ROBERT VAUGHAN. You’re widely considered one of the finest teachers of
playwriting in the country, Paula, and we publish a number of your former students.

PAULA VOGEL. Let’s see: Nilo Cruz, John C. Russell, Sarah Ruhl and Deborah
Baley Brevoort soon, Alice Tuan, and undergraduate writers I’ve worked with
include Lynn Nottage and many many more at theatres near you.

ROBERT. And we have a number of other distinguished Brown playwrights
in our catalogue — Alfred Uhry, Kia Corthron, Tom McCormack, Tim
Blake Nelson, Christopher Shinn, Gina Gionfriddo and John Belluso. I’m
sure I’m leaving somebody out, and if so, I apologize. Can you tell us what
the boot camp and the bake-off are?

PAULA. The bake-off I do every year at Brown and also around the world —
in Brazil with a translator; in Prague; in London with RSC, Bush and National
writers; in Los Angeles at A.S.K. Foundation. Basically, we collect a group of
writers and assign “rules” — e.g., you must write a play with a front porch,
kitchen sink and a withheld secret. Or you must write a neoclassical play: unity
of time, place and action, and a conflict between love and honor. (I love

Continued on page 2
ANOTHER ALMOST HOLY PICTURE

by Heather McDonald
freely drawn from Pamela Ward's story "The Hairy Little Girl"

ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz

Henry and his own rage and bewilderment at loss.
Pamela Ward's story "The Hairy Little Girl"

ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz
Winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize. Tolstoy, the tropics and the American dream prove a volatile combination in a 1929 Cuban-American cigar factory when a new lector arrives with Anna Karenina to entertain the female workers.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS by Julia Cho

In this meditation on loss and the abiding power of the unknowable, a family recounts their memories of the summer when one of their own — a young boy — disappeared.

BEAUTIFUL CHILD by Nicky Silver

A cynically married couple is drawn together when their son, an art teacher, confesses that he has fallen in love with one of his eight-year-old male students.

BOY by Julia Jordan

A teenage boy with a gift for storytelling preys upon an urban family, seducing them with his yarns, one of which is horrific and true.

BRIGHT IDEAS by Eric Coble

Geneva and Joshua’s son is next on the waiting list to get into the Bright Ideas Early Childhood Development Academy, and they are only one dinner party away from the ultimate success as parents — the right pre-school.

BROOKLYN BOY by Donald Margulies

The rich, funny and moving story of a novelist who’s most fascinating minds of the twentieth century.

CAVEDWELLER by Kate Moira Ryan

Based on the novel by Dorothy Allison

Cavedweller is a baseball, a football, a basketball at a very early age in every school. And so we learn as Americans that each time we watch sports, athletes like Manny Ramirez or Michael Jordan or Tom Brady “speak” for us. We are virtual athletes through the imagination; our bodies remember. If we can make sure that all children are given paint brushes, a space for movement and rehearsal, improv, acting, guitar, the arts will speak for us again and will become a spiritual daily bread. The arts budgets are the first thing cut from K-12 curriculum as if the arts are luxuries. We must, as adults in our communities, insist that the arts are essential. They give children personal skills, community building skills, group skills and teach empathy. The arts teach conflict resolution. The arts teach us about what it feels like to be in someone else’s skin. The arts are crucial in any democracy.

When you’re sending your “chicks” out of the “nest,” what do you tell them to expect, and what words of encouragement do you send them away with?

PAULA. First, I ask them if I remembered to sign the contract where I get ten percent … just kidding. I am right now sending out yet another incredible group of writers: Kristin Newcomb, Jennifer Haley and Jonathan Ceniceros. I tell them I’m proud of them, but I will not last another twenty years. I tell them to keep in touch with me and each other. And, in fact, I will this week be meeting with ex-students who graduated a year ago, three years ago and twenty years ago. We’re in the same circle.

ROBERT. You’ve said that you are seriously depressed by the almost nonexistent support the government is giving to the arts these days. As a playwright, an educator and an arts advocate, you’re very vocal about building support. Tell our readers what they need to be doing in their own schools and lives to help.

PAULA. Every child is given a baseball, a football, a basketball at a very early age in every school. And so we learn as Americans that each time we watch sports, athletes like Manny Ramirez or Michael Jordan or Tom Brady “speak” for us. We are virtual athletes through the imagination; our bodies remember. If we can make sure that all children are given paint brushes, a space for movement and rehearsal, improv, acting, guitar, the arts will speak for us again and will become a spiritual daily bread. The arts budgets are the first thing cut from K-12 curriculum as if the arts are luxuries. We must, as adults in our communities, insist that the arts are essential. They give children personal skills, community building skills, group skills and teach empathy. The arts teach conflict resolution. The arts teach us about what it feels like to be in someone else’s skin. The arts are crucial in any democracy.

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ROBERT. You’ve worked with countless theatre companies across the country and around the world. I know also that you’ve
Nature vs. Nurture: Are Playwrights Born or Matriculated?
by Craig Pospisil

New York University’s Department of Dramatic Writing turns out perhaps more than its fair share of notable playwrights, from last year’s Pulitzer Prize winner, Doug Wright, to Kenneth Lonergan and Neil LaBute, plus many more who may not yet be widely known but are pursuing successful careers in the theatre and in film. I received my master’s degree from NYU as well, and as the Play Service was getting the point of view of two well-known playright-teachers for this newsletter, I thought it would be interesting to get reactions from the other end of the spectrum.

I carried out an online roundtable with Julia Cho (99 Histories, The Architecture of Loss) Jessica Goldberg (Refuge, Stuck), Daniel Goldfarb (Modern Orthodox, Sarah, Sarah), David Grimm (Kit Marlowe, Sheridan or, Schooled in Scandal) and Doug Wright (I Am My Own Wife, Quills), five DPS authors who attended NYU, and asked for their thoughts on the program and studying playwriting.

CRAIG POSPISIL. About a year out of college, I realized that I was a writer, not an actor, and decided I wanted to learn more about the craft of writing. I knew I’d write more if I had a professor saying, “Turn in the next scene by Monday.” What made you decide to attend a graduate program in playwriting, and what about NYU appealed to you?

DOUG WRIGHT. I knew if I went to graduate school, I would get housing in the heart of Manhattan. So that provided potent incentive.

DAVID GRIMM. For several years after completing my undergraduate education, I was working a full-time job and writing at night. I decided that I had to make a commitment to my writing and that going to grad school would be the first serious step in that direction. JESSICA GOLDBERG. I wanted to live in the city so I went to NYU for undergrad. I thought I wanted to write fiction, but when I discovered dramatic writing I didn’t want to leave. At the time NYU offered a one-year master’s for students who had been in their undergraduate program. I leapt at the opportunity. A few years later I was working full time in all sorts of jobs. I was desperate to get back into an environment where I could focus on my writing again. I was very lucky to get into Juilliard.

DANIEL GOLDFARB. Well, I had gone to NYU Dramatic Writing as an undergraduate and loved it. I also loved New York. I wanted to stay and keep writing and learning and having deadlines and surrounding myself with writers.

JULIA CHO. I had been an English major in college and had very little experience in theatre and knew almost no theatre artists. A graduate writing program seemed like a good way to get a handle on the basics of writing plays as well as to gain an instant theatre community. I applied to NYU because of its location. I was so new to theatre that I didn’t realize there was such a thing as regional theatres. At the time, I just figured if I wanted to do theatre, then New York was where I had to go.

CRAIG. I liked the fact that NYU had as many classes in screenwriting as playwriting. I looked at Yale, which seemed more focused on plays, and UCLA, which was more about screenplays. NYU’s dual focus appealed to me. What did you like, or not like, about your experience at NYU?

JESSICA. Access! Access to plays, to writers, to discussion. We had all kinds of inspiring guests at NYU — Larry Kramer, Anna Deavere Smith, Arthur Miller, to name a few.

DANIEL. I did my graduate year at NYU simultaneously with my second year at the Playwrights Program at Juilliard. They are both wonderful programs and very different. What’s great about NYU is that you have an opportunity to study with a wide range of instructors that have different teaching styles and approaches to drama.

DOUG. I loved selfishly devoting two years of my life to a very rarefied craft, in the happy company of people who fervently believed that the theatre is a life-or-death affair. When you suffer from delusions like that, it’s nice to have them buttressed by the crowds around you.

CRAIG. Was there any area you found particularly strong, or not, at the program?

DAVID. When I attended NYU, the program was still relatively young and had not yet gone through the major changes it has in the past few years. Focus then was very much on the page, without any real concern for the performative or practical aspect of plays as living, breathing theatre. The strongest aspect of the program lay in its screenwriting component, an aspect which has benefited me greatly over the years.

JULIA. I thought one strength was that there was a good deal of flexibility. I was able to take classes outside of the department to round out my theatre education, and I loved the energy on the floor. There was always so much going on. The flip side of that, though, is that it was possible to get lost in the shuffle. Some students who were really talented seemed to slip through the cracks or just fly completely under the department’s radar. But I guess that’s the truth of any graduate program: You have to be focused and get out of it what you want. No one’s going to hold your hand.

DANIEL. I think the fact that you have to study playwriting and screenwriting is what makes NYU different from any other writing program in the country. It’s practical. And it also shows some of the universals in storytelling. It allows screenwriters to maybe explore their voice more than they might have, and playwrights to really examine structure. Ultimately, forcing writers to do both makes them better writers in both mediums.

CRAIG. I found some of my best teachers were those I studied screenwriting with. Maybe because

Continued on page 4

EXCEPTING ISABEL by Lisa Loomer
Miranda and Nick take an “Alice in Wonderland-esque” journey through the booming baby business, negotiating the fertility trade, adoption industry and in-laws as they try to have a baby — by any means necessary.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES by Athol Fugard
The dynamic story of the relationship between a young playwright on the threshold of his career and an aging actor who has reached the end of his.

FRAME 312 by Keith Reddin
With her family gathered for her birthday, a suburban housewife will finally expose a secret of the Kennedy assassination that she has kept buried for thirty years.

HANNAH AND MARTIN by Kate Fodor
A lacerating dramatic portrait of the affair between the philosophers Martin Heidegger and his most famous student, Hannah Arendt.

I AM MY OWN WIFE by Doug Wright
Winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award. The fascinating tale of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a real-life German transvestite who managed to survive both the Nazi onslaught and the oppressive East German Communist regime.

INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage
Winner of the 2004 Drama Critics Circle and Outer Critics Circle Awards. A turn-of-the-century-black seamstress uses her gifted hands to fashion her dreams in an era when the cut of one’s dress and the color of one’s skin determined the course of one’s life.

THE JOURNALS OF MIHAIL SEBASTIAN by David Auburn
In the decadent, politically explosive Bucharest of the 1930s and 40s, a young writer struggles to maintain his career, integrity and Jewish identity, even as his closest friends ally themselves with Fascism.

LIVING OUT by Lisa Loomer
The story of the complicated relationship between a Salvadoran nanny and the Anglo lawyer she works for.

THE LEFT HAND SINGING by Barbara Lebow
Amidst the idealism and violence of Freedom Summer in 1964, three college students vanish without a trace.

THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME by Paula Vogel
Past, present and future collide on a snowy Christmas Eve for a troubled family of five in this gorgeous “puppet play with actors.”

MAN FROM NEBRASKA by Tracy Letts
A luxury sedan, a church pew and visits to a nursing home form the comfortable round of Ken Carpenter’s daily life — until he wakes up to find that he no longer believes in God.

MATCH by Stephen Belber
An interview with a successful dancer and choreographer leads Mike and Lisa Davis on a journey of self-discovery that will change their lives forever.
THE MISTER by Molière, translated and adapted by James Magruder
A bold and accessible translation of this classic French farce, spiced with timeless burlesque and delicious double entendres.

THE MOONLIGHT ROOM by Tristine Skyler
Watch as the joyously, fiercely flamboyant, politically incorrect Mr. Charles — with his hunky young “companion,” Shane — confronts every hot-button topic, from gay marriage to the history of gay theater on his late-night cable talk show.

THE MYSTERY PLAYS by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa
Two interrelated and haunted one acts that wrestle with the mysteries of death, the afterlife, religion, faith and forgiveness.

THE NIGHT HERON by Jez Butterworth
A tragicomic fantasy that probes the depths of friendship and the human condition.

THE OLDEST PROFESSION by Paula Vogel
As Reagan enters the White House, five aging practitioners of the oldest profession face a diminishing clientele, increased competition and aching joints.

ORANGE FLOWER WATER by Craig Wright
A compelling and original manuscript is still the only effective way of getting a foothold in the field, and they have a funny way of getting noticed.

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES by Oren Safdie
A hilarious satire on academia, intellectual pretension and the failure of postmodernist culture inside the contemporary world of architecture.

screwwriting was (or is) considered to be so much more about structure and craft than plays. Were there any professors who particularly helped or influenced you?

DANIEL. There are a wide range of instructors at NYU, with different writing styles, teaching styles and aesthetics. Elizabeth Diggins was my first writing instructor and probably the most influential. She’s tough, she honest, she’s amazing. I was lucky to study with Tony Kushner when he was there, and he was warm, brilliant and truly inspiring.

JESSICA. Martin Epstein and Liz Diggins are two teachers that had profound effects on me. Sure, there were teachers I clashed with, but I think that kind of tension is good when you’re just starting to discover your voice. For instance, you get a teacher who says, “Plot, it’s all about plot,” and this forces you to say, “No, actually, you know what? That’s not what it’s about for me.” It forces you to own/identify your aesthetic.

DOUG. Some of the professors were absolutely extraordinary — estimable professional writers like Terrence McNally, Michael Weller and Wendy Wasserstein. I especially enjoyed Martin Epstein; he had a scrupulous sense of structure, and a cunning, dry humor that brought welcome levity to the rigors of his class.

JULIA. It’s a very human faculty. Some were wonderful, some were better at writing than teaching, some were inspiring, some had bad semesters — it was the whole range. The ones who really loved teaching were great, though.

DAVID. The biggest influence in terms of my growth as a writer came from the other students in the program. There were some amazingly gifted writers studying there.

CRAIG. I felt I learned a lot from fellow students too. There were the classes where we had to critique each other’s work, and that forced you to concentrate on the nuts and bolts and evaluate each script on its own terms. Was there anything that you learned from going to graduate school that you might not have learned if you hadn’t or that might have taken you longer to discover?

JULIA. The biggest lesson I learned was that not writing is writing. It was the first time in my life that everything I did was oriented around writing, and it almost drove me crazy. I thought I had to be productive 100% of the time. But you quickly learn that it’s actually counterproductive to live for writing. You just have to live — read, go to museums, see friends — and that will feed the writing.

DANIEL. Graduate school puts you in a room with people who share your passion, which is invaluable. I love writers, and getting to spend so much time with them is only a positive thing. It also imposes discipline and structure, which can be heaven for a writer.

DOUG. I think you can learn craft, and classes facilitate that. In a grad school environment, you’re also required to write. Being required to write can be downright inspirational. When you’re a drifter in the world — trying to wedge your writing between tempest or waiting tables — it’s far more difficult. And the best way to grow as a writer is by actually sitting down and doing it. I was also forced to read Aristotle’s Poetics — still the best “how to book” in our field — and I learned how to format a screenplay!

CRAIG. Can you think of a couple specific things you learned in graduate school that stay with you now?

JESSICA. There are three things I learned from Martin Epstein that I always think about when I’m working on a play — and, of course, I will probably grossly misquote him. 1) The difference between conversation and dialogue. 2) What is the weather doing in your play? And 3) Drama begins when ritual is broken.

JULIA. I think being at NYU was for me about trying to find my voice. I think I learned more about craft at Juilliard because I was more ready for it then; that was when I started to think about things like the mechanics of scenes, developing conflict, following a character’s journey, etc.

CRAIG. For me, it’s still applying the craft and sense of structure I learned to those first raw, impulsive drafts of a play. To be able to examine my own writing the way I did the writing of my classmates, and see where it’s going right and where I need to keep working. Did studying playwriting change your own writing style or your approach to playwriting?

JESSICA. I wasn’t exposed to a lot of modern drama as kid, so studying playwriting opened a big door for me. It was exciting to discover how many different forms of theatre there were. Then I go to sit in class and talk about it all with a bunch of talented people who are all full of the same passion.

JULIA. I don’t feel like I “studied” playwriting in grad school. I just wrote more than I had ever written in my entire life, and it was only at the very end of all that writing that I started to understand what my voice might be.

DANIEL. I became drawn to the simplicity of a lot of good writing. My work became more natural, less cinematic. Fewer locations, fewer characters.

CRAIG. Did going to NYU help you professionally in any way?

DOUG. While my profs were supportive and challenging in equal measure, no one ever “gave me a leg up” by sending my scripts to theatres or passing my name along to impressive agents. I don’t think it’s fair to expect that; ultimately, you have to make your own way in the world. A compelling and original manuscript is still the only effective way of getting a foothold in the field, and they have a funny way of getting noticed.

JULIA. It did, but in ways that may not seem obvious. It didn’t pluck me from obscurity and give me a production, an agent and a mentor. But what it did do was set a lot of those things in motion; or to put it another way, it provided some of the soil from which those things could spring.

CRAIG. Any final thoughts?

DOUG. Graduate writing programs help to give the profession some small measure of credibility. You don’t need a degree to become an interesting or unique playwright, but it’s nice to have something to hang on the wall of your garret. And when you’re at a dinner party or visiting family on the holidays, it’s nice to have a degree. When they ask what you do in the world, and you say “I’m a playwright,” at least you have a little paper work to back up the assertion!
Seven Sure-fire Exercises to Lead Your Inner Playwright to Inspiration

by Christopher Durang

Beloved author and Juilliard don Christopher Durang agreed to share with AT PLAY some of his classroom material for playwriting students. For this glimpse into the great teacher’s process, AT PLAY expresses its gratitude.

Can writing be taught? No, it can’t. Go away. Well, truthfully, it can’t be taught, but I do believe it can be “mentored” — that one can assist the beginning writer to strengthen and hone his or her innate talents.

Students seem to love the idea of exercises. Exercises are almost like taking a doctor’s prescription and filling it at the pharmacy. They suggest that through games and tricks, you can find out how to write a good play. I find myself distrustful of them; I believe you can learn a lot by analyzing plays you like, and by listening to responses to plays you’ve written, but at a certain point you have to go with your writer’s intuition.

However, I’m willing to believe I could be wrong on this; there is more than one way to skin a cat. (What a terrible phrase. I love animals. There is more than one way to peel a carrot. You can use a carrot peeler, or you can use a screwdriver and keep jabbing at it.)

I was given an exercise my first year at Yale School of Drama from my wonderful playwriting teacher Howard Stein; and I ended up writing a whole play from it. The exercise was to write a scene in which a man and a woman on a train argue about the man’s smoking a cigar. My train for a while was simultaneously a train and a boat, and eventually became the Titanic, which in my surreal version kept NOT sinking, while all the angry and sick-o characters started to long for it to sink. So I used the exercise as a kind of Rorschach test to unlock my unconscious.

And because I’ve been teaching for a while (at Juilliard since 1993, co-teaching with my esteemed friend, playwright Marsha Norman), I’ve decided I should come up with my own exercises, just because students seem to like them. It's self-preservation as a teacher on my part. Here they are:

✓ Copy by hand the first scene of Tennessee Williams’ Streetcar Named Desire. Then copy the second scene. Copy every scene of the play by hand. Then redo, this time leaving out the vowel “o.” When this is completed, do the same thing with Tennessee Williams’ Summer and Smoke. Or if you prefer Eccentricities of a Nightingale. Keep doing this exercise with all of Williams’ plays. When you become fatigued, give up writing.

✓ Write a scene in which two characters exchange dialogue that has literally nothing to do with what the other person has said. Go on and on and on, without the two characters ever relating to anything the other has said. The audience will find this very annoying, but certain theatre companies may like it.

✓ Make Quaker’s Instant Oatmeal, either the cinnamon brand or perhaps the maple syrup brand. Return phone calls. Take a nap.

✓ Choose a play that you like. Analyze what makes it work. Do big graphs, and have lines that represent rising action, and then lines that represent falling action. Come up with a mathematical equation that somehow represents Linda Loman in Death of a Salesman. Come up with one to represent Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie. Divide the two numbers into each other; have x represent the play you wish to write. Then write that play. Send it out. Wait for a response.

✓ Think and think and think and think. All creativity comes from thinking really hard. Choose an important theme. Man’s inhumanity to man is usually a good one. Write a play in which several characters torture another character. Have it go on for hours. Make it really painful to sit through. Important theme. Man’s inhumanity to man is usually a good one. Write a play in which several characters torture another character. Have it go on for hours. Make it really painful to sit through. Feel proud of yourself that you’ve made the world look at cruelty.

✓ Choose a famous artist. Make your play seem important by this choice. Picasso might be good. Hemingway, if that’s not too passé. Maybe Hemingway and Picasso and an Old Man in a boat in the sea. They go fishing. They discuss the intricacies of bait. A Young Man comes floating out in a little dinghy and says he is collecting for The Evening Star. Picasso and Hemingway discover they are homosexual and try to seduce him, but then kill him instead. They use his body for bait. Then Picasso paints a masterpiece, and Hemingway writes The Sun Also Rises.

✓ Stop doing exercises, and see if you can find out what topics in the world engage you. See if those topics trigger any creative impulses in you. If they do, write that play. When the draft is done, show it to people you trust, get some feedback, and rewrite a couple of times. Have a reading with actors, see how it sounds. With luck, it will be a good play.

Christopher Durang’s most recent play is the uproarious holiday spectacular MRS. BOB CRATCHIT’S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE, a musical sendup of that perennial December event, Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” onstage. MRS. BOB is available from the Play Service at www.dramatists.com.
Lessons from the Heartland: A Mississippi High School Production of The Laramie Project

by Isaac Oliver

I have been on the phone with Mississippi all morning. I am trying to find the city of Hattiesburg, the fourth largest in the state, with a population just slight of 50,000. Hattiesburg is a city that recently produced Moisés Kaufman and The Tectonic Theater Project’s play The Laramie Project. The play dramatizes the 1998 kidnapping, beating and subsequent death of Matthew Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming, The Laramie Project boasts a collection of approximately 500 productions nationwide this year, varying from regional to community theatre to high-school auditoriums.

It was Hattiesburg High School’s production that caught my attention because, initially, it seemed an unlikely place for such a progressive production. “We are always on the lookout for new, innovative material,” high-school theatre director Michael Marks tells me when I finally reach him. We saw Laramie and said, “We have to do this.” Laramie was first presented by the Hattiesburg High School Forensics Department at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2001. The buzz was so audible that the production went to The Mississippi Theatre Association State Drama Festival in 2002, where it won top honors in the high-school division. Consequently, it went on to represent Mississippi in the same year on a national level at the 53rd Annual Southeastern Theatre Conference, where it was named first runner-up. Performances were requested by local churches and community groups. Afterwards, there were pamphlets in the lobby, enabling further education and discussion.

“Creating an arena for dialogue is the first step to healing,” Marks notes. “I didn’t imagine the impact it would have. We had students coming up to us in tears, saying, ‘No one has ever made it possible to talk about this.’ This play is a great teaching tool for the common person who wants to learn more.” The local youth were not the only ones being swayed by Laramie’s message. A committee of parents, administrators, superintendents, alumni and local business people who must give the nod to theatre productions each year unanimously approved Laramie. “This is really a different show for us,” Marks explains. “We held our collective breath.” The nervousness is justified; twenty years earlier, when Hattiesburg wanted to produce Damn Yankees, the church threatened boycott over the title. Later, when Marks and company tried to take a production of William Finn’s gay-themed musical Falsettos to the state competition, the religious right took the production team to court and tried to prove that they were teaching pornography to children.

So does the wave of support for Laramie signal an environment in which a production of Falsettos would now be possible? “Who knows what would happen,” wonders Marks. “We live in very conservative times now. There is a certain nuance required when doing progressive theatre in small towns. We approached Laramie from the avenue of safe schools: No one can argue that schools should be safe for everyone. I think it was the perspective we chose that let the production flourish.” Flourish is exactly what this production has done. Now, Hattiesburg High School has been selected by the American High School Theatre Festival to be one of twenty schools to represent the United States at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. How fascinating that a production from a place unheard of by many has made such an impact.

Can it be that Laramie is at its most realized in a small town? Is it felt more deeply by those who know what the stars must have looked like in Laramie that night, as opposed to those of us who cannot see stars, thanks to the urban blur? Living in New York, we assume that there is something we understand innately about theatre that people living elsewhere do not. But it looks like this assumption has been trumped, and rightly so. In fact, there might even...
Arkansas:

California:


Colorado:


Connecticut:

Delaware:

Washington, D.C.:

Florida:


Georgia:


Illinois:


Iowa:

Kansas:

Kentucky:

Maine:


Maryland:

Massachusetts:


Michigan:


Minnesota:


Missouri:

New Hampshire:


Proof by David Auburn. Winnipesaukee Playhouse, Laconia. August.


New Jersey:

New York:


Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You by Christopher Durang. Leatherstocking Theatre Company. Cooperstown. August.

North Carolina:


Ohio:


Oregon:

Pennsylvania:


South Carolina:

Tennessee:


Texas:


Utah:

Washington:


Wisconsin:

The Uneasy Chair by Evan Smith. Peninsula Players Theatre Foundation. Fish Creek. August.

Canada:


been working with the boards of some theatre companies in order to educate them on the importance of nurturing new plays. Can you tell us a little about this?

PAULA. I’m now doing short versions of the boot camp and bake-offs; I want to thank them for the gift of production and give them a “lagniappe” — I love the joy when they discover this other side of each other in our workshop. I think as artists we need to make our process accessible to board members, to funders and to subscribers, and I’d love to see every artist who comes to work at a company offer some form of workshop. The more our audiences and donors think of themselves as participants, the more I think we all flourish.

ROBERT. You’re raising money for arts programs at Brown; in fact, you’re seriously gung ho about doing this. Are you afraid we’re losing young artists?

PAULA. I’m basically teaching because I want to put my time where my mouth is (pardon that malapropism)! … I am petrified we are losing a new generation. I want to give the Brown writers three years of writing (right now we offer two years of subsidy) so that they have a bit more time to stockpile their scripts. I want to help young artists outside of Brown know about the resources such as grants and colonies that are there. I wish I got a commission from every copy of Dramatists Sourcebook by TCG I’ve peddled in the past twenty years. I don’t want to conceive of living in this country where there are no arts, and we are in danger of that, particularly under the Republican Right’s persistent twenty-year attack on the arts, from Reagan to George W. If we don’t act, we will be left with studio films and television that basically provide what I call gladiatorial entertainment: a New Rome with entertainment to train gladiators for the Empire.

ROBERT. Did you have a teacher, a mentor — anyone — that you credit for putting you where you are as an artist and a writer?

PAULA. My gods are John Guare, Irene Fornes and Caryl Churchill. I’ve met two out of three and treasure them all. They’ve mentored me on the page; they’re mentored me by example. My late beloved English teacher at Bryn Mawr College, Adrienne Lockhart, was the first one to really insist that I become a writer (this was backstage at my second musical, The Beautiful Quasimodo, my adaptation of Hunchback of Notre Dame that I wrote freshman year). And I give credit to Bert States, who was my graduate advisor at Cornell. And lastly, my late brother, Carl, who fed me a constant diet of books and basically taught me table manners.

ROBERT. I know how supportive you are to young/aspiring writers. As a professor at Brown — or even in the professional world, is there anything a former student or a young writer has said to you that just turned you into a puddle and you’ll remember as long as you live? What was it if you can tell us?

PAULA. Oh, too much to tell! But let me tell you of a question I was given at the last playwriting workshop I did at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta for Brown alums and interested board members. A man brought his seven-year-old son, Jason, to participate. And in the midst of the session he asked me, “What’s the best way to get people to feel emotional? Books, poems, films or plays?” Seven years old! I want to read his plays in another ten years.