



For Immediate Release
January 22, 2009

UNH Hennessy Theatre Gets a Sustainable Extreme Makeover

If the year 2009 signals an era of change, then the UNH Department of Theatre & Dance will embrace that sentiment with gusto. Since 1960, the department has utilized two performance spaces in the Paul Creative Arts Center; The Johnson Theatre, a 700 seat proscenium theatre and The Hennessy Theatre, named for retired Professor, William G. Hennessy, faculty director and first advisor of the student theatre organization, Mask and Dagger. The Hennessy was a black box, experimental theatre space. In the late 1990's, the space was reconfigured as a 150 seat proscenium theatre.

Having two proscenium theatres did not allow for variety in performance possibilities or expose student actors, designers and directors to distinctively different working conditions. Because of this, the Hennessy Theatre has been newly reconfigured as an experimental, black box space. During winter break, Theatre majors Christine Boutin, Matthew Frazier, Stephen Badger and Jerard-James Craven joined Theatre Technician, Robert Henry and Associate Professor and Technical Director, David Ramsey to tear the theatre down to bare walls. Over the next eleven days, they built a new performance space, designed by Professor Ramsey. Ramsey, who has been involved with the construction and/or renovation of six other theatres, created a theatre "As close to a flexible space as possible, which still has good visibility for the audience."

"The renovation of this theatre is a model of "sustainability," states Department Chair and Associate Professor, Deb Kinghorn. "The majority of the construction in the new space is recycled from the old or made from materials already in the scene shop. The platforms, risers, staging, even the carpeting and chairs, are recycled." The materials that did not make it into the final configuration were dismantled and put into the scene shop for future use.

The result is an entirely different working area for current UNH directors, designers, actors and theatre technicians. One of the differences between the new Hennessy and the original is a raised platform stage, instead of a concrete floor, which enables dancers to use the space without fear of injury. When asked about the new possibilities or challenges in this space, Ramsey reflected, "Any show you do is a challenge. What is nice now is that we have different solutions because the (two) spaces are so different."

Ramsey also made sure to acknowledge the UNH students who did the bulk of the heavy work. "I'm appreciative of how well these four students did—they did a very good job."

The first production to christen the new space is "Shoulders," directed by Professor Kinghorn, which runs April 22-26. The set is designed by Professor Ramsey.

Visit <http://www.unh.edu/theatre-dance/hennessy> for a complete history of the Hennessy Theatre, to listen to an interview with Professor Emeritus John Edwards and view a slide show of the renovation.

For more information about our program, please call the Theatre and Dance office at 603-862-2919, or visit us at www.unh.edu/theatre-dance.