

Inside the Artist - George Pierce September 2014



Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist. How did you get started in creating theater?

This is one of my favorite stories! In high school I had a friend who was involved in theater doing lights. I think I was a sophomore at the time and he invited me down to see what they were doing. This was back in the late 70's in a big theater with an old lighting board with big levers, backstage in a cage. The actors were rehearsing out on stage, and I was not paying much attention to that as there were all kinds of knobs and wires and things to look at. Then all of a sudden, this very attractive young lady came into the room, took off all her clothes, put them back on again and ran back onto the stage. And I thought, "I am in my element. This is my place".

It was just fun, I enjoyed the people. I wound up doing the lights for all the high school productions and then in college it was the same thing. I went to Cornell as an engineer and I got involved in theater, again, because I liked the people.

While Ginger, my wife, took the path toward acting, I got more and more into directing, coming at it from more of a technical standpoint. I see the set as a character in the play. The lighting, and costuming are all characters and they all have their component. It's really interesting to approach directing in that way. It feels like a different perspective than for actors who transition into directing, because I think they come with self-imposed limitations of what they think is difficult. I've been on stage as an actor, but I'm not an actor, I'm a techno geek. I don't know what's difficult (as an actor), so I ask them to try it.

What most inspires your work? What is the criteria, the guide, to choosing your creative projects?

We had a number of friends who essentially wanted to do straight plays. They weren't really musically oriented, and Community Theater is often wrapped up in the musical world. Our friends felt our community/ area wanted the opportunity for

more obscure and straight plays. So we don't do Shakespeare and we don't do musicals.

We try to pick stuff that's somewhat obscure, in the sense that it's not seen a lot. We rarely do a Neil Simon type play. We'll tend to do *The Drawer Boy* (Michael Healey), for example or *The Clean House* (Sarah Ruhl). To a theater audience, they know who Sarah Ruhl is, but to the people in my office, they've never heard of these plays, these authors.



What has been the biggest thing/event to influence your work? Do you have any artistic heroes or persons whose work you try to emulate?

I'll tell you, getting back into it, I didn't realize how much I had gotten away from theater until I separated from my first wife and met Ginger; she was so clearly open to it. She had done no theater and had never been on stage before. But, as we got to know each other, it was clear that her heart and everything would just totally welcome this theater part of my life that had been dormant. I'd probably stay involved in theater if she weren't here, but it wouldn't be nearly as much fun.

I'm greedy for knowledge! I kind of suck knowledge out of anybody, any place I can get it. And that's part of what I really enjoy about this theater (Waterbury Festival Players) and how it's come to be. I'll sit in on rehearsals and I think people are thinking I'm overseeing them. No! I'm stealing ideas. I'm watching the directors like Ethan Bowen, or Tom Carter. I'll see how they're taking an actor who is having trouble getting somewhere and watch how they help get them there. Their technique is something I'll learn from and later use.

I just got back from Shakespeare Company in Lennox. We go down to Lennox once a year; it's where I go for my Shakespeare

fix. I watch how they make Shakespeare accessible to everyone in that audience. And so rarely do I see Shakespeare done that way; they can take people who don't have a clue about any of the story and make it very clear what is going on (who the people and what their roles are, telling the story through their relationships and interactions). And I watch how well they do that. Then I say, "That's enough for now, I'll go on to the other stuff".

What books or blogs are you reading or would recommend? What activities do you enjoy outside of theater?

Most of my reading is scripts. Beyond that I'm reading the technical guide of RSPP Processing for bank note processing. I do a lot of technical reading and my pleasure is in the scripts.

I'm a motorcycle rider and I like being out and about. I am a massive family man. I have six kids and I adore hanging out with them. They are all over the country now. They did theater like other kids do chores. If I needed someone to hang lights, I was going to grab one and take them with me. They had an interesting exposure to theater.

Theater is my hobby. It's not my business. Computer software is my business. I lovingly refer to theater as my boat, a hole in the water that you throw money into. The computer work, which I enjoy very much, supports the theater.

