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**ALUMNI NEWS**

**Stuart Carden** (01) Associate Artistic Director of City Theatre Company in Pittsburgh will direct *Mary’s Wedding* for City Theatre playing March 12–April 5.

**Pablo Schreiber** (00) named one of America’s Foremost Young Stage Actors by the New York Times for his work in *Desire Under the Elms* at the Goodman Theatre.

**Matthew Russell** (05) was Art Director for the 58th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards.

**Nikki Delhomme** (06) was nominated for a Jeff Award celebrating Excellence in Chicago for her costume design of *La Cage Aux Folles* at Theatre at the Center.

**Patina Miller** (06) will star in the London premiere of *Sister Act* produced by Whoopi Goldberg and Stage Entertainment.

**Alison Popivchak** (01) was the Production Stage Manager for Steelers Style 08 this year in Pittsburgh.

(Alumni highlights continued on page 4 & 5)

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**Playground 2009**: A Festival of Independent Student Work soared this year with sixty-two original shows performed over the course of three days from Thursday, January 29th through midnight on Saturday the 31st. (See story on page 3)

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**FACULTY NEWS**

**MARIANNE WEEMS**

by Crosby Selander

This academic year brings a new face to the School of Drama as internationally acclaimed director, Marianne Weems, steps into her role as Head of Graduate Directing. She comes to Carnegie Mellon University from New York City, where she co-founded *The Builder’s Association* and has served as Artistic Director for the company since its inception in 1994. “The Builder’s Association is a New York-based performance and media company that creates original productions based on stories drawn from contemporary life,” as their website states. Stage performance becomes blended with new technologies utilizing sound, architecture, and video to create new story telling experiences. Weems has been the artistic director for shows such as *Jump Cut*, *Jet Lag*, and their newest show: *Continuous City* currently on tour.

While heading the Graduate Directing program at CMU, Weems will continue to lead *The Builder’s Association*.

(Continued on page 2)
Recently graduate screenwriting student, Crosby Selander, sat down with Marianne to gain some insights into her artistic vision, her work, and her plans for CMU’s directing programs.

CS: Tell me about The Builder’s Association.

Weems: The Builder’s Association tells contemporary stories about how human beings are impacted by modern forces all through the lens of modern technology. We incorporate architecture, music, and sound, focusing on making the invisible visible – unearthing the virtual world that exists within this world and making ties between the two. Part of what we do as a company is create theater for an international audience by touching on these modern issues that affect us all – a message that all can understand and relate to.

CS: What do you think about technology and its role in theater?

Weems: Technology is used as a critical frame and at The Builder’s Association, we’re examining what its impact is on a social and political scale by both celebrating and critiquing it. Technology expands our ideas of time and space, but with it come new stresses. For example, Jet Lag is based on a true story about a woman who died of jet lag. The idea of a human being pushing themselves to such extremes by using modern technology – it exemplifies a lot of the ideas we are all dealing with.

CS: How does your work at the Builder’s Association differ from other high-tech performances?

Weems: A lot of multimedia work that’s done now is orthodox – technology for the sake of using technology. You have to make the technology mean something, seeking out the big ideas hiding behind it.

CS: Tell me about your latest production Continuous City and the use of an online social network to help create the show.

Weems: Continuous City explores how technology tethers us all together. The story focuses around a little girl whose father roams the world and the two are kept in contact via technology. How much children can relate and how identity is defined in the 21st century are two of the major questions raised in the piece. It all comes back to identity – we are all bound up in our identity. As far as the chorus of people created by an online social network, The Builders Association partnered with Yahoo! – we asked people to talk about their transnational experience. Users submitted videos that were then used in the production as a virtual chorus of voices that helped to progress the story.

CS: How do you start the directing process?

Weems: As a director, I start with a strong vision of an idea – a seed that fascinates me and seek out the inspiration in that vision by bringing together all of the materials available to me. After that original seed is planted, that’s when the collaboration starts and you bring everyone in to a room together at the beginning of the rehearsal process so that the design and the writing become integrated.

CS: What changes to the program and CMU’s School of Drama do you plan to make?

Weems: The main directive is to open doors, encourage more of an inter-disciplinary program and really use the resources available from other parts of campus. There are people at CS [Computer Science] eager to engage with Drama – I want to find a way to create a dialogue. It’s important to incorporate architecture, music and other departments throughout the University and encourage a truly collaborative process. I hope to make cross-disciplinary classes – co-teaching a class with unexpected people. Also, I want to update the equipment made available to students in the Wells Studio including projectors, cameras, and computers - enough to create a sophisticated place where students can experiment with new technologies and their role in theater. CMU graduates will also be able to create New York connections through my work at The Builder’s Association.

CS: How do you feel about starting at CMU?

Weems: I’m very excited to get started. I’ve got lots of ideas and already I feel like I’ve made strong relationships with the department as well as other parts of CMU.
NEW HEAD OF SCHOOL, PETER COOKE PhD OAM

By Dean Poynor

“I think the primary goal of theatre school is to open imaginative windows,” said Peter Cooke, the new Head of the Carnegie Mellon School of Drama. I had the chance to speak with Cooke on a recent weekday morning as sunlight streamed through the windows of his new office. Cooke comes to Carnegie Mellon from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney, Australia, where he was Deputy Director and Head of Design.

“I’m naturally drawn to interesting people.” Cooke said. “I think that’s when bright sparks emerge. And you can miss each other by one year, or one class, so I see it as the faculty’s job to make sure that talent connects with talent.”

Through careful assessment, and genuine interest, Cooke hopes to make connections between students that will last for years to come. This concept of “creative teams” was a cornerstone of Cooke’s philosophy at NIDA, and one that fits well with the School’s mission. Cooke was instrumental in forming many of these teams, including paring international director and visionary Baz Luhrmann with his wife, designer and producer Catharine Martin. Cooke concludes, “The school period is a time when you can make those purposeful connections, and find other courageous arts thinkers.”

(Continued on page 6)

PLAYGROUND 2009 REVIEW

By Crosby Selander

With sixty submissions in its first year, Playground grew to over one hundred and five submissions this past November, making Playground 2009 the biggest yet, with thirty two hours of live theater and sixty-two original performances. The festival took place over three unforgettable days, beginning January 29th and ending in the wee hours of the morning on February 1st.

One of the highlights of Playground this year were the light shows in the lobby of the Purnell Center for the Arts. Between performances, new light shows with music would inspire random fits of dancing and jubilee. Freshman actor and Playground participant Corey Cott thought that, “There was an energy throughout the building –– supporting –– happy –– exciting. You just didn’t want to leave.”

Playground 2009 had representation from every discipline, undergraduates and graduates alike. Crystal Lee, a second year lighting designer had this to say, “There was way more involvement from everyone, the grads included –– a lot more cross emphasis work going on this year. We took Playground further than it’s ever been.”

Marque Franklin-Williams, a second year dramatic writing graduate student, whose half-hour Playground musical Neon City drew rave reviews, believed the experience to be extremely valuable. “As someone who has never had the opportunity to produce something in the theater –– Playground gave me an incredible opportunity to learn first-hand how to collaborate. The process of working with a composer, actors, and a director in a production setting, changed the way I approach theatre.”

Playground 2009 brought the community together in a shared joy for creation and a love for innovative and new theater. Pieces ranged from one-acts, music events, and one-women shows, to costumes made out of fruit, and comedic improv performances plus much, much, more –– in fact to many spectacular works to mention. One can only look forward in anticipation for what’s in store for Playground 2010.
ALUMNI NEWS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2008

Here is just a small sampling of recent work done by our alumni all over the country. This is not a comprehensive list. Help us keep Alumni news up to date by emailing your recent work to Anya Martin, External Relations Officer at the School of Drama, at aamartin@andrew.cmu.edu.

Also, To subscribe to this e-newsletter please email Anya Martin at aamartin@andrew.cmu.edu.

Actors

Bob Lenzi (08) and Charlie Brady (01) perform in South Pacific on Broadway
Zach Quinto (99), Demetrius Gross (05) star in Heroes on NBC
Andrew Kober (06), Patina Miller (06), Tommar Wilson (99) performed in Hair on Broadway.
Katy Mixon (’03) acts in the films Four Christmases and to-be-released films State of Play and All About Steve
Jeff Omura (07), Anthony Carrigan (06), Audra Blaser (04), J.D. Goldblatt (04) all performed recently at the New York Public Theatre
Van Hansis (04) received his second Daytime Emmy nomination for Luke on As the World Turns and performed in Die Mommy Die and Roller Derby off Broadway.
Rhys Coiro (01) acts with esteemed alum Cherry Jones in 24 and on Entourage
Gaius Charles (05) appears in Friday Night Lights on NBC
Aaron Staton (04) can be seen on Mad Men on AMC

Directors

Renee Blinkwolt (04) was the General Manager, Architecting, for the TEAM (at PS 122) and the General Manager, Perfect Harmony (Commercial Off Broadway) and Associate Producer, Brooklyn at Eye Level.
Evan Cummings (06) - Recently directed 'Love Letters" for Epiphany Theater Company to critical acclaim.
Mathew Gardiner (05) — resident Assistant Director at Signature Theatre in Wash. DC., Choreographer/co-director Reefer Madness at Studio Theatre, DC.
Russell Kaplan (01) is currently the Artistic Director for New Sounds theatre. Worked on development of new plays with Assembly Productions, Milk Can theatre, Soho Rep, Arena Stage, The workshop Theatre CO. and others.
Anya Martin (03) In 2008 Wrote and directed Teatro Latino de Pittsburgh with the Unseam’l’d Shakespeare Company, Wrote for 2008 Pittsburgh International Festival of Firsts, directed for the Young Playwright’s Festival at City Theatre.
Zach Morris (00) Recipient of the 2008 New York Dance and Performance (Bessie) Awards for his come Third Rail’s latest work of Vanishing Point.
Michael Patranek (05) is currently resident director of Tip My Cup Productions.. Recently directed The Jazz Messenger for the New York Fringe Festival.
Jose Zayas (00) was featured in the New York Times for directing Caridad Sviich’s new adaptation of The House of the Spirits.

Designers

Jennifer Caprio (05) Costume Designer for The 25th Annual Putnam Spelling Bee
Kathleen Dobbins (05) Assistant Lighting Designer to Richard Pilbrow for A Tale of Two Cities and Assistant Lighting Designer to Ken Posner, Brian MacDevitt and Natasha Katz on The Coast of Utopia.
Becky Frey (05) was a Costume Production Assistant for the Conan Obien Show
Hannah Johnson (07) Costume Production Assistant Mad Men
Noah Mitz (05) was the Assistant Lighting Designer 2005 and 2006 Tony Awards
Alana Schmidt (04) was an Art Director 2007 Grammy Awards
Sidney Shannon (00), Designed the Costumes for various shows in 2008: Honor Prospect Theater Company, Sherlock:Solo Resonance Ensemble, The Blue Flower Prospect Theater Company
Heather Wells (05) worked on Puppet and Mask construction for Heart of the Beast at Theatre de la Jeune Lune.
Production Technology and Management

Adrienne Wells (05) works for The Lighting Design Group in New York as a Production Coordinator
Chris Kennedy (02) is an Associate Technical Director at the La Jolla Playhouse
Sarah Deutsch (02) Stage Managed for the American Conservatory Theatre
Rebecca Braillie (05) is a Production Manager for A Noise Within in Los Angeles
Sylvia Fellin (07) works as a Floor Manager for the Goodman Theatre in Chicago
Chuck Andres (01) is a Production Manager for The Kennedy Center
Rachel Hospodar (02) is a Technical Director for Magic Theatre, San Francisco
Kristen Hwang (08) works as a Production Associate for CBS News in New York
Mike Goglia (01) is a Project Manager for The Scenic Route in Los Angeles

Dramatic Writing

James Armstrong (99) has two new plays coming out in published form Dickens Condensed by Playscripts Inc. and The Mysteries of the Castle of the Monk of Falconara will be included in the anthology “The Best American Short Plays: 2005-2006” published by Applause.
James Sandlin Ashby’s (08) Screenplay Boltzmann’s Demon was the winner of the 2007 Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Fellowship ($25,000). He also won the 2008 Family Friendly Programming Forum Award ($4,000).
France-Luce Benson’s (08) Full length play Fati’s Last Dance was selected for the Ignition Festival by Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago, and was a finalist for the Theodore Ward Prize from Columbia College, and received Honorable Mention for the 2008 Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award from the Kennedy Center.
Chris Dimond’s (07) Full length musical Dani Girl (Book and Lyrics) won the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival 2008 Musical Theatre Award, and had workshop readings at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, The Kennedy Center New Visions/New Voices Festival in Washington, DC, and Millikin University in Decatur, IL, and readings at CAP-21, New York, and the ASCAP/Disney Musical Theater Workshop.
Carol Godart’s (08) Full length play Thread had a reading in the 2007 Summer New Play Festival by the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts.
Kourtney Kang (00) is the Supervising Producer of “How I Met Your Mother” (CBS Monday nights 8:30 – now in its fourth season). Kang also has a screenplay in development with Pam Brady (South Park, Team America, Hamlet 2) attached to direct.
Andrea Lepcio (00) – Lepcio’s full-length play, Looking for the Pony which is set for it’s upcoming world premiere Jan. 2009 at the Vital Theatre in New York City and the Synchronicity Performance Group in Atlanta, Feb. 2009.
Tara Meddaugh’s (04) Full length play Free Space was the winner of the New Works for Young Women [Actors] Award from University of Tulsa, and is scheduled to be produced by Frontier Theatre in Valdez, and was selected for the 2006 Last Frontier Theatre Conference in Alaska.
James McManus (06) is the winner of the 2006 Princess Grace Award in Playwriting, and resident at New Dramatists, 2006-2007. His full length play Cherry Smoke was published by Samuel French, and produced by Clockwork Theatre Company in New York, Glass Umbrella Theatre in Sydney, Australian, the 2007 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.
Kathryn O’Sullivan’s (98) short film Dracula’s Mother was a Heritage Film Festival selection and won Best Non-Student Award at the Colony Film Festival.

Dramaturgy

Kate Goldstein (11) — Dramaturgy Intern, InterAct Theatre, Philadelphia summer 2009.
Lavina Jadhwani (05/MAM 06) recent awards include the Dramaturgy prize from Kennedy Center/ American College Theatre Federation (ACTF) for her work on CMU’s Arcadia, and receiving a LMDA Dramaturgy Residency. She acted as the Assistant Artistic Director for Comedy of Errors at the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre.
Alan Katz (08) is getting a M.A. in Theatre History, Criticism, and Dramaturgy at Catholic University.
Sasha Ludwig-Siegel (07) was an Intern: Literary Management at the La Jolla Playhouse in 2007.
RECENT SCHOOL OF DRAMA NEWS

The concept of creative teams also underlies Cooke’s emphasis on collaboration across disciplines. “I’m a driven person, I believe,” Cooke said. “I have broad interests, from theatre to music to painting. I’m not crazy about the silo mentality.” Cooke noted that in the professional world, there is a tendency to fall into prescribed roles, and that territorial conflicts may arise when someone crosses one of those established boundaries. “Whereas in a theatre school,” Cooke continued, “the roles should be flexible. I find that input can come from anywhere.” This flexibility not only opens up new vistas for an artist, but also encourages positive professional relationships. This philosophy can be seen nearly every day at the School of Drama. The capstone Theatre Lab course for senior actors and directors, gives them a chance to work with graduate directors and playwrights on collaborative projects throughout the semester.

Cooke’s international experience will also help to open students’ minds. Having worked and taught around the world, (including the Shanghai Theatre Academy, the National School of Drama in New Delhi, Yale University, and many others) Cooke hopes to bring in guest artists to challenge and expand their definition of theatre. “Whereas Americans may focus strictly on New York or LA, or the regional theatre scene, Australians have been more willing to travel abroad and then bring ideas back home,” Cooke said. This international focus will strengthen the School’s reputation, as well as provide opportunities for learning and inspiration for years to come.

Though the walls in his new office are still completely bare, it was clear that Cooke had already been thinking seriously about his new position. And even in the midst of the current economic environment, Cooke was undeterred by concerns about the future of the art. “Theatre will survive,” he said. “It’s managed to hang in there for the past 2500 years. Human beings live on conflict and drama — people love that high wire moment — and there’s no limit in sight to that.” With his collaborative focus, and international vision, Cooke hopes to lead the School of Drama into a new era, producing the arts leaders of tomorrow.

### Spring Events

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<td>February</td>
<td>6-28 MFA New Works Graduate Dramatic Writing thesis plays</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>20-28 THE LONDON CUCKOLDS Directed by Don Wadsworth</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>25-27 SOMEONE WHO’LL WATCH OVER ME Directed by Jeremy Ungar</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>9-10 New York Showcase Performance for Alumni March 9th at 12 Noon</td>
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<td>Snapple Theatre 1627 Broadway at W. 50th</td>
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<td>March-April</td>
<td>International Artist in Residence, Robyn Archer residency for directing Tough Nut Cabaret</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>23-27 WQED TV Projects</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>1-3 THE FATHER Directed by Phillip Krutchten</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>2 Mike Reiss, Producer of The Simpsons will visit to speak about art and social commentary</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>3-4 Alum Patrick Wilson (95) visiting SOD. Recent work includes feature films The Watchmen and Lakeview Terrace, and All My Sons, on Broadway</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>16-25 BITE OF BRECHT FESTIVAL &amp; TOUGH NUT CABARET Directed by Robyn Archer and Barbara Mackenzie-Wood</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>22-25 THE ILLUSION Directed by Allegra Libonati</td>
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<td>26 Awards Ceremony</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>4-5 Los Angeles Showcase Visit <a href="http://www.cmushowcase.com">www.cmushowcase.com</a></td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>18-22 New York: Design, Directing, PTM, And Dramaturgy Showcase</td>
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