The Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman IUPUI National Youth Theatre Playwriting Development Workshop

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The Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI) Youth Theatre Playwriting Workshop has become a primary source for playwrights seeking opportunities and resources to develop new work. This biennial event brings together not only established and novice playwrights but also dramaturgs, directors, actors, producers and publishers—all dedicated to the creation of challenging new works for young people. In addition, the event provides an opportunity for those interested in youth theatre to participate in invigorating discussion about the future of theatre for children and young adults and to develop new plays through a series of panels and discussions hosted by some of the most accomplished individuals in the field.

In 1984, Dr. Dorothy Webb, professor of theatre at IUPUI, founded the first IUPUI National Children’s Theatre Playwriting Competition with the generous support of Melvin Simon & Associates, Incorporated, and colleagues at IUPUI and around the country. In 1986, the second play development workshop took place with the continued support of IUPUI, as well as the Indiana Arts Commission, the Indiana Committee for the Humanities, the Children’s Theatre Foundation, the Indiana Theatre Association, and the Penrod Society. The workshop ended with an exciting symposium of panel discussions that set the course for future workshops. In 1993, Janet Allen, artistic director of the Indiana Repertory Theatre, became involved with the project, and in 1997 she joined IUPUI as a full partner in producing this event.

The focus of the playwriting workshop is the development of new scripts, chosen on a competitive basis. Scripts intended for young audiences (third grade through high school) are solicited from across the United States and Canada. To be eligible, scripts should be unpublished and have a minimum performance length of 45 minutes. Plays that include music may be submitted, but no musicals. The selection process involves sending eligible scripts to a panel of distinguished preliminary judges, who are professionals in the field of youth theatre. Each play is read by at least two judges, who not only rank the play, but also provide thoughtful feedback to the playwright. When reactions to a particular script differ, it is submitted to a third judge for further review. The candidates are then narrowed to eleven scripts, which are submitted to a new panel of judges. The field is eventually narrowed to four plays.

During the first few years of the competition, the winning script was awarded a fully staged production, while three semifinalists received rehearsed readings—directed by respected leaders in the field. This year, four plays out of 101 eligible scripts will be selected to receive a seven-day development workshop before each play is presented in a polished reading at the eighth Playwriting Workshop to be held at the Indiana Repertory Theatre in Indianapolis, 8-11 April 1999. In addition to this development work, cash awards of $1,000 will be presented to each of the four winning playwrights. Ten finalists will also receive awards and will have excerpts from their plays presented in a rehearsed reading during the symposium. An annotated list of plays receiving high evaluations will be published in the American Alliance for Theatre and Education newsletter and sent to both colleges and professional companies that have indicated
interest in producing new scripts for young audiences.

For the four winning playwrights, the process of script development will begin prior to their arrival in Indianapolis, with interaction with a director and dramaturg, chosen by Webb, whose skills support the needs of their particular works. Acting as sounding boards, these artistic teams will help the playwrights to clarify and advance their scripts based on the feedback supplied by the competition judges. Once in Indianapolis, these same artistic teams will cast the plays and work with professional actors and continue development of the script for an entire week. At the end of the week, the scripts will be performed in staged readings for young audiences and symposium attendees, who will be invited to offer feedback.

In 1997, five winners were selected, including *Drop* by Dano Madden, *Reliable Junk* by Ric Averill, *Home Safe* by Ellen Cooper, *The Riddling Child* by John Urquhart, and *The Wonderful Machine* by Colleen Neuman. In addition to the development of these new plays, the symposium provided workshops with some of the most respected leaders in this field, including "Creative Work in Light of Educational Imperatives" with Janet Allen of the Indiana Repertory, James Larson, the artistic director of Omaha Theatre Company, and Moses Goldberg, artistic director of Stage One; and "Speaking the Unspoken: A Look at How Those in the Profession of Theatre for Young Audiences Can Engage in a Meaningful Discourse about Their Work," led by Suzan Zeder, playwright and professor at University of Texas, Austin, Professor Lowell Swortzell of New York University, and Peter Brosius, the artistic director of Minneapolis Children's Theatre; and "A Town Meeting," with Dana Singer, the author of *The Stage Writers Handbook*, playwright James Still, and Janet Allen.

Judy Matetzschk, artistic director of Project Interact at the Zachary Scott Theatre in Austin, Texas and a regular participant as judge and dramaturg for IUPUI, said of Dorothy Webb and the playwriting,

It is important to our field because it keeps its focus squarely on the play and the writer throughout the event itself. It is wholly about the furthering of the script, with writer, dramaturg and director working as a team to take the play to the next level of development, whatever that might mean. Dorothy Webb really understands that every work is unique and that every writer has a different way of working and realizing their very unique voice. She structures the work of the teams with those unique needs and talents in mind. The event is a major success because Dorothy has so effectively modeled for us what it is to be a gracious host and talented facilitator/mid-wife to the playwrights process.

(The IUPUI/IRT National Youth Theatre Playwriting Development Workshop was held April 8-11, 1999, in Indianapolis, IN. For information on future workshops, contact Dr. Dorothy Webb, IUPUI Youth Theatre Playwriting Workshop, 425 Univ. Blvd. Suite 309, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Tel:317-274-0566 FAX: 371-278-1025)

Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman IUPUI National Youth Theatre Playwriting Competition Winners

(source: Award Winning Plays from the Playwrights Network of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education - no author, no date)

**1983**

*Hallelujah Hopscotch* by Rachel C. Burchard; 12 speaking roles, extras. With only 3 adult roles, *Hallelujah Hopscotch* is a play to be performed by children. Hallelujah Hopscotch, a nonconformist fairy, is abandoned in a backyard, where she must adjust to the ways of human children and depend on their imaginations for existence. The play combines dance, music, and the charm of children in major roles. Contact: Dramatic Publishing.

Runner-up:


**Thirteen Bells of Boglewood** by Max Bush; 1 act, 4m, 3f, 1 set. Casey Smith hires a young companion named Brian to help him find gold in a forest he has just purchased. In their search they confront the Hideous Spuggans, guardians of the hill treasure; Lara, queen of the faeries; and the enigmatic Bogle himself. In this play, contemporary reality merges with traditional fairy tale motifs. For Brian, the events are a rite of passage from a naive childhood to a much larger universe. Contact: Anchorage Press.

1987

**Becca** by Wendy Kesselman, musical arrangements by Michael Starobin; 1b, lg. 4 animals and 5 or more creatures of the Closet, 1 set. *Becca* is a powerful exploration of the inner journey of Jonathon and his little sister, Becca. Through music and dialogue, we see a mix of fantasy and reality in the world through the eyes of children—a world full of mystery, dreams, and love; but also a world where the need for control sometimes results in the loss of freedom, abuse of power, and abandonment of responsibility. Contact: Anchorage Press.

**The Kimchi Kid** by Joanna Kraus; 2 acts, 6m, 7w, 5b, lg. doubling possible, area staging. A contemporary drama based on the adoption of a 9 year-old Asian-American boy. To which country does he belong, his native Korea or an unfamiliar America? How can he be loyal to both vivid memories of one world’s battle and the disturbing culture of another? This is the story of a boy who learns it is possible to have two homes in his heart and make an adoption into a family. Contact: New Plays, Inc.

**Remus Tales** by Stanley Longman; 4m or f, single set. A story theatre adaptation of Joel Chandler Harris’ tale of the same name. Brer Terrapin has the two zombie-like creatures, Brer Bear and Brer Fox, set the stage as the Big Road. Brer Rabbit comes along, wakes the big critters from their lethargy, and plays pranks on them until they get mighty mean. Bear and Fox try everything to outwit Rabbit and Terrapin, but Rabbit and Terrapin finally play one last trick that strikes Bear and Fox dumb. Then Brer Terrapin has the two critters take the set back apart. Contact: Anchorage Press.

1988

**The Silver Saucer** by Sandra Asher; 1 act, 2m, 4w, area staging, folk songs, flute required. Orphaned and ill, Prince Alexis leads a protected, isolated life. A magic saucer that shows him the world beyond his palace torments him with the sight of all he cannot have. At his request, his grandmother sets out to give the saucer away. She settles on gentle Tanya as the recipient, but the saucer’s magic tantalizes Tanya’s jealous sisters, who plot to kill her. The greater magic of Alexis’s love and longing, expressed in his flute song, reunites and heals both families. Contact: playwright—721 S. Weller Ave., Springfield, MO 65802; (417) 865-8234.

**Remember My Name** by Joanna Kraus; (previously titled The Devil’s Orphan); 2 acts, 5m, 5w, area staging. A young girl’s survival in wartime France and the courage of those who protect her from the Nazi Holocaust. Apart from her parents, her heritage, and her name, the young girl matures from a sheltered child to a determined adolescent who fights for her country—and her life. Nearly caught by Nazis, she is befriended by a village priest, a war widow, and members of the Maquis (or underground resistance). Inspired by historical accounts of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. Contact: Samuel French.

**Journey to the Light** by Sarah Schlesinger and David Evans; no information available. Contact: playwright, 7-13 Washington Square N., Apt. 57B, New York, NY 10003; (212) 777-7617.

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_The Man Child_ by Arnold Rabin; 2 acts, 6m, 4f, interior sets. The road to manhood is not easy, but it certainly can be funny. In this touching account of the days preceding _Allen’s Bar Mitzvah_, it seems that everything that can go wrong does. His new suit is late and a lie puts him at odds with his mother. Wise old Mrs. Wishnefsky, Allan's grandmother and the narrator of the play, guides us through the story of a young boy who learns to conquer adversity in order to become a man. Contact: Baker's Plays.

_A Woman Called Truth_ by Sandra Fenichel Asher; 1 and 2 act scripts available, 3m, 3w, area staging, folk music and spirituals. The words of Sojourner Truth reverberate over a century to speak to us about racism and sexism today. The play celebrates the life of this remarkable woman from the day she is sold away from her family, through her struggle to free herself and her son, and to her emergence as a popular and respected speaker for abolition and women's rights. An ASSITEJ Outstanding Play for Young Audiences. Contact: Dramatic Publishing.

1991

_And the Tide Shall Cover the Earth_ by Norma Cole; 2m, 2w, 1b, 3g, suggested set. We are in the world of the lakes and dams of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The hydroelectric dam at Wolf Creek is finished and closed, and heavy rains lift the levels of the new lake. Soon water will cover the lands and farms long since purchased, and people must move to new towns. Only Granny, determined to keep her promise to her man in the graveyard, and her granddaughter Geneva, who is just as determined they will leave, are encouraged of her new friend, Sadako, Kyushu resists the attempts of hospital physicians to help her. With Sadako’s death, Kyushu finds the strength to persist and recover. Contact: playwright—7709 Sparrowgate Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89131; (702) 656-7409.

_Rachel’s Night_ by Julie E. Brinker; 1 act, 3m, 5f, unit set. Rachel’s leukemia is in remission, but she is having a hard time fitting back into a normal routine of school and home. Her struggle is seen through a series of surrealistic dreams that include her days in the hospital, battles with Leukemia Guerrillas, and confrontations between her parents. Contact: unavailable.

_Totty, Young Eleanor Roosevelt_ by Sharon Whitney; 1 woman, 4 girls, extras optional, suggested sets. A fearful Eleanor is sent to school in England, where she meets the eloquent headmistress Mlle. Souvestre and girls with strong opinions. Gradually the girls warm to her shy innocence, but volatile Jane controls her. There is a humiliating showdown between the two at a party, but Eleanor rises beyond her failure to plead for fairness for her nemesis, Jane. Jane is lost, but Eleanor gains a new maturity under the wise eyes of Mlle. Souvestre. Contact: Anchorage Press.

1993

_Paper Lanterns, Paper Cranes_ by Brian Kral; 2 acts, 3m, 2w, 3b, 5g, some doubling, 1 set. In a Hiroshima hospital in the 1950s, two Japanese girls discover that they have been admitted as patients suffering from “A-bomb illness.” In spite of the optimism and
locked in a contest of "the stubborns." Contact: Anchorage Press.

_Another Columbus_ by Barry Kornhauser; 1 act, 2m, 1f, 1m or f, minimal set, commedia-like masks. In 1493, Diego, the son of Christopher Columbus, is serving as a page in the Royal Court of Spain. Here he presents a crude theatrical recounting his own small adventure: Escaping the monastery where his father had "abandoned" him, Diego attempts to stowaway on the Santa Maria. Instead, he inadvertently boards a Jewish exile ship, where his story becomes entwined with that of a young Jewish girl. And so begins an unanticipated journey of discovery. Contact: playwright—404 Atkins Ave., Lancaster, PA 17603; (717) 397-1671.

_Garden of the Witch_ by Brian Williams; 1 act, 2m, 3f, 1 set. Tod, the new teenager in town, is infatuated with Alison, the sunbathing beauty from next door. She reluctantly lets Tod join her garage band, when her jealous and violent boyfriend, Hef, scaries away their guitarist. Watching from her garden is Sybil, an eccentric Woodstock leftover. She befriends Tod, but there are mysteries in her past, revealed all too clearly one calamitous night. Afterwards her herb garden lies in ruins, one teenager is in the hospital, and Tod has learned something about the true meaning of friendship. Contact: Baker's Plays.

_The Prince and the Pauper_ by Travis Tyre; 1 act, 7m, 5w, suggested settings. Adapted from the Mark Twain novel, _The Prince and the Pauper_ is the story of two boys, Edward the Prince and Tom the Pauper, who come from homes in which they are neither nurtured nor understood. When an accidental meeting offers them the chance to switch clothes and identities, they find themselves thrust into each other's world. Their journey, full of sword fights, adventure, and suspense, leads them to a new and deeper understanding of themselves and each other. Contact: New Plays, Inc.

_Ghost of the Riverhouse_ by Max Bush; 1 act, 3m, 2f, 1 set. After being rejected by her father, eleven-year-old Jenny and her grandfather explore the ruins of the old family homestead. An ancestral ghost haunts the ruins, protecting the lost fortune and family secrets buried with it. The Ghost appears to Jenny, revealing events that happened long ago, family events that seem to be recurring in Jenny's present-day life. Throughout the play, Jenny, aided by her grandfather, struggles to understand her heritage, the ghost, herself, and her increasingly difficult relationship with her father. Contact: Anchorage Press.

_Selkie_ by Laurie Brooks Gollobin; 1 act, 3m, 4f, unit set, sound effects. Inspired by Scottish myths of the seal people, _Selkie_ tells the story of Ellen Jean, caught between land and sea, childhood and maturity, as she unravels her true identity and finds "the knowin'." With the poetic language of the Orkney Islands, the sounds of the sea, the wind, and the haunting cries of the seals, _Selkie_ is a play that will touch the hearts of young and old alike. Contact: Anchorage Press.

_1995_

_1995_

_Alex and the Shrink World_ by Ric Averill; 1 act, 5m, 5f, 2m or f, one two-level set, two incidental songs written by playwright, sound tape available. Alex is having trouble adjusting to his baby sister, Tracy. He begins to daydream, leaving the real world of his parents and teacher to play in a "shrink world" populated by comical ants, roaches, and a ring-leading mouse. The shrink world is fun until King Brown, a nasty spider, threatens Tracy. Alex's parents take him to a child psychiatrist, who helps him cope with his emotions. Contact: playwright—2 Winona Ave., Lawrence, KS 66046; (913) 842-6622.
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**The Wolf and its Shadows** by Sandra Fenichel Asher; 1 act, 2m, 1f, with doubling, area staging. “A wolf and a dog chanced to meet in the forest.” So begins Aesop’s fable, and so begins the journey of this play, in which three actors use masks and puppets to bring to life tales from around the world that contrast the natural wolf to the wolf of human imagination and superstition. In the end, Wolf realizes she can never give up her freedom for the comfort Dog enjoys, and Dog understands why Wolf is so often misrepresented. Commissioned by the Omaha Theater Company for Young People. Contact: Anchorage Press.

1997

**Reliable Junk** by Ric Averill; 1 act, 4m, 2f, 3 sets, optional “flying machine.” Michael is a brainy student coming to grips with his grandfather’s illness. He is functioning poorly where he used to do well. Michael meets Harvey Scheetz, a wild and imaginative soul who is building a “flying machine” for another cancer victim. From Harvey, Michael learns that imagination is the key to science and the healing process as he demonstrates for Michael the ability of the human soul to fly above and beyond pain and suffering. Contact: playwright—2 Winona Ave., Lawrence, KS 66046; (913) 842-6622.

**Home Safe** by Ellen Cooper; 1 act, 2w who play girls aged 12 and 16, unit set. *Home Safe* is about two sisters who respond to the influence of their mother’s alcoholism in very different ways. The play culminates in a final powerful moment between the two sisters, revealing both the heart of the conflict and their fierce attachment to one another. *Home Safe* also won the “Best of the Fest” award in Seattle’s New Playwrights Fest. Contact: playwright—2822 E. Thomas, Seattle, WA 98112; (206) 328-1476.

**The Riddling Child** by John Urquhart; 1 act, 6w, 4m, 1b, 1g, doubling possible, unit set. Liza can’t talk, but she has an extraordinary ability to solve riddles. Misunderstood, she lives a reclusive life, but after her father fails to return home following a flood, it is Liza who solves the mystery of his disappearance. In this heart-warming Appalachian adventure, Liza and her brother, Jacob, match wits with mischievous ghosts in a musical cave, and Lisa and her mother gain a new understanding of the “magic that holds a family together.” Contact: playwright—c/o Rita Grauer, P.O. Box 187, Williams, OR 97544; (541) 846-7519.

**The Wonderful Machine** by Colleen Neuman; 1 act, 4w, 3m, (1w and 1m play children), area staging. Ert feels ignored by her parents and has no friends at school. In her room she amuses herself with a pile of junk and three imaginary friends. When Ert’s parents invite Timmy Fibbins over to play, her imaginary friends leave but come back when Ert discovers that Timmy is as quirky as she is. And for a moment, Ert’s parents see her pile of junk the way she sees it—as a machine that can do everything. Contact: playwright—7021 Bunker Hill Rd., Greenleaf, WI 54126; (920) 532-4965.