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History of Theatre at WPI

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by

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Abstract

For this project I created a web site that contains information pertaining to the history of theatre at WPI within one comprehensive location. I conducted intensive research to gather the information from multiple fragmented and previously unrecorded resources. The result is a living document, which contains important information that can be expanded upon, as future performances occur and allows students and patrons to learn about what theatre at WPI is and how it got there.

Executive Summary

Having become very involved in drama productions at WPI, I wanted a resource where I could go to read about the professors and students who had come before me, giving their hearts and souls to productions. I saw my friends at WPI graduate before me, with the incoming freshmen barely realizing their great efforts.

Particularly in theatre, what has gone before affects what is going to happen now. Even the immediate past is used as a reference for what can be done now, and how it should be done. In selecting a play to be performed, for example, knowing what plays have been performed in the past can play a key role in the choice.

Often times, in looking into a theatre, its past is important to patrons. Its reputation is dependent on what has been done. The history of a theatre can interest and intrigue theatergoers. For a college theatre, its history can also interest and intrigue potential students.

I therefore decided that it was important to accumulate and organize information about the history of theatre at WPI. It needed to be recorded in a way that would make it more accessible to all. A living document was also needed, where information on present shows could be gathered.

Modern technology provided me with the means to do this. I used devices such as digital cameras, scanners, laptop computers and the Internet to conduct and present research in a way that was never before possible. I created a web site where I gathered information about Masque's past in a comprehensive and user-friendly way. It needed to be interesting, and as close to everyone as his or her computer. It gave specific

information to those interested in theatre at WPI. I made room for others to add future shows, and update information about past shows regularly.

While searching for information was important, I also needed to learn how to create a web page. I had to either teach myself how to use certain software or learn HTML, in order to create a user-friendly web page. I looked at many programs and many web pages before I was able to make a choice. I chose Dreamweaver II after a thorough investigation as it allowed me to perform tasks that would be much harder to learn in HTML, while keeping it as an option for editing. I also had to learn how to use other technologies, such as digital cameras and scanners.

Next, I began determining ways to gather initial information for this resource, and post it. Because information was not gathered in one location to begin with, I found this to be difficult. I discovered that publications such as newspapers, magazines, and yearbooks were the best and sometimes only resource available. It took many hours, and sometimes days, searching for information on a single production. I found articles and tidbits of information in many locations. Sometimes my searching produced little for results. My primary resource, The Tech News, was begun in 1910. Information prior to 1910 is rare. The earliest published reference to theatre at WPI was found in L'Expose, the 1892 yearbook. The library's card catalogue was not completely helpful as a means to locating information. Due to the vast amount of materials to catalogue and their inability to be specific to everyone's needs, I discovered that information was often missed or not recorded. For instance, no information on theatre at WPI prior to 1914 was documented at all within the archives' card catalogue and documentation for years after that was still very scarce. I ended up doing a page by page search to find information.

As with any comprehensive history, the beginning is of the utmost importance. Seldom is an organization begun with the same goals that it eventually adopts. For this reason, a great deal of my focus was on finding detailed information concerning what led up to the creation of Masque itself, even though information about the Dramatic Association was the most difficult to find. It was seldom documented, and needed to be gathered through an intensive search, looking for names of the people involved, descriptions of the plays, and details about the productions themselves. The information discovered about the Dramatic Association clearly illustrate the process and events that lead to the creation of the organization now known as Masque.

The creation of Masque did not mean the end of changes to theatre at WPI. These changes, such as the introduction of women and the creation of the New Voices festival have been well documented in my work. I also created a detailed listing of performances by Masque.

I am confident that you will find the web page that I have created to be an excellent source of information and a tool for the recording of future events. It has photographs, is colorful, easy to use, and informative. It is my hope that it will never be considered truly completed. It should be constantly updated as new events occur and if more photos or details are discovered, to ensure that this will remain the living document that I intended.

http://www.wpi.edu/~theatre/History