

# TARRAGON THEATRE OUTREACH NEWSLETTER

Edition 3.3

February 2004

## ideasmart an educator resource exchange

Thursday February 12, 2004  
6 – 9pm  
\$15

Tarragon Theatre's OutReach department is inviting high school drama teachers to **ideaSmart**, our latest educator initiative. Developed with educators Laurence Seigel and Mary B. Wood, **ideaSmart** provides fifteen educators with the opportunity to gather in a round table sharing of their favourite (and tested!) dramatic arts lesson plans. The lessons have already proven to inspire students as they explore themselves, their community and their collective artistic experience.

Within the 3-hour exchange, each educator will have ten minutes to present, discuss and share his/her pre-selected lesson. Lessons will be submitted to the OutReach department ahead of time – in addition to a fun and stimulating evening of sharing, each participant will leave with a resource package of tried and true lesson ideas.

Please contact Laura Bonfigli, OutReach Associate, at 416.536.5018 x242 if you are interested in booking or would like to receive more information on **ideaSmart**.

### Educator Workshops

There are still a few spots left in our upcoming educator workshops.

Our workshops are 6 hours (including a lunch break) and cost \$60 apiece. We offer a special rate for pre-service teacher candidates.



Marc Richard leads an exercise in our educator workshop on Movement: The Art of Action

#### What's Inside...

- : Judith Thompson, playwright & educator
- : The Red Priest by Mieko Ouchi
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#### UPCOMING IN APRIL:

**Text Analysis: the world beneath the words**  
**Sunday, April 4, 2004 10am – 4pm, Tarragon Studios**

Led by professional actor, director, National Theatre School instructor, and 2000 Spring Training director, Kate Lynch, this day of study will provide guidance on how to unlock text for yourself and for students. Working with Shakespeare throughout the day, participants will develop an understanding of key elements and how to explore them.

In an effort to make **OutReach News** a useful educator resource document, as well as a current, effective communication method, we have chosen to include a resource section in each of the quarterly Newsletters. Edition 3.2 saw the inclusion of a Tarragon Timeline and brief history. The following is an article written by our OutReach Consultant about her experience as a student of Judith Thompson's. **Capture Me**, Thompson's latest show, is currently playing in the Tarragon Mainspace.

### Teach Me

By Mary B. Wood

I started to write again because of my teacher Judith Thompson. I had been an avid writer as a young girl: fantastic stories, political plays, sitcoms, with a cued in laugh track, and even newspapers, including the classifieds. All the material that flowed out of me was honest, truthful and pure, churning out from my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday present: a Brother 120 electronic typewriter. Teachers said I had "good ideas", but grammar errors muddled each page, sentence structure was weak and my attention to detail was non-existent. I quickly shriveled like an unattended plant pruning itself back. It was only many years later, in a playwriting seminar at the University of Guelph, that Judith Thompson seemed to resurrect me, pulling me into an overflowing well.

I remember this mythology of a woman –always pregnant – always full of stories, full of magic and full of symbols. She was *that* large, *that* archetypal, in the classroom, where she embodied a mythology of theatre for her students. We'd see her *floating* down the brick path of the university Wineguard Walk and stepping carefully over the growing clusters of cracked bricks, pushed up the by thick sprawling tree roots from the aligning Maples. To me, these ever-increasing cracks represented the continuous motion at play underneath, in the shadows of our collective experience. Judith's classes were like these now revealing cracks: small glimpses into the every day that exposed universal truths, the underbelly of emotion, of betrayal and of the unintended rivalry that affects us all.

During course registration, I met Judith in her tiny white office. I was uncertain about my talent and deeply insecure in my abilities. "Don't worry," she said, her voice was low and soft, "We'll lead up to it. They'll be exercises to help you." And there were exercises that helped, for example, the conversation eavesdropper<sup>1</sup>, which challenged us to write dialogue as astutely and convincingly as the appraised dialect queen herself.

As much as she birthed *The Crackwalker* and was honoured by the Governor General, Judith Thompson was quite simply my teacher. Judith's unorthodox approach preceded her because she conjured the wise artist out of the individual and found the compelling drama in what was most often discarded as the ordinary.

Like any good teacher, Judith gave me hope that I could accomplish what I set out to do and belief that what I created mattered, had an effect and spoke shattering truths. I am still fed by her voice as I write this piece: "Never scratch out an initial idea. Keep writing until you get ALL of the story out. Let it flow"<sup>2</sup>. In addition, I am filled with her voice everyday in the classroom as I strive to make my students feel as important and as talented as she made me feel.

On the first day of class, at the head of a large wooden table, she recited a personal piece about why she wrote. It was so lyrical that it carried me to Ireland, where her ancestry runs wild in her blood, beckoning to be brought alive through her fingers burning onto the page. Judith role modeled constantly. Creative risk was a necessary pleasure for her and theatrical space her alluring blank canvas.

She guided her classes with a considerate and thoughtful professionalism. There was to be no judgment of any kind, no matter what stories or material anyone shared<sup>3</sup>. Nor, as we discussed initial scenes, in an imagined hybrid of a Thompson/Tarragon playwrights unit, were we ever allowed to make affirmations quoting likes or dislikes<sup>4</sup>. This was considered harmful to the process, because of the sensitive delicate nature of writing, especially while in progress.

For Judith, theatre is where we can witness the hugeness of our lives as deeply sacred, passionately political, and eternally interconnected. That is exactly how she made her students feel about it. Every class I came to and every assignment I submitted, she met with necessary, encouraging light to nurture the burgeoning, blossoming branch.

When I watched her latest play, *Capture Me*, at the Tarragon Mainspace, it was a breathing testimony of everything she talked about and everything we worked towards in her classes. Judith consistently puts our lives on the stage for everyone to see, and does so with a dignity for the human spirit unlike any playwright I have ever experienced. Like her students, she has love for each character, honours the uniqueness of the individual and, as such, reflects the complexities of our collective spirit.

### Notes

**1) Conversation Eavesdropper:** As students prepare to write dialogue, they are often intimidated. Early in the course, we were asked to overhear a conversation between two people (on the bus, subway, cafeteria, restaurant) and later transcribe the dialogue verbatim. The result was twofold: it became very clear that drama surrounded our everyday lives in the most ordinary of situations and it allowed for a study of language and the linguistic idiosyncrasies of characters.

**2) Letting the writing flow out:** It seems that often students experience writer's block before they even get an idea down on the page. It is important to erase that "judgmental" voice that tells you it's a bad idea even before it's all written on the page. You introduce free writes at the beginning of class where students write for 10 minutes (non-stop) without scratching anything out. Invariably, they will take their character(s) in directions they did not imagine and open new possibilities to their story.

### **The Red Priest (Eight Ways to Say Goodbye)**

By Mieko Ouchi

Upcoming in our Extra Space is a beautiful piece about: a mysterious countess in the opulent court of the Sun King, a violin, Antonio Vivaldi, and an immense challenge. *The Red Priest* is a bitter-sweet love story set in counterpoint to the music of Italy's baroque master.

Especially suitable for grades 11 and up, Ouchi's play is relevant to numerous disciplines, most notably: English, History and Music. Math teachers may also be interested by the extremely defined structure that governs the narrative.

Full study guides are available free of charge with each group booking and matinees are currently being offered on **April 7, 14, 21 & 28 at 1:30pm.**

#### **Call For Volunteers!**

The Tarragon Theatre is proud to launch its new mobile bookstore. We are making available for sale scripts and/or chapbooks of current plays along with copies of other scripts by the same playwright. We are also including t-shirts that have the Tarragon logo. We are looking for enthusiastic volunteers to operate this cart. We ask for a commitment of four nights during a six-week run of each show. In exchange, you will receive a pair of tickets to see that show on another night.

Please call Natasha or Scott at 416.536.5018 ex 221 or send an email, including your availability, to [boxoffice@tarragontheatre.com](mailto:boxoffice@tarragontheatre.com). Volunteers will be responsible for the sales/customer service and reconciliation of the products. *This volunteer opportunity is eligible for community service hours so please pass this message on to your students as well.* **Please turn to the back page for additional volunteer opportunities.**

#### **Teacher Nights**

Teacher Night's occur shortly before or after Tarragon show opening and are designed to allow educators of all types (pre-service and in-service teachers, graduate students, non-traditional educators, etc.) from different regions to meet in a social setting and experience live theatre. The events feature a pre-show chat with someone involved in the production and an opportunity for Q&A. A complimentary performance ticket and bar ticket is included. Each evening begins between 6:45pm and 7pm. Please visit our website at [www.tarragontheatre.com](http://www.tarragontheatre.com) for further information including the dates and times of our remaining 2 teacher nights.

#### **The Third Annual Tarragon Masterclass for Educators**

##### **Playwriting Lab**

Monday, July 5 – Friday, July 9, 2004

Using our Young Playwrights Unit as a framework, this one-week workshop will take participants through a process using their own writing. The program will include creative exercises and text study useful in developing scripts as well as short seminars in how designers, actors and directors approach new plays. Don Hannah, noted playwright, novelist, director and instructor of Tarragon's Young Playwrights Unit for 8 years, will lead the program.

#### **Co-op at Tarragon**

We would like to wish a fond farewell to our 3 wonderful first semester co-op students: Nicole Camarra (Madonna S.S.), Mimi Dendias (Oakwood C.I.) and Imran Hack (Emery C.I.).

**We are currently accepting resumes and cover letters for second semester co-op positions. If you know of any interested students, please direct them to our website: [www.tarragontheatre.com/ed-placement.htm](http://www.tarragontheatre.com/ed-placement.htm)**

### **Paprika Festival – Call For Volunteers**

Do your students still need community service hours? Are they interested in theatre and excited by the prospect of working for a festival by and for young artists?

The Paprika Festival is currently looking for 2 dynamic, dedicated volunteers to fill the positions of lead stagehand and secondary stagehand. If you know of any interested students, please have them contact us at 416.536.5018 x245 or [paprika@tarragontheatre.com](mailto:paprika@tarragontheatre.com).

We are also seeking FOH volunteers who, in return for a guaranteed seat, work concession and take tickets at the door. Please contact Natasha or Scott at 416.531.1827 or [boxoffice@tarragontheatre.com](mailto:boxoffice@tarragontheatre.com) if you or your students are interested.

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This newsletter was compiled by Laura Bonfigli with contributions from Kristen Van Alphen and Mary B. Wood. For questions, concerns, comments, or feedback, please contact:

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