

2008 IMTAL Conference in Frankfort, Kentucky

A Review by Laura Ayers

If someone had told me I would discover the love of my life in Frankfort, KY – well, laughter would have dominated any response. Little did I know what was in store for me at the International Museum Theatre Alliance conference September 5, 2008. As a graduate student at the Cooperstown Graduate Program, I have been immersed in everything museums for over a year now. In a museum education, I first heard about museum theatre and IMTAL. I eagerly looked IMTAL up on the internet and learned about the regional conference; I registered and before I knew it I was on a flight to Louisville, KY. Jillian Finkle and Greg Hardison (secretary and treasurer of IMTAL) met me at the airport. The weekend was a whirlwind of information in sessions that are described more eloquently by my colleagues than I will attempt here. My own experience with museum theatre has been pretty limited; basically volunteers in funny hats. I was thrilled to learn what is being done. From dramatic historical pieces to children's scientific musicals, the field is more expansive than I could ever dream.

I really enjoyed the discussions on integrating museum theatre fully into the institution, and furthering the institution's mission through theatre. I've worked places where staff members are affronted when museum theatre is mentioned. Perhaps they have only experienced bad museum theatre and have been scarred for life, or perhaps they believe theatre distracts audiences from the exhibits. A weekend in Kentucky proved that museum theatre IS art, and it adds to a visitor's experience like a well created exhibit design will. Museum theatre can give the visitor direction, inspiration, and a connection to the information in a very real way. I took away many things from this conference, enthusiasm, knowledge, and hope. Hope for my future, following two passions, museum and theatre. I own a ring with the Greek drama masks, I've had it several years, and it's beat to hell. But I kept it, even after starting college and I learned that undergraduate theatre is designed for theatre majors, not history majors. I kept it after I began graduate school in Cooperstown and left behind my community theatre programs in Missouri. Like the ring, theatre is part of me - always has been, always will be. I have hope for my future as a museum educator, to use my passion in theatre and education to create a memorable experience for my future audiences.