

ON THEATER
BY JUDITH NEWMARK

Death is a reminder: The show must go on

When Brad Graham, the public-relations manager for the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, died this week at 41, everything seemed sadly familiar.

Steven Woolf, the theater's artistic director, put it plainly.

"This is *deja vu*," he said Monday, voicing the thought on many minds.

In July, the Rep's associate artistic director, Susan Gregg, died under similar circumstances.

Each died at home, over a weekend. Each was found because other Rep staffers had not heard from them, could not reach them, became worried and made sure that someone checked.

Friends knew that Gregg, who was 65, had a heart ailment. As far as friends at the Rep knew, Graham wasn't ill. Both deaths were unexpected.

And in each case, friends and colleagues were left reeling from a loss that they probably couldn't have braced themselves for even if they had had the chance.

Rarely do theaters have big staffs, full of people who can step into each other's shoes. The Rep is no exception.

Gregg's loss was felt almost immediately,



Brad Graham

when a director had to be brought in for the Studio Theatre production of "Secret Order," a play Gregg was to have directed. Her intense research on



Susan Gregg

every show the Rep produced and her passion for encouraging creativity in children made her very likely irreplaceable. As is Graham. You want to know how good he was professionally? Look at the Rep's excellent website, repstl.org. Graham started out as an old-media writer (I believe a typewriter was involved) but he embraced new forms, blogging, tweeting and more.

A social networking pioneer who's credited with coining the word "blogosphere," he loved this stuff, and many of

the people mourning him now never met him. But they were crazy about his imagination, his style and his generosity.

So were colleagues, actors and other theater artists.

In a world that's unusually open to "temperament," Graham was a cool drink of water, refreshing and reliable and always willing to share a burden or take on another job.

It almost goes without saying that he made my job easier day after day and year after year, and I loved to hear his voice on the phone, not least because he always addressed me as "Gorgeous."

People in the theater know that they don't have regular jobs, but sometimes they're dissatisfied, just like people in any other field. They can forget that what they do for a living is more fun than anyone is entitled to get paid to have.

Graham never forgot, and he did his utmost to make sure everyone around

him was able to remember that as well.

Tonight, the Rep will open its next production, a comedy-thriller called "The 39 Steps." It has been a shock all season to go to the Loretto-Hilton Center, where the Rep performs, and not see Gregg.

This evening, without Gregg and without Graham, the Loretto-Hilton will doubtlessly seem a strange, diminished place.

But, as Woolf observed, the theater invented the metaphor that everyone applies to these situations: The show must go on.

Once the lights go down and the world of the play opens up, we'll laugh and applaud, the same as always.

We'll give ourselves over to the moment, because that's how theater works on both sides of the lights.

Gregg and Graham understood that perfectly. It's time to give the two of them a hand.



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