

## Playwriting Alumnus and MTC Fellow's Play to Premiere at Renowned Humana Festival

BY KRISTIN STERLING

In his initial year in the School of the Arts, Jerome Hairston, MFA '01, was working on his first exercise in a class taught by playwright and associate theatre arts professor Eduardo Machado. But he never imagined that "A.M. Sunday," the full-length play that grew out of that workshop, would be accepted into the prestigious Humana Festival of New American Plays three years later.

Since graduating from Columbia's MFA Theatre program in May, Hairston has had a whirlwind several months. In September he began a playwriting fellowship at the Manhattan Theatre Club (MTA), one of the country's most acclaimed theatre organizations, and in early December, word came that Hairston's play "A.M. Sunday," had been accepted into the 26th Humana Festival.

"To make it to the stage in a visible way at a prestigious place means a lot," says Hairston. "It feels wonderful. When you first start out any form of recognition bolsters you."

"A.M. Sunday" is a portrait of a family confronting where they stand in one another's lives. The play begins on a Sunday morning and is the tale of an interracial couple who reach a painful turning point in their relationship and that of their two young sons.



Playwright Jerome Hairston

This will not be Hairston's first trip to the Actors Theatre of Louisville for the Humana Festival. In 1999, while a student at the School of the Arts, Hairston had a 10-minute play, entitled "Forty Minute Finish," accepted at the festival. That play was done in conjunction with another Columbian, Sherry Wilner, who has a 10-minute play accepted for 2002.

Although he has been there before, Hairston expects that the upcoming Festival will have a different feeling. "With a 10-minute play, your relationship to the Festival is limited," he says, explaining that they showed eight 10-minute

plays in the same evening. "You are not part of the rehearsal process. There is a difference with a full-length play. It is a more complicated endeavor, and I hope more fulfilling. To have your work demonstrated in that fashion is a more profound experience."

The Humana Festival is reputed worldwide as one of the most important annual events in American theatre. The 2002 Festival will feature the work of more than 25 new and established playwrights from March 3 through April 13. The lineup includes the premieres of six full-length plays, three 10-minute plays, a dramatic anthology written by 15 playwrights and a multi-writer project that will include the exploration of technology and live performance as its inspiration.

Anne Bogart, associate professor of theatre arts, also will make a repeat trip to the Festival. She participated in the 2001 Festival, and had her full-length play, "Score," accepted for next year. Joining Bogart at the 2001 Festival was Hairston's primary instructor and mentor, Eduardo Machado, who was the star of the festival with his play, "When the Sea Drowns in Sand" (which played this past fall at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York under the title "Havana is Waiting").

"Rarely do you come upon a student as dedicated to the art of playwriting as Jerome," says Machado.

"That this dedication is equaled with enormous talent, you have what every teacher dreams of—a chance to give your ideals and knowledge to a new generation. It was a challenge and pleasure influencing Jerome."

Being accepted into the Festival the year after Machado, is particularly meaningful for Hairston. "Having been guided by his teaching, to be there the year after him adds dimension to the accomplishment," says Hairston.

"It has been a long journey," explains Hairston. "You never know what will happen when you write a play. You hope to get a reading, or several readings. It is all part of the development process. Very few plays make it to the stage."

"A.M. Sunday" has had approximately eight readings, the most prestigious of which was at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center during the National Playwriting Conference.

In addition to preparing for the Humana Festival, Hairston has been working at the Manhattan Theatre Club as a Playwriting Fellow for the 2001-2002 season. In conjunction with the fellowship, he will have the opportunity to do a production observation, in which he will see the rehearsals for one of this season's plays, assist the writer, observe and soak in the atmosphere. He is also commissioned to write a play and, upon delivery, to have it read at the MTC. At this

time he is still in the "investigation" phase of the work.

The Manhattan Theatre Club is one of a few institutions in the U.S. dedicated solely to producing new plays and musicals, developing and presenting works by both established and emerging playwrights. The MTC produces seven plays throughout the course of the season.

Hairston was selected for a fellowship from a record 160 applications. He is appreciative of the opportunity. "The fellowship gives me a base of operations and a creative home for a year," he says.

He feels his experience at Columbia helped prepare him for these undertakings. "Columbia offers a community of other talented writers trying to hone their craft and invaluable time for exploration," says Hairston, adding that the guidance of mentors may be the most valuable aspect of the program. "Professors help guide you on a journey. [During graduate school you have] the opportunity to get in touch with yourself as a theater artist. A chance to find your artistic vocabulary."

### New Ecology Department Off To Strong Start

Columbia's new Department of Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology – E3B for short – has attracted substantial interest from students in its short life, receiving 100 applications for nine spaces in its doctoral program and enrolling 13 new candidates for the master's degree in conservation biology for a total of 20 overall. In addition, 28 undergraduates have declared majors in the department, which came into being last fall.

The department, which is led by Professor Marina Cords, a zoologist and expert on primate ecology and social behavior, was created to expand the University's capacity for research in and training of a new generation of practitioners and scholars in ecology, evolution and environmental biology. Study in these fields had previously taken place across other departments.

The department expands Columbia's position in the biological sciences with its focus on higher levels on biological integration and in environmental sciences with its focus on biological rather than physical processes.

The department has added two new courses for the spring semester. Biodiversity is an undergraduate course designed for non-science majors at Columbia College which will be taught by Professor Don Melnick, director of the Center for Environmental Research and Conservation, and a senior member of the new department.

A graduate course on disease ecology and conservation will be jointly taught by two conservation practitioners, Dr. Alonso Aguirre, director of conservation medicine at the Wildlife Trust, and Dr. Sharon Deem of the Wildlife Conservation Society. The course will cover wildlife diseases, disease ecology, disease and conservation, ecosystem health and conservation medicine.

## Variety of New Courses Debut This Spring in Many Departments

BY SUANNE TRIMEL

Each semester, Columbia offers dozens of new courses, some based on developing interests by individual professors, others on breakthroughs and significant reinterpretations and developments that lead the academy and society at large to new areas of inquiry. This spring, Columbia's academic departments offer new perspectives in many fields and turn a wider lens on issues global, regional and local.

In its survey, the Record found new courses in most departments, a list far too large to include here. Columbia's online directory of classes lists courses by subject and department at: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/bulletin/uwb/>.

A sampling of noteworthy new offerings include expanded earth and energy related studies offered by the Departments of Earth and Environmental Sciences through Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, the new Department of Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology, the School of International and Public Affairs and the Biosphere 2 Center. These new courses include a survey for undergraduates on how society is managing environmental hazards like ozone depletion and global warming and a new course on alternate energy resources designed to familiarize students with options in the energy field and how to evaluate them. A new workshop at SIPA will introduce students to cutting edge hydro-turbine technology in the New York metropolitan area and another will examine the management and development of water systems. Also at SIPA are a course on the economics of energy and a practicum in international energy and environmental policy with lectures by guest practitioners

in the field. The Department of Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology, which came into being last fall, is offering two new courses: on biodiversity for undergraduates and on disease ecology and conservation for graduate students taught by the conservation staff of the Wildlife Trust and the Wildlife Conservation Society. A new course on desert ecology will be offered to students at the Biosphere II Center in Arizona.

The attacks of Sept. 11 are being integrated into existing history, political science, international affairs, religion, and other courses, and will be in sharp focus in a course at SIPA by Brigitte Nacos. Planned before Sept. 11, the course on terrorism will now be weighed more heavily toward mass destruction and international counterterrorism. A new course in the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation will focus on the design of military and corporate space, from the Pentagon to the World Trade Center. In the works for next fall is an undergraduate course to be taught by Professor Richard Bulliet in the History Department, on America and the Muslim world.

Five new courses are being offered by the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, including a focus on the experience of blacks in the juvenile justice system and an exploration of the impact of race on the health status of African Americans, including patterns of disease and reproduction and death rates. The African diaspora, Caribbean history and an examination of race and art taught by the playwright and writer Amiri Baraka, a founder of the Black Arts Movement, complete the new course offerings in this field.

The Graduate School of Journalism offers students the opportunity

to learn how to report on the Latino communities of New York in a seminar taught by Evelyn Hernandez, editorial director of La Prensa/El Diario, the largest Spanish-language newspaper in the metropolitan area.

The School of the Arts, in a course titled "Negotiating Alterity," will help students unravel the meaning of intercultural exchange and notions of "otherness" and their impact on visual art, performance, writing and drama.

Six new courses are being offered in French language, literature and cultural studies, including a survey of French novels and their screen adaptations (two adaptations of Flaubert's "Madame Bovary" will be viewed and compared, Renoir's 1934 film and Chabrol's 1991 version); studies of realism and fantastic narratives, the relationship between literature and visual arts in France from the Renaissance to the 18th century and the French tradition of intuitive and geometric reasoning.

Other new courses in the Arts and Sciences include a colloquium examining how different societies "de-code" art and culture, an introduction to cognitive psychology for undergraduates, an examination of the practice of the religious pilgrimage in Asia, courses on Beethoven's Late Style, on American country music and an overview of the impact of the Holocaust on American society.

SIPA students may choose from new courses on international humanitarian law, on the use of scapegoating in European politics, on contemporary politics in Iran, on civil society and national identity in Brazil, and on globalization. A guide to foreign news coverage of Russia will be taught by Tom Kent, former international editor of The

Associated Press. Gary Sick, who served on the National Security Council staff under Presidents Ford, Carter and Reagan, will offer a practical introduction to doing research on the Middle East through the Internet. For students planning careers in government and the non-profit world, a new course is offered in effective political communication, as well as a case-study practicum on providing aid in humanitarian emergencies, and a workshop on conflict resolution.

The Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science will offer three new courses in its Electrical Engineering Department on networking systems and digital integrated circuits. Included is an introduction to network engineering for electrical engineers who want to specialize in communication and a course on computer modeling in molecular and cellular biology.

The School of Social Work will introduce a course on neuroscience, which will discuss brain function and physiology, with an emphasis on how biological as well as psychological, social and environmental concerns impact social welfare.

The School of Architecture will also offer new courses on the development of affordable housing, the first course in an expansion of the Urban Planning program's housing specialization, as well as the rebuilding of Berlin after World War II, and the design of gravity-defying lightweight building systems, or tensile structures.

The Business School is offering new courses on media mergers and acquisitions, business and financial markets in East Asia, managerial ethics and equity derivatives, and the Law School is offering a course on Islamic law, among others.