



PROFESSIONAL WRITING NEWS

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Student comedy team hits the funny bone

For some aspiring comedy writers, a dearth of performance opportunities might seem like an obstacle. But for Christophe Philipps, Robert Self-Pierson and Miles Taylor it was a challenge.

In November last year the three MA Professional Writing students formed dumbFUNDED Theatre to give upcoming writers a chance have their work brought to life by actors in front of live audiences.

Their first move was to launch a writing competition, soliciting sketches on the theme of "Town and Country".

Impressive response

"We were amazed by the response," Christophe says. "The competition was featured on some high-profile websites including The BBC Writers' Room, and within a few days we had sketches by both professional and amateur writers flooding in from as far afield as Scotland and Italy. What's more, the overall quality of the work was extremely impressive."

With the help of James Henry, a visiting lecturer on the MA Professional Writing course who has written for landmark TV series such as Green Wing and Smack the Pony, they selected twelve scripts to be produced at a showcase event.

A few weeks of casting, rehearsals and frantic phone-calls later, the doors opened at Miss Peapod's Café in Penryn for the first in a three-night run of performances by a cast including actors from two of Cornwall's finest theatre companies, Kneehigh Theatre and Miracle Theatre.

Every night was a sell-out, with audiences responding uproariously to sketches on subjects including obscene art, local dialect and talking foxes, introduced and linked by material written by the dumFUNDED team.



Scripts raise a smile at dumbFUNDED rehearsals

After this initial success, what has dumbFUNDED got up its sleeve for the future? Christophe is playing his cards close to his chest. "It's a bit like the best comedy sketches," he says. "There's no telling where things might go from here."

Masterclass in TV drama

As the BBC's Controller of Continuing Drama and former Head of Drama at Channel 4, John Yorke is uniquely well-placed to explain what commissioning editors are looking for in a TV script.

Drawing on his experience gained working on series from Eastenders and The Street to Sex Traffic and Life on Mars, John recently gave a fascinating talk to MA Professional Writing students at Falmouth, focusing on various techniques used by successful scriptwriters.

Among the tips he offered were to use contrast between noise and silence to create a sense of dramatic rhythm, to "disrupt the flow to fulfilment" and to avoid "writing on the nose".

Readers interested in finding out more may like to check out some short video excerpts of John's talk now viewable at www.bloc-online.com, the award-winning online magazine created by Professional Writing students.

Miles ahead as The Writer's Apprentice

An MA Professional Writing student has been cutting his copywriting teeth writing for some of the UK's best-known brands.

Miles Taylor was the winner of a unique bursary offered by The Writer, a leading London consultancy that helps brands define distinctive tones of voice.



Reason to be cheerful: Miles Taylor

As well as providing financial support towards the cost of his studies, The Writer's Apprentice bursary includes three stints of work experience at the agency's London office.

Miles, who recently completed the second of these, says: "This has been a fantastic opportunity for me to get a real insight into how a successful writing agency operates, and a feel for the type of work I might be doing in the future. I've already learnt so much, and the advice of people at The Writer should be invaluable for my MA project over the summer."

Great track record

The Writer's managing director Martin Hennessy says: "The MA at Falmouth has a great track record in finding and training some of the sharpest writing tools in the box. And Miles proved once again that the College hasn't lost its edge!"

Miles is the fourth student to benefit from the bursary scheme. One former Writer's Apprentice, Joe Weir, is now working full-time at the agency on accounts including the BBC, Unilever, Marks & Spencer and HSBC.

Where are they now?

In which we track down MA Professional Writing alumni, to the ends of the earth if necessary.

Having worked as a staff writer for the Environment Agency after finishing the MA course, **Rowan Clarke** (2003-4) left after a year to have her first baby. Nine months later she was working again as a freelance copywriter, for clients including the Department of Work and Pensions, Clarks Shoes and a yacht-broker in Antibes, France. After taking time out for baby number two last year, she's now rejoined the freelance fray, writing websites and editing scripts for corporate DVDs.

"The course gave me contacts which got me started," Rowan says, "thus giving me experience to get more work. It also introduced me to copywriting, which was an area of which I hadn't been aware previously. Practically, it taught me web editing through bloc, honed my Quark, subbing, and editing skills, and taught me the basics of structure that I should have learned at school. It also set me up with an network of writers and gave me invaluable support and confidence."

Ian Collier (2002-3) writes: "I've been at Cambridge University Press for several years now and have risen through the ranks. Now I put other people's writing into e-learning products and advise on the use of technology in the classroom, spend a lot of time in New York (and would give just about anything to live there), play the electric guitar passionately but very, very badly, and still write comics for cash every now and again.

"As for the course, it seems a long time ago. There were two principal rewards for me. The first was the set of new skills and a clear direction for practice and improvement... The second was a whole year's-worth of time to write. Out of the two I'd say that the latter was the more valuable to me, no offence intended, but the combination of the two can be life-changing. So I suppose what I am saying is that the course, and everyone else in it and on it, changed my life."

Exciting news just in: **Judy Heminsley** (2006-7) has landed a publishing deal for her first book. More in our next issue...

To find out more about the MA Professional Writing course, see
www.falmouth.ac.uk/professionalwriting