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# Babcock

*Article by James Post; Layout by Sam Bartusek  
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**R**aturally, before starting this article, I Googled 'Allen Babcock', to see what I could find. The Internet is a useful tool, and it never hurts to do some background research. Old LinkedIn profiles and Facebook pages are often rather revealing. However, I, at first, wasn't able to find an Allen Babcock teacher on the web. My results didn't please Allen:

"Well, the first result was the umm..."

"THAT CAT RESCUE WOMAN!"

That's right. Babs was beat out by a middle-aged woman who makes it her duty to recover lost pets (Barbara Allen Babcock).

"That cat rescue woman is my nemesis...I sent her an email once...She's just more Google-popular than I am."

Internet aside, Allen Babcock is certainly an established member of this community. Under a slightly dazed photo in Names and Faces, his title reads, "Designer & Technical Director of Theatre". He's one of the few faculty members completely devoted to, and involved in, the three yearly major productions: a musical in the Fall, play in the Winter, and another play in the Spring. Like those few other faculty members involved in theatre, Mr. Babcock also teaches

several drama classes here at Hotchkiss. However, outside the oaken doors, cement balustrades, and brick patios of our school, Mr. Babcock lives a second life: managing and operating (with a few of his closest friends) a production group in New York City. His unlikely path to this unexpected life began a long time ago in a state far, far away...

Georgia.

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I doubt that many here at Hotchkiss have heard of Rome, Georgia. Tucked away about an hour northwest of Atlanta, near the Alabama state border, it's probably only used by tourists as a place to find a motel, go out to dinner, and ask for directions. Few would associate Rome with the arts. But surprisingly enough, a young Mr. Babcock was able to flourish in that southern town; to discover and develop his true love for theatre.

Allen's parents first introduced him to the arts. While both were involved in the community theatre, according to Babcock, they "weren't talented; they couldn't sing." After acknowledging this fact about his progenitors, Babcock decided that the first thing he

should do as an artist was learn how to sing: "At first it was mainly classical, and it got to the point where I even toured around the country". Mr. Babcock soon began to delve into all other aspects of the theatrical arts, dancing tap and jazz, and acting in the local community theatre. Once his voice dropped, he bagged the singing, but was still very active in high school and community productions. He fondly remembers a point in his junior year of high school in which he pondered, "Maybe I could do this," ('This' being seriously considering theatre as a career, and a defining part of his adult life).

The time for this life-changing decision came in his senior year: where would he go to college? He was a "passionate sailor", so, in his words, "It was naval academy or art school". He saved up some extra cash by working at Domino's pizza, (a job he only describes as "hilarious"), and decided to head off to Syracuse University. There, he quickly began working on set design. But his senior year at SU held another event that would change his life.

As a senior, Babs was allowed to work on off-campus professional productions, and he'd had the fortune to work on a show with Dawn Chang, a

renowned technical designer. Babs was going to be her first assistant in a show down in Charlotte, NC, but something went awry: Ms. Chang's flight was cancelled. When Allen arrived in Charlotte, the technical director at the theatre had screwed things up, and the young hotshot university student from Syracuse was able to save the day. According to Babcock, the director realized: "Oh, this kid knows what he's doing". Babcock was allowed to control the lights for the show, in Dawn's absence, and play a major role in his first professional gig.

Upon graduation from Syracuse, Mr. Babcock's life took another unexpected turn. Up until then, he thought he would simply "go to New York to be a starving artist", but he was offered a job at Culver Academy (he had family ties in the area, and knew of the school). Mr. Babcock was raised at Darlington School in Rome. He came from a long line of established and accomplished teachers. But never did he think that he would become involved in education: "Uhh...I railed against it. You know, 'I don't wanna be a teacher, I don't wanna be a teacher.'" But for two years at Culver Academy, that's exactly what he did, along with producing several theatrical shows. "Cul-

**"I want to stay relevant. That's why I work in New York. I could stay here [at Hotchkiss] and hang out on the weekends and never leave... But I'm an artist. And I feel like it's my duty to ask questions."**





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ver, [for me], laid the foundation of what it meant to be a teacher”. Babcock soon decided it was time to move on. After Culver, he came to, you guessed it, the best school in all of New England (a place WAY better than Taft)... Mercersburg Academy. There he was put in charge of the brand new, fancy, arts venue, a job he didn’t enjoy too much: “I didn’t want my job to be about a building, I wanted it to be about people”.

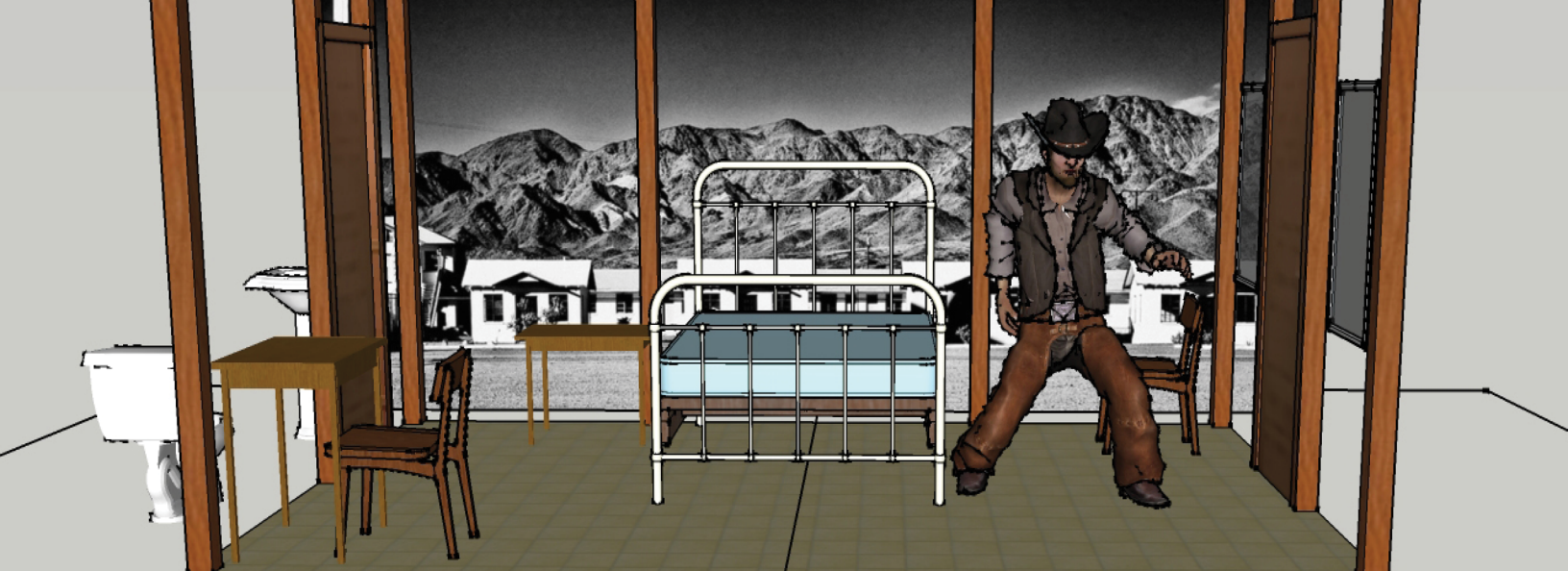
After one year at Mercersburg, Allen came to Hotchkiss. Here, he’s taught Public Speaking, Humanities Theatre, Directing, and Musical Theatre. When asked about his favorite class to teach, he didn’t hesitate: “I looove the Humanities Program. I’m all about Humanities, for all sorts of reasons. I love meeting with my colleagues every week, and chatting about why we are doing what we do.... You don’t get that

kind of interaction anywhere, you know? Teachers [usually] go into their classrooms, close their doors and that’s it.”

Having lived in Edelman Dormitory for his 6 years here, Mr. Babcock also appreciates the dorm life. “One of my conditions when I came to Hotchkiss was, ‘I will not work at this school unless I live in a dorm’. It’s kind of like one of those little terrariums you used to make in third grade, you just throw a bunch of stuff in there together and see what happens. I mean, [the students] are the nexus of boarding school life, and as crazy as it sounds, talking to kids at 4 in the morning about some sort of crisis they’re having isn’t the worst thing in the world.”

By far his favorite aspect of the boarding school, however, is the community, and the students. “[At Culver Academy,] Awful things went down,





**Previous:** Babcock designed the set for *Metamorphoses*, shown here in three different scenes.

**Above:** A computer model vs. the real set of *Fool for Love*.

**Opposite:** Variations Theatre Group's Chain Theatre in Queens, New York.

just...terribly horrific things. And watching that group of 14 to 19 year-olds, that community, pull together and support each other in amazing ways, confirmed for me that it was an OK place to be. That's why I'm still doing it. I find the way that student communities interact and support each other.... I'm still in awe. As frustrating as adolescents can be, there are moments that are just brilliant: where the students work together and support each other in a way that can be really instructive to adults."

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Allen's work outside of Hotchkiss primarily involves the Variations Theatre Group. Mr. Babcock formed the theatre group with three of his closest friends: Rich Ferraioli, Kirk Gostkowski, and Greg Cicchino. The formation of the group a few years ago soon led to the acquisition of The Chain Theatre, in Queens, New York. The group is constantly working on shows in the theatre, or renting the space out to other groups. Babcock complained to me: "Do you know how much money I've spent on the toll to the RFK Bridge?"

His trips often take up his entire weekends, and sometimes force him to miss classes. "...My friends in New York all think I'm crazy; [they think] that I need to be down there doing design, that I'm nuts." Indeed, it's quite a paradox that Mr. Babcock manages to balance this seemingly precarious combination: a teacher and dorm resident at a prestigious boarding school, and at the same time an active member of a small, hardworking theatre group. His explanation: "I spend a lot of time shooting emails".

So why do this? Why would a busy Hotchkiss teacher go out of the way to work in New York? Why isn't Hotchkiss theatre enough?

"I want to stay relevant. That's why I work in New York. I could stay here [at Hotchkiss] and hang out on the weekends and never leave and go to New York and see Broadway shows sometimes.... But I'm an artist. And I feel like it's my duty to... I don't know... ask questions. It's my job as an educator to expose students to the most current art, and to the movers and the shakers of the business. You can only keep your thumb on the pulse of what's going on in the art world by participating in it. Being a part of the off-Broadway theatre circuit in New York, and freelance designing is how I do that. But I wasn't really banking on running a production company, and running a theatre in New York. Although I wouldn't give it back. I'm very happy with the theatre and the space: having a venue to provide for and help young artists create meaningful work in New York."

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