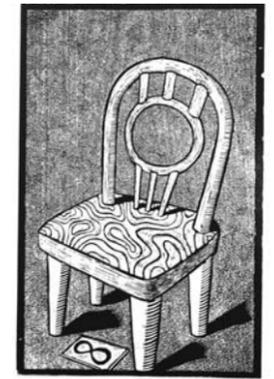


The Arts & Culture



“The great thing about great literature is that it takes us out of the present and simultaneously brings us into it.” —JANE SMILEY, novelist

Theatre: “Bursts” of Theatre

There was a lot of drama on the Vanderbilt University campus each day at high noon during the week of Jan. 22.

Through Sunday, Jan. 28, the Vanderbilt University Department of Theatre staged short plays written by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks at various sites on campus. The performances, which were free, were part of the ambitious 365 Days/365 Plays National Festival. The festival, billed as the largest collaboration in American theatre history, is an attempt to perform all 365 plays written by Parks between November 2002 and November 2003—one a day—in a year-long stretch that began Nov. 13, 2006.

More than 600 theatres around the country are participating in the 365 National Festival. The plays performed at Vanderbilt—ranging from two to five minutes long—were directed by Vanderbilt undergraduates and featured actors from the Vanderbilt community.



“It was kind of crazy logistically because so many people were involved,” says Brielle Bryan, a student coordinator and a senior major in theatre, communications studies and sociology. “We had more than 40 actors and 10 directors at eight different locations.”

Performances took place on the Benson Science Hall steps, the terrace of Wilson Hall, the lawn next to Rand Wall, Fleming Yard, the Library Lawn, Rand Terrace, and in front of Neely Auditorium.

“We did them so quickly all over campus; we wanted them to be little bursts of theatre that people would see and maybe stop for,” says Bryan. “It was always interesting to see what kind of crowd we’d get. We averaged about 15 to 20 [during the week]. Sunday we performed all 10 plays outdoors when it was bitterly cold, but there was a crowd of about 50 or 60 toughing it out.”

Parks wrote the extremely short plays—some with titles like *The Arrival of the End*, *Inaction in Action*, and *Barefoot and Pregnant in the Park*—as “a daily meditation, a prayer, celebrating the rich and strange process of an artistic life,” according to the 365Days/365 Plays Web site.

“Four other theatres around the country participated the same week we did,” says Bryan. “As far as I know, there hasn’t been anything like this before. When [Associate Professor and Co-director of Vanderbilt University Theatre] Terry Hallquist found out about it, she jumped on the opportunity before anyone else even knew what it was.”

For more information about the 365 National Festival, go to www.365days365plays.com.

—Jim Patterson and Bonnie Arant Ertelt

Visual Art: The Jackleg Testament

The Jackleg Testament, an animated, operatic film in which Kentucky native Jay Bolotin



reinterprets the book of Genesis, came to Vanderbilt in late winter to land several places on campus. The film screened at Sarratt Cinema on Feb. 22 and moved to the Fine Arts Gallery on Feb. 23 to be shown concurrently with an exhibit of the same name, while more of Bolotin’s work was shown at Sarratt Gallery. Both exhibits and the film ran through the end of March.

Perhaps the first woodcut motion picture in the history of filmmaking, the artist used his prints as source material and then employed digital

photography and motion picture software to add textures, atmospheric effects, sound and movement. Sarratt Gallery exhibited two portfolios of Bolotin’s woodcuts that inspired *The Jackleg Testament*, while the Fine Arts Gallery exhibited the final prints he used to create the images in the film. Bolotin, a noted singer/songwriter, also composed the score and libretto for the film, a fusion of modern

classical and folk music sung by British tenor Nigel Robson and American pop singer Karin Bergquist of the band Over the Rhine.

—Joseph Mella

Music: A Chinese New Year

They flew thousands of miles and maintained an exhausting schedule. Once, they had to be on the bus at 3 a.m. to make it to their next performance. They played a magnificent 10,000-seat concert hall, as well as other venues that were less than magnificent. Their families had to do without them over the winter holidays. Occasionally, they had a day off to take in the sights.

In short, the Vanderbilt Orchestra ended 2006 and began 2007 as professional traveling musicians. They had a gig that many musicians twice their age never experience: touring China.

“It was a wonderful trip for a number of reasons,” says Robin Fountain, professor of conducting at Vanderbilt’s Blair School of Music and director of the Vanderbilt Orchestra. “The students embraced it to the fullest possible degree.”

The opportunity for the tour came about through Fountain and his previous two tours of China leading the Russian Tomsk Siberian Orchestra. Officials with the Chinese governmental cultural offices contacted him for a third tour, and this time talk turned to bringing an ensemble from Vanderbilt.



Mark Wait, dean of the Blair School, was consulted and agreed to help with funding. “This performance tour is part of a rapidly growing international program at the Blair School of Music,” Wait says. “We are committed to a focus on the global musical experience as an essential element of a full university-level education.”

The final orchestra numbered 70, including several alumni. After a very short December break, they convened Dec. 23 to rehearse, then left for China on Christmas Eve.

“We took 11 flights in 13 days,” Fountain says. “We played in six cities, and despite the incredible amount of time

traveling and the stress associated with that, the orchestra played very well. The music highlight was a concert in Shanghai. The concert hall was absolutely superb and the acoustics magnificent.”

The orchestra played a mixed program incorporating American and Chinese music, finishing with a generous dose of Johann Strauss.

Typical of any music tour, there also were venues Fountain recalls as “dubious.” He’s proud that the students gave their best in situations where they were cold or dealing with poor acoustics.

Some time was spent seeing sights such as the Great Wall of China and meeting some local people.

“We found that anyone who could speak English was dying to speak with us,” Fountain says. “Some of the Blair students found some students in Hohhot to play basketball with. They were showing them around their university in Hohhot and exchanging e-mail addresses. It was lovely.”

Students got a true taste of the musician’s life on the China tour, Fountain says. “It’s at once a very exciting life and one that really takes it out of you. You can’t do it all the time, but you can do it in bursts. If you have the opportunity, you should seize it, because it’s a wonderful life.”

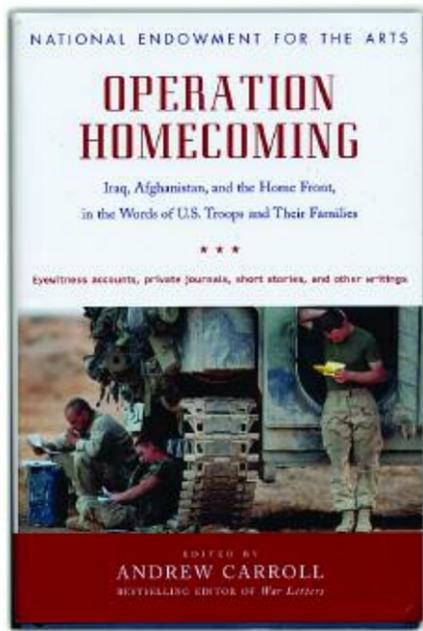
—Jim Patterson

Books and Writers

Operation Homecoming

A mother recounting her stages of grief after her only child is killed by Iraqi insurgents. A staff sergeant’s letter to her unborn baby about what it will mean to grow up with a single military mom. A letter home by a captain describing the men and women who will accompany him on missions into Iraq.

These are but three of the 100 or so personal narratives, journal entries, short stories and other writings contained in *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*, published in late 2006 by the National Endowment for the Arts through Random House and edited by Andrew Carroll, editor of *War Letters*. Behind the project is Jon Parrish Peede, BS’91, who was chosen to direct *Operation Homecoming* in 2003, shortly after coming on board as counselor to NEA Chairman Dana Gioia.



“For years at Mercer University Press, I edited Civil War books, so I had a grounding in the literature of war,” says Peede, whose undergraduate major at Vanderbilt was English. He holds a master’s degree in Southern studies from the University of Mississippi.

“I run a lot of small projects for the [NEA] chairman, and this was going to be another small project. Instead, it

consumed the next four years of my life.”

What was originally planned as 10 writing workshops on five bases in an effort to help troops and their families express their war-time experiences turned into 50 workshops with 34 writers—including Tom Clancy, Bobbie Ann Mason, Jeff Shaara, Barry Hannah and Tobias Wolff—

about 15,000 pages of writing, two documentaries, plays, and a 34-city book tour. Peede was involved with all aspects, attending 46 of the 50 workshops and going to 25 bases in five countries and the Persian Gulf.

The resulting book is, as NEA Chairman Gioia states in his introduction, “not about politics, but about particulars.” He says, “The volume comprises a chorus of one hundred

voices heard as much in counterpoint as in harmony.”

“It was never [about] the government saying, ‘Here’s the voice of the war,’” says Peede. “That’s why it was important that Andy [Carroll] edit it and not me, because we didn’t want a government employee selecting content.” Carroll, who also taught some of the workshops, and 19 other workshop leaders read the submitted material, then met as a panel put together by Peede to decide which submissions to include.

The volume encompasses all kinds of writing, including letters and e-mails. One purpose of the project was to preserve more ephemeral writing that might otherwise have been lost, while the writing workshops were meant to encourage the troops and give them the mechanics to take what they had experienced and put it on paper. Peede believes two things in particular will make this war’s literature different from that of the past.

“We’ve moved in the last century and a half from Sher-

man’s and Grant’s memoirs—basically what the generals thought the war was—to what the grunt in the field is experiencing. But the new aspect is instantaneous communications, and when you’re in a longer war, such as we are now, those instantaneous communications enter the public dialogue and will, if there is a sufficient number of them, shape the public dialogue.

“That’s new on two levels—the idea that the cumulative effect of the experiences of the enlisted could have weight and that it could happen while the war is going on.”

Peede’s time with the troops over the past four years has affected him greatly.

“When you’re trying to do something for people at war, no matter how much what you’re doing consumes your life, you’re never doing enough. It’s your nights and weekends, but it’s never enough when you think of what they’re going through.”

—Bonnie Arant Ertelt

Before Aaron

Captain Teague and Gunny Sergeant Velasquez brought Aaron’s things to me on June 30, 2004. ... on bent knee, [they] took out a smaller box from within the larger, and handed over to me Aaron’s watch, the one removed from his body at the time of death—it is to these men that I owe so much. ...

I began to wear Aaron’s watch, which was still on Baghdad time. His alarm would go off at 3:28:24. Then again at 3:33:20. Aaron was always, “Give me five more minutes, Mom”

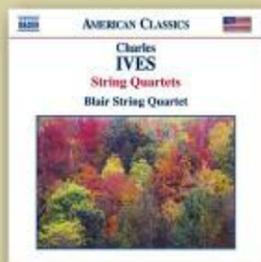
At times, I go back in my head before there was an Aaron. I’ll listen to music from the sixties or seventies. I’ll try to recall that I had a life before Aaron. But in the end, this does nothing.

Words like Forever and Eternity really mean something to me now. Before, when I would read these words, I wouldn’t really concentrate on their true definition, on their real essence. I guess I thought they were for later. Now, I have a real need, a down to the white sand of my bones aching need, to know that forever and eternity started long before my time, way before Aaron, before the Marines came to my home That Day, and then later, brought me his watch. Every day there are gifts. And every day, things are taken away.

Aaron’s watch stopped somewhere between late afternoon on the twenty-eighth of November and noon on the thirtieth. I learned that when the battery goes dead on a digital watch—it’s gone. Blank. Not even a zero. The watch now rests in an Americana chest in his bedroom.

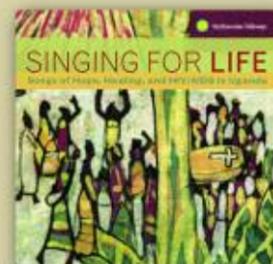
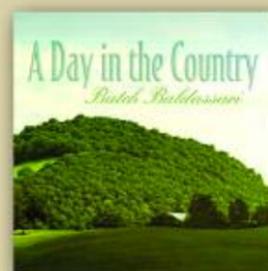
—This excerpt of “Timeless,” a personal narrative by Christy De’on Miller, from the book *Operation Homecoming*, edited by Andrew Carroll, is reprinted by arrangement with The Random House Publishing Group.

Recent Releases by the Blair Faculty



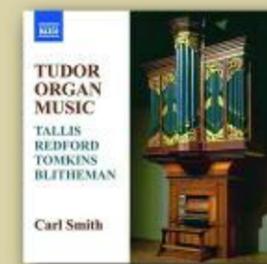
IVES: String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 (Naxos) by the Blair String Quartet, featuring Chris Teal, Connie Heard, John Kochanowski and Felix Wang with notes by Jim Lovensheimer, assistant professor of musicology

A Day in the Country (Soundart Recordings) by Butch Baldassari, adjunct associate professor of mandolin, a collection of old-time/bluegrass and original tunes, with Nashville pickers



Singing for Life: Songs of Hope, Healing and HIV/AIDS in Uganda (Smithsonian Folkways) compiled by Greg Barz, associate professor of ethnomusicology

In Amber Shadows: Electro-acoustic Music (Albany Records) by Stan Link, assistant professor of the philosophy and analysis of music, featuring acoustic and computer music written by Link



Tudor Organ Music (Naxos) by Carl Smith, senior lecturer in music composition and theory, featuring Tudor-era church music, including works by John Redford, Thomas Tallis and Thomas Tomkins

Cello Prayers by Julie Tanner, adjunct artist teacher of cello, a collection of her solo arrangements of hymns along with works by Bach, Rachmaninoff, Vaughn Williams and Nashville songwriter Jamie Huling

