



Acclaimed Stage and Film Actress Jane Alexander Highlights Wendy Wasserstein Celebration

Roanoke, Va. – Jane Alexander’s distinguished career as an actress and advocate for the arts might have turned out differently if not for her education in a single-sex environment.

“I feel that my entire outlook on life was formed at this girls’ day school,” she told a Hollins University audience as she reminisced about attending Beaver Country Day School in Massachusetts. The four-time Oscar nominee and Tony Award-winner, who graduated from Sarah Lawrence College before it became co-ed, noted, “I believe those of us who attend all girls schools are lucky. We have opportunities to shine with the gifts each of us is given as females of the species.”

Alexander came to Hollins to take part in a performance celebration of the life and work of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Wendy Wasserstein, held February 15 – 17. Over a nearly 30-year career, Wasserstein established herself as “one of the greatest voices for the American theatre and American women,” according to Hollins Theatre Professor Ernest Zulia. He added that the playwright, who died in January 2006, left behind “a glorious and inspiring body of work.”

Alexander kicked off the celebration on February 15 with a program on “Women in Leadership and the Arts in the Twenty-First Century.” The following evening, she starred in a reading of Wasserstein’s last play, *Third*, on the Hollins Theatre stage.

In her lecture, Alexander spoke of the importance of stimulating “the creativity in each of us so that we might have happier, thoughtful and more productive lives, and give the world the imagination needed to envision a safe, secure and healthy world.

“It is our compassion and our imagination which will save us, which will draw the map for our future; which will find new ways of living our lives and alternatives to destructive ways. Hollins’ young women will grow up to be our leaders, our mothers, and our best citizens at a time when we need them more than ever. The education they are receiving...will produce the minds that will make the difference for our planet.”

Alexander first earned acclaim in the late 1960s in the original Broadway production of *The Great White Hope* and went on to receive her first Academy Award nomination for her role in the 1970 film version. She subsequently garnered Oscar nods for *All the President’s Men* (1976), *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), and *Testament* (1983).

From 1993 to 1997, Alexander served as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Her book, *Command Performance: An Actress in the Theater of Politics* (2000), describes the challenges and difficulties she faced in heading the NEA.

Wasserstein came to prominence in 1977 with her play, *Uncommon Women and Others*, and earned the Pulitzer Prize in 1989 for her best-known work, *The Heidi Chronicles*. Her other plays include *The Sisters Rosensweig* (in which Alexander starred on Broadway and earned a Tony Award nomination), *Isn’t It Romantic*, and *Old Money*.

Hollins’ salute to Wasserstein continued in the Hollins Theatre on February 17. William Ivey Long, winner of four Tony Awards for costume design, hosted a presentation of seven of the playwright’s one-act plays by area colleges and universities, including Hollins, Virginia Tech, the University of Virginia, Radford University,

Roanoke College, and Washington and Lee University. Long, considered one of Broadway's greatest designers, was Wasserstein's close friend for many years.

That night, the Wasserstein celebration concluded with the Hollins Theatre Department's presentation of *Uncommon Women and Others*. Originally staged at Hollins last fall, the production earned the department a recommendation from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival.

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