

# Actor talks at UNC about 'Witness' concludes series his Clinton endorsement

BY OLIVIA BOWLER  
STAFF WRITER

Sean Astin does not in fact have large, hairy feet. Or if he does, his sneakers hide them well.

Wearing blue jeans and a blazer, Astin couldn't have looked less like a hobbit when he appeared in the Student Union Tuesday evening.

The actor, who is most known as the character Samwise Gamgee in the epic Lord of the Rings trilogy, stopped by UNC as part of his N.C. tour this week, endorsing Sen. Hillary Clinton.

"My passion for Sen. Clinton is deep," he said to the more than 50 Tolkien and Hillary fans who gathered in the Class of 2000 Lounge, bearing blue Clinton stickers and gift-set DVDs.

Astin said he believes this will be an election year in which America will experience a huge upsurge in voter participation.

He said he met Clinton when he was 21 years old and was floored by her sincere focus on human interaction, which he characterized as the most crucial part of campaigning.

"I want to speak through you to the people you'll talk to," he said.

Astin encouraged attendees to volunteer for any campaign, and then opened the floor for questions.

The questions — most posed with some allusion to the trilogy — touched on Clinton's experience as opposed to Obama's fresh voice, as well as her plans for helping small-town rural farmers, which one questioner compared to hobbits.

All hairy feet and wizards aside, Astin is not the first celebrity to offer an endorsement for a candidate, and even with the end of the primaries looming, he will not be the last.

UNC political science professor George Rabinowitz said that celebrity endorsements crop up most often during primaries but that they have been especially prominent this year because the Democratic contest is so high-profile.

"I would say they've played more of a role in this campaign than any other," he said, adding that even frequent endorsements don't necessarily sway voters. "I think basically celebrities attract people, and it can direct dialogue."

Daniel Smith, a sophomore economics major who attended the event, said he doesn't believe star power alone changes voters' minds.

"Celebrities tend to attract moderate people who are just curious," he said, adding that he was interested to hear Astin but still is undecided in his vote.

Amanda Vaughn, director of Heels for Hillary, said that she believes political endorsements carry more weight but that she hopes Astin's presence provoked political discussion.

"I think that it's really important for bringing people out to these events to learn more about the candidate," she said.

Barack Obama, whose most significant celebrity endorsements include Caroline Kennedy and Oprah Winfrey, has also



DTH/J B YOUNG

Actor Sean Astin speaks about his support for Hillary Clinton for president in the Student Union's Class of 2000 lounge Tuesday.

received the endorsement of Win Butler of the band Arcade Fire and Mac McCaughan of the band Superchunk.

Both bands will be playing in "Change Rocks" concerts in Greensboro and Carrboro on May 1 and May 2 respectively.

Tickets are free and are available at the one-stop early voting spot at Morehead Planetarium and Science Center starting Thursday.

Contact the State & National Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

BY KELLY YANG  
STAFF WRITER

Through discussions, photo exhibits, performances and other media, UNC's arts community spent the year exploring issues of capital punishment in society.

The dialogue was brought about by the Creative Campus Innovations Grant, which was awarded to the University and seven other schools in the country.

And to close out this year's project, Creative Campus will bring "Witness to an Execution," presented by PlayMakers Repertory Company, to Elizabeth Price Kenan Theatre. The production premieres today and runs until April 27.

Reed Colver, project manager for the initiative, said when PlayMakers started its PRC<sup>2</sup> series — a second stage lineup of smaller shows — she felt the death penalty project was relevant because it looks at the issue from multiple perspectives.

"This is the first year we've tried to undertake the project," she said. "It's been fantastic, and we will continue next year with the gender and identity project."

"Witness to an Execution" is written and performed by Mike Wiley, a UNC graduate from the Masters of Fine Arts program, and tells stories based on chilling interviews of people involved in the Texas prison system's death row.

"It's told from the perspectives of the individuals who performed the execution, the warden, the ones who witnessed and participated in some way," Wiley said. "We also have a story of a death row chef who makes the last meal."

Joseph Haj, PlayMakers' producing artistic director, contacted Wiley

and asked him "to flesh out the 15-minute play" and write something that was about an hour long.

Now after nearly six months of research and preparation, Wiley's one-man show will premiere where he started the project.

Wiley said he enjoyed working with Haj and others involved with the production, as well as being able to return home.

Ryan Millager, a senior dramatic art major, said he is happy he's been able to contribute to an important issue through his work in the drama department.

"With both 'Coyote On a Fence' and 'Dead Man Walking,' we of (the Department of Dramatic Art) Mainstage saw our hard work in the theater engage in the broader community conversation while also standing alone as works of drama that we can be proud of," Millager said.

Millager added that he and others involved in the productions have never needed each other more in proceeding with their work than after the death of former Student Body President Eve Carson.

"It has taken a lot of courage from everyone to struggle with

ATTEND THE SHOW

Time: Various times, today-Sunday  
Location: Kenan Theatre  
Info: [playmakersrep.org](http://playmakersrep.org)

issues that now strike very close to home," he said.

Emil Kang, UNC's executive director for the arts, said the students who worked last week with "Dead Man Walking" made the best out of working under similar constraints.

"Eve's death is a devastating tragedy, and I can't say that I've made any connections just yet," Kang said.

Colver said all of the organizations involved in this year's Creative Campus project have provoked heartfelt emotions and enjoyment from many.

Others said the project has helped utilize the arts to interpret a difficult issue into collaborative dialogue.

"I think it was a great year where we learned a lot about cross-campus collaboration," Kang said.

"We look forward to continuing our efforts in weaving the arts into the academic fabric."

Contact the Arts Editor at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu)

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author, archivist, collector

**ED SANDERS**  
poet and musician

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poet and Distinguished Professor of Writing and Poetics at Naropa University

**ROBERT CANTWELL**  
professor of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Pleasants Family Assembly Room, Wilson Library  
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Free and open to the public  
Books will be available for sale and signing at the event  
Program Information: [liza\\_terti@unc.edu](mailto:liza_terti@unc.edu) or 919-962-4207  
Ed Sanders and Anne Waldman will read from their work on April 22 at 3:30 p.m. in the Bull's Head Bookshop on the UNC campus  
Reading information: 919-962-5060  
The Beats and Beyond will be on view through July 3  
Melba Remig Saltarelli Exhibit Room, Wilson Library  
Exhibit information: 919-962-1143

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Last Gathering of Beat Poets and Artists, North Beach, 1965. Photo by Larry Keenan

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