

Fall 2019

A Century on Stage

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Recommended Citation

Davis, Laura (2019) "A Century on Stage," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 16 : No. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol16/iss1/14

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A century



on stage

In 1920, as students in the Linfield Dramatic Club performed *Safety First*, “a snappy three-act farce-comedy,” tickets were free and actors no doubt had little idea they were setting in motion a tradition that would thrive for a century and beyond.

The production launched in the Pioneer Hall Chapel, with a trapdoor “to the commons (area) below for an exit and entrance to the stage itself,” but no backstage area, according to notes from Tom Gressler, professor emeritus of theatre, part of the faculty for 20 years.

Fast forward 100 seasons and 554 shows to a flourishing program that engages students from all majors in the performance, design, technical, scholarly and public relations facets of theatre production.

Through the years, the program has brought stories to life for audiences in seven locations – the McMinnville Lark Theatre, the Imperial Opera House, Gallery Theater, Frerichs Fine Arts Building, Pioneer Hall, Melrose Hall and now Marshall Theatre.

“In this centennial season, students continue to explore pressing social issues such as the intersections of gender, ethnicity, global economics and class among others,” says Brenda DeVore Marshall, professor of theatre and communication arts, who is in her 33rd year at Linfield and chairs the department.

Marshall and Gressler are among passionate faculty with long tenures who have been key to the program’s longevity (see sidebar).

– Laura Davis



*This year marks
the 100th season
of the Linfield
Theatre Program.*

From left, Logan Mays '16, Jeremy Odden '15, Collin Morris '13, Nicholas Granato '15 and Chris Forrer '13 perform *Spring Awakening* in 2013.



Is live theatre still relevant?



First, I want to say: bless the digital age.

Via the internet, I can view performances, speeches and events that, because of our truly embarrassing lack of advancements in time travel and teleportation, would otherwise be out of my reach. My emotions often swell while

watching mere recordings of live performances... Lin-Manuel Miranda's debut (at the White House) of what would become the opening song from *Hamilton*... the band Queen owning the crowd at Live Aid... Katelyn Ohashi nailing an exuberant perfect 10 on the final routine of her gymnastics career.

But what if I had actually been in those rooms where it happened? I likely would have felt those same feelings times 10 because, by participating in the energetic exchange that happens between players and audience, my molecules would have received a particular type of vital nourishment: Exquisite elation. Fellowship. The togetherness of paying rapt attention

as we await the big reveal. The vulnerability of shedding tears in a public space where our sniffles can be heard. The camaraderie of expressing shared unabashed enthusiasm.

Way before the existence of movie theatres, live theatre (in all its permutations) developed in every culture and continues to exist in every corner of the globe. Communal live performances – whether in a stadium, a comedy club or around a campfire – are ephemeral, inimitable moments. The alchemy of the particular circumstances and the people present are a one-night-only combination. No re-watching. No rewinding.

As a theatre major myself, this celebration of theatre's long history at Linfield is a reminder for me of how much this art form adds to the texture of our lives way beyond mere entertainment.

– Kristine Oller '93 is a coach, author and host of the podcast *Creating Cashflow*. She lives in Los Angeles, California, and is happily married to her college sweetheart, whom she met in her first acting class at Linfield.

Linfield Theatre faculty and staff through the years

Margaret Ramsey*

Irl S. McSherry

George Varney, 1922*

May Chalfant, 1923-36*

Roy Mahaffey '28, 1929-70*

Minna Ratley, 1938

Robert Boyd, 1941

Virgil Bomemeier, 1942

Nelda (Kurtz) Balch, 1946-54*

Lester Schilling, 1948-67*

Paul Little '53, 1958-70*

Ted Desel '61, 1970-87*

Sharron Hansen, 1970-87, 2003

Dennis Lamberson, 1978-80*

Thomas Gressler, 1980-00*

Tyrone Marshall, 1987-18*

Brenda DeVore Marshall, 1987-present*

Janine Smith, 1987-89

Kate Hawkes, 1989-07

Nancy Carl, 1989-92

Joy Day, 1992-94

MaryKate Lindbeck, 1995-98

Janet Gupton, 2000-present*

Robert Miller, 2000-07

Vicky Ragsdale, 2003-present

Annelie Thurin, 2004-09

Robert Vaughn '97, 2008-present

Alethia Moore, 2009-12

Laurel (Shultz) Peterson '07,
2013-present

Stephanie Mulligan '13, 2015-present

Doug Soderberg '79, 2016-present

Lindsey Mantoan, 2017-present*

Derek Lane, 2018-present*

**Faculty*



“Linfield Theatre saved me. Sure, it helped give me skills and the beginning of a career, and those were invaluable. But more important, it planted deeply within me a conviction that the best work in any field grows from curiosity fed by empathy. Only the marriage between

those two takes us – as artists and as human beings – from the plaintive ‘Why, oh why?’ to the promising ‘What if...’ In saving one student at a time – from arid cynicism, from blind acceptance – Linfield Theatre helps save the world.”

– Patrick Reynolds '92
Chair of Theatre and Dance, Wittenberg University



“As an audience member, I would return to the theatre again and again, and I used the time to study how plays were made. What made a play work for an audience? How they were put together? I strive to bring Linfield’s intimate quality of education to my own students.”

– Elaine Romero '84
Playwright and associate professor in the school of theatre, film and television at the University of Arizona, 2019 Linfield Distinguished Alumna



“Studying theatre at Linfield prepared me for not only a career in the performing arts, but also gave me invaluable skills of creativity, accountability, collaboration, empathy, communication and much, much more. During my years as a theatre major, a running mantra for

the program was that you had to study all facets of theatre so you could be a well-rounded theatre artist and not just focus



Whether produced by student clubs, the faculty or a fully developed theatre degree program, at least two plays per year have been presented under the banner of Linfield Theatre since 1920.

on design, or acting or directing. This gave me the ability to understand and contribute to any theatrical endeavor and got my foot in the door in many organizations, which has allowed me to have a successful career in theatre arts.”

– Matt Loehrke '02
Education director, Missoula Children’s Theatre