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STAGEBRIDGE

Spring 2007



Stagebridge Is Acclaimed Pioneer in Creative Aging

Stagebridge flew to New York to perform at the National Summit Conference on Arts and Aging: Creativity Matters. The Conference was held in Newark at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center on November 3-4. This was the first national conference sponsored by the National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA), the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Conference attendees included the heads of many national organizations, leading policy makers, practitioners and artists from across the country. The conference brought people together to discuss best practices, programming and policy for engaging elders creatively. As the company was about to perform for the full conference, Susan Perlstein, Executive Director of NCCA, introduced Stagebridge as “pioneers in the field of creative aging.” Stagebridge shared the stage with Kairos Dance Theatre from Minneapolis as the only two featured senior companies. The audience gave the company a standing ovation. Stagebridge Director Dr. Stuart Kandell with Kairos’ Artistic Director, Maria Genne, opened the conference and co-led two workshops. Perlstein remarked that Stagebridge and Kairos were the “heart of the conference!”

Study Shows Storybridge Program Gets Results

A two year study of our Storybridge Schools Program by 3D Group of Berkeley has found that 4th and 5th grade Oakland Public School students who participated in the program significantly improved their listening comprehension skills. They were better able to recall a greater number of story elements; segment a story into the beginning, middle and end; and, recall more details when retelling a story. That’s all on top of being more engaged in creative learning and developing important relationships with older storytellers. The study was the culmination of our three-year U.S. Department of Education grant. Stagebridge will be publicizing the results locally and at national conferences, and using them to replicate the program in other schools. The full study is available upon request or on our Web site at www.stagebridge.org.

*It’s something that children will remember
for the rest of their lives.*

— Deitra Atkins, principal of Glenview Elementary School

Pictured above (from left to right): Joanne Grimm, Linda Wilson, Scrumby Koldewyn, Cindy Carrico and Claressa Morrow



NEA Recognition and National Grants

The National Endowment for the Arts has selected Stagebridge as one of only 15 arts organizations being honored as a “Best Practice” in the field of creativity and aging. Johnson & Johnson/Society for the Arts in Healthcare has awarded Stagebridge a \$17,000 grant for our program aimed at improving student nurses’ care of geriatric patients. Based in Washington, D.C., only 26 awards were given to organizations in the U.S. and Canada for projects that help bridge the gap between illness and health. The Stagebridge program was called a “leading model” in healthcare training. The Thoresen Foundation of Georgia has also awarded Stagebridge a major grant to support the Healthy Aging and Storybridge Programs.

Sharing Stories

By Liz Nichols, Storytelling Director



Writing contest winner Iris Wang of Paden Elementary School, Alameda

Whenever we go out to do a storytelling assembly at a school, I open the show by asking the kids to reach out their arms and help us make a bridge between the stage and the audience, between us and them. What is storytelling? It's sharing our experiences, passing on wisdom, exercising creativity and imagination, and having fun. And at Stagebridge, storytelling is one of the many ways we bridge the generations. Here are a few highlights from the past year.

Grandparent Tales Reach a Wide Audience

Last spring over 400 elementary students from 28 classrooms entered our contest, which is now in its 12th year. They talked to an older relative or friend and wrote short stories about them. A fourth grader from Glenview Elementary in Oakland wrote,

Every time I asked my grandma a deep question about when she was young her eyes went up as if she were in that exact place. There are many things I did not know about my grandma that I know now because of doing the research and writing this paper.

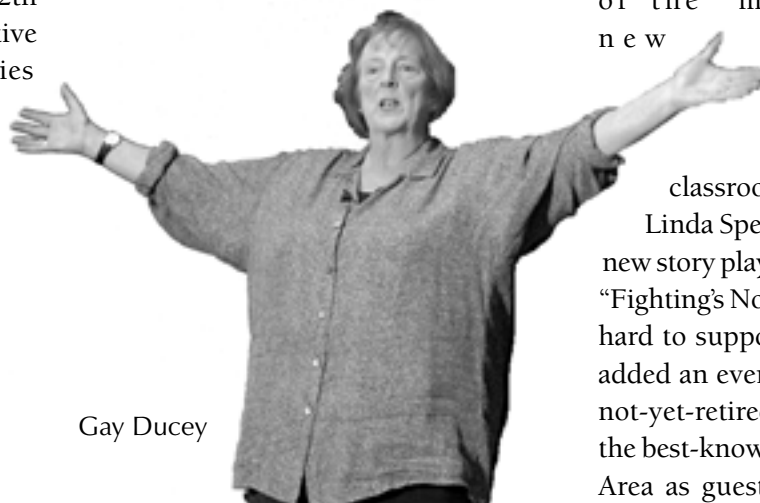
When he and others came with me to the KPFA radio studio in Berkeley to record their stories for "Radio Chronicles," the show's producers were visibly moved by the warmth and wisdom of these diverse voices of our future, connecting with their families' past and learning to be proud of who they are. You can hear their stories on www.kpfa.org (Search the archives.)

Civil Rights Tales Keep on Keepin' On

For the third year Stagebridge elders brought powerful personal stories to new audiences, from middle and high school students to seniors in assisted living. Our audiences learned what it was like to fight discrimination right here in California, to confront racism in your own family, and to march with Dr. Martin Luther King in North Carolina. They felt the power of the music as they sang with our wonderful host, Marijo, "Look What a Wonder We Done Done!"

One student from Redwood Day School in Oakland wrote,

I liked your stories a lot more than ones I've heard previously because yours sounded real and like you've actually been there.



Gay Ducey

Some people tell personal stories that don't sound personal or like they've actually happened to them. I hope you can come again next year, or even sooner!

Neighbors Old and Young Make New Connections

Something new for Stagebridge this past year was "Storybuddies," a project that pairs an elementary school class with a nearby senior center or residence. First, our storytelling instructor worked with each group separately, exploring and practicing stories to tell. The payoff came when the seniors visited the classroom, and then the kids walked over to visit the seniors for an hour of swapping stories, with juice and cookies of course! According to Pat Saddler, principal of Rosa Parks Magnet School in West Berkeley, "Unfortunately, these are relationships that just would never be formed in the normal course of our urban life. By the end, our students could easily see past the walkers, canes, hearing aids and other 'limitations' of the elders, to the individuals."

In fact, all our storytellers have been active and stretching themselves. In March, for example, they were out in the community almost every day of the month! They're serving new clients at senior residences and day programs, promoting our writing contest in classrooms, and working with Linda Spector and her actors on a new story play for schools that's called "Fighting's Not Right." We're working hard to support their growth. We've added an evening class to attract the not-yet-retired and invited some of the best-known performers in the Bay Area as guest teachers. Trying new things is what keeps us all young.

Happenings in Review

by Maryann Maslan, Marketing Director

Marijo

Stagebridge delivered more joy to audiences young and old, with new shows, new performers, award winning programs and popular plays. Cameras rolled capturing events for three Stagebridge promotional DVDs – Healthy Aging, Storybridge, and Introducing Stagebridge. Local television, radio and press highlighted programs as well. In house, the storytelling program launched a series of workshops featuring nationally recognized artists who shared their skills with senior students. Here are some more highlights since our last newsletter.

The Stagebridge Players presented original theme-specific skits at the annual national Call to Action: Prevent Elder Financial Abuse conference held in February. From the 52nd floor of the Bank of America building in San Francisco – best known as the Carnelian Room – the witty, engaging actors were seen on KTVU, Channel 2 and KPIX, Channel 5 evening news.

“Never Too Late – 2007” is all about money. This season’s show is bigger and better with the addition of two new cast members, San Francisco resident Bennie Lewis and Ella Pennewell Vaught, Oakland’s R&B vocalist of the year. “Never Too Late” had a triple preview in December – at the opening of St. Mary’s Center’s new facility in Oakland, the San Francisco Center for Learning in Retirement and the annual holiday luncheon at St. Sebastian the Martyr Parish in Greenbrae. Catch the show at The San Francisco Theatre Festival on Sunday, July 22 at Yerba Buena Gardens.

“Civil Right Tales” one of Stagebridge’s most powerful presentations, was hosted by premiere performer, storyteller and teacher, Marijo. From elementary school through high school, from senior centers to senior resident facilities, Bay Area audiences were moved by the stories that reflect a part of American history. Audiences joined in song and shared their personal stories with everyone.

Healthy Aging branched out from its nursing training program at Samuel Merritt College – School of Nursing (where class size doubled) to include special workshops at the University of California at San Francisco, University of San Francisco and San Francisco State University. In addition, City College of San Francisco and the University of California at Berkeley, new adult day care units, rehab and nursing facilities, participated in the award winning “See Me!” program.

“Strega Nona Festival,” presented as part of Stagebridge’s 16th Annual Family Matinee and Ice Cream



Social, celebrated two days at Arts First Oakland. The traditional first-weekend-in-spring show brought back the Chapman brothers Willie, 20, who played Big Anthony, and Raushon, 10 who joined Stagebridge seniors on stage. The show toured to school audiences throughout the Bay Area playing to more than 2,500 students.

“Tellabration!” — the fourth annual Stagebridge celebration of this national event — featured storytellers from six Bay Area organizations plus national stars Willy Claflin and Gay Ducey. The standing room only crowd was charmed and delighted by the performers and the warmth and welcoming energy of all the participants.

The Dreamers, a vocal trio featuring Stagebridge musical director Scrumby Koldewyn on keyboard and singers Cindy Carrico and Linda Wilson, celebrated their first anniversary in March. With more than thirty performances locally and nationally, the triumphant trio gather enthusiastic responses wherever they entertain. The group grew out of Scrumby’s popular “Find Your Voice” singing class at Stagebridge.



“The Dreamers”

About Time

by Linda Spector



For the past 27 years Linda Spector has been a Stagebridge teacher, director, playwright and Co-Artistic Director. She has written and directed more than 30 plays that have been seen by more than 250,000 people. In June she will retire — leaving a legacy that is rare in American theatre.

Writing “About Time” for the newsletter has been a great pleasure for me because I’ve had the opportunity to interview the staff and members of Stagebridge. Now Stuart has asked me to answer questions about myself and I find the task daunting. How do I summarize the last 27 years into a few “pertinent” questions? Well, here goes.

MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS

The moments that come to mind are those joyful times when I’ve watched theatre work, moments during a performance or in the classroom when everyone knew something very special had just happened - a student finally mustering the courage to risk performing an improv after sitting for weeks in total fear, or a moment in a performance of Grandparents’ Tales when the eyes of hundreds of children are absolutely glued to the stage because they and the actors feel something genuine and universal. Those are miraculous moments and I’ve been fortunate to experience many of them.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I think I’ve learned a great deal about directing and teaching in 27 years and I have the students to thank for that. Their fears, trust and willingness to risk have given me a sense of how

fragile and at the same time, brave we all are, how our needs propel us to accomplish things we never thought possible. I’ve also learned to listen, not just to what a person says but how he says it. Subtext is all.

I also like to think I’ve played a small part in helping Stagebridge grow. In those early days when Stuart and I were directing productions together, I wrote plays that seem rather sophomoric now. Some of you may remember “Health: Lost and Found” a “comedy” about depression with Audrey Goodfriend playing Lily, a depressed widow. At one performance, we had a number of absences, so Stuart played a part, and I played another, rushing to accompany the songs on the piano. I enjoyed writing songs for those early plays, especially the blues. Cecil Pierce sang the “Gold Watch Blues” in a play called, Working Your Way.” The song is about the loneliness of retirement, a condition that Stagebridge has successfully countered for years.

Finally, the years of friendship, personal and professional, that Stuart and I have shared is not so much an accomplishment but a special gift. The nasty imp of ego has never interfered with our vision of Stagebridge. Others have marveled that we’ve worked together for twenty seven years without a major quarrel.

WHAT HAS KEPT YOU GOING AND GOING?

Humor, wonderful people, and the vision of Stagebridge. The improv class is a party every Wednesday where I enjoy laughing at humor from the lowly pun to the sophisticated wit of very imaginative improvisers. There are also moments of sharing that make the classes a kind of extended family, another function that Stagebridge fills. Directing plays or scenes and watching them and the actors grow into performance is pure magic, especially if you’ve started with a blank page. Finally, my sense of doing work that is important and worthwhile for the past 27 years has never faltered.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO

As many of you know, I have a new job. My partner of 33 years, Julius, was a prolific painter. When he died, he left me hundreds of oil paintings, acrylics and drawings. Some of them are huge. He was also a man who refused to deal with the “business” of art. My job is to bring his work into that highly competitive and, at times, nasty world. I look forward to some success because his work is stunning and masterful. Aspects of my new job will be enjoyable — the challenge, travel — but I look forward to returning to Stagebridge to do acting and improv workshops. It’s hard to imagine my life without Stagebridge, but, the only constant in life is change. I’ve worked at what I love all these years. I cannot ask for more.

Tribute to Linda

From her students



I've taken classes and worked on shows with Stagebridge for more than 25 years. Linda accepts people as they are, wherever they are, with no knowledge of theatre. She's empathetic with aging people.

— Audrey Goodfriend

At age 52, I had no stage experience and she took a great leap of faith when she said I could act in one of her plays. She is a thoughtful director and lets me try things and gives feedback that helps me create the character in a play. She's never negative or judgmental.

— Cindy Carrico

First time I saw Linda, I thought, here is a woman who is vital, vibrant and exciting. I was shy in class and just sat. She

has a way of making you feel comfortable, to come out of my shell and take risks. Now they can't shut me up!

— Jerry Fishman



I've been in little theatre for over 40 years and Linda outdoes any director I've had before. She is compassionate, knowledgeable and caring. — Jim Eklund



I started as a storyteller and met Linda in a play. I thought improv would help my storytelling. She brought out dramatic abilities I didn't know I had and allows us older people to be childishly crazy. You can come into the class feeling bad and go out feeling like a million dollars.

— Bertha Reilly



Friends Give Generously to Stagebridge

We are most grateful to our “Friends of Stagebridge” who have generously contributed over \$9,000 during this past season.

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 Marjorie Epstein
 Rosemary Connelly
 Stan Ginn
 Carol Anne Fusco
 Freddie Malvo
 Parminder Dhingra

Wish List

- People to throw house parties
- Office volunteers
- New model laptop
- DV Camcorder
- Wireless microphones



Catherine Willis

MOONLIGHTING

Stagebridge storytellers

have traveled near and far to share their tales. Storyteller Elaine Stanley had a big year: she joined forty other tellers from the United States on the Nu Wa China Storytelling Exchange Project; she joined the Wednesday improv class; and then she retired. Storyteller Kim Takemura pursues her interest in drama at Contra Costa College. She recently appeared in the CCC Drama production, “Motherland: Stories of Immigration, Assimilation & the American Dream” at the Koret Center in San Pablo.

Board president Tom Flynn continues to trod the boards, by popular demand, in shows including “Beauty and the Beast” to “Guys and Dolls” at the Leshner in Walnut Creek.

Company musical director Scrumby Koldewyn was in production with two shows in Marin County this spring, “Brigadoon” and “Music Man.” He is also creating a new musical based on Oscar Wilde called “Wilde Boys” which will open May 26 at San Francisco’s New Conservatory Theatre.

Office manager, Jim Jenkins, debuted his band’s (Ariel) latest album “Sure Thing You Bet” with a sold out concert at the NAMM show in Anaheim.

Stagebridge staff Liz Nichols and Jeannie Haynes plus tellers Gwen Capehart-Bolling, Dana Chernack, Sally Holzman and Kim Takemura performed to a packed house at “Tell It on Tuesdays” a monthly series at the Julia Morgan Center for the Arts.

Creative Aging Matters

By Dr. Stuart Kandell

Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 94??

How do we want to live when we get "old?" A recent news article about generational wars at Rossmoor has Baby Boomers fighting the 80+ year olds over proposed changes. It is clear to many of my Baby Boomer cohorts that the "old" model of retirement living will not work for us. Get rid of the gated "Sun Cities" in the middle of nowhere and build housing in urban settings where people can walk to shop and entertainment or take classes at universities offering lifelong learning. Take away the club houses featuring slide shows of Europe and put in a full service gym, yoga, pilates and cycling classes. And how about this radical idea: leave age segregated housing altogether for intergenerational communities that share chores and help one another.

Board President Tom Flynn and I flew to Burbank recently to see one person's dream house: the Burbank Senior Artists Colony. Located a short walk from downtown Burbank, this two year old complex houses 141 amateur and professional artists aged 55 – 93. One third of the residents pay \$500/month. The others pay \$1,600. Entering this beautiful building you are greeted with wild sculptures and framed artwork on all the walls. You can choose from a wide range of classes in the "studio" for doing clay, sculpture or painting. If that's not your thing, across the hall is the soon to be video-editing room to edit your latest film. For those theatrically minded there is a small theatre that also doubles as an exercise room. In between all the rooms are outdoor courtyards for socializing and eating, swimming

pools, grills, etc. One 83 year-old resident wrote a 12 minute film script, cast it with residents and had a professional shoot and edit it. The film is now touring festivals around the country. Casting agents regularly knock on their door. They even performed a 40s style radio show at a downtown LA theatre this year with actor George Segal. We asked the brainchild of this, Tim Carpenter, why he chose not to have a medical facility as part of the building. He said, "We wanted to see how the arts might keep people healthy and invest our money in that."

Our dream is to build a "Center for Creative Aging" — a multipurpose arts center that caters to older adults and also attracts intergenerational audiences. A place to study dance, painting, poetry; gallery space for art; of course, a small theatre and a café/restaurant. Classes would be offered by older well known artists. School audiences would see plays and take special workshops with noted artists. The center would serve elders from the Bay Area and also train people who work in aging. Now imagine this as part of a housing complex for older artists. What do you think? Give me a call at 444-4755 x118 or email me at director@stagebridge.org.



Bruce Rappaport

Remembering Bruce, Sam, Kathy

One of the great joys of Stagebridge is being around people who are choosing to be guided by their heart in the latter part of their lives. It is such a privilege to have been a part of the lives of Bruce, Kathy and Sam.

Bruce Rappaport, at 64, had just retired from a lifetime of achievement as an activist and pioneer of open adoptions. For the past 12 years he had been telling stories in the same classroom at Sequoia Elementary. As an active Stagebridge board member, he helped guide us into the future. His quick mind and humor will be missed.

Kathy Cabral, 79, brought a lifetime of experience as cowgirl on a ranch and cabaret singer at the Top of the Mark. She shared her colorful stories to children in schools and her passionate songs with "Never Too Late" audiences. She will always be "Swonderful."

Sam Blood, 77, was a brilliant, quick-witted comic with an irascible sense of humor, the likes of which we have never seen before. He loved performing and audiences loved him. Particularly amazing for someone who had never been on stage before until he found his true calling. His legacy of humor will always make us laugh.

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