

## Chapter 8: The Productions

### *Overview of the Productions*

In the following annotated chronological index, I briefly describe the major works of interdisciplinary art created through the systematic application of the Lovewell Method. These highly original productions could only spring from the imagination and experience of the young people who created them. A verbal description does not do justice to the ingenious use of music, dance, and visual design in the telling of these tales reflecting the passion, issues, humor, and concerns of these young artists. At orientations on the first day of our workshops, the participants learn that Lovewell Institute's primary purpose is to give them a voice. The Lovewell Method informs them that the best way to communicate their ideas, their anger, their isolation, their humor, and their solutions is to put them into a well-crafted song, scene, or visual effect and present it as a well-crafted piece of interdisciplinary art. Participants usually begin to listen more closely. Relationships begin to deepen. I have observed that in the Lovewell environment, attitudes become replaced with intellectually and emotionally stimulating two-way communication.

Peers in the audience see new proficiencies and abilities never visible before in their classmates onstage. Teachers see demonstrations of new skills and possibilities for their students who they have previously only observed in a classroom behind a desk. Parents have repeatedly told me that the performances their children gave, and the stories they brought to life in the production, revealed profound aspects of their children that had previously gone unnoticed. This is one example of why things do change within the cultural community created by a Lovewell production. Participants seem to achieve a more intimate level of the human dynamic because of an atmosphere that enhances the

quality and authenticity of communication with each other and with themselves.

*Thematic Elements of the Lovewell Productions*

The Lovewell staff is trained to empower the student artists with as much ownership over the subject matter and the process as possible. The interdisciplinary productions described below reflect this freedom and honesty of expression. It is hoped that the reader will detect recurring themes and patterns in terms of the issues and values that were important to the young creators. Characters and situations that mirror the most important topics confronting these students on a daily basis can be readily identified in every show.

In the following contextual examination of the Lovewell productions, various recurring themes emerge as significant indicators of a consensus of concerns and interests. Since the stories, characters, themes, and issues explored in these productions were formed from the collective ideas of the participants in each program, the productions serve as authentic snapshots of a particular grouping of humans solving problems at a particular point in our social history. Like any thoughtful work of art, these interdisciplinary collaborative creations are rich in multilayered meaning and imagery. They are, consequently, open to various interpretations. The interpretations contained in the following paragraphs are this researcher's best effort to accurately capture the authenticity and integrity of the themes as intended by the participants who created the artworks.

Fear was a primary theme of many of the productions. The teen productions reflect slightly different forms of fear than the preteen productions. Preteens dealt with the fear of ghosts, curses, and unknown forces as exemplified in the 1984 pilot productions, *The Haunted Zoo* and *The Deadly Joke*, and later in *Always Take the Stairs*

(Lovewell Institute, 2001a), *Uh Oh!!!* (Lovewell Institute, 2002d), and *Cloudy With a Chance of Change* (Lovewell Institute, 2003a). Teens coped with more tangible forms of fear such as rejection, violence, authoritarian oppression, death and AIDS as reflected in *Blown Away* (Lovewell Institute, 1991), *Keep On Movin'* (Lovewell Institute, 1994a), *State of the Art* (Lovewell Institute, 1994b), *Around the Bend* (Lovewell Institute, 1995a), *All Fall Down* (Lovewell Institute, 1997a), *Yo, Juliet* (Lovewell Institute, 1997b), *Flashback* (Lovewell Institute, 1998a), *On the Blink* (Lovewell Institute, 1998b), *Operation Generation* (Lovewell Institute, 1999e), *Union High* (Lovewell Institute, 1999h), *Sidetracked* (Lovewell Institute, 2001c), *Define It* (2002a), *Peace of Mind* (Lovewell Institute, 2003b), *Banned Together* (Lovewell Institute, 2004b) and *The Road to Eville* (Lovewell Institute, 2005b).

The other most popular themes reflected the students' concerns regarding tolerance, identity, money, politics, normalcy and unity. The reader will observe these themes interwoven artfully throughout the following productions. As a researcher, I consider these productions highly valuable artifacts that express the emotions, intelligence and soul of the student creators. I have observed these themes arise, and reappear a few years later with a new group emerging into that same age category. Styles change, but it seems that the "human condition" themes remain similar. The social, intellectual and ethical development of these young artists can be tracked as the themes mature and refine into more complex and worldly reflections. The productions are arranged chronologically, but I urge the reader to note the age range of the students in each program as listed under the show's title. The students' growing comprehension and questioning of cultural values and ethical issues can be examined by comparing the content explored in the preteen shows with the content explored in the teen productions. I

comment specifically on some of those thematic comparisons in the autoethnographic commentaries following the descriptions below.

There are illuminating connections made between events in our cultural history and the content of the shows written during the unfolding of those cultural landmark events. Sometimes these connections are deliberate and sometimes they are coincidental. Some examples of this include *State of the Art* (Lovewell Institute, 1994b) written during the United States Senate's attempt to take away national funding for the arts; in 1998, the foretelling of the privacy issue political scandals in *On The Blink* (Lovewell Institute, 1998b); and the ominous call for our lost sense of community in *Sidetracked* (Lovewell Institute, 2001c) just 2 months before the World Trade disaster. The productions below represent thousands of hours of reflective scholarship, creativity, collaboration, research, and productive skill building by thousands of students working with hundreds of professional Lovewell staff artists and instructors over the past 20 years.

*The Interdisciplinary Artworks (Productions)*

Tracking the following productions from 1984 through 2005, the reader will notice the development of the Lovewell process and organization from an artist-in-residency concept to a fully-staffed, highly organized operation--from a relative "one-man-band" to a fully functioning not-for-profit arts organization. Because I was on site at the creation of all of these productions, I have included autoethnographic comments at the end of each production description briefly summarizing and contextualizing the themes and issues being explored. (These comments will be in Arial font, single-spaced, and indented. The staff of each production appears in italics.)

*THE HAUNTED ZOO--A Frightful New Musical*

October 1984

Bridgehampton, NY, Hampton Day School (pilot afterschool program, prekindergarten through Grade 8).

*Director (stage, script, music, dance, and design): David Spangler; Administrative Director: Kevin Brennen.*

The story of a zookeeper and his family beleaguered by ghosts who keep frightening the animals in the zoo. A very smart monkey helps them solve the problem and finally rid the zoo of the pesky ghosts.

This was the first pilot program testing the Lovewell process. It was Halloween season and ghosts were on the minds of most of the children. In addition, a popular movie about ghosts had just been released. Animals are a popular subject with prekindergarten and early elementary students, so it was not a surprise when the young artists chose a haunted zoo as the location for their story. The children dealt with themes of overcoming fear.

### *THE DEADLY JOKE*

June 1984

Bridgehampton, NY, Hampton Day School (pilot summer program, prekindergarten through Grade 8), Hampton Day School auditorium.

*Director (stage, script, music, dance, and design): David Spangler; Administrative Director: Kevin Brennen; Production Supervisor: Dee Kremer.*

A mysterious foreign man puts a curse on an unsuspecting family that has lasted over 100 years. While making a movie on the family farm, the mystery is solved by some bright young kids who decode the cryptic joke and set the family free.

This story involved children as heroes who saved a family from an old Russian curse. The theme was the triumph of good over evil with the caveat that it was the young detectives who were finally clever enough to crack the code and deliver justice.

### *TWO LEFT FEET*

June 1985

Philadelphia, PA, Performing Arts School of Philadelphia (pilot program, teens develop script around existing score), Performing Arts School of Philadelphia Theatre.

*Director (stage, script, music, dance, and design): David Spangler; Administrative Directors: Dr. Carlton Lake and Betty Keiser; Student Director: Stewart D. Ikeda;*

*Musical Director: Glenn Gordon.*

An awkward insecure schoolteacher tries to negotiate the treacherous landscape of romance with the teacher in the next classroom. She does not even notice him. The students try to help. They take the teachers to a magical place far beyond the constrictions of the school where they can loosen up, lighten up, and get to know each other a little better. The teachers learn that life can be a beautiful dance--even with two left feet.

*Two Left Feet* is a hybrid--partly student written and partly written by professionals. Marc Elliot and I had already written the songs; however, we wanted to see if and how the students could improvise the plot and create the dialogue around a loose story outline that we provided. The theme involved students influencing their teachers to live more passionate and carefree lives. Although this was a successful workshop, I believe that it is a more powerful learning experience when the students create their own themes, write their own songs, and design their own characters. This was not an official Lovewell production, just an experiment to gather more information regarding the process.

*SHOWDOWN AT HAUNTED HIGH--An Original Musical*

March 1987

Salina, KS, Kansas Unified Kansas School District 305 in association with the Salina Arts and Humanities Commission (high school combined with middle school pilot program), Salina Central High School Auditorium.

*Director: David Spangler (artist-in-residence); Administration: Martha Rhea, Salina Arts and Humanities Commission.*

The ghost of a former student haunts the local high school. When the school districts are rezoned, demolition of the building is ordered, and the student body is shocked to learn that they will be scattered among adjoining school districts. The kids revolt. They take over the school in a confrontation with school officials. The ghost, an appealing girl named Melanie, appears to the students to help them keep the conflict from becoming violent. Their resolution to the conflict is the kind of showdown only teenagers could imagine.

The school where this production was performed had a ghost story of its own. It

was rumored that a ghost haunted the school theatre and would occasionally appear in the fly space above the stage to wide-eyed thespians. Years earlier, a student who loved to act in the high school plays died in an automobile accident on prom night. She evidently could not bear to leave the place where she had experienced her happiest memories.

The students who created *Showdown at Haunted High* integrated that local legend into their loyalty and unity commentary and produced a powerful piece of theatre. It was the production that persuaded a group of local arts activists and educators to help me incorporate Lovewell Institute as a not-for-profit organization.

During 1988 and 1989, there were no productions while Lovewell Institute was being incorporated as a 501c3 not-for-profit corporation.

*WINDOWS--A Musical Dream*

August 1990

Salina, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Salina Community Theatre.

*Director: David Spangler; Musical Directors: Colleen Jewell, Mitch Todd, and Skipper Kripitz; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Director: Bryan Schmidt; Technical Director: Tom Ward; Administrative Director: Linda Ochs.*

Billed as "a musical dream," this story takes on an adventure along the borderline between stark reality and grand illusion. Students transform events in their everyday lives into comical dreams and ghoulish nightmares. As one student daydreams in her classroom about the relevance of life, another gets himself knocked unconscious in a hallway scuffle over religious intolerance, and another overeats at a slumber party falling into a sucrose-induced trance peopled by Hollywood icons. Each character steps through the window of reality into hilarious and sometimes disturbing situations.

As the first official Lovewell Institute production, *Windows* was a remarkable experience. I was highly stressed and curiously joyful at the same time. It was similar to what I felt when Martha and I had our first child. My attention was primarily on helping the students create something that was relevant to them, something that they felt was giving them a voice. I believe we accomplished that. The themes were classroom politics, tolerance, social cliques, adolescent dating, and subconscious states of being.

*BLOWN AWAY--An Oz-ish Musical*

August 1991

Salina, KS. In cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program)  
Salina Community Theatre.

*Director: David Spangler; Musical Directors: Royce Young and Mitch Todd; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Director: Bryan Schmidt; Technical Director: Tom Ward; Administrative Directors: Linda Ochs and Twila Schneiders.*

The bumbling high school drama teacher is directing his own dreadfully sappy adaptation of the *Wizard of Oz*. The drama students are forced to be in the production but none of them want to go to rehearsals. Ryan, the school's best actor playing the tin man, encourages the other cast members to devise their own version of "the Oz myth," one with songs and dances that speak their own language. Ryan falls ill and starts missing rehearsals. News that he has AIDS splits the school when he recovers enough to return to classes. Several friends remain loyal and help him through his last triumphant performance. Ryan helps his friends find a new level of tolerance and understanding.

This is the year that Ryan White made national news as one of the first American children to die from the AIDS virus. He was ridiculed and discriminated against by a culture terrified by this new plague. The young artists who created *Blown Away* chose to juxtapose the serious theme of courage and tolerance in the face of AIDS with similar themes of courage and compassion represented by the whimsical characters in the *Wizard of Oz*. Their message was loud and clear. In putting this production together, the students worked through their own fears and prejudice (and those of a small Midwestern town).

*THE ORACLE DINER--A Short-Order Musical*

August 1992

Salina and Wichita, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Salina Community Theatre and the Wichita Art Center.

*Director: David Spangler; Assistant Director: Bryan Schmidt; Musical Directors: Brett Maltbie, Randy Fillmore, David Wiggins, and Matt Todd; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: James Talley and Alex Morales; Technical and Design Director: Tom Ward; Administrative Directors: Linda Ochs and Twila Schneiders; Counseling Staff: Jenette Nagy and Alex Hernandez.*

There is something strange about that little diner in the rural town of Delphos. Alpha and Holly are waitresses who have secret powers of perception and unusual abilities to help people transform their lives. The regular customers at the diner explore themes of the trauma of Vietnam, date rape, controlling parents, teen pregnancy, runaways, and other common problems facing teenagers and their parents today. Patrons let go of the past over a cup of coffee and rekindle dreams over a cup of soup.

Although most of the themes are listed above, there was another theme that emerged on an organizational level. The students were interested in exploring metaphysical powers involving palm reading, fortune telling, tarot cards, Ouija boards, and clairvoyance. When word of this interest got to parents concerned by the occult overtones, Lovewell encountered a censorship issue that was ultimately resolved by the students. This conflict is discussed in more detail in chapter 10.

*TRIBE--A Musical Quest*

August 1993

Salina and Wichita, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Salina Community Theatre, Century II Performing Arts Center.

*Director: David Spangler; Assistant Director: Gary Wayne; Musical Directors: Brett Maltbie, Randy Fillmore, Tamir Hendelman, and Matt Todd; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: James Talley and Alex Morales; Technical and Design Directors: Tom Ward, Deb Wall, and Jan Hein "Digger" Phelps; Administrative Directors: Kate Lindsey and Kate Griffin; Counseling Staff: Jenette Nagy and Alex Benjamin.*

A coma victim has a premonition of a civilization on Earth that is recovering from a nuclear holocaust. A space shuttle launched to avoid the destruction crash lands into a remote forest. The shuttle survivors, not knowing what has happened on Earth as a result of the radiation, encounter the conflicts of five tribes of indigenous survivors as they struggle to reconstruct a sense of peaceful coexistence and unity. The cultural clashes between the tribes reflect the primitive instincts of our present society and raise the question, "What does it take for a civilization to learn from its mistakes?" Surreal, comical, and thought provoking, *Tribe* weaves elements of ritual theatre, realistic drama,

and musical comedy into a thought-provoking interdisciplinary piece.

With 46 students onstage, this production became a challenge of pushing the logistics envelope of the program. The Lovewell summer program had become so popular in Kansas that we had to turn down many applicants. I thought that with a large enough staff, I could handle the 46 young artists and give them a meaningful creative and educational experience. The dilemma, as often happens at Lovewell, turned into the theme of the show as we examined the nature of unity. Through the process of creating the story and characters, we learned how to find common ground and mutual respect. We also learned our limits.

*KEEP ON MOVIN'*

June 1994

Ft. Lauderdale, FL. In cooperation with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (teen combined with preteen afterschool program), Broward Center for the Performing Arts, Amaturu Theatre.

*Director: David Spangler; Assistant Director: Gary Wayne; Musical Directors: Gary Wayne, David Spangler, Victor Kidd, and John Larose; Dance Directors: Leslie Bennett and Sharon Daugherty; Script Director: David Spangler; Design Directors: George Gadson and Robert Nathans; Technical Directors: Jan Hein "Digger" Phelps and Bettie Clark; Administrative Directors: Bettie Clark and, Sam Jordan.*

Rival street gangs vie for territory. In a skirmish where an innocent child is hit by a stray bullet, one gang leader kills the other. The conflict unfolds as the girlfriends of the two gang leaders decide the violence must stop. They start a neighborhood society to rebuild their community. The local kids rally behind the two girls, and the gangs celebrate a truce.

Ending violence was the primary theme. The participants knew what they were writing about, and explored solutions to problems that were threatening their own neighborhoods. One memorable scene involved the choreographed basketball game that turned into deadly conflict between the rival gangs. The images and symbols used in this production were very familiar to the students and their families. It took three deaths and two onstage funerals to tell their story. *Keep On Movin'* sent their message out to the community with unquestionable authenticity.

*STATE OF THE ART--The Musical*

August 1994

Salina, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Salina Community Theatre.

*Director: David Spangler; Assistant Director: Gary Wayne; Musical Directors: Tamir Hendelman, Randy Fillmore, Brett Maltbie, Gary Wayne, and Romann Weber; Dance Directors: Leslie Bennett, Susie Gilmore, and Jewel Sato; Script Director: Joel Bicknell, Gary Wayne, and Tamir Hendelman; Design/Technical Directors: Jan Hein "Digger" Phelps, Deb Wall, and Tom Ward; Administrative Director: Kate Lindsay; Vocal Director: Jeannette Bonjour; Counseling Staff: Jeannette Bonjour and Joel Bicknell.*

A local art center is the sanctuary for an extraordinarily talented and passionate group of young artists. A highly uptight mayor and city council attempt to close down the center over a controversial exhibition. The unarmed artists take the city council members and the mayor hostage and give them an art lesson they will never forget.

This production was especially memorable for me. The students voiced an interest in exploring the power of the arts, and were concerned that certain congressmen were attempting to censor artists through federal funding cuts. The students felt a looming threat to their freedom of expression. This show explored the theme of the arts as a potentially controversial mode of communicating and expressing personal viewpoints. Paintings and sculptures came to life and told the stories of the artists who created them thus personalizing the creative process and the linear story being told on another level. The production was sophisticated and timely as it helped illuminate the role of the artist in modern American society. The theme of "freedom of expression" would be echoed in future Lovewell productions from slightly different perspectives. The students had touched on a theme that was of particular interest to me personally, and I found great joy and satisfaction in guiding them through this challenge.

*CRY NO MORE--An Original Musical*

May 1995

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (teen afterschool program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: David Spangler; Musical Director: Rick Valon; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Director: David Spangler; Design/Technical Directors: George Gadson, Bettie Clark, Belvit Jordan, and Harriet Mathis; Administrative Directors: Bettie Clark and Belvit Jordan.*

Three girls share their experiences involving their boyfriends. Two of the girls are suffering from episodes of domestic violence. One of the girls is killed in a dispute with her boyfriend. This show examines the reactions and solutions to the real problems facing

teenagers locked in abusive relationships. The music is dramatic, and there is a bittersweet humor in the way the surviving two friends resolve to never let it happen again.

The theme of this show was teenage romantic relationships. During the writing process, we had professional domestic conflict resolution counselors do presentations and talk with the teenagers about relationships and domestic abuse. Each of the three relationships exemplifies a different dynamic--one is relatively harmonious, one is abusive but salvageable, and one tragically ends in murder.

*AROUND THE BEND--An Original Musical*

August 1995

Salina, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Salina Community Theatre.

*Director: Gary Wayne; Musical Directors: Tamir Hendelman, Randy Fillmore, and Brett Maltbie; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: Anita Liberty and Bettie Clark; Design/Technical Directors: Jan Hein "Digger" Phelps and Deb Wall; Administrative Director: Kate Lindsay; Stage Management: Belvit Jordan; Vocal/Acting Coaches: Jeannette Bonjour, Jason Ware, and Katy Hawley.*

A mental institution is turned upside down when a new staff doctor arrives and discovers that the director has been admitting "normal" patients in a greedy effort to defraud the insurance company. Profits are high but morale is low. Patients become doctors and doctors become patients as they all examine the criteria for sanity in a civilization that has lost its identity. These mental cases have much more on their minds than the next medication. The songs are clever and sensitive and the humor is totally insane.

Who decides what is sane? What gives someone the authority to decide who is sane? Who is making money on those decisions? These are the themes explored in this production. The desire to control one's own life was an underlying theme on the minds of these teenagers. The scenes depicted conflicts between parents and children, doctors and patients, and inmates and orderlies as they explored the issues of control.

*SOMETHING WITHIN US – an original musical*

May 1996

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (teen afterschool program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: David Spangler; Musical Directors: Rick Valon, Brett Maltbie, and Phyllis Jones; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: David Spangler and Richard Gays; Design/Technical Directors: Bettie Clark, Belvit Jordan, and Brian Lundblad; Administrative Director: Bettie Clark; Stage Management: Belvit Jordan.*

A large foster home is forced to close because of its financial instability. The kids rally behind a fund-raiser as a last ditch effort to keep their home intact. They stage a talent show. The administrator absconds with the donations and escapes to Africa. Ten years later, the foster home is thriving due to donations by recording star alumni who were "discovered" at the talent show years earlier. A wealthy man from Nigeria arrives and makes the largest contribution in the foster home's history. The wealthy man turns out to be the former administrator. He is forgiven, and the future of the foster home is finally secured with his endowment.

Integrity, greed, and forgiveness were themes in this production. The students wrote compelling songs about the love of money, the power of friendship, and the importance of honesty. There was a fascinating scene depicting the ethical transformation of the fugitive administrator during his stay in Africa. This was the third year for some of the students and staff of the Boys & Girls Club. They were all proud that they had finally created a show with no deaths, no funerals, and no physical violence. They were proud that there was more humor and less tragedy. We felt we had worked through some painful issues over the past 3 years to a point where we could laugh at some of the injustices of life instead of falling victim to them.

*BACKSTAGE STORY--Ett spel i spelet*

June 1996

Oskarshamn, Sweden, in cooperation with Oscarsgymnasiet and Oskarshamns Teatersällskap (Lovewell's first international exchange teen summer program), Forum Theatre.

*Director: David Spangler; Musical Directors: Birgir Neilsen, Brett Maltbie, and Magnus Hasselgren; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: Ulf Waltersson, David*

*Spangler, and Brett Maltbie; Design/Technical Directors: Martin Bernsholt and Anders Karlsson; Administrative Directors: Harriet Mathis, Ulf Waltersson, Bo Nikolausson, and Peter Kinnander; Stage Management: Belvit Jordan and Terry Brewer; Counseling Staff: Harriet Mathis, Jean Norrby, and Monica Waltersson; Interns: Emelie Lundin and Jesper Tyloskog.*

Through a scheduling error, an American performing troupe is double booked into a popular Swedish theatre. The conflict begins from the moment they barge in on a dress rehearsal for the Swedish troupe's gala opening performance. The American director and a Swedish actress fall in love and encourage a deeper understanding of the situation.

Written in both English and Swedish, the plot follows character relationships that develop as differences are explored and sometimes resolved. The melodies are timeless, the lyrics (mostly in English) are witty, and the themes are universal.

This workshop was a life-altering experience for me. I had traveled in Europe and worked in Europe, but never had I interfaced on such a profound level with the ethos of European culture until I directed this production including 9 American students; 3 American staff members (not including myself); 14 Swedish students; and over 10 Swedish artists, technicians, and staff members. Beyond the love story between the American director and the Swedish actress, there were other less obvious stories being told.

The Swedish students introduced a new subject never examined before in a Lovewell production, a same-sex romantic relationship between the Swedish actress and another actress in the Swedish troupe. This subject had been a cultural taboo in American workshops but was handled with honesty and taste by the Swedish students. The Americans were less comfortable dealing with the subject but learned something about nonjudgment in the process. The themes largely dealt with transcending the tendency to judge foreign cultures by the standards of our own culture.

*SPEAKIN' EASY--A Roaring Musical*

July 1996

Salina, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Kansas Wesleyan University Sam's Chapel Auditorium.

*Director: Gary Wayne; Musical Directors: Gary Wayne, Brett Maltbie, and Ryan McCall (intern); Dance Director: Peggy Simms; Script Director: Gary Wayne; Design/Technical Directors: David Krom and John Henningson (intern); Administrative Director: Kate Lindsay; Stage Management: Jeanny Ocampo and Amy Thompson; Interns: Joel*

*Bicknell, Scott Haden, Katy Hawley, and Shawn Nyberg.*

It is the “roaring 20s” and an invincible Mafia widow has taken over and regrouped her deceased husband's mob into a powerful group of gun-toting molls. The female mobsters add a whole new element to the politics of Prohibition. The Mafia widow is assassinated and her speakeasy, The Everett, is taken over by a rival group of mean-spirited male mobsters. Gumshoes and flappers sing and dance through this sea of corruption as the waters part to reveal how love can conquer even the most cynical society.

This production took an unexpected journey back in time to an era long before any of the participants were born. The young artists chose to examine a time in American history that was turbulent, violent, exciting, and romantic. They did the research, authentically depicted the history and conflict, and added the fresh notion of women taking over a crime syndicate during Prohibition. The themes were loss of innocence, the difficulty of enforcing poorly constructed laws, and the empowerment of women. This show illustrated how history can come to life for students and how an interdisciplinary production can inform and educate by allowing them to recreate and inhabit the past.

*YO, JULIET*

May 1997

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (teen afterschool program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: David Spangler; Musical Directors: Rick Valon, Phyllis Jones, and Andre Brissett (intern); Dance Directors: Leslie Bennett and Leroy Lake (intern); Script Director: David Spangler; Design/Technical Directors: Bettie Clark, Belvit Jordan, Brian Lundblad, and Lurleen Samuel; Administrative Director: Bettie Clark; Stage Management: Belvit Jordan.*

A military academy is called upon to provide male actors for a production of Romeo and Juliet being staged by a nearby girl's school. After a few rough rehearsals of translating King's English into Ebonics, the teenage cadet who was cast in the role of Romeo falls in love with the young art student who plays Juliet. Subplots involve the failed romance between the military officer in charge of the academy and a graduate of

the girl's school who has become a famous recording star. Things get difficult when "Romeo" tests positive for AIDS. "Juliet" stays by his side, and the show goes on. Near the end of the performance, there is a startling revelation that raises the question, "How many have to die before we can learn to love?" Romeo turns Shakespeare's tragedy into a triumph.

The themes of this production were fear of AIDS, tolerance, and the power of love. Although it was written 6 years later and hundreds of miles away from the Lovewell production, *Blown Away*, the themes of these two shows were very similar. The show in Kansas used the imagery of *The Wizard of Oz*, and this show used the imagery of *Romeo and Juliet*, but they both conveyed fear and confusion regarding the mysterious disease and a desire to overcome that fear through compassion and education.

*Yo, Juliet* was one of the most popular Lovewell projects ever produced. The themes of AIDS and Ebonics were current controversies in the news, and the Ft. Lauderdale students knew what they were doing by the time they wrote and performed the musical drama. In preparation, we watched movie versions of the Romeo and Juliet story, read Shakespeare's play aloud, and discussed the meaning of the tragic love story. Examining Ebonics was a way of teaching the participants about the need to communicate effectively with non-Ebonics speaking audiences. This production received outstanding response from the press and the public.

### *ALL FALL DOWN--A New Musical*

August 1997

Salina, KS, in cooperation with Unified School District 305 (teen summer program), Kansas Wesleyan University, Kansas Wesleyan University Sam's Chapel Auditorium.

*Directors: David Spangler and Gary Wayne; Music Directors: Brett Maltbie and Ryan McCall; Dance Director: Peggy Simms; Script Director: Joel Bicknell; Design/Technical Directors: Paula Villar and John Henningson (intern); Administrative Directors: Pam Jones and Dr. Eric Marshall; Stage Management: Amy Thompson and Paula Villar; Interns: Katy Hawley, Shawn Nyberg, and Meme Robinson.*

After a world war causes global destruction, a cautious and traumatized group of leaders try to rebuild a functioning society on Earth. In order to prevent a similar catastrophe from ever occurring again, they maintain tight controls turning the survivors into a cold, passionless, machine-like social organism. Freedom becomes the main issue

being explored as one survivor regains her memory of a good life before the holocaust. The subplot involves an evil, power-hungry renegade who tries to take advantage of the distressed but compliant survivors. Eventually in true science fiction style, the human spirit prevails, and individual freedoms and rights are returned as the story arrives at its emotional climax.

The themes in this show reflected a fear of global catastrophe and the loss of individuality. There were some thematic similarities to *Tribe*, the 1993 Lovewell production. The students were determined to create a science fiction musical--it was a style seldom used in musical theatre and was a daring and challenging way to examine their concerns.

On another level, the Lovewell Board of Directors had just moved the headquarters to Florida and there were some feelings that Kansas was being abandoned (as discussed in chapter 7). The uneasiness from some of the local Lovewell supporters did not affect the quality of the experience for the students.

*FLASHBACK--An Original Musical*

May 1998

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (teen afterschool program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: David Spangler; Assistant Director: Shermika Baynham; Musical Directors: Rick Valon, Andre Brisset, and Phyllis Jones; Dance Directors: Rocky Duval and Leroy Lake; Script Director: David Spangler and Adam Hocke (intern); Design/Technical Directors: Bettie Clark, Paula Villar, Sara Villar, and Lurleen Samuel; Administrative Director: Bettie Clark; Stage Management: Belvit Jordan.*

Cool jazz and poetry abound at The Pharaoh's Garden, the favorite hangout for local students and artists. Problems arise when the landlord decides to tear down the building and replace it with a more lucrative parking lot. Things get more complicated when the young manager (who is in love with the landlord's daughter) throws an Egyptian Night "rent party" to try to save the club. Everyone at the party is mysteriously caught in a "flashback" and transported to ancient Egypt where unforgettable lessons are learned about loyalty, love, and doing the right thing.

This production was a departure for Lovewell's partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs. *Flashback* was sophisticated, imaginative, and daring. It did not dwell on violence, death, or tragedy. The story involved a dramatic flashback from the present to ancient Egypt, tracing the roots of absolute power and absolute abuse of power. The landlord's wealth, power, and insensitivity paralleled the Pharaoh's, and the two stories became intertwined. The themes of virtue, loyalty and integrity permeated both stories. Students enjoyed researching ancient Egypt and examining the effects that wealth and power can have on families.

*ON THE BLINK--A New America Musical*

July 1998

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County (teen summer program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: Nathan Tysen; Music Director: Ryan McCall; Dance Director: Rocky Duval; Script Director: Joel Bicknell; Design/Technical Directors: Bruce Brown and Paula Villar; Administrative Directors: Jose E. Pinera and Harriet Mathis; Stage Management: Paula Villar; Acting/Singing Coach: Mary Beth Strautz.*

This "new-America" musical examines the life of a United States senator caught up in a political nightmare; his desperate election campaign, his dysfunctional family, his immigrant mistress, and the media who will stop at nothing to expose every detail of his private life. This musical takes some unexpected turns and some surprising twists as the characters work through these conflicts with a high degree of soul, humor, and guts. Greedy, self-serving political prototypes are examined, questioned, and chastened as a group of caring citizens try to reinvent a functional and compassionate value system for a new, diverse America.

These remarkable young artists had their finger on the pulse of America with this allegory of political corruption and media intrusion. As the circumference of youthful experience expands, teenagers become aware of and interested in how politics and media can affect their lives. During this project, the teachable moment occurred when the students' high motivation to learn more about these subjects was facilitated by the opportunity to express their understanding and feelings about the issues in a Lovewell production.

*GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER--An Original Musical*

May 1999

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with Pine Crest Preparatory School (middle school afterschool program), Pine Crest Auditorium.

*Director: David Spangler; Codirector: George Contini; Music Directors: Ryan McCall and Geri Roberts; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Director: George Contini; Design/Technical Directors: Tad Herrington and Paula Villar; Administrative Director: Dr. Tony Blanton; Stage Management: Paula Villar. Interns: Kevin Mogyoros, Blair Preiser, Dan Hausman, Darcy Austin, and Ashley Palmer.*

Colette gets the leading role in her high school production. She is a real *prima donna* and expresses aggressively mean and abusive behavior to her classmates; her fellow cast members; and her sister, Camille. Urged by her mother to go to the school guidance counselor, Colette swears she does not know why people do not like her. The counselor is writing a book on troubled teens and sees a valuable case study. Classmates plot to embarrass Colette by slipping vodka into her diet coke at a birthday party. She indeed gets drunk but unexpectedly falls down, hits her head, and dies. Guilt-ridden students pour into the guidance counselor's office and admit to the murder. We experience the moral dilemma of the guidance counselor as the students help him determine the right thing to do. Should he publish this event as a psychological case study, thus incriminating all the students at the party, or should he learn from the tragedy, quietly begin to rebuild the values of the student body, and implement school policies regarding bullies.

The *revenge-of-the-bullied* theme is recurring in Lovewell productions. After years of observing this subject being examined through the Lovewell process, I am convinced that it is the atmosphere of acceptance within the Lovewell culture that permits the students to explore the theme so directly and effectively. Bullying is absolutely not tolerated within the Lovewell culture, so students feel safe in confiding the realities of bullying that they have experienced.

The ethical issues of confidentiality versus disclosure are also scrutinized in this production. The students (in the play) deal with their accountability for Colette's death by searching their souls for the source of their vengeful actions. No one intended for her to die, but she did. The guidance counselor (in the play) weighs his personal gain as a researcher/confessor against the emotional and physical

welfare of the students who turn to him for answers. In the end, the students and the guidance counselor help each other make the right decisions.

*UP IN LIGHTS--An Original Musical*

May 1999

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (teen afterschool program), Parker Playhouse.

*Directors: Gary Wayne and David Spangler; Assistant Director: Shermika Baynham. Musical Directors: Rick Valon, Andre Brisset, and Phyllis Jones; Dance Directors: Leslie Bennett and Leroy Lake; Script Directors: Gary Wayne and David Spangler; Design/Technical Director: Bettie Clark; Administrative Director: Bettie Clark; Stage Management: Belvit Jordan and Shawn'ta Kelly; Interns: Andrew Patterson, Hugh Fuller, Michael Dicks, Otto Gordon, Phebe Walker, and Anne Jankowski.*

This is a behind-the-scenes story of the relationships, intrigues, and conflicts surrounding the production of the high profile Platinum Awards show. It follows the lives of the producers, musicians, celebrities, and the five naïve high school students who win backstage passes and witness far more real-life drama than they bargained for. Ethical issues such as plagiarism, fidelity, violence, and greed are examined under the spotlight of this high-stakes televised media event.

This production reflected the fascination young artists have with celebrities and their false images of perfection and infallibility. This behind-the-scenes story offered plenty of opportunities to look at the effects that wealth, power, and celebrity have on families and relationships. The students examined what lengths to which some people will go to get ahead and succeed in the music business and how ruthless some will become to grab their piece of the American dream.

*OPERATION GENERATION--A Musical on-the-Rocks*

July 1999

Key West, FL, in cooperation with the Educational Coalition of Monroe County and Florida Keys Community College (teen summer program), Tennessee Williams Fine Arts Center.

*Director: Gary Wayne; Music Director: Tamir Hendelman; Dance Director: Leroy Lake; Script Director: Joel Bicknell; Design/Technical Director: Michael Boyer; Administrative Directors: Lori Oertel and Dr. John Machnic; Intern: Sarah Gratton.*

The millennium approaches and anxiety is running high. In a top-secret experiment, the government has cryogenically frozen prime examples of typical citizens sampled from each decade of America's history. It is the government's way of preserving its cultural history. As the cryogenic human specimens are ceremoniously unfrozen on the last night of the old millennium, each decade comes to life revealing the nature and evolution of the American culture.

After the presentation, it is revealed that the audience is to be used in the next experiment involving controlled breeding and study of the Ebola virus on human subjects. A group of social and religious activists are gathering outside the theatre and threatening to violently abort the experiment. Forces of good and evil are played out in a curious mix of humor and high drama as the activists rekindle the passion of the American people to fight for freedom and set the government straight.

The obvious theme of this production was concern over the approaching Millennium and the predicted meltdown of structures and systems. This was the first time my own child was a participant in a Lovewell workshop, and consequently I became more attuned to how the themes of the show emerge directly from the minds of the participants. My daughter and her friend were very concerned about the environment and they managed to incorporate a feasible subplot concerning ecology.

The news media was full of stories of systems failing as the global calendar clicked over from 1999 to 2000, and many students experienced their first glimpses of the complex infrastructure that holds massive systems in place. These new awarenesses were expressed with a mixture of fear and intimidation in this production. The exploration of these subjects by the young artists made the unknown a bit less threatening.

*UNION HIGH--A Clique-ing Musical*

July 1999

Marathon, FL, in cooperation with the Educational Coalition of Monroe County, Florida, Keys Community College and the Marathon Community Theatre (teen summer program)

*Director: Katy Hawley; Assistant Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Directors: Ryan McCall, Tamir Hendelman, Skipper Kripitz, Robin Kaplan, and Shermika Baynham;*

*Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: Carrie Gilchrist and Nathan Tysen; Design/Technical Directors: Paul Buckley and John Ragusa; Administrative Directors: Lori Oertel and Dr. John Machnic. Interns: Anthony Jenkins and Bethany Todd.*

The bullies, the nerds, the jocks, the freaks, and the valley girls animate this musical adventure as the students navigate the hallways of high school culture and subculture. These cliques define and shape the social landscape of Union High, which reveals a battlefield of narrow opinions, harsh criticisms, bullying, and physical violence. The plot revolves around two tough boys who get into a fight and are punished by the principal by forcing them into taking roles in the school's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Desperate to get out of the play, one boy tries to sabotage the show and consequently ends up injuring a student actress. Tolerance, forgiveness, and a sense of humor emerge as the only solutions that can bring Union High back from the depths.

High school social dynamics is a popular theme for Lovewell productions, but this show captured the pain, the humor, and the pathos of the teenage condition in an extraordinarily honest and forthright manner. The simple truth conveyed by these stories and songs struck a nerve with audiences, and the popularity of this show generated a tour a few months later of every high school and middle school in the district.

The characters and issues were so well drawn, and the show was so well written and directed, that almost anyone could relate to the situations and conflicts being dramatized. Seeing truth in the way that high school students tend to label and judge stereotypes like jocks, nerds, freaks, valley girls, gays, and bullies opened the door to many lively and enlightening classroom discussions.

#### *CHANCE OF A LIFETIME--A Musical Experiment*

July 1999

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County (teen summer program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: Nathan Tysen; Assistant Directors: Katy Hawley and Carrie Gilchrist. Music Director: Ryan McCall; Dance Director: Michelle Rivers; Script Directors: Joel Bicknell and Adam Hocke; Design/Technical Directors: Paula Villar and Sara Villar; Administrative Directors: Jose E. Pinera and Harriet Mathis; Stage Management: Paula Villar; Acting/Singing Coach: Mary Beth Strautz.*

What happens when research scientists conduct a yearlong experiment observing

the effects on the behavior of three human subjects as a result of giving up something they love (and the corresponding part of their identity) for the “chance” to win \$10 million? For 1 year, a popular singer gives up her voice (no singing or speaking), a mother gives up her family (no contact with relatives), and a young gay man gives up his sexual identity (no same-sex physical contact). These three stories are interwoven as they play out the themes of sacrifice and choices. The songs and scenes examine issues of values and integrity in a society steeped in materialism.

These students were interested in understanding the boundaries of money. They wanted to know how much of personal integrity, identity, soul, and spirit can be bought. Creating this Lovewell production was an opportunity to critically assess deep-seated character issues and ethical tenets of the current culture. In addition to learning communication skills and artistic skills, these teenagers were learning to examine the core values and moral fiber of their society.

I was seeing basic principles of social studies, history, and psychology being analyzed as well as intellectually and emotionally integrated. Art, education, and social awareness were interacting synergistically to bring these teenagers to a higher level of comprehension. The stage became a classroom, the theatre became a laboratory.

*REUNION AT UNION HIGH--A Clique-ing Musical*

October 1999

Monroe County, FL (Florida Keys), in cooperation with the Educational Coalition of Monroe County and the School Board of Monroe County and Florida Keys Community College (teen program). Tour of district high and middle school venues: Marathon Middle and High School, Key Largo School, Coral Shores High School, Horace O’Bryant Middle School, Marathon Community Theatre, and Tennessee Williams Fine Arts Center.

*Director: Katy Hawley; Assistant Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Directors: Ryan McCall, Tamir Hendelman, Skipper Kripitz, Robin Kaplan, and Shermika Baynham; Dance Director: Leslie Bennett; Script Directors: Carrie Gilchrist and Nathan Tysen; Design/Technical Directors: Michael Boyer, Paul Buckley, and John Ragusa; Administrative Directors: Lori Oertel, Norma Thompson, and Kathy Simpson;. Interns: Anthony Jenkins and Bethany Todd.*

This was a rewrite, recasting, and a remounting of the original production of *Union High* for a tour of the Monroe County School District. It played in every high

school and middle school in Monroe County to nearly 3,000 students and was used in the classroom as a discussion and essay topic examining social problems and tolerance issues within the school culture.

The touring version of this production gave us the chance to clarify, trim and improve the original version. My daughter joined the cast for the 4-day tour of the schools, so the perspective of a parent was added to my observations. I set up the tour with the cooperation of the Educational Coalition and the school district. No Lovewell production had ever played to 3,000 students. The audience reaction to dramatic moments in the show was surprisingly consistent. They were seeing themselves on stage. Their peers had written the show and were playing characters in situations that they, the students in the audience, found themselves facing every day. Even the teachers appreciated the production because it brought to light subjects that were difficult to discuss in the classroom. Themes like bullying, sexual identity, and tolerance were presented with humor, passion, and candor instead of instructional piety.

What I witnessed on this tour convinced me that the Lovewell Method is capable of creating valuable dialogue between peers and their teachers concerning issues and trends that are highly relevant to their lives and educational goals. It also creates a bond between classmates who see how ideas can be expressed and conflicts resolved (or averted) through interdisciplinary arts projects.

### *DIFFERENCES AT GALAHAD*

October 1999

Boca Raton, FL, in cooperation with the Donna Klein Jewish Academy (Grades 6-12), Donna Klein Auditorium (Zinman Hall).

*Director: Shermika Baynham; Assistant Director: David Spangler; Music Director: David Cohen; Script Directors: Shermika Baynham and David Spangler; Administrative Directors: Karen Feller and Dr. Yoram Dahav; Faculty Advisors: Hillary Phelps and Andrew McKensie; Costume Director: Joy Schwartz.*

A pedantic and controlling principal at Galahad School is in a love-hate situation with one of his teachers. He tried to start a relationship with her when they were younger but she was not interested. He has never forgiven her and treats her coldly and rudely. Another teacher is attracted to her, but he is shy and does not know how to approach her. The students help her make the right decision and arrange for them to start a promising relationship. The principal loses the girl but gains some important lessons in forgiveness

and giving up grudges.

There are many stories of teachers getting involved in the personal lives of their students. This show tells the story of students who get involved in the personal lives of their teachers. As the students (in the play) take on the role of matchmakers to their teachers, they also examine troubling issues of unpopularity, adolescent angst, and persecution for being “different.”

The vengeful principal, the attractive teacher who had rejected him years earlier, and the introverted teacher who tries to win her heart, play out their story as their students do what they can to manipulate the outcome towards a happy ending.

I enjoyed watching how the students reversed the relationship between teacher and student in this story. The students helped the teachers “do the right thing.” These young artists fashioned a story that reflected their quest for honest connection and a fair outcome in human dynamics.

### *HAITIAN DAYS*

December 1999

Miami Beach, FL, in cooperation with the Family Resource Center of Miami-Dade and First Night Miami Beach (preteens and teens), Miami Beach Auditorium.

*Director/Writer: Lorna Lesperance; Administrative Director: Ellen Wedner.*

This play was commissioned as part of the Miami River Anthologies Project. The purpose was to celebrate and share the culture of Haitian immigrants living in the Miami area. The production was a collection of skits and songs written and performed by Haitian youth depicting the struggles and triumphs in their daily lives as they adjust to a new language and new culture.

I had worked with Haitian immigrants in the Lovewell/Boys & Girls Club program and thought I knew something about the situation. This project made me realize how little I knew. I hired Lorna Lesperance to direct this production because she was familiar with the territories. One territory was musical theatre. She taught musical theatre at the local arts magnet middle school and, having audited several of her classes, I knew she was an effective teacher who knew the content and the classroom management.

The other territory was the immigrant situation. Lorna was born in Jamaica and had married a Haitian man after coming to America. I felt she could negotiate the challenges we would face in gaining the trust and cooperation from the Haitian community that we would need to carry out this project successfully. She shaped

a show that truly revealed the realities of immigrant life from the point of view of Haitian children and teenagers. I learned much about the difficult situation they face every day. Once again, I observed how the Lovewell process holds a mirror up to society so that we can clearly see the vital need for tolerance, patience, and a deeper level of understanding as America strives to assimilate the many diverse cultures that now populate our nation. Lovewell projects seem to encourage and accelerate this kind of learning.

*PRIDELINES*

December 1999

Miami Beach, FL, in cooperation with the Family Resource Center of Miami-Dade and First Night Miami Beach (teens combined with young adults), Miami Beach Auditorium.

*Director/Writer: George Contini; Musical Director: David Cohen; Administrative Director: Ellen Wedner.*

This play was commissioned as part of the Miami River Anthologies. The purpose was to celebrate and share the culture of gay and lesbian youth living in the Miami area. Many of the youth who wrote and performed this piece had not yet “come out” and were dealing with issues of identity and fear of retribution from family, classmates, and teachers. This theatre piece told the story of the conflicts encountered as these teenagers prepared to risk it all to attend a “gay prom” sponsored by a local social service agency.

These young adults wrote of a real-life situation that many of them were encountering with their schools not allowing same-sex couples to attend the prom. A gay and lesbian social service agency decided to offer an alternative prom, but this gesture did not solve the problem of acceptance. The theme of acceptance permeated this project.

One participant wrote a theme song for the play but was forbidden to perform it by his mother when she found out the show he was doing had a gay theme. I spoke with her and she used the excuse that terrorists had threatened to disrupt the festivities on the last night of the millennium. She was correct. There had been rumors of threats. The Haitian production was also on New Year’s Eve, but those children’s parents did not keep them home.

The teenage actor who wrote the song and had rehearsed the play for months did not show up for the performance. As much as I respected the

mother's decision and understood her fears of the terrorists and of her son's difficult road ahead as he struggled with his sexual identity, I deeply regretted the outcome. The show went on without him. The director and actors made the adjustments and their story was told artfully and professionally without a hitch. The terrorists never showed up either. Only fear filled the void on that memorable New Year's Eve.

*IN GOOD COMPANY--A Wartime Musical*

July 2000

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County (teen summer program), Parker Playhouse.

*Director: Nathan Tysen; Music Directors: Chris Miller and Gary Wayne; Dance Director: Michelle Rivers; Script Director: Joel Bicknell; Design/Technical Director: Richard Simone; Administrative Directors: Irene Butcher and Harriet Mathis; Stage Management: Randy Cheney; Intern/Acting Coach: Lauren Birriel.*

This story deals with the effects of the invasion of Pearl Harbor as viewed from the home front. American troops are moving out, and the Tin Lizzie Bar in New York is full of poignant stories of those left behind. The wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of the boys at war explore the issues of survival, anti-Semitism, wartime sacrifices, and a nation in distress. World War II is examined from the perspective of the ones who were left behind--the men are guilty, the women are lonely, and everyone is questioning the basic principles and core values of American life.

In the first scene of this production, we hear the actual voice of President Roosevelt as he announces the invasion of Pearl Harbor. From that point forward, this is one of the most enlightening and engaging history lessons in any curriculum that I have ever encountered. The facts of the war are integrated into the emotions of the characters being affected by the war to create a total picture of how cause and effect operates during a time of crisis.

This production exemplifies how the Lovewell Method addresses multiple levels of measurable learning objectives (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) within the context of a creative interdisciplinary arts project. In creating the content and relationships in the play, Lovewell students learn the terminology of social sciences history and arts disciplines. They comprehend the theme and illustrate it through discussions and by creating lyrics, dialogue, music, and visuals that convey their grasp. They apply the new information by bringing to life the situations they have designed in rehearsals and performances. They

analyze the information by researching the themes and characters and then discussing the options with peers, instructors, and parents. They synthesize the information by blending prior knowledge with new knowledge and skills into a creative and original interdisciplinary arts production that invents a fresh perspective on the subject. Finally, the students offer their findings and their creation to the audience for immediate assistance in evaluation and interpretation. *In Good Company* illustrated the way that measurable learning objectives could be fulfilled through the Lovewell Method.

My father fought in World War II and never wanted to talk about it. I learned things about the war from this production that I never would have learned from him or from the history books.

*ZOOMING IN--A Picture-Perfect Musical*

July 2000

Marathon, FL, in cooperation with Florida Keys Community College, Marathon Community Theatre and the Educational Coalition of Monroe County (teen summer program), Marathon Community Theatre.

*Director: Katy Hawley; Assistant Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Directors: Ryan McCall and Chris Miller; Script Directors: Adam Hocke and Nathan Tysen; Dance Director: Evelyn Danford; Design/Technical Directors: Paul Buckley and Sue Deary; Administrative Directors: Norma Thompson, Lori Neilson, Tina Belotti, and Harriet Mathis; Interns: Missy Lucas and Christina Belotti.*

A photographer and journalist descend upon the perfect little town of Spring Falls to create a feature article for the American Journal. Instead of a model American community, they find homeless kids, dysfunctional families, and moral decay. The photojournalist team interviews the kids and families uncovering some ugly secrets about absentee parents, religious hypocrisy, and cultural patterns of greed and lack of compassion. Their observations help the town out of denial and on to a few solutions that ultimately benefit everyone by bringing them to a deeper understanding of the phrase, “it takes a village.”

*Zooming In* reflected the concerns these young artists had regarding the erosion of the traditional family and the crisis of religion in America. Monroe County Florida (the Florida Keys) has some unique demographics, and this production captured the dilemma that emerges when the middle class vanishes and kids are

essentially left to themselves because of excessive wealth or abject poverty. When parents are too busy either managing their wealth or trying to achieve it, kids have to raise themselves and answer tough questions without adequate guidance. This piece examined the phenomenon of kids who discover their own isolation and redemption through the assistance of a photo/journalist team that reveals their true stories.

*LIVEWIRE – a hot new musical*

August 2000

Key West, FL, in cooperation with Florida Keys Community College and the Educational Coalition of Monroe County (teen summer program), Tennessee Williams Fine Arts Theatre.

*Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Assistant Director: Nathan Tysen; Music Directors: Ryan McCall and Chris Miller; Dance Director: Katy Hawley; Script Director: Adam Hocke; Design/Technical Directors: Michael Boyer and Robin Halfmoon; Administrative Directors: Norma Thompson, Lori Neilson, Tina Belotti, and Harriet Mathis; Intern: Sarah Gratton.*

Reality shows are taking over, and this musical is an examination of what happens when an apartment house full of working class Americans is wired for television without the knowledge of the tenants (they were deceived into signing a lease they did not understand). Diversity and privacy are major themes as we follow the lives of these vivid characters from numerous cultures as they are publicly exposed to boost the ratings of a “reality” TV network. A fire destroys the apartment building and reveals the deception that had been going on. Hidden cameras and microphones are found as the victims search through the rubble. The tenants band together, stripped of their worldly possessions, and broadcast their own reality show telling the truth about the fraud. A deal is struck between the tenants and the network that rebuilds the building as well as the lives that were permanently altered by the new “reality.”

The participants in this project were clearly reacting to the current trend in television programming shifting from scripted shows to reality shows. This trend generated numerous ethical issues, and the students in this Lovewell program examined the consequences of some of them. As in past Lovewell shows, the subjects of privacy and civil liberties were primary themes. Many of the

participants had not yet had enough life experience and exposure to the outside world to know that these themes are systemic and have great impact on current culture. The young artists approached these themes from a personal perspective. They had been raised in a democracy and sensed that something was threatening their personal freedoms.

Through the process of researching and writing this show, the students expanded their awareness by realizing that many other individuals shared the concern and that the problem was complex and would require unprecedented cooperation to resolve. The collaboration skills they had learned during the creative process of writing the show could now be applied to the larger challenges of social transformation and ethical evaluation.

*LOST AND FOUND--A Musical Recovery*

July 2001

Monroe County, FL (high school combined with middle school program), in cooperation with the Educational Coalition of Monroe County, the Monroe County Council of the Arts, the Monroe County Schools, and the Marathon City Council, Marathon High School Auditorium.

*Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Director: Ryan McCall; Script Director: Jamie Johnson; Dance Directors: Holly McLean, Liz Shanks, and Leslie Bennett; Design/Technical Director: Joe Hagen; Administrative Directors: Tina Belotti, Sunny Booker, Dottie Kirst, and Duncan Mathewson; Interns: Christina Belotti, Debbie Maletic, and Eno Maletic.*

Some adventurous teenagers are on a hike through the woods and get lost trying to find their way back to their summer camp. Some emotionally disturbed kids have escaped into the same woods from their oppressive lock-down mental health facility. They all meet and take shelter in an old abandoned house deep in the forest. The mysterious house is full of items from their past that trigger memories, mind trips, and questions about how they got to where they are. Much is revealed in flashbacks and songs probing the origins of their unrest. The emotionally disturbed kids and the campers have much in common and eventually bond. In a dramatic confrontation, the doctors from the institution and the camp counselors find the kids and attempt to split them up and take them back to their respective homes. Finally, the doctors and counselors must listen to the kids and honor their uniqueness, self-expression, and creativity.

The first thing the audience sees when they open the playbill of this show is a quote from the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. It refers to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to assemble peaceably. The adolescents who created this production were interested in analyzing the limits of their freedom to express themselves and explore beyond their childhood boundaries.

Items the characters discover from their past in the mysterious house represent meaningful images that have remained with them and give them access to themes they are working on in their personal lives. They are connecting the dots seeing how their experience of growing up is affecting their expanding world.

*ALWAYS TAKE THE STAIRS--An Original Musical*

July 2001

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County (Lovewell JR's first annual production - ages 8-12), McGaw Hall.

*Director: Gary Wayne; Music Directors: David Cohen and Gary Wayne; Script Director: Shawn Nyberg; Dance Director: Judith Hurst; Design/Technical Directors: Paula Villar and Sara Villar; Administrative Director: Harriet Mathis; Interns: Richard Cortez and Michelle Moore.*

The Conk Conk a Chonk Hotel is a dark and mysterious place with some strange secrets. Children can take the elevator to various floors where they come face to face with their deepest fears. On one floor, the mothers are trapped in their children's nightmares. The plot involves an old woman who operates the hotel elevator and her two daughters. One daughter is the manager of the hotel and the other has been locked away on the 13th floor since their father's death. As the children overcome their fears, the truth is revealed and the sisters reunite with each other and their mother.

For many years, I had been hoping to initiate a Lovewell program for preteens. The YMCA of Broward County also had an interest in serving the preteen population, so this was an opportune time to start a program for young artists from age 8 through 12. This was also the first Lovewell production where two of my own children were participants.

The challenge for Lovewell Institute was to match the intensity and rigor of the creative process in the teen program to the age-appropriate realities of the younger participants and yet maintain high artistic and educational standards. Baby-sitting has never been a Lovewell option. A talented and intuitive interdisciplinary

director with a strong support staff helped adapt the process into a successful preteen program.

I was overwhelmed with the quality of the work and the inventive way in which the children dealt with their themes of fear and parental attachment. One show-stopping musical number involved a young boy playing the role of Hunter James who ventured out with his weapon to shoot some game. The animals he was stalking came to life and pleaded with him not to kill them. Hunter decides it is the thrill of the hunt, not the killing, that appeals to him. All of the animals live to sing the end of the song with him. For some reason, that theatrical moment struck a nerve with the audience who leapt to their feet in the middle of the show and applauded the insight of the boy and the joy of the animals who lived to tell the tale.

*SIDETRACKED - A New Musical*

July 2001

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County (teen program), Parker Theatre.

*Director: Nathan Tysen; Assistant Director: Katy Hawley; Music Director: Chris Miller; Assistant Music Director: Ryan McCall; Dance Director: Vanessa Gibbons; Script Director: Joel Bicknell; Design/Technical Directors: Richard Simone and Joe Hagen; Administrative Directors: Irene Butcher and Harriet Mathis; Counseling Staff: Lance Gilchrist, Alison Gilchrist, and Jamie Johnson; Acting Coach: Carrie Gilchrist; Intern: Lauren Birriel.*

This musical is a subway ride through the social injustices of this nation. The juxtaposition of an actual subway ride through the tunnels below New York City and the stops at actual historical events in America's darker history chronicles the social consciousness of our culture. The Trail of Tears, the burning of the witches at Salem, slavery and the Civil War, the Kent State killings, Matthew Shepard's violent death, Mrs. Yates murdering her five children, and other dramatic events in our past affect the way the passengers on the subway react to each other as they encounter a disaster that calls for a new level of cooperation and community.

This show was written and performed less than two months before the terrorist attack that brought down the World Trade Center. It involved a disaster that trapped a subway car full of commuters under the streets of New York City. The plot was multilayered and metaphorical as each episode (subway stop) revealed a

social injustice that could have been averted by greater understanding, compassion, and cooperation. Between stops, the subway riders bicker and fight, thus building the theme for the next episode.

Finally, the disaster hits, the subway car is plunged into darkness and chaos, and a sense of community emerges as the riders reach out to rescue one another. Portentous and unnerving as it was, this story was telling us of the need to rise above petty differences and negative attitudes and to learn something from our long history of inhumanity and disregard for the sanctity of life. In less than 2 months, the whole world would be echoing this theme. Here is an excerpt from the lyrics of the haunting title song of *Sidetracked*:

TAKE MY HAND  
 DON'T LET GO  
 I'LL BE YOUR STRENGTH  
 DON'T GIVE UP NOW  
 WORKING TOGETHER  
 WORKING AS ONE  
 LINKS OF A CHAIN  
 WE HAVE SO MUCH TO GAIN...  
 WE'VE BEEN SIDETRACKED TOO LONG

(Lovewell Institute for the Creative Arts, 2001c)

*THE BOOK OF PHIL--A Cynic's Love Story*

March 2002

Chicago, IL, Lovewell Theatre Project in cooperation with New Tuners at the Chicago Theatre Building (Lovewell Staff and Alumni Professionals), New Tuners Theatre.

*Interdisciplinary Artists: Carrie Gilchrist, Katy Hawley, Jamie Johnson, Ryan McCall, Nathan Tysen, Scott Haden, Chris Miller, Holly McLean, David Spangler, Amy Thompson, Misty Bell, and Joe Hagen; Administrative Consultant: John Sparks.*

This was the first production created through the LTP. LTP is the professional production subsidiary of Lovewell Institute. *The Book of Phil* is a dark musical comedy that reexamines human interaction and romantic connection in the 21st century. Is it possible to plan a coincidence? What would you pay for a “chance” meeting with the man or woman of your dreams, equipped with just the right things to say? *The Book of Phil* is an unusual love story that reveals the desperation of a new brand of cyber courtship. It is the tale of an ailing elderly anthropologist, his lonely caretaker, an

eccentric window painter, a ruthless “meet-your-mate” company that will stop at nothing to hook up its client, and the book that documents it all.

The 12 artists who participated in this project had all experienced the Lovewell process in varying degrees and had been through college training in various arts disciplines. I had directed most of them in Lovewell productions when they were teenagers and supervised them as Lovewell staff members in their early 20s.

Creating this production with my former students as “peers” posed numerous challenges. The theme of this piece deals with the effect technology has had on the very human ritual of courtship. I was twice the age of the other artists and had always been in a supervisory position with them until this project. We were forced to make adjustments in the way we operated, but we did maintain the Lovewell curriculum and produce a powerful piece of theatre that explored the ethics and effects of cyber matchmaking.

*DRAWN IN--A Musical in Two Issues*

July 2002

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County and NSU (teen summer program), Parker Playhouse.

*Program Directors: Nathan Tysen and Carrie Gilchrist; Stage Director: Nathan Tysen; Assistant Stage Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Director: Chris Miller; Script Director: Jamie Johnson; Dance Director: Vanessa Gibbons; Design/Technical Director: Richard Simone; Administrative Directors: Irene Butcher and Harriet Mathis; Counseling Staff: Lance Gilchrist and Alison Gilchrist; Interns: Andrea Alvarez, Samantha Charlip, Ilana Isaacson, Kim Mendelsohn, and Nathan Yntema.*

Comic books come to life and the boundaries between reality and fantasy become blurred. Act 1 is a political tale that follows the campaign of a powerful politician, her husband, and two children. Her teenage son is writing a comic book as a way to communicate with his autistic sister. His book parallels his family’s dysfunction and exposes the ruthless ambition of his mother. The media uncovers the story, and the politician loses the election but wins back her family. Act 2 is the story of a young artist who owns a small coffee shop that is being threatened by the competition, a large “Starbucks-like” franchise. She sketches out her struggles in large comic strips that are displayed in her shop. Her comic book art concerns a place called Popperville where an

evil doctor clones people to be identical, docile, and dependent upon being told what to do. Before long, customers start coming to her shop out of curiosity and admiration of her art and the allegory of Popperville as it relates to consumerism and individual identity.

Both her art and her coffee become a huge success.

This group of artists chose two stories to tell using the common device of comic books coming to life. The first story tells how art communicates deep unspoken emotions between a teenage boy and his autistic sister concerning the role they must play in their mother's political campaign. The theme is emotional abandonment by the mother.

The second story deals with the themes of individualism and the perils of conformity. Students who created this piece were investigating the nature of uniqueness and personal expression in contrast to the monolithic nature of corporate and governmental homogenization.

*UH OH !!!--A Musical*

August 2002

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County, Lovewell JR's second annual summer program (ages 8-12), McGaw Hall.

*Director: Gary Wayne; Music Directors: David Cohen and Gary Wayne; Script Director: Shawn Nyberg; Dance Director: Judith Hurst; Design/Technical Director: Michael DeArmas; Administrative Director: Harriet Mathis; Interns: Danny Fernandez, Michelle Moore, Ian Schwartz, Cassie Spangler, Margie Spangler, and Angie Wayne.*

A local writer stirs things up in her hometown of Whatupdunno. Betsy has written a book about magical spells that has the president of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) very upset. The book is banned, and a local reporter starts a series of articles on the controversy. In retaliation, Betsy writes another book of spells where the spells come true whenever they are read aloud. This causes great anxiety in her little town, and the reporter is always throwing fuel on the fire by probing deeper. The President of the PTA and the other townspeople learn a few things about tolerance, and Betsy has the last laugh when she reads the final page aloud that releases all the spells.

The children in this project were clearly concerned with the public response to the

Harry Potter books and movies. The books were banned at certain schools because of the sorcery and dark magic themes. I had experienced some similar reactions to themes in the Lovewell production of *The Oracle Diner* in 1992 (as mentioned above). The participants in this program were interested in learning more about why magical powers and mystical spells were so controversial. It is interesting to note that these young artists did not see any religious implications in the controversy. For them, it was all about adults withholding information from children.

*DEFINE IT--A Normal Musical*

August 2002

Riverside, CA, in cooperation with the YMCA of Moreno Valley (teen summer program). University of California, Riverside Theatre.

*Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Director: Ryan McCall; Script Director: Jamie Johnson; Dance Director: Holly McLean; Design/Technical Director: Fabian Valdez; Administrative Director: Leslie Cheney.*

What is normal? A select group of research scientists have 24 hours to define “normal” for a new edition of a definitive English language dictionary. This musical is structured in “case files” as the concept of normal is examined from a number of authentic perspectives, normal habits, normal beauty, normal fears, normal dreams, normal self-image, normal relationships, normal gender identity, and normal love. Is there such a thing? This show may ask more questions than it answers, but it teaches us much about the limitations of labels and the boundlessness of human expression.

Normality is a theme (or implied theme) in numerous Lovewell productions. This was the first Lovewell production in California, and it is worth noting that the year before, students had explored the same theme across the continent in the Florida Keys with their production of *Lost & Found*.

I have observed that teenagers are often caught in the dichotomy of wanting to fit in, yet at the same time wanting to express their uniqueness and assert their individuality. They often do not know how to handle the conflicting emotions. These productions give them the opportunity to work through some of the issues intellectually and emotionally on stage with their characters embodying and acting out the various perspectives. The creation of this production was a particularly edifying experience for the staff, the audience, and particularly for the teenagers.

There were discipline problems, logistical problems, and administrative problems, but by the closing night cast party, we were all enlightened and gratified by what we learned about redefining the label of “normal.”

*THE BOOK OF PHIL*

March 2003

New York City, NY, Lovewell Theatre Project in cooperation with the Epiphany Theatre Company, New York City (staff and alumni professionals), Epiphany Theatre Space.

*Interdisciplinary Artists: Carrie Gilchrist, Katy Hawley, Jamie Johnson, Ryan McCall, Nathan Tysen, Scott Haden, Chris Miller, Holly McLean, David Spangler, Amy Thompson, Misty Bell, and Joe Hagen.*

This was a staged reading of the revised version of the production originally created in Chicago the previous year (see 2002, *The Book of Phil*).

This was an opportunity to revise the show we had written the previous year. Certain plot points and character developments were clarified. The rewritten musical was subsequently optioned by the Epiphany Theatre Company. This was another step in defining how the Lovewell Method could be applied in a professional setting.

*CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF CHANGE – A Musical*

July 2003

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County, Lovewell JR’s third annual production (ages 8-12), McGaw Hall.

*Director: Katie Rubin; Music Directors: Richard Brookens and David Cohen; Script Director: Lani Isaacson; Dance Director: Judith Hurst; Design/Technical Director: Ian Schwartz; Administrative Director: Harriet Mathis; Interns: Jacob Groton, Margie Spangler, and Cassie Spangler.*

A group of totally bored kids doing their homework during a storm get into some serious trouble. Especially when they leave the window open and let the dreaded “Cloud People” rain in. The Monsters (former Cloud People trapped on Earth) take over Richie’s bedroom, hold the kids captive, and make them find pieces of a puzzle to gain their freedom. The kids learn lessons about the value of friendship and family as they search for the pieces of the puzzle.

The lesson I learned from this workshop is the importance of staffing programs with artist/instructors who have had adequate training in the Lovewell Method and who know how to maintain a good balance between the educational and artistic aspects of the pedagogy. There was a last minute shake-up in the staffing due to the sudden unavailability of veteran Lovewell staff members. We also had to move to a new facility half way through the program because of logistical problems.

Through all of these challenges, according to the parents, staff members, and the children, it was still a fulfilling Lovewell experience. Two of my children were in the production, and the other two were interns. I asked them to help me identify the themes and came to realize that sometimes a show written by preteens has deeper meanings and implications to them than adults can comprehend. The show was entertaining and from my perspective dealt appropriately with the theme of “making choices.” The characters had to ultimately choose whether to return to their normal lives or return with the Cloud People to their fantasyland in the sky.

*PEACE OF MIND – A Life-altering Musical*

July 2003

Hollywood, FL, in cooperation with the YMCA of Broward County (teen summer program), Hollywood Central Performing Arts Center.

*Program and Stage Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Music Director: Ryan McCall; Script Director: Jamie Johnson; Dance Director: Holly McLean; Design/Technical Director: Joe Hagen; Administrative Directors: Lance Gilchrist and Harriet Mathis; Costume and Counseling Director: Alison Gilchrist; Interns: Lani Isaacson and Kim Mendelsohn; Stage Management Intern: Ian Schwartz.*

What is life really about? Bobby Rosenthal is in a coma and the defining moments in his earthly experience pass before his eyes in scenes and songs acted out by the people who loved and hated him the most. We never actually meet Bobby physically but get to know him intimately through the defining moments that shaped his image and identity on earth. We meet his parents, his childhood friends, his college buddies, his boss, his kids, his wife, and his mistress as they reveal his heart, soul, and best-kept secrets. A comatose dream becomes the celebration of a life fully lived.

*Peace of Mind* was one of the most successful Lovewell productions in the history of the organization both artistically and educationally. This was a case where the level of talent (staff and student) and the potency of the theme added up to an extraordinary process and product. The theme was legacy, the imprint that one

human life makes on others. In the story, Bobby remains in a coma while the people who shared his life comment on his defining moments. In 11 scenes and 10 songs, we really get to know this man that we never see or meet.

Not only clever in its structure and content, this show related a remarkable perspective dispelling the fear of death as Bobby passes away in the final scene. His deceased father appears to him (in the coma) and addresses the issue of dying. The following quote is from that speech:

I'll lay it out for you, dying isn't fun. It tends to make you think of life and all the things you didn't have time to do, all the things you screwed up, and all the missed opportunities. But you know what? What are you gonna do? Seriously! Are you gonna go back in your mind and try to re-live those moments? Are you gonna seek out everyone you ever said something unkind to and apologize? No. It's pointless. Do you know why? Because up here, it all evens out. For every negative, there's a positive, for every bad, a good and so on and so on. I know how you must feel, son. There just isn't enough time. I think everyone feels that way at the end. But time starts over here. There's no hurry, no yesterday or tomorrow, there's just now. It's all we ever really have. I miss you son. Oh, and one more thing before I go...you're really gonna enjoy walking through walls...it's like - well, you'll see. I love you, son. I'll see you when you're ready.

(Lovewell Institute for the Creative Arts, 2003b).

*STORM – A Musical Journey*

August 2003

Oskarshamn, Sweden, in cooperation with Lovewell/Sweden, Oscarsgymnasiet (public secondary school) and Oskarshamns Teatersällskap (local community theatre) (Lovewell's second international exchange teen program), Forum Theatre.

*Directors: Nathan Tysen (USA) and Emelie Hasselgren (Sweden); Musical Directors: Nils-Petter Ankarblom, Karl-Johan Ankarblom, and Maria Eriksson; Script Directors: Nathan Tysen (USA), Emelie Hasselgren, and Nina Björk (Sweden); Design Directors: Lina Wictorzon, Jason Panton, and Nina Björk; Technical Directors: Erik Axtun, Robert Felixon, and Tommy Larsson; Administrative Director: Ulf Waltersson; Intern: Jenny Rudell.*

This is a haunting tale of a turn-of-the-century sea voyage from Sweden to America on the S. S. Goren. Passengers include an ailing woman in search of a cure accompanied by her devoted son; an arrogant Texas oilman, his Swedish wife, and their daughter who is about to marry a wealthy young Swedish man; an American captain; a

seductive entertainer traveling with her innocent sister; and a crew of other interesting characters. Their ship wrecks in a storm and they find themselves on a deserted island haunted by five malevolent spirits known as the Clentiff Sisters who had been condemned as witches and sentenced to death by the vengeful, narrow-minded people of their village. These pitiful and revengeful ghosts conjure storms and cast spells to taunt and torture those unfortunate enough to sail near their island. Sometimes humorous, and sometimes poignant, the events following the shipwreck level the playing field for these characters and challenge them on to higher levels of courage, honor, and faith in humanity, living or dead.

Ending the cycle of vengeance was the theme of this production created by Lovewell Institute's second international cultural exchange program in Sweden. There were also secondary themes such as the freedom to marry whom one wishes and sibling rivalry. The relationships formed in the 1996 workshop lasted, and now we were ready to establish a more active partnership. The workshop went well. The relationships grew deeper, and the desire to continue the Lovewell cultural exchange intensified.

This was the first opportunity I had to bring my graduate students from NSU's IAP to Sweden to study creative process based cultural exchange. Eight IAP students observed and participated in the process. They spent part of each day in the classroom learning the fundamentals of cultural exchange, Swedish arts and culture, and the Lovewell Method. The other part of each day was spent in the studio or rehearsal hall with the Lovewell staff and students assisting in creating the interdisciplinary artwork. I observed that Lovewell workshops provide the perfect learning environment in which teachers and artists can balance the theory and practice of creative arts-based pedagogy simultaneously. Part of the value of this atmosphere is that the graduate students can alternate between the *why* and the *how* of the skills they are seeking on a moment-to-moment basis.

*BANNED TOGETHER--A Musical Taking Liberties*

July 2004

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, a standalone Lovewell 4-week summer workshop and production (teen summer program), Miniaci Performing Arts Center, NSU.

*Program and Stage Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Assistant Director: Stephanie G. Wieland; Music Director: Ryan McCall; Script Director: Jamie Johnson; Dance Director: Holly McLean; Design/Technical Directors: Ian Schwartz and Joe Hagen;*

*Administrative Directors: Elissa Greenfield and Harriet Mathis; Stage Management: Andy Sheagren.*

In the safe secure little town of Wherever, a controversial work by a local artist sparks a heated debate between two of the town's rival factions: the Overclass (wealthy business leaders and government officials) and the Underclass (artists and freethinkers). Concerned that one piece of art could cause so much chaos, the Overclass (led by a love-starved, country singing mayor) bans self-expression and begins to create government-issued art. Desperate to regain their rights, the Underclass devises some very persuasive tactics to convince the government that art and self-expression are part of every healthy society.

The Lovewell students in this program chose to create an allegory that reflected their concern over the erosion of self-expression, individualism, and creativity. Government-issued art was not a joke to be taken lightly by these young artists (in the workshop or in their play). This theme continues to emerge in various forms in Lovewell teen productions.

*ART DIVIDED/ART UNITED--A Musical Allusion*

July 2004

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, Lovewell JR's fourth annual production (ages 8-12) in cooperation with Camp Nova (NSU), Miniaci Performing Arts Center.

*Director: Andy Sheagren; Music Directors: Tomas Andersson and Jenniffer Nilsén; Script Directors: Andy Sheagren and Margie Spangler; Dance Director: Stephane Duret; Design/Technical Directors: Ian Schwartz and Joe Hagen; Administrative Directors: Harriet Mathis and Elissa Greenfield; Interns: Margie Spangler and Micaela Gutman.*

It was a tragic day in Artworld. At the annual Art Day Celebration, a conflict arises when one of the arts (singing, dancing, and acting) claims to be superior. The only way to end the fighting was to divide the arts into separate sections of the city. All the citizens are sent to Singing Street, Acting Avenue, or Dancing Drive, never to mix again. In this allegory about divisiveness in the arts, young artists learn about the values of unification in their own words: "Art divided each talent so plain / Not a spark of

imagination running through their veins / When art is united--and talents combine / There is beauty as one, together they shine.”

This piece dealt with the theme of single art discipline versus interdisciplinary art. These students did not want to be forced to choose between music, theatre, dance, and visual arts. I thought this was quite a sophisticated viewpoint for a group of 8- to 12-year-old children. They made a case for the value of interdisciplinary arts that I certainly never could have made. The young artists felt strongly that they should have the right and opportunity to mix art forms and disciplines in whatever way they could to tell the stories they had to tell.

### *360°--A MUSICAL CONNECTION*

August 2004

Oskarshamn, Sweden, in cooperation with Elajo, Oscargymnasiet (public secondary school) and Oskarshamns Teatersällskap (Lovewell's third international exchange teen program) partially funded by an International Cultural Exchange grant from the state of Florida, Forum Theatre.

*Directors: Carrie Gilchrist (USA) and Emelie Hasselgren (Sweden); Musical Directors: Nils-Petter Ankarblom, Karl-Johan Ankarblom, and Maria Eriksson; Script Directors: Nina Björk and Henrik Harrysson; Dance Directors: Ulrika Nilsson and Gerri Caruncho; Design Director: Lina Wictorzon; Technical Directors: Erik Axtun, Robert Felixon, and Tommy Larsson; Administrative Director: Ulf Waltersson; Intern: Peter Dunesson.*

A young Swedish girl walking through the park with her father finds a Kronor lying on the ground. Instead of keeping it, the father suggests putting it back on the ground for someone who might need it more. He scribbles “find love” on the bill and the girl places it back on the ground. The story traces the path of the Kronor through the years as the simple message written on it passes hands and helps numerous people in difficult situations to make choices between love and money. The clever and touching vignettes include a United Nations gathering, a reality TV show, and a hospital scandal over a child in critical need of an organ transplant. The Kronor ends up back in the hands of the little girl, now a grown woman, just at the time when she needs it the most--the “find love” Kronor journeyed 360 degrees.

The theme of whether to make choices based on love or money is not new to Lovewell workshops. It was explored elegantly in this bilingual musical. Utilizing the passing of the Kronor as the unifying device, these artists crafted a powerful story around topics common to American and European teenagers (one student was Bosnian and the rest were American and Swedish). The high level of artistry reflected the remarkable skills of the students and staff. As in the previous year, I brought a group of graduate students from NSU's IAP to observe and participate in the workshop. They made some valuable contributions to the production and benefited as the previous group did from the creative flow between theory and practice.

There was a sense that the Lovewell program was taking root in Sweden and that we all hoped it would become an annual event. Bonds were made that generated many students and staff traveling regularly between Sweden and the United States.

*TAKING ROOT--A Groundbreaking Musical*

July 2005

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, a standalone Lovewell 4-week summer workshop and production (teen program), Miniaci Performing Arts Center, NSU.

*Program and Stage Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Assistant Director: Stephanie G. Wieland; Music Director: Ryan McCall; Script Director: Jamie Johnson; Dance Director: Holly McLean; Design/Technical Directors: Ian Schwartz and Joe Hagen; Administrative Directors: Nina Zakrzewski and Harriet Mathis; Interns: Candice Borden, Tobi Nagy, Angela Patane, and Brendan Blase.*

This musical explores folk wisdom and how it applies to modern life. Lessons learned from a great tree tie these songs and scenes together as they reflect contemporary society. Some of the social issues examined include the subtleties of prejudice; cynicism regarding do-gooders; the shallowness of the current "make-over" mentality; the poignancy of a mother, a wife, and a daughter missing the soldier they sent off to war in Iraq; the value of friendship; the plight of a visual artist going blind; and the deep human longing to take root and yet be able to change naturally as the seasons. The songs are well crafted, the vignettes are emotionally and intellectually provocative, and the humor is sharp.

Several themes emerge in this piece as indicated above. Questioning our society's

values and the importance of gratitude are among the most prominent. These teenage artists examined the concept of *connectedness* to the Earth, to their ancestors, and to each other. Here is an excerpt from the lyrics of the closing song:

THE LAUGHTER OF MY FATHER  
AND THE TWINKLE IN HIS EYE  
THE WISDOM OF MY MOTHER  
AND THE STRENGTH TO SAY GOODBYE

TO BE CONNECTED  
WE ALL NEED TO BE FOUND  
THE SOUND OF STORIES  
AND THE WAY WE ARE DEFINED  
LIFE TAKING ROOT  
AND FINALLY BREAKING NEW GROUND  
ALL GENERATIONS  
INTERTWINED  
I AM EVERYTHING  
I NEED TO BE  
I AM WHO I AM  
BECAUSE OF YOU

(Lovewell Institute for the Creative Arts, 2005a)

*THE TIME IT TAKES--A Musical Adventure*

July 2005

Ft. Lauderdale, FL, in cooperation with Camp Nova, Lovewell JR's annual summer production (ages 8-12), Miniaci Performing Arts Center, NSU.

*Director: Emelie Lundin; Musical Director: David Layman; Script Director: Henrik Harrysson; Dance Director: Jacquie Miller; Design Director: Joe Hagen; Technical Directors: Scott Wollek, Michael Zakrzewski, and Mary Lu Odom; Administrative Director: Nina Zakrzewski; Intern: L. E. Odom.*

In a world trying to recover from a nuclear holocaust, the government has decided to genetically engineer all future generations to eliminate individuality and any other differences that might lead to conflict or eventual war. The problem is that the daughter of the second most powerful government official is the last "natural born" and has a mind of her own. She falls in love with a rebel and is mistakenly assassinated in an attempt on his life. The rebel, in a passionate guilt-ridden effort to change fate, finds a time machine

and goes back to before the nuclear holocaust in order to alter history. The remarkable conclusion examines why diversity does not necessarily mean conflict and hostility.

Stripping humans of their differences and individuality is not the solution to war. The people decide that reacting out of fear is not as effective as acting out of love.

The unique aspect of this workshop was that both the stage director and script director were Swedish artists and teachers and had worked with Lovewell's cultural exchange program in Sweden over the past few years. They brought a new level of global awareness and intellectual sophistication to the preteen program. This musical play echoed the students' concerns about genetic modification of human behavior. They were interested in what price humans had to pay for peaceful coexistence.

*The Time It Takes* was the most complex and lengthy narrative plot that the preteen program had ever produced. It was a signal that with the proper guidance, preteens were capable of creating intricate plotlines and rich characterizations that reveal social awareness and compassion. The serious subject matter was always tempered with humor. As a parent I was amazed that my two preteens were so deeply engaged in such an ambitious endeavor. As an artist, I was delighted to see the lyrical story and classic comedy integrated with such grace and skill. As an educator I was gratified to witness a learning experience that immersed the students in such a wealth of teachable moments.

*THE ROAD TO EVILLE--A Dead End Musical*

August 2005

Linköping, Sweden, in cooperation with Lovewell/Sweden and Linköping Kommun (international exchange summer teen program), Saga Theatre.

*Lovewell/Sweden Artistic Director: Emelie Lundin; Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Musical Director: Nils-Petter Ankarblom; Assistant Musical Director/Vocal Coach: Maria Eriksson; Dance Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Script Director: Carrie Gilchrist; Design/Technical Directors: Joe Hagen and Deborah Walsh Mendiola; Administrative Director: Henrik Harryson; Counseling Staff: Orlando Espinoza.*

Eville is a cursed village. This dark twisted tale unfolds in gothic theatrical style as the Mayor of Eville starts to question the town laws based on the acceptance and practice of the seven deadly sins: envy, gluttony, sloth, greed, lust, vanity, and wrath. The citizens of this grotesque little town gleefully examine these iniquities in song, dance, and scenes in English and Swedish as the mayor and several willing townfolk are followed

through the consequences of their behavior and attitudes. The 18th-century curse put on the town by a former disgruntled mayor is revealed, and the prophecy is fulfilled in an 11th-hour dramatic showdown between good and Evil.

This production was a journey into the hearts and minds of teenagers exploring the boundaries between good and evil. They researched the origin of the seven deadly sins and personified each sin with a character and dramaturgical situation that allowed the character to develop a deeper understanding of the consequences of those sins and ultimately of some form of redemption. It is a darkly comic tale that reveals the curiosity and passion of young artists in search of a moral compass.

This program further solidified Lovewell's presence in Sweden and formed bonds in Linköping, a university town with potential for future partnerships with Lovewell. I had the opportunity to nurture relationships with like-minded professors at Linköping University and share information and resources supporting the educational value of interdisciplinary arts. It was comforting to realize that professors in Sweden are as dedicated as I am to the further development of interdisciplinary arts as a tool for educational, social, and personal transformation.