

CALLBOARD



A Challenge to Graduates: Don't Fit In

By Ted Rabinowitz

Actor/producer Amy Brenneman advises graduates against “the passivity of the performer”

This year's School of Theatre Commencement was marked by laughter, remembrance and a challenge to the graduates by keynote speaker actress Amy Brenneman, creator and star of the long-running hit television show “Judging Amy.”

Dean Madeline Puzo opened the ceremony by declaring her “nakhes,” a Yiddish word meaning the special kind of joyful pride you feel in someone else's achievements, for the class of 2006 – the first to enter the school and graduate under her leadership. She then asked for a moment of silence to honor friend, colleague and teacher Ritchie Spencer, the school's head of costume design for the past thirty years, who had recently passed away. (See “In Memoriam” on Page 3.) The Dean was followed by student speakers



Amy Brenneman

Katie Cowan's heartfelt remembrances. Finally, Nancy Ellen Dodd, as the oldest graduate of the class of 2006, spoke with enthusiasm and encouragement representing the MFAs.

At the start of her keynote speech, Ms. Brenneman drew rueful laughs by contrasting the eagerness of the graduating students with the fears of their parents about a life in the arts,

representing the BA, the BFA and the MFA graduates. Nicholas Rutherford, speaking for the BA graduates, brought the house down with his comedic take on his years at USC and was followed by BFA grad

(continued on page 3)

School of Theatre Offered Exclusive Performance of Spring Musical “Company” for USC Associates



Dean Madeline Puzo, Mrs. Katherine B. Loker and Nancy Sinatra, Sr. at the USC Associates event.

The School of Theatre proudly offered an exclusive performance of the spring musical “Company” for the USC Associates on Sunday, April 2. Immediately following the performance, the entire cast joined the Associates for a reception held in Queen's Court.

The USC Associates, the premier academic support group of USC, is a philanthropic association dedicated to the advancement of knowledge. Gifts from USC Associates members provide essential support for some of the university's most vital academic programs and initiatives.

They have played a key role in making USC the world-class institution that it is today. For nearly

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A SUMMER OF REFLECTION



Dean Madeline Puzo

I seem to remember from my college years that summer was a time of easy reflection – on the past academic year and the slow transition into the year to come. It’s a bit different for me now. The School of Theatre is changing and growing so rapidly, and so much of our activity over the past year has been about the future, that I have much less sense of a “summer break.” Still, now is a good time to pause and consider the good work we’ve done and the great things that lie ahead for us.

We have finished the revision of our undergraduate curricula, making the critical studies program even more rigorous, ensuring more studio and technical work for the students in the B.F.A. Acting program, and creating a new path of study for our B.F.A. designers, stage managers and technical directors. The changes could not be more timely as we are about to admit our largest freshman class ever – 125 students.

Speaking of acting, we have spent much of the past year preparing our new Master of Fine Arts program in Acting. We’ve hired three new full-time faculty – critical studies professor Angus Fletcher, master voice teacher Natsuko Ohama and movement specialist David Bridel – and after holding auditions around the country, we have accepted twelve extraordinarily talented students to join us in August to be the first class of what we believe is a superb and unique professional acting program.

Certainly one of the watershed events of the last year was the start of a very rewarding long-term partnership with Center Theatre Group. Our relationship with CTG goes well beyond the production of “Dead End” last fall. Our students are interning in every department at CTG – literary, administration, production, press, marketing and design. And they are doing real work, getting hands on experience working in the trenches at one of America’s premier theatre institutions – and making a real contribution to CTG. It is an exciting and enriching collaboration for everyone involved and we are very much looking forward to continuing and deepening our relationship with CTG in the year to come.

All in all, I feel that the work of the last few years is bearing wonderful fruit. Not only is the School of Theatre growing, but it is earning a reputation for excellence and word is getting out that USC is the pre-eminent choice for students with a passion for theatre.

I have mentioned in the past that the School of Theatre is to play a central part in the new Arts & Humanities Initiative being developed by Provost Max Nikias. As part of our contribution to the Initiative, the School of Theatre will present over the coming academic year staged readings of four plays that explore how artists and intellectuals respond to the efforts of governments and institutions to limit freedom of thought and expression. I expect these events not only to be entertaining and dramatic but to provoke enriching discussion and thought on what is always a relevant and current issue.

I wish all of you an exciting and carefree summer. We’ll see you in the fall.

Madeline Puzo
Dean

School of Theatre Holds 15th Annual Award Celebration

The School of Theatre held its 15th Annual Award Celebration on Friday, May 5, on the stage of the Bing Theatre. The dinner and ceremony acknowledges exceptional work done by students over the past year. Dean Madeline Puzo said, “This event is second only in poignancy to Commencement. I am so pleased that the school gathers together at the end of every spring and honors our students who have achieved so much over the course of the year. I’m proud of what you have achieved and I’m proud of the faculty that has led you to this moment.”

2005-06 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Aileen Stanley Memorial Award

Catherine Farrington
Michael McLean

John Blankenchip/William C. White Award

Zack Morgenroth
Kathryn Poppen

USC Alumni and Friends Award

Nick Daze

Ruth and Albert McKinlay Award

Performance – Mary Seidel
GPA – Joseph Horton

Student Council Award

Liz Westbrook

Nancy Kehr Award Fall 2005 ISP

Matt Hooker-Agvanian
“The Mandrake” by Machiavelli

Nancy Kehr Award Spring 2006 ISP

Tim Sullivan
“4.48 Psychosis” by Sarah Kane

David Dukes Acting Scholarship

Deborah Ann Woll

Outstanding Dance Concert

Choreographers Awards

Chrissy Anderson
Sally Fuscoe

Dance Leadership Awards

Chrissy Anderson
Sally Fuscoe
Emili Futernick

Bill White Faculty Recognition Award

Paul Backer

Ava Greenwald Memorial Award

Andrea Syglowski

The James Pendleton Award

Sue McGrew

John Ritter Award

Chris Downey

Stanley Musgrove Award

Deborah Ann Woll

Jack Nicholson Awards

Deborah Ann Woll
Ross Bautsch

James and Nony Doolittle Award

Katie Cowan
Jonathan LaCour
Jessica Wheeler
Shiloh Goodin



(L to R) Jason Ritter presents Chris Downey with the John Ritter Award; Catherine Farrington and Michael McLean received the Aileen Stanley Memorial Award; Cindy Kania and Peter Greenwald present Andrea Syglowski with the Ava Greenwald Memorial Award.



Commencement (continued from cover)

and by sharing her own experience as a young actress, wondering if her mother was in the audience while she was being smeared with ice cream on stage. She then suggested that a theatre career was less of a worry than the wider problems of a world in "bad shape." Acknowledging the risk of being a "buzz kill," Brenneman placed the responsibility for solving society's problems squarely on the graduates. "We don't need you artists to fit into the world as it is," said Brenneman. "We need you to change the world."

"The old ideas are not working," said Brenneman to loud applause. "We need new ideas...and that is what artists do – they bring us new ideas...they startle the old structures and begin revolutions."

"Get excellent at what you do. Surround yourself with people who support you. And keep the channel open."

Brenneman warned the graduates to avoid the "performer's trap" of saying "love me, I'll do whatever you want me to do." She discussed mentors who had demanded that she "move from the passivity of the performer to the activity of the creator," and to challenge the status quo. This culminated in her experiences as the creator and executive producer of "Judging Amy," where she used her influence to change the culture of the set. "We had female executive producers. We told stories about children and families that were politically charged...we had periodic sit-downs between writers and actors."

Brenneman concluded her remarks with a discussion of other artists who are changing society and the industry, with quotes from Thomas Merton and from Martha Graham, and with this advice: "Get excellent at what you do. Surround yourself with people who support you. And keep the channel open."

IN MEMORIAM — RITCHIE M. SPENCER



USC School of Theatre Associate Professor, Director of Production and Head of Costume Design Ritchie M. Spencer passed away on Sunday, May 7, 2006, after a long illness. He was 67 years old.

talented artists and established a standard of excellence in design of which the School is very proud. He was a committed teacher and artist who loved the School, his students and the theatre. We will all miss Ritchie immensely."

Prior to USC, Spencer headed the Costume Design Department at Ithaca College and also worked in costume design at Bard College. In addition to the Traphagen School of Design, he attended the Arts Students League and the University of Hawaii. Spencer was a member of the United Scenic Artists, Local 829 (New York). He was also resident Costume Designer at Seattle Repertory Theatre and Center Stage in Baltimore. Prior to that, he held the Assistant to the Costume Designer position at APA Phoenix Theatre in New York. While serving the School of Theatre, he continued to design costumes for independent motion pictures, commercials and stage productions.

Active to the very end, Spencer continued a full schedule of teaching, including supervising student designs, as well as designing the costumes for the School's spring musical, "Company," presented at the Bing Theatre. Spencer joined the faculty of USC in 1976, designing the costumes for the inaugural production at the Bing Theatre, "Sweet Bird of Youth," starring guest artist Dorothy Maguire.

School of Theatre Dean Madeline Puzo said, "We are filled with sorrow at Ritchie's passing. Throughout his extraordinary 30-year career at the School, he taught and trained many

A celebration service will be held Wednesday, September 6, 2006, beginning at 4 p.m. in the Bing Theatre.



Front Row Center: Tony Award-winning author George Furth (with scarf) shared stories with the cast of "Company."

USC Associates Event (continued from cover)

a half-century, Associates members have proven themselves to be among the most devoted members of the Trojan Family – fostering innovative research, education, artistic creation, and community service on many vital fronts at USC, and helping the university attract students and faculty of the highest caliber.

Today's USC Associates offers a full array of membership levels and benefits, a wide ranging calendar of events and more support opportunities than ever before.

The Tony Award-winning musical "Company," with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and a book by George Furth, is full of biting wit, delicious irony, unflinching honesty and quirky

musical twists as it tells the story of a marriage-avoiding 35-year-old bachelor named Bobby and his experience with his married friends and the three women he is dating. "Company" originally ran on Broadway for 706 performances winning the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Musical, as well as Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Director, Best Book of a Musical and Best Music and Lyrics, and it proved to be a big success for the School of Theatre as well.

The cast of "Company" also had the good fortune to be able to meet with author George Furth after the show opened. Mr. Furth regaled the students with stories on the creation of the production, as well as his own acting career.

David Bridel



USC School of Theatre Lecturer David Bridel became Artistic Director of the Franklin Stage Company in upstate New York, which he co-founded back in 1997, and where he directed 11 productions thus far. This unique Equity

theatre, housed in a four-story Greek Revival 1857 listed building, is supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, and offers high quality classical theatre admission free to a loyal and eclectic audience. For the summer of 2006, he is directing Ibsen's "A Doll's House" for the company and produced the hit show from England "An Oak Tree," written and performed by Tim Crouch, and Joe Orton's "What the Butler Saw."

In the fall of 2006, he is choreographing Academy Award winner William Friedkin's productions of "Salome" (Richard Strauss) and "Das Gehege" (Wolfgang Rihm, based on the text by Botho Strauss) for the Bayerische Staatsoper (Bavarian State Opera) in Munich. Starring Angela Denoke, the double bill opens on October 27, and plays through the Summer Festival of 2007, after which it goes into repertoire.

In the spring of this year, he premiered his new play, "I Gelosi," a picaresque drama following

the fate of one of Italy's leading commedia dell'arte companies, at UCLA. He returns next year to the same venue with his production of "The Death and Death of Vladimir Mayakovsky," written in collaboration with UCLA's MFA Acting students.

His latest play, "The Actors Rehearse the Story of Charlotte Salomon," an epic journey through the territories of memory, death, and rebirth, is in development with performer and voice specialist Penny Kreitzer (winner of two Bay Area Awards for Best Actress).

Oliver Mayer



Oliver Mayer, Assistant Professor of Dramatic Writing at the USC School of Theatre and author of "Blade to the Heat," which has been performed in acclaimed productions around the world, saw his play "Conjunto" staged at

Borderlands Theatre in Tucson this past April. It will be staged here in Los Angeles later this fall. His "Rocio! In Spite of It All," a unique, highly entertaining musical cabaret, starring Marlene Forte ("Real Women Have Curves"), opened this summer at the King King Theatre in Hollywood. The play takes you inside the hearts of icons Rocio del Rio (goddess of '70s Spanish language TV) and arch rival Inez Maduro (who

took Rocio's torch songs and transformed them into pre-Reggaeton salsa).

The cast also included actor/singer Shalim ("Lizzie McGuire"), Lidia Ramirez ("I Love America," "Cutting Open Wings"), Lesley Ann Machado (host of the TV Guide Channel), Joe Quintero ("Numbers," "Shaft") and USC School of Theatre alums Sean Dodder (BFA), Michael Moshay (BFA), Aaron Fischer (BFA) and was staged managed by sophomore Meirav Rotstein.

Oliver is the recipient of a Gerbode Grant to write the libretto for a new opera entitled "America Tropical" composed by David Conte, to premiere in October 2006 in San Francisco and has received a commission from The Magic Theatre/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Science & Technology Initiative to further develop his play "Dark Matters," working with Science Advisor/Collaborator Clifford Johnson, Professor of Physics at USC.

Exploring not only ideas of string theory but the intimate lives of the theorists, "Dark Matters" uses two scientists and Donna Summer's back-up singer to describe and test the bounds of super symmetry and the darker parts of dark matter – in the cosmos and within the human heart.

"The Hurt Business: A Critical Portfolio of the Early Works of Oliver Mayer, Plus" was published in May 2006 through Hyperbole Books, San Diego State University Press.



We'd like to hear from you, keep you informed and share your news in an upcoming issue of *Callboard*. Please mail this completed form to: USC School of Theatre, Attn: Tony Sherwood, Childs Way, DRC 104, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0791, or fax to (213) 821-4051.

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