

# Behind the Scene

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Serving the Washington area since 1992

## We've Got Magic To Do

Combine ten energetic kids, two professional magicians, and a big-hearted philanthropist, and what do you get? *Making Magic*, the area's first-ever youth magic training program, which piloted this summer as part of The Theatre Lab's Summer Acting Camp for Kids' aftercare enrichment program. Over the course of one intensive week, children ages 9-12 developed a half-hour show chock full of complex magic tricks that amazed a roomful of senior citizens residing at the Chevy Chase House, an

assisted living facility in the District. From the "cut-and-restore rope trick" to the always mystifying "disappearing milk," these magicians-in-training mastered the art of audience misdirection as they wowed the crowd with amusing patter and seamless sleight-of-hand.

*Making Magic* is the brainchild of Gary Rosenthal, a well-known area sculptor and the founder of the Community and Arts Enrichment Fund, a project that uses art as a catalyst for service to the community.

"In my mind I had these wonderful images of children pulling rabbits out of a hat in front of seniors," says Rosenthal. "I think it's so important that children learn from theatre. And magic is theatre that really pulls people in. I'm very grateful to The Theatre Lab for being the first group that could really make this vision a reality."

Most of the participants in the pilot project attended The Theatre Lab on full scholarship through our educational collaborative with House of Ruth, Calvary Bilin-

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gual Multicultural Center and other community partners. And for these young people in particular, the magic program seemed to be nothing short of...well, magical.

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## We Predict Mood Swings In Your Future!

But no medication should be necessary. We're not talking about a rollercoaster of manic highs followed by irritable lows, but about The Mood Swings, a musical

theatre cabaret trio composed of Theatre Lab Directors Buzz Mauro, Deb Gottesman and Michael Rodgers—pictured below. (They have a lot in common with that rol-

lercoaster, but no queasiness is involved.)

This unconventional group – their unique blend of irreverent comedy and close harmony is difficult to describe – has been performing as the centerpiece of The Theatre Lab's annual Cabaret Benefit for years, and they've recently branched out to DC's growing number of cabaret venues. They also do private functions, including conferences (they headlined NGLTF's Leadership Awards ceremony), birthday parties – and even



Register  
online  
today for  
classes!  
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one recent wedding. (Give them a call for your next Christmas party or bris!)

The Mood Swings' next engagement will be The Theatre Lab's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Cabaret Benefit, on Monday, November 8 at the Wyndham Washington Hotel. The program – designed to be almost

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## New Class Offerings and Some of Special Interest

### EARLY FALL CLASSES

#### Creating a Role:

##### The Laramie Project

The Laramie Project, a fascinating and moving play by Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theater Project, is based on a series of interviews with the residents of Laramie, Wyoming after Matthew Shepard was murdered there in a gay hate crime. The Theatre Lab's double-session Creating a Role class will lead students through a replica of a professional rehearsal process, culminating in a full production of this challenging and rewarding piece of theatre. The only prerequisite is The Theatre Lab's Beginning Scene Study class (or permission of the instructors). The play features more than seventy characters, including friends and family of Matthew Shepard, the perpetrators, the playwright, and many members of the Laramie community, including gays and homophobes, judges and jurors, Mormons and Muslims, priests and ministers, ranchers and reporters. All students will play more than one role. Instructors **Michael Kramer** and **Carl Menninger** will both direct the play and work with the actors on all aspects of performing a full-length play, including how to create several different complex characters, how to keep the process alive during a long rehearsal period, and how to share a performance with an audience. This unique class has produced memorable productions of such great and difficult plays as *The Crucible*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Metamorphoses*, and the rewards it offers actors are potentially limitless. Roles will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, so register early. Prerequisite: Beginning Scene Study or permission of instructors. Tuesdays, 7-10pm, Sept. 21 - Dec. 14 + Monday, Dec. 13.

#### Theatre of the Fantastic

This is another totally unique performance class, and this one has no prerequisite. It's taught by one of Washington's most lauded directors, **Jeremy Skidmore, the Artistic Director of Theater Alliance**, and represents an opportunity for beginning actors to experience the full creative power of the theatre. The class bridges the work of improvisation and scene study by developing an adaptation of an existing play into a one-act performance piece, using the improv exercises of Peter Brooks' "Banana Theory." This theory explores the use of props for things other than what they are (for example, a banana is not a banana

**Ever heard of Peter Brooks' "Banana Theory?" Maybe there's more for you to learn about acting!**

but a gun). Through this creative use of props and directed movement exercises, students will produce an entirely new version of the play, under the direction of one of Washington's finest theatre artists. The course will culminate in a performance open to the public. Mondays, 7-10pm, Sept. 13 - Oct. 18.

#### Teen Acting Workshop

**Deidra Starnes**, professional actor and enormously popular youth educator, will be leading this course on all aspects of acting for students 13 through 18. The course will take students well beyond what a typical high school class can cover, including techniques of improvisation, text interpretation, character development, raising stakes, and making connections with other characters. For students at all levels of experience. Mondays, 7-9pm, Sept. 13 - Oct. 18.

#### Playwriting I

A thorough understanding of play structure is crucial for anyone interested in any aspect of the theatre. For that reason, we encourage everyone (especially actors!) to try their hand at this fun and eye-opening class that takes students from the basics of creating characters and dialogue through to the completion of a ten-minute play, suitable for entry in any of the many ten-minute play festivals that take place throughout the country. Popular playwright and teacher **Carl Menninger** will help each student at his or her own level, and all plays written for the course will receive a reading by professional actors on the last day of class. Thursdays, 7-9pm (last two classes until 10pm), Sept. 16 - Oct. 21.

#### Other September Classes

If you haven't yet taken **The Actor's Workout**, you should give it a try! If you have, another go-round will keep your movement skills and your total-body acting skills from getting rusty! With the ever-growing number of cabaret venues and open mikes in town, singers should have a look at our **Cabaret** class, which covers all aspects of creating and marketing your own cabaret, under the guidance of acclaimed musical director **George Fulginiti-Shakar** and beloved chanteuse **Judy Simmons**. Traditional acting training (the most important kind!) can be found in **The Drama Workshop, Beginning Scene Study**, our inspiring **Auditioning** class, and (for intermediate and advanced students) **Acting with a Director**. You can brush up on important aspects of technique in **Michael Rodgers' Voice and Speech**. If you're interested in acting for the screen, give us a call about **On-Camera Scene Study II**. Finally, for those inter-

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## More on Classes

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ested in real-world applications of the actor's craft, there's **Public Speaking the Actor's Way**, with Deb Gottesman.

See [www.theatrelab.org](http://www.theatrelab.org) or our brochure for details.

### LATER FALL CLASSES

#### Acting in a Professional Production

Join acclaimed actor and director Delia Taylor for a course that culminates in a series of readings with professional actors at MetroStage. That means acting students will work with professional actors, under a professional director, at a professional venue. The benefits of this course include: insight into the professional process, training and practice in the difficult (and increasingly popular) form of the staged reading, and the "rising to the occasion" factor of working in a professional production. Auditions will be required. Details (selection of scripts, dates and times) are still being nailed down. Please call (202) 588-8113 for more info.

#### Conquering the Dance Audition

The piece that's missing in many a promising musical theatre performer's repertoire is a certain facility with "movement." Choreographer Sherry Chriss (who is patient and nurturing, but also knows her stuff) will teach all the basics, with the goal of increased comfort and skill in any dance audition scenario by the end of the six weeks. Don't let your lovely voice and terrific acting go to waste because of that pesky dance requirement! You can do it, and Sherry will show you how. No experience necessary. Convenient time, early Saturday afternoon! Saturdays, 1 - 3pm, Oct. 20 - Dec. 11 (no class Nov. 27 - Thanksgiving weekend).

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A circle of friends from our Summer Acting Camp for Kids 2004. It's never too early to sign up for the mailing list for our popular teen and kids programs!

## Online Registration: Special Offer!

Have you ever had a burning desire to sign up for a Theatre Lab class at 3 in the morning? Who hasn't?

Well, now you can. And with our new online registration system, that's not all you can do. You can register for Theatre Lab classes and events, safely and securely, any time of the day or night, with just a few clicks of the mouse. You can make your selections and pay immediately with a credit card, or put courses or reservations in your shopping cart to think more about later - they'll be there waiting for you next time you sign on, so you can pick up where you left off. All your contact information will still be there, too - so there's no need to enter any info more than once. You can even keep separate records for other people living at your address, so registering a son or daughter for our summer programs couldn't be easier.

In case that's not enough to entice you to give it a try, we're also offering \$20 gift certificates to the first hundred people to register online, good for any future Theatre

Lab course or event, for yourself or a friend. Sign up for all your classes online, get a \$20 certificate for each registration!

This new service is made possible through our partnership with *infosnap*, a leading application and registration provider for schools and youth programs. When you click "Register" on the Theatre Lab website, you'll be given an "Online Registration" option. Click it, and you'll be taken to the *infosnap* site, which lists all the available Theatre Lab programs and provides step-by-step instructions for filling out the appropriate registration forms. All your information - from phone number to credit card number - is completely encrypted and secure. When your registration is complete, you'll receive a detailed confirmation, and you'll be all set.

The \$20 gift certificates are going only to the first 100 registrations, so get to [www.theatrelab.org](http://www.theatrelab.org) ASAP to sign up for fall classes! (See page 2 for descriptions of some of our exciting offerings.) **Ω**

## Making Better Friends

This past spring The Theatre Lab continued to expand its outreach into our community by joining forces with Food & Friends. This non-profit organization prepares, packages, and delivers meals and groceries to nearly 1,000 people living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses such as breast, lung, and colon cancer throughout Washington, DC and 14 counties of Maryland and Virginia. For more than 14 years, Food & Friends has provided food and companionship to its clients, their loved ones, and caregivers. Now, we are helping in their mission by using our innovative Life Stories program to develop a greater understanding and personal connection between those living with serious illnesses and the Food & Friends volunteers who serve them.

Our program, lasting 8 weeks, took place at the Food & Friends headquarters in Southeast Washington. The program culminated in a final performance consisting of both a video scrapbook of the program and presentations of "life stories" performed by several participants.

Michael Rodgers, creator of this program and of our Life Stories program for senior citizens, was

struck by the personal ties forged during the class and the knowledge gained by those participating. "When the program began, volunteers were on one side of the circle [of chairs] and clients on the other. Within a matter of weeks, the 'divide' disappeared and participants were exchanging emails and phone numbers. Although volunteers might have a limited academic understanding of what living with these life-threatening conditions entails, their empathy for and acceptance of those who are served by Food & Friends increased dramatically. For clients, I felt the impact was just as dramatic, but different in nature. People living with HIV/AIDS just want to be seen as regular folks. They don't want to be treated like they are sick or fragile or different.

A great example of this occurred two weeks into the class, at the end of dinner provided by Food & Friends for the participants. A client was on his second piece of chocolate cake when one of the volunteers said, 'I wish I could eat like that and stay so thin. What's your secret?' Without skipping a beat the client said, 'Oh, I have AIDS.' No reprimanding tone, no discomfort in the statement – just a simple fact. The client then proceeded to discuss his body's inability to absorb nutrients due to a combination of factors pertaining to both the AIDS virus and side-effects of the medications he takes. Both client and volunteer gained from that experience." The audience for the final performance consisted of participants, their friends, and family, as well as staff from both The Theatre Lab and Food & Friends. The impact of the video scrapbook and the live story-telling was profoundly moving and the connections made during the class between volunteers and clients were both touching and real. We are extremely excited about the benefits of this Life Stories program and pleased that Food & Friends has asked us to offer it again this fall and next spring. Ω

### Wanted: Part-Time Office Assistant

Seeking energetic, self-motivated adult with excellent phone skills. Minimum of 12 hours per week needed. Prefer afternoon hours. Competitive salary with potential for job expansion for right person. Please direct all inquiries and resumes to [Michael@theatrelab.org](mailto:Michael@theatrelab.org).

**No phone calls please.**

## Young Artists Abound

The Theatre Lab's renowned institutes for young people were bigger and better than ever this summer, with more than 130 children and teens from all over the metropolitan area receiving intensive training in acting and musical theatre. Kids ages 9-13 strutted their stuff with Shakespeare, improv, masks and more, while teens in the Summer Acting Institute developed advanced skills in scene study, voice, movement, long-form improvisation, and auditioning (not to mention fabulous workshops in magic, stage combat, screenacting and more) under the supervision of Theatre Lab Directors Deb Gottesman and Buzz Mauro. Musically inclined teens spent four weeks in the Musical Theatre Institute under the direction of beloved musical theatre diva Jane Pesci-Townsend, a program which culminated in a sold-out revue featuring works from many of the hottest Broadway and Off-Broadway shows including *Wicked*, *The Producers*, *A New Brain*, and *The Last Five Years*.

This year The Theatre Lab was proud to have awarded more than \$13,000 in need-based scholarships to students coming from the House of Ruth in Anacostia, the Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Center, and schools throughout the DCPS. Many thanks to all the youth participants and their families for helping to create such a thrilling summer, and to our tremendously talented instructors: Brandy Burre, Mark Bush, Danielle Drakes, Sean Gabbert, Susan Hazard, Bea Judge, Frank Pesci, Michael Russotto, Deidra Starnes, and R. Scott Williams. Ω

Read Washington City Paper!



A participant in the *Summer Acting Camp for Kids* learns a rope trick from local magician Brian Curry. Plans are underway to incorporate the teaching of magic as a new segment of our outreach programs.

## More on Magic...

(Continued from page 1)

Theatre Lab Director Deb Gottesman was struck by the way the participants embraced the rigorous training. "For many of these kids, especially the ones who are living in transient places like House of Ruth, they are always the last to know about anything that's going to happen to them. Magic is so great because it gives you the chance to be the first to know. The only one to know. And that's thrilling."

"It's really cool because you know stuff other people don't," concurred nine-year-old Bria the Brilliant. (Every magician chose his or her own stage name.) "Usually I'm like second best at everything but since I've been in magic I've learned that I can be first if I want to."

And the benefits of learning magic go far beyond the stage, according to professional magician Brian Curry, who along with colleague

Karen Berris handled the training duties. "Doing magic teaches you social skills. You learn to talk to anybody anywhere."

The Theatre Lab's *Making Magic* program was such a success that it will be used as a model for other programs around the metropolitan area. And student interest was so strong The Theatre Lab is considering a full-fledged magic camp for kids and teens next summer. David Copperfield, watch out! Ω

*Many thanks to Gary Rosenthal and the Community Arts and Enrichment Project for their unparalleled support and guidance.*

**Where are YOU now?  
Contact us about your  
theatre exploits and we'll  
include you in the next  
*Behind the Scene.***

## Where Are They Now?

*News and recent sightings of Theatre Lab students and alumni...*

**Jill Barry-Kessler** appeared in a couple of one-acts at the Theatre-Studio in NYC this summer as well as in Steven LaRocque's *21 Pairs of Sneakers* at Silver Spring Stage; **John Feist** will play Sheriff Guidry in *A Lesson Before Dying* with the African Continuum Theatre Company from Sept. 17-Oct. 10; **Gordon Kumbatira** recently appeared in *Porgy*, part of American Century Theater's "Rescues" series;

*Read how our students are putting their Theatre Lab training to good use.*

Theatre Lab Summer Acting Institute for Teens (SAIT) graduate **Ryan Fergins** won the 2004 Horwitz Playwriting Competition with *Locks*, a one-act play about an interracial relationship in Mississippi, which received a directed staged reading in June; fellow SAIT alum **Evan Milberg** played Curly in Encore Stage's production of *Okla-homa* this summer; **Millie Langford** took part in the one-act festival at Theatre Studio in New York this summer and appeared as Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Tapestry Theater; **Paul McLane** is currently appearing in *The Tempest* with the Washington Shakespeare Company; **Kerry Meushaw** had a blast working as Christopher Walken's stand-in and photo double in the movie *Wedding Crashers*, which just wrapped up its DC filming; and recent Musical Theatre Institute for Teens graduate **Andy Tonken** will soon be appearing in *Cinderella* with Adventure Theatre, having just successfully completed his run there as the title character in *The Adventures of Paddington Bear*. Ω

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office and ask for  
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**We're on the Web!**  
[www.theatrelab.org](http://www.theatrelab.org)



**PO Box 21400  
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## Classes

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### Other Late October Classes

**The Actor's Workout** continues – shouldn't you stick with it? (People love it and take it over and over.) Nationally-known comic Eddie Sarfaty is back with **Standup Comedy** – everything you need to know to knock 'em dead. Voice and Speech I continues with – you guessed it – **Voice and Speech II**. Another "II" that comes around only rarely is **Drama Workshop II**, a class that builds on the improv games of the Drama Workshop in exciting and productive ways. **The Business of Screen-acting** is a great introduction to (or refresher on) the ins and outs of making it in the world of TV and movies (no experience required). And **The Drama Workshop, Beginning Scene Study**, and **Auditioning** are all available to be repeated or taken for the first time, to maintain or initiate contact with the heart of the actor's art.

*See [www.theatrelab.org](http://www.theatrelab.org) or our brochure for details. Ω*

## Mood Swings

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unreasonably entertaining – will include new pieces from recent Broadway and Off-Broadway shows, and maybe a greatest hit or two. The benefit is pricey (\$125 a person), but, as we hope you know, the cause is a really good one: Proceeds support all of The Theatre Lab's educational and outreach activities, including *Life Stories* programs for incarcerated and at-risk youth, seniors, and people living with HIV/AIDS, our new magic program for kids, and our extensive scholarship initiative. And the event might just be the most fun evening of your year – lots of people look forward to it for months and attend time and again, largely because it's so much more laid-back and friendly than the typical fundraiser. A lovely buffet dinner is included, as well as a silent auction where you can get great deals on everything from hand-painted postcards to trips to California, and support The Theatre Lab at the same time. Please join us and/or spread the word! Ω

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**The Cabaret Benefit is Coming!**