

Dramatists Guild Fellows

The Dramatists Guild Fellows Program was founded by Council members Janet Neipris, Arthur Kopit, Lynn Ahrens, and Steve Flaherty in 2000. It was established to form a community of emerging playwrights, lyricists, and composers. Supported by the Guild and the Dramatists Guild Fund, this outreach program is designed for those theater writers who have completed a graduate program, or have comparable practice in organized writers' workshops or other pertinent experience. Each year, ten playwrights, composers and lyricists are selected to participate. This year's fellows are Jill Abramovitz, Aron Accurso, Lucy Boyle, Alexis Clements, Adam Gwon, Sarah Hammond, Jordan Mann, Colin McKenna, Jeffrey Thomson, and Dan Trujillo.

The fellows meet twice a month to present their work and participate in discussions and critiques with theater professionals. Guests and mentors have included Edward Albee, Bill Brohn, Christopher Burney, Craig Carnelia, Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, David Faux, Carol Hall, Mark Hollmann, David Henry Hwang, Tina Howe, Arthur Kopit, Richard Maltby and David Shire, Terrence McNally, Susan Miller, Marsha Norman, Steven Oremus, Sarah Ruhl, Diana Son, Ralph Sevush, and Doug Wright. The program also offers a mentorship for each fellow, opportunities for internships on this season's productions, theater tickets, and a yearly presentation of their work. Each year we welcome applications from interested writers. Please contact Tari Stratton at the Guild for more information on this program.

The fellows have had a productive year presenting exciting work in each meeting, receiving feedback and returning with inspiring revisions. Each fellow selected an excerpt from their works-in-progress to share in *The Dramatist*. In September, we invite you to attend their presentation of work on Mon., Sep. 24, 7 p.m. in the Dramatists Guild's Frederick Loewe Room. That same evening, we will present the new Dramatists Guild fellows, selected from a large number of applications, and our eighth year begins.



Jill Abramovitz (lyrics),
Aron Accurso (music)

In the days after the explosion at Chernobyl, the government orders all citizens to evacuate and leave behind their pets, who have been contaminated. Boychik, an abandoned young mutt who can't let go of his masters, weighs his hunger against his

guilt as the rest of the pack prepares to attack the cow behind the hedges. ... We presented several different drafts of this moment before finally arriving at this song. Our earlier drafts were too much about guilt, or too philosophically knowing or too angry. When we presented these to Lynn, Steve, Andrea, Arthur Kopit and the fellows, they encouraged us to expand the moment further and explore the dogs' primal satisfaction in the kill. We made the addition of this song and the scene finally popped for us. (Lesson: It's always good to have a team of kind geniuses on hand to help!)

"Some More" from *The Dogs of Pripyat*

BOYCHIK

Think of your aching belly
Be a good boy, don't scratch, don't fight
I'm not a bad dog

Think of your aching belly
Grisha and Marya, warm and bright
I'm not a bad dog

My doggie bed
My corner by the window
My yellow ball
Who's your good boy?
I'm not a bad dog –
Tell me what I should do!

Think of it in your food bowl
Succulent, pink, just one small bite
Think of her there, right over there
Think of your hunger and
Think of it marbled and pink
Think of her there – it there
Don't even think!

(Boychik runs behind the hedge and joins the dogs behind in killing the cow. It is war. After, a dazed Boychik emerges.)

Ragged breathing, bloody face
Easy catch. No fight, no chase.
Did she see me? I saw her.
I looked in her eyes. Her eyes.

Vision blurring, skin was hot
Sort of me but also not
Something rumbling, rising, reaching through
(The taste, the sweet, the ooohh...)
How did I know what to do?
NINOTCHKA (*running on*)
(*spoken*) Boychik!
BOYCHIK
Crazy how I dove right in
Felt like heaven, felt like sin
Did you see me?
NINOTCHKA
I saw you! You did it!
BOYCHIK
I know! I know!
How I spotted the rump!
Jumped right onto the back!
Holding on for my life!
Holding on with the others.
Holding and feeling our power combine
And some of that power was mine!
Mine

How we lunged, we scratched and fought
No more shame and no more thought.
Only "fighting with" and "fighting for!"
When can we do it some more?

(Lights up on other dogs)

BUBLIK

How you clung to the snout!
STRELKA

How you hung on the flank!
IGOR

See, it's all in the wrist.
Well, the wrist and the jump-off
STRELKA

Right, a good jump-off is really a skill
BOYCHIK & BUBLIK

It's essential to getting the kill
DOGS

The kill!
Finally something fresh to eat
Finally flesh and blood and meat
Finally felt the wolf that's at the core
I want to feel it

Some more!



Lucy Boyle

I wrote this play in a bakeoff with Paula Vogel last year in the Brown grad playwriting workshop, but the chance to revise it during my DG fellowship with my mentor, Tina Howe, has been invaluable.

From *Girls' School Gothic*

(ASH is in the bathroom of her school, talking to a pair of feet she thinks belong to her friend Peaches under the stall door.)

ASH: Ian McCorkle is such a wild man. You know him, right? Goddard boy? He's totally OOC. I couldn't believe it. We all went to his mom's farm in Connecticut for the weekend. Well, it was his mom's farm, but I have no idea where she was. She was in like one wing of the house and we never saw her. I guess she was having tennis lessons and exercising her horses and stuff, but we didn't see her at all for two days. We just saw this guy, Reynolds, who, like, told us when dinner was ready. It was me, Ian, Jane, and Roland. Two boys, two girls. We all stayed in the attic of the house which I guess used to be the nursery. They had one room, we had another. I could never have predicted what would happen. I mean, especially with the old rocking horse looking on, the shelves of toys. The defunct changing table. You would think it would be weird to, well you know, do stuff with all that around. But it wasn't. We got in, it was late. There had been all this traffic getting out of the city and so we were trapped in the Range Rover for like three hours, which made me think I was going to barf all over Roland. So when we got in to that nursery, this sense of, like, anticipation hung in the air because we'd been trapped for so long. The boys immediately pulled out the 40s they'd been hiding in their backpacks and Ian's dad's bong from the '70s and we all started partaking of that. Peaches, I have never been so wasted in my life. It felt like all the dolls and coloring books in that nursery were spinning around in my head, leaving trails of color like rainbows skipping on a CD. Like a sunset. Then Ian took my hand and led me into a corner. He pushed his body into mine and I melted back onto a pile of old stuffed animals. I was still wearing my kilt – he put his hand under it. Pulled off my bloomers, inched around the elastic edge of my panties, and put his finger inside me. Gingerly. It felt tentative. Not really sure of what to do but desperately wanting to feel it, this warm marsupial wetness inside me. I didn't say anything. I didn't want to scare him off. I liked it. I was like a licked envelope. Even though I could hear Roland and Jane laughing in another part of the room, I let him keep feeling me. Poking sometimes, but mostly making me wetter and wetter with his light touch. I closed my eyes. He reached his other hand up, unsure really how to maneuver all this, and tried to feel up my shirt, struggling to get under my bra, grabbing, stroking, searching, finally arriving at the promised rivets of nip. He tickled them, too soft. Too light. "Harder," I whispered, and he pinched hard, like maybe tweaking his little brother's nipple, and I startled but liked it. Then I heard springs creaking from another part of the room. "What's going on?" I asked Ian. "Roland's fucking Jane, on the rocking horse," he said. "Why don't you do that to me?" I asked, not telling him it would be my first time. "I don't know how," he mumbled, turning away. We figured it out, though. I guided him into me. It was over in two seconds. I bled all over his old stuffed dog named Wombat. He'll have to throw it out.



Alexis Clements

I began Conversation in the second month of the fellowship. It's my first one-person show and has allowed me to explore new terrain, using the audience as an active participant in the piece. This April I performed a 30-min. excerpt for EAT's One Woman Standing Festival.

From *Conversation*

KATHARINE: "Hello," he calls from the front door. "Hello," I call back, standing at the kitchen counter. In he walks, kisses me on the cheek – no, he never did that – most likely he walked to the fridge and pulled out two beers, poured one for each of us and sat down at the table. "Where have you been?" I think I tried never to phrase it quite that way, too much of an interrogation. "Been working late?" "Yes," he would say. And I already knew if that was true or not, most of the time, at least in part. Or I liked to think I did. So it was purely a test, that question, to hear what he would say, to hear what tack he would take. And he would test me back, depending on his mood, or how much beer he'd had to drink, or my mood. He would joke or change the subject or make other conversational maneuvers. But there are few phrases or sentences that I remember so much as that one, "Where have you been?" Where had he been? If actions really do speak louder than words, I should take it as a positive sign that he came home at all. That we would go to bed together every night. But what about the actions he was taking when he wasn't around me? What about the fact that I felt I had to read into every word that came out of his mouth? The tone and inflection of every "the," "and," or "but." And then that one evening, in the kitchen. He was by the stove, cooking something, ratatouille most likely – we were being very domestic. He hadn't even had anything to drink yet, and I came over to see what he was making and he turned, with a big smile on his face, and asked, "Would you have married me, if I had asked?" And without even hesitating, I laughed aloud and said, "You would make a terrible husband." He tried to cover up his disappointment, turned back to the stove, I tried to think of ways to excuse what I said, but there was nothing I could do. After all we'd been through, what did he want, asking me that? And why would I say exactly what I thought, without even thinking about it, before I even realized what was going to come out of my mouth, even when I wanted so much to enjoy our last few months together?



Adam Gwon

I came to the fellowship wanting to start a new project, without a clue as to what that project would be. I brought in this song and ran with it. Eight months later, I had a whole new musical, which got its first reading in June.

"I'll Be Here" (sung by Claire)

We met, of all places, in front of Gristede's
Some freakishly cold winter's day.

I had on several unflattering layers of wool;
He slipped on the ice with his grocery bags full.
So I rescued some Fruit Loops he'd dropped by the curb
And he made some remark that my smile was superb.
I thought that was sweet, and I started to go
When he said, "Hey, whatcha doin' tomorrow?"

Because I'll be here
On the corner of Bleecker and Mercer
Tomorrow at seven.
If you want to meet up
I'll be waiting right here
And in case there are two
Fellas waiting for you
My name's John..."

He waved, and then he was gone.

Needless to say, I went back there to meet him
Mostly to see if he'd show
And there he was, out in the cold with his jacket pulled tight.
He took me to dinner and kissed me goodnight.
The next week we went to this terrible play
And the week after that, drank hot chocolate all day.
And suddenly, eight or nine months had flown by
When he said, "Hey, whatcha doin' the rest of your life?"

Because I'll be here
Right beside you as long as you want me to be
There's no question.
There is nothing I've wanted
So much in my life.
This might sound immature
But I'm totally sure
You're the one!"

And we had just begun...

We got hitched in September, our favorite month
With a rock band that played in this old synagogue.
And we bought an apartment on West 17th Street
And talked about children and getting a dog.
Our first anniversary came in a flash
And we promised to take the day off.
He had to stop in to his office that morning, and so
I went walking uptown to this bakery I know
When I heard on the street what I thought was a joke
'Til I noticed the sirens and saw all the smoke
So I'm running back home with this feeling of dread
To the voicemail he'd left with the last words he said.

I'm sorry, I don't mean to ruin your evening
By bringing up all of this stuff.
You're probably wondering why I even called you tonight.
Well, today something happened that spooked me all right:

I discovered his Fruit Loops still there on the shelf
And I cried and I couldn't get hold of myself
When as sure as I breathe, I heard John, clear as day
Saying, "Hey, you're allowed to move on ... it's okay

Because I'll be here
Even if you decide
To get rid of my favorite sweater.
Even if you go out
On my birthday this year
'Stead of sitting at home
Letting all of life's moments
Pass by.

You don't have to cry...

Because I'll be here
When you start going back
To the places we went to together.
When you take off my ring
And you let yourself smile.
When you meet someone handsome and patient and true
When he says that he wants to be married to you
When you call him one night
And he meets you downtown
And you finally answer him "Yes."

Yes ...

Jason, I will marry you
I will give you my heart.
It has taken so long
But I'm ready to start.

Right now, John's whispering congrats in my ear
'Cause I've finally let myself tell you
That I will be here.



Sarah Hammond

The fellows were a great bunch for bouncing brand new, totally molten scenes around in workshop.

"Backyard Scene" from untitled play in progress

(Mitchell and Frieda sort laundry in the backyard. Sound of a car pulling in next door. They look over the fence.)

MITCHELL: There's Mr. Jar. Home from school.
FRIEDA: White-out's home. Home to mother.
MITCHELL: He has bags from the Piggly Wiggly and the office supply store. Gets the mail. Looks at a flower.
Discovers a dead mouse. With the tip of his toe, he gently rolls it into the shrubbery.
FRIEDA: I wish we had a taller fence.
MITCHELL: He went in.
FRIEDA: I wish we had a cinderblock wall.

MITCHELL: See that massive black eye? Massive!
FRIEDA: White-out had a black eye?
MITCHELL: Hello. There was that girl fight in the cafeteria at lunch.

FRIEDA: *(gleeful)* White-out got a black eye in a girl fight!
MITCHELL: Shouldn't call him that, Frieda. He's older than us. He's got degrees.

FRIEDA: He's got a red pen.
MITCHELL: You still failing his class?
FRIEDA: Probably. Listen, can I ask you a question?

MITCHELL: 'Bout what?
FRIEDA: I mean, are we back together or what?
MITCHELL: That's a weird question. You want to be back together?

FRIEDA: Not really, but if you're gonna be here all the time.
MITCHELL: I told you, I need to focus on my graduation speech.

FRIEDA: Anyway, you're distracting me.

MITCHELL: From what?

FRIEDA: I dunno. Me.

MITCHELL: I worry about you, Frieda. Al's working all the time. Your parents are gone. Nobody's looking out for you. I feel protective. I worry your nutso looney brother's gonna kill you in your sleep.

FRIEDA: Jeez, Mitchell, Ryno isn't –

MITCHELL: I heard he's the one turned Mr. Jar's hair white.

FRIEDA: Ryno did not turn Christopher Jar's hair –

MITCHELL: I heard –

FRIEDA: White-out's had white hair since the earth's crust cooled.

MITCHELL: Nope. Nah ah. Useta be red.

(The sprinkler starts in Christopher's yard. A resplendent arc of water. Frieda mimics the sound.)

FRIEDA: Tch tch.

MITCHELL: What's a kid do to turn another kid's hair white?

FRIEDA: Tch tch tch tch. Christopher Jar smells like white-out. Have you noticed? From all that time at the dry erase board. Christopher Jar teaches math to children. Christopher Jar grooms his mother's Persian cat with a silver comb. Once he was over there gardening, on his stomach. Like lying down. Right? Through the fence, I could just see the top of his head, and I mistook him for the cat and I was calling "here kitty, here kitty" and then Christopher Jar turned around and looked at me, and I was like, "aw shit." Kitty was a math teacher. Then his mom came out. *(Laughs)* His mom. Christopher Jar obsessively waters his lawn.



Jordan Mann (lyrics), Jeff Thomson (music)

One of the challenges in shaping a new musical is giving musical voice to what the protagonist wants and needs. When one grows up listening to brilliant songs like Stephen Schwartz's "Corner of the Sky" or Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's "Waiting for Life," it is easy to believe that these songs are effortless and that the character's want is completely self-evident. In working on our musical Pump Up the Volume, we were faced with the challenge of writing for a character

that faces difficulties communicating with others and understanding his motivations. Finding the key to the character required a great deal of exploration and three complete rewrites. During the year, working with Lynn, Stephen, Andrea, the other fellows, and all the incredible guest artists, we learned that the creative process is just that—a process. It requires work, experimentation, and the willingness to learn from mistakes. Finding the right words and music is a process that is the same for everyone, no matter how brilliant or experienced they may be. It was a lesson that was reassuring, humbling and utterly invaluable.

“When the Words Won’t Come” from *Pump Up the Volume*

(In the course of this song we see Mark, a painfully shy teenager, as he navigates a day avoiding his teachers, peers and his father until he reaches the safety of his basement radio studio, where he can express himself.)

When you have the words
You answer every question just like that
When they need the answer there you are
People ask you for advice
Maybe get some homework help
When you’re the classroom genius
You’re the star

But the words won’t come
So you slouch down in your seat
And the words won’t come
So you stare down at your feet
When the words won’t come
No surrender, no defeat if you retreat
And you play dumb
When the words won’t come

When you have the words
You’re chatting with the girl with pale green eyes
Crack a friendly joke once in a while
Ask about the club she runs
Tell her that you’d like to join
She tells you “Sure why not”
And starts to smile

But the words won’t come
So you stammer, turn aside
And the words won’t come
So you’re trapped and terrified
When the words won’t come
Nothing’s lost when nothing’s tried
When you can hide
Where you stay numb
When the words won’t come

If I had the words
I’d introduce you to Lenny Bruce
And maybe find out more
About the books you like to read
If I had the words
We’d chat on this and that

I’d ask you for a date
And see where things will lead
If I had the words
We’d bitch and moan and laugh
And rave and rant
But I won’t, I can’t

You don’t have the words
So you can’t tell him
Dad I hate this place
Miss my mom the only life I’ve known
You don’t have the words, so screw
Heart to heart and face to face
Who needs it when you’ve got the microphone

Where the words will come
So its time to start the show
And the words will come
Coming through your radio
And before you know
All the daylight phrases
That you kept within
Begin to flow
All the words are there
When you’re on the air
In the static and the hum
All the words will come



Colin McKenna

A highlight of the fellow’s experience was meeting with the star-studded cast of playwrights, composers, and lyricists who took time from their busy careers to work with us. Their comments on our work were invaluable and their presence reinforced the fact that there is a healthily and vibrant professional American theater world eagerly supportive of the emerging playwright.

(The Oven. Zebra Battery, Gate 2. An M-240 points out of a fortified bunker and is manned by PFC Jerome Tucker aka Roadblock. A few feet away CPL. Walt Hickory aka Butthead and translator Mustafa aka Balki are goofing around. Butthead drinks a Red Bull. Occasionally in the distance there’s the sound of gunshots.)

BUTTHEAD: You got to keep the neck loose, Balki. The head flops. Think rag doll. Like so, little grasshopper. Learn from the fucking master.

(Imitating the sound of death metal, Butthead demonstrates the iconic head bang with violent intensity. Balki watches. Butthead ends with a flourish.)

BUTTHEAD (pumped up): WHAT! FUCKING WHAT!
(Beat.) Now you, grasshopper.

BALKI: No, excuse me.

ROADBLOCK: Why you keep saying excuse me, Balki? You fart or something boy? You always saying excuse me after every goddamn mother-fucking thing you say. Good morning, Balki. Good morning, Pvt. Tucker—excuse me. RPG two o’clock! Excuse me. My arm was just blown off—excuse me.

BUTTHEAD: Roadblock, could you shut your cock holster, keep your eyes down the gun barrel and keep protecting us from all those dangerous school children with IEDs strapped to their tricycles? Class is in session and Balki is midway through his exam. Head-banging Studies 101. Blow me away, grasshopper.

BALKI: You crazy.

BUTTHEAD: Damn right I am. Fucking Dick Cheney loco and I want to see you fucking head-bang, grasshopper.

BALKI: Hurts too much, excuse me.

BUTTHEAD: No pain no mother-fucking gain. (Begins head-banging) Come on Balki! BANG IT UH BANG IT UH AND SPIN AND SPIN!

BALKI: You too much sugar, excuse me.

BUTTHEAD: DAMN RIGHT, MY ARAB BROTHER! It’s because I can’t have any fucking beer in this godforsaken sandpit of a country of yours and my only joys are this (ruising his Red Bull), the elixir of life Red Bull, and fucking, delicious, nutritious HoHos. (Beat) And you Balki, you are my other happiness. Our times together, teacher and student, the wisdom of the ages I passed down to you: everything I’ve learned about the history of my country from a lifetime spent watching VH-1 specials. Don’t disappoint me, grasshopper. Let me see what you’ve learned! Show me! Show me the great art of the hardcore head-bang!

BALKI: Then you give me your magazine?

BUTTHEAD (pulling a magazine out of his cargo pants): Yes, grasshopper. A new issue of Maxim just came in the mail. Jessica Simpson is on the cover looking nuclear hot. “Like you never seen her before,” it says!

BALKI: I like it much. It mad good magazine.

(Balki takes a moment to build up and then breaks out with a pretty passable but definitely Iraqi imitation of Butthead’s head-banging.)

BUTTHEAD: There’s tears in my eyes. Roadblock, they grow up so quick nowadays, don’t they?

ROADBLOCK: You keep this training up, Balki, and work real hard every day you can grow up to be a real live white boy like Butthead here.

BALKI: The Maximum, please. Excuse me.



Dan Trujillo

I start a script with fancy ideas. Most of them turn to an oily residue on first reading. Thankfully I have a table of talented writers like the Guild Fellows. They help me find what’s left, what’s simple and dramatic.

From *Distance*

(Jewel and Melk, separate, to the audience)

JEWEL: I left.

MELK: I stayed.

JEWEL: Because of that place.

MELK: Because of this place.

JEWEL: Overcrowded and polluted.

MELK: Six languages I hear every day.

JEWEL: The sense of entitlement.

MELK: The world on every corner.

JEWEL: They think everything in the world orbits around

this little island on the mouth of the Hudson.

MELK: Have you seen the sun behind the skyscrapers? It’s a unique unique beauty, you gotta come open to it.

JEWEL: I did that.

MELK: She didn’t.

JEWEL: Believe me.

MELK: Believe me.

JEWEL: I left because.

MELK: I stayed because.

JEWEL: At this hipster bar, this friend of his.

MELK: The great people, my buddy Tony, perfect example.

JEWEL: Every joke was always, here’s the stupidest thing to say.

MELK: Razor-sharp jokes.

JEWEL: He’d say it in a Southern accent.

MELK: Or more like razor-sharp comments.

JEWEL: And when I said I was from Kentucky.

MELK: Razor sharp joke-ish comments.

JEWEL: He said, “Give your daddy a kiss for me.”

MELK: She didn’t get him. (Pause) I stayed.

JEWEL: I left.

MELK: Because okay I grew up out there.

JEWEL: I went back to Lexington, My Old Kentucky Home.

MELK: I grew up in Indiana.

JEWEL: Folks actually smile at me.

MELK: Oh those people smile, they smile all day long.

JEWEL: Like they did when I was a kid.

MELK: They smiled at me as they followed me home from school.

JEWEL: On a bench at the DQ, eating a dip cone.

MELK: They smiled as they beat me up and threw me in Sugar Creek.

JEWEL: He never gave folks a chance. My doctor was clear up on the twenty-ninth floor. (Pause) I had this soreness, he told me I had bruises on the inside of my body, no marks on my skin, but my muscles and bones, bruised, as if I’d been in a violent car accident. (Pause) Western medicine’s a crock, no drugs for me, who needs ‘em when the cause is so obvious: I was bruised on the inside ‘cause something inside me was bruising, the atmosphere I was breathing in, that place, I *did not* Wanna Be a Part Of It, so I left.

MELK: I stayed.

JEWEL: ‘Cause the future.

MELK: Because the future.

JEWEL: Wasn’t there.

MELK: Is right here.

JEWEL: I tried.

MELK: I tried.

JEWEL & MELK: We hoped for.

MELK: A loft in an old spice factory.

JEWEL: A loft that smelled like cinnamon.

MELK: High ceilings and a view of the river.

JEWEL: But we had a railroad apartment, our shower in the kitchen.

MELK: I’d come into our living room, she was always *always* on the couch. (Pause) I’d say there’s still some daylight left, let’s go *let’s go* honey, let’s find a new park, let’s go eat Jamaican patties, adopt a cat, but she was on the couch, stuck, I went through the entire What To Do In The City Guidebook. ♦