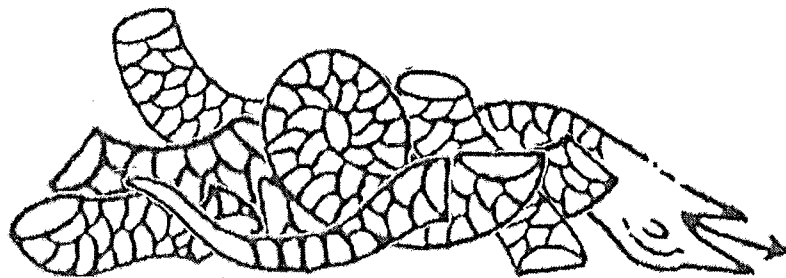


The Wesleyan Theater Department  
Presents



# The Serpent:

a ceremony by Jean Claude van Itallie

A Senior Capstone Project  
Directed by Sivan Battat

December 4-6, 2014 8:00  
The Patricelli '92 Theater

*The Serpent* was originally devised and created by a company called the Open Theater in the early sixties. It was conceived of as a ceremony, a kind of eucharist or communion between actor and audience, intended to outline the boundaries of human experience. Playwright Jean Claude van Itallie and director Joseph Chaikin encouraged later ensembles to use the text as a skeleton on which to put their own flesh, reflecting the lives and minds of the people performing it. It is a slice of theater history; the style of the piece is rooted in 1960's avant-garde theater movements.

For my senior project, I was curious about devising theater processes, about shifting the role of the director and making work collaboratively, and about the methods of building ensemble. Through our process, we explored the themes of the piece and how they relate to our own lives. Originally, the play was deeply rooted in the experience and consciousness of 1960s America, including sequences about Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and the experience of coming of age amidst the sexual revolution. It was not so accessible for us today, fifty years later. So we found our own points of entry, our own memories of firsts, of moments of growing up, of losing our innocence, of learning something for the first time, of moving from one phase to another, all linked to the biblical narrative that pulses through. Through a series of devising workshops, we generated a mountain of material deepening our relationship to the text and to the themes, investigating and challenging our definitions of Eden, our understandings of God, our first memories of violence, and how we relate to each of these age-old stories. Eventually, we began to piece it together. What emerged is a braiding of van Itallie's words, text from the Bible, and our own words, all together. It is about moments of transition and change, about the liminal phases of life, about being between the beginning and the end, but on a path towards something, much like being a senior in college.

The process has been unpredictable and challenging and rewarding and everything I could have asked for. I've had so much help and support from professors, advisors, designers and, of course, from the outstanding cast who I have had the privilege of spending so many hours playing with. The piece itself is just a glimpse into a bit of what our process has been. It is by no means a finished work, but we are excited to invite you into a bit of our exploration as we tackle some of the most famous stories ever written.

Sivan Battat

## Cast

Conor Boughton '15  
Jess Cummings '17  
Nate Gardner '17  
Rose Johnson-Brown '18  
Michael Armen '16  
Eva Ravenal '15  
Sophie Zinser '16

## Crew

Stage Manager: Brendan Coakley  
Assistant Stage Manager: Ariana Rudess  
Set Design: Cara Sunberg  
Costume Design: Sofie Somoroff  
Sound Design/Music Direction: Ben Zucker  
Lighting Design: Rachel Leicher  
Props Design: Maia Nelles-Saiger  
Run Crew: Peetie McCook  
Sound Board Op: Linsin Smith  
Light Board Op: Rachel Sobelsohn  
Master Electrician: Avi Stein  
Electricians: Ian Rice, Philip Heilbron  
Costumes Assistants:  
Celina Bernstein, Alison Silverstein, Nicole Boyd  
Poster Design: Gabe Gordon  
Publicity: Coz Deicke  
  
**Capstone Advisor:** Yuri Kordonsky  
**Design Advisor:** Jack Carr  
**Technical Advisor:** Rebecca Foster

## Special Thanks

Marcela Oteiza, Suzanne Sadler, Charlie Carroll, Dawn Alger,  
Mary-Jane Rubenstein, Christian Milik, Tess Jonas, Virgil Taylor,  
Eriq Robinson, Will Slap, Elijah Stevens, Joan McAfee

# Theater Department

## Faculty and Staff

Dawn Alger.....Administrative Assistant  
Katherine Brewer Ball.....Visiting Assistant Professor  
John F. Carr.....Professor  
Rebecca Foster.....Visiting Assistant Professor  
Ronald S. Jenkins.....Professor  
Phillip Howze.....Yale School of Drama Visiting Instructor of Playwriting  
Quiara Alegria Hudes.....Shapiro Distinguished Professor of Writing and Theater  
Yuri Kordonsky.....Chair, Professor  
Christian Milik.....Visiting Instructor of Costume Construction  
Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento.....Associate Professor  
Marcela Oteiza.....Assistant Professor  
Anne K. Swedberg.....Visiting Assistant Professor  
Leslie A. Weinberg.....Artist-in-Residence  
Emily Zemba.....Yale School of Drama Visiting Instructor of Playwriting

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Regina Melady, Addie McDowell, Grace Nix, Maia Reumann-Moore,  
Hanako Rodriguez, Sofie Somoroff  
**Scene Shop**.....Emma Broder, Brendan Coakley,  
Anthony Dean, Tom Fischer, Cicily Gruber, Sara Feldman, Rebecca Hanschell,  
Phillip Heilbron, Alexander Kaufman, Aileen Lambert, Amanda Larsen,  
Rachel Leicher, Henry Lombino, Mio Magee, Nicholas Murphy, Evan Ortiz,  
Cory Powers, Jeneille Russell, Avi Stein, Madeleine Stern, Noah St. John,  
Daniel Storfer, Cheyanne Williams

## THEA 105: Production Lab

Kiana Akia Dawkins, Maria Eladia Gonzalez, Ali Jamali, Remy Katherine Johnson, Eva  
Lou, Peter Thomson McCook, Melissa Mckee, Christian Nunez, Dache Jordan Rogers,  
Ariana Starr Rudess, Elli Scharlin, Rachel Alexandra Sobelsohn, Celine Tao, Sarah Xu.

# Center for the Arts Staff

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Associate Director for Programming and Events.....Barbara Ally  
Associate Director for Facilities and Technical Operations .....Mark Gawlak  
Art Director.....John Elmore  
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Program Manager.....Erinn Roos-Brown  
Box Office Manager.....Kyle Beaudette  
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Assistant Technical Director/Sound and Video Specialist.....Robert Russo  
Assistant Technical Director/Lighting Specialist.....Suzanne Sadler  
Assistant Technical Director/Scenery Specialist.....Charles Carroll  
Freelance Designer.....Ellen Maurer  
Business Manager.....Alecia Goldfarb  
Exhibitions Coordinator/ICPP Coordinator.....Anya Backlund  
Gallery Supervisor.....Lee Berman  
Program Coordinator.....David Shimomura

Why is *The Serpent* a ceremony? What kind of ceremony is it? It is one in which the actors and audience confront the question: where are we at in relation to where we've been? The ceremony celebrates this point in time: now. We can't remake the past. *The Serpent* insists on our responsibility of acknowledging that we have already gone in a particular direction. It says: where are we at? What are the boundaries we adhere to, and how have they become fixed?

Joseph Chaikin

## Upcoming Events

### *17 Border Crossings*, an "Outside the Box" Series Presentation

February 21, 2015 at 8:00pm, CFA Theater

Written and directed by Thaddeus Phillips, *17 Border Crossings* starts as a classic monologue told from a desk and chair, but quickly morphs into its own skin: it draws inspiration from standup comedy, the Balkan films of Emir Kustarica, the floor shows of the Tropicana in Havana, musicals about Austria, cheap magic, Native myths from the Amazon jungle, and Chilli Relleno recipes.

### *Starfall*, directed by Grace Herman-Holland '15

February 26-27 at 9pm, The Patricelli '92 Theater

Set in the midst of a cover band concert on a present-day college campus, *Starfall* is an experiment in actor/audience relationship that explores different ideas about intimacy. The piece's fantastic world combines popular music and elements of the Japanese kabuki theater. Presented in partial fulfillment of Honors in Theater.

### *Visiting Room*, a solo performance by Sara Guernsey '15

February 27 at 7pm and February 28 at 8pm, Theater Studio

Using the testimonials of 5 inmates, *The Visiting Room* takes spectators inside the walls of our state prisons. Inmates share with us rarely heard stories about their paths and choices, life in prison, and very personal struggles toward release. Presented in partial fulfillment of Honors in Theater.

### *Ida*, a dance-theater piece by Kate Malczewski and Cicily Clare Gruber

April 2-4 at 8pm, Theater Design Studio Terrace

*Ida* is a multimedia solo performance based on Gertrude Stein's novel of the same title. Using technological replications of the human form, the piece explores Ida's creation of identity as she moves, rests, says yes, gets married, and owns dogs. Presented in partial fulfillment of Honors in Theater.

### *The Bald Soprano*, by Eugéne Ionesco

Spring Faculty Production, directed by Yuri Kordonsky

April 22-24 at 8pm and April 25 at 2pm and 8pm, CFA Theater

In this Theater of the Absurd classic, Ionesco reveals the futility of meaningful communication in contemporary society. Inspired by the cliché dialogues in a beginner's English phrasebook, the writer rejects coherent plot, realistic drama, and character development in this comedy about the tragedy of language in a universe ruled by chance.

### *What Happens When We Tell a Story*,

a talk by Playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes

April 27 at 7pm, Wesleyan Memorial Chapel

Quiara Hudes' younger cousin grew up in "the barrio," graduated public school, enlisted at the age of 17, got a leg injury in Iraq, and became a vet all by the ripe age of 20. This talk tells the true backstage story of what happened after Hudes turned his life into a trilogy of plays. For him, opening night was only the beginning.