

## ***Interview:*** Theater Studies Coordinator Dr. Kelly Gordon

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This semester, Brevard College welcomes one of its newest faculty members, Dr. Kelly Gordon, who is the new Coordinator of Theater Studies. Dr. Gordon comes to the campus with an impressive list of credentials and a background in theatre performance and pedagogy. In addition to having received a Ph.D in Theater from the University of Georgia, Dr. Gordon is also a published writer of articles for *The Encyclopedia of Modern Drama* and *The Dallas Morning News*, among others. Prior to accepting to her position at Brevard College, she taught theatre history and dramatic criticism at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G). The Clarion recently sat down with Dr. Gordon to learn more about her plans for the theatre department at Brevard College and to gain insight into the viewpoints of a person who has been living and breathing the art of theater and theater performance since her childhood:

**What is the earliest memory you have of theater?** When I was about six, I saw my grandfather play Horace in *Hello Dolly!* I remember the production very well and still have the program. (I pretty much have programs from everything that I've ever seen.) My most vivid memory of that event was getting a backstage tour and meeting Carol Channing (Dolly), who was (and is) larger than life, especially to a very shy little girl. She is very kind and, on that occasion, gave my sister and I fake diamond rings.

**Your grandfather was actor Eddie Bracken, who was a film star during the "Golden Age of Hollywood" and had an extensive acting career that lasted for almost 80 years. Was he an influence on you when you were younger, and if so, what advice did he give you about the acting and directing business?** My grandfather didn't offer advice as much as he offered support. He was, I think, an unusually loving man (who happened to have impeccable comic timing; if you don't believe me, watch *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*). When I was working



on my doctorate at the University of Georgia, the theater department brought him in as a guest speaker. He encouraged students to pursue a career in theater, arguing that being successful in the profession requires the same hard work and discipline as being successful in any other field. There are jobs out there; it's a competitive field, yes, but that's not a reason to give up on pursuing a passion. I am always surprised, maybe because of my grandfather, how many theater people, including professors, discourage students from making this career choice. Theater is not a place to discourage people from taking a risk.

I do remember having a philosophical discussion with my grandfather about acting when I was a freshman in high school. I went to visit him, so impressed with myself about my new knowledge of Method Acting, which I couldn't wait to share with him. He basically told me it was all nonsense. Over time, I've come to agree with him. But that day, on the porch, I was shocked and a little hurt. He considered me a strong actress, though, and that means more to me than any philosophical argument we may have had about how I got there.

**Are there any particular actors, plays, playwrights and/or directors (stage or screen), that inspired you when you were**

**starting out?** Too many to name!

**What brings you to Brevard?** Brevard College, of course. I attended a small, liberal arts school (Ohio Wesleyan University) as an undergraduate and have always wanted to teach at a similar institution, where students do not have to major in theater in order to be involved. And I love North Carolina. So, when I saw the job posting for Brevard College, I applied right away. The mission of the college and the emphasis on service particularly appeals to me, as I am dedicated to working on socially relevant theatre.

**What are some ideas you have for the Theater Studies Department for the upcoming academic year here at Brevard College?** Professor Bell (our new design/tech specialist) and I will take some time to get to know the campus and community before making any major changes. But we know that we want the department to be more visible. (We already have a facebook page that many students and alumni have joined.) I am looking at ways to collaborate with other departments. Theatre is good training for anything; our students develop analytical skills, their ability to speak confidently in front of large groups of people and, most importantly, their imaginations. All of these qualities are becoming more and more important in the workplace. (Read *The Rise of the Creative Class*) So, our department should be able to serve many students, whether they major in theatre or not.

**Do you have any plans to be involved in the local theatre scene?** Absolutely. It is important for our student's understanding of professional theatre that both Professor Bell and I stay active outside of the college environment. This year, I will focus on my work at school and on making contacts in the community.

**Do you have any advice for up and coming thespians who want to make a career in theater performance?** I will simply quote Thoreau here: "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."