

PlayMakers welcomes new artistic director

Hammond sparking enthusiasm

By FRANK BRUNI
Arts Editor

When Greg Boyd announced last spring semester that he would leave UNC at the end of the academic year, students in the Department of Dramatic Art weren't certain how to feel. Boyd's three years as artistic director for PlayMakers Repertory Company and head of the M.F.A. actor training program were in no way trouble-free, but Boyd had steered PRC and the drama department from relative obscurity to national prominence. No one knew what to expect from a new appointee to his position.

The arrival of David Hammond, however, has quelled any student anxieties. In a matter of weeks, Hammond, who left an associate professorship at the Yale University School of Drama to replace Boyd, has created an enthusiastic following in the drama department. Says Milly Barranger, PRC's executive producer, "David has generated an excitement among students and colleagues that wasn't evident last spring."

Hammond's specific triumphs have been a recognition of the trouble spots in the PRC/Department of Dramatic Art relationship and a commitment to ironing out those problems.

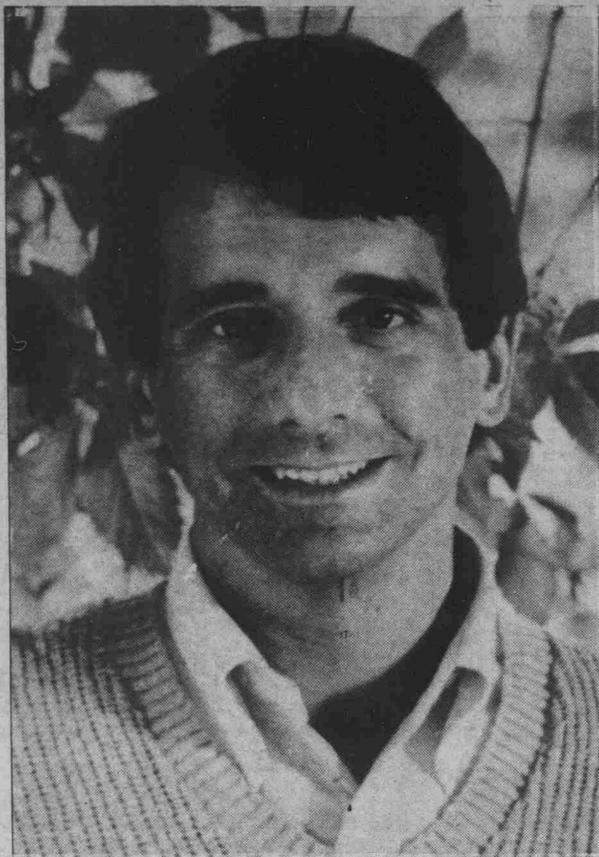
One of students' most persistent complaints about Boyd was that he cared more about the quality of each PRC production than about the education of the M.F.A. candidates who formed the core of PRC. The result, Boyd's critics charged, was an uneven distribution of leading roles, a production schedule that considered the company's existing strengths more than the educational needs of its members, and a shallow commitment to classroom instruction.

"For all his wonderful directing talent, Greg — at least by the time I got here — wasn't seriously interested in the training program," says Ben Cameron, PRC's literary manager for the past year. "With David, the training is the most important thing and the productions will grow out of it. He's exactly what the program needs."

Sources in the drama department say that Hammond has already promised each third-year M.F.A. candidate a lead in one of the six PRC productions this academic year. He will only direct two of these productions so that he can devote more time to instruction, the quality of which will be enhanced by a larger graduate faculty with specialists in movement and voice.

"My first goal is to make the school superb, and from that, to evolve a great theater," says Hammond. "It can't work the other way around."

Part of Hammond's scheme to improve the school involves giving undergraduate drama majors a more integral role. To that end, he has reserved the post of assistant director on each PRC production for undergraduate applicants. He has also promised undergraduates that he will attend all shows mounted in the Lab Theater. The Lab is a space in the basement of the Graham Memorial



David Hammond

building reserved for student-produced, small-scale productions.

"David's committed a lot of support to us," says Steve Maler, a junior drama major from Orlando, Fla. Maler says the general feeling among undergraduates is that Hammond will be more accessible than Boyd, whom undergraduates perceived as indifferent. "David's been so wonderful, so responsive," says Maler, who will be the assistant director for Alexander Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, the second production on the PRC schedule and one of the two that Hammond will direct.

Hammond will also direct Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, the final production of the PRC season. Theatergoers accustomed to Boyd's avant-garde, anachronistic renditions of classical works can expect a change of pace from Hammond, who, according to colleagues, treats texts in a more traditional manner.

"Greg had a very special approach which I call imagistic," says Barranger. "David is more interested in the language of the text."

Recalling the punk garb and Talking Heads score of Boyd's *Measure for Measure*, Cameron says, "Greg always left his signature on a play. I tend to think David's productions will have a greater 'period-fidelity' to them. He won't be as interested in flagrantly violating historical perspective."

What currently interests Hammond most, however, is not directing but teaching, and that is perhaps the most

striking difference between him and Boyd. "I want the theater to be an outgrowth of the training," he says. "I want the work we do in class to become the work the audience sees on the stage."

An erstwhile med student makes good

By FRANK BRUNI
Arts Editor

David Hammond is sitting in his office in an isolated corner of the Graham Memorial building, struggling to pin down what, precisely, the experience of directing is like. Suddenly, his eyes mist, his voice softens to a whisper and a wide smile steals across his face.

"It's just thrilling," he stammers. "It's ... It's magic. I love actors. I love working with them. I just had this wonderful class; everybody in it was so alive."

As he describes the class, his words begin to run together and his voice trails off into reverie. Gone is the intimidatingly articulate man of only seconds ago; in his place sits an exuberant little boy.

Simply put, David Hammond loves his work. After 13 years in educational theater — two at the Juilliard Theater Centre, seven at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco and four at the Yale University School of Drama — he is as content in his profession as ever. As the newly appointed artistic director for PlayMakers Repertory Company and head of the M.F.A. actor training program, he brings to UNC an unfettered enthusiasm and optimism that border on the corny. "I wake up every day eager to do what I have to do," he says. "I wake up glad."

There was a time, however, when Hammond's work and his play were not so closely wedded. Although he had taken acting classes at Manhattan studios throughout his childhood, he entered Harvard University a biology major intent on following his father's footsteps into the medical profession. "I always assumed that I would be a doctor," he says. "My image of adulthood was that you became a doctor."

Still, Hammond's heart was elsewhere, and by his sophomore year he was growing restless. He recalls an organic chemistry experiment that required the student to watch a liquid boil for six hours. "I turned it on to boil and went out to see *Gone with the Wind*," he says. "Something was definitely making itself known."

His pre-med requirements completed, Hammond switched majors to English literature midway through his sophomore year. The new course of study afforded him time for the theater and slowly chipped away at his determination to become a doctor. When it came time to apply to medical school, he chose New York University because, he says, "I figured if I was going to med school, I might as well be in Manhattan, where I could see lots of plays." As it turned out, he decided not to go to medical school but to study directing at the Carnegie-Mellon University Drama School.

Immediately upon his graduation from Carnegie in 1972, Hammond was invited to teach acting at Juilliard, where his first class included William Hurt, Christopher Reeve and

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Mandy Patinkin. Two years later he moved to the ACT. There he directed a list of plays that reads like an anthology of history's greatest drama and garnered awards from various California critics' circles. His reputation was such that for three years, Yale tried to lure him back East. In 1981 Yale succeeded, and Hammond joined perhaps the nation's most prestigious theater program.

How, then, was he coaxed into coming to Chapel Hill? Actually, geography played a large part. At the time word went out late last fall that PRC was looking for a new artistic director, Hammond was somewhat disenchanted with Yale's location. "Any city is nicer than New Haven," he says. "Besides, I had been mugged earlier that fall and it wasn't helping my frame of mind one bit."

The clincher was the contrast in climates he noticed when he flew to Chapel Hill last February to see PRC's PlayFest '85. "I left New Haven in the middle of a blizzard," he recalls. "I got off the plane in North Carolina and the sun was shining, the flowers were blooming and people were apologizing for the long winter."

Of course, none of that would have mattered had he not been so impressed with PRC and the UNC Department of Dramatic Art. "I liked the student actors immensely," he says, adding that they in no way suffered by comparison to his Yale pupils. If the theater world at large doesn't currently mention the two schools in the same breath, "They will," Hammond assures. "They will."

So far, he says, so good. In fact, so far, so great. He pauses, and in the few seconds between his last sentence and his next one, the transformation from self-assured aesthete to enraptured youth occurs once again.

"I had a really good week," he says. "In a class yesterday, we did four new exercises. Four new exercises! In one class! We started doing one thing, but then I saw that another exercise might work better, and we ..."

Parents need correcting, too straight up

By STEVE AUSTIN
Syndicated Columnist

Dear Steven: My parents often make the mistake of calling my fiance, Jay, by my ex-boyfriend's name, Richard. I can understand their confusion to some degree, as they're quite elderly and often get the names of their own children and grandchildren mixed up. But Jay is fed up with them, and I can't say that I blame him. He won't say anything because he's afraid of hurting their feelings, so he's beginning to take out his frustrations on me. This is not a life or death situation, but I'd like to take care of it. Any suggestions?
— Name It, I'll Try It

Dear Name: He won't be out of line if he politely corrects them each time they make a mistake. You can do your part by using his name whenever possible. Go a little overboard with it if you have to. As for

his getting upset with you, I'd set him straight immediately. There's no excuse for it. Good luck.

Dear Steven: Summer vacation is right around the corner, and this year I'd like to go to Europe. Should I go it alone or take a guided tour? What countries should I visit? Can you suggest a good book I can consult?
— Eastbound

Dear Eastbound: Ask your friends to recommend a good travel agent. As for a good book to consult, I'd say your checkbook is the best bet.

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