



Theater: The Next Generation

A look at Changing Lanes Radio Theatre and T3 Triple Threat

By Pat Launer

From school kids to grad students and college alums, a direct experience with theater can change and enrich lives. Herewith are a couple of cases in point.

Mixed Media

The best theater engages the imagination. So what happens when you take the visual element out of the equation? What's left is word pictures and soundscapes, which is to say, Theater of the Mind. Another term for Radio Drama.

Allan Havis, Provost of Thurgood Marshall College at UC San Diego, took the concept to KSDS (88.3FM), the jazz sta-



Actor Keith James and sound designer Andy Muehlhausen review a Changing Lanes script. Photo by Gaeun Kim.

tion that's deeply committed to the arts.

"I had very productive conversations with the program director, Claudia Russell," says Havis. "We decided to give it a whirl, with six hours of radio drama over the first year, 30 minutes per show, on the last Sunday of every month. We called it 'Changing Lanes.'"

Havis contacted current and former students in playwriting, acting and design, who were inspired to create something new and distinctive. The university also enthusiastically embraced the idea.

"They loved the vitality between current students and alumni, not to mention the excellent community outreach opportunity," Havis says.

UCSD's Theatre and Dance department, where Havis teaches playwriting, was keen on the concept, too, as was the head of the MFA program in sound design, Shahrokh Yadagari.

So he and Havis became the faculty advisers, and they named highly regarded local directors (and sometime UCSD instructors) Michael Schwartz and Cynthia Stokes as co-directors.

"Everyone in the department really thinks outside the box," Stokes says. "That's what makes it so great. The work thus far has spanned a huge spectrum, all of it innovative. Some of the 10-minute pieces that make up the half-hour show are actor-driven, like the hilarious telling of a Chekhov story, with one man assuming 20 different characters.

"Then there are the playwright-driven projects, like 'Frosty,' in which a girl falls in



Changing Lanes: Actors Mark Christine and Linda Libby and co-artistic director Michael Schwartz work with sound designer Andy Muehlhausen before recording the next sequence. Photo by Gaeun Kim.

love with Frosty the Snowman — and he rejects her. That one, by Kristen Knight, was hysterical, sad and smart.

"The third style focuses primarily on sound design. These can be soundscapes or tone poems, dark or whimsical. The array of work is eclectic, but all engage the listener."

This summer, "Changing Lanes" introduces something new: a recurring character, Babette, a cranky, idiosyncratic Frenchwoman, played by Julia Fulton, Havis' acclaimed actor-wife. Beloved local performer/director Antonio "TJ" Johnson, next year's Thurgood Marshall College Artist-in-Residence, will present a series of dramatic readings by and about the influential Supreme Court Justice the college is named for.

"Without exception," says Stokes, "all the pieces are edgy, sassy and imaginative. People have been thrilled and surprised by the segments.

"It's such a gift," Stokes says, "to see the

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next generation of creative artists — who will take the theater to the next level — pushing the envelope, having some fun. And bringing unique audio entertainment to radio — not just music or witty banter, but something new and exhilarating.”

“Changing Lanes Radio Theatre” airs on KSDS radio, 88.3FM, the last Sunday of every month at 6:30 p.m. The show is live streamed, and all prior programs are archived at www.jazz88.org/programs/Changing_Lanes_Radio_Theatre/. The University webpage is changlinglanes.ucsd.edu

Triple Whammy

In theater, a triple-threat is a multi-talented performer who can act, sing and dance with proficiency. And T3 Triple Threat is a nonprofit arts and education organization dedicated to “enriching the lives of youth in need through the arts.”



Morie Williams, founder of T3 Triple Threat Youth Mentors.

The founder of T3 Triple Threat Youth Mentors is Morie Williams, a triple threat himself who’s spent the last 25 years doing what he loves, mostly on vacation cruises.

“In 2003,” Williams says, “I had just finished a cruise-line tour of South America. And in those poor countries, I saw so many unfortunate kids. I knew I wanted to give something back to the youth of my own community.”

He started offering free classes in jazz dance, vocal coaching and acting for students 10-18 years old, but all ages are welcome. He’s been running summer programs, but hopes to expand to after-school classes for disadvantaged kids. His home base is the North Park Rec Center, but since 2006, thanks to two high-energy partners, T3 has been offering classes in Montreal as well.

“My biggest ambition,” says Williams, “is to raise funds to pay teachers and rent.” All seven San Diego acting, singing or dancing coaches are working on a volunteer basis, as is Williams.

“They’re all professional-level performers who come together to give back, and to share their passion for the arts.”

Right now, Williams is selling raffle tickets for a Holland American cruise for two. The winner will be announced on July 28. Amazingly, at a dollar a ticket, he’s well on his way to his goal of earning \$5000, as he did last year.

“I believe in the importance of the arts,” Williams says. “The things you gain — confidence, problem-solving, teamwork, camaraderie, social skills — all can be translated into any career.

“Theater saved me,” the tireless teacher/performer confesses. “I grew up in San Jose, with a single parent. At 14, I wanted to audition for the San Jose Children’s Musical Theatre (now the San Jose Musical Theatre), but when I found out



Morie Williams and crew.



A Triple Threat production.

there was an audition fee, I was too embarrassed to tell them I didn’t have the money. A year later, my dad was doing better and I was able to audition — through a payment plan. They saw something in me, and that propelled me forward, and helped me get into a Performing Arts high school.

“I can’t preach enough to parents the value of the arts,” says Williams. “It’s helped me travel around the world. Of course, a lot of ‘No Thank You’s’ come with the territory. I teach the kids: Prepare Yourself, Keep Striving, Don’t Quit, and Lady Luck may shine on you. It’s a powerful journey of self-development and self-awareness that I love to share.”

Information on T3 Triple Threat and its ‘Pay-as-You-Wish’ classes can be obtained at T3triplethreat.com or 619-SUNARTS (786-2778).

Pat Launer, long known as “the voice of theater in San Diego,” is an Emmy Award-winning arts writer and theater critic who’s written for newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and online. Her theater reviews can be heard weekly on KSDS-FM, and she writes regularly for Patch.com. Pat has been named a Living Legacy by the Women’s International Center. www.patteproductions.com

