Dramatic Changes

The Communication Department drama program engages students and audiences in life-changing performances in a newly remodeled church and in a new black box theater space.
Why minor in drama? Two students reveal their reasons for studying drama.

After high school, I knew what college I wanted to attend. It had to be Walla Walla College because they offered a drama minor. I was incredibly excited to audition my first year. I auditioned for everything. Then finally it happened. I got a part in the play, “The Diary of Anne Frank.” I worked hard, memorized my lines, painted the stage, and sewed the couch together. After one really fun performance, a lady walked up to me and hugged me. She felt comfortable around me, and she felt as if she knew me. It was then that I realized what I can do with drama. I can share Christ through drama.

Right now, I’ve just finished directing my first play. It’s quite the experience. There are few things so difficult or so rewarding as watching talented actors grow through the rehearsal process and then letting them go. I feel a bit like I’m a parent raising a child. Oddly, being off the stage for the first time in awhile has given me one of the most important benefits of acting; the ability to look at the world through others’ eyes, to understand life from their point of view, and to appreciate what they do. Sounds like what God did for us.

LUANN VENDEN has taught at Walla Walla College for the last five years. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. in English from the University of North Texas. Her dissertation fell somewhere between English and theatre history studies in its examination of early 18th-century playwright Susanna Centlivre (1667-1723) and the performance history of her extensive body of work. Venden’s areas of academic interest are eighteenth-century drama and women novelists, Victorian novels, and classical drama. She is currently editing the dramatic works of Centlivre, with the goal of producing both scholarly and stageable editions of her plays.

Lucy enjoys all aspects of theatre. Her first on-stage role was as The Old Lady in a first-grade production of “Stone Soup,” and she has been acting and directing in one way or the other ever since. She serves as Co-Artistic Director for woodsmama, and in that capacity directs at least once a year, acts occasionally, and teaches History and Development of English Drama, and Play Direction I, the introductory theory course for student directors. Directing credits at WWC include: “Resurrexio Domini” (a medieval mystery play); “The Gamester,” “Trifles,” and “Proof.”

When she isn’t teaching or directing plays with woodsmama, she enjoys spending time with her husband, David, and her son, Mark, who is seven and a half years old—and who recently played the part of Rahab’s Family in a first grade production of “The Fall of Jericho.”

Melissa King playing the lead role in “The Diary of Anne Frank.”

Andrew Cockerham plays the role of Hal in “Proof.”
Wall Walla College Communications Department

Village Hall improvements

We came to believe in our abilities, and into the art of the possible.
—Jim Bock, Sales Manager and Marketing Consultant, KUJ-AM Radio

I took classes in theatre because they were fun—my motives were not much more sophisticated than that. It turns out those courses are quite practical, too. Practical, because acting on the stage energized my speech delivery, increased my vocabulary, and improved my self-confidence—elements of success in any career. Practical, because organizing and directing plays with my peers proved to be terrific leadership training. Practical, too, because immersing myself in great ideas from other times and cultures helped me understand my own background and chart my own course.
—David P. Lennox, Lecturer, Managerial Communication, School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University

Studying drama showed me when I face real dilemmas, I need to face them with dignified honesty.
—Mark Robison, associate professor of English, Union College

...I came here to Walla Walla for one reason, and one reason alone, and that is because I had heard that Walla Walla had an incredible engineering program...But I'm afraid that I was captured by the drama program here. I went to my first drama tryout because there was a very beautiful girl trying out and I found out. But I ended up getting hooked into the drama program, and I have fallen deeply in love with the theater.
—Adam Lombard, 2003 communication graduate.

I was able to be involved in so many different areas of theater: acting, directing, writing, etc. That generalized background has given me a wide range of practical experience to draw from as I study theater in more depth.
—Bradley Nelson, graduate student in drama, The Ohio University.

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Why study drama at WWC?

By Marilynn Loveless, wwcdrama artistic director

If you’re looking for the place to study drama in a Christian setting, you’ll find it at Walla Walla College.

Who gets involved in drama? When I last checked, there were engineers, mathematicians, pre-med, pre-dentistry, pre-law, biology, biochemistry, theology, religion, music, psychology, French, Spanish and English majors.

Why do such a diverse group of students get involved in drama? Because of what they learn about life, about themselves, and about seeing the needs of others with new eyes. Drama, indeed, plays a unique role on a Christian campus.

When a friend of mine learned that I was going to teach drama at a Christian college, he jokingly remarked, “Well I guess you won’t be directing ‘Inherit the Wind’ any time soon.” He thought that a play based on the 1925 Scopes Monkey trial where religious fundamentalism confronted scientific Darwinism wouldn’t play well on a Christian campus.

I won’t be directing that play anytime soon, but not for the reasons he thought. Why? Donnie Rigby already staged it here, in 1983. A pioneer who laid fresh tracks in the snow during her 30-year tenure as a professor of communication, Rigby remains a woman of strong convictions and a visionary who sees both the need for and the potential of an academic drama program especially in a Christian liberal arts college.

The power of a narrative to effect change is something Jesus understood. His parables started a revolution that continues to transform the world. His stories also made the authorities so angry that they crucified him.

In 1961 Rigby produced the first play at Walla Walla College, planting a seed that would provide the college with a rich drama heritage. Since 1971 Village Hall has been the main stage for our drama productions, and I can think of no other place more appropriate for a theatre program on a Seventh-day Adventist college campus than a former church with the exquisite stained glass windows serving as a continual reminder of why we are here.

Our newly relocated and refined black box theatre—appropriately named The Donnie Rigby Stage—will help to support this burgeoning academic program, providing much needed performance, rehearsal and classroom space.

Like Donnie Rigby, I remain committed to a policy of integrating academic and artistic rigor into both our secular and sacred drama programs at Walla Walla College, providing a catalyst for growth and renewal because just when we think we’ve got things figured out someone always seems to come along and discover that the earth isn’t that after all, and if women were meant to fly they wouldn’t necessarily need to have wings—an airplane or a space shuttle will suffice.

Drama is a discipline that reflects the polarity, the contradictions, and the everyday tensions that are a part of real-world work. WWC is grounded in Christian values and life skills such as collaboration, self-confidence and empathy. WWC teaches an understanding of aesthetic, complex, and at times contrary ideas. ❖

TICKETS

www.wwc.edu/drama

wwcdrama@wwc.edu

(509) 527-2158

wwcdrama information hotline

PRICES

$25 Season Ticket

$20 Student/Senior Citizen Season Ticket

$15 WWC Student Season Ticket

$8 General Admission

$7 Student/Senior Citizen

$6 WWC Student

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Marilynn Loveless shares her vision for drama at Walla Walla College with former director Donnie Rigby.

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