

Technically Speaking

Randy Fullerton '75, theatrical management

by Karen Doss Bowman '91

Randy Fullerton discovered his passion for theater during his freshman year at Bridgewater College, when he was cast as the Devil in a production of George Bernard Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell*.

"The play was directed by a woman, who evidently had been hired as a temporary replacement for Frank Fuller who had recently left Bridgewater," said Fullerton, a member of Bridgewater's class of 1975. "The play was painfully long, tiring and totally not appropriate for the Cole Hall stage, but what did I know? I was a freshman, and I was bitten by the theater bug!"

Though Fullerton majored in math (because Bridgewater did not offer a theater major), he has enjoyed a distinguished theatrical career in the 40 years since graduation. He recently left Emory University in Atlanta, where he was hired 32 years ago as a technical director for Theater Emory. His position evolved over the years, and he most recently was an arts administrator and faculty member in the university's Department of Theater Studies.

Fullerton credits his professional successes to his experiences at Bridgewater and the expert mentoring from Professor Ralph MacPhail '65, who arrived on campus during Fullerton's sophomore year.

"Little did I realize it the time, but the next chapter—and subsequently many chapters after that—were about to be written and rewritten," Fullerton said of MacPhail's arrival on campus. "I owe so much to Ralph and his wife Alice in terms of giving me my start in the arts."

As MacPhail's student assistant, Fullerton quickly became involved in all aspects of theater, including the technical side of building props and painting scenery to hanging lights. Fullerton recalls having a serious discussion about his future in the theater with MacPhail, who encouraged him to develop his organizational and administrative skills.

"What I heard—and Ralph would never actually put it this way—was that I really was not that good of an actor," said Fullerton, who earned a master's degree in theater from the University of Pittsburgh and a master of fine arts degree in technical, design and production in theater from Yale Drama School. "I was, to say the least, devastated. But that was the best thing that Ralph could have told me at that point in my academic career. I began concentrating on the



various aspects of theater—backstage, box office, budgeting, planning, design—and I became increasingly interested in the technical aspects of theater. I realized that I actually had a knack for it."

MacPhail, who has remained in touch with Fullerton over the years, recalls an enthusiastic student always willing to pitch in.

"One of the great things about teaching at Bridgewater is the relationships you form with students, and sometimes you know who they are and what they're capable of doing better than they do," said MacPhail, who retired in 2005. "Randy was a math major, and I soon realized that he paid attention to detail and organization. Artistic people are not always the most organized people, even though they may be brilliant in terms of creativity. But equally important are the people who have to pay the bills, get the programs printed on time, make sure that the schedule is followed and keep the right supplies on hand. They get the job done, and I felt that's where Randy was really gifted."

At Emory, Fullerton applied his technical, administrative and organizational skills—and newly developed fundraising skills—to serve as the "Users Rep" for the design, construction and completion of the \$36 million Donna & Marvin Schwartz Center for Performing, which opened in 2003. He also has advised Emory students throughout his career and always tried to provide that positive mentoring that he learned from MacPhail.

Mostly Fullerton loves the camaraderie of the theater, working closely with a group of people to put on a show that spreads excitement and joy within a community.

"I realized early on, while at Bridgewater, that it takes teamwork to create and accomplish great things," said Fullerton, who recently moved to California seeking new adventures. "I saw it in the kinds of theatrical productions that we worked on, I saw it in the kind and respectful manner in which Ralph and Alice treated students and fellow colleagues, and I saw it in the warm and loving environment that exists at Bridgewater that you sense every time you walk across the campus." —