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FALL 2013      JKB NEWSLETTER      VOL. XXXII      No. 1

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# WORKSHOP: THE LIVING THEATRE

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BY JUSTIN GERARD '17

"Why do you go to the theatre? Is it important to go to the theatre? When you leave the theatre, have you changed actively?" These are just some of the questions with which Living Theatre members **Lois Kagan-Mingus** and **Jerald "Jerry" Goralnick** began the Living Theatre workshop. They come from a chapter called "Questions" in Julian Beck's *A Life in the Theatre*, a book that discusses what it means to be a theatre artist.

The Living Theatre, the oldest theatre company in the United States, was founded in 1947 by Julian Beck and Judith Malina as a non-commercial, experimental theatre company that has performed internationally in 28 countries on five continents. "They have helped to shape different ideas about how theatre can be accomplished, whether it's on the street or onstage," says professor **Carolyn Anderson**. "They've made a monumental contribution to the American theater."

The workshop was attended by students in Carolyn's 'The American Theater' course, as well as a few theater students from outside of the course. In the workshop, students created a devised piece consisting of two plays while also learning theater games and techniques. "It's a very different acting experience because it's very physical, and it's not always text that is within a cause-to-effect or a well-made play," said Anderson. "They use text in different ways and sometimes you just hear words, sometimes phrases. They also base their training on biomechanics, which is a form of physical theater." The physical training that Jerry and Lois gave to the students was translated into the plays in the form of moving tableaux.

The first play, entitled "Pop the Bubble," focused on the divide between Skidmore students and the Saratoga

Springs community. "Communication Breakdown," the second play, addressed the administration's limited release of information to students during emergency situations. Both of these plays originated directly from the ideas of students based on what issues they thought were relevant to themselves and their audience. "As we were having our large group discussion on the topics for the performance," explains **Alexia Zarras '14**, "Lois and Jerry copied down what students were saying and then used these quotes as text for the pieces."

The group gave a performance to an audience under the trees on Case Green, just outside of Case Center. "The Living Theatre gets theater out onto campus," said Anderson, "so people who wouldn't experience something like this can experience it for the first time. And it's always a surprise, which is a very different way of experiencing theatre." In the Living Theatre performances, "the actors have a chance to interact with the audience personally; it's direct-address to the audience in some ways, too, so it's a very different experience in terms of actor-audience relationship." The intimacy between the actors and the audience served the purpose of raising awareness about the issues presented in the plays. The effect was a memorable experience that inspired conversations between the actors and the audience after the performance.

"There is something really exciting about quickly creating a piece and then presenting it outdoors for an audience of unknown size," said Zarras. "It is undoubtedly thrilling and I thank Lois and Jerry for allowing us to witness something like that. It's somewhat terrifying, but ultimately rewarding." The Living Theatre has visited Skidmore once every few years for several years now, and hopefully this valuable relationship will continue.

