

Regional

Theater education includes acting, promotion

University theater departments routinely stage public performances, but they don't do it for the sake of show itself. They play an important part in the training of theater students. Someone who both markets performances and teaches theater students is Kim Allen Bozark, marketing coordinator and faculty member in the department of theater and dance at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

A native of Marmaduke, Ark., he obtained a bachelor's degree in English literature and a master's in media communications, both from Webster University in St. Louis. When Bozark was hired for his current position, SIUE's theater department was looking for someone who had a theatre background who could also market the productions, someone with sensitivity to the unique needs of different productions.

"The marketing that we do is specifically for the productions," said Bozark, "so it's almost like a job in a professional theater." Community outreach, he said, is important for theater departments to connect with a larger audience because a university production doesn't exist in a vacuum.

"It exists within a larger family and community," according to Bozark. "So one of the ways for us to reach out and get involved, especially in the summer, is to hire community people to be in our shows, in addition to our students. It's kind of like inviting all your relatives over to have dinner and a party."

Given the importance of community outreach, one wonders how much social media has impacted the work of people like Bozark.

"It breaks into two things," he explained. "Technology has definitely given us different and quicker ways to communicate with each other. But the bottom line is humans still communicate the way they always have, either verbally or written. When you use Twitter you're still writing words. Or if you send an image there's the old Chinese saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. So really it has allowed us a quicker way of talking with each other. And we sometimes suffer from the same thing that the news media does in that our mouths run ahead of our brains."



Photo by Otis Sweezey

Kim Bozark

Among the many recent innovations we see in theater today is when a play is performed in a particular theatre and then beamed live to other theatres where it is played on a screen. Bozark said that he finds such innovations very exciting.

"I think that you adapt, you evolve, or you die," he said. "Younger people are more receptive to that. Technology will move on whether you totally agree with it or not. If enough people like it, find energy from it, have synergy with how it is being

created, it'll be the next thing. We don't even know what the next best thing is. One of my favorite examples of that that I give in class is how I loved science fiction as a child. I read tons of science fiction, but you know they never predicted the Internet."

During his career, Bozark has both produced and written plays, and of both he finds producing the most difficult.

"There is a thing in the theater that doesn't happen in the movies," he said. "There is still a nurturing of writers.

There's still a respect for writers. You don't change the word of the writer in a play. With movies the joke is we've got the promotion campaign, we've got the t-shirts, we've got the residual contracts, now let's get a script. And it's usually a huge consorting of people. A friend of mine works for Disney, but you'll never see his name because he's what's called a ghostwriter. He makes a six-figure income, but you'll never see his name. He takes other people's scripts and fixes them."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

Besides producing and promoting theater, Bozark also teaches. He said he has a special reason for wanting to be in the classroom.

"I guess it's still the actor in me," he said. "Teaching is a form of acting. It's a persona. We talk about personas in class, and it's a persona that you put on. It's not a hundred percent you, just like the student is not a hundred percent them. They are playing student, while you are playing teacher."

He says that some students hate to see that one of the requirements for completing a course is for them to go see a play. "They might write in their paper that they didn't like the play, but they often turn around and say that they are glad they went because they have never had that experience," he said.

One of the things Bozark teaches is stage fighting, or, in other words, how to pretend that you fight realistically on the stage without really hurting anybody. He was once hired to stage a fight for "Romeo and Juliet."

"The first day I came over and I met my Tybalt (the main antagonist in Shakespeare's play) and my Romeo," he said. "The director had forgotten to tell me that Romeo was left-handed. It changes the angles completely, so that was very interesting. It was my first time to work with a left-handed person, because sometimes in the combat world when they run into people who are left-handed they just tell them they have to do it with their right hand. So the person does a mediocre fight that never looks right. So I adapted and changed it because my Tybalt was willing to roll with the problem. So we spent some extra time together but it was good. It was challenging."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.