

UCF Conservatory Theatre Alumni Newsletter



May 2009

Welcome to the fourth and final edition of the 2008-2009 UCF Conservatory Theatre Department Alumni Newsletter. To honor and celebrate the achievements of our alumni, we present this newsletter for your enjoyment and to let you know what your friends and former classmates are doing these days.

If you'd like to be included in the next edition, please send an e-mail to Nicholas Wuehrmann, Alumni Committee Chair, at nwuehrma@mail.ucf.edu or any of our committee members and let us know what great things are happening in your life.

Or visit our web site and submit your news on line at http://www.theatre.ucf.edu/alumni_spotlight.php. Please forward your information as you'd like it to appear in the newsletter and *please include your year of graduation when writing*.

This month's departmental announcements:

Announcing UCF Conservatory Theatre's Summer Season 2009

GREATER TUNA

Main Stage - June 4-7, 11-14

In this hilarious send-up of small town life, two actors create the entire population of Tuna, Texas in a tour de farce of quick change artistry. They'll be changing costumes and characterizations faster than a jack rabbit runs from a coyote!

COLE!

Main Stage - June 25-28, July 2-5, August 27-30

A fresh musical about Cole Porter, featuring his hit tunes and a story of his life, from Yale to Paris to Manhattan to Broadway to Hollywood and back again to Broadway. Enjoy great Porter standards, such as "I Love Paris," "Take Me Back to Manhattan," "Love for Sale," "Night and Day," and "I Get a Kick Out of You."

We also have an exciting season coming up next year, so stay tuned for more information, or visit our website: www.theatre.ucf.edu For tickets, call the box office at 407-823-1500.

Special Announcement

UCF Theatre Alumnus Michelle Knight

will be appearing in the national tour of

Jersey Boys

when it comes to Orlando May 5 – 23 at the Bob Carr Center!

Please read the blog entry from the Orlando Sentinel:

http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/entertainment_stage_theat/2009/04/jersey-girl-makes-good.html

Alumni News for May, 2009

★ **Jenny Ashman (2005)** From Jenny: “Well it has been quite a while since I sent an update! I am still living in Los Angeles and am doing theatre again for the first time in 3 years. I am currently playing Meg in *Little Women the Musical* at the Lyric Theatre. We still have 2 weekends left and here is our latest review from Backstage West.

http://www.backstage.com/bsa/news_reviews/la/review_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003960618

Up next I am in rehearsal for *As You Like It* at the Next Stage Theatre where I am playing Rosalind! The show runs from May 23rd to June 20th. I am also in rehearsal for a reading of a new musical where I am playing the title role which should be performing in May. Recently I also completed a short film called the *The Time Traveller* and a reading of *Spanky and Spry* at UCLA written by non other than fellow alum, the ridiculously talented Ayla Harrison!”

★ **Marc Collins (1996)** From Marc: “My company, Odyssey Creative (video production for corporate and broadcast), has just produced a national TV spot for independent lawn care product manufacturer Ferti-Lome through their agency of record: Large and Page Communications (Hartford, CT). We shot it here in Central Florida on the Red One Prime/HD camera system, using production personnel and on-camera talent from Orlando and surrounding markets. The Ferti-Lome spot can be seen locally on Brighthouse 13 for the next few weeks, and around the country over the next year. It's also up for viewing here: www.youtube.com/odysseycreative - click the 'HD' button to watch the spot in high def. This was also my first big-budget national spot as director, so I'd love to hear feedback on the finished product. Hope everyone is doing great!”

★ **Courtney Cunningham (Winstead) (2007)** From Courtney: “I recently appeared in a musical production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* for American Dream Theatre here in Louisville, where I played Jack's Mother. The reality show I worked on, *Bridal Bootcamp*, is scheduled to air on CMT beginning on June 6. They decided to delay the airing in order to coincide with wedding season. I am really looking forward to this summer - Dustin and I are both headed to Jenny Wiley Theatre, where I will be playing June Sanders in *Smoke on the Mountain*, Ann Skaggs in *The Legend of Jenny Wiley* and Ensemble in *All Shook Up*.

★ **Ellie Dvorkin (1998)** has had great success over the past couple of years as one half of the hilarious musical comedy duo Mel & El, and is about to open a production of her second original full length show at Ars Nova, New York's premier hub for emerging artists and new work.

MEL & EL are Melanie Adelman and Ellie Dvorkin - real life best friends who have known each other since they were 12 years old. Described as a musical Laverne & Shirley meets Sex & the City, MEL & EL are a riotously funny duo who have quickly become an NYC cult phenomenon. NYC appearances include the New York Musical Theatre Festival, The Hysterical Festival, Nice Jewish Girls Gone Bad, On the Rocks with Danny Leary, The Big Gay Variety Show, Dykes on Mics, Homo Comicus, Hedda Lettuce's Tossed Salad and here! TV's Busted. You can also catch them at popular venues around town like The Box, The Zipper, Gotham Comedy Club, The Stonewall, Therapy, The PIT and Comix.

MEL & EL recently concluded a year-long run at The Duplex of their critically acclaimed show MEL & EL: THIS SHOW RHYMES – which was developed in conjunction with Cannery Works. Their brand new full-length show, MEL & EL: SHOW AND TELL, developed in part at New York Stage & Film, will premiere in Spring 2009 at Ars Nova.

MEL & EL were awarded the Backstage Bistro Award for their song "Fagnet" (Outstanding Musical Comedy Number) as well as the Collaboration Award given by the NY Coalition of Professional Women in the Arts and Media. They are most proud to have participated in performances to benefit The Trevor Project, the NYCLU's LGBT efforts, The Food Bank for NYC and Habitat for Humanity.

If you're in New York (or planning to be in the month of May), buy tickets at www.arsnovanyc.com!

A postscript from Ellie: “I just learned that the production coordinator for my new show, James Cleveland, is a UCF Theatre Alum! Class of 2002, I think he said. Coincidence!!”

★ **Timothy Ellis (MFA, 2007)** had an amazing year as a Visiting Assistant Professor at UCF - teaching acting, voice and dance. It was also my pleasure to choreograph UCF's production of *West Side Story* and a piece entitled "After Eden" for the UCF dance concert. This summer, I'll be traveling to North Carolina to perform in Flatrock Playhouse's production of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. In the Fall, I'm slated to choreograph Orlando Rep's production of *How I Became A Pirate*.

★ **Matthew Hamner (2006)** successfully directed and designed A.R. Gurney's *The Dining Room* at Southern Union State Community College. He also budgeted the show, purchased the materials, built the set, and taught 3 classes. If that were not enough, he attended SETC and the Alabama Thespian Conference for recruiting purposes. FYI, SU gives full tuition theatre scholarships so if one knows of any high school students that would like a full ride let him know at mhamner@suscc.edu. This summer he will study the Meisner technique with Larry Silverberg at Eckerd College (Tampa).

★ **Mark W. Hardin (2006)** was voted Teacher of the Year for Jackson Heights Middle School in Seminole County. Mark teaches grades 6-8 Chorus, Music Appreciation and Drama. Some of his accomplishments have been several All State Chorus members and superior scores at contest, plus a madrigal dinner, and anti-bullying presentation that was written and performed for the entire student body by his advanced drama class. His latest chorus concert was a celebration of official state songs utilizing Power Point presentations and dramatizations. CALL AND WRITE YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES TO SUPPORT EDUCATION AND ARTS EDUCATION!!! YOUR CONTACTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE. On another note, Mark has started a new GLBT/Straight Chorus in Orlando called The Orlando Circle of Friends Chorus. So far about 20-25 singers are involved. The first concert is still pending, but you can check them out at www.orlandocircleoffriendschorus.com

★ **JP Haynie (2008)** From JP: "I'm currently on the road with a national children's theatre tour of *Pinocchio* with American Family Theatre. I have also been offered a year long contract at Playhouse on the Square in Memphis Tennessee beginning in June, and have had several callbacks for a major motion picture."

★ **Margaret-Ellen Jeffreys (2009)** From Margaret-Ellen: "I finally, finally defended my thesis at the end of March, and Nick suggested I send an update to the alumni newsletter. I didn't feel like I could submit anything to it until I was actually an alumnus, but as

that time is finally approaching, here we are. I spent last year in Cincinnati at the Playhouse in the Park, where I understudied Emilia in *Othello*, the leading lady Julia in *A Sleeping Country*, a new comedy by *Big Love* writer Melanie Marnich, created the role of Lucia in the workshop of a new play called *The Travels of Angelica*, got to play my violin and perform as a live foley artist in *Around the World in 80 Days*, and actually replaced in the role of June (an amazing opportunity, such a great show!) in *The Musical of Musicals: The Musical!*. This holiday season, I played Cindy Lou in *The Winter Wonderettes* at Temple Theatre in my home state of North Carolina, and I returned to Cincy to save some money for the move to New York this August. I recently played Nora/Hendra/et al in Sheila Callaghan's *Dead City* and am currently in rehearsal as Petra in *A Little Night Music* with New Stage Collective, and this summer I am traveling to New Hampshire to play Lenny in *Crimes of the Heart* and Aouda/James Forrster/Newspaperman in *Around the World in 80 Days*. I'm moving to New York in the middle of August, and am looking for suggestions of your favorite NY boroughs! :)

★ **Mandi Jo John (2007)** Mandi Jo was recruited straight out of college to perform on Equity contract at Walt Disney World at the Festival of the Lion King show as one of the Lead Singers. Since at Disney, Mandi has learned Flora Long in *The Hoop Dee Doo Review* and *High School Musical 3*. Staying in Central Florida has been very beneficial to Mandi's Career, affording her the opportunity to perform in *Crowns* at Seaside Music Theatre, Cabaret shows at Mad Cow Theatre and the Winter Park Playhouse, and many conventions and commercials for the Disney Event Group. Just recently, Mandi hosted the Disney Dreamers Academy alongside Steve Harvey, and shot commercials that can currently be seen at disneyworld.com. Mandi is also the reigning Miss Orlando 2009 and is preparing to compete at Miss Florida (and God willing) Miss America later this year. Once that chapter closes, Mandi plans to (finally) move to NYC and pursue the dream!

★ **Chris Layton (2006)** Chris has just finished helping choreograph *Nonsense* with Kyle Ann Lacertosa (Class of 2005) and her students at Cardinal Mooney High School, which opened successfully on April 1; and has also just choreographed selections from *Wonderful Town* for the Manhattan School of Music's Pre-College Program. He will join another production of *Naked Boys, Singing!*, for Memorial Day Weekend on Fire Island, NY, and will be a theatre instructor at Independent Lake Camp in the Pocono Mountains, PA from mid-June through the end of August! Things are looking up--"thanks so much, UCF!"

★ **Monica Padilla (2005)** is excited to be graduating Law School this May with a Juris Doctor in Law. The ceremony will take place in San Diego, CA where she will be leading her Graduating Class of 2009 with The National Anthem! Now armed as a performer and attorney-to-be she plans to pass the California Bar and conquer the Entertainment Industry in LA by storm. Monica plans to practice Intellectual Property which includes Music Licensing, Copyright and Trademark. She still continues to perform and has now embraced modeling in San Diego as well where she works with both Sfinx Productions and Red Rope Reviews. This May Monica will also be featured in Quadir's runway 2009 Pret-a-Porter Fashion Show in San Diego, CA.

★ **Lauren Gamber Partin (2004)** From Lauren: "Working at U.N.C School of the Arts as their Budget Analyst and performing consultation work with The Piedmont Opera in Winston Salem, NC. I will also be graduating with a M.F.A. in Performing Arts Management from the School of the Arts in May. Currently writing a thesis, reading comic books, and being a fabulous wife to my wonderful husband."

★ **Rebecca Podsendnik** is currently Tour Coordinator in the Theater for Young Audiences program at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Rebecca is also Photo Editor of *TYA Today*. Please visit this web site for a spotlight article on her work: <http://www.assitej-usa.org/spotlightarchive.html>

★ **Nicki Priest (2007)** Nicki is still creating magic at the Magic Kingdom as an Entertainment Manager. Managing all entertainment on Main Street and at Cinderella's Castle, she also just opened up the successful Move It! Shake It! Celebrate It! Street Party where guests have a great time dancing on the streets with their favorite characters! She is still in contact with Chicago and may be making her way back up there soon to work for the Goodman, but right now is happy hanging out with Mickey!

★ **Janet Raskin (2007)** Janet finished the Spring semester teaching Acting and Intro to Theatre at Valencia Community College. She'll be teaching a new class at Art's Sake Studio (Winter Park), "Play to Read - Read to Play" this summer. It's a play-reading/scene study class that focuses on a different playwright each month. A great incentive to read plays and find audition material. Contact Janet at [janetraskin@yahoo.com!](mailto:janetraskin@yahoo.com)

★ **Marc Rothschild (2000)** Marc is currently the Production Manager for Walt Disney World's newest stage show, "Stitch's SuperSonic Celebration." Marc is not only working on the production elements but also on the construction of a new stage complex in Tomorrowland to support the production. The new show which opens on May 6, 2009 combines cutting edge choreography, a brand new retro soundtrack, special effects, and very special technology to bring Stitch to life. Marc is also working on several smaller entertainment projects throughout the Walt Disney World Resort.

★ **Keith Saltojanes (2006)** Keith has recently moved to Los Angeles, California and is loving it so far. "There are so many opportunities as an actor out here." he says. He has already been cast in a stage production of "Toys: The Windup Puppet Show" at The Next Stage right off of Sunset Blvd. "If you are in town come see the show, and if you want to come visit the city, look me up on Facebook; I'd love to meet up and show you around!"

★ **Michael Wilga (2006)** is successful at Purdue. He is currently finishing multiple projects. He is leading an audio consultant team in re-designing an existing theatre space on campus; also part of a 2-man team in designing a Flash-based casual game where he is building the engine; and is finishing up his semester computer science project involving extremely large integer arithmetic. This summer he will either be an intern at Cirque du Soleil or be writing up his Terminal Project proposal while doing a data network install for a government building in Washington DC.

Did you know... Membership in the UCF Alumni Association is only \$35 a year? As a member you will receive benefits and discounts including:

- Our award-winning *Pegasus* magazine
- Access to CareerBeam our online career counseling resource
- \$5 off your first UCF Alumni Association event
- Invitations to fun events such as KnightFest (UCF's Homecoming)
- Chapter & Club activities
- Access to the Knights Network online directory
- 15% off UCF logo merchandise at the UCF Bookstore
- Car rental and hotel discounts
- Home and auto insurance
- And more!

You can see all of our available benefits, discounts and services and register for the Knights Network on our website at www.ucfalumni.com.

As a gift for renewing you may choose one of the following UCF Alumni Items: Chiller Bottle, Hat, Visor or Tote bag (while supplies last).

Additionally, each \$35 membership provides \$5 to our CAH Alumni Chapter's operating budget. My Alumni Chapters (Marching Knights, Hispanic, Art, History, Music, Theater and Women's Studies) will have additional funds to plan events.

We wish all of our alums continued success in your life's endeavors!!

Make sure to send your news for our next Alumni Newsletter, coming out early next semester.

Don't be shy! Send us your news! If you see anyone who isn't receiving our monthly newsletter and would like to, be sure to have them send us their information so we can add them to the list.

Once again, please forward your information as you'd like it to appear in the newsletter (and please be succinct, if possible...) and please include your year of graduation when writing.

Alumni Committee:

Nicholas Wuehrmann

Mark Brotherton

Dr. Donald Seay

John Shafer

Marc Collins, Alumni Representative