

BEHIND THE SCENES

News From the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre

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Inside...Page 4

“History of Costume” Students
Take Transatlantic Field Trip

Spring 2009

Down for Her Students: Godmilow Teaches (Disciplined) Filmmaking



You could travel the second floor of Notre Dame's O'Shaughnessy Hall on a daily basis and never notice it, the unremarkable gray door simply labeled "LOFT."

Given what takes place on the other side, the old saying about books and covers seems highly appropriate.

"I remember thinking how distinct it felt from the rest of the University, as if you had entered a studio in New York or L.A.," says Peter Richardson, who graduated from FTT in 2002 and premiered his first feature documentary at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. "That atmosphere is part of the 'magic' of the space that inspires a lot of the creative thinking that occurs there."

Independent filmmaker Jill Godmilow, a professor in the department since 1992, is the catalyst of that creativity, much of which involves the students in her "Advanced Film Production" class.

"I'm down for them, and I'm down for their films, and I'm here at two o'clock in the morning, too," says Godmilow, whose office and classroom are through the door and up some stairs. "It is intense, every part of it. I always say it's the best course at the University not because I teach it but because it's such a great opportunity to work extremely hard on something that's entirely your creation, which can go out into the world and entertain and educate anywhere and forever."

Limited to eight students, "Advanced Film Production" carries six credits rather than the standard three. The filmmaking is done in teams of two, each developing and producing a 16mm short over the course of the semester. The finished products are screened at the Notre Dame Student Film Festival (see related story, page six), and Godmilow requires that they all be submitted to at least one outside festival, as well.

Transforming a story idea into a 10-minute, color-corrected, sound-mixed and titled film that you're prepared to show to more than 1,000 of your fellow students is daunting enough. But Godmilow's class has an additional challenge. Instead of working with the increasingly common digital video (DV) tape, which is relatively inexpensive and therefore allows for essentially unlimited shooting, each team has just two 400-foot rolls—or 22 minutes—of film stock for its raw footage.

"That's tight," Godmilow says. "And I believe that's part of the discipline of it. You give them endless amounts of DV tape, they go out and shoot everything and don't think and don't storyboard and don't script tightly."

Becker's Book Sees Stars in a Different Light



Brad Pitt walks around his neighborhood with photographers in tow. Britney Spears can't pass by a newsstand without seeing herself on multiple tabloids. And teen sensation Miley Cyrus—aka Hannah Montana—reserves Disneyland to celebrate her birthday with 5,000 of her "closest" friends.

With lifestyles like these, it's no surprise we tend to see celebrities as somehow different from ourselves.

Associate Professor Christine Becker can relate. As a child, she was fascinated with Hollywood's glamorous image and took every opportunity to read about stars

continued on page 2

continued on page 6

in newspapers and magazines. As an adult, she then turned her childhood hobby into a research interest while pursuing her Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she focused her dissertation on 1950s film stars who crossed the boundary into television.

After graduate school, Becker set about expanding her dissertation into a book and turned to screenwriter Jim Jennewein, a 1977 Notre Dame graduate, for input and suggestions on her project. He offered some simple yet insightful advice: Make sure to think about stars as real people with real jobs who are trying to succeed in a brutal industry.

“I had always thought of stars as these glorious, fantastical people, and that even in the research, they’re almost figureheads more than actual people,” Becker recalls. “It was an angle at which I hadn’t thought of it—of stars as actual, ordinary human beings who are trying to get through.”

That challenge was never more apparent than when she was studying Betty Hutton, star of the 1950 big-screen hit *Annie Get Your Gun* and later, television’s *The Betty Hutton Show*. In her search for information, Becker found herself on eBay purchasing personal videotapes and scrapbooks, which eventually led her to Hutton’s caretakers. They said she was unwilling to be interviewed for the book because she felt she had been exploited and used throughout her life, leading her to become somewhat of a recluse in her later years.

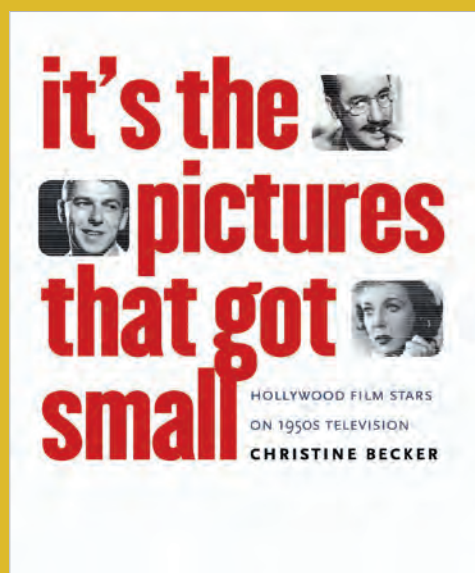
“[Hutton] found it really frustrating and depressing that people expected her to be Betty Hutton circa 1948,” Becker says. “They expected her to be bouncy, excitable, the movie star, and at that point she was 85 and ... an old, frail woman. She always felt like she was disappointing people because she couldn’t live up to that.”

In *It’s the Pictures That Got Small: Hollywood Film Stars on 1950s Television* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008), Becker gives readers an inside look at not only the individual experiences of stars such as Hutton but also a period of great transition in the film and television industries. She notes that perceptions of celebrity were redefined as the classic studio system fell apart and many stars moved from film to television—previously seen as a step down—without harming their reputations. Such changes represented an important point in the evolution of pop culture through the decades, another research area in which she’s interested.

“That’s the classic paradox of stardom—that they’re both extraordinary and ordinary,” says Becker, who teaches a class on media stardom and celebrity culture. “The film industry often wants to exploit a sense of ordinariness so that we feel connected to them, and yet they live extraordinary lives of affluence and wealth. But it’s almost as if the ordinary has also gotten more salacious than ever before, so the ordinary is about affairs and drug use and rehab.”

Since joining Notre Dame’s faculty in 2001, Becker has helped create a television concentration within the FTT major. This year, 55 of the more than 200 FTT majors studied on the television track, and its popularity continues to grow. “Our classes are a place where students are allowed to take television seriously ... and to dig into it in a deep way that they don’t get in other places,” she says. “I’m pleased that we have a place for our students to do that.”

Becker is already at work on her next book, in which she compares contemporary British and American network television. She is also writing two book chapters, one on Clark Gable and one on Paul Newman, for the forthcoming book *Star Decades: American Culture/American Cinema*.



Prizant Encourages Exploration of Theatre From International Perspectives



For a writer, freedom of expression is no less integral to the creative process than a blank sheet and a great idea. But in a number of nations around the world, such a liberty does not exist, replaced instead by the right to discuss only what the government says you can.

Researching how the threat of censorship affects playwrights, Assistant Professor Yael Prizant found examples from Cuban theatre in many of the case studies. "Once I read a few plays from the island, I was hooked," says Prizant, who joined the FTT faculty last fall. "I began exploring how playwrights say what they want or need to say without saying what they know will not be tolerated."

She soon concluded that Cuban theatre could not be studied without considering both the playwrights who stayed on the island and those who emigrated.

"My research strives to put Cuban-American plays in conversation with Cuban plays, allowing connections, reflections, intricacies, and globalization to emerge for investigation," Prizant says. "I am curious about how the works engage each other and how history, economics, and ideology shape theatrical views in both countries."

Prizant encourages this curiosity in the classroom, as well. In her course "The Hyphenated American," students think critically about how the cultures of American immigrant communities influence

the theatre they produce. As with every class she teaches, she also aims to enhance her students' appreciation of art.

"If students become informed, thoughtful audience members, my courses will have been successful," says Prizant, who also teaches a class on dramaturgy. "I believe that students are involved when they encounter theatre that reflects their cultural heritages, challenges their personal views, and appeals to their aesthetic ideals."

Her decision to come to Notre Dame had a lot to do with the resources available to faculty and students, both in the form of financial support to research and study abroad and opportunities presented by FTT's dynamic home.

"The state-of-the-art DeBartolo Performing Arts Center is physical proof of Notre Dame's ongoing commitment to the arts on campus and within the community," Prizant says. "My students and I are able to see internationally renowned artists perform without leaving South Bend, as well as create our own theatrical work in top-notch performance spaces, while integrating important technologies into our studies and creative endeavors."

Prizant is currently writing an article on Cuban-American playwrights living and writing in exile. In the piece, she explores exile from two perspectives—*from* one's native country and *within* one's native country—and how each view contributes to redefining the concept of "home." The article will be published in the forthcoming collection *Performance, Exile and "America,"* part of Palgrave Macmillan's "Studies in International Performance" series.

Forgotten Film About Rockne Era Comes Home to Notre Dame

FTT and the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center marked the end of the 2008 home football season by debuting their recently acquired 35mm print of *The Spirit of Notre Dame* (1931), a largely unknown film about the University's gridiron exploits dedicated to legendary coach Knute Rockne.

"As one of only three films authorized by Notre Dame—with *Knute Rockne—All American* and *Rudy*—it's an important part of the University's history," says Don Crafton, Notre Dame Professor of Film and Culture and the department's chairperson.

Rockne died in a plane crash in 1931 on his way to California to work on *The Spirit of Notre Dame*, which has never been

released on video or DVD. When Crafton received confirmation that Universal Studios still had original copies of the film in its vault, Jon Vickers, managing director of the performing arts center, started working on buying a print for the University with funds provided by the College of Arts and Letters. Rockne's grandson, Knute III, was on hand for the campus "premiere," introducing the first of the two Friday night screenings in the Browning Cinema.

Starring several of Rockne's former players, including the Four Horsemen, *The Spirit of Notre Dame* had an impact that, according to Crafton, far exceeded what its humble legacy would suggest.

"It is a crucial document in the shaping of Notre Dame's academic and athletic identity," he says. "Although the University agreed reluctantly to lend its name to the film and was disappointed that it didn't show more of our academic side, it does capture the mystique and mythology that grew spontaneously around Notre Dame during Knute's extraordinary regime."

“History of Costume” Students Take Transatlantic Field Trip

The eight students in Rick Donnelly’s “History of Costume” course last fall had the kind of midterm break that easily could’ve prompted a good number of their elders to declare: “I didn’t get to do things like *that* when I was your age.” In this case, however, you might well wish you were one of them no matter when you went to college or what you did during break.

Donnelly, a professional specialist in FTT, took the students on a 10-day research trip to England that placed historical garments like those they were studying in the classroom literally in the palms of their hands.

“Costume history is traditionally taught by studying fashion and styles through artwork, mainly in books,” Donnelly wrote in his proposal for one of the College of Arts and Letters’ Learning Beyond the Classroom (LBC) grants. “It is rare that students be allowed to conduct empirical research for this subject at the undergraduate level.”

In addition to LBC funding, the group received financial support from the College’s Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program and Notre Dame’s Nanovic Institute for European Studies. Students selected individual research topics before the trip and used the time in England to develop their projects.

Junior Eddie Velazquez, pictured below with his classmates and Donnelly shortly before they departed from campus, offered *Behind the Scenes* a firsthand look at the students’ memorable journey.



In Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare’s hometown, we saw garments from the 17th century similar to what he and his contemporaries would have worn. The photo shows me outside Hall’s Croft, the house where Shakespeare’s daughter lived with her husband. Touring Hall’s Croft allowed us to observe various paintings of family members in their period dress and compare the garments we had seen with artist interpretations.



Our visit to Hampton Court, the palace of Henry VIII, proved particularly valuable to our research. We had the chance to talk to several actors who dress in reconstructed Tudor costume, and seeing the garments in person helped us to visualize and understand the various layers and elements. We are speaking here with an actress portraying Catherine Parr, Henry VIII’s last wife. As we had learned in class, her dress consisted of at least three layers, with the outermost containing embellishments and decoration.

FTT Net: News in Brief

After spending five summers training with the company, Professional Specialist Siiri Scott accepted an invitation to join **Theatre Nohgaku**, which brings the classical Japanese stage art Noh to English-speaking audiences. The addition of Scott, who annually directs a production for FTT’s mainstage season, and two other performers puts the theatre’s membership at 21.

Renowned choreographer and dancer Nejla Yatkin, who came to FTT last summer as an artist-in-residence and has since joined the faculty as an associate professional specialist, won a 2008 **Princess Grace Foundation-USA award**. Yatkin was one of 44 recipients recognized as “emerging talent in theater, dance, and film” and one of only three named choreography fellows. On leave in 2008–09, she is preparing a new work, commissioned in part by the Goethe-Institut New York, on the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Advised by Assistant Professor Aaron Magnan-Park, seniors Kevin Prawdzik and Laura Wilczek produced ***Adopted Ourselves, Adopting Ourselves: The Ethnogenesis of Korean Adoptees***, an hour-long documentary on South Koreans who, as children, were adopted by families in other countries. Inspired by the students’ own experiences as Korean adoptees, the film received financial support from a number of campus sources, allowing Prawdzik and Wilczek to shoot in Seoul over fall and winter breaks. *Adopted Ourselves, Adopting Ourselves* premiered at Notre Dame’s Browning Cinema on May 1.

The actors at Hampton Court offered a costume presentation that taught us more about men's garments, such as those worn by this actor playing a courtier; I'm next to him, examining a jerkin, or coat, worn over a doublet.



Here, we're in costume storage at the Fashion Museum in Bath measuring and sketching a 19th-century dress. Once again, we were able to collect specific details about garments that we would not have known from simply reading a textbook.

Thanks to the generosity of Jenny Lister, a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, we were able to enter one of the museum's costume storage rooms, where she pulled many extant garments for us to analyze, sketch, and photograph. In the photo, Jenny (on the left) is showing us a shawl and a petticoat understructure known as a crinoline.



When we were not busy analyzing extant garments, we would often go sightseeing. At the Roman baths in Bath, for instance, we took a tour and looked at statues, noting the types of garments that were depicted by the sculptors.

Notre Dame alumni Mary (FTT '86) and Tom Parent have created the **Broad Avenue Filmmakers Award** to support student projects in film and video production. Winners will be awarded funding that can be used to cover production costs, equipment purchases, travel, film festival application fees, and other related expenses.

FTT is now home to **four high-definition Panasonic HVX-200 cameras** and a post-production suite with a **Pro Tools 5.1 mixing system**, all of which have been provided by Craig Pilgian, founder of Pilgrim Films & Television (*American Chopper*, *Dirty Jobs*, *Ghost Hunters*). His donation has already had an impact on the department's curriculum and may lead to new courses.

Maria Iuppa (FTT '08) won an **American Association of Teachers of Italian Essay Prize** for "Social Impegno in Comedy Italian Style," her senior honors thesis. An Italian minor and one of the first students to complete the department's recently established honors track (ftt.nd.edu/major/honors), Iuppa conducted her research under the guidance of John Welle, professor of Italian and concurrent professor in FTT, and with support from Notre Dame's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program.

She is quick to add, however, that it's not a matter of choosing one format over the other, and indeed, FTT offers training in both; it's about understanding how to edit.

"It is very nice to be able to turn a shot into slo-mo with the stroke of a single key ... or to add all kinds of special effects that the digital editing programs make easy. But first you have to learn to make a good cut. First you have to learn that, and I believe you learn that better with actual film in your hands."

Anyone familiar with Godmilow's career could rightly expect her to be a demanding teacher. She is considered one of the primary theorists/practitioners in the American nonfiction genre thanks to films such as *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman* (1974), which she co-directed with folksinger Judy Collins. *Antonia* received an Academy Award nomination, was named best feature documentary by the Independent Film Critics of New York, and, in 2003, was added to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, an honor reserved for films judged to be "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant."

While her substantial reputation has been built largely on her work in the realm of nonfiction, Godmilow has also achieved acclaim as the director of features, with her *Waiting for the Moon* (1987) winning first prize at Sundance.

"They [documentaries and features] both have responsibilities, I think, simply because you have people alone in the dark, in rapt attention, for an hour or two, watching and listening to what you have concocted in a very powerful medium," says Godmilow, who has received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation during her time at Notre Dame. "But when you're eating up the world and real people, you should do it very carefully, and you should have something useful to say."

Godmilow's teaching is most often associated with what goes on during "Advanced Film Production," but her impact reaches well beyond that one course. Richardson, in fact, didn't take it with her. Having taught him in "The History of the Documentary Film," Godmilow became his adviser, and he's continued to seek her guidance as he's started to make his own name in the film industry.

"Jill has been there, advising me, at every major turning point in my career thus far," says Richardson, whose *Clear Cut: The Story of Philomath, Oregon* is currently playing on the Sundance Channel. "[Her] influence is present in my filmmaking, every day, as I'm shooting, editing, or figuring out what to do next.

"I literally would not be where I am today were it not for Jill."

Student Film Festival Celebrates 20th Anniversary

On a Thursday in late January, it was a toss-up as to which adjective, "frigid" or "Arctic," best described opening night of the 20th annual Notre Dame Student Film Festival. While the snowy landscape certainly wouldn't have been mistaken for Cannes, the 14 films screened this year in the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center's Browning Cinema generated something even the most seasoned directors and producers crave:

Buzz.

That energy didn't diminish at any point during the three-day event and led to all six screenings selling out, a regular occurrence for what has become a campus favorite.

"Here are 1,200 people who could have gone out to see *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*, but they chose to come watch student films made at Notre Dame," says Associate Professional Specialist Ted Mandell (FTT '86). "The audience and the cinema breathe a whole new life into the films that never existed in the classroom. It's great for the students to see that transformation—and a bit nerve-wracking for them, as well."

An undergraduate at Notre Dame back when student films only played for classmates and parents in town for graduation, Mandell started the festival two years after joining the department's faculty and still welcomes audiences to each screening, both in-person and via a video introduction he produces. His 20th anniversary version was a takeoff of the classic Mean Joe Greene Coca-Cola commercial featuring Notre Dame women's basketball coach Muffet McGraw and several of her players. (In case you're wondering, its debut preceded the Super Bowl and Coke's own adaptation by about a week.)

This set the stage for a mix of student shorts—the longest was 13 minutes—created as projects in advanced, intermediate, and introductory FTT production courses. First up was a documentary on James Dean fans living in his hometown of Fairmount, Ind., and the night concluded with *Our Lady's Bouncers*, a humorous look at the obstacles Notre Dame students face when trying to drive a car into the primarily pedestrian campus.

In between, audiences saw everything from a music video and a horror flick to two biopics of current undergraduates: *Dana*, which took filmmakers to a Navajo reservation, and *The Daily Work*, a profile of an Opus Dei member that includes scenes shot in Rome. Travel for the films was possible thanks in large part to Learning Beyond the Classroom grants funded by the College of Arts and Letters. FTT students can now also apply for the Broad Avenue Filmmakers Award (see "FTT Net," page five), which Mandell notes will allow future projects to be even more ambitious.

Not that anyone has been lacking in ambition.

"Each year, the skill level of our students seems to increase," he says. "From cinematography to sound mix, they observe and learn from their peers one semester then go out and make better films the next semester."

Visit ftt.nd.edu/news-events/film-fest for more about the festival, including a short video on its history.

○ Bengal Bouts Documentary About More Than Boxing



Senior Mark Weber describes Notre Dame's annual Bengal Bouts boxing tournament not in terms of rings and gloves but as "a great tradition of young men giving their blood and sweat in the fight against global poverty."

If you're thinking this sounds like a film just waiting to be made, then you're thinking like Weber.

A double major in film and the Program of Liberal Studies as well as the 2008–09 Bengal Bouts president, he has teamed with Associate Professional Specialist William Donaruma to produce *Strong Bodies Fight*, a documentary about the distinctive program. The title is inspired by the bouts' longtime mantra: "Strong bodies fight, that weak bodies may be nourished."

"It is not about fighting each other," says Donaruma (FTT '89), who is also the film's director. "It is about fighting for a cause and helping each other."

Starting with the first tournament 79 years ago, all proceeds from Bengal Bouts ticket sales—more than \$50,000 in 2009—have been directed to the Holy Cross Missions in what was once called East Bengal and today is Bangladesh. Part of the work of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Notre Dame's founding religious community, the missions spearhead a variety of educational and outreach initiatives in the impoverished country.

Weber thought a film about the tie that binds Notre Dame's student boxers to the missions would raise awareness of the Holy Cross programs and how to support them. His original intent was to go to Bangladesh by himself with a small handheld camera and shoot footage for a "mini-documentary," but that plan grew to include four of his teammates.

"As a student, I saw the potential to provide a tremendous educational experience for our boxers," Weber says. "As the president of Bengal Bouts, I saw the opportunity to transform our connection with Bangladesh from a mere check into a real relationship."

Fellow boxers weren't the only people interested in adding their names to the lineup. Weber approached Donaruma about the project around the same time he began discussing it with his peers, and John Klein (FTT '06) later joined the crew as cinematographer.

The group traveled to Bangladesh in May 2008 with three high-definition cameras in tow, the filmmakers capturing the boxers' journey as they met those who work in the missions and the people they serve. Back at Notre Dame, Donaruma guided the transformation from raw footage to finished film, as he and Weber combined elements of the trip and the bouts themselves to create what is now a feature-length documentary.

"The most rewarding part of the project," Donaruma says, "has been the experience of visiting that region of the world and that we seemed to really capture an essence of hope, pride, and beauty of the country and not just the idea of despair."

Largely financed by Bengal Bouts alumni organized by executive producer/head coach Tom Suddes, *Strong Bodies Fight* (strongbodiesfight.org) is in post-production and scheduled to premiere in the University's Browning Cinema on Nov. 6, the Friday before the Notre Dame-Navy football game.



○ New iNDustry Alliance Programs Let Alumni Reconnect With FTT



As former majors in the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre (FTT)—or Communication and Theatre, if you're old-school—chances are you've gone on to do some pretty interesting things since you left Notre Dame. That's why we want you back.

Not in a creepy "you can live in our performing arts center's basement" kind of way. We were thinking more along the lines of encouraging you to join the iNDustry Alliance, Notre Dame's alumni organization for media and entertainment professionals.

Already the host of networking events and on-campus reunions, the group recently launched two programs that promise to strengthen the bond between FTT's past and present.

- The iNDustry Alliance Alumni Filmmaker Series allows those who have played a significant role, whether on- or off-screen, in the production of a new feature or documentary to screen the film on campus and talk about it with students and faculty. Screenwriter

Stephen Susco (FTT '95) inaugurated the series in December when he presented his 2008 Sundance Film Festival entry, *Red*, in the Browning Cinema.

- The iNDustry Alliance Summer Plunge pairs alumni with undergraduates so the students get an inside look at the world of media and entertainment. Based on their post-ND aspirations, they are matched with alumni hosts and then spend a week shadowing them on the job. The plunge is expected to involve two students per year.

All iNDustry Alliance events and programs are open to both FTT alumni and Notre Dame graduates who majored in other disciplines. E-mail FTT's Ted Mandell at tmandell@nd.edu for more information.

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