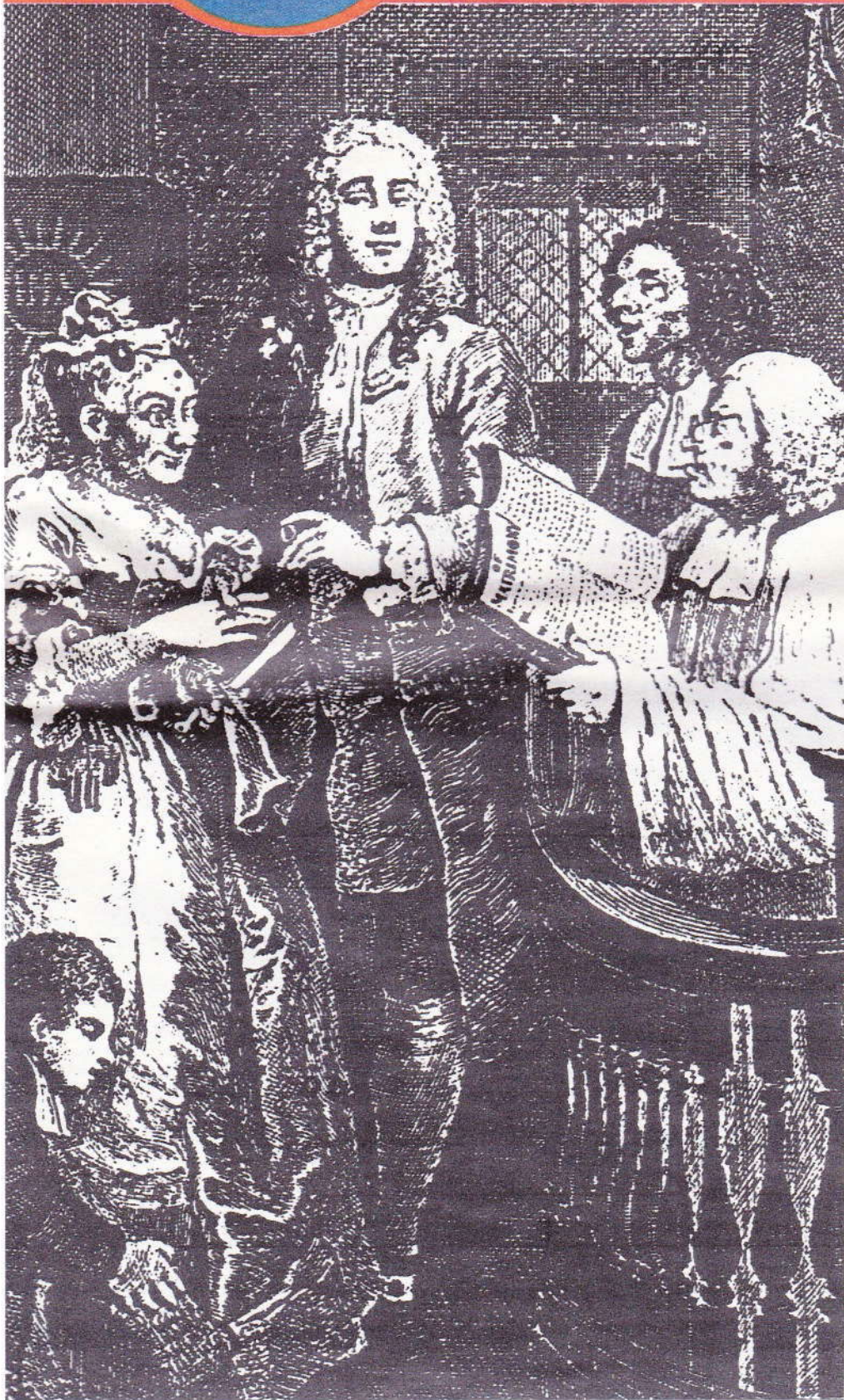


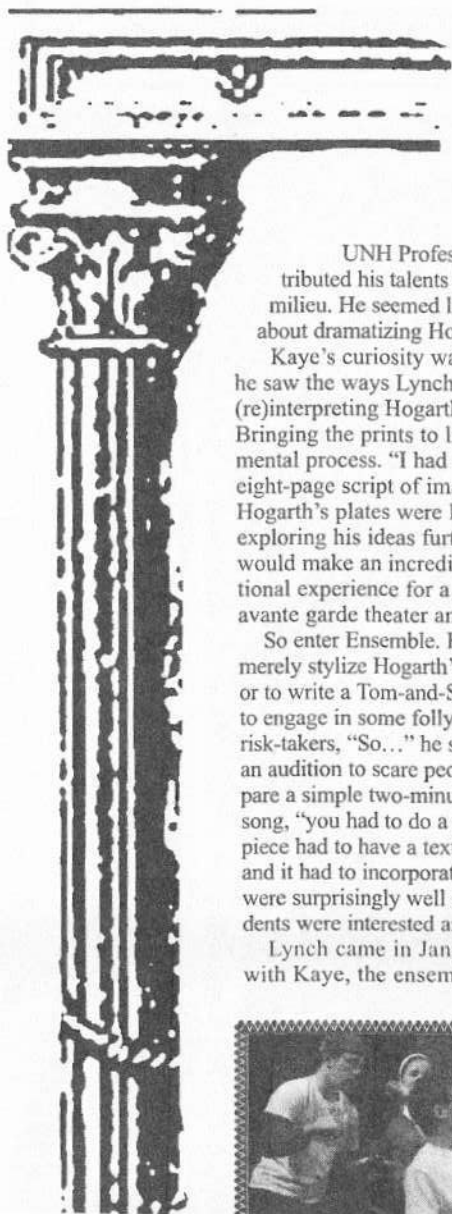
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## cover story



When Lynch was at UNH for a visit Wright thought she ought to meet David Kaye.

Enter Playwright. The UNH Professor of Theater had contributed his talents to the last humanist milieu. He seemed like a natural to approach about dramatizing Hogarth.

Kaye's curiosity was indeed piqued when he saw the ways Lynch was reacting to and (re)interpreting Hogarth's individual plates. Bringing the prints to life would be an experimental process. "I had a script. It was an eight-page script of images," said Kaye. Hogarth's plates were like stage pictures. In exploring his ideas further, he decided it would make an incredibly interesting educational experience for a group of students... avante garde theater anyone?

So enter Ensemble. Kaye really didn't want to merely stylize Hogarth's images onto the stage or to write a Tom-and-Sarah script. He wanted to engage in some folly. He wanted to attract risk-takers, "So..." he says gleefully, "I wrote an audition to scare people." Rather than prepare a simple two-minute monologue or sing a song, "you had to do a six-minute piece. The piece had to have a text. It had to have music, and it had to incorporate movement." Auditions were surprisingly well attended. Seventy students were interested and a cast of 18 chosen.

Lynch came in January and spent time with Kaye, the ensemble, and his two co-

directors. They all went into the gallery together. "In four days," he reflects, "we spent almost as much time preparing to create as we did creating."

Using Lynch's work as a lens they tried to conduct what Lynch calls "conversations across the eras."

"I got to see how David was getting them enthused by the theme. The actors were very thoughtful about the prints and great at building context into contemporary times," she says. This set the tone to explore and experiment.

The ensemble in groups of seven (one director, six actors) did three "takes" for each of the eight plates. Part of the ensemble's first assignment was to gather words, snatches of language, and phrases. What sort of music fit scenes and moods? "First we started with a list of thematic words like fool, or savior, or glutton," Kaye explains. They looked at dichotomies between vices and virtues, and created a "power to impotence riff" to explore. They crafted a distinction between a fool and an idiot to help guide their acting choices. Philosophically, the difference was "a question of spiritual grace and forgiveness." Kaye says, "It was a very important process of learning how to work together." Talk about responsibility. And the ensemble rose to the creative challenges he and his co-directors offered.

They cherry-picked the fruits of their labors and started second takes: which were about riffing on evolving visual themes, smoothing or jarring lines, working the timing. In movies they call it "continuity." Kaye called it "looking for connective tissue." Third take was a wildcard take, an open invite to stand established ideas upon their heads, to honor or explore seductive tangents. New ideas supplanted old, and vice versa, strong movements and rhythms

distinguished characters or added obsessive emotional tone.

Kaye says, "Usually you get up there and the director tells you when, how, and why to read and moves you around. Seldom do you get put in the creative seat." This collaborative process empowered the ensemble. As final rehearsals got teched, Kaye was proud of his cast: "There's not a line up there that an actor didn't create!"

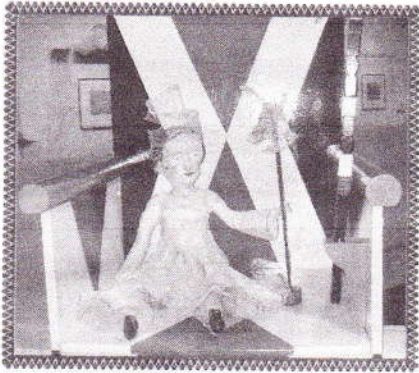
A snatch of a Proverb was borrowed for the play and I enter rehearsal to Kaye "giving" the line to a young protégé. This line will live with me forever: "Like a dog returns to his vomit, so the fool return to his folly!" She nails it on the repeat. The cast begins by tying on their white sneakers. They're decked in Rake's Progress T-shirts with team numbers and last names. Kaye grins when they toss him one. "Check it out, you're Number 1," a young man says.

Everyone's jazzed up. Lots of dancing, mugging and stage play, swirling, twirling, tripping and giggling fill the stopped times, help diffuse rehearsal tension. The Hogarth plates have been added to the mix, projected on two set-filling scrims to delineate scenes. They're used as one might use old black and white photos in a documentary. Images are excerpted, enlarged, macroed and microed. We have voice overs, synopses, and "the moral of the story is" as vocal punctuation for tone-setting classical music, break beats, high school dance anthems, contrapuntal lounge and cheesy game show music.

You've heard of scat singing? Our first scene is scat dialogued: actors using body, vocal tone and gesture to introduce themselves to us in the benign duping of one another for a wallet. Later on Tom



Waits' experimental work is used exquisitely, his cigarette, whiskey, and gravel voice very much at home in a scene called "The Brothel." This scene's choreography is synchronous—our 18 actors embody a mass of humanity enacting its self-destruction in perfect unison, a fool on high as conductor. The dynamics lend a sometimes mechanical, sometimes animal feel to some scenes; an obsessive, addictive quality to others. These gestural unities punctuate a number of the play's scenes and add tension with their speed-stasis-speed rhythm. Individual actors are subsumed and in unison they embody a societal collective or larger organism. A very cool transformation completed amazingly simply.



"Chain of Fools," in the end, though a very interesting trope to investigate, is not easily categorized. For that, all the richer this fool feels. I'll let the folly scholar and the playwright have the last words.

Kaye thinks that in exploring folly in this way, he and the cast have learned you must sometimes surrender to folly: "Sometimes (in the creative process) you have to let go of control... of 'understanding,' and be present enough to something to take it in."

There's the idea: willing surrender. Lynch says that exploring folly in artistic ways is "helping human nature work through its foolishness." Experiencing the art that comes out of these processes can be a path "that helps with walking the line between chaos and order."

Thanks for pointing this fool in the right direction: *Exeunt.*



paintings and installations by Bridget Lynch and play rehearsal: photos by Karen Marzloff; all other images courtesy UNH Art Gallery

### Full schedule of fool's events

The exhibit "Chain of Fools" is on display until April 14 at The Art Gallery at UNH. Hours are Monday-Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday 1-5 p.m. The exhibition will be open at 5:30 prior to each performance (12:30 on Sunday), and admission is free.

The play "The Rake's Progress" runs Feb. 18-21 at 7 p.m. and Feb. 22 at 2 p.m. in UNH's Johnson Theater. Tickets are \$12.50, and \$10.50 for seniors, UNH students, and groups of 15 or more.

A lecture on folly will be presented by Dr. Sean Moore, UNH Department of English, on Wednesday, Feb. 25 at noon in room A219.

Fool's Fortunes on April 1 is a chance to bring your questions to the Answer Fool, who uses cosmic connections to see all, know all, in a fun evening, 6-8 p.m. at The Art Gallery.

All events are located in the Paul Creative Arts Center, 30 College Road, Durham. Call 603-862-2150 for tickets; 603-862-3712 for art information; or visit [www.unh.edu/theatre-dance/productions.html](http://www.unh.edu/theatre-dance/productions.html).

paintings and installations by Bridget Lynch and play rehearsal: photos by Karen Marzloff; all other images courtesy UNH Art Gallery

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