Just six months after U-M alumnus and world renowned playwright Arthur Miller was celebrated at Michigan on Broadway: A Tribute to Arthur Miller at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in New York City, and just three months after the great man of letters died in February at the age of 89, construction is beginning on the Walgreen Drama Center on North Campus and the Arthur Miller Theatre, named in his honor.

The Arthur Miller Theatre will grace the west end of the Walgreen complex. The lofty space has been described by Kuwabara Payne McKenna and Blumberg, the Toronto- and New York-based architects for the project, as a “stately glass cube by day and a luminous beacon at night.” The new complex, which will become home to the Departments of Theatre & Drama and Musical Theatre, will be alive with activity day and night, with theatre and musical theatre classes and studios during the day and rehearsals and performances in the evening.

Laurence Goldstein, U-M Professor of English, said in the Fall 1998 issue of Michigan Quarterly Review, dedicated to works by and about Miller: “Nothing honors Arthur Miller’s native genius more eloquently, or will bring him more pleasure, I’m sure, than a future procession of artists stepping down from the bus or train or plane and taking up residence in his alma mater to begin again the Promethean labor of making the world a better place.”

Miller himself stepped off that bus in the autumn of 1934 after a journey from his Brooklyn, NY home. He tells of arriving in Ann Arbor after a long bus ride that stopped at every crossroads between New York and Michigan, hailing a taxi to take him to the Michigan Union, then later realizing that the cabbie had already been parked in front of the Union and literally “took him for a ride,” ending up right back where they started.

Too addled from travel to notice or care, the freshman paid the driver and set off on his new life at the University of Michigan. He joined the staff of The Michigan Daily, wrote for The Gargoyle, worked in a lab to earn extra money, and got involved in politics and the life of the mind. “The place was full of speeches, meetings, and leaflets,” he said in one interview. “It was jumping with Issues.”

In the meantime, he studied writing with English Professor Kenneth Rowe and struggled in his rented room with draft after draft of stories and plays—settling definitively on playwriting would come later—working out his ideas, wondering if he had the talent to make his mark in the world of literature. Recognition and encouragement came in the form of two Avery Hopwood Awards, his first for an autobiographical play, No Villain, written under the pseudonym Beymom, his second for Honors at Dawn, written under the pen name Corona.

After graduation, Miller stayed in close contact with his alma mater, giving generously of his time on his many visits to campus, presiding at Hopwood Award ceremonies, sharing ideas with his legion of admirers, and, most importantly to him, talking with students. Just last April, Miller was in town for a weekend of celebration that included the staging of scenes from his works—some famous, some less so—by theatre students and a symposium, A Conversation with Arthur Miller, where he shared his thoughts—about theatre and life—to a rapt full house.

And last November, at A Tribute to Arthur Miller in New York, the stage was resplendent with a revue of powerhouse talent—alumni and faculty of the school—who had taken time from their busy performance schedules to dance, sing, and play for their alma mater and for Arthur Miller. From the avant garde to the classical, from opera to big Broadway
numbers, from dance to jazz piano, the evening offered proof—if it was needed—of the range and depth and diversity of talent to come out of the School of Music. As President Mary Sue Coleman said that night, the School of Music and its alumni and faculty could easily have put on five such revues.

The show—and the rousing finale of The Victors that came at the end—had the full house on its feet in an evening the alumni lucky enough to be in the audience that night won’t soon forget. Actor and Michigan alum James Earl Jones was there. Director and Tony-Award winner Jack O’Brien spoke eloquently about the life and work of the honoree. Arthur Miller was there, too. He took the stage toward the end of the evening to tell the assembled Michigan grads what it meant to him to have the Arthur Miller Theatre built at his alma mater. No one could have known that that public appearance would be his last.

Upon learning of Miller’s death in February, Karen Wolff, Dean of the School of Music, said, “As a Michigan alumnus we feel Arthur Miller belongs to us; but Michigan also belonged to him; it was a part of him. Building a theatre named for Arthur Miller—the only theatre in the world to bear his name—is a fitting tribute to him. Future generations of students will see his name on the walls of that theatre and know the extent of the possibilities that lie before them because of his life.”

Laurence Goldstein, in that same issue of Michigan Quarterly Review, wrote of Miller’s belief “that the sacred place of the theater in community life, a site where the case for humanity can be ritually dramatized, is one of our enduring hopes for reform and redemption in the coming century.”

As construction begins on the Arthur Miller Theatre, and as the Departments of Theatre & Drama and Musical Theatre pack up for a move into their new home in the Walgreen Drama Center in August of 2006, a new chair of the Department of Theatre & Drama has been named, to succeed Erik Fredricksen, chair of that department for 15 years.

**NEW THEATRE CHAIR ANNOUNCED**

**GREG POGGI**

Greg Poggi, on the theatre faculty at Southern Methodist University’s Meadows School of the Arts since 1989, comes to the post with over 20 years’ experience in the field of professional arts administration. Dr. Poggi received his master’s and Ph.D. from Indiana University in drama and literary criticism. He went on to co-found the Indiana Repertory Theater, where he served as general manager. While at the helm, he generated grass-roots community participation and audience involvement for a new theatre company and organized and recruited its first working board. The resident professional LORT theatre is now in its 32nd season with an annual operating budget of $6 million. Poggi was managing director of the Manitoba Theater Center in Winnipeg and producing director of the Philadelphia Drama Guild where he initiated a playwright development program of staged readings and the full production of new plays. He will assume his new post beginning in the fall.