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Theater Department Milestones in the Evolution of CSB/SJU Cooperation

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The earliest examples of CSB/SJU cooperation had to do with theater productions.
See also:

Previous “history lessons” on CSB’s Ardeleons theatrical group are available on the “history lessons” page on the Archives’ websites.

(and Part 2)

Drama on a Women’s Campus

The Ardeleons

Part 1
This is one of the earliest images of a theatrical performance at St. John’s. Note the all-male cast, and the blackface characters. (Yes, that’s part of our history, too.)

“Garcia Morenos Tod’ …was played by members of the St. Boniface Literary Association to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation.”
The St. Boniface Literary Association was organized in 1870 by the German students for the cultivation of the German language and literature. ...In March 1870... [it opened]...a library of choice German books.” And here’s their program for a 1910 play.
The cast of “Zwei Studen in Muenchen,” perhaps?
Aside from the Exhibition Hall (1872-1894 and a history lesson for another day!), this was the first performance venue at St. John’s.

Nowadays part of it is still a large room, though not quite so large, that’s on the 3rd floor of the Quad, above Q264/the Centenary Room.
Here’s that early stage again, all decked out...for something.
In the early days at St. Ben’s, performances took place in this theater, on the second floor of Teresa Hall, which doubled as a classroom.
...and, a few years later, the College was established in 1913.
The College and Academy’s “Department of Expression” represented the closest thing to a Speech or Theater department at that time.

DEPARTMENT OF EXPRESSION

The aim of this department is to develop beauty, power, and flexibility of the speaking voice. Pupils will be trained in the reading of short stories, monologues, and the literary forms peculiar to today, as well as the best of classic literature, prose and poetry.

The regular work of this department is divided into two parts: a preparatory and an advanced course. The preparatory course covers a period of two years and is so arranged that it may be taken together with the regular high school course. The advanced course covers a period of two years, and is open to those who have finished High School English in addition to the elementary course of this department.

VOICE CULTURE

The course of instruction in singing is thorough and systematic. The method used is based upon the Italian School of Voice and German Methods, with their deep, elastic breath control, voice-placing, accent, phrasing and distinct enunciation.
And a couple of years after that, the Department of Expression featured the “Shakespeare Dramatic Club,” which gives “literary plays and entertainments.”
Meanwhile, at St. John’s, the theatrical and musical arts make a major leap forward with the 1928 construction of a new Auditorium...
...used by prep and college students alike. Here's a Prep School cast from 90+ years ago. No females needed.
In 1934 someone very important to Theater and Music at St. John’s shows up among the faculty: Fr. Dominic Keller, originally as a history professor.
By the next year, he’s directing the Prep plays.
That same page in the 1935 yearbook shows that the college students were putting on a Morality play...again, no females required.
Same goes for “Captain Van Der Hum” in 1936. This image is a cropping of another photo:
Here’s the complete photo in the Archives, showing the piano and organ in the pit.
“Father Dominic directing Johnny Players for the first time, [is] responsible in large part for the success…” while he’s also teaching in the History department, moderating the International Relations Club and directing the Student Choristers...

In keeping with a time-honored tradition, the Johnny Players gave a Lenten play at the end of the penitential season of ’37—without the customary scenes that make the audience experience vicariously the horror of sin and death . . . . This year a simple play—depicting the life of a holy man—and his struggles to achieve sanctity—a relief from the heavy and nerve-wracking moralities . . . . Father Dominic directing Johnny Players for the first time—responsible in large part for the success . . . . Ed Fleming in the title role, as St. Bernard—won plaudits—resonant voice—fine work in character portrayal, especially in exposition...
Meanwhile, back at St. Ben’s, the Department of Expression was replaced by the Department of Speech in the late 1930s. It offers a course in Play Production.

Department of Speech

The courses in this department are planned to equip students to teach public speaking, debate, and dramatics in high schools; to develop in them poise and ease in appearing before an audience; and to give training to those seeking purely personal culture. Supplementing the regular courses of study in play production is the dramatic club, the Ardeleons—(see Clubs on page 20). Its purpose is to furnish practical training to its members by the presentation of standard plays to the public.

The department also offers opportunities for speech correction to those who desire such assistance.

Elements of Play Production.

Technique of dramatic art. Theory and practice in stage lighting, make-up, arrangement of scenery. Demonstrations in costuming and color scheme. Training in stage management and direction of plays. Three hours a week of laboratory work in the rehearsing of scenes and plays.

Prerequisite: Speech 3.

Quarter credits 4.
Fr. Dominic reorganizes the Players, on stage and behind the scenes.

Last fall Rev. Dominic Keller, O. S. B., faculty moderator, called a meeting of the outstanding actors on the campus and together they thrashed out the organization problem. A small group was selected as a nucleus for the new club. Each of these men was given definite jobs in connection with lighting, programs, scenery, etc., over and above a chance to act in the year's productions. The arrangements proved to be eminently successful.
The Johnny Players club is “one of the most popular extra-curricular activities on the campus” under Fr. Dominic’s guidance.
Being single-gendered campuses posed challenges for Theater productions. Plays on both campuses seem to have been selected to minimize the number of male performers needed for St. Ben’s productions...

All of these parts are played by the Bennies, including the Irish “lads.”

1940s
...and to avoid having Johnnies play female roles.

Likewise, plays at St. John’s were selected to avoid Johnnies having to play female roles...at least for the most part.

“The Great Theater of the World” 1951
were represented in St. Ben’s annual Pageant by an entirely female cast.
Women play the sailors in this scene from a production of HMS Pinafore.

It was decades before students from SJU came to play the male roles.
The real achievement of the year, however, came this spring with the staging of HAMLET, especially re-written for a male cast by Father Dominic. The original five acts and twenty scenes were rearranged...while the character ERIC was inserted to take many of the lines that Shakespeare had originally given to the queen.

In 1946, speech classes were taught within the English Department, and in 1951, within the Division of Languages & Literature.

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The 1946-47 CSB catalog spells out the offerings by its Department of Speech, and still lists a course in Play Production.
1950

Things start to come together between the campuses. Separate one-act plays on both campuses were performed together...sort of (one after the other)

Bard’s Gentlemen
Join The Ladies

Shakespeare, St. John’s and St. Ben’s will combine forces Thursday evening in the university auditorium for two one-act plays.

A group of Bennies belonging to the “Ardeleons,” St. Ben’s dramatic group, will present a comedy, “When Shakespeare’s Ladies Meet,” directed by Doris Bogut. “When Shakespeare’s Gentlemen Get Together,” featuring freshmen Johnny Players, will also appear on the same program. This latter skit was given earlier this year during a regular convocation period.

This Thursday evening presentation is the first exchange program this year between the two colleges.

“When Shakespeare’s Ladies and Gents get together”
When Shakespeare's Ladies Meet backstage (a photo I include just for the fun of it)
1951: A mixed chorus and one Bennie with a role are in an opera at St. John’s.
March 1952:

“Bennies made their debut with the Johnny Players when the dramatic crews of the two schools merged for the production of the one-act play ‘Thor, With Angels.’”
May 1952: A joint play, *Antigone*, is performed as a radio version by the Ardeleons of CSB & the Johnny Players...

...and apparently also performed in St. Joe.
May 1953  *La Bohème* is the “first full-length standard-repertory opera ever presented at St. John’s”

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**The Word Got 'Round**

**The House Was Fully Packed**

By Gary Gross

*La Bohème*, the first full-length standard-repertory opera ever presented at St. John’s, was enthusiastically received here last week at all three performances. Success of the opening night’s production led to packed houses at subsequent performances. The word got round.

Use of the English version by Grist and Pinkerton, revised by Father James Kelly, made the opera completely intelligible to appreciative audiences.

An important factor in this signal success was the amazingly fine quality of the four principal voices, those of James Landwehr, Joyce Hirsch, Richard Berg, and Marilyn Yunkers.

The staging of the opera, under the direction of Father Dominic Keller, OSB, was smooth and fluid. Particularly fine was the Latin Quarter street scene in the second act. It was an animated performance.

The chorus groups showed the effects of good discipline and training at the hands of Sister Firmin and Father Bartholomew, and Father James, from his position in the pit, did a marvelous job of molding the various groups into a harmonious unit.

Paul Huber and Robert Southers collaborated in designing the sets; they were simple but very effective. Even the costumes seemed to fit better than usual.

All in all, the opera proved to be a great popular success. Enthusiasm on the campus has not yet subsided.

PACKED HOUSES acclaimed the Johnny-Benny production of *La Bohème*, first standard opera to be produced at St. John’s. Marilyn Yunkers’ performance in the role of Musetta was one of the high points in the production.
November 1953

Bennies & Johnnies taking the stage together has now become the norm.

Record

Johnny, Bennies Join for Fry Play

P. St. John's University and Organ of the Alumni

By Tom McGraw

First-nighters at The Lady's Not For Burning tomorrow

will get a look at one of Christopher Fry's more popular plays, acted by a combined group of Johnny Players and the Ardeleons of St. Ben's.

Using the old theme of love, dressed by the playwright in poetic comedy, the play is, in many ways, a marked contrast to his poetic dramaphere With Angels produced here in 1952.

Directed by Rev. Dominic Huber, O.S.B., the three-set play will finish its run Sunday evening, and the second performance.

A newcomer to the Johnny stages, William Chilson, is cast as the male lead as Thomas Mendip, a war-scarred pessimist, who hopes to quit the occupation of being by the command of Mayor Hubble Tyson, acted by James Mett.

The audience begins to see which way the wind is blowing as the female lead, Jeannie Jusselmime, portrayed by Mary Anne Gijns, enters the plot to give a spark of hope to the despair of Mendip.

Richard Betts as Richard, the Mayor's clerk, and Jacqueline Ullmers, an Alpino Rhot, take care of the sub-remiante. Allison, fresh from a convent elevator, leads a rather complicated liaison by Richard, chaperoned by Nicholas Davies, and engaged to Humphrey Devine. Cast in the role of the Devil brothers are James Molan as Nicholas and Dave Lewis as Humphrey. Margaret Devine, the mother of the two brothers, who is a never-getting-diamonded sort of person, is played by Nancy Ryon.

A SCENE from The Lady's Not For Burning, Christopher Fry's poetic comedy on the theme of witchcraft. Produced jointly by the Johnny Players and the Ardeleons of St. Ben's, the play will be given here tomorrow night and Sunday.
Here’s a 1954 extravaganza with a huge cast.
In 1962 St. Ben’s Department of Speech became the Department of Speech & Drama – offering courses leading to a minor in it in that year, and a major in Speech and Drama by 1964...

**SPEECH AND DRAMA**

Major sequence: Courses 1 or 2, 3-4, 5 and 27 in lower division; 33, 41, 42, and twelve credits in upper division.

**Minor sequence:** Courses 1 or 2, 5, 27, and an additional ten credits.

Students are advised to take courses in related fields of art, music, history, English, philosophy, political science, and home-economics. They are required to elect Art 2 and voice.

Students who wish to teach speech in Minnesota must hold a certificate of endorsement based upon the completion of a minor sequence in speech.

1. **Speech Fundamentals**  
   2 credits  
   Principles underlying effective speech. Practice in composition and delivery of various types of speeches, with emphasis on content, organization, body control, and diction.

2. **Speech Fundamentals**  
   2 credits  
   Same as Speech 1. Taught second semester.

3-4. **History of the Theatre**  
   2 credits  
   A survey of theatrical activity from its beginnings until the present. (Offered simultaneously with History 1-2.)

5. **Drama Form (English 51)**  
   Development of dramatic form in comedy and fantasy from Greeks to moderns.

Sister Colman O’Connell, M.F.A.  

*Speech and Drama*  

B.A. College of Saint Benedict, 1950; M.F.A. Catholic University of America, 1954.  
College of Saint Benedict, 1954—
...an addition no doubt directly related to the completion, in 1964, of the stunning performance venue, the Benedicta Arts Center.
Two years later, in 1966, St. Ben’s Department of Speech & Drama becomes the Department of Communication & Theatre, a title replicated at St. John’s the same year.

**COMMUNICATION AND THEATRE**

- **Saint John’s University**: Dr. James Jaksa, Rev. Dominic Keller, Rev. Daniel Durken, Rev. Alcuin Siebenand; The College of Saint Benedict: Sister Colman O’Connell, Mr. Donald Mullin

The Interinstitutional Department of Communication and Theatre offers the student an opportunity to develop in the practical and aesthetic areas of communication through the media of public address, theatre, broadcasting, journalism, and mass communication. A major is available in public address, teaching, or theatre. A combination of academic courses and co-curricular activities provide the student with a variety of education experiences. Active co-curricular programs are available in forensics, theatre, radio, and journalism.

**Inter-institutional Curriculum of the College of Saint Benedict and St. John’s University.**

**MAJOR SEQUENCE**: Thirty credits. Courses to be determined by departmental chairman at individual institutions to meet the student’s needs, aptitudes, and interests.

**MINOR SEQUENCE**: Eighteen credits. Courses to be determined by departmental chairman at individual institutions to meet the student’s needs, aptitudes, and interests.
1966: Though still separate, the two departments offer an “Inter-institutional” curriculum, and have the same requirements.
1966: Communication and Theatre requires students to be “joint”

It is the first academic department requiring that its majors take courses at both campuses.

There was still a department chair on each campus until 1970...
1966: Communication and Theatre requires students to be “joint”...when there is one chair and, from the other campus, an “associate chair.”

1970 is also the year when Fr. Dominic’s name no longer appears among the theater faculty. (He was 68 by then.)
Three years later, this Theatre newsletter, “The Prompter,” is clearly issued by

LORENO. THE MONSTER is fast becoming one of the most contemporary pieces of theatre ever to be produced in a Minnesota college. It is almost pure dramatic experimentation: a rock band on stage, poems instead of props, associative slides on two screens, and many other novel features. Combined, they make one of the most powerful events ever to be done at Theatre St. Bon’s. The message and the method mark the show as a rare treat, one which one wouldn’t expect out of New York.

LORENO is the first play this year to have its lights designed by a student, John Thiesen. Having students participate more and more in the planning stages of a show, and not just in the acting areas, is indicative of the strides which Theatre St. Bon’s is taking toward making theatre a more useful, practicable, and complete experience for students. Maggie McKoon and Jon Prince are assisting Thiesen in working out the lighting problems posed by a largely experimental production in general.

Other student-produced segments of the show are the slates which Four Johnies, Tom Bachele, Mike Brusman, John Stockman, and Bob Peller, see as a way of involving the audience more intimately with the problems dealt with in the play.

Two of our instructors, Terry Stoner and Marie Winnicker, appeared prominently in a dance program last Friday and Saturday at the Guild of Performing Arts in Minneapolis. Perry and Marie teach dance to CSS/JJU students each week at the Arts Center. They have increased interest in dance on the two campuses because of their fine abilities as well as their wonderful personalities, which enable them to teach students who have never thought of dancing before. Once a person gets involved in dance, he finds it fascinating.

Pavel Winter, contemporary consort. March 14, 1969 8 o’clock. A group of superb musicians with a program of classical, folk, and jazz pieces. They have played at the White House at Presidential request.


Both shows are in the SAC auditorium.
Another three years later:
This one might be a joint publication...or maybe not!
Being discussed in the early 1970s:

**Should Communication and Theatre become two separate departments?**

A. Differences between the two major areas of study suggest that division is logical.
   1. To some extent, the faculty of the two areas operate independently, controlling budget, co-curricular activities, and many of the decisions concerning course offerings and teaching assignments.
   2. Students in the two areas of study appear to be of quite different types—communication attracts those who intend to use their skills in pursuit of career goals in business, law, and public relations, while theatre draws those interested in pursuing careers in the performing arts.
   3. Beyond the freshman-sophomore level, the two areas of study have little common subject matter.

B. There are both academic and economic reasons for retaining the combined department.
   1. Academic overlap requires that the two faculties work in cooperation.
      a. Speech education majors, according to Minnesota State Law, must have training in both theatre and public address in order to be certified.
      b. Students in both specializations need common core courses in fundamentals of oral communication, communication process, and oral interpretation. Interaction of students and faculty from both areas in these courses provides valuable balance of perspectives.
      c. Because the current faculty have training and experience in both areas of specialization, they provide valuable discussion of matters pertaining to both areas.
   2. Economy of money and effort is gained by working in combination.
      a. Duties of department chairmen—such as reports and representation to administration—can be fulfilled by one chairman with the cooperation of an associate chairman.
      b. Core courses can be taught most efficiently by drawing on the staff of both specializations, ensuring the availability to students of both core and upper division course offerings.
   3. Conditions which have necessitated the division of communication and theatre at other schools do not prevail at SJU-CSE.
      a. Because budgets are not combined, there is not the problem of over-financing one area at the expense of the other.
      b. The staff is not so large and so specialized that faculty members have no interest in or capacity for discussing matters outside their area of specialization.
      c. The staff respect and value the interaction of ideas and perspectives which occurs as they conduct department business.

by Karen Garvin
In 1973 there are two departments: Speech Communication and Theater...with Sister Colman as Theater’s sole chairperson.

Most of the other academic departments didn’t “merge” until the 1980s.
There is a partial list on the CSB Archives website of past Theater productions. It’s a work in progress in association with the Theater Department’s Kaarin Johnston.
Milestones

Theater at St. Ben’s

1916 Department of Expression
1938 Department of Speech
1962 Department of Speech & Drama – a minor
1964 Dept. of Speech & Drama – a major; BAC built
1966 Department of Communication & Theater
1970 One chair, one associate chair
1973 Theater Dept., including Modern Dance:

> Dance for the layman satisfies the physical education requirements. A special program in modern dance, The Professional Dance Studio, is offered under the auspices of the theater department. See description below.

Theater at St. John’s

1940 Public Speaking classes offered
1945 Public Speaking, Dominic Keller
1946 Speech classes within the English Dept.
1951 Speech classes within Div. of Lang & Lit
1966 Department of Communication & Theatre
1970 One chair, one associate chair, no Fr. Dominic
1973 Speech Communication is a separate dept & major
1984 SJU’s Auditorium is renovated into:

The Stephen B. Humphrey Theater

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