

Mizzou's Leading Man of Theater

When Dr. Larry Clark came to MU in 1966, there wasn't a theater department. Today he can take his bows for directing the department to distinction. The faculty strive to turn out students who are scholars and artists.

By MARY VERMILLION

He has neither the classic features nor the piercing blue eyes of a matinee idol. But Dr. Larry Clark is the ideal leading man for Mizzou's theater department.

After 25 years devoted to the world of theater, Clark's affection for the art endures. "Our task is to give the community a bit of itself. Theater should amuse and educate us."

As professor and chairman of theater, Clark, 55, has built a department that is molding scholars and artists. "One feeds the other," he says.

An authority on American theater history and theater aesthetics, Clark, MA '61, personifies his artist/scholar concept. Since 1963, the man who always aspired to be a professional director, not an actor, has staged 39 plays. His specialty is period comedies. Scholarly credits include the fifth edition of *Acting is Believing*, co-written with Charles McGaw. It is the most popular acting textbook in America.

His artistic and scholarly sides couple with administrative experience. He's led all three major educational theater groups — president of the American Theater Association, chairman of the American College Theater Festival National Committee and president of the University and College Theater Association. At MU, he served as assistant and associate provost from 1973 to 1982.

"He's a good example of a scholar, teacher and artist," says graduate student Carol Wright Krause, MA '73. "He's an excellent director and then he's also able to pull all his administrative stuff out of his hat. Whenever he's out of town, we know it because his presence is so strong in the department."

Together the theater faculty, staff and students create a sense of community that Clark says is unmatched on Campus. Theater students are among the loud crew hanging out in front of the Fine Arts Building on Lowry Mall.

"It's true; there is a sense of community here," Krause says. "It's complete from the incoming freshmen to people like me — the old-timers."

That camaraderie is what attracted Clark to the theater. "The whole communal idea of working together to put on a play was one of the major attractions," he remembers. Born and reared in Ozark County, Mo., he got bit by theater at Southwest Missouri

State University, where he graduated in 1956 with a bachelor's degree in education.

Clark taught high-school speech and dramatic art for seven years. But after obtaining a master's at Mizzou and a doctorate at the University of Illinois, he was committed to college-level teaching. Students always have been the attraction. "They have a

MU's Stage Efforts Win More Than Applause

Mizzou broke a tie with the University of California at Los Angeles when graduate student Carol Wright Krause took home the 1988 David Library Award. The win marks the University Theater's sixth time as the David Library honoree.

Krause, MA '73, earned the award for her play *Uncle Jack*. Original full-length plays that examine or reflect some aspect of Americana and are entered in the American College Theater Festival are eligible. She will receive the grand-prize share of the \$3,000 award and will attend the Shenandoah Valley Playwright's Retreat in Staunton, Va. The playwright won the David Library Award and the Columbia Embassy Award in 1985 for her three-act show *Daughters*.

Other David Library winners were *Liar's Day*, *Buck n' the System* and *Father Rafferty's Confession*, written by Michael Mooney, Arts '84; and *Eleven-Zulu* by Patrick Sean Clark, BS Ed '82.

The win adds to the department's reputation at the American College Theater Festival's regional contest. Competitors have dubbed Mizzou's theater family "The Missouri Mafia." In January at the regional contest in Warrensburg, Mo., students, faculty and staff took home five awards. The four-state region includes schools from Missouri, Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska.

The legacy of award winners impresses Ezra Stone, president and director of the Sol Feinstone Foundation, which funds the David Library Award. In 1911, Feinstone, Stone's father, spent his freshman year at Mizzou as a forestry major. "He regretted that he never got back there," Stone says. "A photograph of the Columns always was on his desk."

Through the foundation, six \$500 scholarships were created for Mizzou students. Stone, a former actor and director, this year dedicated two of the scholarships to the theater department.

The scholarships are a fitting tribute, blending Feinstone's love for Mizzou and his son's devotion to the theater. They'll also add to Mizzou's theater tradition.

— Mary Vermillion

"Theater should amuse and educate us," says Dr. Larry Clark. He's done his part, directing 39 plays in his years in college theater.

Jeff Adams photo

wide-eyed enthusiasm for the discipline," he says. After graduating from Illinois, he taught for three years at the University of Iowa and then came home to Missouri.

When he arrived at Mizzou in 1966, there wasn't a theater department. It only began functioning as a separate unit in September 1986, after the creation of the School of Fine Arts. Clark began as an assistant professor and director of theater, and department chairman of the speech and dramatic arts department. Then, three faculty members taught a limited theater curriculum.

At the time it was common for universities to combine the theater and communication disciplines. "And it was becoming obvious that neither department could compete that way," Clark says.

While there wasn't a department, Clark did inherit a strong theater tradition. Mizzou thespian productions date back to early drama clubs and the Missouri Workshop Theater, which in 1923 began producing plays in the Hall Theater downtown, the abandoned cafeteria of Lathrop Hall and Jesse Auditorium.

Professor Donovan Rhynsbarger ushered the program from the 1920s until the 1960s. He began the Roof Top Theater Under the Stars, staging plays on the roof of the education building. The gypsies finally got a home in the 1950s when the fine arts center was built. Rhynsbarger retired in 1968. Clark picked up from there.

Focusing on the graduate program, he patterned it after the scholar/artist concept. At the time, three students were working on master's degrees and one was completing a doctorate. Today, 20 graduate students are working on either master's or doctoral degrees. There are 76 undergraduates in the department.

"We want graduate students who already are proven actors, directors or playwrights," says Clark. "Now they must understand the history and theory of theater and write about it. It's been difficult to find such students and to establish a faculty that can teach them."

He's done both. And the undergraduate and graduate programs have gained national reputations. The notoriety is not so much for graduates who are well-known actors, although past MU thespians include George C. Scott, *Jour'n*, Arts '53, Tom Berenger,

AB '71, and Chris Cooper, BGS '76, but for its ability to turn out well-versed scholars and hard-working actors and actresses.

Students focus on production work and shoulder an academic schedule sprinkled with liberal arts courses. Theater classes include script analysis, stage makeup, the theater in society, directing and studies in dramatic criticism.

Students have plenty of opportunities to hone their craft in University Theater productions, at the student-run Corner Playhouse, formerly Gentry Theater, or in Summer Repertory Theater shows. Summer Rep, celebrating its 20th year, brings in outside students and professionals. Clark created the non-equity, paid summer company in 1969 to give local and visiting students a chance to work in a professional setting.

Clark credits the faculty for some of the department's vigor. "The faculty are remarkable in that we are very close and enjoy one another's company," Clark says. "We respect each other's creative abilities." Research specialties range from Scandinavian theater to 18th and 19th century stage riots.

"Coming to Mizzou was a positive step forward for me," says Dr. Clyde Ruffin, an associate professor whom Clark recruited. Ruffin created the Black Theater Workshop, which stages annual sell-out performances. "The strength of the department is its philosophy that comes from Larry Clark. He wants us to aspire to multiple roles as a scholar, artist and teacher. That's unique. He encourages me to stretch myself in new areas."

Today Clark's attention is focused on developing interdisciplinary programs within the School of Fine Arts, which includes the departments of music, theater and art.

By combining the three disciplines, the school hopes to enhance fundraising efforts, student recruitment, curriculum and faculty resources. "We can establish programs with art and music that will be unique to the Campus and the state," Clark says.

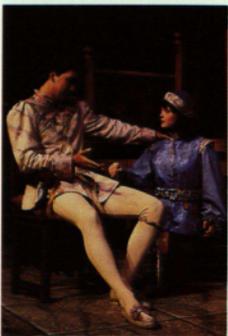
The department's leading man has been recruited in the past by other schools. "But I couldn't top what I have here," he says. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience to have colleagues such as these and the production opportunities. It's a rare and wonderful program." □



Clark's favorite efforts directing actors are, from top, *Of Mice and Men*, *On Golden Pond*, *Twelfth Night* and *True West*.



On Golden Pond was a tribute to his parents, who were there opening night.



Clark loves to direct period comedies, such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

He won a 1988 American College Theater Festival award for *True West*.

