

Prison Performing Arts (PPA) is dedicated to enriching the lives of adults and youth in the Missouri criminal and juvenile justice systems. We foster individual and social change by providing current and former inmates opportunities to participate in the performing arts as artists, students and audience members.

Prison Performing Arts

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Missouri's Poet Laureate Collaborates with PPA

Walter Bergen, the first Poet Laureate of the State of Missouri, accepted an invitation from Prison Performing Arts to work with our students at the adult prisons at Bowling Green and Vandalia. During his December visit, Mr. Bergen provided students with exercises and ideas to prompt their writing. He also read from his work, which most often is set in nature. Bergen writes frequently about water using the form of the ocean or a downpour, or he reflects on the way that water shapes our lives. The women in the Spoken Word Poetry class at Vandalia had studied Bergen's work and written poetry in response to it. At the end of the day, he left us with this tantalizing reminder, "A poem is never finished, it's just abandoned."



WALTER BERGEN

A New Theatre Recipe

Take 17 unemployed men and women with difficult personal histories; add a producer, director and stage manager; mix in four not-for-profit institutions, and stir gently. What do you get? *Staging Old Masters: Former Prisoners Perform at the Pulitzer.*

The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, Employment Connection, and Washington University's Performing Arts Department and George Warren Brown School of Social Work joined Prison Performing Arts in the new collaboration, which coupled six weeks of classes in acting, art appreciation, employment skills, self-expression, and communication, with six weekends of performances. The performers were former prisoners and homeless veterans who were working with Employment Connection to find jobs. All activities of the project, especially the theatre training, focused on helping participants develop skills necessary to find and keep those jobs.

Twenty-eight performances were seen by more than 850 people, and the production has been filmed for those who were not able to attend. Performance scripts were based on the participants' responses to the Pulitzer exhibit of Old Masters, paintings from the 14th to the 18th centuries. PPA director Agnes Wilcox and Maggie Ginestra, a graduate student in English at Washington University, created eight scenes using remarks made by the workshop students as they first approached the artworks, as they developed their observation skills, and after lectures about the paintings by Pulitzer curators. Two scenes were not based on the actors' words — one was borrowed from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and another was a dance choreographed by Cecil Slaughter set to verses from the Gospel of Luke. Actors spent time at the library doing research on their favorite paintings and shared their observations with each other. In addition to "A Rap for St. Sebastian," the scenes included a soap opera, a painting come to life, an interview, and a wildly colorful illustration of The Seven Deadly Sins.



▲ ACTOR ROBERT CRUZ IMPROVISES IN CLASS, USING HIS BODY TO DESCRIBE DESPAIR.

◀ ACTOR DARYL KIMBROUGH SPEAKS AS PAINTER NICHOLAS REGNIER AS RONALD GORE PLAYS REGNIER'S PATRON IN A SCENE BASED ON ANALYSIS OF THE PAINTING BY WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS.



Hip Hop

For the sixth year in a row, the annual Hip Hop Poetry Project turned St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center into a place of celebration. Responding to the theme "Who I Really Am," the PPA students who participated in the weeklong, March workshop were able to show members of the St. Louis community their true faces through original poetry, dance, and design. Students' poetry was mixed with hip-hop beats by a professional DJ and recorded onto a CD. (Each student receives a copy of the CD.) The live performance on Saturday night created a spirited evening that ended with the entire audience on its feet. Many of this year's most moving poems were inspired by Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask."



League of Women Voters Elects PPA's Alumni Theatre Company

In March, PPA's Alumni Theatre Company performed at the annual Theater Party of League of Women Voters of Missouri. One of the biggest social events on the League's calendar, the party was held in the Centene Center's ballroom and drew guests from throughout the state. Alumni Theatre Company members performed scenes from *Julius Caesar* and *Twelfth Night*, joined by new company member Dontez Windrom, who read poems he'd

written about his family and a special tribute he'd written to celebrate women voters. The Alumni Company's newest member, Dawn Shaw, joined veteran members Derrick Hutchison and Tim Norman for a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. League member Sue Dellbringge also joined the cast playing the role of Snug the Joiner. League members voted for more, saying, "This is the best Theater Party ever. Let's do it again next year!"

I WEAR THE MASK

by Shaquille

I wear a mask to let you see and think that I'm fine.
I say no words, but you should know that I'm lying.
No tears on my face but inside I'm crying.
I wear a mask to hide my thoughts and clear your mind.

MY MASK

by Tamell

The mask I wear is that sometimes
I lie about my hooping skills and
I act like I'm happy but I'm really not.
I'm ready to go home.
I'm a superstar on my court in my head.
My mask is silent but deadly like a black widow.

THE MASK OF ME

by Bruce

I hide feelings sometimes in a day
We hide feelings in a different way
Anger and fear does not affect me
I wear my mask predictably
You can tell when you see
That I am the mask of me
Sometimes it might be stress, pain
Sometimes it's 'cause I've gone insane
Made a choice that's probably bad
Now I know my mother's sad
You can tell when you see
That I am the mask of me

■ This Summer, a story on the 2009 Hip Hop Poetry project will be featured on HEC-TV's "State of the Arts." We'll keep you posted.

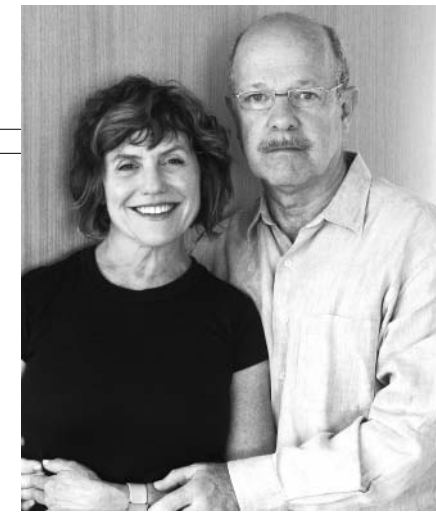
Shakespeare – the Lover, the Lunatic and the Poet

The comediennes of the Vandalia Women's Theatre performed four times for public audiences last semester. A violent snowstorm cut attendance at the two scheduled

January performances, so the prison kindly allowed the actors to return to the stage in February. This was a gift to audience members who had been snowed out, and a rare opportunity for the actors to polish their performances. Acts I and II of *Twelfth Night* ended with a spirited debate between Viola and Malvolio, leaving audience members laughing and looking forward to more in July.

The men at Northeast Correctional Center (NECC) at Bowling Green, who created their own play, *Doing Time*, last June, returned to Shakespeare this year. In February, they tackled Acts I and II of *The Tempest*, with three actors sharing the role of Prospero and one six-foot, 200-pound actor playing the petite spirit Ariel. Rachel Tibbetts, Prison Performing Arts' Education Coordinator, again joined the NECC actors, playing Miranda. The storm that opens the play and the magic of Prospero and Ariel delighted audiences.

MARK YOU CALENDARS FOR THE NEXT PERFORMANCES:
Twelfth Night, Acts II and III:
WERDCC, Vandalia, Missouri –
Monday, July 13, 1:00 and 6:00 pm
(arrive 30 minutes in advance)
RSVP BY JUNE 26th.
The Tempest, Acts III, IV and V:
NECC, Bowling Green –
Thursday, July 23, 6:00 pm
(arrive 45 minutes in advance)
RSVP BY JULY 7th.



ELLEN AND DURB CURLEE

The Curlee Challenge

Ellen and Durb Curlee have renewed their challenge to donors of Prison Performing Arts, offering to match dollar-for-dollar new or increased gifts of \$100 or more. "I invite you to join us in making a greater investment in this amazing work," Durb exhorts.

Birthday Bash for the Bard IV

► THIS APRIL, THE BIRTHDAY BASH FOR THE BARD AT DUFF'S RESTAURANT IN THE CENTRAL WEST END INCLUDED AN ACTING COMPETITION, SHAKESPEARE IDOL. HERE, ELIZABETH HERRING COMPETES WITH HELP FROM ALUMNI THEATRE COMPANY MEMBER DAWN SHAW.



◀ DON AND ANN KORNBLER CONSIDER THEIR VOTES BEFORE MAKING THE DIFFICULT DECISION. THE WINNER OF SHAKESPEARE IDOL WAS KIANA WILDER, WHO PERFORMED THISBE FROM A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

► BEN SENTURIA, PLAYING BEATRICE, THE HEROINE OF MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, COMPETES WITH THE HELP OF ALUMNI THEATRE COMPANY MEMBER TIM NORMAN.





New Board Members



David Weaver has been an attorney with Edward Jones for the last 13 years, working with business owner retirement plans. A native of Salem, Missouri, he holds an A.B. in Biology and a doctorate in Law from the University of Missouri, Columbia. David

is among the founding members of the St. Louis Friends Chapter of The National Children's Cancer Society and is a past president of the organization.



Michele Mallette Sherman, a native of Chicago, lives in the Compton Heights neighborhood with her husband of 25 years, Jim; her daughter Claire lives in Chicago. Michelle majored in theatre in college and her passion for it has never waned. She's "a total Political Junkie" and has worked on numerous political campaigns. Her work on the Obama campaign culminated in attending the inauguration last January.



Ashleigh Henry received her BFA in Photography from NYU, and became a photo editor first for ABC News.com in New York and then AOL News in Virginia. She moved to St. Louis with her husband Ben Wauer, an officer in the Air Force stationed at Scott

AFB, and is currently pursuing her MFA in Arts Management and Leadership at Webster University.

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New Year's Eve in August - St. Louis Style!

You've heard of Christmas in July?

On Friday, August 14, we're celebrating **New Year's Eve in August - St. Louis Style!** to benefit Prison Performing Arts. Join us for appearances by Baby New Year and Father Time, fire eaters and fire eating belly dancers, a balloon drop raffle, a New Year's toast and more, at the MadArt Gallery, 2727 S. 12th Street, in Soulard.

New Year's Eve in August festivities include St. Louis' well-loved food traditions, including toasted ravioli and gooey butter bites, and an auction of art work based on St. Louis icons by St. Louis artists.

Tickets are \$25 per person, \$30 at the door. To purchase tickets or for more information contact Prison Performing Arts at 314-289-4190 or visit prisonperformingarts.org

Thank you, Edison Theatre

The Edison Theatre, a longtime friend of Prison Performing Arts, continues to provide a significant contribution to our students at St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center. Known for presenting great seasons of theater, dance, and music, the Edison regularly includes the detention center in its community outreach activities. Most recently, the Edison brought the Los Angeles dance company *Diavolo* to Detention. Our students got firsthand experience by participating

with the performers in a movement workshop. *Diavolo* also worked with our adult actors in *Staging Old Masters* at the Pulitzer. In addition, those actors worked with the Kenyan dance company *Haba-Na-Haba* and attended their performance at the Edison. Bravo to Edison Theatre Executive Director Charlie Robin and his staff for understanding the needs of the people we serve and recognizing that PPA's actors, in turn, can inspire professional artists.



DIABOLO, THE EXTREMELY ATHLETIC DANCE COMPANY THAT VISITED TWO GROUPS OF PPA ACTORS, SHOW THEIR AGILITY ONSTAGE.

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