



Lex Allen Literary Festival Celebrates Golden Anniversary

by Stephanie Graham '10

The Lex Allen Literary Festival is among Hollins University's most anticipated events during Spring Term. But the 2010 edition particularly resonated with attendees as the festival celebrated both the 50th year of Hollins' nationally recognized creative writing program and its own golden anniversary.

Judging by the early and enthusiastic turnout for this year's festival, which was held March 6 in the Richard Wetherill Visual Arts Center, the event continues to foster a strong sense of community for both writers and those who enjoy great literature.

"I think it's really awesome that I'm here for the 50th," said Brianna McPherson, who is in her first year as a student in Hollins' M.F.A. program in creative writing. "There's such a strong history. It's exciting."

McPherson praised the Lex Allen Literary Festival for welcoming the community at large as well as Hollins students. "I think it's significant that this event is free and open to the public. Literature needs to be accessible...it's not privileged information."

Ben Alter of Roanoke College, one of the finalists in the festival's poetry contest, echoed McPherson's sentiment. "It's just great to bring a social aspect to [writing]. Usually it's a very isolated practice, but it's good to bring people together."

This year, the festival featured readings from poet and creative nonfiction writer Molly Peacock, whose works have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The Paris Review*; Valerie Martin, whose eight novels include *Mary Reilly*, *the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

story told from the viewpoint of a housemaid, which was filmed with Julia Roberts and John Malkovich; and David Payne, the Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Writer-in-Residence at Hollins for 2010, and an author who has been called “the most gifted American novelist of his generation” by *The Dallas Morning News*. A poetry panel discussing student-submitted work rounded out the day’s events, hosted by some of Hollins’ own professors, including T.J. Anderson, R.H.W. Dillard, and Jeanne Larsen.

Larsen has been a creative writing professor at Hollins for over twenty years, and has seen the creative writing program grow and flourish. “I really am proud to be a part of this,” she said. “We are incredibly lucky. We have the benefit of a small but strong community where you really get to know students, and at the same time there are so many writers – both student and faculty – that we don’t get stuck in a rut in terms of style or taste.”

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