

CALIFORNIA THESPIANS NEWSLETTER

Fall 2008

Dear Thespians,

On behalf of your 2008-2009 California Student State Board, I want to take this opportunity to welcome you to a new school year with California Thespians! Your State Board has spent the summer preparing for our three leadership conferences (Summer, Northern, & Southern Leadership), as well as planning the 2009 California Thespian Festival to be held April 3-5 at the Ontario Convention Center. This year's festival theme is "**TIME: 80 Years of Thespians**," in celebration of the International Thespian Society's eightieth anniversary. The All State Act Themes will be "**A Way Back to Then**" (Act 1) and "**Something's Coming**" (Act 2). We hope to see you all at the Festival, taking advantage of its many opportunities, and later dancing the night away at our two themed dances, "**Time Warp**" and "**Back to the Future**." Check the Festival Registration Packet (soon-to-be-released) for more information on these exciting opportunities!

Now, I would like to present to you the first California Thespian Newsletter for the 2008-2009 year. It contains articles written by several State Board members (including myself) about recent Thespian and theatre events and activities.

-Tyler Mercer
Tri-School Theatre, 4566
SSB Vice President

Summer Leadership by Faith Kearns (SSB Secretary)

On July 26th, twelve high schools from all over California herded into St. Lucy's Priory School in beautiful Glendale for an entire day of leadership building workshops, discussions, games, and baking in the heat of summer.

Summer Leadership is the first leadership conference of the year for California Thespians, and it's also the first chance the new Student State Board has to intermingle with Thespians from different schools face to face as well as their first time facilitating lessons. "We were all a little nervous, but Summer Leadership is so much more intimate than Southern - which has tons of attendees - and Northern, so it was easy to work in our group." Andrea Santana, returning SSB member, said of the conference, adding, "By the end of the day everyone had made some new friends." Leadership is also a great early experience for Thespians who want to take the advanced leadership track offered at Southern and Northern leadership conferences.

Courses were taught in Goals and Fundraising, Public Relations, Time and Stress Management, and the Psychology of Leadership as well as breakout officer sessions which were specific to certain positions on an executive board. After lunch the conference began to wind down with two more sessions, games, and final affirmations in order to end the day on a high note. For affirmations, thespians focused on the future in asking themselves, "What's on my plate?" deepening their bonds with new friends by

informing them, “you made any impression on me”, and also “finishing a picture” they all helped to create to bring everyone together.

But, all good things must come to an end, and at 4:30 we started our closures and our goodbyes. I’m sure everyone looks forward to seeing their new friends at state festival!

Southern Leadership by Kimberlee Raymond (SSB Secretary)

Tomorrow over 300 thespians will assemble in the St. Lucy’s gym to learn about one thing: leadership. These students will be attending a leadership conference hosted by the California State Thespians.

[...] This Saturday, thespians will focus on how to be a leader in their troupe, which is composed of all thespian members within their high school. Drama programs in high schools depend on leadership for scenarios ranging from putting on a show to petitioning for funding from their school boards. The ability to manage these situations in a high school environment often translates to those in the “real world.”

The California State Thespian Director and Claremont High School teacher, Krista Carson Elhai, affirms the purpose of teaching leadership skills, "Leadership training is important for success in college, the workplace and running any organization."

The design of the leadership conference promotes the idea that students take an active role in their community. Thespians will be taught by a student- elected state board composed of students from various parts of California.

[...] Tyler Mercer, a state board member from Tri-School Theatre in Anaheim, CA elaborates on the opportunities he believes this day will present to students. “I think that the State Board really does a great job of providing a positive and proactive atmosphere for students to share and receive ideas about fundraising, organization, personal goals, and everything in between.”

Thespians offers students the chance to do more than simply lead, it also promotes interaction with members from across the state. Those who attend will be taught in a classroom setting as well as in groups through games. This social forum has its own benefits as [State Board historian] Kaye Briones acknowledges, “Thespians has forced me to come out of my comfort zone and step up to the plate.”

The International Thespian Society fosters teaching youth about the importance of leadership in their troupe, which can be viewed as a microcosm for the real world. September 20, 2008 will only be one of many days that the Thespian Society has trained leaders as Mrs. Elhai states, “We have trained approximately 3000 thespian leaders during the last 18 years.”

Northern Leadership by Andrea Santana (SSB Southern Representative)

While many merely associate Thespians with performance or technical work, the International Thespian Society’s recognition as an honor society promotes membership among Thespians who are both Theatre enthusiasts and exemplary leaders. Because of this, CA Thespians are given funding every year for leadership training for CA Thespians in both northern and southern California every summer. While I taught at all three

leadership conferences offered this year (two in southern California, and one in northern), teaching at the northern leadership conference was especially rewarding. Being a resident of southern California, I flew up North along with two other student state board members to San Jose where Monte Vista High School Thespians in Cupertino graciously hosted us. Saturday, September 14, a northern Californian student state board member accompanied us for a day of teaching. Troupes from across northern California traveled to receive workshops on the psychology of leadership, goals and fundraising, self-esteem and time management, public relations, and advanced leadership.

All attendants were eager to learn and participate, and most all troupes came prepared with skits for “food for thought,” or brief opening skits that give troupes freedom to express any ideas or concepts that represent their troupe. Aside from the insightfulness of the workshops themselves, troupes were given the opportunity to bond, network, and exchange ideas with other schools. For most students, the highlight of the day was talking about traditions from their troupes and sharing stories.

The turnout of students that came to the northern leadership conference was exciting in that it received far more participants than in years past. The CA Thespian State Board is always looking to recruit more northern representation, and the high enthusiasm for northern leadership is an indicator that more northern Californians are seeking involvement in CA Thespian leadership opportunities. If you attended the northern leadership conference and are interested in running for the CA Thespian State Student Board, refer to your CA Thespian Festival registration packet for official guidelines, and email Krista Carson Elhai for more information.

Camp Bravo by Tyler Mercer (SSB Vice President)

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to attend Camp Bravo, an educational theatre camp at de Benneville Pines in the San Bernadino Mountains, where for one week, theatre *was* my life.

In the morning, musical theatre classics sound through the Breakfast Hall speakers. At night, campers become not only scene partners, but your most trusted confidants. During the day, the camp echoes with the beats of Danny Pulley’s dance combinations, the harmonies of Vance Fulkerson’s voice workshops, the passion of Gai Jones’ Virtual Theatre exercises, and so much more.

To tell you everything about Camp Bravo would be to eliminate the magic. And magic, it is. I met a girl at Camp Bravo this summer from Las Vegas, Nevada who was obsessed with everything Disney. She was constantly jealous of the Californians for living so close to Disneyland. By the end of Camp, however, she was hugging us goodbye, admitting, “Bravo is my new Disneyland.”

What I can tell you is that I never could have expected to come back down the mountain with the memories, experiences, and knowledge that I attained at Camp Bravo. The friendships forged are lasting, the tears and laughter shared are unforgettable, and the performer inside of me celebrates a rejuvenated passion for the art of theatre, and the importance of connection.

Camp Bravo has four one-week sessions, emphasizing acting and/or musical theatre, including a week specifically for middle school students. The camp is run by David Krassner and Artur Cybulski, along with the incredibly gifted staff of theatre professionals and Bravo alumni. I would recommend Bravo to anyone seeking to view theatre, themselves, or the world in a clearer light – the light six thousand feet above sea level at Camp Bravo.

(Go to www.campbravo.org for more information)

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival by Adrian Rodriguez (Jr. Troupe Liaison)

Over the summer my theater teacher gave me and many of my fellow students the opportunity to go the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon. I personally had never heard of it and didn't know if I could go but I saved up money and went with five of my fellow students. We took a long exhausting 12 hour drive up to Ashland but it was all worth it in the end.

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival has been around for about 73 years since its inception in 1935. It officially began on July 2, 1935, with the productions of *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Reserve seats cost a buck, and general admission were fifty cents for adults and twenty-five cents for children. The Festival feared that the plays would lose money from the prices. In 1947, the Festival built its beautiful Elizabethan Stage, modeled after the Globe Theater in England, where Shakespeare had his plays performed during his career. Its next stage, the Angus Bowmer was built in 1970 and opened with Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. And the New Theater was built in 2002 and is able to seat 399,609 people.

Our group went only to the Angus Bowmer and the Elizabethan. We saw a total of seven plays (one being a musical). We saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler*, *The Clay Cart*, and *A View From the Bridge* in the Angus Bowmer while *Othello*, *Our Town* and *The Comedy of Errors* we saw in the Elizabethan.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was done with a 70's theme of disco, peace, and love (demonstrated with the moon being a disco ball), while *The Comedy of Errors* was done like a musical set in the west. Both were beautifully performed, but the musical twist on *The Comedy of Errors* took the cake in my book.

But if Shakespeare isn't your taste, the contemporaries were just as amazing. The brand new, *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler*, written by Jeff Whitty (the author of *Avenue Q*), took us into the world of plays and books that were great but, no one really cares about any more. The play *The Clay Cart* is a 2,000 year old romantic comedy from India, which tells a beautiful story of within India's caste system. *Our Town's* story was told with the use of very few props, and the actors made most of the sound on stage. Thornton Wilder showed us not to take the small things in life for granted. Author Miller's *A View From the Bridge* was a must-see at the Festival. The Shakespeare company did a fantastic job by truly capturing the essence of Miller's great story telling through defined characters and amazing acting.

Over all, my visit to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival was spectacular, and I hope I can go again someday. So if you wish to see some truly great acting, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is the place to be.