



August 15, 2009

New River Dramatists is in the 10th year of its mission:

to help raise the standards of storytelling in theatre, film and television by assisting writers to achieve their best work; and to connect that work to producing entities.

To the ears of most writers, this mission sounds angelic, and NRD's assistance has been gratefully accepted by such literary lights as Denis Johnson and N. Scott Momaday, as well as by 68 other established and emerging playwrights. These talented artists have used NRD's staff, facilities and its unique crafting process to develop 345 new plays and screenplays, almost half of which have been either optioned or produced as plays or films.

This is a stunning record of artistic and commercial success, especially by an organization of such modest resources as ours. And so, building on our achievement, I'm thrilled to announce the expansion of NRD's mission: to nurture artistic excellence in poetry, fiction and music, along with the plays and screenplays it has so long fostered. And as we broaden our scope, we're simplifying our name to just New River.

But there's more... Our Board of Directors recently chose for New River:

- a beautiful new home – River House — one that can support and fully accommodate our growing mission. (See photos on page 4.)
- a New River publishing imprint with McFarland & Co, Inc. is in the works; a first book of 3 New River plays is scheduled for late-2009 publication.
- Master Classes – taught by prize-winning New River teachers – are taking place this fall.
- public performances and readings of New River plays are being given in New York City and elsewhere around the nation, performed by some of the best actors and actresses in the business. (For dates and theatres, see page 7.)

The following pages tell you more about New River: past, present and to come, and invite your continued support and participation.

Mark Woods
President

The Secret of New River

New River is an incubator for emerging works of art, engaging its creators in an extended, intensely-focused process of development, craft and revision, guided by the artistic director and supported by other playwrights, performers and the feedback from this group. This coming together on the banks of the New River in the Blue Ridge Mountains is a powerful experience, as a roomful of creative people bend to the task of birthing the impossible: some winged horse, a chariot of fire — or whatever blithe spirit lives in and speaks to us through a great play, book or poem.



It is this extraordinary collaboration among artists, director and performers that, we believe, is at the heart of New River's 10-year history of success.

“The key to our success is our emphasis on pure process. Since we have no final public presentation, we have no deadlines or marketplace concerns. Everyone contributes to everyone else, using their enormous talents in each other’s service. Our only mission is to help these great, gifted writers write the best play or screenplay they have in them. At New River, we know that the only way we’re going to enhance the quality of storytelling is to help our storytellers write what they long to express, not that most proximate to commercial demand.”

— M.Z. Ribalow
New River Artistic Director



Cassandra Medley

American playwright and winner of the August Wilson Prize for the best African-American play of 2007

“New River will most certainly become one of the signature ‘birthing grounds’ for the landmark plays of the new century.”

The New River of North Carolina is one of the oldest in the world. One of the few rivers flowing North (like the Nile), its waters are placid; its banks, fertile, covered with woods and wildflowers, as it wends its way through North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.



Like its namesake, New River channels a broad stream of creative energy: the moving waters of our age-old tradition of drama, story and song. It, too, has been flowing quietly for some time in an unusual direction that is equally strong and fertile.

Another distinguishing feature is that New River looks for writers to assist, not works to present. New River does not produce, package or financially encumber a writer's product, ensuring an unselfish process that preserves the purity of New River's intent: to help its writers write their best work.

However, New River's assistance does not end there. Serving as an *ad hoc* literary agency — without the 15% fee — New River finds outlets for the works produced. The traditional means for doing this will soon be augmented by a new system that will makes its playwrights' plays available on-line for consideration by theaters and other producing entities.

Selection

New River participants include emerging and established writers from all over the world selected through solicitation and discovery.

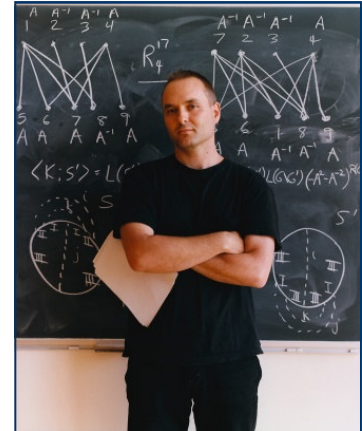
There are no application forms or fees to pay. And for the privilege of having their work developed, the participant is given room and board at River House, transportation to and from, plus a \$500 weekly honorarium.

River House

For the last several years, New River's main facility has been River House, a gorgeous country inn overlooking the North Fork of the New River. With outbuildings and cabins for guests, this inspiring milieu includes a mile of riverfront for strolling, wading, tubing, canoeing and fishing, as brown trout and rainbows abound. Walking trails wind through 170 private acres.

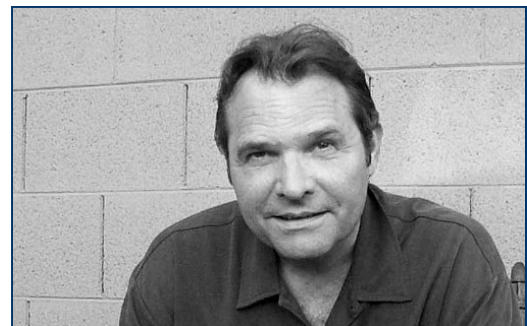
However, New River's original collaborative process isn't dependent on geography. In some instances, instead of artists coming to New River, New River comes to them, as was done recently with successful pilot programs in Davidson, North Carolina and Serenbe, Georgia — programs we intend to repeat this year.

New River's most ambitious, long-term goal is securing River House as its permanent home. (See next page.)



John Mighton

Canadian author, dramatist and mathematician and winner of the \$100,000 Simonovitch Prize



Denis Johnson

American novelist, dramatist, poet and winner of the National Book Award

"At New River I not only had a wonderful time and met wonderful people, but I learned lessons I'll always treasure — about playwriting, about the theater, about what it means to be an artist. Sitting at the feet of other playwrights, marveling at the talents and spirit of fine actors — the experience changed me."



River House as viewed from cliffs above the New River



The interiors of two River House rooms

A Final Word

Music and literature are the lifeblood of our civilization. Their excellence is a sign of a society's health. Their circulation throughout the body politic ensures that different voices, perspectives and fresh ideas are heard and considered by all. They also serve as a form of insurance for our democracy, making it harder for a party line — any party's— to become regarded as the only truth.

New River has no pretensions to saving the world — just a vital piece of it. The following page will tell you more about how you can support New River or an individual New River writer or artist. Please look it over carefully, and offer what you can.

If you believe, as we do, that great music and literature can help us to better know ourselves and to uplift our society and our world, then how can you not be a part of New River — in whatever form or measure you so choose?



N. Scott Momaday
author, playwright, and recipient
of the Pulitzer Prize and the
National Medal of the Arts.

“This is a brilliant venture and I should very much like to continue to be a part of it... If I could spend a month in a place like this, I could write something REALLY good.”

Graffiti (from the artists' residences at New River)

One of the hardest-achieved goals for any playwright is to find a community, a welcoming context, in which to work on his or her plays. New River provides exactly that, and with a sincerity of commitment I've rarely encountered...Those involved with NRD truly are the 'good people' that an artist, no matter where she or he may be in a career, is forever on the lookout for.

— Lee Blessing, playwright

New River is infused with so much intensity, so much warmth and so much honesty that it has been given the rare and magical power to transform...It astonished me. It amazed me. It delighted me.

—Mark Eisman, playwright

My introduction to New River was a note left behind on the table in my cabin. It read, 'whoever comes after, this is a very special place.' I could not put it better...as a past contributor to places like the O'Neill Playwrights' Conference, New York Stage and Film, and New Dramatists, I must say that New River Dramatists has proved repeatedly to produce powerful new writing for the American theatre. If you are lucky enough to be invited to participate, turn Meir and Mark down at your own peril! It is deeply refreshing to be in the company of these two men of the theatre who put the creative fire first and foremost in their lives.

— Victor Slezak, actor

The process of hearing my play, and then discussing it, is probably the most positive feedback I've had of my work in the 25 years I've been writing for the theatre.

— Jack Heifner, playwright

There are fine programs, but you gentlemen top them all because: (1) the level of criticism verges on the brilliant and goes right to the gut; (2) the astute selection of participants, towering talents all; and (3) this is unique - difficult issues are faced with lively near-scientific skill. Thus, the work grows deeper daily. Your methods stir up responses that linger in the mind. The stimulation of the days I spent with you continues to pay off... I've been producing volumes.

— Arthur Giron,
playwright

New River is not merely a creative community; it is a magical creative community. We felt lifted to a place of honor, as if the very fabric of society depended on what we were doing ... and it does.

— Sharon Pomerantz,
novelist & playwright

My time at New River was the two most productive weeks of my life.

— Joe McDonough,
playwright

This is what I live for.

—James McLure, playwright

The place in the story where you come in...

To continue its work and to launch this expansion of New River's mission, fresh funds are needed — especially at this time of economic uncertainty. Over the past decade, the great work at New River has been supported financially by a combination of individuals and small foundations who believed that our cultural and artistic heritage was precious and worth supporting. Now, as New River enters its next phase, we invite you to become a supporter, as well, or — if you'd prefer — the patron of an individual writer or musician. New River is a legally recognized 501 (c) (3) non-profit and your donations are fully tax-deductible.

The new monies raised will underwrite:

- a participating writer's or musician's time at New River. The usual stay of 2 weeks is \$10,000, all of which pays program costs. It includes transportation, room and board, plus a \$500 weekly honorarium for the artist. It also pays the honorariums, expenses, and room and board of the team of supporting actors and artists.
- expansion of New River's programs and capabilities to include musicians, poets and fiction writers. Costs include further development of these programs, plus remodeling, renovation and equipment.
- scholarships for students of New River Master Classes in playwriting. The fee of \$2,300 for this week-long course includes room, board and local transportation. Though less expensive than many similar programs, nonetheless, some deserving students may be unable to attend without your assistance.

Please make your check payable to "New River," and indicate on it — if you wish — how your donation should be spent: on # 1, 2 or 3 above. Mail to:

New River
112 Koinonia Lane
Mooresville, NC 28117

If you'd prefer to give by credit card or PayPal, please visit New River's website:

newriverdramatists.org, and click on the DONATE button on the homepage. No offering is too big or small. As a New River supporter you'll also receive:

- a quarterly newsletter about New River
- an invitation to receptions following our many New River events where you can meet and mingle with the playwrights, actors and cast

If you choose to be the patron of a New River writer, you'll be initiating with that artist a career-long friendship, and a signed copy of the work you helped support will be sent to you, along with that artist's — and New River's — sincerest gratitude and thanks.

Some Up-Coming and Recent Productions of Works by *New River* Writers

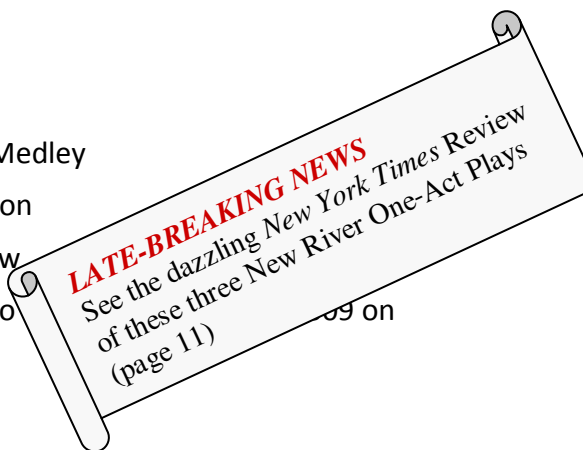
Upcoming

- *Absence* by Wendy Hammond will have its world premiere this fall at People's Light and Theatre in Malvern, Pennsylvania
- *Stone* by Angus MacLachlan is being filmed by Robert DeNiro
- *What Once We Felt* by Ann Marie Healy opens at Lincoln Center's new LC3 space at the Duke Theater on 42nd Street this fall

Current (June 2009)

- *Daughter* by Cassandra Medley
- *Little Duck* by Billy Aronson
- *Sundance* by M.Z. Ribalow

All at the Ensemble Studio
West 52nd Street, NYC



Recent

- *A Body of Water* by Lee Blessing at Primary Stages, NY
- *American Girls* by Hilary Bettis recently completed a run at the 45th Street Theatre, NY
- *Augusta* by Richard Dresser at Portland Stage, Maine
- *By Proxy* by Amy Fox just closed at Cap 21 Theatre Group, NY
- *Emilie's Voltaire* by Arthur Giron at the Samuel Beckett Theatre, NY
- *Hallelujah Street Blues* by Valetta Anderson had its world premiere at Horizon Theatre, Atlanta
- *Her Naked Skin* by Rebecca Lenkiewicz premiered last year on the Olivier stage at Britain's National Theatre, the first play on the Olivier stage by a living woman playwright
- *Psychos Never Dream* by Denis Johnson just completed a run at the Kitchen Dog Theatre in Dallas
- *The Little Flower of East Orange* by Stephen Adly Guirgis was at the NYSF Public Theatre, NY

New River Alumni Playwrights

1. Valetta Anderson
2. Billy Aronson
3. Bill Baker
4. Courtney Baron
5. Brooke Berman
6. Susan Bennett
7. Hilary Bettis
8. Lee Blessing
9. Susanne Bradbeer
10. Pope Brock
11. Keith Bunin
12. Leslie Sara Carroll
13. Damon DiMarco
14. Richard Dresser
15. Sheila Duell
16. Mark Eisman
17. Suehyla El-attar
18. John Ellis
19. Steven Fechter
20. Ron Fitzgerald
21. T-Cat Ford
22. Amy Fox
23. Arthur Giron
24. Jessica Goldberg
25. Stephen Adly Guirgis
26. Wendy Hammond
27. Jeffrey Harper
28. Karen Hartman
29. Ann Marie Healy
30. Jack Heifner
31. Shawn B. Hirabayshi
32. Olga Humphrey
33. Arlene Hutton
34. Karla Jennings
35. John Love Jr
36. Denis Johnson
37. April Jones
38. Julia Jordan
39. Tom Kleh
40. Adam Kraar
41. Rebecca Lenkiewicz
42. Antonio David Lyons
43. Phyllis MacBryde
44. Angus MacLachlan
45. Molly Smith Metzler
46. Joseph McDonough
47. Rachael McGill
48. Ian McHugh
49. James McLure
50. Michael Medeiros
51. Cassandra Medley
52. John Mighton
53. N. Scott Momaday
54. Megan Mostyn-Brown
55. Anne Nelson
56. Sharon Pomerantz
57. Toni Press-Coffman
58. Lisa-Maria Radano
59. Jonathan Reynolds
60. M.Z. Ribalow
61. Laddy Sartin
62. Edwin Sanchez
63. Janece Shaffer
64. Jason Sherman
65. D. Tucker Smith
66. Staci Swedeen
67. Robert Tenges
68. Lucy Thurber
69. Rachel Urist
70. Bridgette Wimberly

Mark Woods President & Founder

Mark Woods has had the lifelong dream to raise the level of storytelling. Characteristically, he reversed the customary manner of pursuing such a vision. Instead of leaving home and working in New York, he left New York for North Carolina to try to create a creative home for talented artists.

Prior to leaving New York, Mark graduated with honors from The American Academy of Dramatic Arts, worked as an actor with first The Classic Stage Company and then The Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre, performed as a puppeteer with Lava Productions, and produced/directed at Manhattan Theatre Club, Theatre at St. Clements and Lincoln Center.

In 1975, Mark co-founded The North Carolina Theatre Ensemble, which produced 17 plays over as many months. This led to the founding of the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival (NCSF) in 1977. During the seven years that Mark produced NCSF, it grew to encompass the Festival Stage Company (presenting classics, both old and new, in High Point and Charlotte); the Actor in the Schools Program, designed to augment high school English curriculum in North and South Carolina; and a touring program of NCSF productions playing in communities all over the Southeast.

In 1984, Mark was invited to create what was to become Charlotte's Repertory Theatre (CRT), that city's resident professional theatre. For several years, Mark produced CRT (continuing and expanding The Actor in the Schools Program initiated at NCSF) with a particular emphasis on bringing new plays to public attention and making a permanent home for CRT in The Blumenthal Center for the Performing Arts. Paramount among his many achievements with CRT was the establishment of the "Charlotte Festival/New Plays in America" which has consistently offered Charlotte audiences the best in new theatre and brought significant national attention to Charlotte's cultural environment. During this time, Mark also served on the boards of The Frank Holder Dance Company and The Community Theatre of High Point, as well as for six years chairing the Theatre Panel for the board of the North Carolina Arts Council.

Mark left CRT to launch his lifelong dream, New River Dramatists. In New River's first decade, Mark has seen his vision realized, as 70 of the world's finest writers – from America and abroad, some famous and others unknown – have developed more than 300 exciting new plays and screenplays, almost half of which have already been optioned or produced.

His dream now is to channel New River's creative process to raise the level of storytelling in fiction, poetry and song.

M. Z. Ribalow Artistic Director

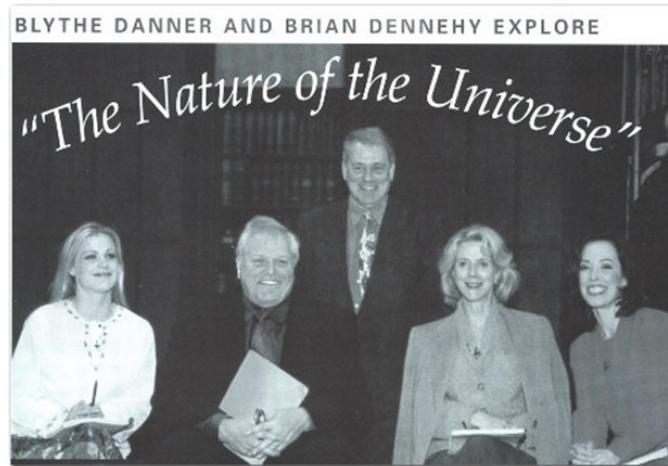
M.Z. Ribalow is a writer, director and arts administrator, much of whose life has been divided between his own writing and helping to develop the work of others. A popular and outstanding playwright, 24 of his plays have received some 180 stagings worldwide, including productions at Dublin's Abbey Theatre, at Playwrights Horizons and Circle Rep in NYC, and in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Canada and Estonia. His plays have been filmed, published, anthologized and awarded prizes in London, New York and nationally. His play *The Nature of the Universe* appeared on Broadway at the Neil Simon Theatre as a Gala Charity Benefit.

A prolific writer of widely diverse interests, he has co-authored books on baseball, chess and sports; ten children's books; and the program for the 1990 World Chess Championship. He has also written four optioned screenplays and won a BMI Award for his musical lyrics.

Meir's poetry has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *The Literary Review* and elsewhere, and he has written on film, theatre and music for *The New York Times* and other well-known periodicals. He teaches film courses at Fordham University (where he is Artist-in-Residence) and Script Analysis at The William Esper Studio in NY. He has appeared on The Discovery Channel discussing the portrayal of scientists in film (he was film columnist for *The Sciences* magazine) and on several DVD reissues of classic films, and he co-hosts an online radio show on film.

A theatre director of note, Meir was for several years Joseph Papp's Production Associate at the New York Shakespeare Festival, where he coordinated new play development and directed several plays. He was subsequently founder and Artistic Director of the American Repertory Company for its two acclaimed seasons in London, and has directed numerous plays in New York, London and regionally, including *Children Of the Sun*, a world premiere by Pulitzer Prize-winner N. Scott Momaday, at the Kennedy Center in Washington.

Meir also served for many years as Vice-President of The Creative Coalition, of which he was a founding member, with President Alec Baldwin. As International Arts Coordinator for The Global Forum, he worked with Mikhail Gorbachev, Robert Redford and the Dalai Lama, among others.



L. to R.: Gina Tognoni, Brian Dennehy, M.Z. Ribalow, Blythe Danner and Patricia Randell



Mark Woods: President and Founder

Peter Hayes: Chief Executive Officer

M.Z. Ribalow: Artistic Director

Dr. Cliff Lowery: Vice President-Secretary

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Contact

To discover more about New River:

Call: (704) 799-0223

E-mail: mark@newriverdramatists.org

Write: New River
112 Koinonia Lane
Mooresville, NC 28117

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about us. New River welcomes your further inquiries, insights, suggestions and support.



Melanie Nicholls-King and Ron Cephas Jones
in the Diversecity Theatre Co.
production on New York's "Theatre Row" of
Cassandra Medley's *Noon Day Sun*,
written at New River

This brochure was conceived and
written *pro bono* for New River
by Peter Hayes of Tara
with the assistance of Susanne Baker of
Susanne Baker Design
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THEATER REVIEW | 'MARATHON 2009' Whether It's Cowboys or Kids' TV, Short Plays Focus on Struggle for Power

From left, Ean Sheehy, David Deblinger and Richmond Hoxie in “Sundance” by M. Z. Ribalow.

By [JASON ZINOMAN](#)
Published: June 17, 2009

Jesse — one of the cold-blooded cowboys in the barroom comedy “Sundance,” a work of cultural criticism wrapped neatly in a suspenseful shoot-'em-up western — lives by a strict moral code. He will rape, torture and murder any man, woman or child, but only for pleasure. As for fighting for justice or protecting the righteous, well, a man has got to draw the line somewhere.

In his opening showdown Jesse spars with his rival Hickock (Richmond Hoxie), an old-fashioned gunslinger who says he only kills for cause, and that sadistic killing ruins the reputation of cowboys everywhere.

M. Z. Ribalow's short play, the last entry of the Series B of “Marathon 2009” at the [Ensemble Studio Theater](#), is a deceptively savvy cultural essay about the mechanics of a beloved American genre wrapped inside a pitch-perfect satire. It applies the same brainy brand of self-consciousness that “Urinetown” used to send up agitprop drama.

When Jesse, played with hilarious conviction and a hair-trigger temper by David Deblinger, asks the barkeep about the origins of the name of the assassin Sundance, he says that there's “probably some symbolic reason.” “Or else metaphysical,” he continues. “One or the other, anyway.” Sundance represents a threat to both of these cowboys. Amoral, totally unmotivated and barely verbal, he shoots people simply because, as he puts it chillingly, “they're there.”

Through the incongruously articulate debates among these cowboys, staged with wit and teasing suspense by Matthew Penn, the darkening evolution of movie morality is mapped, from the fake piety of [John Wayne](#) to the nihilism of modern horror.

In its 31 years producing this venerable short-play festival, the Ensemble Studio Theater has staked a claim as the pre-eminent theatrical home for short works by major artistic talents like [Sam Shepard](#), [Horton Foote](#), [Neil LaBute](#), [David Mamet](#), [Richard Greenberg](#) and [David Auburn](#).

The writers this year are lower-profile than usual, but at their best, they understand that the difference between a short play and a long one is not merely length. You suspect that the grad-student cleverness of “Sundance,” for instance, would wear thin over 90 minutes. But brevity can be liberating; its limitations allow you to take a risk, because if the play fails, so what — it will all be over soon anyway.

While the Marathons are typically mixed bags, with evenly divided line-ups of high and low points, the two evenings of five works provide a pretty clear choice. Series A includes mostly overlong misfires, starting with [Kia Corthron](#)’s pedestrian political drama, “Trickle,” which schematically analyzes the ripple effect of the collapsing economy on ordinary people with the imagination of a connect-the-dots picture book.

“For the Love of God, Saint Teresa,” Christine Farrell’s Roman Catholic school comedy about a nun disciplining a student, and Maggie Bofill’s “Face Cream,” about a marital spat featuring a wife panicking about wrinkles, have more potential, but they suffer from a dramatic stasis not uncommon in one-acts.

Not every play works perfectly in Series B either. “Daughter,” about parents who watch their daughter leave to fight in Iraq, overheats into tedious melodrama quickly. But as organized by the theater’s artistic director, William Carden, Series B nicely builds momentum, with works of gradually increasing ambition.

It starts with Leslie Ayvazian’s sweetly comic play “Carol and Jill,” in which the playwright stars as the aging Carol (“I’m about to be 60,” she mutters, shell-shocked. “Wow. Tough.”), whose longtime friendship with another married woman gradually moves in a more romantic direction.

The skillfully understated way Ms. Ayvazian (whose “Make Me” is running currently at the Atlantic 2) develops this relationship, underlining the blurry lines between intimacy and friendship, contrasts with Jeanne Dorsey’s more heavy-handed, if often insightful, father-daughter play, “Blood From a Stoner,” featuring the veteran actor David Margulies as a pot-smoking and prickly old Brooklyn curmudgeon who can’t bring himself to let his daughter know he needs her.

These well-made and carefully observed character portraits about late-life identity crises whet your appetite for the more elaborately stylized worlds of “Sundance” and the confidently drawn farce “Little Duck,” Billy Aronson’s highly amusing look at the boiling sexual intrigue and artistic warfare behind the scenes of a politically correct children’s television program.

Dr. Jill (Julie Leedes), the show’s director of content, grapples with the writer Anne (Geneva Carr) over the virtues of including a “physically challenged” pig as a central character. The artist R J (Steven Boyer) and Robert (Paul Bartholomew), the president of the television station, struggle for power, while the intern Holly (Jane Pfitsch) appears to be aping the career path of [Monica Lewinsky](#). These battles explode in a Bacchanalian conclusion that makes the murderous gunslingers of the Wild West look rather civilized.

“Marathon 2009” continues through June 27 at the Ensemble Studio Theater, 549 West 52nd Street, Clinton; (212) 247-4982.