



The Kennedy Center

OPENING STAGES

A Quarterly Newsletter for People with Disabilities Pursuing Careers in the
Performing Arts

Published by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

Stephen A. Schwarzman, Chairman

Michael Kaiser, President

Darrell M. Ayers, Vice President, Education

Betty Siegel, Director of Accessibility

Edited by Paul Kahn

EDITORIAL BOARD

George Ashiotis

John Dillon

Martin English

Rod Lathim

Joy Mincey Powell

Janet Salmons

Ike Schambelan

Betty Siegel

Mimi Kenney Smith

Gail Williamson

OPENING STAGES ARCHIVES

To view past issues of the newsletter, go to:

www.quest4arts.org/company/callboard/index.htm

ISSUE #15

June -- August 2005

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editor: Sacred Theatre -- page 2

Features

Behind the Scenes in the Performing Arts... by Gregg Donaldson -- page 3

Writing and Performance Art... by Nancy Scott -- page 5

Resources

The WomenArts Network -- page 7

News and Notes

Disability Arts and Culture Festival to Be Held in Toronto -- page 7

ACB Radio Café Seeks Contributors -- page 8

Actors with Down Syndrome Receive Awards -- page 9

Australian Integrated Theatre Company Launched -- page 9

Changing Perceptions Play Premieres in Los Angeles -- page 10

Chicago Festival Scheduled for 2006 -- page 10

David Roche Receives King Award -- page 11
Disability Film Festival Announced for Alberta -- page 11
Review Dedicates Issue to Theatre And Disability -- page 12
VSA AmeriCorps Seeks Artists for Community Service -- page 12

READERS' ALERT

Opening Stages is always interested in hearing from our readers about pertinent programs, resources and events, as well as ideas for articles. We can pay a modest fee for articles we accept. Contact us at access@kennedy-center.org.

FROM THE EDITOR: SACRED THEATRE

Recently I attended my friends Eryn and Carlos' wedding, and it made me think about how such rites of passage are very much theatrical events. Theatre had its origins in religious ritual, but nowadays, when we think of going to the theatre, we have in mind a secular experience. Only in weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs, communions and the like do we get a glimpse of its sacred aspect.

The wedding had all the components of theatre. It had scenery. This was provided by the opals and grays of Nantucket Sound, which stretched out behind the oceanside inn where the wedding was held. It had actors -- the young couple and their wedding party. It had costumes. The men wore brocaded Mexican wedding shirts, and Eryn wore a beautiful, pale lavender dress that her mother had sewn. It had dialogue and ceremony in the form of vows, invocations and affirmations that drew eclectically from Eryn and Carlos' different heritages: he is from Peru, and she has some Finnish ancestry. It had props -- the wedding rings, flowers, and a long, multi-colored boa of llama fur, with which family and friends surrounded the young couple and which symbolized their loving support. It had music -- again an eclectic mix. The song I remember most was the Donovan tune "Happiness Runs in a Circular Motion," that we all sang together. And it had dance. For their first dance Eryn and Carlo chose, not a sedate ballad, but the wildly energetic "Livin' La Vida Loca" to express how crazy in love they were.

The only dramatic element that was lacking was a surprise ending. That, of course, is something you don't want to have at a wedding.

This wedding, like all such events, used all these components -- scenery, costumes, words, props, music and dance -- to do what only theatre can so powerfully accomplish: bring a disparate group of individuals together into a communal emotional experience. The energy of that emotion truly flows in a circular motion from the actors to the audience and back again. This experience is particularly poignant at weddings because the emotion that brings us together is love. We give our loving support to the bride and

groom, and they love each other and us, too, for loving them. The sacred enters the picture, because these occasions always remind us, not only of our bonds with each other, but also of our place in the greater scheme of things -- the province of religion and spirituality.

I think all of us in the performing arts are motivated by the hope of creating such moments of coming together. I know I am.

Paul Kahn

BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE PERFORMING ARTS **by Gregg J. Donaldson**

This spring I had the pleasure of interviewing three straightforward individuals who work behind the scenes in the performing arts. They shared their experiences and insights about being disabled professionals in their highly competitive fields.

ANNIE WIEGAND

Annie Wiegand has been involved in the theatre since the age of five. She grew up acting on the stage as well as doing backstage work. Her focus in college was in technical theatre and design, mainly costume construction/production and lighting design. Wiegand attended Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, before transferring to Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. There she designed and built costumes for the stage and became the master electrician. Wiegand also had the opportunity to assume the roles of lighting, costume and scenic designer in various productions at ASU. Upon graduation, she returned to the Washington, DC area to freelance in costume and lighting production. She has worked as a stitcher, a first hand, a draper, and an electrician at many theatres in the DC/MD/VA area. These include: Signature Theatre, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, Folger Shakespeare Library, and Gallaudet University, as well as the Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, New York (for three summers now). She is currently a First Hand for the Opera's production of "Lucia di Lammermoor," which opens this July. Wiegand is Deaf.

TONY SCHMIESING

Tony Schmiesing has directed two plays: "The Wisdom of Eve" and "Where There's a Wil(l) There's a Play." He is also an actor and writer. He is a quadriplegic from a diving accident and uses a wheelchair.

JAMES LEBRECHT

James LeBrecht is a veteran sound designer. He launched Berkeley Sound Artists in 1996. He has supervised or edited sound for feature films and documentary projects that include "Daughter from Danang," "Battlefield Earth," "The Skulls" and "The Singing Detective." He has also designed sound for The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and for video game companies. Most recently he did the sound design for the PBS documentary "Freedom Machines." LeBrecht has spina bifida and is a wheelchair user.

Do you disclose your disability when seeking work? Why or why not?

WIEGAND: Yes, I do. I don't think it is fair to leave an employer in the dark. Plus, more often than not, my disability sparks more attention and interest in the possibility of hiring me.

SCHMIESING: In discussing accessibility issues, I do. Otherwise, I don't mention it, because I don't want to be pre-judged.

LEBRECHT: No, not really. Only when necessary.

Do you require accommodations to do your job? If so, what kind and what has been the best way of obtaining them?

WIEGAND: I don't usually need accommodations, since I work in the costume and lighting field. I build costumes for theatre companies in the DC area as well as hang lights. Since it is mostly a one-on-one task, I get by with lip-reading. However, for big meetings I usually prefer to have an interpreter, but that doesn't happen often.

SCHMIESING: As a director, I rely upon my assistant director and someone to videotape the rehearsals, since I cannot be there every day. I budget them in when I ask for funding for the project.

LEBRECHT: Basically, the only accommodation I ask for is the height of my work desk. Most of my editing is done on the computer.

What professional barriers, if any, has your disability created and how have you overcome them?

WIEGAND: I have been fortunate not to experience any horrible barriers. With costumes, it hasn't been a problem. Since it's usually one-on-one instructions, I get by fine. It has been a little bit frustrating with lights, since there is a lot happening on stage, and it's hard to focus on what I am supposed to get done. The master electrician (the boss) is usually shouting instructions and I can barely understand what is happening. So, I usually go up to the master electrician and ask him to repeat his or her instructions to me face-to-face, so I can understand. I do the same thing with costumes. I ask the primary costumer to repeat his or her instructions, if I don't understand the first time around.

SCHMIESING: I haven't really encountered barriers, but I do have pressure sores from time to time. And I can't sit in my chair for long periods of time. I've learned to pace myself and delegate duties to other people, such as the assistant director.

LEBRECHT: I really don't have any professional barriers.

What advice would you give to other people with disabilities in your field?

WIEGAND: Be straightforward with your employers. Don't let your disability stop you! It hasn't stopped me.

SCHMIESING: Be confident in your abilities and don't be afraid to go after what you want.

LEBRECHT: Don't be afraid to network with other people. That is how I switched from the stage to film, because I asked other people in my field.

The lessons from these successful professionals seem to be:

- Work hard and get the same training as other people in your field.

- Be straightforward: disclose your disability and ask for accommodations when necessary.
- Build the cost of accommodations into the project budget.
- Don't be afraid of failure. Have confidence in your abilities.

If you do, chances are you will succeed like these three individuals have.

WRITING AND PERFORMANCE ART **by Nancy Scott**

My 21-year career as an author has contained many challenges and happy accidents. Writing requires discipline and perseverance. Getting published is helped by belief in oneself and tangible recognition. And sometimes artistic dedication needs new projects that get the adrenalin going. One way to test work in the world or to find new reasons to write is reading work for audiences.

I write both essays and poetry. Though I attended readings early on and was a good Braille reader, I didn't think I could read my work with every word and inflection correct.

In 1992, a friend read several of my early-published poems at a local coffee house. That became my catalyst-- not because I now had poems out in the air, but because I was afraid the sighted audience would think I couldn't read. My advocacy as a blind person made me get up, shaking hands and knees, and read two brailled poems the following month. I practiced at home beforehand. No one threw things. They applauded.

After that, I occasionally read in open mike portions, never trying more than two pieces. I got smarter about microphones. Because Braille is big and I do not memorize work, I learned to read from a podium or table or other flat surface, if I was standing. (I've used everything from flimsy music stands to the edge of a grand piano.)

It became fun to surprise people with my white cane and Braille pages. And, since some of the work was about disability, I could influence people's thinking and talk about disability issues after the event.

In 1993, I was asked to feature read for a half hour. That led, in 1996, to the publication of my poetry chapbook *Hearing The Sunrise*. And that led to other readings of both essays and poetry.

I've read at local arts festivals, churches and synagogues, service clubs, writers' groups, senior centers and bookstore and coffee house gatherings. Some groups badly need speakers and are happy to be approached. Sometimes word of mouth encourages groups to approach you.

My most challenging performance art to date happened because a friend recommended me, after seeing me read commentary essays that I'd published in our local newspaper.

Our public radio station wanted people to write and record short pieces of this type. I knew that writing the approximately 460-word essays to fit in a three-to-four-minute time slot would be easy. But I wasn't sure I could read Braille fast enough for on-air. The news director convinced me to try.

So far, I've recorded twenty-six essays, and the station has aired twenty. I have to record them at the studio, and I read four at a time (all my nerves and cold hands can stand). I practice at home with a talking timer and, although they never come out with every inflection perfect, most essays are recorded in one take. There's no money for this work, but it forces me to write at least eight essays a year for which I can find secondary publishing markets. About one in four essays have a disability theme. Most of my audience now knows I can't see, whether I'm discussing talking to kids about blindness or considering the plural of rhinoceros.

Logistics of performance art and disability are tricky. I need transportation to venues and help knowing the reading set-up. If I'm traveling with friends or attentive program providers, I can ask about audience size and reactions after a reading. And someone often has to rescue me because I can never remember how to get on or off a stage or out the front of a room, even if I've done it twenty times. It's nervousness, although I don't usually look or sound nervous.

Sometimes, groups pay for readings. A national anthology tacked on \$50 if I'd read my essay and one other at a local bookstore. I didn't tell the publicity people I couldn't see until my appearance in a second anthology. They wanted a radio interview along with a reading, and I had to explain my reluctance to read Braille while holding a phone on my shoulder. (I've since bought a headset.)

I rarely read without choosing pieces and practicing ahead of time. I have to remember page turns because my hands are doing other things while my mouth is reading. I always read faster in performance than in rehearsal. I mostly read my own work, although some venues allow people to read favorite pieces by other writers. I always try to engage live audiences, using humor or a response question. Pages have floated off podiums. I've whacked my nose against microphones. And there are nights I've worn sneakers because I couldn't walk far in heels. But I still get asked, and I still offer to read to audiences.

Something I say or do might spark new thoughts for someone. Something I hear might spark an idea for me. Maybe, with enough practice and luck, I'll make it to NPR or Book TV.

RESOURCES

THE WOMENARTS NETWORK

The *WomenArts Network* is designed to make it easy to contact women who have artistic work or skills to share. Whether you are putting together a production team, planning a conference, booking a festival, or organizing a single event, you can find the artists you need by searching through online profiles.

If you are an artist, creating a profile on the *WomenArts Network* will make you part of an online community that is being publicized to arts organizations, academic institutions, and others involved in women's or social justice issues. People who share your interests will be able to learn about your work and contact you for possible collaborations.

To connect to the Network go to <http://www.womenarts.org/network/>.

NEWS AND NOTES

DISABILITY ARTS AND CULTURE FESTIVAL TO BE HELD IN TORONTO

Abilities Festival, A Celebration of Disability Arts and Culture, will be held in Toronto on October 27-30. Musicians, authors, visual artists, poets, dancers, playwrights, comedians and actors with disabilities will come together for four days in a multifaceted and multidisciplinary festival that showcases and celebrates their talents, strengths and achievements.

The Festival is seeking works of art that exemplify the diverse and exceptional quality of artistic talent within the disabled communities. To find out how to apply, view the entry conditions at <http://www.abilitiesfestival.org/artentry.html>. To download the entry form go to <http://www.abilitiesfestival.org/artentryform.html>. The application deadline is June 30.

More information is available at <http://www.abilitiesfestival.org/> or by writing to info@abilitiesfestival.org.

ACB RADIO CAFÉ SEEKS CONTRIBUTORS

The ACB Radio Café is a stream run by London-based ACB Radio and is on 24 hours a day, seven days a week and features the work of blind musicians. You can reach it via the acbradio.org page, and it is streamed both for modem and broadband.

The Café is seeking to improve its audio quality and to garner new material. If you are a blind musician, member of a band or group, poet, comedian, comedy writer, or short story writer and can read your own work or have someone read it for you, the Cafe would like to hear from you. It would also like to get better audio quality versions of existing tracks.

The person working on these changes is Chrissie Cochrane. If you have a general inquiry concerning the Cafe, you can e-mail her at chrissie@acbradio.org. If you have

FTP facilities and also can make your music into MP3 files, you can anonymous FTP them to acbradio.org and put them in incoming/acbradio. You can also do this using the wav file format. If you do FTP your music, Cochrane encourages you to do a short announcement for each track as either a separate file or as part of the main track, saying who you are, what the track title is, a little bit about yourself, whether you have any of your music available for sale and how people can purchase your work. The MP3s should be encoded at a minimum of 128 bits with a sample frequency of 44.1 khz. If the files are less than 10 megs each and you don't have FTP facilities, you can also send them directly to her as e-mail attachments (one track per e-mail) at chriessie@rose.demon.co.uk. Do not send them to chriessie@acbradio.org as that address doesn't handle attachments.

If your music is on CD, you can send it directly to her at:

Chrissie Cochrane
151 Fawe Park road
London
SW 15 2EG
UK

Cochrane hosts a monthly show on the Café called "Across the Café Table," in which she talks in depth to an artist whose work is being showcased and plays some of his or her music. If you would like to take part in this, she can record interviews either by Skype or telephone.

Cochrane reminds contributors, "The Café is your showcase to the world, so the higher the quality both artistically and in terms of audio the better!"

ACTORS WITH DOWN SYNDROME RECEIVE AWARDS

The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) and the Down Syndrome Association of Los Angeles (DSALA) bestowed VISION awards to seven actors with Down syndrome at their Spring Luncheon on April 12.

The honorees included: Chris Burke (LIFE GOES ON, THE COMMISH, STRONG MEDICINE), Andrea Friedman (LIFE GOES ON, WALKER TEXAS RANGER, 7th HEAVEN, LAW AND ORDER: SVU), Blair Williamson (ER, CSI, THE GUARDIAN), Kristine Johnson (ER), Christine Young (ER), Louise Brown (ER) and Brad Silverman (QUANTUM LEAP, I AM SAM, CURB YOUR ENTUSIASM).

AUSTRALIAN INTEGRATED THEATRE COMPANY LAUNCHED

Atypical Theatre Company is a new group in Sydney, Australia that integrates artists with and without a disabilities. It was launched by Co-Artistic Directors Kirūna Stamell and Emma J Cooper. Both women are actresses of short stature. Atypical creates contemporary theatre and performance that includes a repertoire of traditional plays and

new works. The Theatre's inaugural production is "The Maids" by Jean Genet, which runs June 1-18.

Atypical aims to achieve a fair representation of disability within the arts. The Company claims to present disability in a realistic way, avoiding sensationalism and subverting typical stereotypes perpetuated by the popular media. It seeks to promote positive attitudes to difference.

Postal address: PO Box 306, Vaucluse 2030

Telephone: 0407 390 343

Web Site: <http://www.atypicaltheatre.com.au/>

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS PLAY PREMIERES IN LOS ANGELES

Changing Perceptions Theater by the Blind & Physically Disabled will present "Revelation," a new play written and directed by Christina Kokubo, June 3-19 at the LA Design Center, 5955 S. Western Ave, Los Angeles. The matinee performance will be audio described and ASL interpreted on Saturday, June 18. It will be followed by a reception and discussion with the director and cast. "Revelation" is a world premiere and the first full theatrical production in Los Angeles by Changing Perceptions.

Changing Perceptions Theater by the Blind & Physically Disabled is a year-round dramatic arts program for adults with visual and/or physical disabilities, founded by Producing Artistic Director Christina Kokubo in 2002. Its mission is the transformation and empowerment of people with disabilities through excellence in a dramatic arts program, creating performances designed to educate and ultimately create a more inclusive and mainstreamed world.

Christina Kokubo is a professional actress, who has starred in film, TV, theater and commercials for more than 20 years. She is an Artist in the Community recipient for 2001 and 2002 from the L.A. Cultural Affairs Department. In 2003, Christina gave a lecture/workshop at The International Theater Festival by the Blind in Zagreb, Croatia, where Changing Perceptions Theater Company has been invited to perform in October 2005.

CHICAGO FESTIVAL OF DISABILITY ARTS AND CULTURE SCHEDULED FOR 2006

The Chicago Festival of Disability Arts and Culture will take place April 20-30, 2006. The Festival will explore and celebrate the contributions of artists with disabilities, the contemporary contexts of disabled lives, and works that illuminate disability experiences. The multi-venue Festival will include theatrical performances, dance, music, literature, poetry, spoken word, film, visual art exhibitions, lectures, panel discussions and more. A consortium of the Chicago area organizations is organizing and sponsoring the Festival.

For more information contact:
Eva Silverman
Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs
Tel: 312.744.4405
TTY: 312.744.2947
E-mail: esilverman@cityofchicago.org

DAVID ROCHE RECEIVES MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AWARD

David Roche, keynote speaker, humorist and performer has been awarded the 2005 Martin Luther King, Jr. Diversity Award from Marin County, California. Roche is noted for transforming the lessons of lifelong facial disfigurement into a compelling message that leaves audiences entertained and encouraged to face their own personal challenges. In his one-man show "The Church of 80% Sincerity" Roche weaves his experiences into a funny and moving evening of theater.

Roche has appeared throughout the United States, including at the Clinton White House, and in Canada, England, Russia, New Zealand and Australia. He was a headliner at the Olympic Arts Festival in Sydney. He has appeared in two stage premieres: Charles Mee, Jr.'s "Summertime" at San Francisco's Magic Theatre and "Opening to You," Corey Fischer's adaptation of Norman Fischer's new translation of the Psalms. He is also a popular keynote speaker, addressing issues such as self-esteem, diversity, disability and facing change to clients such as Hewlett Packard, Lockheed Martin, Lawrence Livermore Labs and many universities.

DISABILITY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCED FOR FEBRUARY IN ALBERTA

The 5th annual Picture this...Film Festival, devoted to films by and about people with disabilities, will take place February 6-10, 2006 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The Festival celebrates disability culture through film and video. A nonprofit event started by the Calgary SCOPE Society, the festival's mandate is to showcase works on disability and works by filmmakers who have a disability in order to entertain and to stimulate discussion around disability issues. Films submitted come from many countries and are of many genres, including documentary, animation and drama.

The Calgary SCOPE Society works in alliance people with disabilities, their family and friends, and other community members to understand problems and create solutions to personal and social justice issues. The first Picture this...Film Festival occurred in 2001. The deadline for submissions to the 2006 Festival is September 30, 2005.

Mailing address:
Picture this...Film Festival
c/o Calgary SCOPE Society
ATTN: Vern Reynolds-Braun, Festival Director
#211, 2323 - 32 Avenue NE
Calgary, AB, Canada T2E 6Z3
Tel: (403) 717-5610

Fax: (403) 291-4087
Website: www.ptff.org
E-mail: info@ptff.org

CANADIAN REVIEW DEDICATES ISSUE TO THEATRE AND DISABILITY

The Canadian Theatre Review has dedicated its entire spring 2005 issue to the intersection of theatre and disability. A complete description of the issue and an order form can be found at <http://www.utpjournals.com/ctr/CTR122Promo.pdf>.

Guest editors of the issue are Michele Decottignies and Andrew Houston. Decottignies is the Founder and Artistic Director of Stage Left Productions, Calgary's only theatre company engaging exclusively in professional artist-community collaboration and the producers of Balancing Acts: Calgary's Annual Disability Arts Festival. Houston teaches at the University of Waterloo and is the Views and Reviews editor of the Canadian Theatre Review.

VSA AMERICORPS SEEKS ARTISTS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE IN ALBUQUERQUE

The VSA North Fourth Art Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico is recruiting artists with and without disabilities interested in community service to become VSA AmeriCorps members. All positions are based out of the Art Center. VSA AmeriCorps members will spend a year planning, organizing and teaching classes for people of all ages and abilities at North Fourth and/or conducting outreach activities. Performing arts positions involve performance work as well as teaching. Members receive a basic cost-of-living stipend, some benefits and earn an education award.

VSA AmeriCorps members range in age from 18 to their mid-50s and include people with and without disabilities. Educational backgrounds range from graduates of APS Transition Programs to PhDs. Each year VSA recruits from a pool of both local and national applicants.

- Full-time, half-time and part-time (6 hrs/wk) positions available.
- All positions begin in September 2005 and end in August 2006.
- Applications are being accepted now from dancers, theatre artists, musicians, and visual artists to fill a total of 22 positions for the 2005-06 year.

All VSA AmeriCorps members also participate in training and some service activities promoting volunteerism and learning about citizenship, health and safety, and disaster preparedness. Training in supporting people with disabilities is also provided.

The stipend for full-time positions is \$12,000/year. Individual health coverage is provided. Part-time positions do not include health insurance, but do include a pro-rated stipend. All members are eligible to place student loans in forbearance during the term of service. All members are eligible for an education award at the completion of

their term of service. The full-time award is \$4,725, while half and part-time awards are pro-rated. Qualifying members may also be eligible for child-care benefits.

To apply, submit a resume and the standard AmeriCorps application form. Applications can be found on-line at www.americorps.org. To receive a copy of the application packet by mail or to find out more contact:

VSA North Fourth Art Center
4904 Fourth Street, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87107
Tel: (505) 345-2872, ext 18
E-mail: dmashibi@vsartsnm.org

Opening Stages is produced and copyrighted by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. You are welcome to copy and distribute this newsletter and articles from it, if you credit the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Use the following when crediting the Kennedy Center: *“Opening Stages is a newsletter produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts at www.kennedy-center.org.”*

To become a subscriber and receive the free quarterly **Opening Stages** newsletter:

- e-mail your request for a subscription to Opening Stages along with your name, e-mail address and snail mail address to access@kennedy-center.org, or
- mail the same information to Accessibility Program, Opening Stages, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 2700 F. Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20566-0001, or
- fax your request to: (202) 416-8802.

If you do not want to receive your newsletter via e-mail, please request a hard copy and let us know if you need it in large-print or Braille.

For more information contact: The Accessibility Program at (202) 416-8727 (voice) or (202) 416-8728 (TTY), or via e-mail at access@kennedy-center.org