



Playwright's Lab  
at Hollins University

**Inside this issue:**

- Guest Profile: Jeff Goode **2**
- Toby Thelin Directs **3**
- Reading at Theatre for the New City
- Guest Profile: Toby Huss **3**
- From the Director **4**

**Next Month:**

- Overnight Sensations at Mill Mountain Theatre
- Guest Profile: Paul Meshejian
- Affiliated Organizations: PlayPenn
- Area Highlight: Blackfriar's Theatre
- From the Director

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# The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 02, Issue 01 (June, 2008)

## Love Loves a Pornographer by Jeff Goode



**Love Loves a Pornographer** by Jeff Goode is a rollicking comedy written in the style of Oscar Wilde. The play was given a reading as part of the Playwright's Lab summer session and was a joint effort with Mill Mountain Theatre's Discovery Reading Series. The presentation was designed to promote greater local interest in new works programming, and such efforts are a wonderful opportunity to reinforce the ongoing creative relationship between Hollins and Roanoke's only professional playhouse

Though primarily intended for students from the Playwright's Lab, the general public were also invited and nearly filled MMT's Waldron to capacity. A catered reception followed the

talkback with the author.

"It is always better to have the playwright on hand for these types of readings," Todd Ristau said of the series. "This play is already published, so the discussion is not so much about how to improve the play, but helping develop an audience that is interested in, and can speak knowledgably about, new plays. That's vital in a community that is home to an MFA playwriting program."

*Love* was published only this month by Broadway Play Publishing, Inc., and the author signed copies of the text in the lobby before the show. He also played one of the characters in the reading. Other performers

included Ristau, Ernie Zulia (Hollins Theatre Department Chair) reading stage directions with veteran local actors Laura Tuggle Anderson, Gina Laguzza, Ben R. Williams, and Kris Laguzza. Hollywood character actor Toby Huss played the lead role, with Cheryl Snodgrass of Chicago's Hell in a Handbag Productions directing.

*Love* has already enjoyed showings at Nova Arts Project, Circle X Theatre Company, hotINK International Festival of Readings and Reality Aside Theatre.

Look for more Discovery Reading Series offerings throughout the year at Mill Mountain Theatre.

<http://www.jeffgoode.com/pgpor.htm>

## Student Spotlight: Neeley Gossett



**Neeley Gossett** joined the MFA playwriting program this summer from Atlanta, where she currently teaches English at Georgia Perimeter College.

Neeley received a BA in Theater Arts with a focus in playwriting from Marymount Manhattan College, where she graduated with honors and had several of her plays produced. She received a solid background in dramatic writing, script analysis, dramatic literature, theatre history, acting and directing.

After graduation, she worked as an assistant stage manager in an Equity theatre and interned in their literary office.

Neeley decided an expertise in literature was needed to improve her writing and she now holds MA in English from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She never abandoned playwriting, though. Her play *Outsourced* was produced by Big Dawg Productions in Wilmington.

The young playwright is equally interested in dramaturgy and is setting up an internship at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta with Celise Kalke for 2010.

[www.myspace.com/neeleyann](http://www.myspace.com/neeleyann)

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Page 2

## Guest Spotlight: Jeff Goode



**Jeff Goode** is a director, actor and the author of over 50 plays, musicals and children's shows, including *The Eight: Reindeer Monologues*, the cult serial *Larry and the Werewolf*, and the shock-comedy *Poona the Fuckdog and other plays for children*. (**Not** for children.)

His published scripts include *The Eight* (now available in Dutch!), *The Misadventures of Dick Piston*, *Hotel Detective* and *The UBU Plays*, a children's trilogy based on the Jarry classic. His most recently published play is *Love Loves a Pornographer*, which was read as part of his visit to Hollins this summer.

Currently living in Los Angeles, Jeff has written television pilots for Fox, UPN, USA Networks, Canal Plus, and two for MTV, including the pilot for *Undressed*. For the Disney Channel, he created and executive produced the animated series *American Dragon: Jake Long*. Jeff is a co-founder of No Shame Theatre, and founding artistic director of No Shame Los Angeles.

Jeff is a perfect example of

what personal initiative in the theatre can accomplish. As part of his talk to the Playwright's Lab, Jeff discussed his journey from the back of the No Shame pickup truck in Iowa to being a successful writer with productions of his work in theatres around the world.

After his talk, he took questions from the students.

### **Which do you think poses the greater threat to a play, actors or directors?**

Anyone who misunderstands your intent is a risk to your play. There can be bad directors, bad actors, or bad producers. There were people who did the reindeer monologues because they thought it seemed fun. And the reindeer monologues is about rape, and child rape and animal rape and, you know, you don't do that for your church picnic and some people have done that for their church group, and that's a bad producer decision. Someone just wasn't getting what the play was about. It's not always your fault, but because there are so many places people can make a mistake, it's important

to take that into consideration. You get opportunities for your show to be saved if any reasonable person can read it and understand exactly what you wanted them to understand.

### **How does your background as a director inform your writing?**

I'd been thinking of objectives in terms of acting objectives, and my teachers found me and said, no, it's not about what's this actor doing for this actor, objectives are about what are you, the director, doing to the audience. And that's what I've learned from directing. I apply that to everything I do. What is the function of this scene? To make them laugh a few times so that they like this character you want them to see as the hero. Writing more jokes because they are fun to write maybe you'll lose the audience with this brilliant super funny scene that goes on way too long. Being able to understand my writing on a purely functional level was very important because it makes the work a lot more effective.

### **Is it hard to keep from directing if you are in the rehearsal as a**

### **playwright?**

It is more important for me as a writer to see where there is a mistake in the writing than to fix the problem through a directing note. Then the problem in the script never gets fixed, even though this production now looks great. I'm more likely to see what happens if I change the script without talking to the director and see if they get it now. I have this audience, any future audience, plus the reading audience and I need it to work for all of them.

### **What inspires you?**

For me it's always about something new for the audience. What can I give the audience that is new, that they haven't seen? Even if it is a small thing. You can argue about what is art all you want, but for me it boils down to something new that they can't see or get someplace else.

### **Do you have any advice?**

Write. You learn about writing from writing. The more you write the better you get at writing.



Jeff Goode conducts a writing workshop in the Hollins Room.

## Toby Thelin Directs Reading for Theatre for the New City



MFA playwright Toby Thelin directed a reading of *People Like You*, by Connor Ratliff, at Theatre for the New City this month as part of their New City, New Blood Reading Series.

*Two women devise a blackmail scheme. Step One: find a married man. Step Two: Photograph him during a series of seemingly chance encounters with an attractive and flirtatious young woman. Step Three: Confront him with a simple choice—your money, or your marriage?*

For 35 years, Pulitzer Prize winning Theatre for the New City has nurtured hundreds of playwrights through its Emerging Playwrights Program. The New City, New Blood play reading series is intended to provide a hearing for worthy plays in even earlier stages of development. Audiences get the opportunity to provide feedback, and artists gain valuable insight from audience response.

We are working with Theatre for the New City to find further opportunities for creative exchange in the future, including internships

for our graduates and co-productions of student plays.



THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

[www.theaterforthenewcity.net/newblood.htm](http://www.theaterforthenewcity.net/newblood.htm)

## Guest Profile: Toby Huss



**Toby Huss** has been a writer and performer for most of his life. Always quirky, always unusual, always passionate and uncompromising.

He has also been collaborating with Todd Ristau and Jeff Goode since they were all students at the University of Iowa during the explosively creative period of the 1980's when some of today's most important theatre artists were cutting their teeth in that very well respected theatre department.

As an undergraduate, Toby performed in many productions, including the Iowa Playwright's Festival. He was also one of the original Iowa No Shame writer/performers in the truck which is

where he created the character "Artie, Strongest Man in the World." Artie came to be loved by millions as a regular supporting character on the Nickelodeon television series *The Adventures of Pete and Pete*. Scouts for the show saw Toby perform the character in a 1989 sketch at No Shame New York, hosted by Randy Rollison's HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art. They were interested in having Artie in the show and Toby negotiated his playing the part and writing for the show. From that entry point, Toby has continuously worked television and film.

Toby spent many years in New York doing independent films, network and cable television and alternative theatre performances before finally relocating to LA.

Huss has also worked as a company member with famed avant-garde director Jerzy Grotowski. He is an accomplished and versatile actor whose credits include eccentric stage performances, independent films, major motion pictures, recurring characters on network and cable television shows (like the voice of "Kahn

Soupanousinphone" on *King of the Hill* and "Big Mike" on *Reno 911*) as well as a principal character for the HBO series *Carnivàle*. His impressive screen credits include Werner Herzog's *Rescue Dawn*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *The Venture Brothers*, *Seinfeld*, *Harvey Birdman*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *Down Periscope*, *Vegas Vacation*, *Bedazzled*, *The Basketball Diaries* and many others.

Toby is also a writer, singer, songwriter and recently a recording artist performing a Sinatra-esque stage show as lounge singer Rudy Casoni.

He continues to work in nearly every artistic medium, including painting, sculpture, poetry, photography, performing, and writing. He is the proprietor of the National Mule studio in Los Angeles.



<http://www.myspace.com/vootini>

## Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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For application materials, please call (540) 362-6326 or visit on the web at [www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting](http://www.hollins.edu/grad/playwriting) for more information.

Check out our MySpace page!

<http://www.myspace.com/hollinsplaywrightslab>

### From the Director: Economic Stimulus for the Arts

Paul Meshejian, the Artistic Director of PlayPenn, came to Hollins this month as a guest speaker. I've been a real admirer of his efforts to promote and develop new plays and the writers who write them.

We got to talking about fundraising for arts organizations hit hard by the current economy, and the recent Economic Stimulus checks being mailed out to tax payers across the country. Most households will get between \$600 and \$1200.

I mentioned to Paul that I had pledged our household's \$1200 check from the President to the **New Works Initiative** fund at Hollins, so that our money could support the creative work of my students rather than buy a big

screen TV .

Paul pointed out that the money was still going to help the economy. He said. "Look, the President wants you to buy stuff, right? Well, give the money to an artist and let them buy stuff. The economy gets a boost, you get a tax deduction, and the artist gets to create something that will benefit everyone."

It really makes a lot of sense when put that simply. I'd like to put it to you then, just as simply.

Please give your Economic Stimulus check to an artist or arts organization. It doesn't have to be the **New Works Initiative** at Hollins, though I'd really appreciate your doing so.

Just consider giving your

Economic Stimulus check to an artist or an arts organization you support, and let *them* not only stimulate the economy but also the life of the arts where you live.

If you do consider giving your stimulus check to the Playwright's Lab so that we can buy the stuff we need to produce plays written by our students, it couldn't be more simple to do.

Just go online to [www.hollins.edu/giveonline](http://www.hollins.edu/giveonline) and under "Gift and Pledge Information," look for this option: "My gift is for \_\_\_"

Simply indicate that your gift is for the **New Works Initiative** and your tax

deductible contribution will be set aside in a restricted fund to be used exclusively support of productions of new plays from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University.



**Todd Ristau, Director  
Playwright's Lab at Hollins  
University**