

# THE DUSABLE PROJECT

Northwestern University

April 28, 2004



Funded by the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in the Arts

## Description of Project

The purpose of The DuSable Project is to provide Northwestern undergraduate students and faculty collaborators from various disciplines, a unique opportunity to develop, design, and stage an interactive multimedia work-- a performance that will utilize digital media and traditional Second City based improvisational methods, to dramatize the life of Jean Baptiste du Sable: Chicago's first non-native settler. In utilizing Second City improvisational forms, The DuSable Project approaches the subject of Chicago's origins in a humorous, forthright and revealing manner, allowing the story to be accessible to a young audience, yet containing more sophisticated references for all ages. The Second City style also encourages a high level of performer and audience interactivity (for example, the audience chooses between various narrative options throughout DuSable's journey – reflecting the many theories concerning DuSable).

The text will be drawn from Dan Zellner's script "DuSable" which was first developed in collaboration with Red Path Theater (Illinois' only Native American theatre company) and has been presented at the Chicago Historical Society, Truman College, and as part of the first annual Juneteenth Festival (African-American Theatre Program) at the University of Louisville. The play was further developed for digital media presentation through collaboration with members of University of Illinois' Electronic Visualization Laboratory.

The goals of The DuSable Project are to develop and implement a method for integrating live theatre and digital technology at Northwestern, to experiment with cross school and interdisciplinary approaches to digital art making and to envision a model for digital stage production that accommodates simple and advanced technological applications for future performances on campus. We anticipate the involvement of Northwestern undergraduates (approx. 10-14) in developing and acting in the live performance on campus. We will conduct a university wide search/call for participation that will include diverse student organizations, arts groups and academic programs: African American Student Affairs, the African-American Theatre Ensemble as well as the departments of Engineering, Computer Science, Theatre, and Art Theory and Practice. In addition, in order to involve the wider community in the project, we will establish contact with Chicago's cultural and historical organizations and civic groups, including: the Chicago Historical Society, the DuSable Museum of African-American History, the Friends of DuSable, and others stakeholders of the DuSable legacy.

The DuSable Project brings together practitioners in the disciplines of Theatre, Computer Science, Performance Studies, and Digital Media. The collaboration will provide a means of actively experimenting with concepts of design for a digital stage, the testing and modification of implementation processes and the coalescence of individual approaches to the creation of digital art works for a live audience. In addition, The DuSable Project will further enhance university support of art and technology programs and human/computer interaction initiatives.

### **Personnel/Collaborators**

**Dan Zellner (Digital Media Services, Northwestern University Library)**

*(Playwright/Technology Coordinator for The DuSable Project)*

Dan, the project leader, has over 15 years experience in producing and developing theatre. Zellner is the interactive writer on "Virtual Vaudeville", a performance simulation project funded by the National Science Foundation and spearheaded by the University of Georgia. He is also the Artistic Director of Studio Z – an organization that has been cited for innovative work in the area of theatre and digital technology. At Northwestern University, he has served as project manager and consultant for many faculty and graduate student projects relating to digital media production design and application. He holds an M.F.A. in theatre from U.C.L.A.

**Sandra Richards (Theatre Department, Northwestern)**

*(Dramaturge of The DuSable Project)*

Professor Richards is the Leon Forrest Professor of African American Studies and is also Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at Northwestern. Her expertise lies in African American, African and American theater; African American women playwrights, Black feminist theory and acting. From 1998 to August, 2001 Professor Richards acted as chair of the African American Studies Department and has in the past been the Acting Director of Northwestern's Program of African Studies. During

2001-02 she received a Rockefeller Fellowship in the Black Performing Arts at Stanford University's Humanities Center, where she began working on a project related to cultural tourism to slave sites in the Black Atlantic. Professor Richards has directed theater at Stanford University and the University of Benin in Nigeria.

**Kathryn Farley (Performance Studies Department, Northwestern)**  
*(Stage Director of The DuSable Project)*

Kathryn is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern where she is completing a dissertation titled, "Theatre in the Digital Age: Interactive Technologies, Virtual Spaces and Aesthetic Transformations". Combining theatre history with ethnographic and performative research, the project, which is directed by Professor Margaret Thompson Drewal, balances speculative and practical approaches to the study of technology and performance, by situating case study analyses of groundbreaking digital practitioners within cultural theory and media studies frameworks. At Northwestern, Kathryn has taught undergraduate courses which explore the performance of contemporary Irish drama and the adaptation of fiction. A digital portfolio of Kathryn's artistic and academic work can be found at [www.kathrynfarley.org](http://www.kathrynfarley.org).

**Sam Ball (Theatre Department, Northwestern)**  
*(Design Advisor to The DuSable Project)*

Professor Ball teaches design and technical theater, a curriculum that he designed himself, and he has been a moving force in theater since 1960. His theater design credits include more than one hundred productions, ranging from *One Foot in America* at Northwestern to *Before My Eyes* at Chicago's Victory Gardens Theater. Other credits include the Lyric Opera, Chicago, local television stations WMAQ, WLS, and WGN, the Seattle Repertory Theater, and the Orlando Shakespeare Festival. He recently completed a two-year stint as the theater consultant for the Northwestern Settlement House Vittum Theater, Chicago.

**David Saltz (Dramatic Media Program, University of Georgia)**  
*(DuSable Project Advisor/Consultant)*

Professor Saltz is a specialist in modern drama, performance theory, the philosophy of art, and directing. His current research focus has been the interaction between live performance and digital media. He has explored the use of computer technology extensively in his own work as a director and teacher. Along those lines he established the Interactive Performance Laboratory at UGA, and has directed a series of productions incorporating real-time interactive digital media. He has also created interactive sculptural installations. Before coming to Georgia, Professor Saltz was co-Director of the Laboratory for Technology in the Arts at State University of New York at Stony Brook, and held teaching positions at The College of William and Mary, and Stanford. He is the principal investigator on the NSF funded project "Virtual Vaudeville: a performance simulation system."

