

Howard Jensen

Howard Jensen grew up in Redmond, Utah, a tiny rural town with fewer than 500 people located between Salt Lake City and Cedar City. His father, who was a coal miner, died in a mine accident while Howard was still a child. Consequently, during his public school years, Howard's mother was the major source of stability for the family and an inspiration to him and his siblings. It was during those early years that Howard became an avid reader and a devotee of the movies. Although Redmond originally could boast of an opera house, it had burned down by the time Howard could begin to appreciate the theatre. On one occasion during his childhood, however, Howard was afforded an opportunity to see a children's theatre production with live actors; and this was the inspiration that led him to ultimately pursue what was to become a distinguished career in the theatre.

Howard's academic training began in 1962 at the College of Southern Utah. After spending two years at Southern Utah, he moved to Salt Lake City to complete his B.A. in English at the University of Utah. Following his graduation from the University of Utah, he spent two years on active duty with the U.S. Army; and after his discharge in 1968, Howard enrolled at the University of California, Davis. Upon graduation from U.C. Davis with a M.A. in theatre, Howard received a fellowship in acting from the Hilberry Graduate Repertory Theatre, a professional theatre operated in association with Wayne State University. In 1972 he received his Ph.D. in theatre from Wayne State.

When the Indiana University Department of Theatre and Drama was created in 1971, one of the primary goals of the faculty was to develop a first-rate professional acting program. Consequently, a nationwide search was undertaken and among the people recommended was a "brilliant" young actor/director who was finishing up his degree at Wayne State. In 1972 Howard Jensen joined the faculty as chair of the acting program at IU. In 1976 the acting and directing programs were combined, and he assumed the chair of the combined program. It was a position he held until 1999.

During his career Howard directed more than 30 productions for the University Theatre and taught more than a dozen different undergraduate and graduate courses in acting and directing. What is more, his students have gone on to become major figures in the world of theatre and television as actors and directors in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and elsewhere. His students are also members of the faculty in many of the best university theatre programs in the nation.

But Howard Jensen's contributions to the art of theatre are not limited to IU. He was a founding member of the Utah Shakespearean Festival, a theatre company that won the Tony Award in 2000 as the country's outstanding regional theatre. He started as an actor with the Utah Shakespearean Festival in 1962, and since 1975 he has been one of the theatre's core directors. Howard began his professional directing career at Utah with *King Lear*. In 2005 he will be directing his thirteenth production at the Utah Shakespearean Festival, *Doctor Faustus*.

Howard has also continued to act. At the Indiana Repertory Theatre, for example, he has performed in *The Tempest*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Front Page*, and *Three Sisters*.

From the beginning, with his first production in 1973 of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, Howard Jensen established a professional standard that became the hallmark of the program at Indiana University. Little wonder, therefore, that when the Ruth Halls Theatre was opened in the new Lee Norvelle Theatre and Drama Center in 2001, it was Howard Jensen who was selected to direct *Death of a Salesman*. Similarly, in 1977 Howard was selected to open the newly constructed Brown County Playhouse with his production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

When the M.F.A. in theatre was created in 1976, it was Howard Jensen who was asked to put together the basic framework of requirements and list of courses for the acting and directing program. He was also asked to coordinate the performance area with the other M.F.A. programs in theatre and drama that were being developed within the department. The fact that the M.F.A. in acting and directing has changed very little over the past three decades is indicative of the breadth and depth of his vision.

In addition to his work in the classroom and his work as a director, Howard has been actively involved in numerous other activities both inside and outside the department. For more than three decades he attended the University Resident Theatre Association auditions and was the key figure in recruiting talented students for the graduate program in acting and directing at Indiana. Then too, he was a member of the building committee for the Lee Norvelle Theatre and Drama Center, served on the student awards committee, and for many years chaired the play selection committee. Within the university he served on the College of Arts and Sciences tenure and promotion committees, and was a member of the 2002-03 provost search committee.

Outside Indiana University, Howard Jensen has served as an evaluator for the Killam Research Fellowships for the Canada Council for the Arts, chaired the external review committee for the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, was a member of the performing arts visiting committee for the University of Delaware, and was an adjudicator for the American College Theatre Festival. From 1979 to 1983 he was casting director for the Utah Shakespearean Festival.

Howard's awards and honors are indicative of his impact on the theatre locally, regionally, and nationally. In 1989 he was honored by *Arts Indiana* as a "state arts treasure who has achieved international, national, and regional recognition." And in 2001, at the fortieth anniversary of the Utah Shakespearean Festival, he was identified as one of the 40 most "illustrious persons who have illuminated our lives." In 2002 he received the Indiana University Trustees Teaching Award. In essence Howard Jensen is the ideal "artist/educator," an ideal that theatre students strive to emulate.

To say that Howard Jensen will be missed would be a gross understatement. To say that he is irreplaceable would be more accurate. Nonetheless, his retirement is upon us and his theatre students past and present, his colleagues, and his many friends inside and outside the university wish him well. As he begins a new phase in his life, we send him off with the time-honored theatre blessing, "Break a leg, Howard."

R. Keith Michael