

New Orleans theater community loses a cherished player

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Buzz Podewell, a member of the theater faculty at Tulane University for nearly 40 years, died March 29 of lung cancer at his New Orleans home at the age of 69.



Buzz Podewell will be remembered for Patchwork Players and Shakespeare Festival at Tulane. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

In addition to teaching Shakespeare, theater history, acting and directing at Tulane, Podewell was founder of the Patchwork Players, the children's summer theater at Tulane. He wrote the stories and songs for the troupe, which has entertained audiences for nearly 30 years with Podewell's quirky retellings of stories such as "Rumpelstiltskin," "Cinderella," "Aladdin," "Pecos Bill," and "The Emperor's New Clothes."

Podewell often took the role of "pit orchestra," playing banjo throughout the performances. While rehearsal time was limited, Podewell said there would be room for improvisation during the numerous scheduled performances each summer.

"That's what keeps it fresh for the actors," Podewell said.

Podewell also was a co-founder and former artistic director of the [Shakespeare Festival at Tulane](#), and he was the longtime director of Tulane Center Stage, the theater department's former summer-stock company.

He authored a two-volume study of time and place in Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Watch*.

Over his career, Podewell directed about 200 plays at Tulane University and with other theater companies. His directorial debut for the Shakespeare Festival in 2010 was for [Love's Labor's Lost](#) starring his daughter, Jessica Podewell, now an adjunct assistant professor in the Tulane [Department of Theatre and Dance](#) who continues the legacy of the Patchwork Players. His wife is the musician and singer Banu Gibson.

Plans for a memorial celebration will be announced at a future date. For those who wish to pay tribute to Buzz Podewell, the family suggests donations to [MusiCares](#). Affiliated with the Grammys, MusiCares provides a safety net of critical assistance for music people in times of need.