

# ◆ The Scarlet Masque ◆

Wabash College Theater Department

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## Theater Department Newsletter

Vol. 16

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## An Impression

After a busy semester, exams, Commencement, and now, finally, a chance to clean house and prepare the way for a new academic year, my thoughts turn to you...well...you...and...uh... Shania Twain. Have you seen her recent music video? Archetypes and would-be lovers, (Lawrence of Arabia, Indiana Jones, etc.) regaled in the glory of their time and place, vie for Shania's love. She rejects each with five simple words in one grammatically flawed sentence: "That don't impress me much." We know the proper contraction. We also know that "That doesn't..." doesn't scan and fails to punctuate the meaning of the song. Music has its own language of sound and sequence, tempos and rhythms, and lyrics, if used, should honor the language of music composition and not English composition. (I have two teenage boys and so I catch the occasional music video.) "That don't impress me much."

Evan is 14 this month and will enter Crawfordsville High School in the fall while Matthew



commences from CHS this Saturday. Jamie, Matthew, and I have spent considerable time this year with the college search process. Matthew will attend Grinnell in Iowa. The search has been rewarding and sometimes overwhelming. After a year or more of discussion, a steady flow of slick view books (filled with images of happy students traipsing about bright and richly colored campuses), and visiting several bright and richly colored campuses, I was beginning to develop Shania's attitude. "That don't impress me much."

The opportunity to look at other institutions has renewed my belief in the work that we do in the Arts at Wabash. Many of the colleges and universities we visited or considered offer excellent programs. Wabash, for its size and resources, is among the best. The Wabash community enjoys a state-of-the-art facility, and we, in the building, appreciate the College's commitment to a variety of arts-related programs.

I've enjoyed 18 years in the Arts at Wabash. I've seen the construction of the Fine Arts Center, served on committees to shape new faculty and staff positions in the arts, helped students apply for off-campus study in the arts, and planned and helped implement many Visiting Artists and theater programs. Good changes have taken place here over the years. But buildings and programs, while essential, **don't impress me as much** as the many Wabash students I have known and who have shared their talents with the College.

This newsletter features excerpts from the work of two theater majors, rising seniors Tony Goodwyn and Christopher Short. The winner of the 1999 Leonardis Theater History Award, Tony submitted two fine dramaturgical essays for Theater 9 (Dramaturgy). Christopher's monologue, *Solitaire*, written in Theater 10 (Playwriting) was highly praised and delightfully performed by Jamie Watson in this year's Studio One-Acts. I hope you enjoy their work.

--Dwight Watson, Chair, Wabash College Theater Department



## Excerpts from "The Tears of Clowns: Comedy as a Dramatic Enhancement in *The Boys Next Door*"

At the beginning of Act 2, scene 3 in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses the humorous element of comic relief in the form of a feisty porter to alleviate the oppressively serious weight of King Duncan's murder. Making allusions to equivocators, tailors who skimp on the fabric they use for the hose they make, and several amusing references to the effects of alcohol as an equivocator, the porter effectively causes the audience to temporarily forget the dark and cutthroat tone of the play and laugh at his wit. Such timely use of humor in an otherwise dramatic, depressing or serious work is appropriately known as comic relief.

Shakespeare was adept in his use of comic relief, often utilizing lowly characters to provoke humorous situations in the play (as well as humorous reactions from an audience). Characters such as these are in a great deal of his plays, be they comic or tragic in tone, and are often known as fools or clowns. Characters such as the porter in *Macbeth*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and the gravedigger in *Hamlet* comprise the lower class of people, much like the "trickster slave" in the drama of Plautus long before Shakespeare. Effusive and glib as they are, they are often derided as silly and unimportant by most of the other characters. Despite the low opinion that may be held of them, they often end up saying some of the most profound things in the stories. They accentuate humor in the comedies, provide comic relief in the tragedies, and often are equated with the notion of the "wise fool," one who turns out knowing more about human nature than the presumably more educated main characters of the play.

The use of comedy in what would otherwise be serious works is a common feature of drama even today. This formula is employed in various movies and situation comedies as well as self-contained works of the stage. Examples abound, from the popular "Roseanne" television series to works such as *Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley. One play that seems to touch intriguingly on the use of comedy in a mostly serious story is *The Boys Next Door*, by Tom Griffin.

It is easy to compare this use of comedy to Shakespeare because four of the main characters in the play suffer from either mental retardation or the mental illnesses of schizophrenia or

obsessive-compulsive disorder. This disadvantage shared by these characters will, in the minds of many audience

members, connect them almost instinctively to the ideas of the fools in Shakespeare's plays. This connection exists in their having characteristics that necessarily keep them from doing many tasks that could be done by a normal person. In this sense they are stripped of some of their dignity from the outset, as are the fools, who are usually considered lowly and undignified (often incorrectly) by the majority of characters in Shakespeare.

The stark difference between this comparison comes with the same disadvantage that may link them to the fools: mental retardation. Foolish and facetious as fools can be, they are also witty, sharp, and usually amply able to defend themselves and participate in the battle of wits. None of the mentally retarded characters in *The Boys Next Door* are able to do this, yet comedy is used in relation to them to enhance the dramatic aspects of the play.

In *The Boys Next Door*, the use of comedy in close proximity to Lucien, Norman, Arnold and Barry provokes an interesting comparison of them to Shakespeare's fools and clowns. In the sense that these men are clowns, comedy often occurs in direct relation to them because of their handicaps. In the sense that they are not, comedy is either used in jest of them or as a setup to enhance sad or poignant moments in the play—appropriately, in some cases, referred to as the tears of clowns.

...The inclusion of comedy in dramatic or tragic theater (and vice versa) seems to indicate that, to most playwrights, life is a balance of happiness and sadness, of silliness and seriousness, and that only through exploring both do we, the denizens of "this mortal coil," truly experience what it has to offer before we "shuffle off" of it. Comedy, as we have seen with *The Boys Next Door*, helps an audience to better see both the serious and the touching moments in a play. It is an effective foil that helps to lighten a somber mood, heighten the sentimentality of a tender moment, and enhance the poignancy of a dramatic moment. With his use of comedy, Tom Griffin has made *The Boys Next Door* a play that deserves to be known as a sentimental comedy that utilizes the tears of clowns.

—Tony Goodwyn

Tony Goodwyn  
(00), winner of  
the 1999  
Erminie C.  
Leonardis  
Theater History  
Prize



# Excerpt from *Solitaire*

by Christopher Short

*MISS CHRISTIE sits on a davenport, on which she is surrounded by several green and orange Girl Scout cookie boxes, before a glass-topped coffee table. She lays out a deck of cards, preparing to play solitaire. She plays throughout the monologue, albeit slowly.*

MISS CHRISTIE: It was a day like any other, now that I'm removed from it and can think more clearly. It was remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that I was killed, but it started out a day like any other, and I sat in my sun room to enjoy a nice game of solitaire, just as I would on any other day.

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Miss Isobel Christie, a widow, and I live by myself in this elegant house which my late husband, Alvin, purchased with the monies he amassed during a particularly lucrative holiday on the Riviera. *(a side thought)* Oh—my late husband's surname wasn't Christie, but Montblanc. I reverted to my maiden name not out of disrespect for my husband following his passing—Alvin was actually a grand man, apart from his gambling problem, which *(looking about the house)*, all things considered, I suppose I can't complain about—but because I like to think myself empowered. And, for the respect part, I did take on the middle name of Alvin, the Christian name of my dead spouse, because I hadn't been granted one at birth. I am Miss Isobel Alvin Christie, properly. Oh dear, I'm rambling. What was I talking about? Oh yes. Nonetheless, I did revert to my maiden name after Alvin's parting, and it was because, as I said before, I like to think myself empowered. After all, it's about the only thing I have. As I said, I live by myself, which is why I spend most of my time playing solitaire and not bridge, as is the tradition, I am led to believe, of other widows my age. *(she takes a deep breath)* Nonetheless, on the day of which I wish to speak to you, I was sitting in this very sun room, preparing to enjoy a nice game of solitaire, much as I am doing now. Actually, now I'm playing solitaire, rather than preparing to play, but you get the drift, as they say. So, I had laid out my cards, and was just marveling over the fact that three of the four aces had turned up, straight from the deal—perhaps I hadn't shuffled as well as I fancy myself to be able—when the bell rang; *(bell rings)* imaging my surprise!

Oh—at this point it would behoove me to tell you that I don't live alone, in the most technical sense of the word, but with my manservant, a delightful older and ever-so-slightly effeminate man named Jeeves. When I hired Jeeves, following Alvin's passing, I begged him to change his name—after all, having a manservant who is a delightful older and ever-so-slightly effeminate man named Jeeves is so clichéd, particularly in the theatre and cinema—but he would have nothing of it. And so, I was stuck with a delightful older and ever-so-slightly effeminate manservant named Jeeves, with which I was finally able to cope. I digress. *(deep breath)*

So, on the day in question—yes, it is still in question, as the rest of the conversation still hinges upon it—the bell rang, and my delightful older and yadda yadda Jeeves answered it. I was still in a bit of shock, as I am an elderly widow who lives more or less by herself and thus receives few callers, if any, but I was perfectly keen on receiving a caller on this day, as I had invariably wound up spending the last several fortnights playing solitaire and openly weeping—much to Jeeves' alarm and more than a little of Jeeves' delight—for a good ten hours a day, with no exceptions whatsoever. Thus Jeeves showed the caller in, *(rises and steps forward, as if to receive a caller)* and it turned out to be—of all people—a pizza delivery person. I should say, a pizza delivery man, as he was male, or even a pizza delivery boy, as he couldn't have been older than, say, thirty, but at any rate, here was this tall, thin, boy, sweaty from a long day of delivering pizzas and, I should like to imagine, randy from the same venture, but at any rate he was bearing pizzas. Imagine—pizzas! As if I, or any other marginally self-respecting elderly widow, should order pizzas. So, he—the pizza boy—opened his mouth and emitted this low, burly, sensual tone, saying:

PIZZA BOY: *(off-stage right, in a nerdy voice)* That'll be \$17.55, ma'am.

Christopher Short ('00), selected playwright for the 1998 Indiana Theater Conference New Works Festival

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# Theater Season 1999-2000

## ***Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde***

by Moises Kaufman

October 6-9, 1999

## Studio One Acts: ***Id: An Evening of Unbridled Dementia***

by Christopher Short ('00)

November 17 & 18, 1999

## ***Twelve Angry Men***

by Reginald Rose

February 23-26, 2000

## ***Othello***

by William Shakespeare

April 19-22, May 12-13, 2000

Join Us  
This  
Season

**Michael Abbott** opened the 1998-99 season with *The Grapes of Wrath*, an extraordinary production requiring enormous time, energy, and talent. Michael also served as a faculty supervisor of the Studio One-Acts (to which he contributed original music for Christopher Short's *Solitaire*), presented a paper at the Ides of August ("Talmudic Tradition in the Films of Woody Allen"), and published a book review, "Shakespeare, The Movie," in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. Michael will teach theater and film to L.I.F.E. Partnership students during the summer residential program, and squeeze in another directing assignment at the Red Barn Summer Theater, one of Indiana's finest summer stock companies.

James Gross began his Wabash designing career with *The Grapes of Wrath*. Visually remarkable and technically ambitious, James' design involved many movable parts (including an actual 1930s pick-up truck) and clever special effects. James follows this epic with two wonderfully realized designs: a painterly set for *The Notebook of Trigorin*, and a complete environment for *The Boys Next Door*. Eager to develop opportunities for students outside of class, James organized several field trips to the Indiana Repertory Theater, and coordinated the campus visit of Larry Kaushansky, a highly respected, Russian-trained scenic designer.

**Laura Conner's** designs for the 1998-99 season carried her signature of creativity, clear vision, and masterful use of form, fabric, and color. She continues to receive recognition for her art quilts. In April, her exhibition, "Piecemeal," was well-received at the Richmond Art Museum. As a staff supervisor and participant at the Quilt & Surface Design Symposium in Columbus, Ohio, Laura worked to refine and expand her design knowledge. Laura wants you to know that her family is blessed with "good health and full schedules."

Nolan, her son, is finishing his freshman year at Southmont High School, and Sam is finishing fifth grade at New Market Elementary.

**Jim Fisher's** book, *Stephen Sondheim. A Research and Production Sourcebook* is scheduled soon for publication by Greenwood Press. Granted a sabbatical leave and awarded the MaLain-McTurnan-Arnold Research Semester for next year, Jim is eager to complete research on Gordon Craig, and to continue his research for a book entitled *The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope*. His direction of *The Notebook of Trigorin* weaved many threads of his scholarship and creativity, and gave us a rare opportunity to see both Dana and Anna Fisher sharing the stage. Jim and Dana will travel to London this summer. Anna will attend Kenyon College in the fall, and Dan, a rising junior at Denison, plans to study off-campus in India.

**Dwight Watson's** direction of the final play of the season, *The Boys Next Door*, brought together a talented blend of experienced actors with many newcomers including three young thespians from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College. Joining playwrighting students Aaron Stout and Christopher Short, Watson contributed two short plays to this year's Studio One-Acts. His two-act comedy, *Dapple Gray*, was published in March by Palmetto Play Service.

## Notes & News

### FACULTY & STAFF



## ALUMNI NEWS

**Jim Amidon '87** and Christine were blessed with a daughter, Samantha Elizabeth Amidon. Congratulations!

**Aaron Cook '97** is planning to pursue a master's degree and counseling and social work. Thank you for the great family photo!

**Michael Dalby '79** accepted an appointment as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Visual and Media Arts at Emerson College. "I'm splitting my time between Boston and New York."

**Marc Doshi '97** completed his second year at Yale working toward an MFA in theater design. Last summer, Marc had the opportunity to design lights for a production at Lincoln Center in New York City.

**Jon Foust '98** and Darby are the proud parents of Gabriel Seth Foust. Congratulations!

**John Flak '90** stopped by campus and discussed his enjoyable work as a stage manager for the Steppenwolf Theater Company in Chicago.

**Rick Haffner '84** toured the South Pacific and London with the California Theatre Center. This is Rick's fourth season with the company. His commercial success (His Chevy spot played during the Oscars!) allows him travel.

**Mark Hayes '88** acted in the World Premiere of *The Abeisha Conspiracy* at the Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago. Department members enjoyed lunch and the opportunity to join Mark in celebrating **Alvin Schuh's (88)** birthday at a local restaurant.

**Phil Hoagland '93**, teacher of theater and English, directed a successful production of *The Crucible* at Seneca High School in Louisville.

**Kaizaad Kotwal '91** provided art direction and production management for the film "Dominant 7," scenography for India and Far East tours of *Art* and *A Perfect Ganesh*, and acted in the National Independent film "People Like Us." He is developing his own film company while working with several theater companies and as a freelance arts writer (He recently interviewed Faye Dunaway.).

**James Kuluicki '81** moved to New York to take a position as Director of Engineering for Nelco.

**Parker Lyons '97** is working on his master's degree at the IU School of Journalism and serves as a theatre critic for the Indiana Daily Newspaper.

**Rob Lyons '96** directed "Die Verwandlung" (The Metamorphosis) for *theater am horizont* in Berlin. Rob is currently living in Wichita but plans to return to Germany in the near future.

**Ken Ogorek '88** returned to his 10<sup>th</sup> year reunion last October. Since then John Matthew Ogorek arrived to Melissa and Ken. Congratulations! Ken is in education administration for the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

**Gregory Manning '96** completes his third year at Concordia Theological Seminary and serving as "vicar" (intern) at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne. "I love seminary, but can I please come back and do one play!"

**Steve Martin '95** is a full-time quiz editor for Scholastic Corporation: "I am allowed to use my brain and be creative as I write plausible wrong answers..."

**Nick Roth '88** worked in corporate real estate development and traveled extensively after receiving his MBA at IU.

**Roy Sexton '95**, Wabash College Assistant Director of Alumni Affairs, has enlivened the campus with several well-received vocal recitals this year.

**David Schultz '88** new position with Microsoft will lead him to consider "other possibilities inside and outside of academia."

**Patrick Tyndall '92** completed his 4<sup>th</sup> year at the Univ. of Texas doctoral program in theater. Patrick is putting the finishing touches to his dissertation, "An Analysis of Black Rage Through the Works of August Wilson."

**Ansley Valentine '90** completed his second year in the MFA program at IU. His direction of the IU production of *Flyin West* was well-received.

**LET US KNOW—Write, Call, or Visit**



***The Wabash College Theater Department would like to acknowledge the time and effort of those who participated in this season's plays. Thank you for your dedication!***

***The Grapes of Wrath*** by Frank Galati (based on John Steinbeck's novel; directed by Mike Abbott, scene & lights by James Gross and costumes by Laura Conners)

Cast – Jim Webb (Visiting Artist), J.R. Sherburne, Tom Lustina, Josh Cohen, Andrew Elderkin, Andrew Reitz, Nick Ohmer, George Belmore, Suzanne Walker, Carol Homann, Ryan Soard, Kevin Benson, Jim Abercrombie, Abby Gillan, Chris Deufel, Riley Gillan, Katy Gentry, Zach Hoover, Aaron Stout, Gabriel Duarte, Crystal Hester, David Hirt, Dr. Joe O'Rourke, Amanda Griffith, Kim Mosbaugh, Sam Sherburne.

Crew – Ryan Soard, Kevin Benson, Chris Bull, David Hirt, Jeremy Hopkinson, Pete Robinson, Robert Summers, B.J. Whetstine, Brian Confer, Gabriel Duarte, Andrew Kaiser, Tony Goodwyn, Brad Erdel.

### **Wabash Studio One-Acts: *BUZZ***

***Four Corners*** by Aaron Stout (directed by Tom Lustina, music by Aaron Stout). Cast – Josh Cohen, Tony Goodwyn, Lynn Dimick, Tom Lustina.

***Good Touch, Bad Touch*** by Aaron Stout (directed by Tom Lustina, music by Aaron Stout). Cast – Jim Abercrombie.

***Hopper & Pete at High Noon*** by Dwight Watson (directed by Kevin Benson, music by Max Davis). Cast – George Belmore.

***The Bleeding Heart*** by Dwight Watson (directed by Kevin Benson, music by Max Davis). Cast – Aaron Stout, Shiv Karunakaran.

***Solitaire*** by Christopher Short (directed by Tom Lustina, music by Mike Abbott). Cast – Jamie Ritchie Watson, Jim Abercrombie.

***Bouncer*** by Christopher Short (directed by Dwight Watson, music by Christopher Short). Cast – Kevin Benson, Phil Kesler, Josh Cohen, Andrew Elderkin, Shiv Karunakaran.

Stage manager, Andrew Elderkin; Scene designer, David Hirt; Faculty advisors, Mike Abbott, James Gross, Laura Conners

***The Notebook of Trigorin*** by Tennessee Williams, adapted from Anton Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* (directed by James Fisher, scene & lights by James Gross and costumes by Laura Conners).

Cast – Aaron Childress, Kim Wagner, Trevor Fanning, Joshua Elmore, Tony Goodwyn, Gabriel Duarte, George Belmore, Mike Abbott, Anna Fisher, Ramona Zachary, Nick Ohmer, Ryan Soard, Dana Warner Fisher.

Crew – Kevin Benson, David Hirt, Gabriel Duarte, Joshua Elmore, Tony Goodwyn, Martin Bowman, Pete Robinson, Tony May, Erik Svaruenud, Chris Bull, Ryan Tuttle, Ricardo Ramirez, Nick Nussenbaum, Vosoibjit Banerjee, Todd Bower, Jeremy Hopkinson, Nathaniel Quinn, Greg Augspurger, Song Rogers, Ryan Soard, Andrew Kaiser, Evan West, Basabjit Banerjee.

***The Boys Next Door*** by Tom Griffin (directed by Dwight Watson, scene & lights by James Gross and costumes by Laura Conners)

Cast – Trevor Fanning, Joshua Elmore, Nick Ohmer, Andrew Garcia, Paul Kennedy, Tom Nelson, Ryan Soard, David Hirt, Brian Confer, Jolene Long, Colleen McQuaid, George Belmore, Alex Fletcher, Michael Shannon.

Crew – George Belmore, Pete Ambrose, B.J. Whetstine, David Hirt, Ryan Soard, David Coates, Joyce Plew, Jake Kaminer, Ryan Tuttle, Jeremy Hopkinson, Erik Svarverud, Andrew Kaiser, Evan West.

***Special thanks to Marge Jackson, Doug Boodt, Dr. John Zimmerman, and the Friends of the Arts.***