

# The Last Frontier Theatre Conference 2010 Evaluations Report



*Tony Williams and Jenny Vilim performing David Guaspari's "Roger and Juliet," a part of the Ten-Minute Play Slam.*

*All photos taken by Ryan Adkins for Prince William Sound Community College.*

## **Introduction**



*Conference Coordinator Dawson Moore*

Each year, feedback forms are distributed to all Conference participants when they register. The forms are also made available after the Conference on the website, both as PDF and Word documents. The responses are amassed here and used in the planning for subsequent years.

The first ten pages of this report are a numerical breakdown of participants' rankings of various topics. This is followed by quotes from the participants, sorted first by question, then more specifically by the topic of the response. The Coordinator's analysis is at the start of each section.

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## Information Received Prior to the Event

Our goal is to maintain extensive communication with everyone planning on attending the Conference. Particularly for new participants, the size of the event and remoteness of its location can be daunting. To help allay this, all participants are corresponded with directly by the Coordinator, and are repeatedly encouraged to contact him with any questions. The website ([www.pwscc.edu](http://www.pwscc.edu)) is used as the primary conduit for information that participants need to prepare to attend the Conference.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	71%	66%	61.5%	45%	75%
Good	20%	24%	29%	39%	20%
Satisfactory	7%	8%	4.5%	12%	3%
Unsatisfactory	2%	0%	2%	2%	0%
N/A	0%	0%	3%	2%	2%

People generally seemed to feel well-prepared for the Conference, with the best ratings since records of results started being kept. Last year's lower scores made this one of two major points of emphasis in coordinating 2010's Conference (along with evening performance overall quality).



*Texas playwright Sarah Saltwick checks the schedule.*

### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

Our plans changed here in 2010. We had intended to give individual calls to new participants and to connect playwrights with their casts ahead of time, but on further analysis, it was decided that this created more problems than it solved. Specific correspondence that goes out every year was added to the master to-do list for the Conference to help avoid having specific messages going out too late (or not at all). The only large change planned for next year is to take a more active role with the Lab playwrights on preparing their scripts for their readings prior to those scripts being mailed to participants. More on this in the Play Lab section.

## Conference Schedule

The ambitious slate of activities for the week provides participants with more activities than they can possibly attend. There are generally three choices during any times slot, and activities go from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every day. Evenings contain both a show and a late night Fringe Festival.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	73%	67%	55%	59%
Good	23%	29%	38%	39%
Satisfactory	4%	3%	7%	1%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	1%
N/A	0%	1%	0%	0%

98% of the participants rated the schedule good to excellent, so this is not a major area of concern. Dropping a day from the schedule went largely unnoticed, which is a positive.



*Michael Hood's "Basic Unarmed Combat Techniques for the Actor" class.*

### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

The general schedule for the event will remain unchanged. The main other scheduling change that took place this year was holding the Conference in May. While there were issues for some participants, attendance was slightly up this year, and the community of Valdez was less crowded with competing tourists. 2011 will be in June again, but after that the intent is to go to May on a regular basis.

## Conference Website

Direct personal conversation and the website are our main means of distributing information to participants prior to the Conference, and of publicizing the event. Information contained includes the Conference schedule; Featured Artist biographies; Play Lab selections; a “how the conference works” essay; registration form; list of financial benefactors; available local discounts for participants; and link to contact the Conference Coordinator. We also use it to facilitate a few programs such as the Monologue Workshop by making dramatic material available to participants there prior to their arrival in Valdez. Lastly, it is used to as a historical record of the event. Programs, photos, and other information give evidence of the Conference’s rich history.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	52%	51.5%	52%	45%
Good	27%	22%	21%	35%
Satisfactory	4%	4.5%	10%	12%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	2%	0%
N/A	17%	22%	15%	8%

These numbers have stayed nearly identical since this category was added in 2007. While they are solid, we would like to see growth.



### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

A question will be added to next year’s feedback form to assess what we can do to get the website with a higher percentage of excellent responses. Additionally, we will be looking at ways to have it better represent the current mission and recent history of the Conference. Right now, it very accurately and clearly gives the history of the event, and it has lots of information for people participating in the current year, but it could give a more clear vision of what the event is at the present.

*Portland actress Anya Pearson reading Kia Corthron’s work in the Evening with Our Featured Playwrights.*



## Play Lab

The top priority of the Conference is to support the development of early- to mid-career playwrights. Every year, the overall success of the Conference flows from the quality of the Play Lab. Experience has shown that when there are good plays being presented by strong writers, the positive effects are felt in every other aspect of the event. Therefore, the continued improvement in the quality of the Play Lab is our top priority.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	71%	81%	76%	71%	77%
Good	26%	15%	20%	25%	23%
Satisfactory	3%	4%	2%	2%	0%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
N/A	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%

The Play Lab had its strongest year to date, which is saying a lot with its strong history as the engine of the Theatre Conference. Numerous panelists commented that the quality of material they were looking at was the best in their history with the event. The fact that no one ranked it less than 'good' would seem to bear this out. Last year, there were a lot of concerns about the varied level of performers reading in the plays; while not completely eliminated from the comments, it is far less of a theme this year. Partially this comes from the influx of talented performers who augmented the cast this year from Los Angeles and elsewhere.



*Paul Brynner, Rodney Lamb, and Assistant Conference Coordinator Ryan Buen in the Lab reading of Anchorage playwright P. Shane Mitchell's Play Lab reading of "And Lo the Kings."*

### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

The cast this year was excellent, and largely addressed 2009's concern about the overall talent level of the cast. We will continue to expand ways in which we prepare our actors in advance for their readings, however. One way we do this will be by having the Lab playwrights choose which stage instructions to have read aloud prior to the Conference. This will help the playwrights be able to more efficiently use their rehearsal time. We will also try to increase involvement in TBA Theatre's preparatory class in Anchorage.

Also of great interest at the wrap-up brunch discussion was the idea of finding a way to improve the acoustics of the Panel A and B, as it interferes with the vocal quality of the readings. The general thought here is that facilities are not something that the college has any control over, but we are going to explore both band shells and a hanging drape system of addressing the issue. There are lots of questions about the feasibility of either option, but it has remained a consistent complaint about the space since the event's inception, so there will at least be some exploration.



Anchorage actor Paul Brynner reading in Laura Neubauer's "Catch of the Day."

The other primary issue was raised by actors who felt that they weren't used enough. By way of a mathematical explanation, there were approximately 330 roles in the Play Lab. There were an additional 30 roles in the Ten-Minute Play Slam, for a total of 360 available roles in readings. There were approximately 84 actors and 95 actresses, for a total cast of 179. This averages out to just under than two roles per performer, not counting other activities such as Fringe Festival readings. Other programming exists to provide alternate activities, such as the Acting for Singers program and the Monologue Workshop. Another expectation is that actors with downtime will spend some of their time as audience for Lab readings, which have a highly educational component even if one is not a writer. We will continue to explore additional programming, while seeking to clarify what already exists.

## Panels and Classes

In addition to the Play Lab, the primary educational component of daytime programming, the Conference also offers classes and panel discussions. Classes are scheduled two to three at a time, with at least one of these focusing on playwriting, with the other classes there to provide activities for non-playwrights.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	55%	73%	58.5%	52%	62%
Good	17%	22%	29%	37%	17%
Satisfactory	13%	0%	4.5%	7%	7%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	1.5%	0%	1%
N/A	15%	5%	6.5%	4%	13%

There has been a consistent challenge in spreading classes over multiple sections; i.e. having two or more part classes where students build on their previous work in later classes. Generally, comments point toward the participants looking for something meatier than they get from the 90 minute format that has been the general standard practice for the event since its inception. This year there were two multi-part theatre classes (The Monologue Workshop with Laura Gardner and Frank Collison, and Export Theatre with Timothy Daly), in addition to the daily yoga warm-up.



*Featured Artist Arlene Hutton works with Fairbanks playwright Anne Hanley in her Scare-Free Improv class. Performers include Rachel Marquez, Bostin Christopher, Penny Lucas, and Annie McCain Engman.*

### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

We will add another daily physical class and an 8:00 a.m. morning writer's warm-up. Otherwise, it will be a matter of creating a diverse curriculum from the available teachers.



## Evening Performances

There are evening performances every night of the Conference, staging a wide variety of work. The focus is on playwrights developed at the Conference and representative work of the playwrights on the Featured Artist staff. The shows provide both education and entertainment for our participants. They are also our main connection with the community of Valdez, who often cannot take the week off to attend the day-time events due to work, but are available to see shows in the evening.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	55%	65%	56%	23%	61%
Good	39%	23%	30%	44%	34%
Satisfactory	6%	6%	12.5%	29%	5%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%
N/A	0%	6%	1.5%	2%	0%

This was our biggest improvement in ratings since the previous year, and it is simply tied to a stronger slate of shows. There are vagaries to how well productions will turn out, no matter how talented the collaborators working on them may be, and this year they turned out well.

### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

Certain shows have become regular components in the evening line up, including Anchorage's TBA Theatre producing a night of one-acts by Lab writers and a performance where the playwrights on the Featured Artist staff present from their own work. This year we added a show the night before the Conference began, a production by the college's drama department. It was the day before the Conference officially started, and provided people who were early with a place to gather. It also increased local involvement, as people in the show were some of the most involved local participants in the history of the event. The Coordinator is currently working with theatre companies to select what shows will be brought down. Right now, these include another college production, a playwrights evening, and TBA's one-acts. It is also likely that the highly successful Ten-Minute Play Slam will be moved to the Friday night slot from its Saturday morning position. It has been well-received for four years, and the Saturday daytime schedule is becoming more tightly packed with the addition of a final presentation of the Acting for Singers program.

## Fringe Festival

The Fringe ran Sunday through Thursday at the Egan Street Pub under the direction of 9 year coordinators Erick Hayden and Barry Levine. The first day was kicked off with a short production of two scripts featured in last year's Fringe. The 2009 statistics refers to both the Fringe Festival and a late-night improvisation program that ran concurrently that year.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	35%	27%	38%	38%
Good	12%	28.5%	26%	29%
Satisfactory	8%	11%	6%	3%
Unsatisfactory	2%	5%	0%	3%
N/A	43%	28.5%	30%	27%

While 3 in 10 people do not involve themselves in this program, the level of satisfaction is perfectly satisfactory: 92% of those participating rank it either good or excellent.



### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

To alleviate the technical stress of having two shows on the mainstage on the first day, the opening show will either be moved to a separate location or eliminated. Also, the branding of the event will be examined to make sure it is clear that this program is not a requirement, as some people felt it was on an equal footing with the primary programming of the Conference (not true).

## Featured Artists

The goal is to create a group of professionals from all aspects of theatre who can provide attendees with insight and inspiration. We strive to involve featured artists who are accessible, entertaining, good-natured, and talented. These people are picked to best suit the collaborative spirit of the Conference and the education we are looking to provide. There is also an effort to involve Alaskans on the staff, both from within the University system and outside of it.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	62%	76%	81%	69%	77%
Good	33%	20%	17%	27%	23%
Satisfactory	5%	4%	2%	2%	0%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
N/A	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%

Talented people to fill the artistic staff is not a concern.



*Featured Artists Michael Hood and Craig Pospisil sitting on the panel discussion about critics.*

### **Our Goal** for improvement for the 2011 Conference

The issue here is who NOT to bring. In our past featured artists, we have more talented people than we can bring up each year, and it is important to bring up new people as well. There are worse problems to have than a wealth of talent, but hard choices will have to be made.

## Conference Staff

The staff is the backbone of any quality organization. PWSCC strives to have the highest quality staff possible year-round, and the Theatre Conference is no exception. Through staff meetings and information packets, we make sure that all of our staff is qualified and capable of handling anything that comes their way (or finding someone who can).

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Excellent	94%	100%	98.5%	94%	100%
Good	6%	0%	1.5%	6%	0%

Once again, the staff is ranked as perfect.



*PWSCC President Doug Desorcie dressed down to prepare fish for the welcoming fish fry.*

### Our Goal for improvement for the 2011 Conference

Staffing is the largest single budget item for the Conference. When a slot can be filled with a volunteer as opposed to a paid staff member, this is done. In the past couple of years, thousands have been saved by reducing college shuttle drivers, with minimal impact to participants. We will continue to look for ways to cut costs here while maintaining quality.



## 1. How did you hear about the Conference?

Nearly 50% of the respondents replied that they were either previous attendees or heard about it from one, backing up the general belief that a majority of participants are repeat participants, both from within Alaska and outside. This is part of the reason the class curriculum is designed to not repeat classes more than every three years.

Other sources listed included:

KSKA's Stage Talk

Fairbanks Theatre Zeitgeist

PWSCC website

Local writers group

Anchorage Opera

Edward Albee reports in the Dramatists Guild newsletter

The Playwrights Center

Playscript analysis class at UAF

InSight for Playwrights

Alaska Playwrights Newsletter

Theatre Bay Area

Individuals listed included Terence Anthony, Kim Estes, Gary Garrison, former UAA Chancellor Lee Gorsuch, Shane Mitchell, and Sara Wagner.



*Frank Delaney, Lindsay Lamar, David Haynes, Todd Glidewell, Heather Sawyer, and Dana Mitchell in the Cyrano's Theatre Production of P. Shane Mitchell's "The Courtship of Zack and Ada."*



## **2. Are there any other types of activities you would like to see added to future Conferences?**

The responses below indicate generally that people would like more classes offered as a part of the curriculum, with increased emphasis on active writing classes. The suggested morning writing class will be added to the schedule next year, hopefully filling this need.

The call for more acting classes probably indicates that we need to do a better job explaining to actors all of the options that are available to them. The Acting for Singers program and the Monologue Workshop are open to everyone. The former provides five straight days of working with specific instructors, and the latter provides the opportunity to work on a monologue with one of the leading teachers out of Los Angeles. In addition to these programs, there were five other one-off classes. Next year, one to two pages of the program will be dedicated to giving more complete descriptions of the educational opportunities available at the Conference.

The Conference will also examine the possibility of having classes for people of different levels in the development as playwrights: a playwriting workshop for non-playwrights, for example, and at least one more advanced class as well.

The suggestion to add a final presentation for the Acting for Singers program is also under consideration.

### **Don't Change Anything**

- Balance of schedule is just about perfect
- Let's not overdo – there's enough for the time we have!
- Nothing comes to mind?
- Not time for much else...
- Loved the movement class and especially the singing class.
- I can't imagine anything else being added, as it is I didn't have time to do a third of it.
- It's already packed!
- Things were so great and so full, I can't imagine time for anything else.
- Are you trying to kill us? So much to do! Love it all!

## Classes

- Nuts & bolts: Using new media; public relations; fringe festivals; pros and cons or having an agent; negotiating with theatres; what is our relationship with the director?
- Puppetry, Design.
- More workshops for actors – most of them were for singers this year.
- More acting classes.
- Like the ongoing classes... where the students can work over consecutive days and actually see marked changes.
- I enjoyed that there were classes and panels offered but I thought they could have been a little more advanced or multiple parts. I would have been happy to do a little prep work for a class. I liked Craig's class about short plays but even better would be a class about using your short plays to help create long plays.
- An end-of-week panel made up of playwrights, directors, producers, and actors that answer questions which people have submitted during the week.
- Maybe a movement and dance workshop would be nice.
- I got a lot out of the workshops like Stage Combat and vocal projection with Yoga
- Better class schedule – have them in the evenings for those of us not interested in fringe activities instead of all on Sunday before week starts.
- More classes to improve the quality of the acting in the readings and evening performances.
- I would love to see more opportunities to write or generate material. As a playwright, I'd love to see more small group breakfasts or lunches with featured artists to foster discussion.
- I would love to see a workshop on something like, "The Next Step: What to do with your play after the Conference" – a workshop on how to take your play to the next step such as submitting it to theatres, mounting a workshop production, etc. Bring in some folks who are involved with producing original work to lead it.
- Wish yoga was every day.
- An opportunity to do generative exercises; sort of a brain yoga in the morning.
- Beginning writing for newbies.
- Class on submissions or a panel. Of course we often don't have time to attend classes.
- Loved the classes! Would like to see Improv come back.
- More workshops with writing exercises.
- How about voice acting? Radio Theatre?
- An Alexander class would be beneficial.

- I would like more playwriting workshops and opportunities to actively write. I feel this was slightly neglected.
- More playwriting workshops, topics, and panel discussions throughout the day and week – with times listed in program. I didn't see any in the program – only actor workshops – that distinguishes them from play labs.
- More writing workshops. (2)

#### **Play Lab**

- Would like to have a little more info on type of plays for play labs, such as drama, comedy, etc., especially if unfamiliar with authors.
- Maybe there should be workshops on Wednesday morning.

#### **Acting for Singers Class**

- It would also be cool to have a recital for the participants of the Acting for Singers workshop, if it becomes an annual workshop (I would love it if it did!!!)
- A performance by the music class.
- I thought the singing workshop was a fun and incredibly valuable addition to the Conference. If it can continue I think it could grow into something really quite special that could possibly be featured with the monologue workshop, which was also immensely successful.
- Singers should have a chance to show their stuff. I went to the last class and watched, it was fantastic.

#### **Other**

- Some organized nature activities would have been fun too.
- Direct collaboration with actors.
- Maybe more knowledge sharing about the individual theatre communities that people come from – what's their experience of theatre in San Francisco or Seattle or New York, etc."
- In the category of "thinking out of the box" here's an interesting idea – how about a "midterm" mini conference? Here's how it would work: It would take place sometime in the late fall or early winter, probably in Anchorage. Playwrights who had their plays read at the previous summer's Conference could have their plays read again with whatever re-writes they made. Maybe Out North could sponsor. Yeah, I know it would be a headache it's complicated and you'd need someone to coordinate all the playwrights and get actors and stuff, but just a thought. I'd be willing to help or even take the lead on it if you are interested. I have more specific thoughts about this if you are interested.

### 3. Which Featured Artist was most helpful to you in your time here? What did you enjoy most about the Conference?

Most of the details of this response section are not being included in the public report. It is the Coordinator's feeling that this information is for him to assist in staffing choices for the future. The artistic staff of this event remains consistently excellent (page ten: 73% excellent, 27% good ratings), and publicly weighing their comparative merits is not fair to that team.

To summarize, artists who ran a program with lots of specific one-on-one interaction with participants (Ten-Minute Play Slam, Monologue Workshop, Acting for Singers) were among the highest vote-getters. Their position involves intimate work, and it is not surprising that their



position made it so that they had multiple fans. All three of these programs are well run and in keeping with the spirit of the event.

In the Play Lab, almost every panelist had at least one citation, a good sign. There was a single panelist who was cited more than the rest, but each of them had a strong, personal affect on at least one participant.

There was also strong support for the Featured Artists from Alaska, with Wayne Mitchell (pictured) in particular receiving a great deal of praise for his movement workshop. While it is important that much of the staff come from outside the state to provide Alaskans with access to teachers that they would not normally have, it is also good to share the wealth of talented teachers we have here with participants from outside.

## 4. What did you enjoy most about the Conference?

Many respondents listed multiple aspects in their answers, so each individual response might not be a person's single favorite part (for example, 'Valdez' might not have been the absolute best part of someone's Theatre Conference, but they wanted to make sure they cited its importance to them).

### The Play Lab

- The Play Lab (5).
- Plays in the Lab.
- All the plays I saw during the Lab were exceptional. The panels were right on.
- My own Lab reading (great actors).
- Opportunity to read stage instructions.
- Feedback on my play.
- Plays, play evaluations, and discussions about plays with other participants.
- Chances to discuss the plays and interact with the people here.
- Reading in Play Labs.
- Play Lab panels.
- Audience feedback.
- The feedback and the play labs.
- Working with the Actors who did my play. The play lab – getting to know the talented and professional actors/playwrights with whom I roomed.
- Acting in play labs.
- Hearing the comments on the plays was very instructive.
- The ease and flow and personality of it all (thanks to Conference organization and staff). Other conferences and seminars seem stiff – show up from the room/leave. This one somehow promotes easy exchange all day and evening, perhaps because of the Lab format: read, panelist comments, listener's comments and discussion. Respect for what's happening, and each other, encourages the ongoing camaraderie.
- Play Lab was really cool! I only got to read for one, but it was amazingly fun, and I loved sitting in on the readings.
- Working with playwrights and developing their work.
- The quality of acting and plays. From the readers to the evening staged plays. Most of the play labs were very good plays already or the start of a good play.
- How can I count the ways? The creativity, the responders, the plays.
- My reading, the people, other people's readings.
- The feedback and the mentoring.



## General Atmosphere

- The people at the Conference are so wonderful... I made so many new friends, and the sense of camaraderie was palpable among the veterans of the Conference. I can't wait 'til next year.
- The enthusiasm with which everyone met each other's week.
- Being part of a community of artists.
- The variety of theatre artists and the passion and enthusiasm of the AK artists.
- Organized fantastically well by awesome Dawson, friendly helpful staff, people, people, people, the play labs, the feedback, lunches (much improved except vegetarian) evening shows at night, the brunch.
- The supportive environment and how we just get thrown into it.
- The attitude of helpfulness and the energy.
- Impromptu readings in the lobbies and halls. Any sort of random collaborations occurring throughout the week.
- The camaraderie and helpfulness of all the attendees.
- Meeting new people.
- Camaraderie.
- Sense of community, learning who's who.
- The warmly supportive artistic environment. From the top down – just about everyone I came into contact with seemed to share the common goal that all participants should be given the tools to succeed in their immediate endeavors – in work and in play.
- The people, the readings, workshops, Fringe, the whole package.
- Liked the structure and meeting people.
- Time with fellow artists!
- I liked the glacier cruise as a mellow opportunity to have real conversations with people about the week's events.
- The supportive, nurturing nature. And free coffee.
- And the great weather!!! And the housing situation!!
- Play labs, fringe, evening performances, cruise, um... everything else.
- The chance to see all the play labs and fringe plays and main stage productions really opened my eyes to the talent of Alaska playwrights and actors.
- I have to say first meeting so many great people and making friends. Being in a place where everyone is brought together for mutual goals. The Lore of Theatre.
- Sense of community.
- So many choices so much stimulation.
- Ease of operation for conference was great.

- Meeting new friends and seeing old friends.
- Mingling with everyone, viewing the difference between younger (just graduated) and seasoned actors...
- Getting to know or having meaningful conversations with the featured artists.

### **Classes**

- I really got a lot out of the Acting for Singers workshop, and I hope it becomes annual.
- The workshops. Plays were great but focus on so many plays and all else going on made the workshops a playtime and a release, keep them coming.
- The classes!
- Monologue Workshop and Improv classes.
- Workshops by Craig and Timothy.
- Sessions for actors
- Opportunity to look at theatre processes from many angles and the yoga.
- Timothy's workshop.
- The singing class.
- The monologue workshop.
- Yoga.

### **Evening Performances**

- *Heart* Performance!
- Playwrights Sunday evening show, *Blood and Thunder*, *Rounding Third*.
- Evening performances were excellent!
- Loved the evening shows this year, especially *Blood and Thunder*.
- The L.A. production of *Blood and Thunder* was a treat. And the Play Slam was a fun wrap-up.
- Loved the local production kicking off the festival; was a good idea and very impressive.
- The Play Slam.
- I like that the evening programs were a mixture of longer and shorter work.

### **Fringe Festival**

- The Fringe Festival. (4)
- Fringe was great fun, when it was good it was AWESOME.

### **Staff**

- I was a little unclear about how to get from the airport into town – pleasantly surprised that the Conference had arranged shuttles.
- All the people who made it happen... thank you!!!

**Valdez Itself**

- Valdez! Beautiful views, lively town, great hikes. Good job on the weather too! I even got too much sun.
- Kayaking on the sound.



*Participants mingling at the kick-off Fish Fry.*

## 5. What did you enjoy least?

Most of the complaints were minor this year. We mostly addressed a big issue from years past by providing a daily vegetarian option with the lunch provided to participants (free of charge). The gala dinner was not too well received, but this is an issue that varies yearly based on the caterer and many other factors.

### Nothing!

- That it had to end.
- Not a single thing!
- I can't think of a thing!

### Food

- Lack of healthy vegetarian food (but thank you for the sandwiches!!).
- Not enough vegetables in Valdez.
- When/how food is provided.
- The lunches and banquet dinner.
- The Thai Restaurant was closed.
- Food service @ gala.
- The vegetarian option. I love vegetarian but this was yucks!
- The gala was something of a marathon.
- Smoke-filled bars, but what can you do?
- Serving of the food at the gala. I liked the "heavy our' devoers" but I thought having more than one serving line would have helped.
- Standing in line for food at the gala only to find empty food trays. Would have to have stood there for a while and hold up the line to wait for new trays to be brought out. Gave up and ate off my neighbor's plate. Not enough vegetarian lunch options.

### Housing

- Lack of furniture in the dorms. (C'est la vie!)
- The cots.
- Getting sick, the dorms, my roommate's snoring.
- My first roommate's thunderous snoring.
- No chair, no cot in dorms, but do like staying there.

### Play Lab

- The part I had to read in one of my plays. Ugh. Cliché to the max. I did not like her at all and it was hard to act like I did.
- Not enough rehearsal time.
- I want more readings – parts! Guess I'll have to write again!

- Scheduled and welcomed as an actor but omitted from the reader's part of the program. Plus I was only put in one play as Stage instructions which I enjoyed. I hope to act more next year.
- The unpleasantness of the rehearsal spaces.
- Many actors would like to be busier. I know you have many actors, so that probably isn't possible. How can you use a so-so reader in other ways?
- A bad play, but that's okay it happens.
- Too many playwrights and directors kept their people late. I was in 2 shows that both went over by 20 minutes or more. This is unacceptable.
- [One panelist's] feedback was terribly disrespectful to the artists, without any tact or sensitivity. After a panel led by them, I heard the playwright say that he'd come all this way for nothing.
- Panelists on Thursday allowed overrun so one had rude options – walk out early on feedback or walk in late on next play.
- Too many people exiting and entering during comments.
- Not cast in enough readings.

### **Fringe Festival**

- The Fringe. Feels mandatory and space is awful.
- More info on the Fringe would be helpful for first time attendees – especially people who might be interested in acting.
- The Fringe. I think the Fringe evenings should 1) be shorter, 2) not take place every night, and 3) have a greater variety of selection – whether in length, theme, material that has been written during the Conference, or in a Conference writing workshop, etc. The last several years, it feels like the days & nights of the Conference are overscheduled. I feel a real loss of exchange with people, connections made over the day's events, real conversations after the evening performance over a drink... The appreciation of theatre sometimes needs to breathe, like a good wine. You need a little distance to process and then discuss what you've heard or seen that day or evening. With the Fringe happening every night, there is no breathing room. I especially feel a loss of opportunity to connect with the panelists and guest artists in their off hours; most are saturated at day's end and unlikely to attend the Fringe to listen to more plays. This after-hours exchange is something that has made the Conference really stand out against the other conferences I've attended in larger cities where people and events are more spread out. I don't know how much the Conference has to do with the execution/planning of the Fringe. The work I hear read is less 'fringe' in terms of material that is outside the mainstream or challenging, risk-taking theatre than a kind of sketch comedy one-up-manship.



### **Too Much To Do**

- My exhaustion level!
- Sleep deprivation, as usual; didn't come to sleep though.
- Lack of time, it went too fast.
- I miss the BIG house parties with local residents of the early years.
- Not being able to see more Play Lab plays.
- Not enough time to do it all.
- Only the fact that I couldn't see everything I wanted due to exhaustion.
- Missing readings because of being otherwise committed – but that's the nature of the beast.
- Not enough hours in the day?
- I couldn't see all the plays.
- Unable to do it all, but everything gets better and better.

### **Miscellaneous**

- No throat coat tea on sale in lobby.
- How long it takes to get leave. I might have come a day earlier so as to be here Sunday Morning. I had no idea there would be no night flights out of Anchorage to Valdez.
- Also, I'd give a little friendly info sheet to newcomers about the town, the schedule, clothing recommendations... like a pre-camp list. It's better to have too much information than not enough. Especially for a Texan, I could have used more packing recommendations.
- Two boats for the glacier cruise. The people I want to get to know better never seem to be on my boat. Buy a bigger boat, Dawson
- Featured Artists' remoteness.
- Fluorescent lights.
- My ability to go brain dead on stage (personal problem)
- I would have loved more opportunities to write with my colleagues or an orientation/first-timer's meeting (or maybe I missed it!)
- Also not crazy about this year's Monologue Workshop. Not great material, not great acting overall.
- Being sick.
- Hard to value some of the evening's performances. Some were less valuable.

**6. Is there anywhere that you feel you should have heard about the Conference but didn't (playwright's newsletter, website, etc)? This will be useful in helping promote the event in the future.**

There was some confusion on this question, as some people thought it was asking what they wish they had known before they came. This is an excellent question that will be on next year's form. These answers were added to the appropriate part of this report.

**Outside Alaska**

- Spokane Civic Theatre.
- Facebook will add immediacy.
- Do you advertise in American Theatre magazine? I just renewed my membership in TCG and so don't know if you do or not. If not, it might be a good idea.
- American Theatre magazine.
- Playwrights Guild of Canada.
- Twitter.

**In Alaska**

- Anchorage Press.
- How about big ads addressed to audiences at theaters in Anchorage?
- Soldotna, Kenai Peninsula, I really only hear about it by word of mouth.
- KLEF Anchorage

**Colleges in Alaska**

- I go to UAA a lot. It seems that a fall semester & Christmas break push for 10-minute plays (via poster, English-Theatre-Communication departments) to be written is needed, promoting writing for the Conference deadline would generate lots of buzz, and maybe a push to try it out at one other outside the university as well.
- Are there fliers at UAF? Dulcy Boehle has volunteered to help put up fliers at places in Anchorage like REI, Title Wave, Sagaya's, etc.
- UAF student and theatre community.
- Play programs around the state?

## 7. Additional Comments

### Positive Comments

- I'm very impressed with Dawson and the staff who make this amazing event take place. The energy remained positive at all times. I liked the cruise and the setting is to die for.
- From my first day there, I was amazed by the scope of what the Conference accomplishes in one week. The people were great, even though I was a newbie. I felt most at ease with the playwrights.
- Thank you for making my experience in Valdez truly unforgettable. It was a privilege for me to be in the company of such talented and generous artists. I now see why this Conference is so special and why people return year after year. It's given me tremendous motivation to get to work on a new piece to submit for next year. Thanks again for all your passion and commitment to the local theatre scene up there... it's incredible the impact you're making.
- This experience was so phenomenal, for exceeding my expectations. I hope to come back and perform again next year. I have never been treated better as an artist and am artistically fulfilled to the brim.
- Tremendous Talent Nexus! Makes you want to write work worthy of the Conference.
- This was my first time down and, despite being sick, it was still some of the best fun I've had. I look forward to attending/participating in future Conferences!
- Great job! A fantastic experience.
- This was a generous event.
- Love it!!
- Thank you for the awesome opportunity of attending the Conference. I expected to enjoy myself, but your hard work and the passion of the community you work with rejuvenated my love for theatre in so many ways. I've been working on [my Lab play] for some time, and the response I received in Valdez was most validating and the feedback most helpful. I'm looking forward to attending again.
- Rock on! Let's keep this Conference going... forever!
- Thank you to Dawson et al for putting in the long hours needed to mount such an incredible event. And thank you to the guest artists who came up here to share their expertise. And the actors... and the playwrights – hell, thanks to everybody! Let's do it all again next year ok?
- I had an excellent time overall!

- This Conference awakened me... it refreshed and rejuvenated me, just by my being there.
- I was blown away by the Conference. It was so well-organized and so RICH and rewarding for me as a playwright.
- As always, thanks for making the Conference a positive, inspiring love fest that makes me want to do theatre every day. I was so impressed by the talent and vibe this year. I am definitely making it next year no matter what.
- Congratulations on a great Conference.
- Wow. Did that just happen?! Feels like I am just now starting to process it all, and I am left standing in AWE of all that you did! The Conference was magical and so so special. I haven't stopped talking about it. It did wonders for my faith in humanity as well! Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity.
- LOVED the Conference this year! It went so smoothly. I liked the shorter Conference for certain reasons, but I had less downtime this year, which was a bit intense. The caliber of artists present was very high, and the people who came to do shows were brilliant, and I loved that they stayed and participated after their performances.
- Great job!
- Super Conference!! Well done, Dawson!
- I think the staff this year was fantastic. Very well organized. They knew the answers to questions and had resources ready whenever something was needed. They just seemed sharper this year than ever. And I thought the laptops set up in the hallway were a great resource to have on-hand.
- Thank you all so much who make this week happen.
- I really enjoyed the evening events this year! All in all, I thought it was a great Conference.
- I want to honor the effort put in by everyone all year long to make this happen.
- I hope this Conference goes on for many years. So valuable.
- Overall a wonderful experience. I will be back!
- I had a wonderful time! Beautiful place and a fun and useful conference.
- Dawson, Kudos. Everything was organized so well and really ran smoothly. It was my first time here and the wonderful memories will stay with me forever. Lots of great and good theatre and hey I learned new "stuff" as well. Thank you.
- A superb Conference.

## Fringe Festival

- The Fringe has outgrown the Glacier Inn Space. Not enough room to accommodate the crowd and still keep performing space. It's fun but it does deflect focus.
- I didn't mind the lack of receptions after the evening performances – in fact I liked the fact that the Fringe had a more definite start time. However, it would have been nice to have something, perhaps just a cash bar, available on the night of the playwright's works and the opening of the Fringe. It's early in the Conference when we're all getting to know each other or renewing old friendships and it would have been nice to have a beer or glass of wine while we mingled.
- The Fringe isn't 'fringe' any more (due to Erick and Barry's excellent management), but more of an organized, bawdy evening activity. The comment is that I miss the anarchy of the original Fringes in the commons or at bonfires. The present Fringe serves playwrights, actors, and the Conference well, but the anarchy roots were 'fringe' activities. Tiny plays, poetry, any kind of performance, even punk guitarists. Maybe I'm saying that no one is encouraged to be fringe – the try-anything slot, the step up and show us your juggling – that might go in a play sometime; so it has settled in to being only fringe playwriting/readings. Yet the early Fringe often fell apart, so thanks for, and to, Erick and Barry.
- The Fringe was greatly improved from when I was here 2 years ago. Less adolescent sniggering and more intelligence and creativity.
- Enjoyed the fringe, better plays. (2)

## Play Lab

- I had a great reading, perhaps the best reading I've ever had, anywhere, and that is a testament to the quality of the actors. The level of acting talent was as high as I've ever seen, and throughout the weeks, the plays were better than ever. I was never bored; I was challenged; and I enjoyed myself thoroughly.
- More rehearsal time.
- Could we allow playwrights to submit both a short play and full-length to the lab with the understanding that only one would be picked? I would have been bummed if my full-length didn't get picked.
- Really liked listing play lab rehearsal times in program.
- I did not have a great adjudication experience – my Play Lab [respondent] talked far more about themselves than my play. However the Conference was fantastic. Despite my personal experience this year, I hope to return.
- Would like to make sure at least one playwright per panel.



- Great suggestion about asking playwrights to send in a copy of their scripts with edited stage directions!
- I look forward to reading again next year. I am even inspired to put a play on paper, which I never thought I would do.
- For one who knows very little about the art and craft of play writing the labs were fascinating. I learned a lot and have greater appreciation for the challenges of writing.
- Would like to see more emphasis on actors attending the workshop on how to act in a staged reading. Some actors were just too quiet and some had obviously not taken notes on which stage directions would be read. Also, they need to be told to repeat a line if they screw it up. For instance "I can understand what you mean" being read as "I can't understand what you mean."
- Aoise, Kia, Jayne, Jeff, Stefan, Craig, Beth, Timothy were all great!!!

### **Classes**

- I was honored to be a part of the first Acting for Singers class. I learned so much from Kim, Darcy, and Nancy. Of course, there were bugs, but that comes with anything new.
- Arlene's improv workshop rocked! It was too big though, almost 40 people. I'd consider a series of such workshops with a cap of 10 people each so that the improve work can be more effective.
- Craig's workshop was very helpful.
- I wish there had been more workshops. I know you want to get in as many plays as you can. Maybe limit 2 hour readings to a select few to make room.

### **Food**

- The espresso station was a great addition.
- Install a method to reserve lunch for folks who are scheduled all day and miss lunch hours and some fruits and veggies. Would be willing to pay for lunch if it would help.

### **Scheduling**

- As someone who had to leave early two years in a row, it would be nice if the group photo was taken earlier in the week.
- I missed some of the evening group dinners – again, a place where connections can be made in a casual environment. I completely understand why they were eliminated this year, but I still missed them.
- As a Fairbanks resident, appreciated the May scheduling.
- I have mixed thoughts about the time of year question. I like June better because it's warmer and more places in town are open. Also, I do think it's important for a major event to have consistency. Sometimes moving around the calendar

makes an event seem less substantial or less well organized. That's just a perception thing. Also there are other events in the May theatre calendar, like the Great Plains Theatre Conference. Hard to go to two events that are back to back. That said, I realize that the cost savings and availability of resources (such as hotel rooms) is a significant advantage for the Conference being in May... or in May every other year.

- Love having it in May! I know it may move back to June but that is a very busy time for me so May is much better. Plus, Valdez is less crowded and it really feels like the Conference attendees are everywhere.

### **Productions**

- Love *The Courtship of Zach and Ada*. I was upset I missed it at Cyrano's so it was great to get a second chance.
- I would like to see a wrap up performance of the work of the musical workshop participants.
- Play Slam is too good to not have an evening slot.
- 10-Minute Play Slam and Monologue Workshop were great.

### **Website**

- Add a place on the website for comments on places to stay/eat?
- You may already do this – I'll check the site. It would help to guide us when we write our sponsor thank you letters to list contact names, at least for major sponsors.

### **Staff**

- From Doug and Dawson to front desk staff, all are friendly and helpful which makes for an encouraging environment. Schedule update screens are much appreciated. Gorgeous Conference bags.
- Staff as always was wonderful, cheerful, informed, and helpful. Should there be an age limit? No, probably no. Some young people seemed to not have an idea what was going on.

### **Miscellaneous**

- I know there were a couple of singers who thought that we should have some sort of separate billing, so to speak. I completely disagree with this. I believe that we singers who enter the Conference should be willing to absorb and learn from the experience, and not separate ourselves from the group of artists as a whole.
- I think collecting some kind of fee for say the boat cruise would be well received. I plan on returning!
- Jim Cucurull was extremely supportive and helpful with our evening shows. Big thanks to Jim!
- Computers being made available to participants was much appreciated.

- Writer would prefer to know if monologue [for Monologue Workshop] had been chosen [for performance] ahead of time.
- Signs on doors that sign open or close quietly, or even an announcement before an evening show.
- Recycling
- Shane and Wayne are inspiring and uplifting.
- My only minor reservation about the Conference comes from the usually beneficial fact that it is geared for “theatre experts.” Sometimes comments from participants, including some of the Play Lab commentators, seemed to have a major disconnect with the viewpoints of most audience members who attend shows outside of theatre conferences.



*Valdez Mayor Bert Coddle waves to the crowd after a brief appearance at the closing Gala, which took place on the same day as his marriage to Cathy Christensen, standing in the back with PWSCC President Doug Desorcie.*