



The New Harmony Project®

Serving Writers. Celebrating the Human Spirit.

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THE NEW HARMONY PROJECT

2008 Project Summary

Paul Walsh, Artistic Director

The New Harmony Project Hosts Playwrights, Filmmakers, Veteran Actors

Late one Sunday afternoon in May, veteran actor Richard Riehle, whose career spans from Broadway to stages across the country, and includes television shows like *Grounded for Life*, *West Wing*, and *Married to the Kelly's*, and nearly 150 films, arrived at the Conference Center in New Harmony, Indiana, jet-lagged, jovial and ready to work. He had just flown halfway around the globe from a film shoot in Bucharest, Romania, to join the 22nd annual New



Alejandro Monteverde with Gary and Cindy Bayer

Harmony Project. The New Harmony Project (NHP) offers competitively selected professional playwrights and screenwriters the opportunity to work with professional actors, directors, and dramaturgs on their scripts in a quiet and supportive community far from the pressures of New York or Hollywood.

Actors like Riehle are pleased to be invited to New Harmony because the conference reaffirms a sense of community that is easily forgotten in the day-to-day hassles of a life in theater, television, or film.

This year's conference met from May 16 to May 31 and featured playwrights Willy Holtzman and Regina Taylor, television producers Rob Loos and Jim Leonard, and filmmakers Alejandro Monteverde and Pepe Portillo, among others. Founded in 1986, NHP has contributed to the development of nearly 200 plays and other projects during its 22-year history, including works by such nationally prominent writers as Horton Foote, Warren Leight, Michele Lowe, Shane Black, Arlene Hutton, John Henry Redwood, John Pielmeier, Dan O'Brien, Robert Schenkkan, Sunil Juruvilla, David McFadzean, and Russell Davis. Celebrating hope and the possibilities of the human spirit, NHP gives writers the opportunity to work for two weeks in a supportive community of professionals and student interns who

are as committed as they are to examining the complexities of life in the 21st century.

Dedicated to “serving writers and celebrating the human spirit,” NHP “encourages writers to dream, to dare, and to envision new ways of exploring the complexities of life, the resiliency of the human spirit, and the wonders of creativity,” says artistic director Paul Walsh. “Participants come from across the country,” Walsh adds, “but all share a common desire to explore what it means to be human in the best sense of the word.”

Playwright Margaret Hunt feels that the work she did as part of NHP exceeded the high expectations she had set for herself. She attributes this to The Project’s commitment to serving writers: “The promise [The New Harmony Project] makes—it’s all about the writer—is a promise they keep. The writer decides what to do or not do, what to write or cut or noodle over—even what to deal with another time. Nobody does that in the theatre today. Nobody gives playwrights that kind of freedom with that kind of support. Nobody spends

that kind of time, money, and talent developing a play and not producing it. Nobody does all that and asks for nothing but a credit. Nobody does that. Nobody does anything close to that but The New Harmony Project.” As veteran playwright Willy Holtzman adds: “The New Harmony Project is like a dramaturgical spa for the soul.”



Left to right – Janice Lowe, Marjorie Duffield and Margaret Hunt.

This year three plays and a musical received “full development” workshops at NHP, culminating in public readings during the final weekend of the Conference. Margaret Hunt’s heart-warming family drama, *The Ravens Feed Us*, set in Chicago in 1959 just after the White Sox lost their World Series bid, examines the loving struggle of four sisters dealing with an alcoholic father and a mother in denial. The two-week workshop was directed by Los Angeles-based director Marianne Savell with dramaturgical assistance from Ilana Brownstein of the Huntington Theatre in Boston. Actor Deirdre Lovejoy of the HBO hit series *The Wire* played the role of Mrs. Cavanaugh and students from the University of Evansville played the four Cavanaugh sisters.

Distinguished West-Coast director Richard E. T. White, past artistic director of the Eureka Theater in San Francisco and Wisdom Bridge in Chicago and now head of theater at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, teamed up with Seattle-based dramaturg Christine Sumption, formerly of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, to work with New York playwright Crystal Skillman on her play *4 Edges*. An American artist photographs a

disturbing ancient ritual that makes her famous while changing forever the strangely enigmatic place she photographed. Skillman's tale of ritual and redemption explores not only the responsibilities of the artist in the modern world, but also the unexamined consequences of our actions.



Left to right – Keith Langsdale, Willy Holtzman, Richard Riehle and Joel Grynheim.

Holtzman's hilarious and surprisingly moving one-man show, *The Real McGonagall*, is set in a Hell's Kitchen tavern on the eve of McGonagall's return to Dundee after a hoax brought him to the United States for a supposed series of readings and lectures. In an evening of poetry and song, McGonagall examines what it means to him to be a poet even if he is not the best poet ever to have graced the language. Holtzman participated in the Conference as the inaugural recipient of the Walter Wangerin, Jr. Fellowship, honoring NHP founding board member Walt Wangerin, Jr.

Marjorie Duffield and Janice Lowe work-shopped their coming-of-age musical, *Sit-In at the Five and Dime*, with assistance from freelance director Clayton Phillips, musical director Andrew Morrissey, and dramaturg Richard Roberts from the Indiana Repertory Theater. Set in Nashville in 1959, Duffield and Lowe's musical explores the decision of three Fisk University students to join the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement to desegregate the American south.

In addition, five writers-in-residence joined NHP this spring to work on personally selected projects. Actor and playwright Regina Taylor took time away from a busy schedule that includes a leading role on the CBS hit television series, *The Unit*, to work on her play *Magnolia*, a rereading of American race relations by way of Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*, set in Atlanta in 1963. Scheduled to premiere next season at Chicago's Goodman Theater, *Magnolia* stunned The New Harmony Project audience with the depth of its humanity when it was read by a pick-up cast of conference participants.

Screenwriter and director Alejandro Monteverde, whose film *Bella* has received enthusiastic response from filmgoers and critics across the country, joined partner Pepe Portillo to work on their next film project. Monteverde



Anthony Willis Jr. actor in *Sit-In at the Five and Dime*.



Regina Taylor and Crystal Skillman

attended the conference as the winner of the 2007 Heartland Film Festival Grand Prize for Dramatic Feature. His film *Bella* received a special screening at the Harmonie Haus Cinema during the Conference. Television producer Rob Loos worked on his film script *Will to Succeed*, which received a spirited cold reading early in the conference. Finally, long-time NHP supporter and participant Jim

Leonard was on hand working on a new television series for F/X Network called *Borderland* and offering encouragement and sharing his years of experience with other Conference participants.

A significant number of scripts developed as part of NHP's annual conference in recent years have gone on to world premiere productions and national attention. Most notably, Theresa Rebeck's *The Understudy*, written in its entirety while Rebeck was a writer-in-residence at last year's conference, will premiere later this month at the Williamstown Theater Festival in Williamstown, MA. Rebeck's play *Maruritiuus*, read at the 2005 Conference, was produced last fall on Broadway by the Manhattan Theatre Club at the Biltmore Theatre after successful productions by New Jersey's McCarter Theatre Center and the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston. Dan O'Brien's new version of Jean Giraudoux's *Ondine*, read at the 2006 conference, premiered at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in February. John Pielmeier and Matty Selman's *Slow Dance with a Hot Pickup*, developed at the 2004 conference, was named "Best Original Play" at the 2008 New Hampshire Theater Awards after a successful production by the Barnstormers Theater in Tamworth, NH. In addition, Arlene Hutton's *Nibroc Trilogy*, developed over several years at the Conference culminating in 2006, was produced in its entirety at the 78th Street Theatre Lab in New York and by the Los Angeles' Actors' Co-op and has been published by Dramatist's Play Service; David Caudle's *Likeness*, developed at the Conference in 2006, premiered last fall at the New Theatre in Coral Gables; and Mat Smart's *The 13th of Paris*, also developed at the 2006 Conference, premiered in January at Pittsburgh's City Theatre.

For more news, or to obtain information on The New Harmony Project's open submission policy and deadlines for next year's New Harmony Project conference, go to www.newharmonyproject.org, or contact The New Harmony Project at P.O. Box 441062, Indianapolis, IN 46224-1062.

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