Remembering John Ross

Former Professor of Scenic Design, John Ross, passed away on January 27, at the age of 76. He will be remembered fondly by both faculty and students in the department as an advocate for the Tuscaloosa arts community.

Ross graduated from the University of Alabama in 1960 and continued on for an MFA from Yale University’s School of Drama. He worked with Hartt Opera Theatre in Connecticut and designed an off-Broadway show before returning to the University as faculty in 1965 to serve as the scenic designer and technical director for UA Theatre & Dance. Ross continued to work professionally across the United States as a designer, technical director, consultant and master electrician. As an active supporter of the arts, he served on the boards of five arts organizations and helped spearhead the creation of what is now Theatre Tuscaloosa. He also served in a leadership position with the Southeastern Theatre Conference, Alabama Theatre League and League of Historic American Theatres.

His love and support of the arts is not the only thing he will be remembered for. Students and professors remember him for his unwavering curiosity about life and his sharp wit. He had a unique quality for finding the distinctiveness of an historical era and incorporating it into his designs so that they became seamless to the show, sometimes going unnoticed.
Ed Williams, a former student and colleague of Ross’s said “He cared about all sorts of things that a lot of people don’t: Proportion, line, getting it right; not just getting something, but getting it right. If it’s not right, it’s calling attention to itself. His work was just right.”

Throughout his tenure as a professor and after retirement, Ross continued to be an avid supporter of the Department of Theatre & Dance and his impact on students and fellow faculty will continue to live on through the years. Last year, thanks to contributions from a former student, the department was able to create an endowment fund in honor of John Ross. The John Ross Theatrical Design Scholarship will provide funding for current theatre majors interested in pursuing a career in theatrical design.

The stories and adventures of John Ross will continue to live on through the students and faculty in the department. As we mourn the loss of a great artist and friend, we will remember his dedication to and support of the arts and artists in our community. He helped shape the arts community we love and support today.

If you would like to honor John Ross and his memory, his family has requested that gifts be sent to support the scholarship. You can make checks payable to The University of Alabama and reference the John Ross Scholarship Fund on the memo line. Please send checks to: The University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance c/o Dominic Yeager, Box 870239, Tuscaloosa, AL, 35487.
This semester our students and faculty had the opportunity to work on the world premiere of a new American Musical, *The Countess of Storyville*. Set in 1930s Storyville, New Orleans, the story follows a wealthy and beautiful woman’s return from Paris to operate a “Maison de Joie.” With a principal cast of Broadway actors, the workshop provided great learning and networking opportunities for students and faculty on and off stage. We talked with a few members of the cast and crew about their experiences to get their feedback on the process and their favorite parts about working on the show.

Senior Daniel Velasquez was a member of the ensemble, playing roles such as a bully boy and Perez, one of the principal’s best friends. As a senior, Daniel is used to the demands of working on a musical with the faculty, but it was rewarding and exciting for him to be working on a new musical, where things change every day. He talked about the fact that one of the big numbers for the ensemble wasn’t going to be heard until tech week because they had to rewrite it. Of course he enjoyed getting to work with the high caliber actors and creative team, and commented that they noticed who had great work ethic. For him, getting to make these contacts before graduation will be crucial as he moves forward in his career. He’s excited to be able to network and maintain relationships with both the actors and creative team even after the process is complete.

Chelsea Reynolds is a second year MFA Acting candidate. Also a member of the ensemble, she changed characters several times throughout the rehearsal process. But changing a character in a new musical isn’t just about changing one line or a solo in a song. It affects the ensemble as a whole. A brand new character meant that Chelsea had to go through the character building process and learn how to interact with others on stage multiple times. But from this experience, she’s learned how to be adaptable, a skill that will help her going forward. She was also excited there was no stigma for the students in the ensemble with the Broadway principals. The creative team encouraged the students to share their ideas and incorporated several of them into the musical.
Her favorite part of working with the show was working with the women in the Maison de Joie scene. They had a ballad called “Woman of Means” that really showcased their talents.

Third Year MFA Scenic Design candidate, Liz Whalen, talked about similar things as Chelsea and Daniel, but really focused on the ideas of networking and research for the new musical. Liz worked on props for the show. Just as the actors had to deal with changes every day, the crew adapted as well, adding new props or production elements with every change. For Liz, the historical aspects of the show were really exciting because it allowed her to do research into the time period to make everything specific. Liz also enjoyed getting to work with the creative team and actors and networking with all of them. As the show continues to move along its journey, it’s exciting to think about how future productions may incorporate her work.

Alumni Jen Nelson Lane also returned to UA Theatre & Dance for this production after twenty years of experience in stage management. The exciting thing about working on this show for Jen was the fact that there was a New York City pace in Alabama. It was also interesting to work on a new piece in a much shorter time frame than she was used to. She’s worked on 19 new works, but the six week process for Countess was the shortest.

As the stage manager, Jen was able to use her experience and knowledge to mentor the younger assistant stage managers and crew. The process gave these students a chance to meet new contacts and see the bigger picture outside of shows at the University.

*The Countess of Storyville* will continue its journey to Broadway at the Pasadena Playhouse. We wish the creative team the best of luck as the story moves forward and look forward to more opportunities like this in the future.
Mark Woodham

UA Theatre & Dance, 2012
Bachelor of Arts (Technical & Scenic Design)

Where are you now? After graduation, I moved to Savannah, Georgia. I was accepted into graduate school at the Savannah College of Art and Design where I obtained my Master’s Degree in Sound Design. In July 2015, I moved from Savannah to Orlando, Florida where I took a position as an Audio Entertainment Technician with Walt Disney World. I am currently working as a technician at Disney’s Hollywood Studios and can be found at Front of House Audio on the Jedi Training Academy: Trials of the Temple, For the First Time in Forever: A Frozen Sing-Along Celebration, and backstage at the Beauty and the Beast - Live on Stage shows.

What does a typical day look like for you? One of the many perks working with Disney is that every day is something new. I may go in one day and be working as an A1 Front of House audio on one stage and the next day I may be at a different stage doing a totally different show. It does bring great joy to be able to say I help bring the magic to everyone who visits our park.

What advice would you offer for current students about to enter the field? Never give up on your dreams. Always challenge yourself to take it to the next level, and never be afraid of failure. Always accept criticism with an open mind and just be you. You may not be the best at what you do, but no one can do it just like you. Don’t be afraid to walk through the door when it opens for you.

Do you have a favorite story from your time at UA? My favorite time at UA was probably taking the Intro and Advanced Stage Make-up classes. I took a razor blade and filed it down so the blade was real smooth. Perry Harper did this awesome makeup on his arm and we ran a tube underneath the appliance that was connected to a bug sprayer pump full of fake blood. I ran the razor blade across his arm tearing open the appliance and at the same time, we squeezed the trigger on the pressurized tank and shot fake blood about 15 feet into the air. We had the whole class dying from laughter.
Allison Michalke Gupton
UA Theatre & Dance, 2009
Bachelor of Arts (Dance & Public Relations)

What have you been up to since you graduated?
I’ve taught and choreographed throughout the metro-Atlanta area for several dance studios, choreographed for TV and film and judged dance competitions. For about a year and a half now, I’ve been the Administration Manager and a Journalist for the dance magazine, Dance Informa.

How do you think UA prepared you for what you are doing now? I feel UA prepared me for what I am doing now by helping me learn more about myself as a leader, teacher and dancer/choreographer. I’ve always known I was meant to be a teacher, so Sarah Barry helped me a ton in that aspect. I come from a family of coaches and always had that mentality of ‘suck it up’ and didn’t really understand a better way of leading until Sarah and Cornelius asked me to be the head counselor for the ABT summer intensive. It’s a hard lesson to learn that the way you’ve been doing things your whole life might not be the best way and I feel UA prepared me for what I’m doing now because I learned the balance between fun and discipline.

Do you have a favorite story from your time at UA? For a choreography assignment for Cornelius’ Choreography II class, we were asked to collaborate with a graduate student from the Creative Writing department, and an undergraduate student from the Film department. I ended up working with Brian Oliu (now a professor at UA), and we had the best time collaborating about this film that was half computer-generated words as music that he created, and half a soft poem. I danced outside for the softer poem section, and danced in one of the parking garages on campus for the computer-generated words section.

What do you hope to accomplish in your career? I hope to work more in the TV and film industry here in Atlanta. I hope to go back to college and receive a Masters in Dance. I also want to start a company called, ‘Dance Training for Athletes’, or something like that. I love sports, and I love dance. It would be a perfect way to combine the two. But whatever I end up doing, I want to leave a positive stamp. It is such an important lesson to learn that people want to work with someone that can produce great work, but also be light, and friendly.
June 3 - July 1, 2016   Tuesday - Sunday 8pm
George C. Meyer Performing Arts Center
visit summertide.org for tickets

College of
Arts & Sciences
Theatre and Dance
This summer, we will bring a new world premiere play to New York as part of the Bridge Project. This project produces professional shows that bring professional actors and students together to collaborate on new works while allowing them to have increased exposure in a specific city. This year, the project brings its fourth play since 2006 to Broadway with *Here I Sit Brokenhearted: Wit, Witticisms, and Wisecracks from the WC* written by Professor of Acting, Seth Panitch. The play is a series of stories and adventures that were inspired from the graffiti and writing in public men’s restrooms. The irreverent comedy explores the ideas behind what men write, why they write it and why they can’t stop.

Each scene is its own story of the characters behind the writings and drawings inside the bathroom. One of the scenes, called “Famous Awkward Moments in the Bathroom” brings together pairs of historical figures like Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler and Sammy Davis Jr. and George Wallace as they encourage each other to write their feelings out on the bathroom wall instead of causing harm to anyone outside. Panitch wants to bring these themes and ideas to life in a fun way that audiences will enjoy. As part of that, the play features lyrical adaptations of popular songs from musicals and the 1930s, including “Shall We Dance” and “Ain’t She Sweet”, retitled as “Sitting Sweet”, a barbershop quartet about toilet seat covers. He hopes the popular songs will make the audience remember the original song and laugh even more at the situation.

Several alumni and current students are heavily involved. The show will run for three nights in Tuscaloosa on June 14 – 16 before heading up to the Samuel Beckett Theatre in New York for a three week run June 22 – July 10.
Faculty and Staff Highlights

Steve Burch

When Dr. Burch, Professor of Theatre History and Playwriting, isn’t teaching, he spends his time writing plays, speaking at conferences and directing Shakespeare in the Park with the Rude Mechanicals. In March, Steve will present a staged reading of Aristophanes’ *Assembly of Women* at an international conference on campus. This summer, he will be directing *Hamlet* with the Rude Mechanicals and *Appropriate* this fall as part of the 2016-2017 season.

Currently, he is working on a new play about Emily Dickinson called *Is My Verse Alive*. The play follows Emily’s friendship with a man who eventually coedited her first volume of poems. This is the first play he has worked on since *Moby Dick* in 2011.

Rebecca Salzer

Along with choreographing live dance pieces, Assistant Professor of Dance, Rebecca Salzer produces dances for the camera. She currently has three films in circulation at a few film festivals including the Loikka Dance Film Festival in Helsinki, Finland and the Utah Dance Film Festival. In October, she worked with two artists in residency, Anya Cloud and Eric Geiger, to shoot “Peephole Sonata” in Morgan Auditorium. A companion film is in the work.

Rebecca has also been working on a series of dances in reaction to the Syrian refugee crisis. The first dance was presented in October at the UA Arboretum as part of Music for the Garden in partnership with Amir Zaheri. The next installment, “The Flow of Boats” was part of this semester’s ARDT concert and features 24 dancers interacting with the crisis through their smartphones.
Sharron Skipper

Administrative Secretary, Sharron Skipper has been the constant in the department since it was formed and has stories to tell of students and faculty along the way. One of these stories happened during the department’s production of *The 1940s Radio Hour* when the costume department created a costume specifically for her to wear during the reception.

Despite all the changes, one thing has stayed the same for her – the quality of students and faculty that have come through the department. They all have tremendous talent, drive and a passion for their dream. She used to joke that this place would drive her crazy and she’d end up at Bryce, but now she looks forward to working in the new performing arts center on the Bryce campus when it is completed.

Todd Roberts

Costume Production Specialist, Todd Roberts, spends his day managing the practicum students in the costume shop as well as helping build the shows each semester. He enjoys being able to bring his real world experience into an academic setting and teach these students necessary skills like sewing. This semester, he has been helping build costumes for *The Countess of Storyville*, a process that has been challenging with new additions and changes constantly.

Todd will spend this summer at Stagedoor Manor Performing Arts Training Center in the Catskill Mountains. He’s been there for 12 years and each summer they put up 42 shows in just 9 weeks. For him, it’s very exciting to come back every year and work with the kids and see them grow through the years.
College of Arts & Sciences
Theatre and Dance
2016 - 2017 Season
Marian Gallaway Theatre

Hamlet
October 4 - 9

While Hamlet mourns the death of his father, the king, his world begins to unravel. Join us for this classic Shakespearean tragedy of murder, mystery and a search for truth in the murky waters of Denmark.

Appropriate
November 15 - 20

Winner of the 2014 Obie Award for the Best New American Play, this comedy explores the reunion of an Arkansas family following their father’s death. When they discover something shocking in their father’s belongings, the reunion becomes the ultimate family feud.

The Philadelphia Story
February 14 - 19

In 1930s Philadelphia, the privileged daughter of the Lord family has created quite the scandal, divorcing her husband, and arranging to remarry. Enjoy this romantic comedy that went on to become a popular movie starring Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant.

A Chorus Line
April 13 in Mobile
April 18 - 23

“I hope I get it” – words that every dancer says when they audition. Follow these 16 dancers through the exhilarating and exhausting world of a Broadway musical. Winner of 9 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, A Chorus Line is among the longest running shows in history.
Allen Bales Theatre

*Doubt*
September 19 - 25

How do you prove a scandal in the Catholic Church? Follow Sister Aloysius and her doubts about the morality and faith of the new young priest in this award winning drama.

*Falsettos*
November 7 - 13

Marvin’s life is a whirlwind. He’s left his wife and son to live with another man, then his wife marries his psychiatrist. This Tony Award winning musical combines two stories in the Off-Broadway trilogy In Trousers and will make you laugh and cry as the triangle collapses on itself.

Les Liaisons Dangereuses
February 20 - 26

Adapted from the 1782 novel, French aristocrats play a vicious game of vengeance, humiliation and manipulation. Seduction and debauchery are their greatest tools for success and they plan to win at all costs. The play later became a film starring Glenn Close, John Malkovich and Michelle Pfeiffer.

La Ronde
April 10 - 16

This witty comedy presents a cycle of ten intimate dialogues across all levels of society. Originally banned for its provocative nature in 1900, the play offers a social commentary on how intimacy transgresses the boundaries of the class system.

Morgan Auditoirum

Join the dance program, recently ranked #15 in the nation, for another season of fun and inspiring concerts. *Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre* and *Dance Alabama!* return to bring you faculty and student choreographed pieces in various styles including hip hop, jazz, ballet and modern dance.

*Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre*
October 11 - 14, February 21 - 25

*Dance Alabama!*
November 15 - 18, March 28 - April 1
SCHOLARSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Guardian Angels ($5,000+)

Angels ($1,000 - $4,999)
Alpha Lambda Delta, Mrs. Jessica Clare Comas, James E. Hedgspeth Jr., Jim & Daphne McMullen, Linda L. & Robert Shumilas

Platinum Stars ($500 - $999)
Alpha Psi Omega, John & Mary Burke, Mr. Thomas Parks Davis, Linda Dobbins, Mr. & Mrs. Ralph & April Lane, Pamela J. McCollough, Dianne & Bill Teague, Lauren Wilson & Andy Fitch

Gold Stars ($250 - $499)
Joan & Jon Atkinson, Joan Barth, Neil & Christine Dietzch, William Gantt, Bob Halli, H. Scott & Nita Hestevold, Jack & Fran Jecen, Kenneth Lichstein, Linda & Terry Olivet, Mara McKay, Norvin Richards, John Ross, Caroline Spillane, Dr. & Mrs. Warren Spruill

Silver Stars ($100 - $249)

Bronze Star ($50 - $99)
Chester & Suzanne Alexander, Sheri Andro, Janice Baldwin, Rona Donahue, Tanya Fratto, Julie Friedman, Memorie Gosa, Joanna Jacobs, Michael Malinconico, Lillian Martin, Lisa Gerios-Rohl, Hunter Thomas, Julie Vaughn, Mary Kay Webb, Asia Webber

Rising Star ($20 - $49)

Your participation doesn’t have to end when the show is over! Give to the Annual Scholarship Campaign and invest in these future artists!

Over the years, our donors have generously contributed to our Annual Scholarship Campaign providing scholarships for deserving Theatre & Dance students. We ask you to consider joining our family of donors who ensure UA Theatre & Dance continues to attract the brightest and best students. If you would like to donate, please visit our website at theatre.ua.edu.
We are excited about the opportunities available for our department. Students and faculty are gaining hands-on experience with industry professionals and expanding our presence around the country. As we continue our mission, we take pride in our ability to provide students with engaging and challenging experiences.

In this *Stages*, we celebrate new adventures. With every project, our network of students, alumni, faculty and staff continues to grow. As our journey continues, we thank you for joining us and look forward to the future.

—William Teague, *Department Chair*