



BACKSTAGE

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STAGEBRIDGE

December 2009

Vol. 2, Number 4, Outreach Issue

Serving Bay Area Communities Since 1978



“You bring light into our lives.” Stagebridge is in the business of lifting people’s spirits. The company serves a wide variety of community needs working with people age 5-102. Last year we did 495 performances and workshops for 85 agencies and 20 schools reaching over 27,000 people throughout the Bay Area.

A typical month for Stagebridge’s troupe of actors, storytellers, improv and musical performers is quite varied. On a Friday afternoon, we were in San Lorenzo training elementary school teachers in Title 1 (low income) schools how to use storytelling to help students improve their language arts skills (see accompanying article). Across town, our improv troupe the **Antic Witties** was entertaining at the monthly meeting of Lavender Seniors. Stagebridge has been using storytelling, theatre and music to help LGBT seniors share their stories for the past year and a half as part of our multicultural outreach program. And a six-month workshop with Spanish speaking elders in Oakland’s Fruitvale culminated in the airing of their stories on KPFA-FM, Berkeley. The stories were told bilingually with Stagebridge storytellers.

In Concord, with only five days notice, Stagebridge performers were commissioned to perform a rap song on elder abuse. This lively number was presented at an Elder Financial Abuse Conference and will be aired on local television next month. Stagebridge has a long history of assisting informational campaigns for elders

through various agencies by acting in training videos, print ads, public service announcements and conference performances.

Across the bay in San Francisco, Charles Blue shared his memory of marching with Martin Luther King Jr. with students at International High School. He was joined by other Stagebridge tellers who sang songs and told stories of their remembrances of the Civil Rights Movement. Stagebridge’s Living History Program helps young people achieve a deeper understanding of history as a story well told by a caring elder.

Farther from home, our popular musical trio, **The Dreamers** traveled to Tracy to perform songs from the 30s, 40s and 50s for a women’s club luncheon of enthusiastic fans. Stagebridge musical programs evoke memories and touch audiences on deep emotional levels. In the North Bay community of Mill Valley, **TimeSlips** Director Liz Nichols conducted an all day sold out workshop for regional activity directors at the The Redwoods, a retirement community. Stagebridge is the Western regional training facility for this creative storytelling method for people with dementia and their caregivers. The company has trained over 100 people in the past two years.

Meeting community needs has always been a guiding force for Stagebridge. Given the economic times and the growing Baby Boomers population, these needs continue to grow.

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In the Spotlight:

STORYBRIDGE LISTENING AND SPEAKING PROGRAM



Thirty fifth graders eagerly crowd into a circle on the corner rug and pass a “sound ball” back and forth. “Remember to get someone’s attention with your eyes. Look right at the person you are throwing to,” coaches Stagebridge Storytelling

Mentor Jeff Byers. The students work hard to focus while also making vocal sounds as they throw the invisible ball. “Make sure we can hear your sound,” Jeff reminds the shy ones. There are giggles and the occasional confident voice that promises a good storyteller in the making.

You could call this game “basic training” for storytelling, and it is happening in nine classrooms around the East Bay as the **Storybridge Listening and Speaking Program** gets underway this fall. By the end of the school year all the students will have made great strides in their vocal expression and dramatic body language. They also will gain greater listening and remembering skills after hearing and discussing stories for a total of 24 weeks.

Thanks to a second multiyear grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Stagebridge is serving minority, low-income children by using storytelling to bridge the generations and increase students’ listening and speaking skills. Six Mentor Storytellers (Jeff Byers, Marcy Delgadillo, Joan Mueller, Sharon Nichols, Elizabeth Overmyer, Elaine Stanley) and five Master Tellers (Jeanne Haynes, Marijo, Tureeda Mikell, Nina Serrano, Clara Yen) are involved this year. Over a four-year span, Storybridge and the concurrent research study, conducted by 3D Group of Berkeley, will reach a total of 2,160 fourth and fifth graders in twelve schools in the San Lorenzo Unified, Alameda Unified and Berkeley Unified School Districts. Training and materials will be provided to enable teachers to sustain the program after completion.

Storybridge is welcomed in schools because the learning goals for the students are tied directly to National and California Arts Education and Language Arts standards. The Stagebridge storytellers enthusiastically report that the students are captivated and the classroom teachers applaud the benefits of the program. Of his classes at Washington Elementary Mentor Jeff Byers, said, “I haven’t had this much fun in a long time!”

Greacian Goeke, Storybridge Director

greacian@stagebridge.org



From the GREENROOM

(A series of profiles on company members who reflect the energy, enthusiasm and great variety of talent at Stagebridge)

Left brain (facts) + right brain (fantasy) = Stagebridge

The third time was a charm for Dorothy Carnegie, Ph.D., a retired UC Berkeley senior statistician and someone who, even as a “theatre-goer,” never thought she would be in a show.



“Taking an acting class was so unlikely for me, it was almost like divine intervention,” said Dorothy. It took three events in a short space of time to change her self-perception from analytical to fanciful.

“I was walking at Lake Merritt with a friend when I saw the Stagebridge van, then later that day I met a friend who was taking classes there.” Not long afterwards she was talking to someone else who said ‘let’s check it out.’ Her friend dropped out, she stayed, and less than a year later she was performing at The Ashby Stage in Berkeley in a class recital.

“I don’t know if I feel like an actress,” Dorothy said. She was co-stage manager and props with *Grandpa’s Teeth*, a children’s show produced by Stagebridge that toured Bay Area schools, when she was called upon to take on a small role. She found it most rewarding.

“After the show, you go into the audience and the children make you feel like a real star and want your autograph and want to chat with you,” she said. “One little girl in Redwood City said ‘that’s my grandma up there.’”

It’s the camaraderie of acting classes that really motivates her to step from back stage to on stage. “Everything is pretty much a challenge, but I stick with it because the instructors make you feel so comfortable and the students are so supportive,” she said. “We’re all near the same age so you don’t feel like you’re making a complete fool of yourself.”

Her warmth, enthusiasm and over-the-top volunteerism have won her recognition from the Stagebridge staff and company.

“I’ve received three awards: ‘Volunteer of the Year 2009’, ‘Unsung Hero’ for *Chicken Sunday* 2008 and ‘Who Stole the Smile’ for *Grandpa’s Teeth*,” she said. The awards reflect the perfect combination of the analytical and artistic Dorothy.

Maryann Maslan, Marketing Director

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CURTAINS UP!

New Storybridge Director Makes Magical Connections



Even before she studied trapeze dancing or created performance art, Greacian Goeke understood the magic of bringing people together with music and imagination.

Stagebridge's new Storybridge director has worked for more than 20 years as a teaching artist with all ages creating and directing original projects in drama, movement, music, oral history, poetry and

visual art. She holds an M.F.A. in Performance from the California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) and a bachelor's in English from Cornell University.

Bringing seniors and young people together to discover how much they have in common is the foundation of the Storybridge program.

"Coming to work at Stagebridge is a dream come true," said Greacian of her new role. "Matching an older person who is young at heart with a young curious mind fills a longing for connection they may not find elsewhere."

Her young imagination caught fire when she was cast in a musical at her elementary school in New Jersey.

"In the fifth grade I was hooked when I played *Mary Poppins*," she said. "I believed in magic as a child. You can fly if you imagine it. That's how it works."

On stage, in the classroom or in the world, imagination and magic can be tools of survival.

"The most important thing in teaching is to awaken imagination in children. It's a tool, a skill and an artistic vehicle that is subversive and powerful. It can help you envision solutions to terrible problems," she said. "It keeps us strong as we go through life."

When she was a resident artist in the San Francisco Bay Area schools she discovered that children's speaking voices didn't project well. She introduced movement, music and vocal sound effects to stimulate their imaginations and enhance their performances. This gave students power to create more vivid expression for their characters and stories – plus it was a lot more fun. She wrote and received a California Arts Council grant that supported her work.

Although she's only been at Stagebridge for a short time, she is "filled with awe and admiration" for the senior storytellers she has met. "Everyone here has not stopped learning," she said. "They are models for me of how to be 70, 80 or 90."

Maryann Maslan, Marketing Director

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Sylvia: the Making of a Musical

(This is the second of a four-part series by Maryann Maslan on the process of creating an original musical.)

Rehearsals are in full swing and the collaborative process is unfolding for everyone including the cats Kismet and Lassie (*disclaimer: being cats they were not to be ignored and insisted on being mentioned first*), choreographer Bruce Bierman (who will be creating moves for *all* the stars) and Joan Mankin, who plays Sylvia.



"I love the outrageous part of who she is and I accept and embrace it," said Joan, who previewed the title song in May at Stagebridge's 30th anniversary celebration. "I am really excited about the musicality of the show. The songs are tremendous."

Bringing the character of Sylvia to life will mean finding a balance between the essence of the cartoon and the believability of the character, Joan said. "What Martha (Boesing) has written is a bit different from the cartoon. Sylvia is a real character with real problems that people feel as they get older," said Joan, who added that she identifies with Sylvia's life challenges.

One of the major reminders of the cartoon quality of the musical is Sylvia's conversations with the cats while in her bath tub, on the phone or while giving advice. "I love the asides to the cats, it's part of the outrageousness of the play," Joan said. But, being a dog person off stage, she said it's been an "intense change" learning to talk to cats. And these cats talk, sing, dance and generally let reality clash with their cartoon "essence."

"I am happy to be playing a feline, Lassie the Wonder Cat, as opposed to a canine," said Sara Moore, a professional clown. "Usually clowns and physical comedians become dogs and monkeys, something that is natural to us. A cat is an interesting challenge especially playing a younger, friskier, bumbling cat sliding across the table or into a door."

Kismet, played by Franklin Hall, is an older, wiser, less physical cat and doesn't try to keep pace with Lassie. To create the role, Franklin takes his clues from the script to "bring realism to the character." "I'm an old tomcat and cool," said Franklin. "I say, 'Hey, we can do this (mischief) a bit slower and still get it done' and if I only get one meow, it's going to be a midnight scream."

The cats, with their need for attention, have pushed the choreographer right into the next issue!

Coming in January: Bruce Bierman on teaching the stars to dance – revealing plot and character through movement.



Stagebridge Showcases at The Ashby Stage in Berkeley:

Monday, December 7th at 6:30 p.m.

An evening of storytelling and Greek tragedy

6:30 -7:30 p.m. – Storytellers with Kirk Waller

7:45 -8:45 p.m. – Scenes from *The Trojan Women*

Monday, December 14th at 6:30 p.m. A

An evening of improv and musical theater

6:30-7:30 p.m. – The Antic Witties improv troupe featuring Barbara Scott and live music

7:45-8:45 p.m. – The Musical Theater class presents selections from *A Chorus Line* with Ellen Robinson and Bruce Bierman

Pay What You Can Events: \$5 - \$20

Winter Classes January 11 - March 26

Make your New Year's resolution to have fun, learn new skills and study with some of the country's finest artists. We are proud to announce that famed director David Ford returns to teach Solo Performance; Berkeley Rep dialects coach Lynne Soffer will be teaching Voice and Dialects; set designer Russ Milligan will be teaching our first ever Scenic Design class; and dance teacher Dyana Foldvary will inaugurate our first Argentine Tango class. They will be joining our talented staff. Click here to see the list of classes, fees and to register.

Spare Change?

Six ways to help Stagebridge:

1. Fulfill our "Wish List" – we need:

- Recent model laptops
- Small flat screen TV
- LCD projector
- Portable Sound System
- Flat Screen Monitors (2)
- New cordless mikes (10)
- Small microwave for office

2. Donate online or by mail – It's never been easier to make a donation to your favorite charity. You can donate safely through Network for Good by clicking www.networkforgood.org and just type in "Stagebridge." Or you can use PayPal at www.paypal.com. You can always send us a check at 2501 Harrison, Oakland 94612.

3. Host a House Party – Help us celebrate our 31st Season by throwing a house party. It's simple: you invite your friends, we provide the entertainment, and people are encouraged to make a donation to this wonderful organization. Contact Stuart Kandell at director@stagebridge.org for more info.

4. Write a Review of Stagebridge – You can help more people learn about and donate to Stagebridge by writing a short review on the company at Guidestar/Great Non Profits <http://www.greatnonprofits.org/reviews/profile2/stagebridge>.

5. Use E-Scrip. You can donate to Stagebridge every time you shop or eat at a wide variety of stores. There is no cost to you!!! Just go to <http://www.escrip.com>/
www.escrip.com, sign up and type "Stagebridge".

6. Volunteer – We always need people to help out with mailings, the library, productions, outreach events, etc. We also would like to have someone to coordinate our monthly social events. Contact: Jim in the office at 444-4755 ext. 114



From the Director's Desk

Who's backstage?

Thirty years ago there were six or seven people on stage and just one person backstage: me, working 8-10 hour days. I had a CETA job and my total income was \$336 a month.

Today, there are 150 people on stage (not at the same time thankfully) supported backstage by five full time staff, five half time staff, a Board of Trustees of six members and a roster of 30 artists, teachers and technical staff. Our budget has grown to more than \$600,000 and our payroll is over \$7,000 per week.

While Stagebridge is now considered a "mid-size" non-profit theatre company, it is not typical as a theatre or a senior theatre. Most traditional theatres earn most of their income from ticket sales (60-70 per cent) and depend on foundations and individual contributions for the rest. Because we serve people who don't attend theatre (the old on limited incomes and inner city youth) we depend on contributions and donations for 80 per cent of our income. There are over 700 senior theatres across the country. Almost all of them are run by volunteers or college professors. Only a few actually have a paid staff and pay their actors stipends.



Our staff has job titles, but at the end of the day, they do whatever it takes to get the job done. I can't imagine a harder working team. Good luck catching Barbara Johnson, our Schools Program Coordinator, flying from school to school selling our programs, making arrangements for schools to attend our matinee performances, getting get-well cards for company members who are ill, buying cakes when we celebrate their

birthdays, and of course, gathering the food for all our parties. In a single day, Jim Jenkins, our Office Manager, may be publishing our calendar, updating the Web site, negotiating for rehearsal space, creating flyers for an event, putting out a mailing, or a number of other things and is always the last to leave at 6:00, 7:00 p.m. or later. Our Marketing Director Maryann Maslan juggles meetings with new clients, answering emails, attending chamber of commerce mixers and healthy aging events, arranging and promoting all of our community performances and workshops, publicizing all our shows and classes and reviewing everything that goes out of the office. Every other staff member is working at their max to do the best job they can do.

Creating a new show, like "Sylvia's Advice . . ." is a HUGE endeavor for us. The process is at least a year long. Beginning with the idea, finding the playwright, securing funding easily can take six months. The production staff includes the director, two assistant directors, a musical director, choreographer, two stage managers, a lighting designer and operator, set designer and three builders, costume designer, publicist, production manager and producer and a back-up staff at Stagebridge and at the theatre. And that is why we don't do this kind of show very often, and are excited when we can.

So, backstage, behind everything we do: our Performing Arts Training Institute, StoryBridge, TimeSlips, Seniors Reaching Out, student showcases and performances – is a small army of hard-working, talented people who are committed to the mission of Stagebridge.

Stuart Kandell

Founder/Executive Director

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