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THE BROADSHEET

Issue II, September 2013

Rap Soundtrack Ruins Luhrmann's *Gatsby*

I had a hard time liking *The Great Gatsby*, which might be surprising, since it ranks as one of my favorite books. Although I appreciate that much of it was faithful to the novel (some of the lines of dialogue come directly from the text), there were some key scenes and elements missing from the adaptation. Using updated music was an interesting attempt to make the movie appealing to audiences today, but I did not enjoy the soundtrack. Aside from Leonardo DiCaprio as Gatsby, I did not care for the casting. The rest of the actors and actresses didn't fit the parts very well. I would recommend seeing it if you are a fan of the original story, but do not go into it with high expectations.

by Jennifer Hanselman



from Google Images

Overall, I really enjoyed *The Great Gatsby*. Apart from a few differences, I felt like the movie followed the book pretty closely, which was nice considering that many movie adaptations of novels often change important details. However, I couldn't decide whether or not I liked the director's attempt at bridging the time period with today by using rap music; the idea was interesting, but I don't think it quite succeeded. The best thing about the movie, though, was that it prompted so many people to go and read Fitzgerald's classic novel.

By Alison Leonard
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Merrimack College
Writers House

Poet Jamaal May

All photos courtesy of Kevin Salemme

Poet Jamaal May Performs at the Writers House Grand Opening

by Alison Leonard

Acclaimed poet Jamaal May of Detroit took Merrimack by storm in spoken-word style at the Writers House grand opening on September 23. His humorous, likeable disposition warmed the audience, and his poetry kept the group spellbound. May's indelible imagery, hard-edged diction and dynamic reading style made the performance a unique experience. May's poems covered a wide variety of topics, such as aging, the progression of time, fear and love, which were energized by his electric rhythm, accentuation of key words and hand gestures.

May's insightful, passionate performance led to an interesting discussion forum at the conclusion of his reading. When asked to discuss the relationship between poetry composed on paper versus poetry composed for recitation, May noted the different writing styles that often accompany the two, but also emphasized that passion and inflection when reading is vital to conveying a poem's message. He cited the ability to enliven the words and embody feelings as the hallmark of a successful poetry reader, something he certainly accomplished during his own performance. May also emphasized the importance of form in oral poetry. As an example, he spoke about the challenge of writing a contrapuntal poem, a poem that can be read three different ways, which gave birth to the impressive example he shared with the audience. He first read the left hand side of the page, then the right and then through both, making a total of three poems.

Interestingly, May's poetry career evolved from his work with writing hip hop lyrics in his early 20s. However, he found hip-hop to be restrictive as there was too much of a focus on the beat and not enough on the language. He then took the stage as a slam poet and gained much recognition as he honed his skills and experimented with different writing styles. May has since been a finalist at both national and international poetry slams, won a variety of awards such as the 2013 *Indiana Review* Poetry Prize, and awaits the release of his newest volume, *Hum...*

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Included in this Issue:

Jamaal May Performs at the Writers House
The Great Gatsby (2013) Review
Meet Andrea Cohen
Upcoming Events
New Courses Spring 2014

An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published monthly during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.

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This movie is a crude bastardization of one of the greatest novels ever written. Director Baz Luhrmann and his writers reduced a story about the decline of society in the American 20's to a simple, boring love story. The culture of the 20's is so absent that if the viewer didn't know better, she may easily think this story took place in 2013. This may be due to the absurd choice of using rap music as the soundtrack. The writers insisted on sprinkling in the most famous lines from the novel, for example, "beautiful little fool" ;however they were poorly delivered by a poorly casted group of actors, and were often so out of context that Fitzgerald's message never came through. Many have said *The Great Gatsby* is impossible to film. After seeing this attempt, I've never been more convinced that this is true.

by Laura Stevens

Founding Director Cohen Excited About Writers House Future

By Laura Stevens

Professor Andrea Cohen, a published poet, accomplished scholar, and now founding director of the Writers House at Merrimack, brings energy, excitement, and experience to Merrimack's newest space. Professor Cohen describes the Writers House mission as serving "everybody on campus" and hopes that the space will "invigorate the intellectual life" of the college. She has worked tirelessly with other faculty members on campus to plan and promote events, the first of which occurred on September 23 and had 85 attendees. Professor Cohen says that they are "starting with a bang," and that she hopes to host speakers that will "appeal to different groups on campus and to inspire different students." Located in the Merrimack Innovation Center, the Writers house features beautiful lighting, a working fireplace, a kitchen, conference room, and faculty office space.

Professor Cohen's impressive background as a poet and as director of the nationally known Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, Massachusetts, uniquely qualifies her for the position as

Jamaal May cont. from p. 1

His poetry has been featured in journals such as *POETRY*, *New England Review* and *Ploughshares*. During his performance, May read a variety of his poems from previous publications, as well as from his new manuscript, *The Big Book of Exit Strategies*. In addition to performing, he also teaches in the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA program.

May's appearance marks the first of many by accomplished literary figures to be featured at the new Writers House in the upcoming months. The Writers House, located in the Innovation Center in the Merrimack Athletic Complex, is a unique initiative on campus dedicated to providing a forum for students and faculty to learn, write, and interact with one another, as well as with guest speakers and performers, such as Jamaal May. May's inaugural reading followed a welcome reception and ribbon-cutting ceremony, a blessing from Father Ray, and introductions from President Hopey and Andrea Cohen, local poet and Writers House director. President Hopey cited the event as one of his proudest moments due to the endless possibilities of the Writers House, while Andrea Cohen thanked everyone involved in bringing the idea of the House, the only one of its kind in the local area, to fruition. Jamaal May will certainly be remembered as an inspirational and talented first guest.



Founding Director of the Writers House. She has a B.A. in English and French from Tufts, and an M.F.A. in Poetry from the University of Iowa. She has taught at the University of Iowa, the University of Massachusetts Boston, Emerson College, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and here at Merrimack College. She has also worked at MIT as Communications Director. Professor Cohen has spent the last dozen years running the Blacksmith House Poetry Series, one of the most renowned reading series in the country. The Series just celebrated its 40th anniversary, and Professor Cohen began working there when she was in college. She says her experience with the Blacksmith House Poetry Series helps her in bringing such accomplished authors to the Writers House.

A published poet, Professor Cohen said her fourth book is coming out soon. She also frequently publishes in journals. "So for a poet," Professor Cohen says, "to get to be in a house like this, a house sort-of built for 'the word', is kind of a dream." Professor Cohen observed that it is not only the Merrimack community who benefits from the Writers House program, however. Speakers will find the experience invaluable in different ways. She says that the first speaker, Jamaal May, was "honestly thrilled" to be here, and that he was "in awe that we have a President who values this, because many places do not."

Merrimack is the first college in the region to have a space and program of this kind. President Hopey has invested much in the way of resources and support to it. Professor Cohen says this shows that "Merrimack has amazing priorities."

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Cohen excited about future cont. from p. 2

She added, the “commitment to the humanities, to the imagination, to the belief that being able to be creative and to think critically is essential no matter what path you’re on.” She is proud to be part of an institution that prioritizes this investment in its students. Professor Cohen made clear that her vision for the Writers House is a student-centered place. She hopes that students from all disciplines will “come over, get involved, and tell us what they’re interested in.”

The development and mission of the Writers House ties in seamlessly with the efforts in the English Department to reform the curriculum and provide students with more opportunities for academic and intellectual stimulation. Professor Cohen believes that “there is a great connection between what the English Department does and what we do, as far as nurturing creativity, and this love of literature and writing.” She hopes for some crossover between the Writers House events and English classes. For example, if a professor is teaching a playwriting course, the Writers House would look into hosting a published playwright to conduct a master class. Moreover, it is the perfect spot for students to meet, to organize study groups, or just to hang out. Professor Cohen hopes to see some student-run poetry slams or literary groups forming now that there is a great space in which to hold them. In fact, the Writers House will be holding a meeting for all students interested in learning more about getting involved with the Writers House on October 10th at 3:30 in the Writers House. Professor Cohen emphasizes the fact that this is not only a space for English students, but rather, “students from all disciplines, faculty members, alumni, and the community outside of Merrimack” to enjoy.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday October 8, 7:30 PM, Merrimack Club: English Career Night

Thursday, October 10, 3:30 PM, Writers House: Writers House informational meeting for students

Friday, October 11, 2013, 3:00 PM, Sullivan Hall 207: Memorial Re-dedication of Professor Catherine A. Murphy Faculty Conference Room. Professor Murphy taught Irish literature, Creative Writing, and Shakespeare. Speakers will include Maureen O’Rourke Murphy, international Irish literature scholar, and Bud Jennings, Merrimack graduate, who is a high school teacher and fiction writer.



Students and faculty members enjoying the Jamaal May Writers House event.



Reminder: Advising Appointment Dates

Seniors: Wednesday, October 30-Friday November 1

Juniors: Wednesday, November 6-Friday, November 8

Sophomores: Wednesday, November 13-Friday, November 15

Freshman: Wednesday, November 20-Friday, November 22

The Broadsheet Production Staff

Jennifer Hanselman

Alison Leonard

Laura Stevens

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Professor Paul Vatalaro

New Courses for Spring 2014

The New England Shore

Creative Writing: Screenwriting

Chaucer in Popular Culture