

# the ASTIC letter

The Newsletter of the AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THEATRE CONSULTANTS

## Theatre: the Temple and the Factory

*"There seems to be a wide divergence of opinion today as to what the theatre really is."*

— Robert Edmond Jones

Jones, who was a leading theatrical designer and luminary in the early years of the last century, was speaking of *The Theatre* as an institution and not theatre buildings *per se*. Nevertheless, the question is applicable to the buildings that house *The Theatre*, too.

The history of both *The Theatre* and the theatre building begins five thousand years ago, when, theatre historian Sheldon Cheney says,

*"Dionysus came down from the wild mountains of Thrace into Hellas, already worshipped as a god of the groves and the fields and of fertility; and with the very special power of lifting mortals to a share in divine ecstasy."*

In the beginning, the worship of this half-human, half-divine god included the active participation of all present. They shared sacred rites of drinking, dancing, singing, story telling and sex that united them with, and made them for a time, god like. What had begun as a simple sacristy-like hut, to house the various props and practical elements of the production, (the *skene*) became an imposing building. And the simple dancing circle around Dionysus' altar (the *orchestra*) became a semicircle in front of it.

In these spaces stories sacred and profane were acted out; stories that told of the tragic fall of heroes at the whim of the gods. And comedies, too, that were often rude and always ended in sexual union (*comus*) were presented with equal attention to detail and technique. By this time, the audience was seated on semi-circular steps radiating out from the orchestra. That ancient audience, like the audiences of today, came to focus on the

story, empathize with the storytellers and be moved by the experience.

We don't worship Dionysus any more. The plays of today are entertainments, and the extraordinary worlds of today's theatre are places where children can fly (*Peter Pan*) as well as where moral lessons can be depicted in a fight scene or declared in a stage whisper by a dying lead character.

For the modern day audience or congregation, there is a clear difference be-

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tween sacred spaces and theatres. We are entertained at the theatre. But in church, synagogue, mosque and temple we are all performers before the supernal audience of One. Yet these buildings remain more alike than different. Because their essential purpose is to be places where the veil that separates the ordinary world from the extraordinary one is made transparent.

On the evening of performance, the audience enters the theatre building with a heightened sense of anticipation. It may be a night out on the town, or the rare and cherished opportunity to see one of the leading luminaries of the stage, or to re-visit a favorite story. Whatever the reason, the audience enters the audience chamber to be transported into the world of the playwright. For this to happen there can be no distractions that would keep each person from their own willful suspension of disbelief. No intrusions from the ordinary outside world can be

permitted. No noise, no light, no vibration. Nothing at all, as the audience chamber sinks into complete darkness. And then the magic happens.

*On Stage the Audience sees and hears:*

*The curtain rises in darkness*

*The lights come up revealing the castle courtyard bathed in moonlight.*

*Someone watching from a doorway whispers,*

Lo, you, here she come! This is her very guise, and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her: stand close.

*Lady Macbeth enters carrying a candle. A pool of candle light follows her as she moves across the stage. The second watcher asks,*

How came she by that light?

*First watcher,*

Why, it stood by her. She has light by her continually. 'Tis her command.

*Backstage, the stage manager calls cues:*

Warning Lights cue 23; Fly cue 9 go!

Lights cue 23, go!; Warning Lights cue 24 for follow-spot one, your back-aim number 7

Lights cue 24, go! Warning Lights cue 25, Sound cue 14, and Effects cue 9

Lights 25, Sound 14, Effects 9, all go!

(Continued on page 3)

## Geffen Playhouse Renovation and Addition

Designed in the “Spanish Medieval” style by architects Morgan Walls and Clements, the Geffen Playhouse was built in 1929 as the Westwood Masonic Club. UCLA purchased the site in 1993 to provide a professional venue to support the University’s School of Theatre, Film and Television. Today, the Geffen Playhouse remains affiliated with UCLA, serving as an educational resource and providing opportunities for students to interact with theatre professionals through master classes, internships, and workshops.

The Playhouse had long been in need of aesthetic and technical upgrades. Ronald Frink Architects was commissioned to develop a master plan that addressed compliance with current building, safety, and accessibility codes and that sought to improve the comfort of the historic 500-seat theatre and increase its seating capacity. In 2004, the Playhouse broke ground on its ambitious \$17 million renovation and expansion project.

Along with enhanced acoustics, re-configured seating, and improved sight-lines in the historic main theatre, there is a new stage floor with traps and apron,



and extended wings to facilitate scene changes. A two-story addition built adjacent to the existing theatre on Le Conte Avenue houses dressing rooms, wardrobe facilities, green room, and a new second stage – the 145-seat Audrey Skir-

ball Kenis Studio Theatre – which is used for smaller experimental works as well as rehearsal space.

<i>Building Owner:</i>	<i>UCLA Capital Programs</i>
<i>Client:</i>	<i>The Geffen Playhouse</i>
<i>Project Manager:</i>	<i>The Hileman Company</i>
<i>Architect:</i>	<i>Ronald Frink Architects, Inc.</i>
<i>Preservation Architect:</i>	<i>Kaplan Chen Kaplan</i>
<i>Theatre Consultant:</i>	<i>Theatre Consultants Collaborative, LLC</i>
<i>Acoustician:</i>	<i>McKay Conant Brook Inc.</i>
<i>Structural Engineer:</i>	<i>Nabih Youssef &amp; Associates</i>
<i>M/E/P Engineer:</i>	<i>Syska Hennessy Group</i>
<i>General Contractor:</i>	<i>Morley Builders</i>

### ASTC Member News

The Armory Theatre renovation, new home to Portland Center Stage in Portland, OR, has received a LEED Platinum rating from the US Green Building Council for sustainable design. This is the first historic renovation and the first performing arts facility to receive a Platinum rating. John H. Bogan, ASTC, Heather McAvoy, ASTC, and Rose Steele, ASTC, of Landry & Bogan were the theatre consultants.

In September, Bill Conner, ASTC, continued his code development work on behalf of ASTC, attending the International Building Code hearings. He was successful in convincing the Code Development Committee accept the ASTC code change proposal to permit smoke management systems to be allowed on stages as an alternative to the traditional fire safety curtain or deluge system.

Lawrence L. Graham, ASTC, and Charles I. Swift, ASTC, have re-located to a new theatre consulting office:

Graham, Swift & Company, LLC  
1300 Summit Boulevard, Suite 1500  
Atlanta, GA 30319  
(404) 460-4245  
www.theatreguys.com

Michael Mell, ASTC, has written "Building Better Theaters." Published by Entertainment Technology Press, it describes the process of designing a theater.

At Theatre Projects Consultants, Benton Dellinger, ASTC, has been promoted to Principal Consultant and Director of Project Management. David Rosenburg, ASTC, has been promoted to Principal Consultant.

### ASTC Gathers in L.A. for Forum 2006

On a warm and sunny September weekend, the membership of the American Society of Theatre Consultants gathered for their yearly Forum in Los Angeles, the topic of which was “Planning Facilities for Music Performance”. On Friday, the attendees started off with a tour of a few of Los Angeles’ more noteworthy concert venues including the Hollywood Bowl, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Following the conclusion of the tours, a handful of members returned to the Hollywood Bowl as guests of the Philharmonic for that evening’s Los Angeles Philharmonic concert featuring Willie Nelson.

Saturday morning’s first order of business was the completion of the facility tour program with a visit to Hollywood’s Kodak Theater. Following immediately after was a panel discussion entitled “Design and Operation Challenges of Music Performance Spaces” that proved to be the highlight of Saturday’s session. Our invited guests were all from the Los Angeles Philharmonic

Association - Paul Geller, Production Director; Steve Linder, Director of Presentations; and Fred Vogler, Sound Designer. They participated in a lively discussion offering their perspective on topics focused on the operational, production, and programming challenges faced by the operators of music performance spaces.

The discussion explored the challenges faced by today’s music producers imposed by taking the "Concert Hall" and making it work for the new variety of music styles and genre typically presented at facilities similar to the ones toured earlier. In their day to day roles with the Philharmonic Association, each of the panelists is often required to confront the problems posed by producing concerts showcasing a wide variety of musical styles. They eagerly shared their recent experience and insights gained from their participation in the Philharmonic’s development of the Walt Disney Concert Hall and revitalization of the historic Hollywood Bowl.

## ASTC Members' Projects Chosen for PQ07

Seventeen theatre facilities have been selected to represent the United States in the next Prague Quadrennial Architecture and Technology section. All but one of these noteworthy projects were supported by ASTC consultants. The theme of the U.S. submission is "Performance Spaces for a New Generation" and will focus on theatres for educational institutions. The winning projects are:

*Class of '62 Center for Theatre and Dance, Williams College, Williamstown, MA*

Architect: William Rawn Associates  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Bard University, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY*

Architect: Gehry Partners  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Performing Arts Center, California State University Fullerton*

Architect: Pfeiffer Partners  
Theatre Consultant: Landry & Bogan

*Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland*

Architects: Moore Ruble Yudell / Ayers/Saint/Gross  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Ferguson Center for the Arts, Christopher Newport University, Newport News, VA*

Architect: Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas + Company / Pei Cobb Freed  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Glorya Kaufman Hall, University of California Los Angeles*

Architect: Moore Ruble Yudell  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Lee Center for the Arts, Seattle University, Seattle, WA*

Architect: LMN Architects

*The Center for the Arts, Towson University, Towson, MA*

Architect: Wilson Butler Architects  
Theatre Consultant: Davis Crossfield Associates

*Yue-Kong Pao Hall of Visual & Performing Arts, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN*

Architect: Hammel Green and Abrahamson / Scholer Corporation  
Theatre Consultant: Auerbach Pollock Friedlander

*Burgin Center for the Arts, The Mercersburg Academy, Mercersburg, PA*

Architect: Polshek Partnership  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Detroit School of Arts, Detroit, MI*

Architect: Hamilton Anderson  
Theatre Consultant: Schuler Shook

*Mesa Arts Center, Mesa, AZ*

Architect: BOORA Architects  
Theatre Consultant: Auerbach Pollock Friedlander

*Mondavi Center, University of California at Davis*

Architect: BOORA Architects  
Theatre Consultant: Auerbach Pollock Friedlander

*Rivercenter of the Performing Arts, Columbus State University, Columbus, GA*

Architect: Pfeiffer Partners  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*New Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, OR*

Architect: Thomas Hacker Architects  
Theatre Consultant: Landry & Bogan

*The Music Center at Strathmore, Montgomery County, MD*

Architect: William Rawn Associates  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

*Weber Music Hall, University of Duluth, WI*

Architect: Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects / Stanius Johnson Architects  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants

(Continued from page 1)

While the audience is engrossed in Lady Macbeth's famous sleepwalking scene, backstage the stage manager continues to call cues and the stage technicians continue to operate the rigging, lighting, sound and effects equipment that help to bring the scene alive. These illusions of the castle, of nighttime, of the glow of candlelight around the distraught lady are the creation of an unseen and unheard backstage army that operates a complex, flexible and invisible factory.

Long before this production of Macbeth opened, somebody designed the nightgown; draped it, cut it, stitched it, fitted it, and finished it. Somebody made the battery-operated candle. Somebody designed the castle. Others built and painted it. The light of midnight and a

pool of moving candlelight were designed, and the lights placed, focused and colored to provide the proper atmosphere for the audience to engage the events on the stage.

Tonight's extraordinary world - that is being created right before the audience's eyes - is the world of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Tomorrow night's world may be Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*, and on this same stage Stanley will scream out for his wife, "Stella!" Next, Hamlet, standing upon the dark and misty ramparts of Elsinore Castle asks, "hath the ghost walked yet tonight?" It is this adaptability of the backstage performance space that makes any theatre useful - in theatrical parlance, a building that "works." To achieve that aim, nothing less than a full-fledged theatre factory is required in or-

der to create *any* illusion that it is called upon to achieve.

The transformation of the playing space from witch-haunted Scotland to humid New Orleans to misty Norway is accomplished by the efforts of the designers who decorate the stage, the mechanics of the modern theatre building, and technicians who operate them. For this reason, it is not unusual for the factory portion of a theatre building to be as large and often much larger than the public spaces that the audience experience. This infrastructure that supports the ability to create and sustain the illusion - the theatre as factory - is the unseen and essential part of modern theatre production.

Lawrence L. Graham, ASTC  
Charles Swift, ASTC, also contributed to this article.

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# THEATRE PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

*The following theatre and assembly projects are in various stages of design and construction in ASTC members' offices*

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## ARTEC CONSULTANTS

Icelandic National Concert & Conference Centre, Reykjavik, Iceland  
Montreal Concert Hall (at the Place des Arts), Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
Zarautz Arts Centre, Zarautz, Spain

## AUERBACH POLLOCK FRIEDLANDER

MGM City Center Showroom and Convention Center, Las Vegas, NV  
Palms Hotel Casino Concert Hall, Las Vegas, NV  
Emerson Paramount Theatre Renovation, Boston, MA

## BILL CONNER ASSOCIATES

eta The Creative Arts, Chicago, IL  
Rio Rancho HS, NM  
Hinds Community College, Utica, MS

## DAVIS CROSSFIELD ASSOCIATES

The Community Performing Arts Center, Manassas, VA  
Arthur Zankel Music Center, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY  
Bailey Hall Renovation, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

## FISHER/DACHS ASSOCIATES

Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC),  
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY  
Shakespeare Theatre, Harman Center for the Arts, Washington, DC  
Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York, NY

## GRAHAM, SWIFT & COMPANY

St. Andrews School Auditorium, Savannah, GA  
Holy Innocents Performing Arts Center, Atlanta, GA  
Port Theatre, Port St. Joe, FL

## GEORGE C. IZENOUR ASSOCIATES

Center of Arts and Academics, Charleston County School District, Charleston, SC  
State College Area High School, State College, PA  
Lenape Regional High School, Medford, NJ

## JK DESIGN GROUP

Performing Arts Magnet High School, Los Angeles, CA  
Cuesta College Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo, CA  
Performing Arts Magnet High School, Simi, CA

## J&M LIGHTING DESIGN

Hanover High School Theatre, Hanover, NH  
Auditorium for Mount View School, Thorndike, ME.  
Renovation to Champlain Union Valley High School Theatre, Hinesburg, VT

## LANDRY & BOGAN

A Noise Within, Glendale, CA  
Livermore Regional Performing Arts Center, Livermore, CA  
Taube-Koret Campus for Jewish Life Cultural Center, Palo Alto, CA

## ROBERT LORELLI ASSOCIATES

Performing and Visual Arts Complex, American University, Cairo, Egypt  
Founders Auditorium Renovation, Milton Hershey Middle School, Hershey, PA  
YAB Theater Renovation, Hillsboro Community College, Tampa, FL

## LUSTIG & ASSOCIATES

Westminster College, Fulton, MO  
St. Joseph Abbey, St. Benedict, LA  
Grand Center, St. Louis, MO

## NAUTILUS ENTERTAINMENT DESIGN

Carnival Freedom Cruise Ship  
Queen Victoria Cruise Ship

## SCHULER SHOOK

Performing Arts Center Eastside (PACE), Bellevue, WA  
York College, York, PA  
University of Texas/Texas Southmost College, Brownsville, TX

## THEATRE CONSULTANTS COLLABORATIVE

Block 21 Music Venue (Austin City Limits), Austin, TX  
Dock Street Theatre Renovation, Charleston, SC  
Casino Windsor Entertainment Center, Windsor, Canada

## THEATRE DESIGN INC.

Langford Auditorium, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN  
Teatro Municipal de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil  
Orquestra Filarmonica do Espirito Santo, Espirito Santo, Brazil

## THEATRE PROJECTS CONSULTANTS

Kauffman Center for the Arts, Kansas City, MO  
New World Symphony, Miami Beach, FL  
Tempe Center for the Arts, Tempe, AZ

## TSG DESIGN SOLUTIONS

Gulfshore Playhouse, Estero, FL  
St. Augustine Amphitheatre, St. Augustine, FL  
Little Haiti Cultural Arts Center, Miami, FL

## WESTLAKE REED LESKOSKY

Balboa Theatre, San Diego, CA  
Clemens Center, Elmira, NY  
Kennedy Center Comprehensive Building Plan, Washington, DC

## WRIGHTSON, JOHNSON, HADDON & WILLIAMS

Palo Alto College Fine Arts Building, San Antonio, TX  
Greektown Hotel and Casino, Detroit, MI  
Alamo Heights High School, San Antonio, TX

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To learn more about the ASTC, visit our website:  
[www.theatreconsultants.org](http://www.theatreconsultants.org)