

University of South Alabama
Theatre **USA** **Newsletter**

The Department of Dramatic Arts ☺ PAC 1052 ☺ Mobile, Alabama 36688-0002

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**Theatre USA Presents
A play for young people:
*Eager Beaver Builds a
Dam***

Children and parents and audience members of all ages will love this upbeat story of a young beaver struggling with his over abundance of eagerness and his unusual dread of water and overcoming both problems with aplomb and a big, toothy smile. Theatre USA will present the World Premiere of *Eager Beaver Builds a Dam* on December 4, at 7:00 pm at the USA Wright Auditorium, 1400 S. University Boulevard. Join us as we present our only public performance of this exciting new play.

Eager Beaver is a happy-go-lucky animal who is always eager to help others. "I can do it; I can do it" is her often stated motto. But she can't. She makes a mess of just about everything she tries.

Upset at her constant interference, the other animals petition her to stop helping them and to focus on only one thing: building a dam so the animals will have water to drink, fish to eat and a place of recreation. She agrees. But there are two problems she must overcome to do their bidding. First, she must convince the obstinate Hootie Owl to move out of the biggest tree that must be gnawed down, and placed across the stream to stem the flow of water. Second, she is afraid of water and cannot dive into it to construct the dam. In fact, she is so frightened of water that she is building her lodge, generally constructed in a pond, on dry land.

Icky the Lizard becomes Eager Beaver's friend and tries to lift her spirits. Together they conspire to trick Hootie Owl to leave and, when the creek begins to overrun its banks, Icky must persuade

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**About the Playwright
R. E. Jackson**

Eager Beaver Builds a Dam is the most recent play by playwright and University of South Alabama Dramatic Arts Department Chair R. Eugene Jackson. Jackson is the author of more than 60 plays, most of which have been published by such companies as Baker's Plays, I. E. Clark Publications, Eldridge Publishing, and Pioneer Drama Service.

Jackson's plays have been performed by schools and community groups all over the United States, but Theater USA's annual Christmas season production of one of Jackson's works for young people has become a Mobile Tradition. Last year's production of Jackson's version of the classic Hans Christian Andersen tale, *The Little Mermaid*, played to sold out houses of Mobile school children. His "plays for young

people" (he is loathe to call them "children's plays") are sometimes original works, sometimes adaptations of popular stories, indeed, sometimes have a musical score as well, but they are always filled with a variety of colorful characters. Original works produced at Theater USA include *The Mardi Gras Murders*, the musical *HallowScream!*, and *When the Bough Breaks*. Jackson's adaptations, like *The Brave Little Tailor*, written in 1991 and produced through South Alabama in 2000, *The Wind in the Willows*, and 1993's *The Secret Garden* have also entertained audiences in the entire Mobile community.

Jackson's plays are not merely for young people, however. Often writing under a pseudonym, Jackson also writes works with decidedly more adult themes. Jackson recently took his first sabbatical from his duties at South in over

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**25 Years
200,000
School Children!**

This year's production of *Eager Beaver Builds a Dam* will commemorate 25 years of children's productions at Theatre USA. First started in 1977, each December the department has mounted its annual children's show bringing in young audiences from the South Alabama region. This year at one of our eight daytime school performances, one lucky student will become our

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Scene Designer Connie Smith's model for *Eager Beaver Builds a Dam*.

Artist Spotlight
Costume Designer
Jamie Englehart

Our Artist Spotlight for this show is on Costume Designer Jamie Englehart. A junior B.F.A. student from Dayton, Maryland, if you ask Jamie how she ended up at the University of South Alabama the answer is simple: "I was visiting my sister who was in the Physical Therapy program at South. I walked through the Laidlaw Center, looked at the production pictures on the wall, saw one of the plays, and I was sold."

Jamie has been in the middle of things since she arrived. Her primary emphasis is Performance. You may have seen her on stage her Freshman year as one of the Bacchantes in *The Bacchae*, flitting around the stage as the Dancing Girl in *The Brave Little Tailor*, or as Nora, the child-like wife in *A Doll House*. Last year saw her balancing the comedic role of Georgina in *The Little Mermaid* with Chris, the sister with the young son in *Dancing At Lughnassa*.

But acting is not her only talent. She began volunteering in the costume shop her freshman year and is now on Assistant-ship. She is an excellent seamstress thanks to her mother who has helped her make costumes most of her life. Faculty Designer Rebecca Britton comments, "She has a great feel for detail and has handled some very difficult sewing projects, not the least of which was Julia's second act costume in *The Rivals*."

Last summer she was hired at the Berkshire Theatre Festival in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, as the Wardrobe Mistress of the Unicorn Theatre for three productions: *Dimetos*, *Miss Julie* and *Insurrection*. She once again volunteered in the costume shop and also built costumes for the main stage productions of *Zorba* and *A Saint She Ain't*.

Eager Beaver Builds A Dam is her first actualized Costume Design Project, but she has been the Assistant to the Designer for *Romeo & Juliet* and *The Rivals* as well as the Makeup & Wig Designer for *The Rivals*.

She has been on either the Dean's List or the President's List academically since her first semester. She's a member of Alpha Psi Omega National Honorary Dramatic Fraternity and is the Historian for Jesters, the theatre student association. Ask her what she sees herself doing after she receives her B.F.A. and the answer is as varied as her interests. "I would be happy as an actress in a regional theatre or New York. Who wouldn't, but I could also see myself as happy working as a wardrobe mistress in New York or with national tours."

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twenty years, using the time to research and write *Stalked*, which deals with the issue of unwanted attentions and

obsessive behavior. The aforementioned *When the Bough Breaks*, which had its premiere with Theater USA in 1997, dealt with spouse abuse. Even a

"children's play," like his 1996 work, *Amazing Grace and her Jellybean*, which dealt with divorce, can touch on these grown-up issues.

R. Eugene Jackson has been a playwright at least since his days as an Ohio High School English Teacher, when Kent State University produced his *A 1001 Spells to Cast*. His writing career has spanned nearly forty years and a variety of genres, and his works have entertained thousands. Indeed, his distinguished writing and teaching career led to Alabama Hall of Fame Award, presented through the Alabama Conference of Theater and Speech. From *Ferdinand and The Dirty Knight* to *Young Davy Crockett* and *The Adventures of Peter Cottontail*, Gene Jackson continues to develop old tales and new for the stage. Eager Beaver and his cohorts mark only the most recent of his achievements in storytelling.

Beaver from page 1
Eager Beaver to forget her fears, to jump into the water, and to quickly build the dam to help her fellow critters. The final plug in the dam is the huge tree. Eager Beaver must chew its bark, nibble on its insides until it's nearly eaten through, and tip the tree in the right direction so that it falls across the water. Oops! It's falling the wrong way! What can she do?

Of course, all turns out well and, with the assistance of the likeable Icky the Lizard and to the cheers of the other animals, Eager Beaver is able to defeat his fears and become a normal water-loving, tree-gnawing, dambuilding beaver.

Coming
February 20 - 24
Samuel Beckett's
**Waiting for
Godot**



Scenic designer Connie Smith checks as Kenneth Kudulis mixes paint for the set for *Eager Beaver*.

From the Director and Playwright About the Play

Everything I do, everything I see, and everything I read become prospects for new plays. When I read a newspaper article or magazine story or a simple ad in the daily tabloid, my subconscious is processing it as an idea for a play. Every crossword and other word puzzles and greeting cards often use clever phrases or titles that pique my playwriting interest. So it was with the germinal idea of *Eager Beaver*.

For some reason that I cannot recall--perhaps it was idle daydreaming--the idea of a beaver as a character in a children's play struck me as interesting. Using word associations, I quickly thought "eager beaver," a phrase commonly used in describing them. With a beaver as the main character, then, what problem might s/he face? Well, what to beavers do? They build dams. And what kind of conflict could arise that would delay or deter a beaver from building his/her dam? The answer: this beaver is afraid of water!

The building of the dam, then, must be the focal point. How best to express Eager's fear of water? To a best friend. Who would be the best friend of a beaver? I stretched this a lot. I selected a lizard--whom Eager names "Icky." What animals in

a forest would most need a dam so that a pond would grow behind it? How about Stinky Skunk, Ruby Raccoon, and Mama Mallard and her three little ducklings? Other animals must provide background. A Rabbit, a Weasel, and Petey Possum came to mind. Hootie Owl becomes the owner of the tree that Eager eventually gnaws down to form the dam, while three Loony Birds frantically search for a nice vacation spot near a lake, and two evil otters--Slick and Sleazy--serve as the comical villains.

The script calls for a small stream to run across the stage and for a tall tree to teeter and then fall across the stream, damming it up and causing a pond to grow. These special technical problems were worked out by Connie Smith, the scenic designer for the show. Of course, there is no real water; it is painted on the backdrop and floor. And no pond really grows--only its illusion. The tree, though, does really sway and fall (though with cables attached).

The costumer, student Jamie Englehart, selected real people clothing for the animals to wear, with only suggestions of their animal-ness in the makeup and style of the garments. It's an imaginative approach that puts more burden on the actors--but a burden actors enjoy--to clarify their specific animals and personalities.



Student costume designer, Jamie Englehart discusses her choice of fabrics for two of her costume designs with faculty member Rebecca Britton.

The Cast for *Eager Beaver Builds a Dam*

Eager Beaver Jamie Lynn Barbour
 Jamie Lynn Barbour
 Stinky Skunk Camryn Duff
 Ruby Raccoon Leah deButts
 Mama Mallard Margarette Joyner
 Margarette Joyner
 Her Duckings Rocquelle L. Woods
 Rocquelle L. Woods
 Crystal Hope Willams
 Icky the Lizard Crystal Hope Willams

..... Jennifer Borntreger
 Rabbit Chad Davis
 Weasel Daniel Garvin
 Petey Possum
 Roderick Aust
 Otter Slick
 John Aubrey Wright
 Otter Sleazy
 Robert J. Wells, III
 Hootie Owl David Mims
 Three Loony Birds
 Natasha Lynn Tucker
 Robert Tucker
 Katie Vickers

Though there is a good message for all--"I can do it, I can do it"--the play is a comedy with lots of color and spectacle, pratfalls, and good-humor. A videotape will be made of the show and it, along with the final revised script, will be published by I.E. Clark Publications of Schulenburg, Texas. But you can say, "I saw it first!"

200,000 from page 1
 200,000th young audience member to see a Theatre USA children's production.

This year alone 8,000 new students from Mississippi and Alabama will join the ranks of those who will experience live theatre, many for the first time. It is a great honor and privilege for our Department, Faculty and Students to have touched the lives of so many young audience members.

If you would like more information on our daytime school shows please contract Pat Bacon at 251-460-6305.



Ticket & Box Office Information Phone (251) 460-6306

Tickets for Theatre USA's Production of *Eager Beaver Builds a Dam*
 General Admission \$7.00 All Students* & Children \$ 5.00

Ticket will be available only at the Door starting at 6:00 pm at the USA Wright Auditorium. Tickets are sold on a first come, first served basis. General Seating. All sales final. No refunds or exchanges.

* College students must present a valid ID. One ticket per ID. High School students do not need ID.



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A black and white illustration of a beaver wearing a vest, standing on a log and using an axe to cut another log. The scene is set in a forest with trees and a stream.

Theatre USA
Presents
EAGER BEAVER
Builds a Dam
by R. E. Jackson
A Play for Kids of All Ages
USA/Wright
Auditorium
1400 South University Boulevard
December 4, 2002
7 P.M.