as it first seems. Experience this Soviet satire by the author of The Master and Margarita.

Directed and Translated by MARGO GRAY
OCT 1-4

WOLVES
STEVE YOCKEY

Wolves lurk in the city in this deconstruction of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale. At least that’s what Ben believes. Things get messy when Jack, his ex, brings a gentlemen called Wolf back to their small apartment. Ben wants a story where love triumphs or the woodman kills the wolf and saves the day. Well, this isn’t that story.

Directed by IAN JULIAN-WILLIAMS
FEB 18-21

DIRECTOR SERIES

FOOL FOR LOVE
Sam Shepard
Directed by Ian Julian-Williams
NOV 5-8

MILKMILKLEMONADE
Joshua Conkel
Directed by Alex Tobey
NOV 19-21

THE MAIDS
Jean Genet
Directed by Patrick Zakem
Feb 11-13

STUEBENVILLE
Directed by Eleanor Bishop
MAR 18-20

in a word
Directed by Rachel Pustejovsky
APR 8-10

DECEIVE
A short film by Clarence Williams IV
Screening date TBA

NEW WORKS

OCT 20-24
APR 22-25

New Works is the cauldron in which exciting ideas, concepts and performance practices are presented to our audiences by the next generation of dramatic writers. Just as August Wilson and Anton Chekhov were once new dramatic voices, so too are our graduate writers who seek innovative ways to tell compelling stories.

Dan Giles / Wei He
Julianne Jigour / Tracy Potter
Savannah Reich / Stephen Webb

HORIZONS READING SERIES

Horizons is a new initiative designed to give the community access to plays that may not fit into the annual play season. The aim is to broaden our understandings of the range of theatrical writing, subject matter and stylistic form. It is an opportunity to hear new voices in a staged reading setting.

DEC 3
TBA

FEB 24
REBORNING by Zayd Dohrn