

A Short Draft for a Longer History of Marist College Theatre

by Gerard A. Cox

Based on oral tradition and anecdotes from a variety of sources, we know that theatre activities were in evidence throughout the first decade and a half of the history of Marian College. One-act and full-length plays by established playwrights and productions of Shakespeare's plays were among the accomplishments of the student body, then a small assemblage of male religious preparing to become educators. (Among the present faculty of the college are several cast members from a 1950s production of HENRY V.) The playbills from these years show that their programs also included student written short and full-length plays such as "The Lame Donkey," a short play based on a Christmas fable and LUX ET TENEBRAE, a full length play portraying the final hours in the life and death of Christ..

According to a 1958 edition of the student newspaper, in response to urgings of the college's newly installed president, Linus R. Foy, a theatre organization for students was formed, creating what is now "the college's oldest student club." By 1959 the group was known as the Theatre Guild. (The designation as "the oldest club" first appears in print in THE RECORD in 1961. In 1960 the college's name had been changed to Marist College.) During the start-up years of this organization it existed side-by-side with a separate set of in-house theatre productions staged by the young religious attending the college and, within their structure, student directors were common from earliest days.

The initial attempt to permit "lay" students to direct Guild productions came in December, 1961, when Richard Kearney, a 21 year old undergraduate, directed a one-act play by Eugene O'Neill as the first student assignment under "The Student Director Program." The program was begun by James Britt, Guild Director, "to foster a finer understanding of the Dramatic Arts," as well as deploying leadership qualities in students . The drive to create alternatives approaches to theatre through new student clubs was partially caused by the desire to have more opportunities to direct.: Children' Theatre (c1968) and Experimental Theatre (c.1970) A later trial program sponsored by the Guild for student directors came in 1974

when a repertory company was formed. The annual festival of student written plays (1981) eventually became a major opportunity for students to gain experience as directors.

The Theatre Guild persisted as the Guild until 1976 when it merged with Children's Theatre (c. 1968) and Experimental Theatre (c. 1970) to become the Marist College Council on Theatre Arts (MCCTA). Children's Theatre had been founded as a separate organization since the Guild did not want to take on extra productions. Also, the student founders of Children's Theatre wanted to direct the plays, themselves. And it was at about the same time that other students expressed a desire "to experiment with new works." There was something of a rebellion abroad against the Guild's commitment to draw its bills exclusively from those plays which had enjoyed, if not commercial, at least critical success on Broadway. Two factors came into play. There was a new openness to staging original works by both students and faculty and there was a renewal of the push to create more chances for students to learn about directing in the theatre.

The college's first children's production was given on March 21-23, 1969. In the beginning, a few performances were given on campus; often more performances were performed "on the road" than on campus. Elementary schools, hospitals, and, even every now and then, prisons were the locations at which the road-shows were given. Funding for these trips came from community agencies. Eventually these external dollars became more difficult to obtain and student academic schedules became more disparate making travel arrangements impossible, even when money was secured. Touring ended and the number of on-campus performances increased to a week, seven performance schedule. Performances have since doubled within the one-week format thereby requiring two casts of characters to avoid having students miss too many classes. Today Children's Theatre is performed annually for several thousand children who come to the campus.

Consistent efforts to encourage student writing for theatre are noted in 1970 under what then were called "experimental productions." Although these early efforts originated as class projects in one professor's theatre course, the Theatre Guild encouraged and financially supported the class efforts. At first the plays were presented both on and off-campus. The most often used off-campus site was the historic Vassar Institute which, at that time, housed the Marist College administered Poughkeepsie College Center. At the same time some independent productions of original works appeared.

Eventually the format for original works began to change, the class projects resulted in programs of multiple works, such as DOUBLE BILL (1978) and TWO FOR THE SHOW (1979). Since 1980 the natural extension of this practice has been an annual festival of short plays written, directed and acted by students.

Today, theatre productions at Marist College are still being funded through student government's allocation of money derived from the student activity fee. The students' drama club, MCCTA, submits a budget request to student government on a semester by semester basis.

The sole structural change within MCCTA since the 1976 unification came with the addition of HuMarists. In the early 90s some undergraduates branched out into the arena of stand-up comedy. At first their performances were high points in students' talent contests. Then, slowly at first, but with persistence, a group of comedians came together and searched for recognition as an organization. The earliest effort was to incorporate with MCCTA which was prepared to sponsor the humorists as an adjunct activity. But student government eventually decided that this group should find its permanent home within the MCCTA organization, as another performance unit. Final constitutional unification came about in 1998.

The traditional approach of relying on the faculty adviser(s) to supply professional guidance was effective through the 1960s and for a short time in the 1970s. It was during the '70s that the involvement of full-time faculty began to disappear, here due to some of the most supportive faculty turning to college administration, while on other campuses it may have been due to faculty withdrawal from involvement with extra-curricula activities. Today's faculty advisor is a voting member of MCCTA's Executive Board. Yet it is quite different from when two or more faculty met with a small group, three or four student officers of the Guild, to make all the administrative decisions for the season.

While dependence upon semester by semester budget allocations from student government worked when fewer productions were staged, planning an entire theatre season became vastly more complicated starting with the late '70s because from one semester to the next, there's no guarantee of the level of allocated funding. Even a semester plan is troublesome today since it is impossible to hire professional directors, choreographers, musicians when there is no time to do a search after budgets are announced or, worse yet, to make adjustments when the money for professional staff is disallowed.

Finally, there is a comment in one of the more popular national college guides that helps to describe the role played by the theatre organization on campus today. "In the cultural arena, the Marist College Council on Theatre Arts is a favorite, producing several plays each year, some of them written by students and now appearing in the new 350-seat Nelly Goletti Theatre located in the \$27 million student center."

On October 16, 2001 the Marist College Council for Theatre Arts was presented with the Dutchess County Executive's "Art in Education"

Award. This honor was given in recognition for the activities MCCTA has presented for a variety of audiences through the years. :

History of College Productions

Retrievable records, primarily the college's student newspapers (names of the newspaper over the years: Greystone GAZETTE, The Reynard's RECORD, The Marist College RECORD, THE CIRCLE) and yearbooks (THE GREYSTONE, THE REYNARD), along with memorabilia provided by theatre alumni, have made it possible to compile the list given below of productions staged by the college's staff and students.

Productions by external groups (when recorded) have been noted; these are listed to the right on each page. When an asterisk (*) appears it indicates the play was written by a Marist College student or alumnus.

1960 - 1961
WAITING FOR GODOT
THE WISE HAVE NOT SPOKEN

1961 - 1962
AN EVENING WITH EUGENE O'NEILL: "The Voyage Home" & "In the Zone"
TWO BLIND MICE

1962 - 1963
THE VISIT

1963 - 1964
MY THREE ANGELS
A HATEFUL OF RAIN

1964 - 1965
THE MISER
THE WALL
LUTHER

1965 - 1966
TWELVE ANGRY MEN
HIGH TOR
ROSS
A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

1966 - 1967

THE BEST MAN

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

THE APPLE CART

ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

THE FANTASTICKS

1967 - 1968

LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL

KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE

110 IN THE SHADE

MARAT/SADE

1968 - 1969

DETECTIVE STORY

BETWEEN TWO THIEVES

DEATH OF A SALESMAN (County
Players)

CINDERELLA

1969 - 1970

INCIDENT AT VICHY

THE DARK AT THE TOP OF THE
STAIRS

CALCULATED RISK

COME BLOW YOUR HORN

THE WIZARD OF OZ

1970 - 1971HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS
WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

EVERYMAN REVISITED *

MEDEA

PETER PAN

1971 - 1972

THE PETRIFIED FOREST

JOAN OF LORRAINE

J.B.

SNOW WHITE

1972 - 1973

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE

ROMANOFF AND JULIET

BUT NOT JUST EVERYMAN *

CELEBRATING THE FIRST FEW
MONTHS *

PINOCCHIO

1973 - 1974AN EVENING OF THE ABSURD:
"The Room," "The Orchestra," &
"The Lesson"

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

METANOIA *

THE BEEPLE

1974 - 1975

THE LARK

GENTLE CATAPULTS *

IN REPERTORY: WHO'S AFRAID OF
VIRGINIA WOLF, PLAZA SUITE, THE
EFFECTS OF GAMMA RAYS ON
MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS

GEORGE M

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

1975 - 1976"The Emperor Jones" & "Chamber
Music"

LEAVE IT TO JANE

BAREFOOT IN THE PARK

ALLADIN AND THE WONDERFUL
LAMP**1976 - 1977**

THE MOUSETRAP

WINNIE THE POOH

1976 - 1977

THE MOUSETRAP

WINNIE THE POOH

1977 - 1978

PLAZA SUITE
STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
THE MIRACLE WORKER
DOUBLE BILL: "At Laura's Locker" * & "Althea's Throne" *
THE WIZARD OF OZ

1978 - 1979
PLAZA SUITE
STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
THE MIRACLE WORKER
DOUBLE BILL: "At Laura's Locker" * & "Althea's Throne" *
THE WIZARD OF OZ

1978 - 1979
I REMEMBER MAMA
TWO FOR THE SHOW--TWO NEW PLAYS: "A Soldier's Song" * & "Exercise for a Dandy Horse" *
JUNGLE BOOK
THE BELLE OF AMHERST (Mason/Olsen)

1979 - 1980
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
THE CRUCIBLE
(CERT) THE CHILDREN'S HOUR MASS APPEAL
(Davis/Bolling) *
\ [After Old Coat prod., yet before Off-Broadway & Broadway]
WILLY WONKA

1980 - 1981
CABARET
THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK (CERT)
WAIT UNTIL DARK
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "When Opportunity Pounds," "ThePaisley Picador," "The College Years," "Thin Walls," "Someone's Sleeping In My Bed," "Midstation" * (all)

DOCTOR DOOLITTLE

1981 - 1982

GRAFFITI **

THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN IN-THE-MOON
--

MARIGOLDS (CERT)

THE ODD COUPLE

THE PENNY STEALERS *

FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Here We Are," "When Shakespeare's
--

Ladies Meet," "The Ugly Duckling," "Curse You Jack Dalton," "Cathleen Ni Houlihan"
--

MARY POPPINS

1982 - 1983

GODSPELL

THE TUG OF WAR *

BUS STOP

THE DRUNKARD

FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "A Moment of Silence," "Thicker Than Water," "The Bonds of Obedience," "Sisters," "Taking to the Streets" * (all)
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SNOW WHITE

1983 - 1984

"The Weatherman" *

"The Scholar's Wife" *

"The Bonds of Obedience" *

THE GLASS MENAGERIE (CERT)

THREEPENNY OPERA

LEAD ME HOME *

THE FANTASTICKS

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Gifted," "Abandoned Treasures," "House of Mirrors," "What Are Friends For," "Saints or Sinners," "Seen But Not Heard," "Playing Against the House" * (all)

THE FROG PRINCE

1984 - 1985
GREASE
SEASONS' GREETINGS AT HOBART ARMS *
BLITHE SPIRIT
THREE AT SEVEN: "Acts of Contrition," * "Sorry, Wrong Number," "More Than Remembrances" *
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Milestones," "Payment of Dues," "Have a Good Life," "Me and Brian," "Money to Burn," "The Game," "Grendel" * (all)
BACK TO BACK BAKKE: "After All" * & "16 Pages from Scene Three" *
THE WIZARD OF OZ

1985 - 1986
"The Bonds of Obedience" *
THE DARK OF THE MOON
THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER *
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "A Tangled Web," "Gatekeeper," "Engine's Heat," "Life's eyes," "Drugs, Sex and Rock & Roll" * (all)
PETER PAN

1986 - 1987
"The Scholar's Wife" *
DRACULA
GODSPELL
BLOOD KNOT (New Day Rep.)
DANCING IN THE END ZONE *
FIFTH OF JULY
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Chop Suey," "Late Ending," "Dinner for Three," "Upstage," "Romeo & Julio," "Second Sight," "Katy's Bag," "In a Lonely Place" * (all)
CINDERELLA

1987 - 1988
"Via Humanitas" *
CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM *
HAIR
HARVEY
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Dear Ann," "Nagged to Death," "Wedded Bliss," "To Fit the Cloth," "Sketches," "To Be Remembered," "My Brother's Keeper," "Insecurities" * (all)
WILLY WONKA

1988 - 1989
TWO FOR ONE: "The Guerdon or a St. Luke's Summer Recompense" * & "The Bonds of Obedience" *
DEATHTRAP
LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
TWO CAN PLAY (New Day Rep.)
DON'T DRINK THE WATER
SCENES FROM SHAKESPEARE(On tour)
BOESMAN & LENA (New Day Rep.)
AN EVENING WITH EDGAR ALLAN POE (On tour)
DEAR LIAR (Garrison Art Center)
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Without Humor," "An Ordinary Travel through Time," "It's a Dog's Life," "The Game," "A Bite to Eat," "We Are Companions on a Journey," "Straight Up Please" * (all)
THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

1989 - 1990
BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS "Via Humanitas" *
JESUS CHRIST SUPER STAR
PICNIC
ALICE IN WONDERLAND (non-musical)
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Death

Meets the Lovebug," "Final Judgement," "Piece of Mind," "Backstage," "The Honeymooners Get Divorced," "Unsuspecting Characters," "The F-Word," "Complications," "The Shark Tank," "Cars" * (all)

1990 - 1991

ANTIGONE "The Scholar's Wife" *

STEEL MAGNOLIAS (Queen City Stage Company)

COMPANY

THE ANGEL'S SHARE *

THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES

PINOCCHIO "Vows" *

FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "True Confessions," "The Bridal Shower," "Truth Game," "Trashed," "Life at 20," "Known But to God," "Intimate Relations," "Farewell Tour" * (all)

1991 - 1992

BURN THIS

WINTER RAIN (Life of Thomas Merton) [On tour]

EVITA

FOOLS

STRANGER THAN FICTION

MY CHILDREN! MY AFRICA! (New Day Repertory Co.)

THE WIZARD OF OZ

DOUBLEBILL: "The B.S. Formula" * and "Forever and a Day" *

FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Blackout," "The Card Shop," "Charlie's Independence Day," "Check, Please!," "Cutting Remarks," "Dreamah," "From the Porch," "The Last Visit," "Madness to My Method," "Wagner's Temptation" * (all)

1992 - 1993

THE FRONT PAGE "The Guerdon, or a St. Luke's Summer

Recompense"*
GOOD NEWS
KING LEAR
THE MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST
THE SPELL OF SLEEPING BEAUTY
DOUBLE BILL: "The X Factor, " "72nd Street Messiah" * (both)
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Dream Maker," "Family Affairs," "Jake's Ladder," "Knockin' On Heaven's Door," "One Fish, Two Fish," "Red Tape for the Boa Constrictor," "A Room With No View," "Sean Morgan's Family Solution," "Second Chances," "Truman," "The Year the Real World Began" * (all)
TRIPLE BILL: "Imagination," "Untitled," and "The Hay Is On Fire" * (all)

1993 - 1994
LEND ME A TENOR
A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM
DOUBLE BILL: "The Farther to Fall" & "The Show Must Go On"
THE NEW ODD COUPLE (Joint Alumni & MCCTA production)
ETG TRIPLE BILL: "The Room," "The Actor's Nightmare" and "The Dentity Crisis"
A DOLL'S HOUSE
THE GLASS SLIPPER
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Jack In the Box," "Scenes From An Italian Restaurant," "The Further Adventures of Hamlet," "As Time Goes By," "Escapin' Reality," "A Modern Fairy Tale," "Ninety-six Dollars," "Movin' In" * (all)

1994 - 1995
I HATE HAMLET
ME AND MY GIRL
TRIPLE BILL

NOISES OFF
LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST
ROBIN HOOD
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: "Deja Vu," "My Life," "The Possibility," "Family Dinner," "God Games," "The Blisters of the Suburbs," "Going Up" LOVE LETTERS (Joint Alumni & MCCTA production)

This marked the end of the first thirty years of use of the campus center/student center theatre. Following the Jennifer Dressel Memorial Scholarship Fund production, LOVE LETTERS, renovations began within the theatre, preparing to turn it into the Nelly Goletti Theatre.

1995 - 1996
LOVE, SEX AND THE I.R.S.
FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
DOUBLE BILL: "Dateline" * & "The Machine" *
PRELUDE TO A KISS
THE MOUSETRAP
RUMPELSTILTSKIN IS MY NAME
CARPE DIEM: THE FESTIVAL OF STUDENT PLAYS: "Tombstones" by Roseanne Saracino; "Forgiveness" by Tauren L. Hagans; "The Wait" by Andrew Tokash; "Blue" by Andrew Tokash; "One Thousand & One Oranges" by Bryon Cahill; "A Prisoner of the Mind" by Erica Feick; "Rain" by Ben Fishelman * (all)

1996 - 1997
RUMORS by Neil Simon
GUYS & DOLLS by Damon Runyon, Abe Burrows, Jo Swerling; music and lyrics, Frank Loesser
TRIPLE BILL, 2 + 1: "Bedfellows" by Ben Fishelman; "Bumping the Cover" by Andrew Tokash; "Playing Against the House" by Gerard A. Cox *(all)
SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR by Luigi Pirandello
MARVIN'S ROOM by Scott

McPherson
THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES by Karen Boettcher-Tate
FESTIVAL '97, STAGE ONE, STUDENT PLAYS-IN-PROGRESS: "Nihl" by Shannon McNamara; "Armageddon Vs. Joe Shmoe" by Bryon Cahill; "How Little They Know" by Michelle C. White; "A Man in a Chair, a Woman at the Window" by Ben Fishelman; "Of Brass Rings & Finer Things" by Tom Gallagher *(all)

1997 - 1998
MOON OVER BUFFALO
JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT
AN EVENING OF ONE ACT PLAYS: "Real Estate" by Bryon Cahill; "What the Wind Won't Blow Away" by Tom Gallagher; "Premonition" by Jef E. Freydl; "Pizza and Chinese" by Jason Scheringer *(all)
MACHINAL
DANCING AT LUGHNASA
SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM
STONE SOUP
MACBETH
AS GRAPES UPON THE VINE, FESTIVAL '98: "All the Dips Are Dancing" by Erin Scully; "Ashes to Ashes" by Kim Rescorla; "Convulsing Twins" by Bryon Cahill; "Decisions, Decisions" by Katie Tracy; "Famous Men: An Act of Mizzling" by Michael James Feurstein; "In Brother I Trust" by Alex Heineman; "The Engagement" by Heather Lynch; "Tuesday" by Bryon Cahill; "Whatever Happened to Long Island Mike?" by Daniel Curry * (all)

1998 - 1999
[Mainstage] PRESENT LAUGHTER
[Mainstage] WEST SIDE STORY

(MCCTA & Marist Singers)
[ETG] EVENING OF ONE ACTS
[ETG&™s Mainstage] DOUBLE BILL: SHANLEY & FORNES
[ETG] THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES (MCCTA & Gender Equality)
[Mainstage] CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
[Children&™s] ALICE IN WONDERLAND
[Mainstage] MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (MCCTA & English Department)
[Special] FESTIVAL &™99: A TOUCH OF HARRY: &œA Quiet Sabbath in Amherst&™ by S. Randall Thompson; &œFreshman Year in Life&™ by Alex Heineman; &œLucrative&™ by Brian Ketcham; &œMama&™s Boy&™ by Ben I. Hecht; &œPickles&™ by Giovanna Coppola; &œThe Devil and Mike Faust&™ by John Sullivan; &œThe Journey&™ by Keisha Mason; &œThe Pale Eggs of the Beast&™ by Bryon Cahill (MCCTA & Theatre Workshop)

1999 - 2000
[Mainstage] PROPOSALS
[Musical] CITY OF ANGELS
[ETG Mainstage] THE CHOICE
[Mainstage] A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
[Musical Revue] THE WORLD GOES ROUND
[Children's Theatre] RAPUNZEL
[Standup Comedy] HuMarists Skits (Comedy Nights)
[Special] FESTIVAL 2000: EARLY LIGHT (Student-written Short Plays) "A Night in the Park" by Dean Orgera; "Act IV: Richard, Once and Future King of England" by Scott Randall Thompson; "Elbow Room" by Sam Moorman; "Grandma's Treasure Chest" by Shelly Napoli; "Icing on the Wedding Cake" by Alex

Heinenman; "Power Lunch" by Daniel Tyburski; "Ridiculous" by Chris Clemens; "South of Sunrise" by Kimberly S. Genesi; "The Paper War" by Ben I. Hecht; "The Restless Nights of Roxy Thrill" by John Sullivan

2000 - 2001: MCCTA'S 25th Season

[Mainstage] THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

[Musical] DAMN YANKEES

[ETG] DOUBLE BILL: "Fool for Love" and "What I Meant Was"

[ETG Mainstage] HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE

[Special] THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

[Mainstage] ROMEO AND JULIET

[Children's] KING MIDAS AND THE TOUCH OF GOLD

[Special] SWIFT AS A SHADOW: Festival of Student Plays "Angel Down" by Benjamin Hecht; "Closure" by George Luis Garcia, Jr.; "Dinner With Cactus" by Jeremy D. Smith; "Is Ignorance Bliss: An Exploration of Ebenezer Pudd" by Lori Musorrafiti; "That Girl" by Matthew Ryan *(all) On the final night of festival, a special performance of "In the Name of the Mother" by Gerard Anthony Cox was performed under the direction of David Laffin in recognition of the writer's years as an administrator at Marist College