

JOHN JAY MAGAZINE

EDUCATING FOR JUSTICE

SPRING 2010

SUICIDE BOMBERS

TERRORISM

CALL-INS AL QAEDA

FAVELAS

TORTURE RACIAL RECONCILIATION

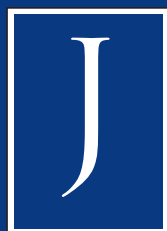
MILICIAS JUSTICE GANG VIOLENCE

REENTRY THROUGH THE ARTS
CRISIS INTERVENTION

SACRED VALUES

OPEN-AIR DRUG MARKETS

SUBVERSIVE LEARNING



JOHN JAY COLLEGE
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

CRIMINAL JUSTICE & THE THEATER

At John Jay, A Perfect Fit

By Peter Dodenhoff

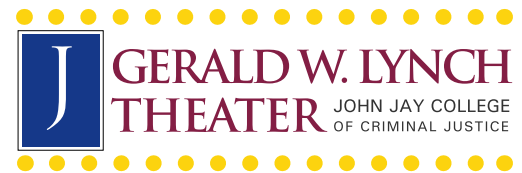
THE STUDENT THEATRICAL CLUB AT JOHN JAY IS ONE THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY ACTIVE CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS.



The notion of combining criminal justice themes and drama is as old as the ancient Greeks and as new as the latest “ripped from the headlines” episode of *Law & Order*. At John Jay, criminal justice and the theater have enjoyed a happy, fruitful partnership that is as old as the College itself.

Over the years, that partnership has played out in a variety of ways: in staged productions from classical as well as contemporary repertory; in course curriculums and classroom teaching; and in outreach to criminal justice agencies and institutions, to name just a few applications. Two John Jay alumni have built a long and successful career for themselves in public- and private-sector training based on theatrical techniques they first learned at the College. And, in one telling bit of testimony, the student theatrical club at John Jay is one of the oldest continuously active campus organizations.

The variety of criminal justice themes that have been dramatized at John Jay is nothing short of staggering. Audiences have seen corruption, drug abuse and gangs; explored



false confessions and problematic eyewitness evidence; considered the nuances of revenge killings and justifiable homicide, and gotten riveting behind-the-scenes looks at jury deliberations and military justice. Equally impressive, these themes represent the creative output of an A-list of theatrical talent: Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim; Aristophanes and Aeschylus; Arthur Miller and Aaron Sorkin; Brendan Behan and David Guare, to name but a few.

Putting John Jay on the Map

John Jay's Gerald W. Lynch Theater, which opened in 1988, has provided a professional-quality venue for a wide range of productions, and recent shows bear witness to the continuing influence of criminal justice themes. In the spring of 2009, Professor Dana Tarantino of the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts directed the daring play *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, a courtroom thriller about an imagined trial involving the Bible's most notorious sinner. Two years earlier, Tarantino staged the

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Lt. Schrank & Jets in the 2007 production of *West Side Story*

youth-gang spectacle *West Side Story*, in an authorized 50th-anniversary production. In 2008, Tarantino's colleague Professor Lorraine Moller directed the taut military court-martial drama *A Few Good (wo)Men*. *Rashomon*, the quintessential tale of eyewitness evidence gone awry, has been produced twice at John Jay, as has *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller's poignant allegory of 1950s anti-Communist fervor, set in the context of the Salem witch trials more than two centuries earlier.

These diverse and powerful plays represent just a sampling of the many criminal justice-relevant works that have been produced under John Jay's auspices, in a dramatic arc that can be traced to the College's very beginning. (See p.10.) In fact, theatrical efforts were instrumental in first putting John Jay on the map.

As Ben Termine, a charter member of the faculty and former chairman of the speech and theater department, recalled in a recent interview:

"The vehicle chosen for John Jay's maiden theatrical effort in 1966 was 'nothing simple,'— Franz Kafka's *The Trial*... In the audience we had the

police commissioner, all of the brass, and on the stage were all the cops who had been taking the course." Jerry Tallmer, the influential theater critic, reviewed the production for *The New York Post*, calling it "extraordinary in the history of Western civilization, not to mention Eastern civilization."

That production, along with the following year's staging of Aristophanes' *The Birds*, would later be cited in the *Encyclopedia Americana* as major events in police education, Termine noted.

Detective Story, in 1968, continued the College's string of successful productions, and earned John Jay front-page coverage in the theater section of *The New York Times*. Termine recalled how rehearsals were not often easy for his cast of police student actors. As the show's opening night approached, one rehearsal was abruptly cut short when the cast members were deployed to break up a student demonstration on the Columbia University campus. The show went on, to laudatory reviews, and even had Police Commissioner Michael Murphy take a turn on

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"All of that helped to get people to sit up and take notice of this new college," said Termine, who retired in 1986.

As important, however, *Detective Story* would prove to be the bridge to another synergy of criminal justice and theater: the use of drama in police training.

Crisis Intervention and "Subversive Learning"

Evidence showed at that time that more people had been seriously injured or killed in the line of duty from intervening in a domestic dispute than from any other kind of police action. Termine, who had studied psychodrama with its originator, Jacob L. Moreno, organized the first course in which principles of drama were used to teach police how to intervene in a family crisis.

Police students from the cast of *Detective Story* — Bob Burke (BA '65), head of programming at the Police Academy; Ed Powers (BS '71) and Ethel Breslin (MA '74) — became the vanguard of this new approach, employing it not only in classes at the

New York Police Academy but in police departments throughout the area. A follow-up study of police response to domestic crises found that the new drama-based training approach significantly reduced the number of injuries associated with such calls.

Joyce St. George (BA '74) a young civilian student at John Jay, became enthralled by what she saw in the new training approach and in Termine's class on family crisis intervention, and her fascination with it would ultimately become a calling. "After playing with it for a little while and seeing the light bulbs go on above the heads of participants, I knew there was something really special about this," she said. Along with several fellow students, and mentored by Termine and other speech and theater faculty, she helped spin off the Police Academy's crisis intervention training into an independent group, the Criminal Justice Repertory Company (CJs). "It was really just to bring some of the ideas we had at the academy into school," St. George explained. "We started working with professors and coming into their classes to do different things — scenes from *Detective Story*, *Short Eyes*, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* and

continued on page 20

CURTAIN UP!

A non-inclusive listing of justice-themed plays that have been staged at John Jay over the years.

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|---|--|---|
| <i>The Trial</i> | <i>Rashomon</i> | <i>Macbeth</i> |
| <i>The Birds</i> | <i>The Crucible</i> | <i>Arabian Nights</i> |
| <i>Detective Story</i> | <i>12 Angry Men (and Women)</i> | <i>Metamorphoses</i> |
| <i>The Hostage</i> | <i>Il Furioso (Eumenides)</i> | <i>West Side Story</i> |
| <i>Corruption in the Palace of Justice</i> | <i>La Medea</i> | <i>A Few Good (wo)Men</i> |
| <i>Riot Act</i> | <i>For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf</i> | <i>The Last Days of Judas Iscariot</i> |

And, coming in December 2010, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.



Rape Crisis Response, a training session conducted in the 1970s by the Criminal Justice Repertory Group (CJs)

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CRIMINAL JUSTICE & THE THEATER

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continued from page 10

several other plays. We would hold discussions with the classes and talk about how issues in criminal justice were reflected in the plays.”

As so often happens, one thing led to another. Word spread, and the CJs began to receive invitations to do their “structured improvisations” — a term St. George coined — for police, corrections, probation and parole agencies. Through the CJs, she also met (and later married) cast mate Frank Canavan (BS '78), who brought the perspective of a private security industry veteran and saw that the training approach could be applied to a much wider audience than just criminal justice professionals. “There’s an incredibly wide application of this learning technique,” Canavan said, and his

and St. George’s career path have borne out the truth of that. St. George and Canavan went on to attend graduate school at New York University, studying learning theory, educational theater and related subjects. Their respective master’s degrees served as the foundation for what would become PACT Training [www.pacttraining.com], their wildly inventive and wholly original training firm, the essence of which is the structured improvisation.

“It’s learning by osmosis — subversive learning,” St. George observed. “With these training exercises we help to redirect people toward other choices that they have, so they can choose different paths.” This process of self-discovery, Canavan added, is part of the essence of adult learning.

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Bayview 1, a prison-based drama production by Professor Lorraine Moller at Bayview Correctional Facility Photo: Richard Moller

Moller said studies by her and others have shown that prisoners engaged in theater activities have reduced levels of anger. “It teaches emotion management and control,” she observed.

Theater has also been shown to improve discipline and behavior, promote empathy and coping skills, and foster a sense of community and mutual responsibility.

Reentry through the Arts

Professor Moller has seen the truth of Canavan and St. George’s assessment most vividly through her theater work with incarcerated women at the medium-security Bayview Correctional Facility in Manhattan, and with male inmates at Sing Sing Prison. “Prisoners are role-deprived,” said Moller. “Drama-based activities allow prisoners to resume rehearsing and playing real-life roles in fictive settings, which has a resocializing effect, and allows the actor to observe the consequences of behavior.” Moller’s Bayview production of *Metamorphoses*, using a cast of inmates and John Jay actors, won an award from the American College Theater Festival for its contribution to theater outreach.

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“Going one step further,” Moller said, “it gives disadvantaged people cultural capital, a feeling that one owns a piece of what ‘educated’ people have.” Providing access to this kind of cultural wealth can enhance one’s self-esteem, she observed.

Another member of the Department, Professor Greg Donaldson, who has worked with Moller in Bayview productions, needs no convincing as to the power of theater as an educational tool. “There’s nothing quite like theater work in prison,” he said. “You can’t imagine what it’s like to work with 25 women who are serious felons. Theater is highly therapeutic, and through it prisoners can learn about things in ways we can’t begin to understand.”

A similar effect can be seen in the classrooms of John Jay. “Dramatic things happen in my classroom,” Donaldson said. “They never

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A scene from *A Few Good Women*

know what's going to happen next. For me, the performance is in the service of the teaching."

An Ancient Teaching Tool

Added Professor Tarantino, who like Donaldson teaches a criminal justice and theater course: "**Theater unifies across disciplines. For example, what better way to teach criminology than to explore the mind of a criminal?**" The use of theater to teach is ancient, she observed. "The Greeks knew this, and the Bible is just filled with theater," said Tarantino. "Theater is simply a better teaching tool." In a college like John Jay, the effect is enhanced, since "there isn't a play written that's not about justice," according to Tarantino. "If there's no conflict, there's no play."

As if to ensure that the educational value of theater is optimized,

Tarantino typically accompanies her John Jay productions with a one-day symposium on a relevant topic: street gangs for *West Side Story*, justice and theology for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* and, for the forthcoming production of *Sweeney Todd*, a discussion of vigilante justice.

"The play's the thing," Shakespeare observed in *Hamlet*, and Tarantino would likely be quick to concur. "This isn't professional theater, but we're trying to prepare students for the professional world. There are students who have so much inside them that's untapped, and theater can help bring that out. When you do, it's a beautiful thing."

Peter Dodenhoff is editor of @John Jay.