

## What's Happening?

◆ Oldcastle's final play reading will be at the Clark Museum on Friday, November 5. Put it on your calendar now.

◆ Once again opening nights at Oldcastle Theatre are special. Different area restaurants offer complimentary hors d'oeuvres after the show. This is a chance to chat with friends and meet the actors as you sample the fine cuisines of our local restaurants while sipping wine, compliments of Sante Magazine. So far we have had *Four Chimneys* and *The Bennington Station*. Next is the *Mount Anthony Country Club*.

◆ Visit us on Facebook and check out our website for all the up to date news about plays and other activities..

<http://www.oldcastletheatre.org/>

◆ On Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 pm, Oldcastle will have a gala improvisation/auction at the Bennington Center for the Arts. This is a chance to see your favorite actors create comedy skits and to pick up some great bargains. The cost is \$25 for this special event.

## What Does a Technical Director Do? David Groupe Has the Answers



David Groupe has been the Technical Director for *The Oldcastle Theatre Company* from its first days at the Bennington Center for the Arts. When asked the question of what a technical Director does, he said, "He is most responsible for building the set, but over all for everything technical on the set. As with most things, there are gray areas."

Sometimes David will be responsible for props and

costumes and lighting. For *Leading Ladies*, David designed the lights and Carl Sprague designed the set.

How closely the Set Designer and the Technical Director work together varies with the play. Carl Sprague was doing a movie so he e-mailed the plans to David before David arrived in Bennington. Carl found the wall paper and the colors and the set dressing. Carl and David communicated by telephone on some of the set details.

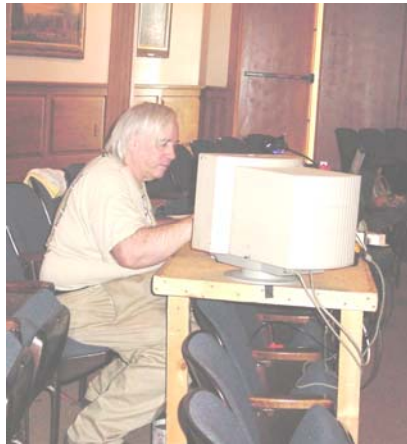
Asked to compare Oldcastle to other places he has worked, David said that every place is different. At Oldcastle David generally has one or two helpers. At other places, he might send the drawings out where the set would be built off stage and trucked in. It runs the gamut, depending on the size of the company. At Oldcastle, David builds the set on the stage.

After a show opens, the role of the technical director varies depending on where you are. When he lived in Bennington, David was available. Now that he lives out of town, someone else will run the lights and deal with any technical problems after the opening.

David worked at Bennington College and Marymount Manhattan College as well as The City Theatre Company in Pittsburgh. He now works as a Technical Director at St Mary's College in Maryland which is part of the state system. David has also worked for the Berkshire and Connecticut Opera Companies,

David received a BFA and an MFA in Technical Production and Lighting Design at Carnegie-Mellon which is known for its drama programs.

David notes that every show has something new that needs to be figured out, even if there is a standard way to do things.



This was one of the largest sets that Oldcastle has ever put up. There is a challenge to reuse materials. After every play a company has to decide what part of the set they keep and what they throw away. Some of Oldcastle's flats are stored at the high school and are used in their productions. One of the challenges is to have each set be different and to transform any elements that would be recognizable

Having worked with Oldcastle for many years, David finds it to be a congenial group. Not only does David enjoy working with Rick Howe, but he calls on Bob Howe for intricate work such as the curved balcony railing in *Leading Ladies*.

David has two days short of three weeks to work on a set. One show closes on a Sunday and another opens on a Friday. He must tear down the old set and start working on the new set and lighting. The actors also have rehearsals on the set during that time.

Having worked with Oldcastle for many years, David noted that his biggest challenge was the set for *Moon Over Buffalo*, which he designed. There were two sets, The floor of one set would lift and become the ceiling of the other set.

His favorite lighting design was *Terra Nova* where the lighting was a character in the play.

On opening night and every night of *Leading Ladies* as the curtain opened on the set, the audience applauded. The play and the performances equaled the set and the production was one of the most popular of Oldcastle's productions.

The work of the Technical Director may be before the play opens and behind the scenes, but it is vital to the success of the plays.

## Who Makes a Play?



Actors are front and center. We see them, hear them, often identify with them. They are a playwrights best tools. But there are other important tools as well. Plays need sets to be designed and built. There have to be costumes (even *O CALCUTTA* had some costumes). Lights are a necessary ingredient and sound too, of course. All the elements of a production require talented people, behind the scenes, working diligently. Oldcastle is blessed by having an enormously talented group of artists creating our sets, costumes, lights and sound. David Groupe, for instance, interviewed in this issue has been designing lights and serving as our technical director for numerous productions over a span of some 20 years. David lit and built Carl Sprague's

fabulous,, and very, large, set for *LEADING LADIES*. It was a Herculean task as we have a small crew and there are never enough hours. But somehow Dave manages to get the work done. It was wonderful hearing the applause as the curtain opened for *LEADING LADIES*. We rarely use a curtain but it gave the audience a splendid surprise when the fantastic two story set was revealed.

Ken Mooney, our long-time Director of Production, who designed the more than 40 costumes for *LEADING LADIES* deserves a mention here as, of course, does Richard Howe, our Associate Artistic Director who has not only acted in a staggering number of Oldcastle productions but has also designed and built an amazing number of sets. Rick designed and built the set for David Budbill's *A SONG FOR MY FATHER*.

Wm. John Aupperlee and Carl Sprague have both been designing for us for a long time and are both highly skilled and inventive designers. Bill designed *DANGEROUS OBSESSION*, our joint production with the Bickford Theatre that opened our season, and will also design the final production of the season *AWAKE AND SING*. We

are lucky to have such talented artists as part of our Oldcastle family.

Eric Peterson  
Artistic Director

## Meet Trustee Ray Rodrigues



Ray is in his third year as an Oldcastle Trustee. He is a retired professor of English and English Education. He was the Provost at the University of Texas at Brownsville. At MCLA, he was Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Ray has written thirteen different textbooks; some of them co-authored with his wife, Dawn. The books were for public school and included *How To Teach English* and *How To Do Research*. He has also written a book about a boy who followed Ethan Alan, *Memoir of a Green Mountain Boy*.

Ray has been running the Pownal Wiki for four years. It is essentially a web site to which anyone can contribute. The idea is to keep the community informed. Ray is also working on the committee arranging a celebration of Pownal's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Ray has been the Secretary of the Oldcastle Board for two years. His goals are to increase the audience for Oldcastle and to support the interests of the Board in its various projects.

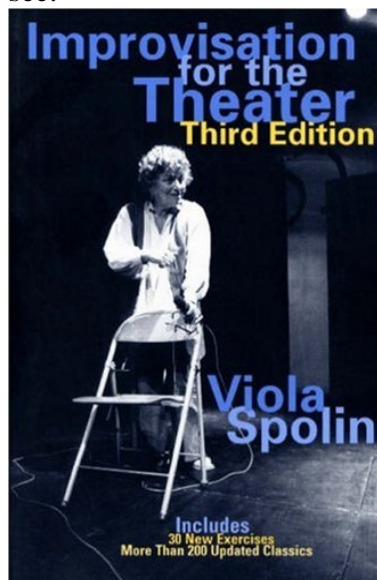
Ray has been very impressed by the quality of the Oldcastle productions. "People are really missing something when they miss the productions."

## Improvisational Comedy



Improvisational comedy has a long history. From the 1500s to the 1700s, Commedia dell'arte entertained street audiences with their spontaneous

performances. Acting teachers used the techniques in their classes. Dudley Riggs was the first vaudevillian to use audience suggestions for his skits. However, the main force in the United States was Viola Spolin in the 1940s who with her theatre games created an art form that people would pay to see.



Her son, Paul Sills along with David Shepherd started The Compass Players in Chicago, as well as the famous Second City among whose performers were Stephen Colbert, Mike Myers, Chris Farley and John Belushi. The comedy of Mike Nichols and Elaine May was also grounded in improvisation.

Improvisations are unscripted with suggestions often coming from the audience. The actors must

be quick upon their feet, able to take on different characters quickly and to pick up on the cues from the other actors. Working together over long periods of time helps improvisational actors to be responsive to the material that the other actors use in response to the audience's suggestions.

The principles of improvisation influenced film makers like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, while the Marx Brothers were famous for their spontaneous ad libbing that later became a part of their routines.

The performers in Oldcastle's improvisational comedy are led by Christine Decker, an actress who has performed with Oldcastle for many years. She has also spent many years at Disney World doing improvisation and some of the New York actors who are working with her on September 10<sup>th</sup> have also worked at Disney World.

This evening at Oldcastle is a unique opportunity for the audience to participate in this exciting and spontaneous creation of comedy skits. This combined with a silent and live auction should make for a special evening.