

plays the seasoned whore Jenny Diver. Various others, including some local drag queens, will fill the remaining roles.

Barton, a well-credentialed modern-dance choreographer, says that creating movement for non-dancers is fine by her. Furthermore, she insists, all these people can dance; they just don't know it. "A lot of the stuff I've come up with, I got it from looking at them. I'm more interested in the insides of people, and in bringing that out physically. I don't want these dances to be steppy, like a lot of Broadway shows. I want them to be real." That's consistent with her other recent work: her dancers tear around on naked legs, their emotions pulling them, throwing them.

The "Threepenny" actors are on her side, she says. "I'm sure they think that what I do is completely strange, but in a good way." She also has faith in the power of Brecht's text, and Shawn's translation, to motivate their movement. Near the end, Mr. Peachum sings:

Men really aren't good,  
So possibly it would  
Improve them if you kicked their heads,  
I truly think it would.

Mac and the others kick heads in return, and everyone has a nice, dirty good time.

—Joan Acocella

## PENCILS UP! THE S.A.T.'S WATCHDOG



The Web site of the test-coaching company the Princeton Review includes a feature called the "Vocab Minute"—a brief original song whose lyrics are intended to help students memorize the kinds of polysyllabic vocabulary words that come up on standardized exams. The current song is called "Rainy Day S.A.T. Blues #4000." It concerns a test-taker named Billy, who almost doesn't get into the college of his choice (Princeton, of course) because "the company that runs the S.A.T.,/it was a little nonchalant;/it let those tests get wet,/causing Billy to get/a score he didn't earn or want." (*Nonchalant*: feeling or appearing calm and relaxed.) The lyrics allude to the recent difficulties of

the College Board, which in the past few weeks has had to notify more than a thousand colleges that forty-four hundred students who took the S.A.T. last October received scores that were too low, some of them by four hundred and fifty points. The problem, the board said, was excessive moisture in some of the answer sheets, which didn't register properly in the scanning equipment of Pearson Educational Measurement, the Iowa company to which the board subcontracts its S.A.T. grading.

The board's problems have also produced some hectic weeks for Robert Schaeffer, who is the public education director of the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, or FairTest, a nonprofit advocacy group. Schaeffer's telephone has been ringing constantly, with calls from reporters, college admissions officers, high-school guidance counsellors, and parents. He has also heard from more than a half-dozen law firms, several of which have been involved in other testing cases, including a successful suit against Pearson over scoring errors on a test administered to Minnesota high-school students.

FairTest was founded in 1985, when a friend of Schaeffer's who had been involved in battles over standardized testing "kidnapped" him, as he put it, and persuaded him to help with a project that ultimately became FairTest. Schaeffer had become interested in testing while working in M.I.T.'s now defunct Education Research Center. FairTest's current headquarters are in a rented house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose owner is a retired high-school guidance counsellor. "Our landlord, like almost all guidance counsellors, hates the S.A.T.," Schaeffer said.

In recent years, FairTest has suffered serious financial difficulties. Its budget—currently around two hundred thousand dollars a year—is heavily dependent on grants from foundations, which have been less generous than in the past. "We used to have as many as six full-time employees, and our offices were on both floors in the Cambridge house," Schaeffer said. "We're now down to the equivalent of one employee and about a room and a half." Schaeffer constitutes half of that employee. He now lives in Florida and devotes the other half of his work time to the Cen-

ter for Civic Participation, a nonpartisan group whose principal concerns include voter registration and election participation—issues that, in Florida, at any rate, also involve machines that can't count.

People who worry about the deficiencies of machine-graded multiple-choice tests sometimes advocate replacing them with essay tests, on the model of the twenty-five-minute writing section that was added to the S.A.T. last year. Schaeffer said, "The so-called new S.A.T. is just a marketing gimmick. And the way the College Board grades essays, they might as well use machines." The board's human graders (mostly moonlighting teachers) are taught to use a method that the board calls "holistic" and that Schaeffer calls "a cyber sweatshop": the graders spend about two or three minutes reading a digital copy of each essay (scanned by Pearson), then grade it immediately, on a scale of zero to six. The College Board tells readers to base their evaluations on things like "clear and consistent mastery," but the truly decisive criterion may be simpler. Last year, Les Perelman, who is a director of the undergraduate writing program at M.I.T., reviewed a number of scored essays. "I discovered that I could guess an essay's prescribed score just by looking at its length—even from across a room," he wrote.

As for the current scandal, one significant issue that most people seem to have overlooked concerns S.A.T. scores that the College Board has *not* changed: those of the more than six hundred students who took the same test and were given scores that were too high. The board's rationale for letting those scores stand, a spokesman said last week, was that test-takers shouldn't be punished for the improper scanning of their answer sheets. But test-scoring errors are a zero-sum game. Giving students erroneously high scores is no different, either in principle or in effect, from giving students erroneously low scores, since both mistakes create an unfair advantage for one group of test-takers at the expense of another. Schaeffer said, "I think that the decision not to reduce scores was a very shrewd calculation by the College Board not to create more plaintiffs."

—David Owen