Staged Reading

by Michael Lieden

a PROPOSAL TO THE E. CLYDE LUTTON FUND

Brendan Wattenberg '06
Staged Reading

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GEORGIA: Do you want us to do anything special?
FLOYD: Just be yourself. That’s why you guys are here. So you can have your own voices.
GEORGIA: Technically we will be speaking with our own voices, but we have scripts in our hands and it looks like you’ve given us lines to say.
FLOYD: Right but they’re your lines. All the words are yours.

The stage for Michael Lieden’s new play, Staged Reading, is set for a workshop: five unopened manuscripts on five empty chairs. Georgia and Alan enter and are soon joined by Dr. Kenter, Floyd, and later, Iris. A sixth character, Martin, makes a surprise entrance halfway. At first, it seems that the members of the “cast” are only actors assembled for a reading. But Floyd, a writer currently committed to a mental institution, has gathered together his parents, girlfriend and therapist to play themselves in the first draft of his screenplay. As it commences, the reading is continually interrupted by off-script commentary, psychoanalysis, and increasingly serious and troubling revelations. Floyd is obsessive-compulsive; Iris is seeing another man; Georgia has an unfounded fear that the moon is receding from the earth. With elegant obfuscation, the lines between Floyd’s written world and the world in which he is writing soon become blurred. Staged Reading, which has never been produced, is innovative, sharply funny, and as Georgia says, “I’m sure your play is wonderful.”

With the support of the E. Clyde Lutton Fund, Haverford would provide the venue for the world premiere of Staged Reading in April 2006. Spark Productions in New York, where I worked as a summer and fall-break literary development intern, holds the rights to Mr. Lieden’s play. Eric Falkenstein ’91, who founded Spark, will produce the professional debut of Staged Reading in New York City. Mr. Falkenstein has agreed to license the rights for a performance at Haverford, and has also proposed that the Haverford cast participate during the spring with the playwright and Matt Tauber, the director of the forthcoming New York production. It is proposed that we invite Mr. Lieden and Mr. Tauber to come to Haverford for the weekend of the performance to work with the students involved and for Mr. Lieden to give a public question-and-answer session after the show. In addition, the Haverford cast and I, as director, will be invited to New York to observe performances of the professional workshop as the play prepares for its commercial run. It is also proposed to stage a performance of Staged Reading during Alumni Weekend. This will be an occasion for alumni to view the realization of an independent student theatre project and to consider the possibilities for partnership between Haverford and New York artists and producers.

The Fund will be used for all the necessary technical, scenic, and publicity requirements—rights, furniture, props, costumes, and professional-quality posters and programs. However, because Staged Reading does not require a set and only minimal other scenic elements, the bulk of the Fund will provide for the transportation and accommodation both for Mr. Lieden’s and Mr. Tauber’s attendance during Haverford performance and for the students who elect to participate in the New York workshop.

A student production of Staged Reading would present the Haverford community and the Alumni association with an unprecedented opportunity to be participants in the process of making contemporary drama. The play itself a creative challenge. Its broad appeal, psychiatric insight, humor and originality, should draw a large audience, which might even extend beyond 370 Lancaster Avenue. Ultimately, the production of Staged Reading will bring new artistic experiences to the college, establish a connection with professional theatre, and brighten the potential for dramatic arts at Haverford.
Staged Reading
PERSONAL STATEMENT to the E. Clyde Lutton Fund
Brendan Wattenberg

Haverford students with talents in acting, directing, and designing have always made the most of limited resources. When I auditioned for Lend Me a Tenor, by Ken Ludwig (who is a Haverford alumn), as a first-semester freshman I had no idea that in addition to playing the “Bellman,” I would be building and painting flats, buying out the Ardmore Pennywise thrift store (the local supplier for independent theatre), sewing costumes, and learning how to hang and position stage lighting. By second semester, while stage managing Neil Simon’s Rumors under the direction of two enthusiastic seniors, I learned the bureaucratic secrets to producing independent shows at Haverford. Now as a senior, I have honed the skills of casting, scheduling, budgeting, rehearsing, publicity, garnering support from faculty, making eleventh hour repairs to furniture, selecting wallpaper, editing Debussy piano solos, and turning down the house lights on opening night.

Student-produced theatre at Haverford is also about solving very precarious problems. How, for example, were we going to make a New York City street out of Stokes Auditorium for one short scene in the first play I directed, Yasmina Reza’s Life (x)? We dressed up our actors in costume and drove to University City for a photo shoot. Then we projected a slide show onto the all-white set, accompanied by the scene’s dialogue recorded out on the street. Marsha Norman’s night, Mother, which I directed in the spring of my sophomore year, posed the challenge of transforming Stokes into a realistic, homely, southern living room and kitchen. Luckily, we found an old abandoned gas stove and a big window in Barclay basement, which we dragged across campus just days before the performance.

As a student director, I have continually chosen full-length, provocative dramas with high stakes—infidelity, suicide, sexual harassment. In fall 2004, I chose to direct Edward Albee’s The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? for which I created a “black box theatre” by bringing chairs onto Marshall stage, closing the curtains, and directing actors in the round. The intimate setting was certainly disarming for audiences who witnessed the explosive dissolution of a family in crisis over a father’s bestiality. This semester, I am directing David Mamet’s Oleanna, an intense analysis of the relationship between a university professor and his female student, also to be staged in the round at Marshall. In addition to Oleanna, I will be directing Edward Albee’s Marriage Play as part of a director’s lab course at Swarthmore involving rehearsals outside of class, weekly critiques, and two performances in December.

Even in the absence of a formal theatre department, the six independent shows in which I have participated have been anything but informal; all were serious, successful productions, and each proof that theatre is thriving on this campus. Directing and producing Staged Reading as my final undergraduate theatre project would be an unimaginable opportunity to contribute to the dramatic life of the college through a connection with the world of New York theatre.

REFERENCES
- Prof. Kim Benston—kbenston@haverford.edu
- Prof. Debora Sherman—dsherman@haverford.edu
- Prof. Laura McGrane—lmcgrane@haverford.edu
- Eric Falkenstein, Producer, Spark Productions—efalk@sparkny.com
**Staged Reading**

**PROPOSED BUDGET to the E. Clyde Lutton Fund**

Brendan Wattenberg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Royalties</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Held and licensed by Spark Productions, New York</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture &amp; Properties</td>
<td>$300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five black chairs, one maroon easy chair, carpet, five black binders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Costumes</td>
<td>$200</td>
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<tr>
<td>For six actors; including clothes, purses, bags, shoes, glasses, and makeup and hair supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>$200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full color 11x17 card-tag posters and formal card-tag programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; Accommodation for Mr. Lieden &amp; Mr. Tauber</td>
<td>$1800</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Roundtrip flight tickets Los Angeles to New York (2 @ $300 each)</td>
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<td>• Accommodation and board in Philadelphia (4 nights @ x $150 per person per night)</td>
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Accommodation for the Haverford cast in New York $500

• 2 rooms @ $125 per night, 2 nights

**TOTAL PROJECT COSTS** $3500