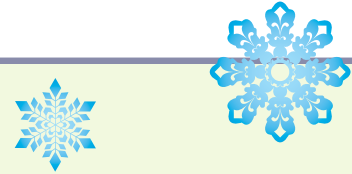


Walking with the Dead



by Suellen Winstead, Littleton Museum

Suellen Winstead is the Curator of Education and Interpretation of the Littleton Museum, Littleton, Colorado. She's also the chair of IMTAL's 2016 conference committee; Littleton Museum is hosting the 2016 conference.

Each year, her team presents a night-time outdoors Halloween program that moves from station to station, using existing structures "converted" to serve that year's program. From 2009 through 2014, the program has been a guided tour of vignettes. That changed in 2015.

The first walkthrough wasn't good, but it was what I expected.

October 2015 was our seventh year presenting the Littleton Museum's Walking with the Dead Halloween program. And it was our first year having staff and volunteers act out the stories in character.

When the program first began in 2009, it was designed as a new way for us to present our visitors with Victorian Era Colorado history through stories illustrated with vignettes featuring staff and volunteers. For the first three years, we

chose a different theme each year and found stories that fit with that theme. The first year we focused on Victorian funeral traditions; the second, the spiritualism movement; and for the third year, the Cabinet of Curiosities, or Victorian scientific explanations for the natural world. In the following years, we rotated the themes, and to keep things fresh, we added a few new stories every year and discarded the ones that didn't fit as well with the theme.

Initially designed as a walking tour of the museum's 1860s farm, the success of the program relied heavily on the talents of the three tour guides. It was evident from the beginning that we would have to limit the number of people on each tour; our historic buildings are small and most will fit no more than 20 adults comfortably. So, we provided three tours an hour, with 20 people on each tour. It was the guides' job to provide an introduction, tell the stories as they led the tour, and answer any questions afterward.

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Cemetery

Suellen Winstead

President's Welcome



Elizabeth Pickard, President

Happy New Year IMTAL!

We are gearing up for another great year in 2016. Here are some dates to keep in mind:

- ♦ At AAM on Saturday, May 28th at 12:30pm in the Mt. Vernon Square Room at the Marriott Marquis, we will host a luncheon honoring our Lipsky Playwriting award and IMTY leadership award winners. Remember that ticket sales for the luncheons end well ahead of the conference registration deadline.
- ♦ There are also sessions featuring IMTAL members on the slate of programs at AAM—including the IMTAL Theatre Showcase, Saturday, May 28, 11:00am (right before the luncheon) and a panel on “Handing Over the Reins” with yours truly (I’ll be talking about the Teens Make History program) at 8:45am Sunday, May 29—so make sure to stop in!
- ♦ We are thrilled to be hosting a national conference in Colorado at the end of August—more details to come soon.

To receive details and updates for all of those, please make sure that your membership is up to date, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Now, on to this issue of *Insights*!

I can't tell you how much I am looking forward to reading this issue—Amazing Space. That's partly because the spaces we use in museum theatre run the gamut—from multi-million dollar, state of the art theaters, to smoky 17th century reproduction houses, to odd corners of exhibits, to stairwells, to exhibit spaces that transform from interactive museum game space to theatre with the twitch of a barn door. I often find in my own work that oddball spaces force creative solutions, and I've been impressed with how colleagues have made the most of spaces that most people would consider more hallway than theatre. This work is well and truly a form of guerrilla theatre or happening, and I love how it disrupts the space and creates a wonderful if sometimes unexpected experience for our audiences before turning back into a hallway or a corner.

As inspiring as I find work that makes the most of what a museum has in a pinch, I also appreciate how museums think about incorporating performance spaces into exhibits so that they aren't just dead or wasted space if there isn't a performance. That kind of well thought out plan is a product of good cross-departmental collaboration in our museums. It means that our guests are often more comfortable and also creates a greater likelihood that our programs will become destinations and not just happenstances.

What are your space challenges? Your triumphs? Your creative solutions? Let us know by posting to our Facebook page (look for IMTAL Americas <https://www.facebook.com/IMTALAmericas/?fref=ts>) or by shooting us a tweet at [@IMTALAmericas](https://twitter.com/IMTALAmericas).

Hoping to see you all soon,

Elizabeth



Editor's Corner

I don't have time for this, I really don't. I've got a business to run, projects under deadline, family responsibilities, what feels like a hundred thousand commitments and obligations, all demanding my time and attention.

You know, normal life.

Yet how can I not be involved?

Museum theatre in all its forms is fascinating. Intriguing. Beyond cool. It's one of the most effective and most powerful interpretive techniques out there. It's one of the most visible, too—yet also one of the most overlooked.

Sure, visitors enjoying and benefiting from our programs might not realize they're watching a professionally scripted, acted, and produced performance—but many of our colleagues don't realize it, either. They don't recognize that what they (and we) are doing is grounded in performing arts as well as the fields of interpretation, education, and communication. And many of those colleagues who do know (or suspect) don't know about IMTAL, or the resources available through us, from the Best Practices we developed which have been accepted by AAM to scripts, advice, and conferences.

So I'm here, trying to change that. I'm in my second term as Publications Officer; this is the 11th issue of *Insights* I've edited. I'm a member of the just-formed 2016 IMTAL-Americas conference committee, too. We're gearing up for the next conference, which will be in Denver, Colorado, August 27 through August 30, hosted by the Littleton Museum.

In our board meetings, we talk about how to spread the word about IMTAL, as well as how to expand awareness of museum theatre and all it has to offer. We shake our heads in wonder (and, sometimes, frustration) at the latest news of museum theatre professionals who've never heard of us (Los Angeles? *Really??*) and brainstorm ideas about how to run a membership marketing campaign with little money, limited time, and a lot of heart.

In this issue, we begin an exploration of Amazing Space (adapting and leveraging space for performance and performance to space) with an article by Suellen Winstead of the Littleton Museum. We'll continue that exploration in our Spring 2016 issue, too, as well as look at management challenges.

Also in this issue you'll find calls for submission for our two annual awards, the IMTY and the Jon Lipsky Award for Excellence in Playwriting, and for nominations for Treasurer and Membership board member positions.

If each member spent one hour a month on IMTAL-related stuff, that would total about 1200 hours a year: 1200 hours gaining new members, planning and presenting a conference that's more than worth the time and money to attend, posting on our Facebook page and Twitter feeds about what's happening at your site, talking with colleagues at all levels about museum theatre in its many forms, even writing the occasional article for our humble quarterly publication.

I know you don't have time for any of this, but I hope you'll join in anyway.

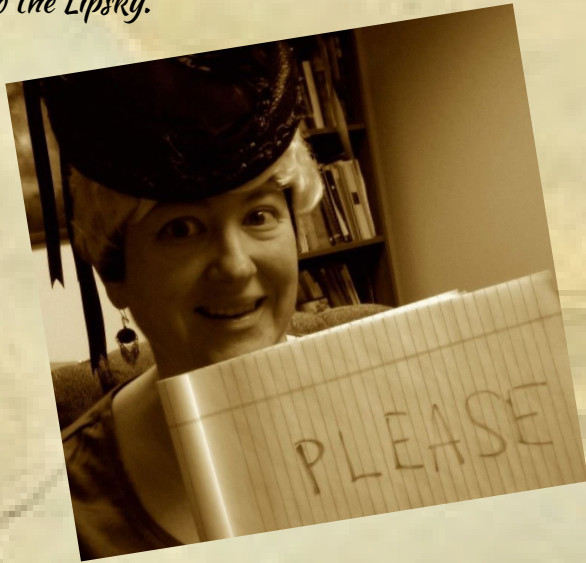
Judy



Judy Fort Brenneman, Publications Officer

T. L. Brenneman

The Dowager Duchess of IMTALtham and Lady Thalia cordially invite you to send submissions for the board, the IMTY and the Lipsky.



Deadline: January 29, 2016

You're Invited

...or we could just have Lady Thalia stare at you meaningfully.



Seriously, she can keep this up for ages. Just send in the submissions.

Submissions & Nominations

The Jon Lipsky Playwriting Award, which recognizes excellence in museum theatre playwriting. See information at the link, then email script and supporting documentation to our vice president, Douglas Coler at vicepresident@imtal-us.org.

The IMTY Award, which honors outstanding leaders who support the practice of museum theatre. Email nominations to our president, Elizabeth Pickard at president@imtal-us.org.

Board of Directors: we are taking nominations for treasurer (three-year term) and for membership officer (two-year term.) We are also looking for volunteers to be members at large. Members at large act as liaisons to other organizations, support our membership efforts, and aid us in communications (web, blog, and social media). **Self nominations are not only allowed, but encouraged.** Nominations should be sent to Elizabeth Pickard at president@imtal-us.org.

DEADLINE FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE IS MIDNIGHT, JANUARY 29, 2016.

Why you should be on the board: “It is lonely here at IMTAL Abbey all alone with the Dowager Duchess. You can’t leave her alone to run the place. She already spends far too much time taking stunt selfies.” —Lady Thalia

Why you should submit an IMTY nomination: “Good leadership should be recognized. Otherwise you end up as a bit player in a World War I drama. It never ends well.” —Bill “marked for death from the start” the Footman

Why you should submit a play for the Lipsky playwriting award: “The Dowager Duchess is at this point probably 125. Also car crashes following the birth of new babies. You can do better than that, IMTAL; let us tell the world how much better.” —Another Actor Lost





Suellen Winstead

Funeral procession

The vignettes were set-up using the historic buildings and land of the 1860s farm. Visitors who had visited the museum before found the buildings and land transformed into something different from what they were used to. For example, this year, the blacksmith shop became the workshop of the coffin builder, the 1865 cabin became the home of Mr. Lacko'breath from Edgar Allen Poe's story *Loss of Breath*, and the grassy area to the east of the cabin became a graveyard.

storytelling. In the past, they'd been passive players as a part of a vignette. Now, we were asking those staff and volunteers to become actors.

The "script" was written by Jennifer Woeste, a museum staff interpreter, who originally came up with the idea for the Walking with the Dead program. However, the script was intended not so much as lines to be memorized, but a compilation of stories for the staff and volunteers to read and absorb, along with some suggestions of dialog that might be exchanged between characters.



Suellen Winstead

Mr. Lackabreath

Each year, the popularity of Walking with the Dead has grown and each year, it has become more complex. In 2015, we expanded to include the 1890s living history farm on the tour, and we went from one night to two nights but decreased the number of tours per hour to two. We stationed a knowledgeable and experienced volunteer interpreter at the end of the tour to answer questions and add more historical background to the stories told during the tour. The biggest change was that instead of relying on tour guides to tell the stories along the way, staff and volunteers in the vignettes were responsible for the



Suellen Winstead

Measuring for a coffin

continued...

Essentially, we were asking our staff and volunteers, who had little or no acting experience, to assume a character and then improvise. Our normal mode of interpretation on our living history farm is what I call “conversational”—what in living history is referred to as “costumed third-person”—interpretation. Our interpreters are dressed in period costume, but they are not performing as historical characters frozen in time. This new presentation style, more akin to costumed first-person interpretation, was a bit of a challenge.

Immediately following the first walk-through, we asked our actors to really get to know the script well, but emphasized that it wasn't necessary to memorize it. They just needed to remember the theme and the basic story line, and they could embellish from there. We also asked the actors to think about their character—to come up with a back story and imagine a little bit about their character's motivation.



Suellen Winstead

Coffin salesman

Next, we sent everyone an email, asking them to sign up for a time when they could come into the museum for some one-on-one coaching. Several of the actors took us up on this offer, but as expected, several did not.

For those who did come in for coaching, it was a valuable experience. Perhaps the most challenging part of the coaching sessions was prying the script away from actors who clung to it as if it was a life preserver. Although they had been told it was only a guideline, most memorized the script word for word. Once I got the script away from them, I asked each actor to perform the story for me from memory. Then we talked about the important points of the story that they had to remember and convey, and we discussed the character's objective and what the character would do to reach that objective.



Suellen Winstead

Embalming tent

We had a quick dress rehearsal the night prior to the first night of the program. It was quick, because not all staff and volunteers could make it that night. The next night, all the actors were in costume and in place. The first couple of tours were a little rough, but once everyone was warmed up, the rest of the night and the following night went well. Most importantly, the visitors seemed to enjoy themselves, and many stayed to learn more of the history from which the stories they heard had developed.



Visit IMTAL On-line: imtal-us.org

Drop us a note—board member email addresses are listed on the last page of the newsletter.

Want to write for *Insights*?

Short, long, article, essay, opinion piece, announcement, photo

—if it has to do with Museum Theatre, we're interested!

Submission guidelines and the 2015-16 editorial schedule are now online: <http://imtal-us.org/publications>

Auditions, Calls for Submissions & Announcements

Auditions and Cool Events for Museum Theatre; Calls for Submissions

Calls for Submissions

Scripts on a science-related topic or person, 20–45 minutes in length, no more than 2 actors, for Carpenter Science Theatre Company’s quarterly staged readings of “science theatre” scripts at Science Museum of Virginia’s Lunch Box Science events. Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis; royalty payment of \$50.00 for single staged reading performance of accepted scripts.

Email copy of your script to lgard@smv.org OR submit hard copy to:

Larry Gard
4716 Scouters Pl
Chesterfield, VA 23832

OR to

Larry Gard
Science Museum of Virginia
2500 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23220



Conferences, Workshops, and Events

Feb. 22, 2016
Museums Advocacy Day
<http://www.aam-us.org/advocacy/museums-advocacy-day>

May 25, 2016
IMTAL board meeting in Washington DC

May 26-29, 2016
AAM Conference, Washington DC
<http://annualmeeting.aam-us.org/>
Including:
May 28, 2016, 11:00am-12:15pm
IMTAL Theatre Showcase (incl. with AAM registration)

May 28, 2016, 12:30-1:45pm
IMTAL Annual Luncheon (\$50)

continued next column...

AAM, continued

May 29, 2016, 8:45am
Panel, “Handing Over the Reins,” including panelist (and IMTAL President) Elizabeth Pickard presenting on Missouri History Museum’s *Teens Make History* program

August 26, 2016
IMTAL board meeting, Denver, CO

August 27-30, 2016
IMTAL-Americas annual conference
Denver and Littleton, CO

Submit articles, news, and ideas for *Insights!*

Send us your article, opinion, or news to publications@imtal-us.org (It doesn’t have to be perfect; it just needs to be reasonably coherent. If we have questions, we’ll contact you.)

Spring 2016 issue: Management Challenge: starting, keeping, and growing museum theatre programs; calculating costs; planning; coordinating with the world and others. Deadline: March 25, 2016

Summer 2016 issue: Award winners, AAM report, and more! Deadline: June 15, 2016

Be Included on a Map of Conservation Theaters

Bricken Sparacino is creating a map of Conservation Theaters to share with teachers, community leaders, and others who bring groups on field trips or have tours visit their facilities. Conservation Theater uses theatre as a teaching tool to inspire young people and their families to love wild things and wild places, helping to create the next generation of conservationists. Here is what the map looks like so far.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zYPI9ZckjnWc.k7YnqoF4Gjgk>

If you feel that your work fits under the Conservation Theater umbrella, please fill out this survey and she will add you to the map:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1zDJ8t1tN2Aduo6xBaTO_QL0u5eyYUG5X3KIwcUyVSxI/viewform?usp=send_form

Once it is finished, it will be searchable on a blog and Facebook.

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The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate to the American Alliance of Museums. IMTAL's mission is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience. For more information, to become a member, or to volunteer, please visit our website, <http://imtal-us.org/home>, or contact a board member via email.

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**Doug also continues as IMTAL Website and Social Media guru. Please send questions about such things to him at web@imtal-us.org.*