

Assessing Impact: An Overview

by Amber Davis Parham

How does theatre impact science learning for family audiences in science and natural history museums, zoos, aquariums, and other science-based institutions? What creates the spark for learning, and more specifically, the spark for science learning? How does theatre contribute to igniting the spark? What methods of evaluation are currently being implemented to assess this impact? And what do professionals in the field want to further examine?

To answer these questions I reviewed pertinent literature, analyzed 12 evaluation studies from six science-based institutions, and conducted 13 interviews with professionals in the field.

In the literature review I examined the intersection between theatre and museums and how theatre has the ability to reach diverse learners. I also explored educational theories about teaching science in informal settings, connecting how museum theatre programming supports the learning process.

I collected evaluation studies conducted between 2007 and 2013 for the meta-analysis. The studies represented a range of science-based institutions from across the United States. I identified current trends in the field, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in the evaluative methods currently used to investigate the impact of museum theatre.

The interviews richly informed the research, offering tremendous expertise, ideas, and insight about why museum theatre works as an educational technique, and exposed some of the challenges in

continued on page 2



Photo courtesy Amber Davis Parham

Amber Davis Parham as an astronaut for the Mars Demonstration at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS), 2010

The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate to the American Alliance of Museums. IMTAL's mission is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience. For more information, to become a member, or to volunteer, please visit our website, <http://www.imtal.org>, or contact a board member via email.

Copyright 2013 International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL). Request reprint permission through pubsofficer@imtal.org.

evaluating this educational approach.

In some institutions, museum staff argue that theatre programming is too costly or is an inferior approach to education compared to other interpretive methods. Yet evaluation studies have consistently demonstrated positive responses from visitors who attend museum theatre programs.

Unlike other styles of programming, theatre allows for an emotional, human connection that contextualizes the content and stories museums tell. It can transport visitors to other places, tapping into their imaginations and vividly bringing to life the past, present, and future. Theatre is an excellent device for reaching children and families, bridging the gap between education and entertainment.

While the general consensus among the professionals interviewed is that museum theatre does work as an educational device, there remains limited data to show why and how it works educationally.

I found abundant anecdotal evidence supporting the use of theatre in museums, including many accounts that emphasize programmatic success. There have also been a number of successful

evaluative studies. Nonetheless, professionals in the field need to continue assessing theatre programming in a more formalized manner, documenting both qualitative and quantitative data.

I spoke with one professional who explained that their institution had conducted informal surveys, but after looking over the responses, they discarded the results. This lack of formal process is a problem, and one that I encountered more than once during my research. The professionals I spoke with agreed that the museum theatre field needs to be more deeply assessed: having sound, documented evidence of their programs' success serves as justification for funding their programs or increasing the on-floor presence of actors and interpretive staff.

While they acknowledged the need for further assessment, they also recognized some of the challenges in evaluating museum theatre. For instance, the diversity among theatre programs makes it difficult to develop uniform studies that can be replicated across the field. The evaluation studies I collected were as unique to their institutions as the programs being evaluated.



“[T]he studies that employed more diverse evaluative methods tended to yield richer data that more fully captured the essence of their programs.”

Of the 12 studies I assessed, nearly all were short-term and relied on survey results. While surveys can and do gather valuable information, they tend to only scratch the surface. Often these results proved to be primarily beneficial to the internal needs of the institution, rather than supporting the field as a whole.

By contrast, the studies that employed more diverse evaluative methods tended to yield richer data that more fully captured the essence of their programs. I was particularly impressed by the 2007 study conducted at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science that assessed their historical enactor program. DMNS used surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, time and tracking, staff logs, and follow-up interviews, all in one study.

In the 1980s, when museum theatre was first being evaluated, many of the studies focused on the visitor's enjoyment, what was learned, and the show's "take-away." In many of the contemporary studies I examined, the inquiries have not evolved beyond this. Nearly all assessed how engaged visitors were with the program; only one asked whether visitor expectations were being met. When asked what evaluation methods they would recommend for assessing their programs, most interviewees responded that they "didn't know" and suggested I speak with their evaluators. To demonstrate impact more fully, I began to wonder, how can you quantitatively capture the magic of theatre? How do you document the emotional response? What about the long-term impact? These questions fueled my recommendations for the field.

I recommend that museum theatre professionals collaborate with evaluators to develop a common language. While some efforts have been made by the International Museum Theatre Alliance, the field must continue to further define museum theatre

and set standards for this practice. By better defining the standards, it gives us something to measure against and improves our ability to comprehensively evaluate, documenting the impact of museum theatre programs. The field would also benefit from clarifying the educational expectations of museum theatre, thus better linking museum theatre with educational theories and frameworks. Identifying key educational goals and implementing them across the field will help to further legitimize theatre as an educational approach in museums.

Moving forward I hope to see increased evaluative studies, in particular those that assess the long-term impact of museum theatre. There is also a need to implement consistent evaluation methods across the field. Establishing strong and manageable methodologies that demonstrate effective approaches for gathering data, and then making examples of those studies available as models, would be a tremendous benefit for the museum theatre community.

Museum theatre is such a powerful device for teaching about so many subjects and has the ability to capture the human spirit unlike any other interpretive approach. As these successes are further assessed, I hope the broader museum field will continue to incorporate the practices of museum theatre.

Amber Davis Parham is a recent graduate of the Museum Studies M.A. program at John F. Kennedy University. She has a theatre background and was first introduced to museum theatre while working as an actor at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. This article draws from her Master's project. The bibliography and full text of her thesis, *Assessing Impact: Igniting the Spark for Science Learning with Museum Theatre*, is available in the members only section of the IMTAL website under "resources" as a PDF download.

President's Report

While texting at the international conference in D.C. in October, our Membership Officer, Heather Barnes, received an auto-correct. It read, “Dogs Up!”—and the phrase quickly became an anthem and our unofficial slogan for IMTAL. “Dogs Up!” was heard by all throughout the week.

Speaking of setting things right, an immense thank you to Susan Evans and her team for making the conference run smoothly among government insanity. The week was invigorating, instructive, and a pure joy to partake in. More importantly, professional relationships were formed that will last and have a meaningful impact on our field.

It occurred to me while listening to one of our keynote speakers, Roscoe Orman (“Gordon” from *Sesame Street*), that museum theatre is as old as the most treasured informal learning television show. We all know the immense cultural influence “The Street” has had on generations of children, and I truly believe, and evaluation proves it, that our work does do and has the capacity to do the same. This belief was reinforced again and again as I attended sessions covering all manner of topics, from tackling controversial and

sensitive issues to giant puppets and so much more.

Besides all the impressive sessions, inspiring keynote speakers, and fab evening events, our board met twice during the week. I’m happy to report on just a few of our new initiatives:

- ◆ You will now receive publications from IMTAL Europe and Asia/Pacific via email as well as IMTAL–Americas’ *Insights*.
- ◆ The IMTAL boards (Americas, Europe, and Asia/Pacific) agreed on a global, unified logo.
- ◆ And last, but certainly not least, we are proud to announce a new IMTAL award in honor of the late Jon Lipsky: the Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting. As many of you know, Jon was an active IMTAL member, a talented playwright, and a dear friend to many. Details about submitting your work and the criteria for the award are on pages 5 & 7 and the website, imtal.org/home.

Thank you to all who attended the conference, and we missed those of you who could not be there. Let’s repeat and expand on the amazing experience at next year’s conference in Chicago. We hope to see each and every one of you there.

Dogs Up! to museum theatre!

Stephanie Long

Science Museum of Minnesota,
IMTAL President

*Dogs
Up!*



Photo by Judy Fort-Brenneman

Surprise visit from Diane Stillman, IMTAL’s first president, at Maryland Historical Society during 2013 IMTAL preconference

Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting

IMTAL-Americas is proud to announce the Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting, named in honor of exemplary museum theatre playwright Jon Lipsky (see below). IMTAL-Americas' board of directors approved the details at the October 2013 board meeting, and submissions for this new annual award are now open.

Lipsky Award Criteria

The winner of the Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting will have written the play that most exemplifies the following standards of excellence in Museum Theatre:

- ♦ The resulting production is engaging and “not boring.”
- ♦ Factual content is embedded within the play so it is “shown” and not “told.”
- ♦ Plot contains conflict and/or story arc.
- ♦ The characters are well developed (unless the theatrical style requires otherwise).
- ♦ Dialogue achieves goals of production and is consistent with style of play.
- ♦ Script and presentations evoke emotion and encourage audiences to make personal connections with the content and/or characters.
- ♦ Script aligns with an institution's exhibitions and/or programmatic priorities, and augments, expands, or fulfills a need that is not being addressed elsewhere in the institution.

more info on page 5



Jon Lipsky, professor of acting and playwriting at Boston University's School of Theatre for 28 years, was also a playwright and artist-in-residence at the Museum of Science in Boston, Massachusetts. His work and passion for theatre continue to influence and inspire Museum Theatre practitioners.

“... if I have any ax to grind, it is this: that we can afford to let the passions out of the box we so often put them in. We can risk surprising our audiences who expect information but not exaltation. Let visitors to our museums and other halls of culture see us laugh, cry, rant and rave over the information we are presenting. Let us convince them with the depth of our feelings that the issues and the people who struggle with them matter to us, and matter to them. Let's not be afraid to scare them, turn them on, charm them, repulse them, inspire and provoke them. They can take it. In fact, they thrive on it. The more we can touch people's hearts, the more they will feel that what we are talking about matters to them.”

Jon Lipsky

<http://jonlipskyplays.com/science-plays/>

Editor's Corner

Musings from the 2013 Global Conference

As I write this editorial, it's been seven weeks since the IMTAL Global Conference in D.C. We're well into planning for the 2014 Regional Conference, but I can't let go of the global conference yet. I doubt I ever will.

Like any good conference, 2013 in D.C. was a mix of interesting people, excellent presentations, and provocative discussions. There was silly—a campaign to make “Dogs Up!” a new catch-phrase (see President Stephanie Long's column). There was sweet—Josh Moore's invitation to form a “cuddle-puddle,” a perfect descriptor if ever there was one. There was business—networking and contact info exchanging, regional and global board meetings, the final approval of our new playwriting award (see pages 5 & 7).

There was karaoke organized by Aussie John Patten, the mysteries of Metrocard options, the capriciousness of politics and the unpredictability of weather (and uncontrollable HVAC systems)—

—and English spoken through diverse filters of country, culture, and home (Australia, New Zealand, Germany, England, Kuwait, Iraq, Taiwan, Nigeria, Greece, United States)—

—and the chaos of changed venues (a miracle of event planning pulled off by Susan Evans, Mary Macko, S. Xavier Carnegie, and Harriet Lynn), construction-on-the-subway adventures, food and drink to derail the most dedicated dieter—

And amidst all of this, I returned—and keep returning—to P.J. Powers' keynote address.

P.J. told the story of how he and a handful of friends formed Timeline Theatre, now a well-respected Chicago theatre that “presents stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues.”

He'd been a working actor, successful by anyone's measure, but was frustrated with work that was unfulfilling. He kept asking, Why this role, why this play? What difference does this make?

He talked about the challenges of starting, of moving ahead, of long hours and little or no pay, of well-meaning disbelievers. He talked about

commitment and the importance of remembering why you are doing what you are doing, and about why it matters.

And I thought: this is how it is for most of us, maybe all of us.

Dissatisfied and frustrated, driven by a desire to make a difference and convinced there is a better way, we invent art that teaches, performances that startle, stories that resonate long after closing time.

We want our work to matter, to make a difference in the world. We hope it will be easy, that the money, resources, and support will be there. We hope success, however we choose to define it, will come sooner, not later. But even when the budget is a broken shoestring and it feels like we're standing alone and abandoned on a crumbling stage, we use our creativity, ingenuity, and tenacity to build anew. We join with colleagues, rediscovering our own inspiration as we draw from their experience and wisdom.

This is the joy and thrill of IMTAL—a kinship that reminds us that not only can we overcome obstacles, but the obstacles are worth overcoming.

New, Improved, and Coming Soon!

- ◆ Beginning with this issue, *Insights* will be available only in electronic form. If you or your organization need a print version and you're unable to print your own from this PDF, please contact me via email, pubsofficer@imtal.org.
- ◆ Entries for IMTAL's new Jon Lipsky Playwriting Award are open! See pages 5 & 7 or the website (<http://imtal.org/home>) for details.
- ◆ IMTAL's website redesign is coming along nicely, thanks to board member-at-large Douglas Coler of Discovery Place, Charlotte, NC. The new design (which will have newsletter archives, including extended interviews) will be up and running soon.
- ◆ Info for the 2014 IMTAL Regional Conference (Sept. 7–11, 2014, Chicago, IL) and the call for session proposals will be posted on the website soon, too.
- ◆ IMTAL is putting together a session proposal for the 2014 National Association for Interpretation conference (Nov. 18–22, 2014, Denver, CO). This may be a theatre showcase (similar to our AAM presentation), a combination of performance, training, and discussion, or something else entirely. Help us extend our reach and increase the impact of museum theatre—contact me at

pubsofficer@imtal.org to be involved—planning, ideas, participation, or all three!

Winter Insights Deadline

Winter issue theme: *Can we talk?* Live performance, facilitated discussions, and providing “safe space” for hard, complex, or otherwise challenging stories.

Thoughts? Programs, events, or plays? Research projects? Ideal interview candidate? Submit articles and ideas by **January 15, 2014**: pubsofficer@imtal.org. (Don't have time to write an article but have a cool idea, know about an interesting program or tough challenge? Email me!)

Judy Fort Brenneman
Greenfire Creative, LLC



Photo by Judy Fort Brenneman

Talk-back with Baltimore School for the Arts performers, at 2013 IMTAL preconference

Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting *details*

continued from page 3

2014 Submission process

Submit your work for the inaugural Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting! Submission deadline is January 31, 2014.

Submission Requirements

- ◆ Applicants must be members of IMTAL and must include their member number with their submission. Non-members may join IMTAL at www.imtal.org (choose Americas) and join at the individual rate for \$55 before submitting their entry. There is no additional entry fee.
- ◆ Submissions must include a copy of the script **as performed**. Collaborative works will be accepted.
- ◆ Plays must be new work produced within the last two calendar years prior to the annual AAM conference held in May. For example, plays eligible for the award given in May of 2014 must have been produced in 2012 or 2013.

Email submissions to the Jon Lipsky Award panel chair and Vice President of IMTAL, Elizabeth Pickard, at vicepresident@imtal.org by midnight Central Standard Time on January 31, 2014. Include “Lipsky award submission” in your subject line.

The winner will be announced in mid March, and the award will be presented at the IMTAL Luncheon at the American Alliance of Museums conference in May 2014.

- ◆ In addition to the play script, submissions will include a 1-2 page document detailing:
 - » How the play aligns with the institution's overall mission, philosophy, messages, and educational strategy;
 - » How the play's subject matter, presentation style, and length of program reflect the educational and cultural needs of the intended audience;
 - » How the play complements and contributes to the diversity of perspectives represented in a museum's overall program roster;
 - » How the institution offers a means for answering questions and/or emotional processing after performances;
 - » How the play supports the goals of other departments in the institution, if applicable.
 - » Submissions may also include an additional one page summary of evaluations from the play's performance or select comments from audience evaluations of the performance.

Interview: Bill Weldon

by Judy Fort Brenneman

*If New York or LA had held any appeal for Bill Weldon, Colonial Williamsburg—and museum theatre in the broader sense—would be the poorer for it. After studying theatre in college, he got involved in the back to the land and craft revival movements of the 1970s, working as a carpenter and woodworker while pursuing music, primarily folk singing, on the side. When an opening for a historic carpenter brought him to Colonial Williamsburg, he discovered all kinds of performing opportunities and soon began balladeering in the colonial taverns. From there, his work evolved into historical theatre, the dramatizations of the Williamsburg revolution stories, and beginning in 2006, the successful and innovative outdoor theatre program, *The Revolutionary City*. Bill is currently Creative Director of *The Revolutionary City* at Colonial Williamsburg. He's also chair of the Cultural Interpretation and Living History (CILH) section of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI).*

JFB: Tell me about *The Revolutionary City*.

BW: What we decided to pursue—and this is very similar to a lot of things that IMTAL and people in other cultural organizations pursue—were street theatre, guerrilla theatre, type things. My whole philosophy with living history from the beginning has been to see it as theatre. As far as I'm concerned, historic character portrayal, whether it's just one-man or -woman shows portraying a character or actual staged and scripted pieces that involve multiple characters and that pursue particular plot lines—it's all theatre. That's been my guiding philosophy with all the things I've done.

We developed this program called *The Revolutionary City*, which is an outdoor drama focused on the key Williamsburg revolution stories. We wrote a series of scripts, and we hired people who had professional acting experience to portray the roles of these historic figures. The stories run the gamut from founding father types—Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry—all the way through colonial society to and including enslaved characters. Their stories are all based on documentation that we have of the different events that occurred in Williamsburg—not just the events, but the ways different kinds of people reacted to those events, the kinds of actions they pursued in light of those

events and as a result of those events. The whole idea is to use theatre as a vehicle for portraying history and for provoking people to think about historical themes, stories, and events; that's really what it's all about.

JFB: When you're hiring professional actors, do you do additional training to familiarize them with fundamentals of interpretation?

BW: Absolutely. Once they're hired in, they go through all the Colonial Williamsburg historical interpretation training. Lots of historic background—general background to Williamsburg and its story, delving into the particulars of the revolution and how it was pursued here, and then lots of what I call colloquium training, about period costuming and period deportment, behavior related to particular class and gender—lots of acculturation training.

JFB: When you're developing a new program, how do you determine its fit with the existing program? And once it's up and running, do you evaluate both the performers and the program, so you know if it's doing what you want it to?

BW: Yes. With a scripted scene or dramatization, you can tell pretty quick whether or not it's working. We have written, staged, and produced scenes, and then within a few weeks determined they were just not hitting the mark, but that a variation might work. So we've rewritten or rethemed scenes and staged those, and that's been a pretty successful process for us.

Of course we only stage scenes or create dramas that either represent a Williamsburg event or for which we have a strong rationale for believing that these would be legitimate reactions of people to those events. Those are the guiding principles for the stories we choose.

They have to have natural drama—they have to be dramatic. And of course, that's what history is, as far as I'm concerned! (laughs) I pretty much see life as theatre, so that's certainly the way I see history.

You can find drama in just about anything. It all goes back to basic narrative structure, conflict being the core element. For me, it's just keeping those basics in mind. Identifying your core protagonist-antagonist, core conflict, and determining how

particular stories work toward a resolution. It's a matter of staying true to that.

I think one of the biggest challenges in historical interpretation generally and particularly to dramatization is that as public historians—as sort of history buffs—there are stories or elements of stories that appeal to us as individuals, but we have to ask the question, Is there a broader appeal, a broader message there, or is this going to be so arcane and obscure that it will be lost on a general audience? In my experience, you can always find a way to take it back to those elemental questions, but as you develop a script, are you introducing things in that story that the audience won't be able to make sense of if they don't have a masters degree or a strong background in that story?

“The whole idea is to use theatre as a vehicle for portraying history and for provoking people to think about historical themes, stories, and events; that's really what it's all about.”



Bill Weldon

So you get into the whole unpacking element. As we storyboard a scene or program and say, “Well, I think we need to talk about such and such and such”—well, how much unpacking are we going to have to do of that for the audience to make sense out of it? So those are things I see as particular challenges in historical interpretation.

JFB: *Do you temper how much unpacking you feel is necessary based on other interp resources that are available?*

BW: Yes, absolutely. If we know the majority of people who are going to see a particular scene have been on the tour of the Governor's Palace, then they probably learned about characters X and Y, know a little about the last royal governor and his family, so we don't have to start from scratch. And frankly, it works on two levels: if they've received that kind of backstory, then the drama is that much richer for them, but if they haven't, it's written in such a way that the characters function as archetypes. But we really scrutinize the scripts and the narratives to

make certain we're not painting the audience into a corner.

JFB: *How do you address the issue of authenticity?*

BW: We strive to be authentic. The phrase I'm fondest of is that we have to be *historically responsible*. Any phraseology is subject to translation and interpretation, of course. But if I say something's authentic to one person, then they're going to say, "Okay, in other words, so-and-so said these exact words at this time in this circumstance," whereas someone else will interpret authentic to mean, "Okay, that's in line with the kinds of things we know this guy said." So that's why we try to talk in terms of being historically responsible.

JFB: *That gives you the leeway to make the drama work as a story without bogging down in details that aren't relevant, but it keeps you honest as you're doing it.*

BW: Yeah, exactly. You can't create theatre without exercising some dramatic license, but as far as a character or the character's portrayal goes, you absolutely have to be true to what you know about that character or people like that character; it's not acceptable to go outside that compass. But understanding the parameters, you do have to put words in people's mouths if you want to tell the story. It's just a matter of how diligent you are in making sure that what you're representing is an accurate representation.

Another thing that's behind all of this as far as I'm concerned: What are we doing this for in the first place? It gets into this debate that rages in different quarters about the difference between history and antiquarianism. What I'm here to do is to use the lessons of history and the stories from history to try to inform and provoke the present day. I'm not here to strictly preserve anything. To interpret, we have to preserve, but preservation is just one step in the process. There is a baseline level that you must be true to—I cringe when I see a period costumed character with a present-day prop in a program; that kind of thing is unacceptable. But it's far more important to me that someone walk away from a scene or interaction talking about what happened in the scene, than to have them questioning some visual or artifactual element.

JFB: *How do you see living history in the future?*

BW: What I hope we're evolving toward here—you mentioned all the other experiences that people can

have here, the 19 different trades, the eight different exhibition buildings that are all really part of and aside from the dramatizations. In the last four years, we've worked very hard to align thematically all the different elements. It's still a smorgasborg, but now it's more of a "German smorgasborg" than "German-Italian-Greek-Chinese"—so there is one over-riding narrative, one unifying theme to the experience. That's what we want to see happen here, and we've made some pretty good progress.

In the major exhibitions, like the Governor's Palace building and the Colonial Capitol building, we've also introduced narrative as the organizing framework for the experience, rather than the more old-fashioned linear lecture-type experience. We build the story that people hear in those buildings around a narrative that has all the narrative components and functions, so there is a similarity between what you experience on a tour of the Governor's Palace, which is conducted in the third person by costumed interpreters, and what you see with one of the actors, the historical characters on the street.

Our goal is to extend that suspension of disbelief so that more and more of the audience can have a much more extended experience and sense of having stepped back into a particular place and time. We're really trying to get interpreters away from thinking of themselves as being "museum interpreters," and to think of themselves more as portraying people who are living in this different culture, so that when you visit here, it's not like you're coming to learn about the 1770s in Williamsburg; it's that you're actually walking into a different culture. Just like if you were to take a trip to Paris or London: you want it to be comfortable enough to feel safe and secure, but you want there to be this exotic element to it. You don't want it to be like it is at home. You want to have a sense of having gone into a different dimension.

JFB: *Are you criticized for being too "amusement park," for "Disney-fying"?*

BW: It's not a criticism we receive from a great number of people. But yeah, as we've turned more to dramatization and theatre, we've had some people react that way.

JFB: *Are they feeling like they're more involved, which takes them too far out of their comfort zone?*

BW: Yes, for some. But we receive probably more criticism—still not many—from a vocal minority of folks who say we don't help them suspend disbelief

enough, that the experience is not as transcendent as they wish it was.

JFB: *I'm having flashbacks to the movie Westworld.*

BW: The way we self-satirize here is to refer to ourselves as Brigadoon. You know, "You're really going too Brigadoon on me there," or, "You're not Brigadoon enough."

The response from people who visit is overwhelmingly positive—70% and higher saying very good or excellent experience. The problem has been that we have been doing this against the backdrop of the recession. Like most historic sites everywhere, there has been this suffering of declining numbers. Visits have really fallen off. That's the challenge all of us in the field are facing.

JFB: *What's your hope or advice for people who want to incorporate more theatre into their programs?*

BW: I think there is room for the dramatic in just about any kind of presentation. The cautionary note is whether or not it's well advised to do it in the

form of a character. If you're a good storyteller, you don't necessarily have to be a character.

There's a difference between being an effective performer and being an actor. The question that I always ask institutions to put to themselves when they want to start a first person program is, Do you have the acting talent? Do you have the resources to use legit acting talent? Because not everybody can do it. Not to sound exclusionary or elitist, but it does require particular sensibilities and talents. And a strong and well-presented third person program is better any day of the week than a lousy first person performance. I can't overstress that. The first person stuff and the character stuff have gone through this long period of being sexy and "Wow, that's what people want." Well fine, if you can do it well. It's like John Luzader's rant about costuming: if you can't do it appropriately, you're better served not to do it. That's the message that I hope people will consider.

All that said, anybody can use narrative, anybody can identify the core conflicts in any story they want to tell. Any presentation, any interpretation should be seen in terms of a story, in terms of a narrative. ♦



Photo by Judy Fort-Brenneman

IMTAL 2013 conference events

Left: Our guide for the "History on Foot" walking tour

Below: Katherine Lyons as Ida Rehr



Photo by Harriet Lynn

IMTAL 2013 conference events

1 & 2 Talk-back with Baltimore School for the Arts performers

3 Burt Kummerow, executive director of the Maryland Historical Society, with original draft of "The Star Spangled Banner"

4 Good eats before visiting the International Spy Museum

5 "Dr. Craik" at Mount Vernon



Photos 1, 2, 4 & 5
by Judy Fort-Brenneman

Out & About

Harriet Lynn, Producer/Artistic Director of Heritage Theatre Artists' Consortium in Baltimore, Maryland, reports on an intriguing dance event she attended at MoMA (Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY) in mid-October.

"I was there with dear friends, and they had dancers all over the museum dancing historic vignettes (and even some audience participation with my dance friend and me, too, with this fabulous dancer from Kenya who now resides in France). There were dancers all in different areas dancing from noon to 5:00 p.m., and at the end, they shared background and content about the works—from contemporary to African, ballet, and more. It was intimate and

intriguing. Definitely live theatre and quite a large undertaking for MoMA and the guest performing artists."

The program ran through Nov. 3, 2013, but you can still read about it and choreographer Boris Charmatz:

<http://press.moma.org/2013/07/musee-de-la-danse-three-collective-gestures/>

<http://www.broadwayworld.com/bwwart/article/Muse-de-la-danse-Three-Collective-Gestures-Set-for-the-MoMA-October-18-2013-November-03-2013-20130927>

Boris created this idea of the "dancing museum" in France and brought the concept to MoMA. Here's an interview with him:

http://press.moma.org/wp-content/files_mf/charmatzjanevskiinterview.pdf

Boris Charmatz created this idea of the "dancing museum" in France and brought the concept to MoMA.

IMTAL 2013 conference events

Below: Exploring Jewish Museum of Maryland

Right: "Martha Washington" at Mt. Vernon

Far right: Roderick Howard II, War of 1812, Maryland Historical Society

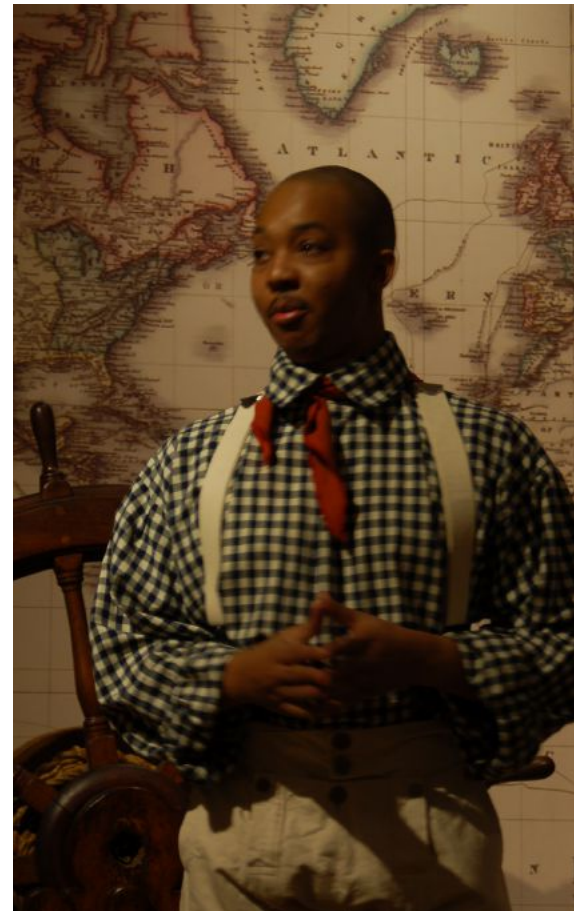


Photo by Judy Fort-Brenneman

Announcements

Workshops, Events, Calls for Submissions, Job Opportunities, and Other Cool Stuff You'll Want to Know About

Call for submissions/inquiries

January 31, 2014: Deadline for entries for IMTAL's NEW Jon Lipsky Playwriting Award: See pages 5 & 7 for information and IMTAL website for guidelines and criteria: imtal.org/home.

Workshops

Sunday, Jan. 26, through Friday, Jan. 31, 2014: Nature Writing Workshop with Judy Fort Brenneman and Greenfire Creative, LLC, sponsored by the Anza-Borrego Foundation, Palm Canyon Resort, Borrego Springs, CA.

Join the Anza-Borrego Foundation (ABF) and Palm Canyon Resort for a week-long nature writing workshop with Judy Fort Brenneman. Over the course of the workshop, participants will go on 2 field trips, have daily workshop sessions with different topics of focus, an optional one-on-one session with Judy, and time to write, reflect, and explore. \$700 Public / \$650 ABF Members. For more details including workshop agenda and special preferred room rates at Palm Canyon Resort, please visit ABF's website: http://theabf.org/event/lectures/nature_writing_workshop.

Conferences

May 18–21, 2014: American Alliance of Museums (AAM), Seattle, WA

Sept. 7–11, 2014: IMTAL-Americas Regional Conference, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL. Check the website for details, including the call for session proposals, to be posted soon.



Oct. 18–21, 2014: ASTC Annual Conference, Raleigh, NC.

Nov. 18–22, 2014: National Association for Interpretation (NAI) National Workshop, Denver, CO.

IMTAL Board of Directors

Stephanie Long, *President*

Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN
president@imtal.org

Elizabeth Pickard, *Vice President*

Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, MO
vicepresident@imtal.org

Jillian S. Finkle, *Past President*

Providence Children's Museum, Providence, RI

Josh Moore, *Treasurer*

Minnetrista, Muncie, IN
treasurer@imtal.org

Elizabeth Keaney, *Secretary*

Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, MD
secretary@imtal.org

Heather Barnes, *Membership Officer*

Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL
membership@imtal.org

Judy Fort Brenneman, *Publications Officer*

Greenfire Creative, LLC, Fort Collins, CO
pubsofficer@imtal.org

Members at Large

Rebecca Colon, *Membership Database*

Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL

Cat Chiappa

Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey, CA

Harriet Lynn, *Member Relations and Preconference Coordinator*

Heritage Theatre Artists Consortium, Baltimore, MD

Susan Evans, *Conference 2013 Chair*

National Museum of American History, Washington, DC

Dave McLellan, *Liaison to AZA*

Zoological Society of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

Douglas Coler, *Social Media and Website*

Discovery Place, Charlotte, NC

Michael Nickerson, *Scripts Database*

American University, Washington, DC

Melanie Wehrmacher, *Insights Copy Editor*

Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN

Advisory Board

Catherine Hughes, PhD, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA

Tessa Bridal, Independent Consultant

IMTAL Insights

Editor Judy Fort Brenneman

Design & Layout Deborah Robson

Copy Editing Melanie Wehrmacher