

Mid-Hudson Valley World Affairs Council Newsletter

May/June 2012

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Political Plays: J.T Rogers by Jennifer Monti

On March 28th at Marist College the World Affairs Council of the Mid Hudson Valley sponsored an event in which political playwright J.T Rogers came to speak about and read from his most recent play "Blood and Gifts." Rogers is a graduate of the Professional Actor-Training Program of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts where he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Performing Arts in 2009. His credits include "Madagascar" which is set in Rome during a mysterious disappearance, and "Overwhelming" which discussed the Rwandan genocide.

From the moment Rogers began speaking he captivated the audience with his story. "Blood and Gifts" begins in the heat of the Soviet-Afghan War, and follows CIA operatives from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union in their quest to achieve their respective goals. Rogers explained how he interviews his subjects to draw out the everyday experiences and human elements of the story while not losing the political implications. Rogers discussed the difficulties of writing a political play; not getting lost in the details, making sure the timeline fits. He said when he writes, he creates a "box" and if something he wants to add does not fit into the box, it is not right for the play. His passion for his writing was clear when he stated that his test for what he will add to the play is if he sees something and goes "this is so cool!", knowing his audience will feel the same.

Once Rogers began reading some excerpts from the play, the audience was captivated. Sevgin Oktay, Vice President of the WAC-MHV, said the entire talk was "very dynamic and well delivered." I agree with his sentiments. A few days later I read the entire play from cover to cover in one sitting. I became lost in the story of Jim Warnok, a United States CIA operative, Simon, his British counterpart, and Gromov the Russian operative- and their quest to do what was right for their country. This successful program of the WAC-MHV was an insightful journey to the past which had one lesson, a lesson that Rogers himself he didn't realize he was writing until the end: we have not learned from our mistakes. Towards the end of the play Gromov says to Jim "If you break our army and we do not have strength to stop them...When they are done with us, who do you think will be next?" Rogers says it was not until he was watching the reactions of the audience on opening night that he had recognized its relevance today.

Back from an Oasis: The Cultures, Politics and History of Oman By Jennifer Monti

This past January, the World Affairs Council of the Mid Hudson Valley, under the initiative of Board Member Joe Lombardi, received a grant from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center to sponsor 10 educators from the Hudson Valley to go on an educational trip to Oman. The college level educators from Bard, Marist, SUNY New Paltz, Orange and Ulster, and Vassar spent 10 days in Oman. On April 26th several of the educators reunited to give a presentation at SUNY New Paltz about their experiences. The room was filled with members of the WAC-MHV, educators, and students. The event was co-sponsored by The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center (SQCC), the SUNY New Paltz Center for Middle Eastern Dialogue and the and the New Paltz Political Science and International Relations Department.

Many of these students, my fellow classmates, had only positive things to say. Christina Mazzarella a junior in the Political Science Department at New Paltz said that she "learned a lot about Oman. The country seems to be so progressive for a nation that is in the heart of the Middle East, while steeped in tradition it seems to simultaneously be allowing for its citizens to move forward and have more freedoms than other nations around it." Anna Samuldoski, also a junior majoring in International Relations said the best part of the experience for her was "getting the perspective of the Omani woman in the audience. Her pride in her country was almost inspiring and she showed her knowledge of her country's politics and social issues. It was interesting to see such a high level of pride and women's participation in the Gulf Region which traditionally have been male dominated societies." The first forum focused on the cultures of Oman, while the second panel focused on the politics and history. Drawing from the experiences and impressions of the educators, both panels opened up the eyes of the audience to Oman's past, present and future.

Following the presentation, Anatolia Restaurant provided a lovely Turkish dinner for all of the guests. Then after a nice walk to the other side of New Paltz Campus, everyone participating got a special musical treat; a performance by the OudHobbiest Association of Oman. This portion of the evening was co-sponsored by the SUNY New Paltz Performing and Fine Arts Department. The quintet played beautiful traditional music that filled the entire hall with warmth and joy.



"Turkey Workshop" by Jennifer Monti

On March 31st the WAC-MHV hosted a training workshop for the three Hudson Valley high school teachers heading to Turkey this summer. This workshop had several dynamic speakers who helped prepare these educators for their journey. After an informative movie about Turkey, Andrew Davidson a professor at Vassar College discussed the history of Turkey from "West to East" and how the Hellespont had been and still remains an important connection from West to East. Following Professor Davison, the discussion switched to a discussion on Turkey's political and social development with a presentation by Professor Ş. İlgü Özler. After a wonderful lunch, Martin Charwat and Joe Lombardi spoke on Turkey and their neighbors today.

WAC-MHV President Andrew Rieser said that "this was much more than a training session for our three high-school teachers bound for Turkey this summer. It was also a symposium that explored the history and international relations of Turkey, its role as a border crossing between the contested concepts of "East" and "West," and creative strategies for bringing an understanding of Turkey into the classroom. Martin Charwat, Andy Davison Joe Lombardi, and Ilgü Özler all gave wonderful talks." As an observer of this workshop, it was eye-opening for me. I have never studied Turkey in much depth. Yet, just the few talks at this event gave me great knowledge and perspective on Turkey. I think the most rewarding part was listening to how important Turkey was during the ancient period- and seeing how today it is still an important region. Overall, this workshop was great, not only for those who were going on the trip, but for those who were not as well.



Upcoming Events:

Jun. 5, Tues., 6:00 p.m. - Members'-only dinner. "The Balkans."

The Escoffier Room of the Culinary Institute of America.
Reservations required.

Speaker: Prof. Shinasi Rama, Clinical Associate Professor of Politics & Director of MA Programs at NYU Dept. of Politics, "Albania at the Crossroads: Choosing between Integration in the EU or Nationalism."