

Why we love robots. Free reading of first robot play R.U.R. at National Academy of Sciences

June 25, 2014 by [Keith Loria](#)

It was back in 2009 when the Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences teamed with Shakespeare Theatre Company to present a staged reading of *Inherit the Wind*, as a way to showcase science in theater. For those unfamiliar with the play, it tells the fictionalized account of the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" Trial, which resulted in John T. Scopes's conviction for teaching Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to a high school science class, contrary to a Tennessee state law.



JD Talasek, Director, Cultural Programs of the NAS

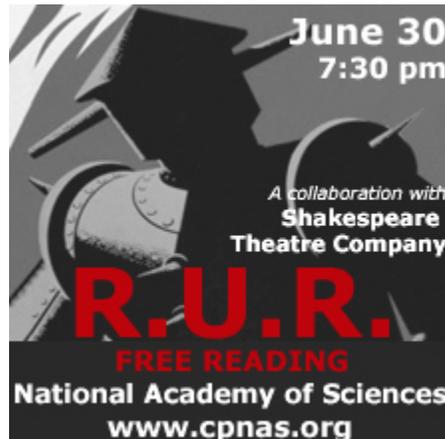
"It was very timely as it was the anniversary of Darwin's birthday," says JD Talasek, director of cultural services for the NAS. "We performed it as a one-out, but it had such an amazing response and it was so much fun doing it, that we have been doing them ever since."

Over the years, plays like *Doctor Faustus* and *A Life of Galileo* have been performed and this year, CPNAS once again teamed with Shakespeare Theatre Company to present two robot-themed events.

"Science and technology and medicine are areas we are all so concerned with, it just seems like a ripe, rich area of bringing in theater to think about the issues and look at the impact of science and

the way we process information,” Talasek says. “The program is very interested in exploring the idea of art, science and culture, and in different ways we have talks, readings, and there is a real power to theater in the sense that it provides a platform for discussing issues that concern us.”

Last week, Talasek presented an “A D.C. Art Science Evening Rendezvous on June 19 and next week, it will stage a theatrical reading of *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)* in collaboration with the Shakespeare Theatre Company on June 30.



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A science fiction lover’s favorite, *Rossum’s Universal Robots* is a 1920 play by Czech writer Karel Capek, which offers one of the first-ever introductions of robots into popular culture.

“*R.U.R.* is such an exciting play for me. This was the play where the word ‘robot’ was coined,” Talasek says. “The whole concept of robots doing work for us was born out of this play. It shows how theater can shape our thinking. The robots in the play are very different than what we think of robots as today. They are not nuts and bolts, they are almost like biotechnology creatures.”

The reading will be directed by Samantha K. Wyer and features a cast of John Lescault, Kimberly Gilbert, Rick Foucheux, Tim Getman, Hugh Nees, Harry Winter, Bev Appleton, Jefferson Russell, Joe Isenberg, Lee McKenna, Nora Achrati, Thony Mena, Jacob Yeh, Manu Kumasi, Joy Jones, Nick Byron and Matthew McGee.

“One of the fun things about working with the Shakespeare Theatre Company is they always come up with something—a projection or other creative way to bring the play alive,” he says. “It’s amazing what wonderful actors can do with practically nothing and how they can capture the imagination to transport you even with no objects.”

At the June 19 event, Dennis Jerz, associate professor of English, New Media Journalism who teaches at Seton Hill University, examined what we think of robots as first introduced by *R.U.R.*

The free reading will be held at 7:30 p.m., Monday, June 30, at the NAS, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. Reservations and photo IDs are required. [Reservations and details here.](#)

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