I was recently at work on an annual report, one necessary to the ongoing accreditation of MBC’s Shakespeare and Performance program. Measures. Metrics. Outcomes. Outputs. How many credits did we generate, how many diplomas issued? That sort of thing. While the accreditation process is of vital import to the maintenance of academic integrity, it is nevertheless difficult to account — in the strictly mathematical sense of “account” — for our impact; how we, in layman’s terms, would measure success. I do it like this:

- Dawn Tucker ’09: director of education and an actor at Southwest Shakespeare Company in Mesa, AZ
- Brett Sullivan Santry ’11: head of fine arts at Stuart Hall School in Staunton, VA
- Cassie Ash ’08: pursuing her PhD in English at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon, England
- Jason Narvy ’05: assistant professor of theatre at Concordia University in Chicago
- Rick Blunt ’06: professional actor performing on stages throughout the United States as a member of American Shakespeare Center’s touring company
- Andrew Blasenak ’08 and Chelsea Phillips ’09: pursuing PhDs at Ohio State University
- Justin Schneider ’10: pursuing his PhD at American University after serving as artistic fellow at Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, DC
- Casey Caldwell ’11 and Christine Schmidle ’10: served as interns during the past year at Shakespeare’s Globe in London
- Katherine Mayberry ’07: executive director for Pigeon Creek Shakespeare Company

The only thing wrong with this list is its brevity, since I could fill this entire issue of Folio with a list of accomplished graduates who have come through this program during its 10 years. Our programmatic vision is not merely to enfranchise each student’s curiosity, but also to prepare them as they move on either into the workforce or toward further study.

With a decade behind us, graduates of our program now dot the globe — acting, educating, and enhancing the world of Shakespeare and Performance. That’s the best validation of this program; the immeasurable “measurable” that I would like to report to the accreditation board. In fact, one of the great pleasures of the recent months was fielding a phone call from one alumna asking my opinion of a more recent graduate she was thinking of hiring. As our numbers grow, I have no doubt that those phone calls will become a regular, pleasurable feature of my job. Make my phone ring.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Alumnae Offer Glimpse of Post-Grad Life

By Linden Kueck

What alumnae like Carie Donnelson appreciate about the Shakespeare and Performance (SAP) program at Mary Baldwin College is the rich foundation it provides for building a life in the theatre and beyond.

“Much of what I’ve been able to do in my life is a result of my broad knowledge of Shakespeare,” reflected Donnelson, associate education director at Theatre

(continued on p 8)

 clockwise from top left: SAP alums Donnelson, Grumelot, Ayers, and Riffe.
By Katy Mulvaney

During the opening keynote speech of the 2011 Blackfriars Conference, Stephen Booth challenged his audience to imagine Shakespeare as Richard III addressing his audiences as Lady Anne. Booth, professor emeritus of English literature at University of California at Berkeley, presented numerous examples in which Shakespeare seems to be crowing, “Was ever audience in this humor wooed? Was ever audience in this humor won?”

As a specialist in Renaissance and early modern English literature, Booth relentlessly pointed out instances in which audiences accept a series of plots and characterizations that fly in the face of logic. Prospero is viewed as a kindly and generous man, despite his consistently cruel and frustrating behavior throughout the play. We do not feel cheated that Romeo and Juliet is not at all the play promised by the Prologue. No one is expected to question Hermione’s chastity when her pregnancy dates almost precisely to Polixenes’ arrival in Sicilia. And — in a speech Booth described as one that “seems to be there just to see if the play can get away with it” — The Winter’s Tale character Autolycus explains that nothing was discovered on the ship because everybody was seasick the entire time.

Booth also noted that many of Shakespeare’s plays do not succeed in this vein, such as Richard III’s attempt to pull off a feat of persuasion with Queen Elizabeth.

My own reaction to Booth’s examples was a sheepishness that I had been manipulated skillfully by a master who seems to be seducing my senses just to see if he can win me over. I was left with this burning question: What is it that makes me willingly set aside the nagging little details to let Shakespeare “mess” with me?
CONFERENCE KEYNOTE: ‘Such Place, Such Men, Such Language and Such Ware’
By Clara Giebel

Speaking with utter authority and winsome delight, Tiffany Stern presented the historical context of London fairs and applied that knowledge to her audience’s understanding of Shakespeare’s plays. Stern demonstrated that, contrary to common belief, the fairs were neither politically subversive nor challenging to the social hierarchy, but, rather, highly sanctioned — opened by the city of London and sponsored by the nobility. Unlike the theatre, the fairs had their own legal structure, and when crimes were committed at the fair, offenders were tried and punished within the confines of the fair.

Theaters were like fairs in many respects. For example, in both locations one could purchase refreshment and printed texts, and a person could make any number of financial transactions alongside the entertainment. Stern also focused on the various types of entertainment common to fairs, such as well-educated monkeys, puppet shows, dancing horses, and a vanishing banquet, all of which Shakespeare mentions in his plays. Puppets, for instance, performed with an “interpreter” who pointed to each of the puppets in turn and spoke for them. Knowing this gives a reader or viewer context for Hamlet’s lines, “I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.”

The final piece of Stern’s lecture focused on puppet theatre and the ways in which puppets adapted theatrical plots, jokes and characters. Because the Master of the Revels licensed not puppet plays but puppeteers, plays that had been banned from theaters could still be performed by puppets, and many plays performed in the theaters were also performed in puppet booths. Printed advertisements boasted of puppet Tamburlaine or puppet Caesar. Other advertisements mention characters living a rich afterlife in other puppet story lines, such as Andrew Aguecheek fighting in the Persian Wars.

Stern’s expert introduction to the intriguing subject of mutual influence between Shakespearean drama and London fairs opened the way for other scholars to further explore the field.

CONFERENCE KEYNOTE: ‘Acting Shakespeare’s Wordcraft’
By Katy Mulvaney

The Blackfriars Conference delights in focusing on the intersection of scholarship and theatrical performance, but rarely does an academic keynote presentation bring actors to the front lines. Scott Kaiser, Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s director of verse and text, put actors Doreen Bechtol and Dan Kennedy through their paces, to show how he helps actors demonstrate the rhetorical figures in a text.

The first rhetorical strategy explored was that of a “speech measure” or “a unit of sense that contains one inhalation, one operative word, one focal point, one image, one action, and one moment of human behavior.” Kaiser suggested breaking speech measures in a manner that illuminates the way characters structure their arguments. These examples worked particularly well with lists. Kaiser also demonstrated the power of focusing on images, operative words, focal point shifts, and subtext.

As Kaiser worked through his examples, Bechtol and Kennedy found a number of surprising readings of familiar lines, revealing the power of rhetorical figures to awaken an actor’s imagination and the ability of actors to turn scholarly observations into powerful performative tools.

CONFERENCE KEYNOTE: ‘Climbing Shakespeare’s Ladder and Other Sound Patterns’
By Casey Caldwell

George T. Wright is one of the scholars I have to thank for one of my “game-changing” experiences in working with verse. His Shakespeare’s Metrical Art, a finely balanced work of enrap-tured and challenging prose on the development of Shakespeare’s verse, opens with this quote from William Carlos Williams: “When Shakespeare and M arlowe and B en Jonson sat around the M ermaid Tavern and talked like we are doing, iambo pentameter was wonderfully new and timely.” That brief line condenses the kernel of passionate insight that drives Wright’s entire book, and I have repeated it often when working with students and actors.

During his conference address, Wright focused on discussing — then performing — his concept of the ladder in Shakespeare’s play texts. To Wright, the ladder refers to rising and lowering one’s voice pitch as an actor moves through a Shakespearean speech. Wright suggested actors today may have moved away from this technique due to its associations with an outdated acting style. Wright graced the audience by performing, from memory, several speeches where this kind of formal attention to pitch can help add a tonal backbone. He also showed how cues internal to the text can help indicate where the ladder technique can be employed.

Throughout the keynote, Wright shared several anecdotes from his capacious memory about great actors from the past. The keynote ended on a point most apt, when American Shakespeare Center actor James Keegan — whom Wright had just seen as Prospero — confessed that he shied away from using the ladder for exactly the reasons Wright outlined. Wright demonstrated his preternatural ear by pointing out the exact line in a speech where Keegan had enacted a shift in pitch during the previous evening’s performance.
Henry IV, Part I: A Fun Night with a Fat Man and Friends

By Brian Falbo

Katy Mulvaney’s MFA production of Shakespeare’s Henry IV, Part I (nicknamed “Henry IV with Four”) provided a strong start for the fall semester’s directing-focused MFA projects. Undertaking a significant challenge, Mulvaney not only chose a well-known and beloved play but also chose to reduce the 34-odd characters in its cast list down to just four actors.

What resulted was a style of theatre referred to by MFA student Jeff Chips as “x-treme casting” in which the number of actors required for scenes purposefully exceeds the number of cast actors. From the ashes of more traditional casting, Mulvaney pulled off an energetic, creative, funny, and often surprising production that drew heavily on its actors’ abilities to completely change characters on a dime, on stage, while making the audience not only believe them, but relish the transitions. Clara Giebel’s violin playing provided a warm, welcoming accompaniment to the play, helping the four actors begin this experimental show on a friendly, familiar note. After a short introduction to the radical casting and staging conventions, with costume-demonstrations narrated by stage manager Ana Feliciano Chico, actors Rin Barton, Bobby Byers, Maria Hart, and Amanda Noel Allen came out, guns blazing. Mulvaney put all actors in black, with added accents to distinguish characters. For example, Byers moved between a stuffed doublet and a cape to signify his presence as either Falstaff or King Henry IV, while Allen utilized a blue vest, glasses, and a red cummerbund to transition between Hal, Worcester, and Lady Percy, respectively.

Of course, the character transitions entailed more than costume changes: Allen’s bold physical, vocal, and psychological choices made the transition between Hal and Worcester immediately apparent. Barton’s Hotspur was light on his feet, enthusiastic, and self-blindingly full of charismatic honor, while her Points exuded an accustomed malvolence and relaxed but defensive posture. Byers’ Falstaff sported a rotund personality to match his doublet, but when he entered as a carrier in the stable scene, he was transformed to a wiry, wry, and easily amused commoner. The heaviest doubling fell on Hart’s slate of 11 characters ranging from Mistress Quickly to Glendower, but her variety and energy as an actor easily differentiated her work.

Mulvaney’s doubling scheme went beyond mere functionality. Using a gender-blindness that only helped the production, her strategic doubling revealed many poignant parallels. For example, when Allen, playing Lady Percy, pleaded with Barton’s Hotspur to open his mind to her, the contrast in the relationship between Hal and Poins was palpable. Mulvaney, her cast, and her crew delivered to their audiences an engaging, daring, and entertaining performance.

Julius Caesar Makes for a Simple, Haunting Performance

By Stephan Pietrowski

In his November 7 & 8 MFA directing production of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Dan Stott presented a production in the style of a young touring company of early modern England. The company of ten actors, through extensive doubling, performed over 40 characters’ roles; and using quite an abbreviated script, the play transitioned smoothly from scene to scene. The director employed appropriate pop music selections to echo elements of the play. The actors, instead of wearing ancient Roman garb, wore modern business clothing which worked well within the context of the play. Audience members could appreciate the distinct difference between the attire of Brutus and Portia in contrast to the finer appearances of the clothing that Caesar and Calpurnia wore in their respective domestic scenes.

The company’s staging choices also amplified the intensity of the plot to kill Caesar and the tension in the aftermath of the murder. During the first few scenes, the doors to the backstage area were open which added dimension to Caesar’s parade. Opening up that area also encouraged viewers to make a connection between the conversation of Brutus and Cassius and the events that were occurring off-stage. The open doors and discovery space also contributed to an inventive choice for moving the accumulating dead bodies off of the stage. Instead of having to drag the bodies off stage, each actor would mime the action of hefting a dead body over his shoulder, to remove it, while each actor playing a dead body would stand and follow the exit of his mimed form, as if he were a ghost. This method gave the deaths an eerie, haunting effect.

The actors fully embodied their characters and kept the play’s intensity fueled throughout the production. The director’s notes in the program stated that the actors had little to no collaborative experience before the production began, and that they had been able to come together to make the play work. I think the cast’s work resulted in quite a thrilling performance.
Less Was More in Chips’ Interpretation of Double Falsehood

By Katy Mulvaney

Last year, Jeff Chips presented several scenes at the Thesis Festival and a four-person reading of Lewis Theobald’s Double Falsehood as part of the research for his M.Litt thesis on what he dubs “x-treme casting.” This year, he demonstrated his premise with a full production of the play. Joining Liz Lodato, Rachel Ratkowski, and Ben Ratkowski, Chips set out to prove that one does not need props, costumes, elaborate sets, or even enough actors to fill each scene to create good theatre.

Playwright Theobald claimed that he based his play on Shakespeare’s lost play Cardenio, and while the play is written for a total of 19 characters, Chips’ four actors handled all the roles. Dressed in jeans and plain white T-shirts, actors mimed most of their props and used vocal variation and changes in physicality to communicate the frequent in-scene transformations from one character to another — often adding considerably to the comedy quotient within the scenes.

As Chips said, the production was put together in four weeks with “a shoestring budget and duct tape.” However, the “x-treme” cast format invited the audience’s playful participation in each actor’s clearly active imagination, resulting in engaged audiences during both performances. During the first performance, one audience member even responded aloud three times during Henriquez’s soliloquy. (Okay, it was me!)

Perhaps the largest challenge for Chips was portrayal of the play’s content. Unlike Shakespeare’s plays, the storylines of Double Falsehood were unfamiliar to anyone who did not recall details of last year’s reading. The rape subplot was particularly disturbing as it seemed to pop out of nowhere in the midst of a romantic comedy. However, this plot, like the more cheerful lovers’ main plot (featuring betrayal, an extended sequence of insanity, and threats of suicide), was handled with grace by the talented actors. Even if Violette (Lodato), in the final scene of the play, found herself married to her rapist to preserve her honor, the final image of the play was of Violette holding a love token the man had once given to her as a gentler suitor, then throwing it away from her as she looks at him, fearless and judgmental.

Chips’ version of Double Falsehood charmed its audiences and presented a modern commentary on the morality espoused by the play.

A ‘Radical’ Adaptation of Hamlet

By Bobby Byers

As Mariah Carey poignantly sang, “to the floor/everybody to the floor/to the floor/everybody to the floor.” Audience and cast members alike were “floored” by radical subtractions and additions to Shakespeare’s Hamlet in MFA candidate Zach Brown’s directing project at the Blackfriars Playhouse.

Many a whisper escaped from the audience in the closing moments of the performance. Following a choreographed double fall by Laertes and Hamlet, and the normal violent ends of the usual suspects, David Ashton’s Horatio — with a surprising flourish — downed the remnants of Gertrude’s poisoned chalice, ending the play with a slightly larger body count. In Brown’s splendid staging of Shakespeare’s magnum opus, Maxim Overton took on the titular role, giving relish and humor to the famous madness of the Danish prince.

With the normal gallant stools struck for performance, the stage took on an added bareness, with the odd banana thrown in to lend absurdity to a few situations. The cast also included Jonathan Haas, Kim Maurice, Elizabeth Rentfro, Shannon Schultz, Riley Steiner, Melissa Tolner, Michael Wagoner, and Jamie Weaver, with costumes by Monica Cross, music and violin accompaniment by Clara Giebel, fight choreography by Benjamin Cums and the wonderful dumb show choreographed by Doreen Bechtol.

Alumna Teaches Transformative Vocal Technique

By Bobby Byers

After her sensational work directing Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief in fall 2010, Mary Coy ’06 returned for four weeks in October 2011 to teach an intensive course in Linklater voice techniques. Students learned the basic Linklater progression — which leads to “freeing the natural voice,” according to technique developer Kristin Linklater — and applied it to Shakespearean sonnets and monologues. Coy is a designated instructor in this vocal method, which focuses on breath and the connection between the actors’ bodies and the words they are saying. After only a month of work, each student in the class demonstrated improved vocal awareness. Attention paid to lengthening the spine and letting go of neck and shoulder tension also led most students to literally walk out of the class taller than they had arrived. The Shakespeare and Performance program looks forward to working more with Coy.

WINTER 2012
Students Get Chance to ‘Ask Jim’

By Julia Nelson

Dr. Ralph Alan Cohen introduced visiting scholar Jim Volz to his Shakespeare and Performance students by saying that the annual Shakespeare Theatre Association conference features a session simply called “Ask Jim.” Volz is the Uber consultant for theatre professionals, and he requires little introduction. His extensive experience in theatre and education and his willingness to share that experience make him an invaluable resource.

Volz began with a quote from Goethe: “He who seizes the right moment is the right man.” He said that “now” is our chance to seize the moment, to sort through our priorities and find out what really matters to us. He encouraged us to make opportunities for ourselves, to gather as much information as we can, to find people to work with, and to work with honesty and integrity.

Volz then described the components of a successful theatre company. First, one needs vision and leadership, which usually means a board of trustees and a select group of mentors. Companies also need strong marketing because, in his words, “you need butts in seats.” A fundraising and development component is also critical, for investment in the company and also in the community, and, of course, a person to keep track of finances. Volz recommended starting with a mission statement, and then jotting down objectives, deadlines, and a basic financial plan.

He suggested two of his books as resources. How to Run a Theatre is based on his experience working with Shakespeare festivals, and on asking CEOs in both the corporate world and not-for-profit theaters, “How do you do this?”

Volz also referenced Working in American Theatre, a resource for making the best choices about who to work for to make a living in the theatre. The book also contains helpful sample documents such as budget proposals from various companies.

In an unexpected gesture, Volz gifted the MLitt/MFA program with copies of both books, and he handed his business card to every student in the audience, encouraging us to email him with questions at any time.

‘Thou Shouldst Print More’: Scholarly Publishing in the Digital Age

By David Ashton

Dr. Amanda French and Dr. Sarah Werner came to MBC in fall 2011 to address scholarly publication in the digital age, in the aptly-named forum “Thou Shouldst Print More.”

French, THATCamp coordinator at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, opened the discussion with observations about what she refers to as the “scholarly communication crisis” — the fallback of a broken system of publication wherein scholars donate their research to companies who then publish it and charge often exorbitant fees for access. French emphasized that technology, namely the Internet, might provide the means to resolving this problem. For example, enterprises such as the Open Access Movement or institutional repositories have taken to the Internet in an attempt to provide abundant, free, and instantly available scholarly information.

Werner, undergraduate program director at Folger Shakespeare Library and associate editor of Shakespeare Quarterly, added to the conversation by discussing how the peer-review model operates online in theory and in practice. Drawing on her own experience of editing Shakespeare Quarterly’s fall 2011 issue — a process that took place online and was open to the public — Werner emphasized the online method’s benefits, such as immediate feedback and the elimination of a hierarchal method. Unlike French, Werner questioned the efficacy of online editing, citing problems including the editor’s increased workload and an unwillingness of many people to comment.

The issues raised by French and Werner point to the fact that the ultimate success of online or open access publication is as of yet uncertain. Their discussion made one thing clear, however: the world of scholarly publication is on the brink of change.

A Scholarly Look into Performance Criticism

By David Ashton

Dr. Jeremy Lopez, associate professor of English at University of Toronto and 2010–11 fellow at Folger Shakespeare Library, brought to MBC’s first foray into performance criticism. Lopez’s special topic colloquium, Performance Criticism: In and Out of Context, surveyed the critical discussions of Shakespeare’s plays from the 16th century to the present. The course involved analyzing and analyzing form and ultimately trying to figure out what writing about performance tells us about the relationship between the theatre and the world. Lopez is an experienced director, editor of theatre reviews for Shakespeare Bulletin, and author of numerous pieces on Shakespeare and performance, including three books: Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama; Shakespeare Handbooks: Richard II; and his work in non-Shakespearean drama, Parables of the Canon.
You know you're a Shakespeare geek when ...

Compiled by Katy Mulvaney, Michael Wagoner, and Amanda Allen

#10 ... all your jokes need a footnote.

#9 ... you tell everyone you are voting Cade/Dick 2012 and have the bumper sticker to prove it.

#8 ... you have discussed the idea that if Ben Jonson is like the early modern Saturday Night Live, then Shakespeare must be the early modern Lost.

#7 ... you have had long, intense, emotional arguments using only lines from a sonnet.

#6 ... you literally leap out of your chair when Horatio manages to drink the poison.

#5 ... the longest running argument between you and your roommate is about whether Caliban or Ariel should be viewed as the true “native” of the island.

#4 ... you flummox several academics at the Blackfriars Conference by not only recognizing an obscure early modern play but replying immediately, “Oh yeah, I saw that last year!”

#3 ... after hearing Tiffany Stern’s conference keynote, you decide to write a puppet play called “Darius, King of Persia, or The Noble Englishman with the Comical Humors of Sir Andrew Aguecheek at the Siege of Babylon.”

#2 ... your spelling suffers because you read too many original spelling texts.

#1 ... you worked on a YouTube video advertising a production of Henry VI in the style of a pro wrestling match promo (search Shakespeare at Winedale).
for a New Audience in Brooklyn, six years after earning her Master of Letters degree.

Fellow alumna Heidi Grumelot ’07 is artistic director at Horse Trade Theater Group in New York City (NYC), where she helps artists who are early in their careers (she recommends Clay McCloed Chapman and Josh Conkel). She touts flexibility and exposure to all aspects of the creative world as the program’s distinctive elements: “You can come in as a teacher, director, or actor and you can completely change careers.”

Grumelot launched The Fire She Started, a festival that encourages African-American playwrights to “write outside the boundaries of what’s considered a ‘black play’” and she produces TOLD, a monthly storytelling show in NYC’s East Village.

Kristine Ayers fell in love with performing and behind-the-scenes work while in the MLitt/MFA program. The Big Apple called to her as well after graduation in 2008. Working in New York City as a stage manager and occasionally directing for EBE Ensemble — a company that performs Shakespeare alongside contemporary works — Ayers fondly recalls her time as a student. “We would get together in the middle of the night and just read Shakespeare out loud,” she said. “Those were some crazy nights.”

For Laurie Riffe ’11, the program offered a rare luxury: time. “Having that time to focus on the genuine beauty of Shakespeare was profound,” she said. As education director and artistic associate for Greenbrier Valley Theatre in Lewisburg, West Virginia, Riffe does it all: grant writing, teaching, directing, acting, coordinating interns, casting, and more. A lot happens on any given day, Riffe said, and she is most proud of creating a teen conservatory that provides young students a place to “find their own voice.”

Donnelson’s volunteer work with Rehabilitation through the Arts includes bringing Shakespeare to prison inmates, an outreach experience that she treasures and describes as “great and complicated and fulfilling.” Her MLitt and MFA degrees not only inform her understanding of Shakespearean language, but also help her communicate with the scholars that Theatre for a New Audience brings in to train teaching artists. “I was able to talk about the text with [renowned Shakespeare specialist] James Shapiro in a way that I don’t think I would have if it were not for my experience at MBC.”

Ultimately, all appreciated the work they accomplished at MBC. As Donnelson advises, “Enjoy your time in Staunton. It was a perfect place to focus on something for two and a half years. So enjoy that.”

What connects these women is their appreciation for the experiences they had during their time in Staunton and their excitement about the work going on in their respective theatre communities. As Ayers puts it, the Shakespeare and Performance program offered her a place where she was accepted “as a scholar and a student and a theatre person.”