

## Playwrights Explore the Social Complexities of Life in First Annual New Play Festival

By Kristin Sterling

This year for the first time graduating playwriting students at School of the Arts (SOA) had a chance to see their new work come to life on the stage. Childhood tragedy, family secrets and loyalty among fraternity brothers were some of the challenges of life explored in the inaugural New Play Festival, which ran April 28-May 4. The festival provided graduating playwriting students Meredith Tomason, Tasha Ross and Bixby Elliot the opportunity to have their plays produced at Teachers College's Horace Mann Theatre. Previously, students had only had their work read at the end of the semester.

"I'm thrilled that we finally have the opportunity to produce fully staged productions of the best new works written by a new generation of writers thanks to the generous support of Barnard alumna Dasha Epstein and John Williamson and his family," said Steven Chaikelson, chair of the Theatre Arts Division at SOA. "This has been an exceptional opportunity for these emerging playwrights, both as the culmination of their academic experience and as an opportunity for their work to be showcased for New York producers, theaters and theatergoers."

Ross said, "I am very excited at this opportunity because I've often heard that many playwrights graduate from playwriting programs and get stuck in 'reading land' because few people want to take a chance on an unproduced playwright. I believe this will not only open up a number of doors for me, but it will also give me the confidence once I graduate to continue the momentum that this show is creating for me."

Ross' *ABK for Life* depicts a young man eager to join the ranks of an exclusive group within a prominent African-American fraternity. A pledge assignment tests his loyalty and personal feelings and envelops him in a power struggle between his two big brothers.

During a recent fellowship at the Cherry Lane Theatre in Greenwich Village, Ross obtained great insight as a personal assistant to the theater's artistic director and by aiding the library curator with historical research on the theater's plays and playwrights. Ross' collection of monologues, *Subways and Bedrooms*, was presented in the Cherry Lane's reading series of new American plays. Ross' plays include *Cotford Manor*, *Love's Triangle* and *Aunt Dee's*.

In Tomason's play *Delayed*, the

protagonist is forced to relive a childhood tragedy and its aftermath through the eyes of her former neighbor and his family. As conflicting memories collide, each person questions their lives and the moment that changed them forever.

"It is always nice to see your work brought to life, and it is even better to have our department helping us make it happen," said Tomason, a member of the International Women's Writing Guild. Her play *A Matter of Time* was shown at the Creative Acting Company, an acting school in New York, and *Trees* was shown at Columbia's Schapiro Theater. She is currently working on a play about the eugenics movement in the United States as well as a television pilot.

In the third play, *Treasure Island*, Elliot examines the local residents of a seaside resort town and explores a family buried in secrets.

"I hope the play is sort of a *Glass Menagerie* meets *Twin Peaks* meets *Our Town*," said Elliot. "The New Voices, New Play Festival is a tremendous opportunity for me to see my work fully realized. SOA, Dasha Epstein and John Williamson have provided us with amazing support."

Elliot's *I Am Not Peter Pan* won the Best of Fest award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Scotland, and was produced at the Cherry Lane Alternative in Greenwich Village. In Chicago, the Bailiwick Theatre Company produced *Truck Stop Love* and the Brown Couch Theatre produced *Lucky*.

"Of the many skills, lessons and tricks I have learned during my time in the M.F.A. program, the main thing that stands out is my ability to listen to myself," said Tomason. "I came into this program nervous and afraid of what I really wanted to say with my writing. The further along I got with my writing classes with Eduardo Machado and Kelly Stuart, the more they taught me about the patience and strength needed to truly hear myself."

"Bixby, Meredith and I have such different styles, and it is so great to know that we can have individual styles here [at SOA] and still be supported and encouraged," added Ross. "[The faculty] discovered our styles and tried to make us the strongest we can be in that, while always keeping true to our visions."

In addition to these productions, the New Voices, New Play Festival included a reading of Barnard student Greta Gerwig's *The Living Room* and SOA alumna Sandi Goff's *Get Well Soon*.

## Celebrating Leadership in Business and Government



Columbia Business School Dean Glenn Hubbard, center, congratulates NBC Universal's CEO Bob Wright, left, and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) on winning the school's 2005 Leadership in Business and Government Awards. Wright and Lautenberg were honored on May 2 at a gala dinner at the Waldorf Astoria that drew a thousand of the school's alumni, faculty and students.

## Five Columbians Awarded Guggenheims

By Kristin Sterling

The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation has named five Columbia faculty members as 2005 Guggenheim Fellows. Their work includes a book on the anti-Nazi movement in Germany during World War II, research on the impact of the League of Nations on colonial administration and a book on the debate of nature versus nurture in the 18th century prior to the advent of modern biology.

Anne Nelson, adjunct professor of international and public affairs, will apply the fellowship toward a new nonfiction book with the working title *Mortal Allies*, about a group of Germans and German-Americans active in the anti-Nazi movement in Berlin from 1933 to 1942.

"The Guggenheim Fellowship has been a wonderful boost to both my book project and to my lifelong career in developing a new discipline that integrates the fields of journalism, human rights and international affairs," says Nelson. "Teaching at Columbia has greatly enriched my thinking, first at the Journalism School and now at the School of International and Public Affairs. The lives I describe in my book offer a dramatic new perspective on the Nazi era, and their story is one more cautionary tale about the terrible price societies incur when they choose to surrender civil liberties and public debate."

Nelson is the former director of the International Program at the Columbia Journalism School. A seasoned journalist, she has also worked as a field producer in Chile and Central America for the CBC and as a war correspondent in El Salvador in the early 1980s.

Her books include *Murder Under Two Flags: The U.S., Puerto Rico and the Cerro Maravilla Cover-up*, which was produced as the feature film *Show of Force*, and *Twenty Years and Forty Days: Memoirs of a Cuban Political Prisoner*.

Paul Spencer Byard, director of the Historic Preservation Program at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, will examine public interest in old architecture.

"I want to bring together all the things great architecture does for us all as members of the public and then suggest principled ways of researching them, discussing them, teaching about them, protecting them and being their advocates," explains Byard. "At the core of this is historic preservation, but it's also things like the role of old architecture in the formation of our identities and, very importantly, in the definition and management of conflict. It brings together all the things I have been thinking, practicing, teaching, arguing about for a professional lifetime."

Byard is a principal of Platt Byard Dovell White Architects. He is also a lawyer and was active in developing a low-income housing program for the New York State Urban Development Corporation. He is the author of *The Architecture of Additions: Design and Regulation*.

Byard has served as director of New York Landmarks Conservancy since 1973 and as a director or officer of the Architectural League of New York since 1978. He is the former director of the Municipal Art Society of New York and is a fellow of the American Institute for Architecture.

Jenny Davidson, assistant professor of English and comparative literature, will work on a book, *Breeding: Nature and Nurture Before Biology*, focusing on 18th-century Britain.

Davidson explained to the Guggenheim committee that the goal of the book is "to develop a more complex picture of how people thought and wrote about breeding—an umbrella term that can refer to nature or nurture, generation, pregnancy, heredity resemblance, manners, moral character, social identity or all of the above—in the several hundred years that preceded the coinage of the modern nouns *biology* (c. 1802), *heredity* (c. 1830) and *genetics* (c. 1906), telling a little-known story that offers a new perspective on the language with which we now explore and explain the fundamentals of human nature."

Davidson joined the Department of English and Comparative Literature in 2000. Her publications include an academic monograph, "Hypocrisy and

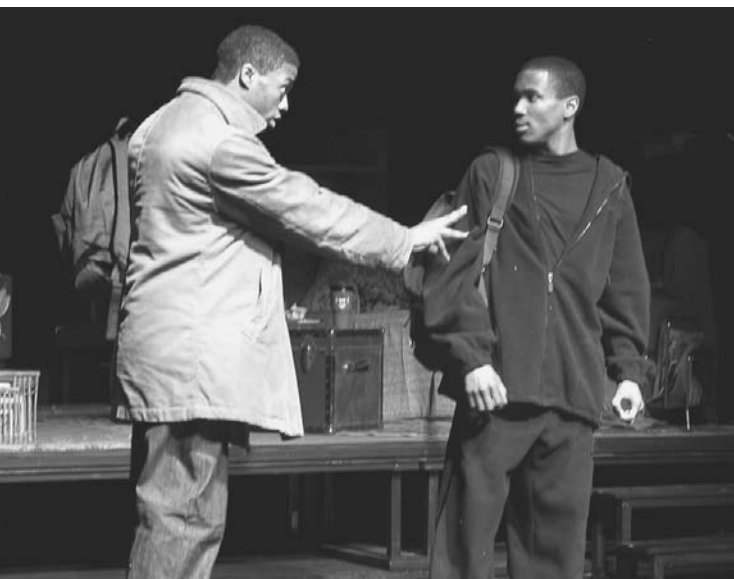
the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen," and two novels—*Heredity* and *Dynamite No. 1*. The latter is the first volume in a projected trilogy.

Susan Pedersen, professor of history, is examining the impact of the League of Nations on colonial administration. The league existed from the end of World War I through 1946 to promote international cooperation, peace and security. Pedersen will use the fellowship to conduct research in the league archives in Geneva, Switzerland, and in the British and French national archives. She also plans to visit some areas that were league mandates between the wars or that held mandates, including Jerusalem; Sidney; Windhoek, Namibia; and Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Pedersen joined the Columbia faculty in 2003 after teaching at Harvard. She is the author of *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* and *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (edited with Peter Mandler).

Mark Slouka, associate professor of creative writing, will work on a new fiction book. He is the author of the novel *God's Fool; Lost Lake*, a collection of stories that was cited as a New York Times Notable Book of the Year; and *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-tech Assault on Reality*. Slouka's short story "The Woodcarver's Tale" won the 1995 National Magazine Award for Fiction. He received a National Endowment for the Arts grant for 2000. Slouka has taught at Harvard University, Pennsylvania State University and the University of California, San Diego.

These Columbia scholars are among 186 selected for the 2005 fellowships for awards, which total \$7.1 million. Guggenheim Fellows are appointed on the basis of distinguished achievement in the past and exceptional promise for future accomplishment. The purpose of the Guggenheim Fellowship program is to help provide fellows with six to 12 months to work with as much creative freedom as possible. Since 1925, the foundation has granted almost \$240 million in fellowships to more than 15,500 individuals.



Chadwick Boseman and Eric Anthony in *ABK for Life*.