

# Elevator plays amuse, didn't hold door

By JUSTIN CARTER  
Staff Writer  
bencarte@ius.edu

The Specific Gravity Ensemble, a new Louisville theatre group, is taking acting to new heights.

The company of 14 actors, directors, designers and playwrights from the Louisville and Southern Indiana area are currently presenting their new endeavor in the theatre world, "Elevator Plays: Ascent-Descent/Assent-Dissent."

Rand Harmon, artistic director and actor for SGE, said he proposed the idea of elevator plays to the company, but it was the SGE Literary Committee that developed the theme, chose the plays and developed the production structure.

Rand Harmon has taught theatre at IU Southeast and was named interim program director for IU Southeast's Theatre Department while teaching at the university.

"We want to make theatre that takes the audience beyond their expectations," Rand Harmon said. "This is intimate theatre in its truest form. We strive to create environmental theatre that works in 'found' spaces."

"Elevator Plays: Ascent-Descent/Assent-Dissent" is a collection of 24 original plays that are each under two minutes in length. The SGE specifically commissioned plays that would work within the small space of an elevator and then divided the plays into three acts.

Barb Harmon, SGE marketing director and designer, said the group received more than 100 scripts from 38 playwrights from the United States and Canada. She said their goal for the short plays was to take a typical elevator ride and transform it into a fast-paced, entertaining and intimate theatre experience

**'We wanted to use the confined space of an elevator to reach our audience and include them in the energy of the play.'**

**Barb Harmon**  
Specific Gravity Ensemble  
marketing director and designer

for their audience.

"We wanted to use the confined space of an elevator to reach our audience and include them in the energy of the play," Barb Harmon said. "I just love it when I hear audience members say that they think this is how acting should be experienced. They get it. Acting should be felt as much as seen."

The SGE's Elevator Plays series is being held in the elevators of the Starks Building in downtown Louisville. Rand Harmon said they chose the historic Starks Building because of its aesthetics and the rich artistic feelings the plaza and elevators offered.

Four elevators in the lobby of the Starks building run simultaneously, taking four or five audience members with the two or three actors presenting the play each trip.

A play is acted out on the way up to the 15th floor, and then the actors exit leaving their audience to digest the quick scene while new actors rush in to act a different skit while riding back down to the lobby.

"It all happens so fast," Sarah Hayden, Louisville resident, said. "There's really no time to feel awkward or speechless like you sometimes do on a normal elevator ride. It's a bit exhausting too, though. There are so many emotions and so much energy bouncing around that

little space."

Rand Harmon said the SGE selected plays first for their own individual merit, but also on how they worked together within the theme of Ascent-Descent/Assent-Dissent. He said the plays focused on themes of going up and down in whatever context; whether that was political, religious, social, sexual or a little ludicrous.

Christopher Shiner, SGE actor and English and theatre senior, said he couldn't be more thrilled to be a part of such an innovative and groundbreaking event in theatre. Shiner wrote two plays that are being performed in Elevator Plays.

"It's a bit exhausting, I'm not gonna lie," Shiner said, "but this is what I love to do and it's great to interact with your audience and see their reactions."

Anna Saltgaver, SGE actress and theatre senior, said the SGE is a very tight group of friends and almost all of them have worked together on plays either at IU Southeast or in other local theatre groups.

"It's a lot of fun because we all know each other's style and who would work best in certain roles," Saltgaver said. "We're like a family, always supporting one another and helping to make sure the plays run smoothly."

Several local playwrights who are not members of SGE



By Justin Carter

**People watching and or participating in Specific Gravity Ensemble's "Elevator Plays: Ascent-Descent, Assent-Dissent" in the Starks building in downtown Louisville.**

have attended the showing of Elevator Plays and were able to experience their own plays first hand.

Todd Ziegler, journalism and theatre graduate from the University of Georgia, said the versions of his two plays that were accepted were professionally performed and made him feel proud to have such competent actors and actresses showcasing his ideas.

"I feel that they acted out my play, 'Finishing the Beginning,' excellently," Ziegler said. "I've never really had my brain spotlighted before by an independent company, and it was just marvelous."

Saltgaver said the first night of performances was a little nerve racking and there were certainly obstacles to work through. She said people would accidentally lean up against the elevator buttons and they would make unexpected stops. However,

Saltgaver said these setbacks were just part of the overall intimacy of the plays and the actors found ways to improvise.

Corey Long, SGE actor and theatre senior, said some of the audience members would talk back to him and try to interact with the context of the play after they loosened up to the vibe of the show. He said this could be distracting, but at the same time the feedback from the audience could really pump him up and let him act more freely.

Rand Harmon said the IUS theatre department has a long history of providing their students with a very well-rounded exposure to the theories and practice of theatre.

"The experiences and learning that the IUS students and graduates received helped polish already extremely talented theatre artists here at the Specific

Gravity Ensemble," Rand Harmon said. "SGE is bonded together by its shared artistry, artistic mission and great respect for each other."

Rand Harmon said the majority of the ensemble met while working on various IUS productions, and their chemistry should continue to strengthen through time.

"I'm sure that IUS is proud of the fact that they've produced alumni and students making such an impact in the area's theatre community," he said.

The Specific Gravity Ensemble will perform their "Elevator Plays: Ascent-Descent/Assent-Dissent" in the historic Starks Building in downtown Louisville on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 16 and 17 at 8 p.m. and on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 23 and 24 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$10 each and reservations can be made at 502-384-2SGE.

## German teaches English

By JACK MCCOY  
Staff Writer  
mccoym@ius.edu

Christa Zorn may have been born German, but now she spends her time educating students on the English language.

Zorn, associate professor of English, is from Hamburg, Germany.

She made her way to the IUS campus in the fall of 1995.

Before coming to the United States, Zorn got her master's degree in English, History and Educational Science in 1978.

After receiving her degree, she also spent some time teaching in Europe.

"I was a grammar school teacher for about a decade in Germany," she said.

Then Zorn decided to come to America.

"I had traveled extensively," she said, "so that made the transformation fairly easy."

She said her studies in Germany had properly prepared her to come to the United States.

"When we study English in Germany," she said, "we study every aspect of American culture, including language, politics and history."

Upon arriving, Zorn took a job at the University of Central Florida as a member of the Fulbright Exchange

Program. This prestigious program was founded in 1946 as a way to "increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries through the exchange of persons, knowledge and skills," according to the Web site.

Zorn then decided to further her education by studying British Literature at the University of Florida. In 1994, she received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida, and then decided to come to IU Southeast.

Soon after she said she made it to campus, she began making an impact. In 1995, she began serving as the co-advisor for the IUS Review, IU Southeast's annually released literary review dedicated to student writers and artists.

Working for the IUS Review, she oversaw the budget, recruited student editors, helped organize distribution and discussed the contribution of IUS students.

Zorn worked as the co-advisor from 1995 to 2006, before Tom O'Neal took over the job as faculty advisor.

O'Neal, full-time lecturer of English, had nothing but great things to say about his colleague.

"She has an interdisciplinary knowledge of literature



Christa Zorn

that is very conceptual," O'Neal said. "I have also observed her teach, and she has a way of motivating her students to do their best interpretive work."

"If you have a chance to take one of her literature courses," he said, "I strongly suggest that you do so."

Annette Wyandotte, associate professor of English, also praised the impact Zorn has made on IU Southeast.

"Dr. Zorn is an exemplary professional, as good a teacher and colleague as she is a scholar, and she is an award-winning scholar," Wyandotte said. "I find her contribution to quality education at IU Southeast to be inestimable."

Although Zorn is known on the IUS campus for her teaching, one of her main

interests is art.

She has had numerous works of art displayed, including her own exhibit at the University of Florida titled "Body Language."

"I prefer using acrylics and watercolors to create my pieces," she said, "and I have had some of my artwork displayed in the IUS Library."

Zorn's work appeared in a recent exhibit called "Artists Among Us" along with other artists connected to IU Southeast.

Though Zorn has turned over the reigns of the IUS Review to O'Neal, she is still supportive of the magazine as an artist.

The IUS Review release party will be held on Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. in the Indiana Room.

## 'The Brightness' displays quality

By MARY Q. BURTON  
Editor  
mqburton@ius.edu

Anais Mitchell must have been that girl in high school who sat in the back of the classroom quietly observing her surroundings, scribbling poetry on notebook paper. On "The Brightness," Mitchell's Righteous Babe Records debut, she takes us on a journey through those thoughts and musings, and it is beautiful.

At the age of 25, Mitchell has become a fascinating amalgamation of Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, no relation, and Ani DiFranco. Though her influences are worn on her sleeve, she is by no means unoriginal. It is her perspective and approach that are unique.

Her voice is not perfect, almost child-like, but the depth and range of the lyrics more than make up for this deficiency, as any Dylan fan would understand. Throughout most of the album she seems to hold back her voice to maintain this sound, but we catch glimpses of her true range on the chorus of the opening track "Your Fonder Heart."

Like Joni Mitchell, she makes poetry out of everyday people and her own feelings with little flourish, and

the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar. While the emotions expressed on this album and particularly on "Changer" denote a woman who has experienced a wealth of pain, Mitchell maintains an essence of innocence.

This essence seeps into the instrumentation of "The Brightness" as well. The guitar work is superior on this album, filled with intricate finger-work and few chords. At times Mitchell is accompanied by other instruments such as the Hammond organ or a piano, but more notably by the viola on "Hobo's Lullaby."

Impressively, Mitchell also draws from literature for inspiration. On "Hades & Persephone" she lets us listen in on an argument about the pain and hatred between these two mythological figures. The angst and inflections expressed in this track and others display the effects growing up listening to Ani DiFranco has on a young woman, who incidentally runs the record label this album is distributed on.

What is most refreshing about Mitchell is the sense of truth in her words. Nothing about her seems disingenuous. Her image is unembellished. Thank goodness for Indie labels.