October events:

**In the Next Room, or The Vibrator Play** is the Department of Theater’s inaugural production in the Whitman Theater (see dates at right). For reservations, please call 718-951-4500.

**Maidenhead** by Kim Davies, directed by Welker White (see profile, page 3), will be the first in a series of play readings co-sponsored by the theater department and the playwriting program. Admission is free for the event, Friday, October 21, at 2:30 p.m., Roosevelt Hall, Room 307.
Up and Comer: Jonathan Blitstein

By Andy Buck

It’s hard to figure how Jonathan Blitstein has time to pursue an MA in Theater History and Criticism. This year, he helped launch a new theater company called Lesser America, which, in the spring, premiered his second full-length play, Squealer, and this month, a sold-out evening of one-acts by various writers, titled Too Much Too Soon. In 2010, his first full-length play Keep Your Baggage With You (at all times) was a downtown hit at Theater for the New City. (It won a New York Innovative Theater Award last month, which was handed to Blitstein by the Tony-winning playwright David Henry Hwang.) His first film, 2008’s Let Them Chirp Awhile was a breakaway indie hit that Blitstein wrote, directed, and partly bankrolled with the help of about ten credit cards. And next year brings a new round of works for stage and screen.

What inspired you to write your debut play, Keep Your Baggage With You, which chronicles the relationships of several young people at the beginning of the 21st century?

I was frustrated with trying to put films together and the difficulties in raising funding. I also had been through a relationship and a breakup, and I had seen friends, who had come to New York with these idealistic visions, just get pummeled. I had moved to New York [from the Chicago area] ten days before 9/11, and the idea of the post-9/11 fallout on the American psyche is at the root of all of my work.

What was your own experience on 9/11?

I was living in an NYU dorm on Third Avenue and Twelfth Street. When I went to class, there were people already walking up the avenue covered in ash. It’s sort of a blur, but I remember I was taking a British literature class and we were reading Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. Everyone in the class was crying, people were trying to call their parents. It was terrifying. There were all these rumors that there were nuclear bombs in the planes that were going to go off at any second.

Your first film shoot, Let Them Chirp Awhile, was dramatic in its own smaller way, driving you into debt and sending you to the hospital for ulcers.

That movie helped me get every job I’ve had since then. But it completely ruined my life for awhile. Had I understood what I was doing, I would never have done it. There’s something awesome about being stupid.

Jonathan Blitstein (left) with David Henry Hwang at the Innovative Theater Awards
“I’ve been to so many schools, it’s not even interesting anymore to list them,” insists Welker White (MFA, ‘10). But after dropping out at 19 and then pursuing a successful acting career, it was to Brooklyn College that White finally came to complete her undergraduate education. “I had never thought about going back,” she says. “But after 9/11, I thought, ‘Gosh, I should have a degree.’ I don’t know why. I felt my own mortality or something.”

Once ensconced in Brooklyn, White enjoyed it so much, she stayed on to pursue an MFA in directing, lured by the chance to work more with veteran instructors like Thomas Bullard and Mary Robinson. “Mary was the first professional director I ever worked with, when I was 19,” White says. “She cast me in a production of Lanford Wilson’s Lemon Sky at Second Stage, a huge off-Broadway hit with Jeff Daniels and Cynthia Nixon. Mary is the kind of director that I aspire to be, which is somebody who places the text first and foremost, gently guiding the play where it needs to go.”

For movie fans, the most celebrated director with whom White has collaborated is undoubtedly Martin Scorsese, who cast her as the drug mule with the lucky hat in his 1990 classic, Goodfellas. “He’s just the sweetest, most generous man,” she exclaims of the Oscar-winning legend. “I’ve never had a director so completely let the actors in on exactly how he was going to shoot a scene and ask for their input. He’d say, ‘Here’s how I’m shooting it, here’s the lens I’m using, here’s what we’re going to see.’ You’ll see directors do that with stars but rarely with supporting players.”

Since graduating in 2010, White has pursued acting (Cedar Rapids with Ed Helms), teaching, and directing. This summer, she helmed her own adaptation of Molière’s The Miser, featuring her husband, actor Damian Young, and Obie-winning performer Jan Leslie Harding. This month, she helps launch the first in a series of play readings co-sponsored by Brooklyn College’s Department of Theater and the English Department’s acclaimed playwriting program (see page 1).

And, in the spring, White will direct the theater department’s production of José Rivera’s Marisol, a surreal, early ’90s tale of angels, apocalypse, and urban chaos. “I wanted a New York City play for Brooklyn College,” she explains. “The whole second half takes place in Brooklyn. It’s poetic in a visceral, aggressive way.”
ALUMNI News briefs:

BA in Theater

• Reynaldo Piniella: Worked with director Woodie King Jr., founder of the New Federal Theatre, on Benito Cereno at the Flea Theater, through October 16

BFA in Acting

• Lisa Anderson, 2011: Has been hired for a competitive internship at Rattlestick Theatre in Manhattan

• Ugo Chukwu, 2009: Performed in Future Anxiety at the Flea Theater in a spring production that also featured BA actor Reynaldo Piniella

• Justin Davis, 2011: Recently appeared in two national commercials for J. C. Penney and Coca Cola, and continues in his recurring role on HBO’s “Boardwalk Empire”

• Mack Exilus, 2009: Received AEA membership by performing a lead role in A Behanding in Spokane by Martin McDonagh, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre, Massachusetts

• Rosa Fernandez: Her play Professor What was selected by the Emmanuel Fried New Play Workshop at Buffalo’s Road Less Traveled Theater

• Luke Leonard: Produced a new work in progress, Here I Go, at Dixon Place in Manhattan, with his theater company, Monk Parrots, courtesy of a grant from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

• Thomas J. Lombardo: Inaugurates his new theater company, Look at the Fish Theatre, with a revival of Don Nigro’s Seascape with Sharks and Dancer, November 3-20, at the Red Room Theatre in Manhattan

• Michael LoPorto: Directed The Producers at Park Playhouse in Albany, New York, and Next by Stephen Gracia at HERE Arts Center in Manhattan

• Collin McConnell, 2010: Appeared with Adirondack Shakespeare Company in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (as Guildenstern), as well as in A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Merchant of Venice

• Jose A. Rivera: Performed in As You Like It at Buffalo’s Shakespeare in Delaware Park, and in Peter Pan at Buffalo’s New Phoenix Theatre Company

• Adam Smith: Appeared in his third season with Bakerloo Theatre, Troy, New York, as Orsino in Twelfth Night

• Francisco Solorzano, 2000: Is directing, through October 22, the latest venture from Barefoot Theatre Company, a revival of Joe Pintauro’s Raft of the Medusa, at the Cherry Lane Theatre, featuring a cast and creative team of fellow Brooklyn College alumni, including Samantha Fontana, Michael Pierre Louis, Gillian Rougier, Andrew MacLarty, Morgan Eisen, Minna Taylor, Niluka Hotaling, Victoria Malvagno, and Eric Vigdorov

MFA in Acting

• Emme Bonilla: Booked a Commercial VO in Spanish for Garanimals, a children’s clothing line, and, from October 20 to 30, is performing with Becca Landis (MFA, 2009) in the Morningside Players’ production of Mrs. Farnsworth, directed by Susanna Frazer (MFA in Directing, 2009)
ALUMNI News briefs:

• Ann Bonner, 2002: Appeared in the Actor’s Project NYC August production of Screams of the Butterflies, at the Dorothy Streslin Theatre

• Bianca Bryan, 2008: Performed at Alice Tully Hall last spring with the ensemble Broadway Sensation, which was broadcast live in Times Square

• Sonora Chase: Appeared in the indie feature My Best Day, performed in an improv show at Upright Citizens Brigade East, presented her play Winning on the Losing End of Things at this summer’s Gi60: Gone in 60 Seconds, and appeared in a segment on Comedy Central’s “The Colbert Report” featuring the year’s funniest commercials

• Fatih Genckal, 2008: Currently based in Istanbul, appearing in the feature film Voice of My Father; has recently published a translation of The Price by Arthur Miller for Mitos Boyut Publishing

• Becca Landis, 2009: Worked on a new musical titled Unville Brazil, in association with the Drilling Company in Manhattan, and on the Morningside Players’ current revival of Mrs. Farnsworth

• Jorge Luna, 2009: Performed this summer in El médico de su honra by Pedro Calderón de la Barca at Repertorio Español

• Vanessa Parvin, 2005: Appearing in City of Angels at Goodspeed Opera House at least through November 27, and at a CD-release party on November 7 at the Laurie Beechman Theater, for the debut album of her MAC Award-winning vocal group, Marquee Five

• LaTonia Phipps, 2008: Featured in All American Girls at the Actors Temple Theatre, New York and, subsequently, at the National Black Theater Festival in North Carolina

• Johanna Pinzler, 2008: Won a 2010 San Francisco Area Broadway World Award for Best Director for The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee at Summer Repertory Theatre in Sonoma County; directed Company this summer at the same theater

• Jennifer Provenza: Workshopped her play Nina’s Musical Ear as a staged reading at the Playwrights Project in San Diego

• Richard Rella Jr: Appeared with fellow MFA Paula Jon DeRose in Scapino! at the Shadow Lawn Stage in West Long Branch, New Jersey, and in a performance of Tony N’ Tina’s Wedding in Marlboro, New Jersey

• Emily Clare Zempel, 2007: Received a grant last year to start a multi-disciplinary arts non-profit called Spark and Echo Arts, which is developing a new play about the Old Testament character of Esther, as well as a new interpretation of Othello

MFA in Design

• Hae Jin Han, 2012: Created the lighting design for Bound, Professor Laura Tesman’s co-adaptation of the Prometheus and Pandora myths, which played at New York Theatre Workshop’s 4th Street Theatre, with set and costume design from MFA alums Christopher Hoyt and Jennifer Stimple, respectively, and stage management by BA alum Rekima Cummins
ALUMNI News briefs:

MFA in Directing

- Meghan Finn: Directed 3 2’s or Afar (written by Mac Wellman, the head of the Brooklyn College Playwriting Program), which is running at Dixon Place through October 29, featuring performer/puppeteer Chuja Seo, a BA in Theater alum
- Shana Gold: Will be directing Lameece Issaq’s Food and Fadwa for New York Theater Workshop’s spring season, in conjunction with Noor Theater
- Cyndy A. Marion: Presented Tennessee Williams’ Suddenly Last Summer this fall with White Horse Theater, for which she is the producing artistic director
- Johnmichael Rossi, 2006: Pursuing a practice-based PhD at London’s University of Reading and continuing to develop work through his company, newFangled theatReR, a collective that includes several BC alums, including Bret Jaspers

MFA in Dramaturgy

- Desi Moreno-Penson, 2004: Published four of her plays this fall through Broadway Play Publishing and presented a new short play, Comida de Puta (f@#king lousy food), as part of the River Crosses Rivers/Going to the River II Festival at Ensemble Studio Theatre in Manhattan

MFA in Performing Arts Management

- Amanda Pekoe, 2006: Heads the Pekoe Group, a full-service, boutique marketing and advertising company, specializing in Broadway, off-Broadway, touring theatrical productions, attractions, and museums
- Teresa Woodall, 2011: Helped present, with Whitney Britt (2011), a show at the 2011 New York Musical Theater Festival, Blanche: The Bittersweet Life of a Wild Prairie Dame, October 6 and 7

MA in Theater History and Criticism

- Russell Dembin, 2013: Selected to be the new associate editor at The Sondheim Review, a quarterly magazine dedicated to the works of musical theater composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim

MFA Playwriting Program, English Department

- Dennis A. Allen II: Presenting his ten-minute play A Shadow With No Form at this month’s Harvest One-Act Play Festival, at the Hudson Guild Theatre in Manhattan
- Annie Baker, 2009: Has been named one of the Signature Theatre’s Residency Five playwrights, which guarantees her three world-premiere productions over the course of a five-year residency at the award-winning off-Broadway theater company
ALUMNI News briefs:

• Chad Beckim: Presented his newest play, *After*, in an acclaimed run this fall at the Wild Project in Manhattan

• Kristoffer Diaz, 2009: Won the 2011 Obie Award for Best New American Play for *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*. Also receiving a Special Citation was Young Jean Lee for *We’re Gonna Die*

• Young Jean Lee, 2005: Workshopped her new dance narrative piece, tentatively called *Untitled Feminist Multimedia Technology Show*, at the Baryshnikov Center last month in anticipation of its Minneapolis premiere and its official New York debut at P.S. 122’s COIL Festival, both in January. In addition, a broadcast of her play *The Shipment* was shown on October 17 at BAM Rose Cinemas via OntheBoards.tv

• Normandy Raven Sherwood, 2009: Designed costumes for Mac Wellman’s *3 2’s or Afar* at Dixon Place; teaches writing in the Brooklyn College Department of English; is co-curator of Little Theatre @ Dixon Place, a monthly performance series; and is currently writing and costuming a new play for her company the National Theater of the United States of America, which will premiere in May 2012

Please let us know what you’re up to. Contact us at: TheaterAlumni@brooklyn.cuny.edu