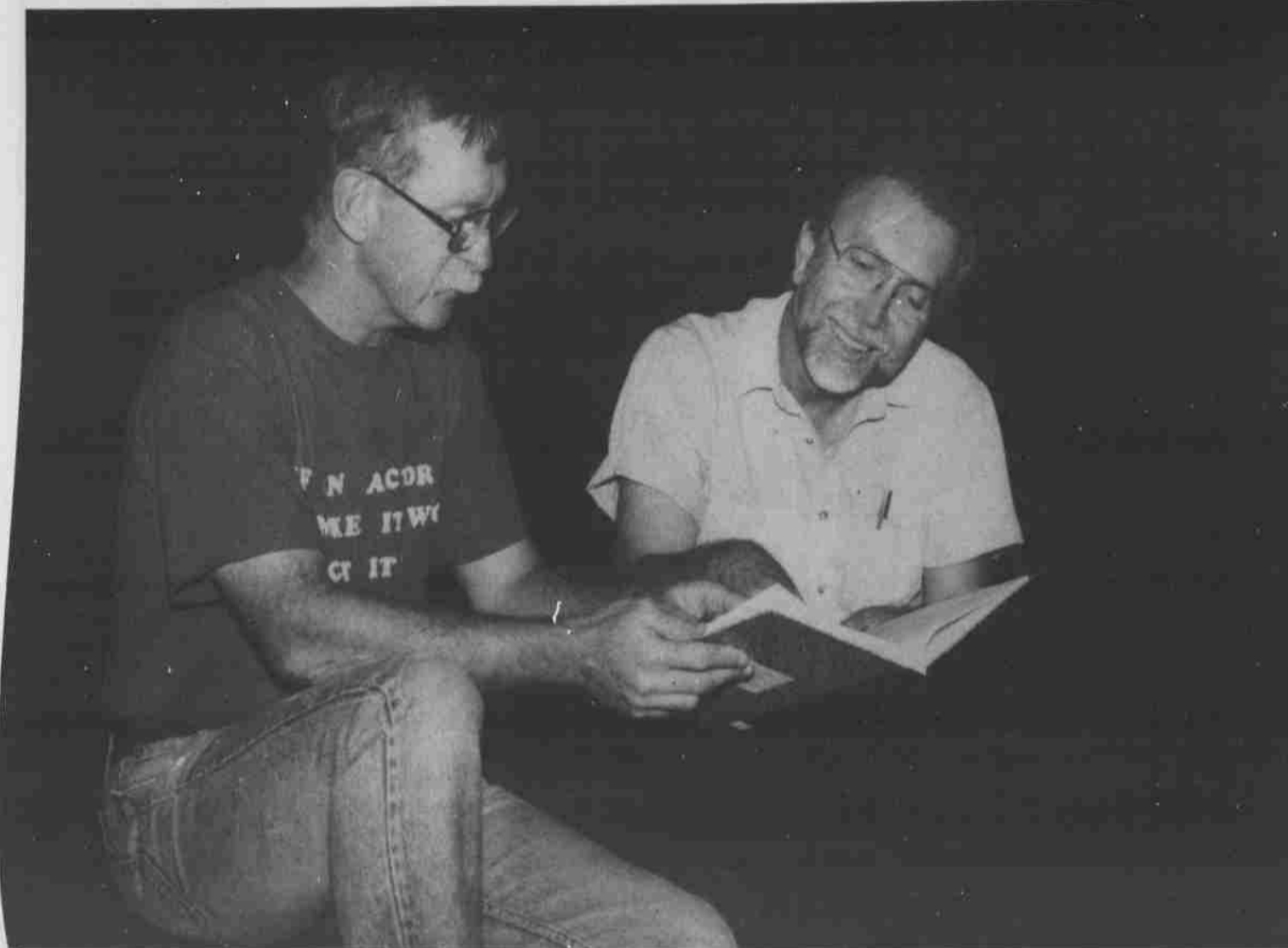


UNLV Department of Theatre Arts to compete with Ivy League Colleges



Award winning playwright Red Shuttleworth (left), consults with Jerry Crawford (right). Crawford directs the MFA Graduate playwrighting program.

"UNLV committed to become among the primary — if not THE primary training ground for new, professional playwrights in this country"

— Jerry Crawford

LAS VEGAS — Determined to become the "Yale of the Southwest" in theatre, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas is focusing on new playwrights for its 1990-1991 season.

"Three years ago, the faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts at UNLV decided to place the Master of Fine Arts Original Play Program at the forefront of its future goals and objectives. In other words, UNLV committed to become among the primary — if not THE primary training ground for new, professional playwrights in this country," said Dr. Jerry L. Crawford, Professor of Theatre Arts who heads the M.F.A. Playwriting Program.

"Currently, such schools as Yale University, Columbia University, the University of Iowa, probably have the distinction of being the leading professional

playwriting programs in the country," noted Crawford. "In our first two years of the M.F.A. program, our playwrights have won state and national arts awards and had their work produced in such states as New York, Minnesota and Arizona."

The playwriting program at UNLV is a reflection of the growth of the Department of Theatre Arts whose programs have increased enormously in the past four years, especially in the area of graduate education. The department has instituted professional M.F.A. degrees in playwriting, design/technology, and musical theatre performance. Both the theatre department and the UNLV administration have made a commitment to develop quality professional experience and programs for students that enter these programs, according to Dr. John C.

Unrue, Sr. Vice President and Provost.

In the last two years, the theatre departments' faculty has grown from 9 to 16 full-time professors. In addition to the growth of the staff, the whole production aspect of the program had to be expanded.

"All three M.F.A. degrees are production oriented. Obviously, to accommodate the performance/production requirements of the graduate programs, there now has to be a great many more productions," Theatre Arts Department Chair Dr. Jeffrey Koep noted. "This is reflected in the 1990/1991 season."

The summer season has featured "When the House was Shining," a full-length original by undergraduate student Walt Hunter. Hunter, who is also a lead singer at a major hotel on the Strip "possesses potential professional writing talent," stated Dr. Crawford. "His dark comedy, 'When the House was Shining' is an impressive first effort."

In September, launching the main season, University Theatre will present an original play inspired by Charles Dickens' novel "Great Expectations," written as a complex collaborative effort by six student playwrights — Rand Higbee, John Newsom, Chris Danowski, Tami Silver, Red Shuttleworth, and Walt Hunter. Guest artist Davey Marlin-Jones will direct. The play, "Pip's Trip: A Theatrical Journey Through Great Expectations — and More!" moves from the present to the past, adds Dickens as a character, and presents the essence of the classic novel in dramatic terms with a fresh contemporary viewpoint.

"The piece is ideally suited

for the entire family," said Dr. Crawford.

The same group of authors, aided by at least four first-year UNLV playwriting students, will write the final production of the season in May 1991 with an original script titled "West!" The production will include a series of comic and serious scenes and short pieces telling the story of both the historic and the new American west.

In between the two major collaborative pieces, the department will present two full-length original plays written by Shuttleworth and Higbee. In November, Shuttleworth's new and stirring drama, "The Children's Hair Turned White," will be premiered. It is an explosive dramatization of what happened to a group of fictional children who were exposed to radiation fallout from the first atomic bomb tested in New Mexico. The play combines fantasy, myth, ritual and reality. It uses dancers as well as actors in its complex format.

In the spring, Higbee's "Sir Isaac's Duel" depicts the life of Sir Isaac Newton and his personal and professional struggles as a man and genius of science. Robert Brewer directs this production.

In October, four original one-act plays will be presented on a single evening's bill of entertainment. The first piece by Tami Silver, "Oh, Harry, How I Love You," satirizes two young black women's fascination with their college professor. The second piece by Shuttleworth, "Farewell the Catastrophe Works," depicts both an amusing and poignant character study between an elderly woman and a young woman employed by an American bank. The third piece, by Higbee, a dark satire on the

Vietnam War is entitled, "The Smell of Mortality," dramatizes a young man's efforts to escape his tyrannical father and a small Nevada town.

In the spring semester, three to five more original one-acts, which are yet to be selected, will be produced from among these and the entering playwrights.

"Thus from 8 to 12 original plays will be produced on our stages in the 1990-91 season — a frankly astounding number when compared to the MFA playwriting programs in the United States," Dr. Crawford emphasized.

"In addition, the season will include "Seeds of Darkness," the winning script in UNLV's Sarett National Playwriting Contest."

The expanded season also includes two musicals and five other plays. "Toys in the Attic," "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and "Candide" help complete the exciting program.

"Such a theatrical season is innovative," Koep stressed. "We have eliminated the 'formula' academic season which traditionally includes for example, a play by Shakespeare, a Greek tragedy and a restoration drama."

"We believe that our students are certainly working with contemporary writers by working with new playwrights. We feel that students must be trained and exposed to important classical and historical styles and forms, but it does not have to happen in one year. Consequently, we are viewing each year as part of a four-year plan, rather than approaching each year as a compressed version of a four-year plan," Koep explained.

MFA in Theatre has a three year program

UNLV M.F.A. playwrights must complete a 60-credit training curriculum which includes 6 to 12 internship credits at professional theatres prior to graduation. UNLV playwrights work at such prestigious theatres as the Sun Dance Institute in Utah, the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, Seattle Rep, the Actors Theatre of Louisville and the Sequoia workshop in Arkansas among others.

In addition to public performances and internships, UNLV playwrights are constantly testing new works through weekly workshop readings, laboratory productions, and class experiences.

Every Friday the student organization, "Poor Playwrights Theatre," presents readings of new works utilizing student actors.

M.F.A. playwriting students take a required minimum of 15 credits in dramatic literature and criticism, as well as appropriate courses in English. Each playwriting student must complete a minimum of three plays, one of which must be full-length and one of which must be produced.