

# Life is a cabaret for Donna Marie Nudd

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Nudd

Upon arriving in Tallahassee, Donna Marie Nudd took a teaching position in the department of communications at Florida State University, and alongside her wife and artistic partner Terry Galloway, began the venture that would become Mickee Faust, an academy for the "really" dramatic arts.

Fast-forward 30 years and the group is thriving at their "clubhouse" (a tongue and cheek play on the famous Mickey Mouse Club) location in Railroad Square, with a loyal core group, new members being added every year, and a wide range of repertory. As Executive Director, Nudd says the clubhouse itself has become her largest artistic endeavor. Working with grant dollars awarded to make the stage, office, and backstage accessible for company members with disabilities, anonymous donations of curtains and lights have also helped to give the space added vitality.

"There's a delight in working in this very diverse company with very diverse voices," says Nudd. "As the writers write the pieces and what's on their mind, people give feedback and watch it develop in their performance. Any theater company has its own tensions, whether they're artistic or political, and I'm very proud of the way Faust works those out."

The youngest of six, Nudd was a fairly shy child. With the encouragement of her mother, she entered speech competitions at school, often practicing her speeches while nestled in the tree-tops of her backyard. From that time on, she fell in love with speech and performance and earned a BA in speech communications, an MA in theater arts, and a Ph.D. in communication studies.

Of her favorite courses to teach in speech and performance, she loves the public speaking classes she teaches at FSU's London satellite campus. First-year students will go on assignment to the British Museum, choose an artifact to research, and then give an informative speech about it for the class. Nudd says this exercise also provides some humor due to the dynamic nature of the audience, as the students giving speeches often draw crowds of tourists looking to them as guides.

"The trick is using the environment," smiles Nudd. "It's fun too because in public speaking students are writing their own speeches, so they're writing about what they're passionate about. And civically, it's important."

Nudd met her partner Galloway at the University of Texas at Austin, and together, they've enjoyed many successes



Donna Marie Nudd playing Helena in a Faust production of "A Moveable Midsummer Night's Dream," the other actor is Jimmers Micallef.

in writing and performances on both a national and international scale. Nudd believes in the duty of academics to give back to the community and fervently works to do just that with Mickee Faust. Nudd shares this belief with her wife and is inspired by Galloway's ability to push herself and others, and the ability of performance to connect with communities.

"We both genuinely believe in alternative theater and find it essential for communities to have these raw spaces to develop art," says Nudd. "Those kinds of rough, crunchy spaces are not as intimidating. They can be incredibly welcoming to the performers and give the audience a sense that you're enjoying something fun."

Given the wide spectrum of ages, orientations, and abilities of the company members, Nudd says the assortment of ideas the group brings lends itself well to the cabaret format that Mickee Faust often utilizes. Nudd admits that negotiations aren't always easy, but the continual conversations always lead to innovations and improvements.

For example, the group decided to caption the skits of one company member in order to give added clarity to their lines. The company member countered with a question as to why they couldn't caption all the skits — Nudd, Galloway, and the group agreed, and eventually this revelation led to an unexpected outcome.

"You think you're captioning for the deaf community, but then we found out that the senior citizens and international students loved the captioning," explains Nudd. "It's not that hard to do, yet how many theaters caption their shows? You do what you can and should do, and be open to people telling you you're not doing enough or you're doing it wrong."

Just as her directing style relies on collaboration, Nudd says the same goes for the creative environment cultivated at Faust. The roles of directing, dramaturge and actor are often blurred within the company, with everyone free to offer up suggestions or thoughts. Nudd admits that it can get to be many



## If you go

**What:** Faust and Frivolous: A Mickee Faust Cabaret/Variety Show

**When:** Doors open at 7 p.m., show at 8 p.m., March 30-31 and April 1

**Where:** Mickee Faust Clubhouse, 623 McDonnell Drive  
**Cost:** \$15 general admission, \$10 for students, retirees, and persons with a disability, \$5 off Thursday's show

**Contact:** For more information, visit [www.mickee-faust.com](http://www.mickee-faust.com).

yard.

As a director, she'll be bringing the genre of "short-short fiction," to the stage with "The Laughter" by Heinrich Boll. Nudd will also appear as an actress in three skits. In one titled "Star Trek Parody," Nudd plays seductress Julieann, a potato person from the planet Idaho, delivering sultry, femme fatale lines like "I've always wanted to be supersized with a Big Mac," with a smirk.

Another piece, titled "Scorn #3," relies heavily on quick movement and physical comedy and features Nudd and another actor playing as a-

tars on an interactive Shakespeare website. Most importantly, Nudd hopes the audience members will find catharsis and laughter with the company as they take a look back on 30 years of their best, most memorable skits.

"You can get away with more in comedy," smiles Nudd. "It's a great means to poke fun at power but it's also a wonderful way of talking back to what's on your mind, but I think you want to create an environment where there's a freedom to take risks and a freedom to fail. We try to keep each other from failing, but you also don't want to have it so structured or safe that people aren't taking risks, because what's the purpose of performance and directing if you're not pushing it?"

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).

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