

Workshop to remember

By Addison Dent
Contributing Writer

This past weekend, Friday, Jan. 24 through Sunday, Jan. 26, the Brevard College Theatre department welcomed the world renowned director, acting teacher & playwright, David Hammond, for a three-day intensive Shakespeare workshop. This was a tremendous opportunity to work with one of the greatest artistic minds of today.

We were told to prepare two contrasting Shakespeare monologues, read "Macbeth," and read his manuscript on scansion and Shakespearean text work. Five participating majors, Raquan Edwards, Joshua Runkels, Marris Burdette, Karen Bennet, and myself had a previous course, Audition Technique, in which we were introduced to the Hammond method of working with Shakespeare.

It is rigorous and precise and yields a great deal of truth from the text that cannot be gleaned otherwise. To have the first hand experience of being lead through the process by Hammond was invaluable! The growth in our majors over the weekend was unbelievable, which is a testament to the power of the work.

The first day we met at 6:00pm in the Morrison Playhouse, our black box theatre, we arrived early and eagerly awaited the arrival of David Hammond. We were all nerves and reflecting over our memorization and preparation for what would be a monumental workout! He arrived and was all smiles and welcoming, but we were intimidated by the reputation that followed him into the black box.

David Hammond has taught at the Juilliard School, the American Conservatory Theater, the Yale School of Drama where he became the artistic director of the Play Makers Repertory Company, New York University's Graduate Acting Program at Tisch School of the Arts, the American Repertory Theater/Moscow Art Theater School, at Harvard University, and recently at Guilford College.

David Hammond returned to Guilford to teach, and will be teaching at Harvard in the fall, followed by directing several of Shakespeare's plays in Uruguay that have been translated into Spanish specifically for

his productions. His professional resume must be as long as his near fifty page manuscript!

He walked to the front of the space next to a white board and table and sat down calmly in his chair, already having everyone on edge with anticipation. His first words, "Okay. Who's first?" We were stunned, all I could do was smile, a deer in the headlights and then he said, "You. Your smiling, come up here." Me? My legs moved on their own and I was already shaking his hand before I knew it.

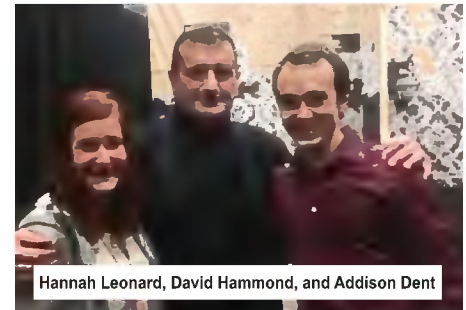
From then on we cruised through our monologues, with the careful and intensive direction of David Hammond. It was such a rush to be lead in such a way that you continually reveal the truth of the text and your character. We had to fight off the, "Muscle memory of practicing lines aloud in our room," and that was quite difficult. We had to practice, "Picking up the new tool and using it, rather than go back to the old tools that don't work."

We finished the night around 10 p.m. after listening to Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Holiday and Paul Robeson. He explained how these musical artists hold a listeners attention by the way they communicate the imagery of the piece.

The following day he guided us through the history and legacy of Elizabethan rhetoric and how it informs the Shakespearean text and us as actors. We learned that when digging through a play in search of facts about the world of the play and our character, we must know the process of which the text and material was originally conceived, and in that lies great truth of the character and story.

His method of scansion had us feeling like Sherlock Holmes, but we came to realize that if you spend the time, and go through the play examining the imagery and iambic pentameter that is the framework of the text the truth you uncover about the character and the world of the play is so incredibly informative. It was an epiphany. We all came to love Shakespeare in a way we were not taught in grade school.

We were all scanning lines of Corinthians, Sonnets, and the beginnings of "Macbeth," all hesitantly offering up ways in which to scan the Iambic Pentameter, and how to image the piece. We were wiped as he asked to have our



Hannah Leonard, David Hammond, and Addison Dent

monologues ready for the last day. He inspired us with previous stories of famous actors and actresses he has worked with and how they found truth in the text by, "Scanning first and asking why later."

The next day we scanned the last bit of a speech we began the previous day from Lady Macbeth. After the lunch break we tore into the monologues again and we all wore eager smiles on the edge of our seats.

The improvement was incredible! The Coordinator of the Theatre Studies Department at Brevard College, Brandon Smith, had this to say after David left. "He said more than once how impressed he was with the students and the fact that they were being trained in the right way, how they had a great understanding of text work, and how he could tell they were working their butts off. He was very impressed."

David Hammond, as he was making his good byes at the end of the crazy, jam-packed weekend thanked us, "This was very gratifying...I had a very good time, thank you." We were humbled and so grateful to be directed by such a brilliant director. We left with extremely high spirits and eager for the next great challenge!

The experience to work with David Hammond is one that has marked our undergraduate careers as Theatre Majors at Brevard College. More importantly we have been given incredibly powerful tools as actors: tools that will lead us to stronger dramatic truths on stage or in film, tools that allow our art to be so much more.

The work this past weekend with David made us stronger actors and more conscientious young professionals. We know how to do the work and we know how to do the work in such a way that will clearly and powerfully communicate the grand stories we become a part of. It was a brilliant weekend—one we will never forget.