

Downstage Center

Go behind the scenes with Kevin Selwyn

After final exams ended last semester, students made the mass exodus to get as far away from school as quick as they could. Textbooks were sold back and notes were, by more audacious students, burned and forgotten.

Some students made it their goal to do nothing over winter break, though this type of student is limited to a small percentage.

Many students pursued intellectual enrichment over break in order to further their educations and careers. Chief among this group are theatre majors.

Perhaps it's that they have less notes to burn, or they are constantly looking for an edge in an extremely competitive field, but theatre majors always seem to make the most of their time off.

Freshman musical theatre student Nigel Huckle headed to his home in Roanoke, Va., but was determined to keep himself busy by reading plays.

"They helped a lot in researching new monologues or scenes I might want to do this semester," said Huckle.

He also auditioned for a children's show at a local theatre.

"That helped me apply a lot of what I learned this past semester, as well as keeping myself on my audition 'A' game."

Sophomore musical theatre student Aaren Keith made her trek home



to Savannah, Ga., and stayed long enough to support some local theatre and see her sister in a performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" before making her way up to New York City.

"It is important for the growth of any actor to see as many shows as they can, whether it be community theatre, university-level theatre or professional," said Keith.

So unlike many typical New York City tourists during the holiday season, Keith and her classmates do not attend shows for their entertainment value alone.

"Whenever I see a live performance, I always leave asking myself — and my friends — so many questions. It's these questions that get me excited about returning to school to continue growing as an artist," admits Keith.

Junior musical theatre major Schyler Conaway made a trip home to Delaware and then bounced right up to New York City as well.

Ever the critic, Conaway offers an interesting observation of the New York theatre scene after seeing Tony Award-winning rock musical "Next to Normal," which stars Shenandoah alumnus J. Robert Spencer.

"It was so refreshing to see a show that is just about the acting. So many shows on Broadway are all about the extravaganza. They all have flashy effects and now all have to be family friendly, too," Conaway said.

But there is always something to learn from seeing theatre and Conaway found a good source of inspiration rekindled in himself.

"Being an actor and a lover of theatre, 'Next to Normal' is one of the most moving and wonderful experiences I've had in the theatre for a long time. Seeing the show reminded me why I chose this profession in the first place."

Huckle, Keith and Conaway are a freshman, sophomore and junior,

respectively, and still have some time left at school to kindle a love of theatre and foster an understanding of their craft and how to apply it with the best results.

But, for a handful of seniors, including senior musical theatre major Jessie Hooker, time is running out before they are out on their own with everything they have learned at school.

Hooker attended a performance of the short-lived revival of one of her favorite musicals, "Ragtime," which happened also to star a Shenandoah alumnus, Aaron Galligan-Stierle.

The tickets were a Christmas gift from Hooker's boyfriend and included a talk-back session with the writers of the musical that provided her with a great insight into the world of show business that she was about to enter.

Much of the rest of her time was spent refreshing and staying on top of all the work she had done for this weekend's performance of "The Wild Party," which plays this Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, Jan. 15, 16 and 17.

"Honestly I tried to rest as much as possible," Hooker said, but in anticipation of May graduation, she has been working on marketing herself in as many ways as possible.

"I got my business cards done, submitted myself for an independent film, and I'm working on putting some songs together for a demo," she proclaimed with glee.

So across the board from freshmen to seniors, the regimen for a theatre student over breaks include seeing theatre and continuing their education as much as possible.

As with any major, nobody is going to do your work for you. One can graduate from college either by doing only the required work in the required time, or those who are passionate about their work can breathe, dream and live what they love.



SUN Photo courtesy of KEVIN SELWYN

Shenandoah students Will Goodwin and Aaren Keith (left) and Kelley Connolly (right) meet alumnus and star of the Broadway show "Ragtime: The Musical" Aaron Galligan-Stierle '02 backstage after a performance of the show in December.