STANDING ON THE WORLD’S STAGE

“Fanciful” was how one reviewer described last year’s Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of Shakespeare’s As You Like It. “The sweet lovers and the oft-quoted speeches are all here,” the review continued, “plus some of the most gorgeous set design and clever stagecraft that OSF can muster.” That set design (above) was courtesy of School of Communication associate professor Todd Rosenthal, and the fanciful tone was surely the work of two of his fellow faculty members, director Jessica Thebus (GC’91, GC’97) and costume designer Linda Roethke.

In As You Like It we learn “all the world’s a stage.” That sentiment makes sense to us. Our faculty, alumni, and students act on the world’s stage—discovering, delivering, and delighting. Rosenthal’s work is one of our best examples; in the last year he’s also designed sets for Ghost Brothers of Darkland County, a musical by Stephen King and John Mellencamp, and for an interactive “Mythbusters” exhibit for Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry. The world is a stage, and the School of Communication is helping tell stories that entertain, educate, and matter.

In every project, School of Communication donors are our collaborators. Thank you for the role you played in last year’s successes. We look forward to turning to the next page with you.

Barbara J. O’Keefe, Dean
CREATING TIMELY, TIMELESS ART

The stories we tell about ourselves often center on what we do as work. “Labor is such a large part of how we define ourselves,” said D. Soyini Madison (GC89), professor of performance studies. “And it’s something we all experience, in one way or another.” That universal connection—tied to the specific moment we live in—was the catalyst for Madison’s Labor Rites last year. The multimedia performance combined satire, myth, dramatic monologue, sound installation, digital imagery, and dance (choreographed by dance program faculty member Joel Valentin-Martinez) to tell the story of the United States labor movement. Student actors brought to life moments from myth (above, dancers reinvent the myth of Sisyphus and his rock-pushing fate as a renewable chance at new beginnings) and from history—as well as from contemporary movements like Occupy Wall Street.

“It’s a contemporary issue, still, because there’s so much concern about not having the opportunity to work,” said Madison. “Our students are more concerned than ever about what they’ll do after school, about the quality of work they’ll do. I wanted to look at work as an existential fact of our existence and to look at how meaningful work can give us a sense of security, hope, and accomplishment.”
### Making Ancient Tales New

Jaharis Family Professor in Performance Studies Mary Zimmerman (C82, GC85, GC94) pulls texts from the depths of memory, bringing such stories as *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, *The Arabian Nights*, and Ovid’s myths (see July) into the spotlight. For *The White Snake* (above), a coproduction of Berkeley Repertory Theatre and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Zimmerman reached back to China’s Tang dynasty through layers of story and revision. As she told SF Gate, “The challenge here was the extremely different versions of the story through the centuries.”

The title character, White Snake, is literally a snake—and she ensnares a mortal man. In some versions, White Snake is evil, and the Buddhist monk who breaks up her marriage is the hero. “But through time,” said Zimmerman, “White Snake became more sympathetic, and the monk became the bad guy because he’s the fundamentalist and believes it’s not natural for a man to be married to a snake.” If that’s not a timely enough issue for you, there’s also the feminist reading; White Snake’s friend Green Snake is a tomboy. “The story takes for granted that they’re heroes,” said Zimmerman. “Not lady heroes. Just heroes.” With sets by Dan Ostling (GC96) and costumes by Mara Blumenfeld (C92), the show is sumptuous as well as timeless.

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SEEKING A SHARED LANGUAGE

If Danceworks 2012 was a leap forward, it may have been the result of turning back the clock. Normally the production has stretched out over 10 weeks of preparation, but for last year’s show, artistic director Annie Beserra (WCAS’97) wanted to think thematically about the “human moment—the individual in the midst of community who is figuring out his or her relationship to the here and now, both historically and personally.” To capture that tone, she compressed the show’s development and rehearsal timeline. “As a result, there was a momentum and an energy,” said Beserra, “a sense of urgency that really fueled interesting leaps in some of the individual choreographers’ work.”

Several of those interesting leaps surely belonged to the student dancers, such as (above, times two) Britt Banaszynski (C12). The show was choreographed by Beserra and fellow faculty members Jeff Hancock, Billy Siegenfeld, Joel Valentin-Martinez, Laura Wade, and Amanda Exley Lower as well as guest artist Stephanie Paul (C06), who added a hip-hop number to the eclectic lineup. For Beserra, that mix of styles is Danceworks’ greatest strength. “Having these different dance vocabularies and dance techniques right next to each other is lovely and exciting. Audiences who see this work will say, ‘Oh, they’re telling different stories, but there’s a shared language.’”
TELLING STORIES THAT IGNITE

Thomas Bradshaw first came to Northwestern as a guest on a writing panel taking a serious look at comedy. But for Bradshaw’s typically dark-themed plays, he expects any audience laughter to be the uncomfortable kind. “If you’re only endorsing the values of an audience, it’s not exactly art,” he said at the panel session. “It has to challenge if we’re going to call it ‘art.’”

Now a faculty member in the Department of Radio/Television/Film, Bradshaw challenges his students to push the envelope. He’s still at it, too. His plays—including Burning (above), staged at the Acorn Theatre by New York’s The New Group—provoke strong reactions. A New York Times review of Burning said, “Mr. Bradshaw walks—no, make that tramples—the lines that divide the good, the bad, and the plug-ugly, both in art and in life. He aspires to amuse, shock, disgust, enlighten, bore, and titillate you all at the same time.” Bradshaw will have abundant opportunities to make people squirm: he is adapting Uncle Tom’s Cabin for the screen and has teamed up with Oprah Winfrey’s Harpo Studios and HBO to develop a series about a prestigious liberal arts college whose first African American president is thrust into national headlines.
EDUCATING GLOBAL STORYTELLERS

When the School of Communication class of 2012 marched across the Arts Circle to the school’s graduation convocation, among them were students seeing the Evanston campus for the first time: members of the first graduating class from Northwestern’s campus in Doha, Qatar.

The entire class of 2012 heard convocation speaker Michael J. Gottlieb (WCAS99), associate White House counsel and special assistant to the president. A two-time National Debate Tournament champion while active in Northwestern’s nationally “winningest” Debate Society, Gottlieb noted how his college experience—especially the influence of his mentor, the late Scott Deatherage (GC94)—still plays out in daily life. “I write memos to the president that sound in his voice,” said Gottlieb. “There is a published Supreme Court opinion that is structured according to his principles.”

Influence was also the topic at the earlier graduation ceremony in Doha—the influence that graduates would wield as communicators in the changing Middle East. “It is the single biggest story in a generation, and it is falling into your lap,” said Lebanese journalist and scholar Rami Khouri. “You leave here with a formidable tool kit to cover it in all the ways you will find work in the region. You are not just another ordinary graduating class. You are the story.”
EMBRACING THE CREATIVE PROCESS

It's only fitting that a play titled *Metamorphoses* has gone through a few changes. Originally staged as *Six Myths* on Northwestern's campus by Jaharis Family Professor in Performance Studies Mary Zimmerman (C82, GC85, GC94), her adaptation of Ovid's myths landed with a splash in 1998 at Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre, where Zimmerman is an ensemble member. Dan Ostling (GC96) designed the pool set; Mara Blumenfeld (C92) designed the costumes. The show did laps around the theatre world: Chicago, the West Coast, and New York Off-Broadway and then Broadway, where as the play's director Zimmerman won a 2002 Tony Award.

Today *Metamorphoses* is staged all over the world, often in sand or dirt or on blue fabric representing water. But for Lookingglass's 25th-anniversary season, the company pooled its resources to put transformation at center stage once again (above). "All these stories, these metamorphoses, are about unlooked for, unwanted change," said Zimmerman. "Yet their lesson is that with every radical change, something new is produced." Still, some things haven't changed all that much. Three actors from the original production—Chris Kipliak (C96), Louise Lamson (C96), and Erik Lochtelfeld (C96)—are still with the show, along with Douglas Hara (C95), Lawrence DiStasi (C88), Raymond Fox (C89), and Anjali Bhimani (C96).
LISTENING FOR QUIET VOICES

Jacqueline Reyno (C12) and Matthew Litwiller (C12) set out to tell one of America’s most difficult stories, that of the Ogala Sioux who live on the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwest South Dakota. “Ogala” means “to scatter one’s own”—they are scattered from the other six subtribes of the Lakota people, and by the loss of their land—but the Ogala are now concentrated on the isolated reservation. Unemployment is at 80 percent; nearly 50 percent of households live below the federal poverty line. Infant mortality is five times higher than the national average.

Funded in part by the Northwestern student group Inspire Media, the documentary Language of the Unheard (above) was created to tell tough stories—but also found uplifting ones. “We hope that through this film we can begin to get an idea of who the people of Pine Ridge really are, and what stories they have to share,” the directors wrote in their bid for the festival circuit. The film was accepted to festivals around the country and beyond, including the 2012 Cannes Short Film Corner, where it took top documentary honors in the American Pavilion Student Filmmaker Showcase—guaranteeing that at least a few Ogala voices have been heard after all.
TELLING STORIES THAT ENTERTAIN

When Arts Alliance at Northwestern University produced Avenue Q, things got warm and fuzzy—and not just because of the puppets. The student cast (above) enjoyed a visit by Jason Moore (C93), the Tony-nominated director of the show’s original Broadway run. As the 2012 Hope Abelson Artist-in-Residence, Moore spoke to classes, screened his movie Pitch Perfect, and did a Q&A with film music guru Michael Knobloch (C92). But it was the Avenue Q rehearsal that anchored his visit. Sitting in a rehearsal room he’d used as a student, watching performances of songs he knew as well as any of the singers, was in his words “a full-circle moment.”

Our alumni find lots of ways to give—and get—back to Northwestern. In 2012 screenwriters Margaret Nagle (C83) and Jeff Pinkner (C87) shared their writing expertise with students; actors Gregg Edelman (C80) and Marg Helgenberger (C82) guest-taught acting classes. TV producer Jason Bolicki (C04) talked about the entertainment industry, and playwright Lydia Diamond (C92) spoke on campus as the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Visiting Artist. The Wirtz program itself is a full circle for its benefactor: Rockwell “Rocky” Wirtz (C75), president of the Wirtz Corporation and chairman of the Chicago Blackhawks, funded the program in honor of his grandmother, who had encouraged him to attend Northwestern.

Give every year, make a difference every day.
TELLING STORIES THAT ARE TRUE

In Steppenwolf Theatre’s production of Keith Reddin’s absurdist Life and Limb (above), a Korean War vet with a missing arm tries to give his young bride the American dream. Things get surreal. “Director Emily Campbell keeps a steady hand on Reddin’s wild variations in tone,” wrote a TimeOut Chicago reviewer—and that’s significant, because the director in question was still a directing student.

Campbell (GC12) and set designer Courtney O’Neill (GC12) were students in the Department of Theatre’s graduate programs in direction and design. Thanks to Next Up, a collaboration between Steppenwolf and the School of Communication, their final student project played out on a professional stage, with a professional cast and mentorship from Steppenwolf staff and artists—including ensemble members (and Tony Award–winning School of Communication faculty members) Anna D. Shapiro and Todd Rosenthal.

“The Steppenwolf-Northwestern collaboration for Next Up is an exciting experiment in large institutions integrating and supporting the work of young theatre makers,” said Shapiro, the Marjorie Hoffman Hagan, Class of 1934, Chair in Theatre. “Of course, Steppenwolf has a long and storied history of doing just that—but this multiyear mentor-mentee experience is really a reimagining of the university–regional theatre partnership. I am so proud to be a part of it.”

Give every year, make a difference every day.
### GIVING VITAL STORIES THE STAGE

In *The Kid Thing* by Sarah Gubbins (C97, GC08), two lesbian couples are rocked by the revelation that one set wants to have children (above, staged by Chicago Dramatists and About Face Theatre). In Gubbins’s play *fml: how Carson McCullers saved my life*, staged by Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre for Young Adults, an isolated gay teen finds connection in reading.

In our programs, students learn to wield storytelling techniques to connect, and not just on the stage. Radio/television/film alumnus Martin Rodahl (C08) used those skills to document a group of golfers mourning a friend in *The Longest Drive* and to showcase the journey of a disabled athlete from speechless to public speaker for the Special Olympics. With the same degree, Ethan Molitch-Hou (C02, FSM08) uses storytelling skills to diagnose patients in his family’s free health clinic in Bolivia.

Several members of the Story Pirates, an improv group that inspires kids to write, are School of Communication alumni.

Wherever you turn, in fact, our people are making a difference—and earning recognition for doing so. In the process they create more good stories, including this one: On the same night that Gubbins’s *The Kid Thing* took the 2012 Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Work–Play, *Hero: The Musical* by fellow graduate Michael Mahler (C04) won its sister award for Best New Work–Musical.

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WRITING COMMUNICATION’S FUTURE

While working on a production of Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* for California Shakespeare Theater, Department of Theatre associate professor Amanda Dehnert found that the characters had a different story to tell. The result, *The Verona Project*, features a rock band, and the cast also performs as the orchestra. At the School of Communication, where so many students have had musical training, Dehnert had no trouble finding multitalented actors to cast in the American Music Theatre Project’s fall 2012 staging of the show (above).

Early musical training is good news offstage, too, according to Nina Kraus (GC80), Hugh Knowles Chair and director of the Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory in the School of Communication’s Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. Kraus’s research shows that formal musical training at an early age yields benefits in memory and in the ability to understand spoken and written language. “To learn to read, you need to have good working memory, the ability to disambiguate speech sounds, make sound-to-meaning connections,” she told the *New York Times.* “Each one of these skills can be strengthened with active engagement in playing a musical instrument.” Kraus has found that musical training is a gift that keeps giving. People with musical training can pick out signals from complex soundscapes—like a noisy New Year’s Eve party—long after they’ve put down their instruments.

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The following individuals and organizations made donations of $100 to $999 between September 1, 2011, and August 31, 2012. We apologize for any errors or omissions.
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Photography
Cover, January, March: Jenny Graham
for Oregon Shakespeare Theatre
February: Rafi Letzter (J15)
April, June, September, December:
Justin Barbin (C11) Photography
May: Monique Carboni for The New Group
July: Liz Lauren for Lookingglass Theatre Company
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