

Seattle Pacific University's Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts Newsletter

creators

Spring 2012

Following Wherever Art and Heart Lead

Teddy Roosevelt the hamster is buried in the backyard next to Rapunzel the guinea pig. Aragog the tarantula shares the address with bunnies Mr. Bean and Tinker Bell. A human mother, father, and three children also live at the house.

A children's story? No. It's a glimpse into the creative home life of two 1991 Seattle Pacific University theatre graduates, James and Maija Miller. They first met when both were cast in the sixth grade children's musical "Ants'hilvania" — he as a prodigal ant, she as wise Miss Millipede. Now, after 24 years of

marriage, they live in Southern California and share a mortgage, a love for the arts, and his stage name, Miller James.

"Your name is your business," says Miller, a director and costume designer, who flipped his first and last names when he discovered that all forms of his birth name were already taken by other working artists. Since his students mostly called him Miller anyway, the name change stuck.

As Miller James, James Miller has built a rock solid professional reputation that includes current

positions as director of the Santa Barbara Children's Theatre (SBCT) and resident costume designer at Westmont College.

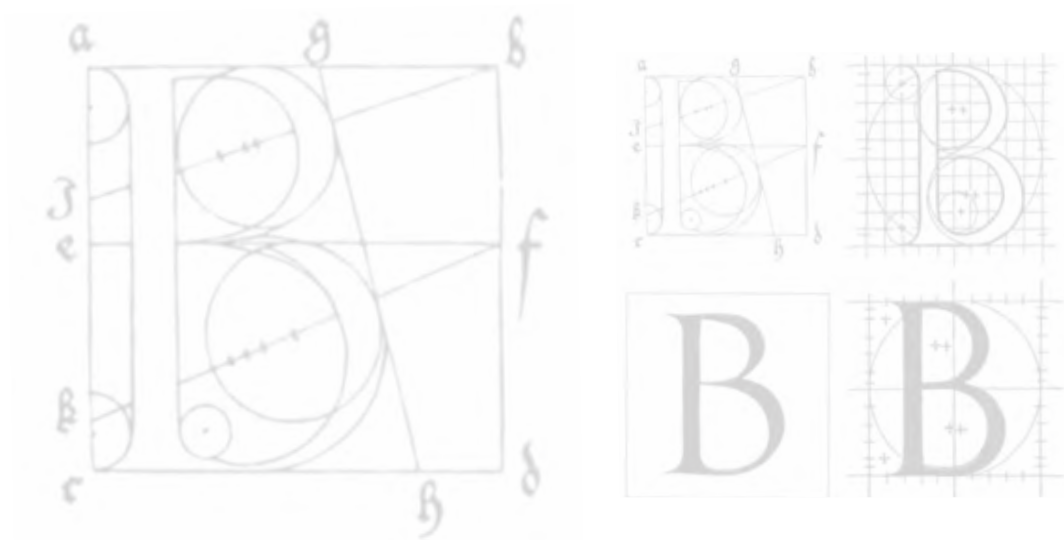
Maija Miller worked in geriatric care until their daughter was born. Now she takes the kids to Los Angeles where they have budding acting careers of their own. Tessa, 12, has performed in several professional theatrical productions and operas, including auditioning for a part in a New York Broadway show. Twins Jakob and Andrew, 9, have appeared in the popular TV shows Scrubs and Grey's Anatomy, and in last year's Steven Spielberg/J.J. Abrams movie Super 8.

James Miller is busy on several fronts, not the least of which is building 37 gorilla costumes for "Tarzan," a local high school production. "It's rewarding," he says. "I'm teaching kids how to sew and giving them an idea of what designing a show entails." This spring, he also built horse legs out of jumbo plastic bats, cardboard tubing, and paper mache for Westmont's production of "Animal Farm." The skills of conceiving and constructing a make-believe world on stage were honed at SPU, where along with acting and invaluable work-study positions within the thriving Seattle theatre scene, he was taught the technical side of show production. Assistant to scene designer and SPU Professor of Theatre Don Yanik for four years,

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James and Maija Miller, with their daughter Tessa and two sons Jakob and Andrew



Designing Between the Lines

The signs are strong that the original vision for Seattle Pacific University's Visual Communications Program (vis-com) begun in 2001 has been met and exceeded:

- Limited to 20 students, the program runs at capacity.
- More than 80 percent of all SPU vis-com graduates have found work in the design field.
- The SPU chapter of the American Institute of Graphic Arts is the largest and most active among all Pacific Northwest schools with AIGA chapters.
- Each year, SPU hosts the annual AIGA design exhibition and portfolio review. Between 70 and 80 design experts attend.
- Design firms regularly call SPU looking for accomplished student designers.

When a major design expert for Hornall Anderson (clients include Microsoft and Starbucks) said that the work on display at last spring's SPU graphic design show was the best student work he had ever seen, Roger Feldman was among those left beaming. The man with the original vision for

the vis-com program, he knows the satisfaction of starting something that inspires students to produce their best with the gifts they have been given.

"There is not a one-to-one correlation between design and spirituality," says Feldman, whose own graphic designs have served Boeing and the American Cancer Society, "but the vis-com program challenges students to ask pertinent questions. What is the nature of creativity? What is the essence of what makes us tick?"

Though his role in the studio area of the program ended in 2009, he is gratified to see the program thrive under the leadership of commercial designer and Professor of Art—Visual Communication Karen Gutowsky. "She has taken this by the horns," he says. "The program is in great hands."

The aesthetic that Feldman brings to design is forged to a great degree in the realm of site-specific sculpture. His exhibits include work shown at the Tacoma Art Museum, Seattle's Suyama Space, and Schloss Mittersill in Austria. His large drawing, "Current," exhibited at New York City's Museum of Biblical Art.

This summer, he plans to return to Freswick Castle on a Viking landing site at Scotland's northeast tip. Last year, he began an outdoor stone installation

there called "Ekko," Norwegian for "echo." The castle by the sea dates to 1000 A.D. The austere building and the stark nature of its surroundings inform the sculpture incorporating stone that fell from Freswick's original walls. When finished, Ekko will provide wayfarers protection from the almost constant wind that sweeps the land.

"It's a place of contrast and reflection," says Feldman. "Freswick is a still point in the storm." For students in SPU's vis-com program, the graphic design possibilities inherent in that one statement are endless.



Roger Feldman and "Ekko."



The gamelan

Strike the Gongs!

The Seattle Pacific University Music Department has partnered with the University of Washington School of Music in teaching what some might consider an exotic suite of musical instruments: the Javanese gamelan.

Made up of a set of instruments that includes gongs, bamboo flutes, strings, drums, and xylophones, Seattle Pacific's gamelan is the only full Javanese gamelan in Washington state. A gift from Seattle's sister city of Surabaya on the island of Java, the gamelan takes up one entire room of SPU's Crawford Hall and provides students with a unique world music experience.

Gamelan curator and SPU Professor of Music Education Ramona Holmes, who traveled to Surabaya to study the gamelan, says the joint project with UW benefits both universities. SPU had a gamelan and no teacher; UW had a teacher but no gamelan. The result is a marriage made in ethnomusicology heaven.

UW Assistant Professor of Music Christina Sunardi teaches gamelan at SPU to both SPU and UW students. She studied gamelan in Indonesia and

has returned several times to continue her research into the gamelan and Indonesian dance.

"I want to see my students excited about Indonesian culture by introducing them to basic playing techniques of gamelan," says Sunardi, who has also performed music and dance with gamelan ensembles in the San Francisco Bay Area. "One of my students was even inspired to study music and dance with some of my teachers in Java."

Holmes also sees the potential for study abroad opportunities and thinks students gain a great deal from study of the completely new eastern tuning system demanded by the gamelan.

Finding Honey in the Horn



It didn't take a trumpet blast to convince Brian Chin that what Seattle needs -- no, what the entire West Coast needs -- is a Trumpet Arts Festival. The East Coast has done them for years. The vision is for a place where once a year budding trumpet players can gather with jazz specialists to talk about and perform the trumpet and its repertoire. It gives them a place to perform, not in competition, but in celebration of the instrument and its music.

"I was 30 years old before I performed without being judged by people with pencils," says Chin, assistant professor of music and performer with the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Opera. The annual Festival may be the only time youthful trumpet players will ever perform before a real audience.

The third annual Trumpet Arts Festival was held at First Free Methodist Church on January 29. After a day of master classes in trumpet fundamentals and jazz improvisation, came the concert for the general public followed by an after-hours jam session at a local Thai restaurant. The day provided what Chin calls "a crucial missing piece" of music education, where an instrument can be enjoyed for its own sake and played for the pleasure of all.

Chin likes to quote Bela Bartak: "Competition is for horses!" Chin's busy life includes teaching and playing somewhere professionally nearly every week.

As well, he is the creator of the Universal Language Project, devoted to finding a fresh sound for the 21st century.

Though it represents a great deal of work on his part, Chin is committed to growing the Trumpet Arts Festival. It is the one time of year the co-founder of the Seattle Trumpet Consort gets to gather with other professional trumpeters in the Seattle area and to bring in outside talent, such as this year's Bryan Appleby-Wineberg, head of brass at New Jersey's Rowan University.

And those beguiled by the trumpet? It inspires them to pick up the horn and proudly blow. For them, January 2013 can't come soon enough.



Baton or Wand?

To all appearances, Eric Hanson the conductor, poised before the nearly 60 students who comprise the Seattle Pacific University Symphony Orchestra, is an island of calm. Neat, precise, practiced, every molecule of his compact frame infused with the finest music ever composed, he executes the first stroke of his baton and sets in motion a Beethoven concerto.

What the audience, transported by the exquisite music, may not appreciate is that before the final stroke of Hanson's baton, Hanson's brain will make a thousand decisions requiring constant adjustment. Timeless music demands a high degree of technicality and such refinement virtually ensures that no two performances of the same piece will ever be identical.

"There are four parts to my responsibility as a conductor," says Hanson, who has taught music at SPU for 33 years. "I'm responsible to the students to expose them to the best music in our repertoire; to the composer to make sure that some kind of contextual excellence be reached; to the audience that they have a good experience; and to myself to keep growing. When I choose music, those four must be in balance."



Eric Hanson puts the SPU Symphony Orchestra through its practice paces.

And when they are, it can be a performance to remember. Hanson says that once when on tour, he and the orchestra were playing the sixth movement, "What Love Tells Me," from Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 3. "The orchestra was performing so well that I stopped and closed my eyes. When I opened them again, all my musicians were crying. They'd discovered the magic in that performance."

For Hanson, music is magic. "I love music," he says. "I love thinking about music. I love making music." His conducting career spans 50 years.

He urges talented high school students, who either want to be music majors or who wish to continue with their music whatever major they choose, to explore the opportunities at SPU. He notes there is a wide range of academic majors represented among the members of his orchestra.

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and Heart Lead

Continued from front

Miller learned from a master, and a friend. “I could have gone on working with Don forever,” he says.

His special love is running his children’s theatre company, “a group of adults who perform family-friendly shows.” He hopes he can find the funding for SBCT to take off and employ him full-time,

The pragmatist is never far from the artist. “It’s so risky to do what we do. It’s not like I have a single job with benefits. I freelance. I have to get out there and get work. If I don’t, I don’t get paid.” The stress is high, but he and Maija know they are on the right path. “This is hard but we know we are doing what we’re supposed to do.”

Consequently, Miller is admired for good work, being a collaborator and easy to work with, and for an adaptable streak which has served him well in adjusting to the highs and lows of the fluid theatrical world.

“I don’t dominate my productions,” he says, “I serve them. And that in turn has served me well.”

People know he is uncompromising in his Christian faith. The temptation is sometimes there to go make a bigger name for himself, but he is convinced he and his family are planted right where God wants them.

His surety shows. “I love doing something that’s important, that somehow moves the theatre or creates something more.” Every year he re-reads his dog-eared copy of Madeleine L’Engle’s *Walking on Water*, a text for a class he took from SPU Professor of Theatre George Scranton. “Every artist should read that book.”

His other advice for students bent on a degree in theatre? “If there is anything else you would rather do than be an artist, do it. Make art your hobby. But if it’s the life force for you and you can’t see yourself doing anything else, well then, the Lord bless you!”



A Miller James creation for “Peer Gynt.”

The Miller James
Playbook

A sampling of plays directed by Miller James:

“Aesop’s Fables”
“Amahl and the Night Visitors”
“Cinderella”
“Hansel and Gretel”
“Pirates of Penzance”
“South Pacific”
“The Diviners”
“The Magic Flute”
“Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory”
“You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown”

Spring Arts Calendar

- April 19-21, 26-28

Rashomon

** by Fay and Michael Kanin based on stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa. When a Samurai is murdered, and his wife is assaulted by a roving bandit, a beguiling mystery begins to unfold. An incisive meditation on the nature of human weakness, human virtue, and the nature of truth. Matinee April 28, 2 p.m. E.E. Bach Theatre.
- May 10

Jazz Ensemble Concert

E.E. Bach Theatre.
- May 18

Wind Symphony Concert

First Free Methodist Church (adjacent to campus).
- May 22-26

The Billy Goats Gruff

Words and story adaptation by John Davies. Matinee-only May 26, 2 p.m. McKinley Backstage Theatre.
- May 29

Percussion Ensemble Concert

E.E. Bach Theatre.

** Ticket required. Call Fine Arts Box Office at 206-281-2959
- May 31

Symphony Orchestra Concert

First Free Methodist Church
- June 1

Choral Concert

First Free Methodist Church
- All performances are open to the public and begin at 7:30 p.m. (except 2 p.m. Matinee). For ticket and other information, spu.edu/finearts, or call 206-281-2959.

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www.spu.edu/finearts

Catch a vision set in stone.
Strut the stage with a risk-taker.
Meet a maestro made of music.
Blow your horn for joy!



Inside!

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