**Michigan/Berkeley in Washington**  **Instructor: Ari Roth**

**Fall 2012 UM THTREMUS 328.00/ENG 311.001** Artistic Director, Theater J

1529 16th Street, NW

Classroom: 1608 Rhode Island Ave. Auditorium http://theaterjblogs.wordpress.com

General Meeting Time: Thursdays at 7 or 20 minutes before curtain

Class Email: [**dctheaterclassfall2012@umich.edu**](mailto:dctheaterclassfall2011@umich.edu)

**A THEATER OF POLITICS & THE POLITICS OF THEATER (Round 13)**

a semester in three INTERCONNECTED PARTS:

**I. STAGING WAR: IMPACT AND AFTERMATH**

**II. STRATEGIES IN ADAPTATION**

**III. THE ETHICS AND EXIGENCIES OF THE ARTIST**

**COURSE PREAMBLE**

Since 2006, this course has canvassed the Washington theater scene and discovered a wealth of offerings, much of it—not surprisingly—political in focus. What does it mean to have a robust artistic presence within an essentially political town? What might be the impact (and challenge) of presenting politically-inflected work in this community? What is the definition, the history and legacy of "political theater" and what is the point of it today? We'll figure that out. What are the stories being told that reflect how we view the past, understand the present, and envision the future? We’ll have a chance to think about the role of theater in society in this most unique setting, as the focus shifts all semester long from examinations inward and inter-personal, to the local, national, and international realms.

Which is only fitting for Washington, where the matters are intensely local, national, and international in scope all at once. And the theatrical culture here has kept pace. So there's a story to tell about the evolution of DC as a cultural town, a fitting update to what economist Richard Florida called *"The Rise Of The Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community And Everyday Life"* in his noteworthy 2002 book, now revised and updated from the vantage point of a decade later (this is an OPTIONAL text to purchase— http://www.amazon.com/The-Rise-Creative-Class-Revisited-Edition-Revised/dp/0465029930—but do check out the website http://www.creativeclass.com/richard\_florida/books/the\_rise\_of\_the\_creative\_class). More specifically, DC has emerged as the second most vibrant theatrical city in the nation, rivaling Chicago and surpassing Los Angeles (deferring only to New York) in number of performances offered, audience in attendance, and union actors appearing in Equity-contracted productions, with an unparalleled proliferation of new theatre buildings (over a billion dollars in construction and capital campaign costs over the past decade). Locally, the city now boasts some of the finest classical, flagship and culturally-specific theaters in the country. And now of course the economy threatens that vibrancy, even as DC is, in part, insulated from some of the worst of the economic strains. Rather than study theater history and the fundamentals of stage craft, you'll learn about the artform by partaking in the cultural landscape of DC (this *Washington Post* series on "The State of DC Theater" should be read in advance of next week: http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater-dance/the-state-of-dc-theater/2012/01/03/gIQADvwIfP\_story.html). Each play should inspire further study as to how a particular production grows out of a tradition of theater making and the development of Political Theater.

At its heart, this class is a Theater Appreciation course, with an emphasis on viewing plays in performance and in manuscript form, and responding to them in blog entries, a portfolio reflection on those entries, a final paper, and a group project.

We'll look at the fundamentals of what makes a play "work;" what makes a play-going experience successful, satisfying, usefully provocative, or unsatisfying. We'll try to develop a way of talking and writing about theater, and a way of talking to writers, actors, and directors about their work as well in post-performance sessions with the artists performing in the plays we’ll be seeing, and with the other audience members who attend them.

**Our Focus:**

We'll take advantage of our close relationship with our anchor theater, Theater J, and stay closely abreast of a very busy part of their fall season. We'll keep abreast of activities for Theater J's Locally Grown: Community Supported Art Festival which taps into many of the values of the Locavore Movement (see *"10 Steps to Becoming a Locavore"* http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/344/locavore.html). We'll look at the "Challenge of Creating New Work," examining that challenge as posed both to the artist--the difficult process of creating--the theater (in assuming the risk) and examine the ethical dilemmas that befall creators of work that draws substantially from life--and from found sources first created by other artists.

The second framing element of our semester concerns the portraiture of war, be that the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, or the reverberations of WWII and The Holocaust, as experienced both by perpetrators, victims, survivors, and bystanders. How are our playwright's staging war and how are they dramatizing its immediate and more distant impact and reverberations as its memory is transmitted to a new generation.

Finally, we'll examine the challenges posed to the playwright when adapting material for the stage, be that material drawn from the life and death of a musician, or material drawn from a novel, a book of non-fiction, or a Medieval poem.

**Requirements & GUIDELINES**

* Attendance: Students must attend all assigned productions over the semester with the class and all class sessions. *(If illness prevents you from using the pre-purchased ticket, you will have to purchase a new ticket to attend the play on your own.)*  NOTE: There is one Sunday night class session, and one Monday night reading that are mandatory.
* Part I: Post at least 10 blog entries on the Theater J blog within 72 hours of seeing any of the shows this semester. Initial postings should be a minimum of 250 words. Each good blog posting is worth 2 points. An unimpressive blog posting is worth 1 point. Any posting later than 72 hours will be 1 point. A late, unimpressive blog posting is worth 0. To get an A, you must have accrued 20 blog post points. Comments/Responses to other blog postings will accrue toward your Participation grade. Postings should reflect your experience of the production (or reading), and have an insight into what made the event successful for you, or not. They can incorporate comparative elements to other plays seen during the semester. Please be considerate in your engagement with the art and with others, and do know your words will be read by many outside of our class. So address others as well. And check your spelling, and save your programs, so you can refer accurately to the characters, actors, and all the other participating artists by name.
* **Preparatory & Follow-Up Reading**: Don't go to the theater blind. Read something about a show before you come. Read the program/playbill given by the theater when you're at the performance, or after. Consider the play in light of reviews once you've experienced the play for yourself. In some cases, we'll send electronic copies of the play manuscripts to you.
* **Links and Manuscripts:** You'll receive pdfs of the plays *Body Awareness, Our Class, Andy and The Shadows,* and many of the extra credit offerings as well including Mike Daisey's *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*. Links and attachments will be provided during the course of the semester to inform and enhance your appreciation of the play and, in some cases, the controversy surrounding it.
* **Participation**: Students are expected to participate in post-show discussions on our play-going adventures; and to ask strong, insightful, respectful questions, and to participate in class. Commenting on other people's blog postings incisively, supportively and advancing the discussion with a new idea will count positively toward class participation.
* **One Final Comparative Paper** of 1,300 - 1,500 words focusing on at least two works by one of the artists studied this semester, or presenting a thesis relevant to themes discussed this semester. Paper focus should be reflected in some way and coordinated with the group presentation being made on the final day of class.
* **Group Presentation:** Create your own Mini Festival as a theater. Your company should have a mission, a target community, and a proposed line-up that includes the selection of an older work, a contemporary work, and brand new commissioned work (that you conceive, create, and present at least a 4-5 minute scene). One of the works (including the newly commissioned work) may be a film/video/documentary/opera/musical presentation.
* **Grading and Extra Credit:**

\* 10 blog postings (2 points a piece; 20 points for an A): 35 of overall grade%

\* Midterm self-critique of first 6 blog postings and inspiration to improve: 10%

\* Participation: 20%

\* Final Paper: 20%

\* Group Project: 15%

*Attendance at Optional Readings offered by Theater J will result in improved participation credit. Blog entries posted about Optional Readings offered by Theater J will result in higher Overall Blog Points. More than 24 blog points and an A on final paper, plus strong work in all other areas will result in an* A+

* **Class & Theater-Going Policies:**

\* Students are expected to come to class and all performances on time; to post blog entries within 72 hours of a performance, and to submit all assignments on time.

\* Two or more absences from class negatively affect the student’s performance and integrity of the group outing experience, resulting in a lower grade.

\* No personal electronic devices may be used during class or performance. Period. Use of a cellphone, PDA, laptop or any other form of personal electronic device during class or a performance will negatively affect a student’s performance, resulting in a lower grade.

**Schedule for the Semester**

**STAGING WAR: IMPACT AND AFTERMATH**

**STRATEGIES IN ADAPTATION**

**THE ETHICS AND EXIGENCIES OF THE ARTIST**

• **Class #1: August 30**

**Meet at 7 PM at University of California/UM dorms in DC (UC/DC)**

1608 Rhode Island Ave. 1st floor auditorium

Introduction to the class and to Theater in DC

• **Optional FREE Extra Credit Play to Cover: Sunday, September 2 at 5 pm**

at **Theater J (DCJCC)**

1529 16th Street, NW - corner of 16th & Q Street

In the 1st floor library

§ Locally Grown Presentation:

**The Prostate Dialogues**

solo work by Jon Spelman

 A comedic retelling of Spelman’s experience, and those of others, with prostate cancer and its effect on his relationships and sense of mortality.

RSVP to attend: http://thejdc.convio.net/site/Calendar/642545627?view=RSVP&id=134861

NOTE, ALSO YOU ARE INVITED TO 4 OPTIONAL READINGS AT THEATER J (FREE TO YOU) DURING THE SEMSTER, FRIDAYS @ 2 PM

September 14 - COLD NOVEMBER LIGHT

September 21 - THE BUTCHER

October 19 - DANIEL DERONDA

November 30 - TBA

• **Optional FREE Extra Credit Play to Cover: Monday, September 3 at 3 pm**

**John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**

2700 F Street, NW Washington, DC

**MILLENNIUM STAGE NORTH**

**3–5 p.m. Theater J presents**

**THE HAMPTON YEARS**

By Jacqueline E. Lawton

This breakthrough premiere explores the development of great African-American artists John Biggers and Samella Lewis under the tutelage of Austrian Jewish refugee painter and educator, Viktor Lowenfeld. Focusing on the pivotal years at Hampton Institute, Virginia during WWII, this richly researched tapestry reveals the dreams and travails of young artists in a still-segregated society.

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://www.jacquelinelawton.com/**

• **Class #2:** September 6

**Meet at Theater J (DCJCC)**

1529 16th Street, NW - corner of 16th & Q Street

at 7:10 for a 7:30 performance of

**BODY AWARENESS**

by Annie Baker  | directed by Eleanor Holdridge

A touching comedy from the Obie Award-winning author of *Circle Mirror Transformation*.  It’s Body Awareness Week at Shirley College, and the non-traditional Vermont family members Phyllis, Joyce and their possibly autistic son Jared are rocked by a visiting photographer and his ‘male gaze.’   As sexuality, identity, role modeling and political-correctness get stirred up, the results are both touching and hilarious.

**Dramaturgical preparation:** **http://washingtondcjcc.org/center-for-arts/theater-j/on-stage/12-13-season/body-awareness/explore-the-world.html**

• **Class #3: September 13**

**Meet at Roundhouse Theatre Bethesda**

4545 East West Highway

Bethesda, MD (METRO: Redline to Bethesda)

7:10 pm for the 7:30 performance of

**BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO**

By Rajiv Joseph  | directed by Jeremy Skidmore

This ferocious, groundbreaking new comedy follows the intertwined lives of a quick-witted tiger, two homesick American marines, and a troubled Iraqi gardener as they roam the streets of war-torn Baghdad in search of meaning, redemption, and a toilet seat made of gold. Surreal and darkly humorous, it explores the madness of life in war as well as the power and the perils of human nature. A finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize and a recent Broadway hit, *Bengal Tiger* delivers a haunting look at the aftermath of violence and what it means to be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**Dramaturgical preparation:** **http://www.backstage.com/news/a-young-playwright-in-demand-rajiv-joseph/ + http://www.roundhousetheatre.org/performance/bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo/**

**• Class #4: September 20**

**Meet at Shakespeare Theatre**

Sidney Harman Hall 610 F Street NW

At 7:40 for 8:00 pm performance of

**BLACK WATCH**

Viewed through the eyes of those on the ground, ***Black Watch*** reveals what it means to be part of the legendary Scottish regiment, what it means to be part of the war on terror and what it means to make the journey home again.  John Tiffany’s production makes powerful and inventive use of movement, music and song to create a visceral, complex and urgent piece of theatre that is as relevant now as ever.  4 *Laurence Olivier Awards* including BEST PLAY;  New York Drama Circle Award BEST FOREIGN PLAY;  *New York Times* – Ben Brantley’s Top 10 Plays of 2007 *New York Magazine; The Washington Post* – Peter Marks’ “Best Theatre of 2011” (“Like a dose of caffeine delivered directly to the bloodstream.”)

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://www.playbill.com/news/article/168973-Black-Watch-Will-Return-to-Washington-DC-in-September (with more to come)**

• **Class #5: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23**

**Meet at (UC/DC) at 6:15**

1608 Rhode Island Ave. 1st floor auditorium

for special one-hour long discussion to review first 3 blog postings

\* Optional FREE TICKET to see **BODY AWARENESS** for 2nd time (Sun at 3 or 7:30 pm) and/or FREE TICKET to see at 5 pm at Theater J in the theater.

**Married Sex**

*commissioned solo work by Laura Zam*

A one-woman show exploring a woman’s quest to understand her body and her past.

• **Class #6: September 27**

**Meet at Studio Theatre**

1333 P Street, NW (14th & P Streets)

Meet at 7:40 for an 8:00 performance of

**INVISIBLE MAN**adapted for the stage by Oren Jacoby | based on the novel by Ralph Ellison   
directed by Christopher McElroen  
starring Teagle F. Bougere

A blistering adaptation of Ellison’s 1952 masterpiece. The play follows an anonymous black man as he journeys from the Deep South to a basement in the borderlands of Harlem, from a betrayal at his ivy-covered Negro college to a nightmare job in a paint factory in New York City to the story’s violent climax at a Harlem race riot. Ellison’s hero moves through an America divided by race and class, and grapples with the paradoxes of identity that have rendered him invisible. This savage, hypnotic, and impassioned adaptation of *Invisible Man* explores bigotry and its effects on the minds of both victims and perpetrators.

**Dramaturgical preparation:** **http://www.studiotheatre.org/calendar/view.aspx?id=3522**

• **October 4** (**No Class** - Ari in Israel)

\* Read and listen to **Mike Daisey's *The Agony and The Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*** - listen to NPR's Ira Glass' confrontation with Mike Daisey on his show, "This American Life." Read the follow up round-table discussion at The Public Theatre. **http://www.timeout.com/newyork/theater/truth-in-theater-the-mike-daisey-panel**

\* Prepare for OUR CLASS - Read dramaturgical material, including excerpts from Jan Gross' "Neighbors," the controversy surrounding its publication, and background on Polish history.

• **Class #7: October 11**

**Meet at Theater J (DCJCC)**

1529 16th Street at 7:10 for a 7:30 performance of

**OUR CLASS**

by Tadeusz Słobodzianek |  directed by Derek Goldman

Starting in 1926 and spanning 80 years, moving between Poland and America, this epic play has profoundly affected audiences and critics since its premiere at London’s National Theatre. As ten Polish classmates – five Catholic, five Jewish – grow up, their lives take dramatically unexpected turns as their country is torn apart by invading armies, first Soviet, then German, then Soviet again. Friend betrays friend and violence quickly escalates, reaching a crescendo that will forever haunt the survivors. “A remarkable and powerful play”- *The Daily Telegraph*

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://washingtondcjcc.org/center-for-arts/theater-j/on-stage/12-13-season/our-class/explore-the-world-of-our.html** with more attachments to come!

• **Class #8: October 18**

Meet at UCDC at 7 pm

follow up discussion about Our Class

• **Class #9: October 25**

Meet at Arena Stage

1101 Sixth Street, SW(off Maine Ave - Metrorail: Waterfront station, on Green line)

Meet at 7:40 for a 8:00 performance of

**ONE NIGHT WITH JANIS JOPLIN**

Written and directed by Randy Johnson

With a voice like whiskey and a laugh like pure joy, Janis Joplin took the music scene by storm. Simultaneously rough and vulnerable, Joplin was dubbed the Queen of Rock ‘n’ Roll, proving music wasn’t just a man’s world anymore. Packed with classic songs (“Piece of My Heart, “Summertime,” “Mercedes Benz”), the show also shines the spotlight on trailblazers who influenced Janis – like Bessie Smith, Etta James and Aretha Franklin. Now, in a new musical event featuring more than a dozen singers and band members, playwright-director Randy Johnson creates “a compelling portrait of an artist” (*Culturemob*) through the words, inspiration and music of one of America’s greatest rock ’n’ roll originals.

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://www.arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/one-night-with-janis-joplin/index.shtml**

• **Class #10: Special Monday Night Reading - October 29**

**Meet at Theater J (DCJCC)**

1529 16th Street, NW - corner of 16th & Q Street

at 7:10 for a 7:30 workshop reading of

**ANDY AND THE SHADOWS**

by Ari Roth  | directed by Daniella Topol

A family comedy with Freudian hallucinations and pre-marital angst by Theater J’s Artistic Director and award-winning playwright.  Andy Glickstein is the son of Holocaust refugees who fears he can't get married because he hasn’t suffered enough. His family's gathered on the South Side of Chicago to celebrate his engagement to clear-headed Sarah, but party preparations are interrupted as Andy is pulled by memories and pre-adolescent enchantments of his mother's bath-time stories recounting her dramatic escapes from the Nazis. Andy's search for his *duendé*—the Spanish expression of soulfulness and tragic ecstasy made popular in Ernest Hemingway novels--leads him to make a movie mythologizing his mother's triumphant legacy and, when that fails, his father's unsung Zionist heroism, but he ultimately finds more meaning in a jar of jam and a hospital bed that sleeps two.

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://washingtondcjcc.org/center-for-arts/theater-j/on-stage/12-13-season/andy-and-the-shadows/explore-the-world-of-andy-and.html**

• **Class #11: November 1**

Meet at UCDC at 7 pm - 10 pm *\*(note, extra hour of class to be used, if needed)*

Midterm portfolio presentations and announcement of end-of-semester group presentations

• **Class #12: November 8**

**Meet at Theater J (DCJCC)**

1529 16th Street, NW - corner of 16th & Q Street

at 7:10 for a 7:30 workshop reading of

**WOODY SEZ: THE LIFE & MUSIC OF WOODY GUTHRIE**

 Devised by David Lutken with Nick Corley, Darcie Deaville, Helen Russell & Andy Teirstein

Celebrate the 100th birthday of Woody Guthrie, the creator of American classics like “This Land is Your Land” and “The Ballad of Tom Joad!”  This boisterous retelling of the life of America’s troubadour blends musical numbers, scenes from Guthrie’s life and excerpts from his progressive newspaper column. The infectious and moving piece brings to life a true American hero, who proudly declared he would “always be there whenever working folks fight for their rights.”

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://www.woody100.com/**

• **Class #13: November 15**

**Meet at Folger Theatre**

201 East Capitol Street, SE

Washington, DC

At 7:00 pm to tour library in advance of 7:30 performance of

**THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS**

Stage version by Jean-Claude Carrière and Peter Brook

Based on the poem by Farid Uddi Attar

Directed by Aaron Posner | Original music performed by Tom Teasley

A theatrical adventure soars in this poignant 12th-century Persian fable about the search for the divine. The Conference of the Birds is equal parts hero's quest, moral fable, tall tale, adventure story, religious parable, buddy movie, and poetic flight of fancy," says director Aaron Posner. "It is an astonishing work, and, hopefully, unlike anything you have likely ever seen before." For more of what Posner has to say about the play, read his director's note.

*"The play is a flying carpet gliding us aloft into a land of mystery, splendor, and ritual."*

*—The New York Times*

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://www.folger.edu/Content/Whats-On/Folger-Theatre/More-on-The-Conference-of-the-Birds/** with more coming!

**November 22 -** NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

• **Class #14: November 29**

**Meet at Studio Theatre**

1333 P Street, NW (14th & P Streets)

Meet at 7:40 for an 8:00 performance of

**THE ALIENS**by Annie Baker | directed by Lila Neugebauer

The dingy back alley of a sleepy Vermont coffeehouse is home to trash bins, weathered patio furniture, and two affable slackers. KJ and Jasper fill their languid days with Bukowski references, low-key jam sessions, and ’shroom-spiked tea. When smart but awkward teen Evan, a new employee, attempts to evict them from their makeshift perch, KJ and Jasper recruit him as their unlikely summer protégé. From the critically acclaimed writer of *Circle Mirror Transformation*, this artful and indelible drama is a subtle ode to the truth and compassion hidden in unexpected people and places.

**Dramaturgical preparation: http://www.studiotheatre.org**/ with more coming!

• **Class #15: December 6**

**Final Class - Group Presentation**s - **With Food!**