

A Theater Is Born

By Ayala Ben-Yehuda

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. But it also takes a village to raise a theater—namely, the Astoria Performing Arts Center.

APAC, as it is known, was conceived over a year ago by Astoria resident Sue Scannell, a former television actress and singer whose life had taken her from a role on "Dynasty" a dozen years earlier to a role as director of a teen summer theater program at IS 126. That program failed due to uneven attendance at rehearsals, but a cheerful Scannell said, "It totally changed my life. I fell in love with acting again."

Like a Pied Piper, her enthusiasm for children's drama inspired Astoria's entire artistic and commercial "village" to help realize her dream, which was to raise funds for drama camps and after-school programs in the community. She set out to attract kids to acting by forming an adult professional repertory group so that the kids would think it was cool.

"I think God meant for this to happen," said Scannell,



Sue Scannell, executive producer of the Astoria Performing Arts Center

APAC's executive producer. Perhaps literally, because the Rev. Donald Ölinger of the Presbyterian Church of Astoria agreed to let Scannell's group use a church building for nighttime rehearsals and performances.

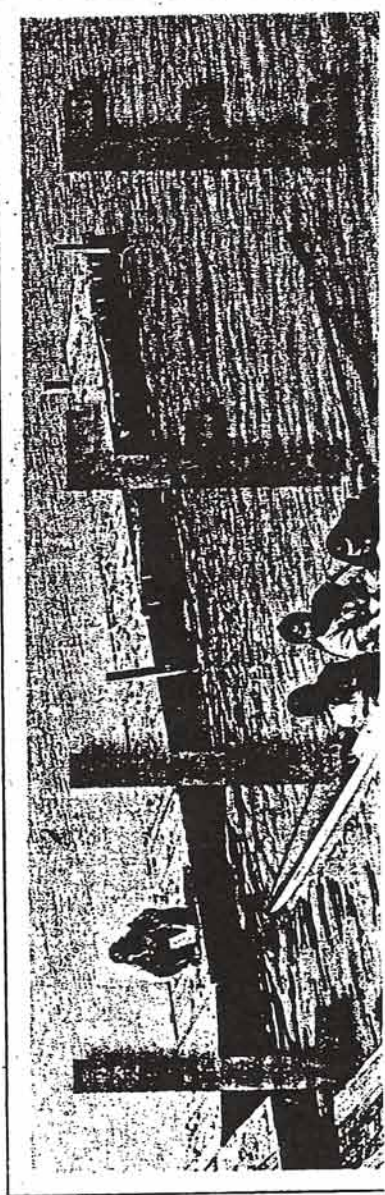
With a performance space

secured, Scannell held an open audition last summer for actors. Four hundred showed up, and forty were chosen for the privilege of working for free and pitching in wherever they were needed in the theater.

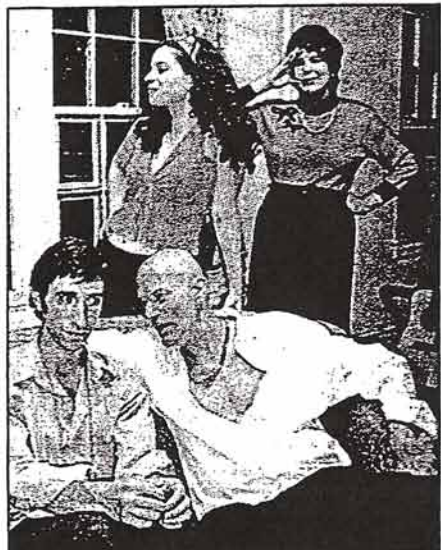
"It started out as a community thing, but it turned into a professional thing. That surprised us all," said Scannell, who said that 75% of the company's performers belong to the stage actors' union—and live in Astoria.

APAC has grown precisely because of a willingness on the part of its actors, technicians and the surrounding community to contribute to its success. "I called up a lumber store and explained that I'm with a non-profit theater group, and the man on the other end said, 'Fax me over a wish list of everything you need.' So I did, and ever since then, he has never said 'no' to me."

Scannell sees a bright future for APAC because of the quality of the productions—and because of community support. "There's a vibe here," she said. "I can't explain it."



OUTINGS



Seated from left, Chris Santangelo and Tom Knutson; and standing, Lauren Milberger and Joan Faust star in "Butterflies Are Free" at Astoria Performing Arts Center.

In 'Butterflies Are Free,' This Muse Is Good News

WHAT: "Butterflies Are Free," at Astoria Performing Arts Center.

WHY: A flower power play about a blind songwriter and his romance with the muse next door marks the beginning of the Astoria company's second season.

The production is the first project in an ambitious schedule of plays and musical performances planned by executive director Susan Scannell. Future shows include a jazz and cabaret concert in October and a tribute to George Gershwin in November. "I Hate Hamlet" and "Nonsense" are scheduled for February and May, respectively. The group also intends to hold a play-writing contest in March and hopes to someday launch an after-school and summer youth program.

The 40-member repertory company's aspirations are reflected in "Butterflies," written by Leonard Gershe and starring Chris Santangelo as Don, the would-be composer. When Don moves out of his overprotective mother's house and takes his own apartment, he meets and falls in love with Jill, a free-spirited actress played by Lauren Milberger. (The 1972 movie version starred Goldie Hawn as Jill.) Filling out the cast are Joan Faust as Mrs. Baker and Tom Knutson as Ralph. The play is directed by John Hurley.

Initially staged at the Booth Theatre in 1969, the comedy-drama follows the young lovers as they learn life lessons from one another and ultimately confront Don's disapproving mother.

WHEN AND WHERE: Sunday, Sept. 22, 6 p.m.; Friday, 8 p.m.; and Saturday, Sept. 28, 8 p.m., at Astoria Performing Arts Center, 31-30 33rd St., Astoria. Final performance on Sept. 29, 6 p.m.

HOW MUCH: \$15, \$12 students and seniors, \$5 children younger than 16.

GETTING THERE: Take the N or W train to Broadway, walk one block north on 31st Street, turn right onto 31st Avenue and walk two blocks to 33rd Street.

MORE QUESTIONS: Call 718-278-5925.

ALTERNATIVE

VOLUME 2 - NO. 7

THE ALTERNATIVE NEWS OF GREATER QUEENS

MARCH 28, 2003

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"Nunsense" Brings Quality Theater To Astoria

It would be a sin if you missed this hilarious show

By Daniel Cuevas

Cast: Genevieve Baer as Sister Robert Anne, Lydia Gladstone as Reverend Mother Mary Regina, Gina Holland as Sister Amnesia, Alisa Schiff as Sister Hubert, Julia Snider as Sister Mary Leo, Matt Castle as musical director and Brian Swasey as director/choreographer.

Nunsense is a hilarious and exaggerated look into the life of the remaining Little Sisters of Hoboken that borders on blasphemy. There used to be more sisters in the order until their cook unknowingly served them some tainted soup and 52 sisters died of botulism. Luckily these five sisters lives were spared as they were out playing bingo that night. The nuns only had enough money to bury 48, leaving the remaining four on ice in the convents deep freezer. They had to put on a benefit to raise the money to bury their four deceased sisters, which is the show itself.

The nuns are Sister Mary Regina, the Mother Superior, a strict yet feisty overweight woman who just can't resist the spotlight. Next in line is Sister Mary Hubert, Mistress of Novices. She's the second in command, always in competition with the Mother Superior. Next is Sister Robert Anne, a street wise tough character from Brooklyn who would love to tell a dirty joke or two if the Mother Superior ever allowed

Then there is Sister Mary Amnesia, who lost her memory after a crucifix fell on her head. She is very sweet but not too bright as Mary Regina describes her, nice house, but "no one's home." Last, but not least,



Nunsense creator Dan Goggin with APAC cast members.

is Sister Mary Leo who has entered the convent with the firm desire to become the first nun ballerina.

The benefit is a talent show where the remaining five nuns are the stars, except for Sister Robert Anne, who is unhappily stuck playing understudy for the Reverend Mother. The show begins with a prayer and opening song, followed by a brief history of the Little Sisters of Hoboken describing their difficult transition from a leper colony in an island south of France to their current status as a convent in New Jersey.

The belly laughs skyrocket when the Reverend Mother brings out Sister Mary Amnesia to tell the audience what it's like to be a nun. Sister Amnesia admits she can't do her act alone and brings out her puppet.

performance by Sister Mary Annette asks that the spotlight be turned up as she takes center stage herself.

The audience is amused and amazed as the cast keeps in character. Once in a while a sister will come down and interact with the audience, telling jokes like "How" do you make holy water? You burn the hell out of it? Even a dirty joke-if you get the double meanings through the show as Sister Amnesia recalls the large clock at the convent where the 12 Apostles replace the 12 numbers. When the little hand is on the Joseph and the big hand is on the Peter, that's when we know it's time for the nuns to go down on their knees and pray, of course!

The show is filled with song and dance numbers and the musical wing of the cast is made up of Matt Castle on the piano and his quartet. Castle's efforts are no less significant than that of the actresses on the stage. His small ensemble even has a role in the play as the Little Sisters of Hoboken Band, and the nuns frequently come off the stage to speak to him about last-minute musical arrangements.

Made up mostly of seasoned actors from Queens, the performance of Nunsense at the Astoria Performing Arts Center would make an audience member think they were in a Broadway Theater, and not in Astoria, Queens.

The extensive experience and talents of these five actresses and their musical counterparts truly shine through for the duration of the show. This is a must-see, even for those who never attended Catholic school and especially for anyone who has ever thought of nuns as dull.

The Astoria Performing Arts Center is located at 31-30 33rd Street in Astoria. The remaining show times are March 29th at 8 p.m. and March 30th at 6

Playwright's Queens Visit Simply 'Nunsense'

The Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) met with a close brush of off-Broadway last week as their cast rehearsals for "Nunsense" were visited by Dan Goggin, the man who wrote the book, lyrics and composed the music to the musical which ran off-

Broadway for eight years.

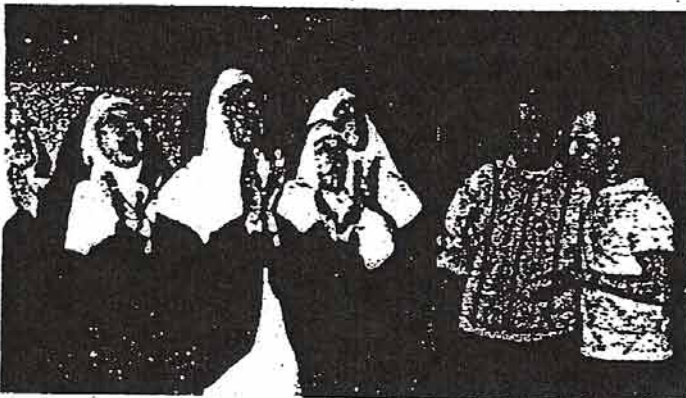
A former seminarian, Goggin was brought up in Roman Catholic schools and has made an enterprise out of funny nuns having written five shows about the sisters. "Nunsense" is the first in the series.

In time for Women's History Month, APAC is producing the feisty musical about five nuns who put on a talent show to raise money for the burial of three nuns who died from food poisoning.

The health department is soon to arrive and the nuns must get the deceased sisters out of the freezer and buried before they do. Executive Producer Susan Scannell described the production as "just a very, very fun show. Brian Swasey, APAC's artistic director who is directing the show, wrote Mr. Goggin a letter and this famous and successful man accepted our invitation to come see the theater. He will be out of town for his newest version - 'Meshuggah-Nuns' - during the run of our show and he offered to come to a rehearsal. We were thrilled!"

Goggin was also happy when he entered the gymnasium of The Pres-

byterian Church of Astoria, which donates the space for APAC to perform. "This reminds me of the very first performance, it was the same set-up," the playwright and composer said. "I know it will be a great show. The girls sound and look great. Productions like these are a pleasure for me to see."

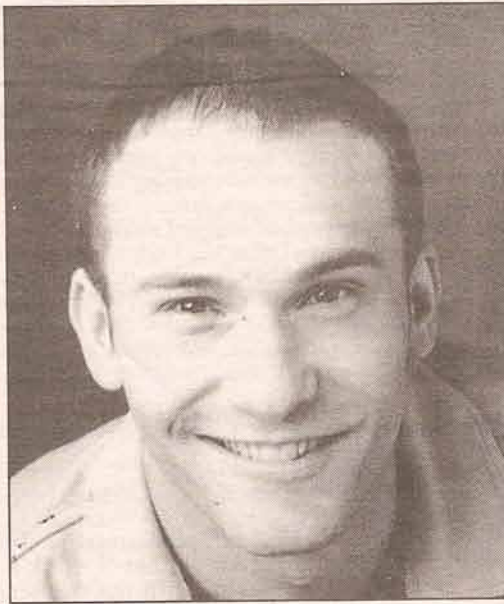


While rehearsing for its upcoming performance of "Nunsense," the Astoria Performing Arts Center was visited by the play's author Dan Goggin.

COMING SOON

Coming Soon
SHOW: "Nunsense"
TIME: March 21, 22, 28 & 29 at 8 p.m.; March 23 & 30 at 6 p.m.
TICKETS: \$15, \$12 seniors/students, \$5 under 16. Call 718-278-5925.
RESERVATIONS: email sueapac@cs.com
PLACE: APAC, 31-30 33rd St., Astoria

Brian Swasey



ROLE

Artistic director of the Astoria Performing Arts Center, a community theater company at the Presbyterian Church of Astoria.

BIOGRAPHY

30; native of Portland, Maine; bachelor's degree in musical theater from the University of New Hampshire; an actor and director, has appeared Off-Broadway in "Naked Boys Singing"; a member of the Astoria Performing Arts Center since its inception in 2001; lived in Sunnyside for eight years before moving to New Jersey a year ago.

COMMITMENT

"I have seen how quickly [the arts center] has become part of the community. There has been so much support and such a great response in terms of positive feedback and what it has done that I continue to stay involved. Also we have gotten support from [City Councilman] Peter Vallone Jr.'s office. It's been an incredible thing to see and hopefully it's going to become a permanent arts organization in Astoria. Our goal was to try to provide something for the community that they didn't have, and we have seen in the past three years that we have done that and more."

CURRENT FOCUS

"'As You Like It' opens on Feb. 20 and will run for six performances and we are also seeking out performers for 'Quintessentially Queens: A Musical Revue,' which will be at the end of March."

LOOKING AHEAD

"Astoria is this up-and-coming arts community. It's amazing the change that has happened just in the past four to five years. The amount and types of artists as well as the amount of support for these artists is tremendous and we're doing our best to showcase them. . . . I also would love to see us with our own facility and my wish is that we have a permanent home in the future." — Sheila McKenna

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SPORTS FINAL

ASTORIA Times

50 CENTS

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80 Total Pages

APAC announces auditions for kids' summer theater class

The Astoria Performing Arts Center will offer a free musical theater summer program for kids — APAC's Summer Stars 2004, for ages 8 to 13. Auditions will be June 26.

Participants, who must be Queens residents, will sing, act and dance throughout the program, which APAC Director Susan Scannell said is a great way to increase a child's self-confidence, team-building and social skills and ability to concentrate. "And they have a lot of fun during it all, too."

There is no fee for participants and there will be a showcase performance at the end of the program.

Scannell is APAC's executive director and a professional actress with television and stage credits. She has also enjoyed working with the youth of Queens and the Bronx as a teaching artist.

Choreographer Danielle Erin Rhodes is a member of APAC's acting company and has toured nationally in starring roles in musicals such as "Grease" and others. Rhodes has also worked with children in various church choirs and groups.

Community outreach coordinator Trisha Fallon is APAC's house manager and has acted as administrative assistant for the company as well.

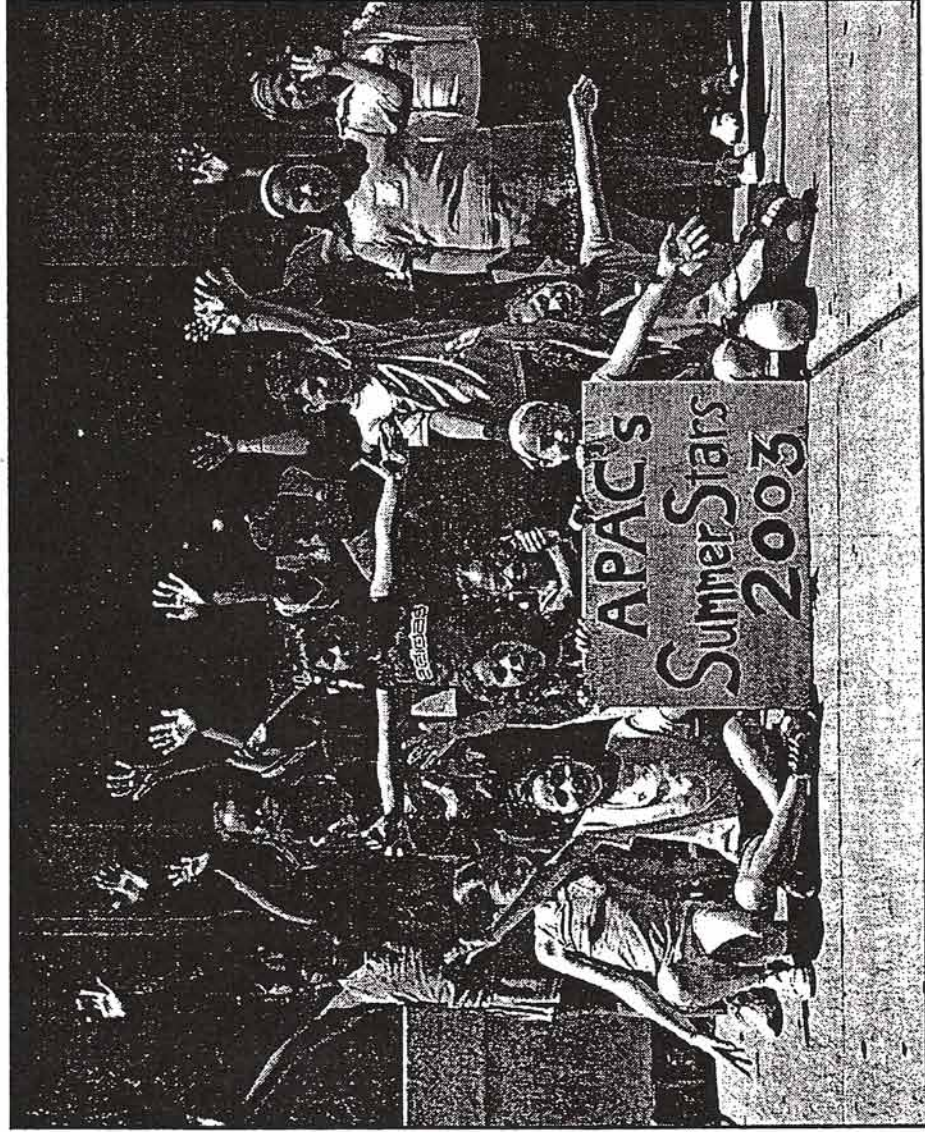
Community outreach coordinator Gina Holland has acted as APAC's casting director and was program director of last year's Summer Stars program. She is also an actress and has appeared on APAC's stage.

Auditions will be Saturday, June 26, from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Space is limited. Experience is not required — only enthusiasm and desire. Kids should be prepared to sing a song of their choice (music is not necessary), dance and participate in acting games.

Classes will run from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. July 3 through Aug. 14. Children must attend all seven classes in order to participate. Classes and a performance open to the public will be held at The Astoria Performing Arts Center in The Presbyterian Church of Astoria at 31-30 33rd St.

Funding for this program is provided by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey with support from state Assemblyman Michael Gianaris, City Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. and The Presbyterian Church of Astoria, APAC's performance home.

For information and an audition appointment call Gina Holland at 917-701-8670. Visit www.apacny.org for more information.



THE STARS OF last summer's APAC theater program.

BAYSIDE *Times*

50 CENTS

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PLAYWRIGHT ESTA FISCHER and director David Renwanz work on Fischer's play.

Jamaica playwright wins APAC playwright contest

Playwright Esta Fischer from Jamaica is the winner of The Astoria Performing Arts Center's Second Annual Playwright Contest. More than 80 scripts were submitted from across the country, according to APAC's executive producer, Susan Scannell.

"We were really excited to read Ester's script, 'Invitation to a Mastectomy.' It is a wonderful one-act play about family relationships as we watch a husband, brother-in-law and mother-in-law in a hospital waiting room as a woman is undergoing surgery for a mastectomy," Scannell said. "Ester's approach is through comedy as well as serio-drama — it's a very special play"

The performances will be directed by

Astoria resident David Renwanz. Fischer's winning one-act play will be presented along with several original monologues performed by a variety of actors and actresses.

Scannell said that by presenting such variety in one evening APAC is able to support the works and talents of many aspiring playwrights. "Each monologue is like a mini-play in itself, so the audience will see lots of great theater covering all sorts of styles and topics," she said.

The performances will be held May 16, 17, 23 and 24 at 8 p.m. and May 18 and 25 at 6 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church of Astoria, 31-30 33rd St., Long Island City

For more information call 718-278-5925.

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SHOW BUSINESS

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BRIDGE AND UNNEL THEATER

er isn't just in Manhattan—take a look around
the boroughs: where theater is thriving.

Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) has been around for three years. APAC includes adult theater, youth training summer programs in musical theater. And, develops writers, "our actors will read plays for them," says APAC founder, Susan Scannell.

APAC is located at the Presbyterian Church of Astoria on 33rd and Broadway. "We used this donated space for the first two years, so we could use our money for other things. The church saw us as an outreach for the community," said Scannell. APAC continues to use the church space for a small fee.

"In three years we've gotten to the professional and production value level most theaters have at 10 years. We're at that level because this community has contributed so much in-kind materials—building materials, lumber, and everything," says Scannell.

APAC does five shows a season—a published musical, a published play, an original play, some sort of revue—Scannell calls—a wild card slot and a musical revue. This year APAC did Shakespeare for the first time.

APAC is one of only two equity showcase theaters in the area. "What makes us different is the heart. There's just a spirit,"

Scannell says.

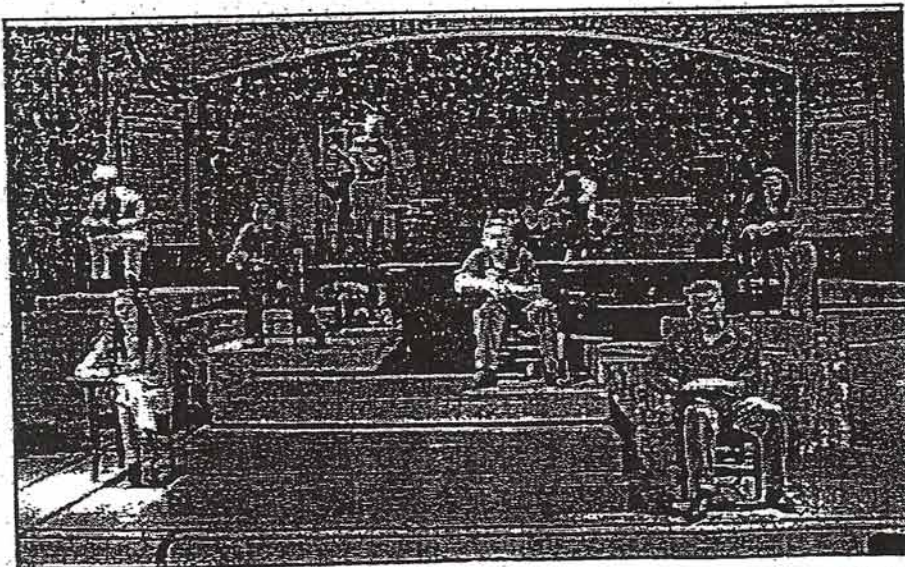
APAC funding including government grants. The group is currently looking for a space to create a performing arts center and a cultural hub with the backing of Councilman Peter Vallone, Jr., and Queens Borough

"In three years we've gotten to the professional and production value level most theaters have at 10 years. We're at that level because this community has contributed so much."

President Helen Marshall.

It is conveniently located two blocks from the subway and six blocks from the freeway—BQE, and Grand Central Parkway.

While there may be a larger variety of theaters in Manhattan; for both the working actor and the theater lover to enjoy, you should never count the boroughs out. All the bright lights burning in theaters are definitely not limited to the streets of New York City, around the Times Square mark. Theaters in every direction from Manhattan are locations where actors are performing unforgettable productions that can move actors along in their careers, helping them to have exposure to a part that they might not normally be considered for, or help the blossoming playwright to have a place to hear his works read. These theaters offer audiences a local spot to visit and have a delightfully entertaining experience.



ASTORIA

The 'My Girl' Girl, Now Grown, Sets Off to Chase Her Muse Again

On the basement basketball court of the Presbyterian Church of Astoria in Queens, Anna Chlumsky was re-creating her acting career as Isabella, the virginal young heroine of Shakespeare's dark comedy "Measure for Measure."

"To-morrow!" she shouted, beseeching the nefarious lord Angelo from her spot on the free-throw line. Her goal was to win the release of her brother, Claudio, who had been sentenced to death for indulging in premarital sex. "O! That's sudden!" she continued breathlessly, her eyes wide and her expression heartbroken. "Spare him, spare him!" (Spoiler alert for you non-Shakespearean scholars out there: Her pleas don't work.)

More than a decade ago, Ms. Chlumsky, then a 10-year-old from Chicago, was acting in a far more star-studded atmosphere. As Vada Sultenfuss, the winning blond protagonist of the hit 1991 movie "My Girl," she delivered a mature and true-to-life performance of a girl coping with the death of loved ones in the 70's. Her

co-star was Macaulay Culkin, fresh from his megahit "Home Alone," and her name was on the lips of every 10-year-old boy in America.

After a sequel to that movie and roles in a few other films, Ms. Chlumsky shifted gears and enrolled at the University of Chicago, where she majored in international relations. Drawn to writing, she moved to New York after graduation and went to work as a fact checker for the Zagat guides. "I ended up making a bargain with God," Ms. Chlumsky said the other day. "Wherever you give me a job, that's where I'll go."

Yet after one year of confirming facts about restaurants and another working for a publisher, thoughts of acting kept creeping into her mind. "For so long I had suppressed it," she said, "and all of a sudden I was like, Anna, what the heck is wrong with you?"

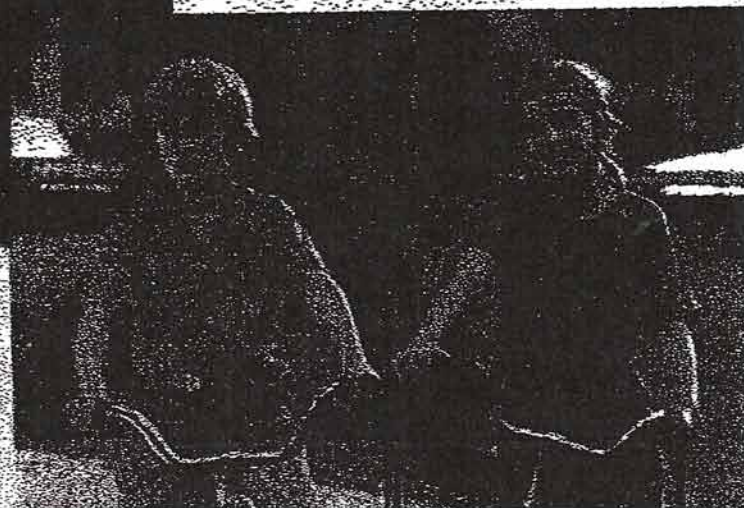
At this point, Ms. Chlumsky is making a full-time job out of simply trying to return to the business; her life is auditions and more auditions. But even in a modest arena, she said, she found that playing the virtuous Isabella was a thrill. The comedy, a production of the nonprofit Astoria Performing Arts Center, exposed her to Shakespeare, which, she said, "will feed me for the rest of my career." Her next production is a reading of "Alice," a musical version of the Alice in Wonderland story, to be presented tomorrow at the York Theater Company in Manhattan.

Though the route to stardom is often long and treacherous, Ms. Chlumsky has faith in New York. These days, when she is feeling a little lost, she strolls around Times Square, looking at the lights, the people and the Broadway marquees. "It's a place you come to test every bit of your will," she said. "And it's thrilling."

JEFF VANDAM



In 1991 it was "My Girl" with Macaulay Culkin. Now, it's "Measure for Measure" in a church basement.



ASTORIA TIMES

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'My Girl' tries Shakespeare at Astoria Performing Arts

BY NATHAN DUKE

Anna Chlumsky will make her professional stage debut Friday in the Astoria Performing Arts Center's production of William Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure."

The 23-year-old actress, star of the popular films "My Girl" and "My Girl 2," will make her return to the world of acting as Isabella. She is a nun-in-training who must decide whether or not to sacrifice her virginity to save the life of her brother, who has been sentenced to death by Angelo, a strict deputy who has been left in charge of Vienna when the Duke takes a leave of absence.

Chlumsky said Isabella is a great introduction for an actor performing Shakespeare on stage for the first time.

"She is compelling because she tries so hard to be in control of herself," she said. "She tries to be stoic, but life doesn't let her."

While Isabella's life veers out of control, Chlumsky has had no problem directing her own. Following success at an early age with the "My Girl" films, she began to question whether life as an actor was the right choice. In her mid-to-late-teens, she said that she felt the movie industry was "dis-ingenuous" and took a break from acting.

"(The business) can be very frightening when you are an adolescent," she said. "High school was tough and I wasn't getting the kind of roles I wanted. It made me insecure, but you do not have to be an actress to have those feelings."

Chlumsky took several years off to study international



al relations at the University of Chicago and took classes abroad in Brazil, where she learned Portuguese. After graduating, she moved to New York and soon began to pursue a career in acting again. When scanning the theater trade paper "Back Stage," Chlumsky noticed a casting notice for the Queens-based production of "Measure for Measure" and auditioned.

"She had almost the entire role memorized and was right on in the interpretation," said director John Hurley in an APAC news release. "We were very excited that she was so eager to be a part of APAC."

Although she jump-started her career in film, Chlumsky hopes to work both on stage and in film, preferring to pursue an acting career in New York rather than move to Hollywood.

"In this kind of life, you jump all over the place depending on who needs you," she said. "But I feel that I can get a lot more out of New York for the type of career I want. It's a place where you can be creative."

"Measure for Measure" will be performed at APAC at the Presbyterian Church of Astoria on Nov. 12, 13, 19, and 20 at 8 p.m. and on Nov. 16 and 21 and 6 p.m. Call 718-393-7505 for tickets and information.

ANNA CHLUMSKY

The Queens

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“Lucky Stiff” Comes To Life At APAC

Bimmy award-winning writer Lynn Ahrens and composer Stephen Flaherty unabashedly borrow from every possible comedic genre to create the light-hearted musical mystery, “Lucky Stiff”.

The very talented players at APAC (Astoria Performing Arts Center) have kept this same clever edge in their own version. It's showcased at their current home at 31-30 33rd Street in Long Island City. There are just a few shows left, running weekends only, through the end of February.

Poor, hapless Harry (Ron DeStefano). He's a floundering shoe salesman who is behind on his rent and is victimized by the local mongrel. As fate would have it, his long lost uncle leaves him a fortune in his will. The catch? He must wheel the deceased (Howard Brewer, Jr.) through Monte Carlo on the vacation of a lifetime. Did I say lifetime? If the deception fails, the millions will revert to frumpy Anabel (Amanda Ryan Paige). Her noble cause? The Universal Dog Home of Brooklyn!

There are plenty of twists and turns, many delightfully predictable. Of course, there are gangsters, gorgeous girls, romances (new and old) and a few surprises.

Director Brian Swasey offers a collective wink from his cast to the audience. They all perform with tongue-in-cheek

and a fine-tuned level of professionalism that elevates the comedy far above a standard farce.

Gun toting Rita (Laura Daniels), is truly outstanding. She sings, struts and shoots, plots, plans and performs with a Brooklyn accent befitting a gangster's main squeeze.

Rita's brother, her boyfriend, some deliberately off-key lounge lizards (male & female), various friends, relatives, guests and employees are all somewhere between wacky, hip, neurotic and self-oblivious. Great job! Kudos to the entire ensemble including Adrienne Asterita, T.J. D'Angelo, Michelle Doucet, Greg Horton, Tommy Labanaris, Darren Rozumet and Susan Wilson.

In addition to crisp timing by the cast, Musical Director Jeffrey Campos plays the piano with zest. There's an extraordinary dream/nightmare sequence in which the characters are transformed into malevolent hounds. Bravo to maskmaker Holly Lehmann and costume experts Kristine Koury and Darolyn Robertson.

The sets and flats were often low-key but with a distinctly clever flair. Thanks to set designer Marie Lynn Wagner and lighting design by Niklas Anderson.

Poor Harry trudges up and down the long, wooden ramps without a hitch. Stage manager Christine D. Goutmann



Photo courtesy APAC

Howard Brewer, Jr. and Greg Horton in APAC's "Lucky Stiff."

and assistants Noah Levin and Nikki Bowman maintain the evening's momentum.

After enjoying "Lucky Stiff," the troupe's Executive Director Sue Scanell is planning a second venue at "The Cave." It's a block from the show at 32nd Street and Broadway in Long Island City. This format will spotlight new talent with a live piano and open seat on the aisle.

Well, it's been four short years for APAC as they continue to emerge as one of the best new troupes to watch. Call (718) 393-7505 for reservations and information. Check out their website at www.apacny.org. As always, save me a seat on the aisle.

PLAYBILL®

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Astoria Theatre Company Seeks New Home

By Kenneth Jones
May 16, 2005

The Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC), the young Equity company that has operated as guests of The Presbyterian Church of Astoria for four years, is experiencing growing pains. The growing troupe left the church in recent weeks and is seeking a new home in Astoria, the Queens community across the East River from Manhattan. Executive director Sue Scannell and artistic director Brian Swasey said in a statement they are "in search of a venue where we will have use of facilities during daytime hours in order to increase our work with youth and seniors. We will continue to provide our popular evening and weekend Equity Showcase stage productions..."

On May 11-12 the troupe opened its doors to give away items and materials it had acquired. Other materials were put in storage.

APAC thanked "the Presbyterian Church of Astoria, the community and local legislators of Queens for the tremendous amount of support shown over the years. After a short hiatus we will be back eager and ready to continue to serve you all!"

Swasey told Playbill.com that New York City Council Member Peter Vallone Jr. has helped secure funds for the company and that the plan is to stay in Vallone's district, which includes Astoria.

Performances were made possible with funds from Peter Vallone Jr., Assembly Member Margaret Markey, The Port Authority of NY & NJ, the Decentralization Program, a regrant program of the New York State Council on the Arts, administered by the Queens Council on the Arts and the JP Morgan Chase Arts and Culture Re-grants Program, the Kiwanis Club of Astoria/LIC, the Ravenswood Lions Club, the New York Department of Cultural Affairs, The Port Authority of NY & NJ and the support of Assemblyman Michael Gianaris, Community Board 1, Kaufman Astoria Studios, Tom LaRocca, Material for the Arts and the Astoria/LIC Community.

In its four years, APAC has presented cabaret shows, revivals, Shakespeare and new works by Queens playwrights.

DAILY NEWS



NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

2 0X

Actors in search of bigger stage

BY MAXINE SIMPSON
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

THE ASTORIA Performing Arts Center found that bigger is not necessarily better.

Four years ago, television actress and Astoria resident Susan Scannell had a vision — she wanted to bring quality performing arts productions to her neighborhood. Eventually, that vision took shape as the Astoria Performing Arts Center.

"I wanted Astoria Performing Arts Center to be the door people knock on when they are looking for quality theater in the area," said Scannell, 47, who has appeared on TV soap operas, including "All My Children" and "Dynasty," as well as the action shows "Remington Steele" and "The A-Team."

She started her quest by letting her fingers do the walking, calling local entrepreneurs she found listed in the Yellow Pages until some agreed to put up seed money for the performing arts center.

"Everyone has been so generous to us," Scannell said. The center found rental space at the Presbyterian Church of Astoria at 31-30 33rd St., and from there it grew.

It presented such productions as "Measure for Measure," "In a Manner of Speaking," "As You Like It," the 2004 OOBRA Award Winner "Is There Life After High School?," "Butterflies Are Free," "I Hate Hamlet" and "Nonsense", among others.

But as the cast and the number of productions grew, the space needed for the growing audiences dwindled. Then there was the matter of the lease for the church space, which expires at the end of this month.

All things considered, Scannell said, it was decided that it was time to bring down the curtain on the performing arts center — at least temporarily.

"APAC will be taking a four-to-six-month hiatus," she explained. "We are looking for another space. We just grew so quickly that it is time to really find a home that is ours."

That home, Scannell says, should be large enough for the center to continue putting on theatrical productions, while also offering daytime programs serving local youth and senior citizens.

Realizing that elsewhere, the show must go on, last week APAC opened its doors to other metropolitan-area theater troupes.

So members of The Garage Theatre Group in residence at Becton Theatre at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, N.J., drove up a truck and loaded it with props and other theater-related items.

"We will put them to good use," said Garage Theatre Group founder Michael Bias.

Later, representatives of the STAR Senior Theatre Acting Repertory of Bayside and The Chocolate Factory of Long Island City came by to browse.

"The Presbyterian Church of Astoria has been wonderful to us. Without their support we wouldn't be where we are today," Scannell said.

And the feeling is mutual.

"APAC took on a life of their own. They rapidly grew very successful, and . . . Susan has succeeded in bringing quality theater and a price theatergoers can afford to the neighborhood," said the Rev. Don Olinger. "We will continue to let people know about them. We wish them success and the very best — they deserve it."

BULLETIN BOARD

APAC Loses Lease, Gets New Executive Director

BY LINDA J. WILSON

In spite of the fact that the Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) has lost its lease at the Astoria Presbyterian Church, the four-year-old theater group is looking forward to a new season of big doings with the guidance of a new executive director. Taryn Drongowski, a three-year resident of Astoria, took over the executive director position recently. Founder Susan Scannell will serve as president of the board of directors and Brian Swasey continues as APAC artistic director.

Drongowski is a native of Akron, Ohio and that state's capital, Columbus. She attended Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio and comes to APAC with a background in funding, marketing and administration garnered at the Social Science Research Council, a nonprofit organization with headquarters in New York City and Washington, D.C. She received her theatrical training at Kenyon and at the Atlantic Theater Company Acting School, The last named, founded in 1983, is both a private conservatory and an undergraduate program in conjunction with New York University.

Drongowski met Scannell through Jeffrey Rosenstock, executive director of Queens Theater In the Park. "I got to know APAC and thought it was a good fit for what both of us wanted to do," she said. Besides her duties as president of the APAC board of directors, Scannell will work with the group's youth and outreach programs while Drongowski assumes the day-to-day duties of executive director and "guiding us along our exciting road to future growth and service in the community," Scannell's announcement of Drongowski's appointment said. Drongowski was less sanguine. "There are all sorts of exciting possibilities," she said. "I feel like a newlywed."

Drongowski finds the prospect of heading a nomadic theater group an especially intriguing one. "This is one of the most exciting projects without a venue I've ever seen," she said. "We're trying to find different venues for our different projects."

Those different projects are clustered under the heading "Astoria Delivers!" and Drongowski thinks the idea of theater coming to an audience instead of an audience coming to a theater is rife with possibilities. One of the projects APAC will be delivering, for example, is nurturing new talent within the neighborhood's many facilities for senior citizens. "We have our children's program, 'Summer Stars,' and we're working on a similar program for seniors," she explained. Through Vocal Ease, Musical Director Eva Swan is bringing a troupe of singers to three Astoria Senior Centers, including the Steinway Senior Center. Other centers will be determined. In the Senior Stars program, Scannell, as musical director, will offer free musical theater training to Astoria's seniors. Seven weeks of training will culminate in one performance, showcasing Astoria's senior talent. Potential venues include restaurants.

"It's always exciting to build a child's self-esteem and foster their professional development, but there's a lot of untapped potential in our senior citizens, too," Drongowski said. "This way, they won't have to be their own producers," she added.

The first of APAC's two programs for children is "Game Day" by playwright Michelle Doucet. An original show for children that tells the story of Bobby, a boy who wants to be a cheerleader and his best friend Katie, who wants to be a football player, "Game Day" shows how they decide to help each other prove to everyone that girls and boys can be who they want to be and teach everyone not to judge a book by its cover. APAC will bring a total of five performances to local day care centers (including Adventure Land Day Care Center on 33rd Street between Broadway and 31st Avenue and local parks.

The second of APAC's children's programs is Summer Stars 2006, now in its third year. Director Gina Holland will lead 30 students in grades 4 through 8 at Astoria schools through six summer Saturdays of musical and theatrical training. Their efforts will culminate in two performances of a showcase. Rehearsal and performance locations are to be determined.

The eight-week Summer Stars program gives the children who participate valuable theatrical experience while they have fun doing it. Summer Stars will run on summer Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Exact dates and times have not yet been scheduled for the coming year.

Parents of children between the ages of 8 and 13 who have expressed an interest in Summer Stars should contact APAC at P.O. Box 195, 34-23 Steinway St., Astoria 11101, 917-566-0969. APAC will, in turn, contact parents when the 2006 audition schedule for the 2006 Summer Star project is being set.

Summer Stars is free of charge, thanks to funding from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, HBO, and Chase.

APAC is also planning a "big musical," according to Drongowski, to be directed by Artistic Director Brian Swasey. "I'm excited about that—I've never seen one of Brian's works," Drongowski said. The musical will have nine performances, so far, tentatively scheduled for I.S. 126 in Long Island City

Choreographer Jacqueline Young will present dancers from the Push Factor dance company in three performances to be held in local Astoria high schools. "This is one of the most ambitious projects we've undertaken, especially without a venue," Drongowski said.

Walter Jalbert wrote, produced, and performed "Caruso", a one-hour, one-man educational, historical theatrical work celebrating the life of one of the fathers of modern day recording artists, Enrico Caruso. The work includes live operatic tenor singing as well as drama. There will be three performances of "Caruso" in local Astoria high schools, and at local civic associations.

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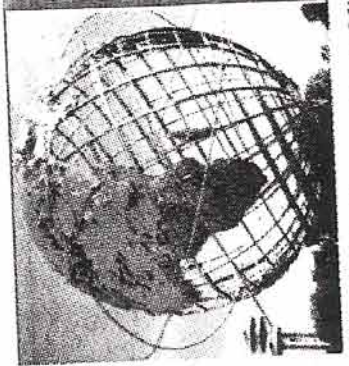
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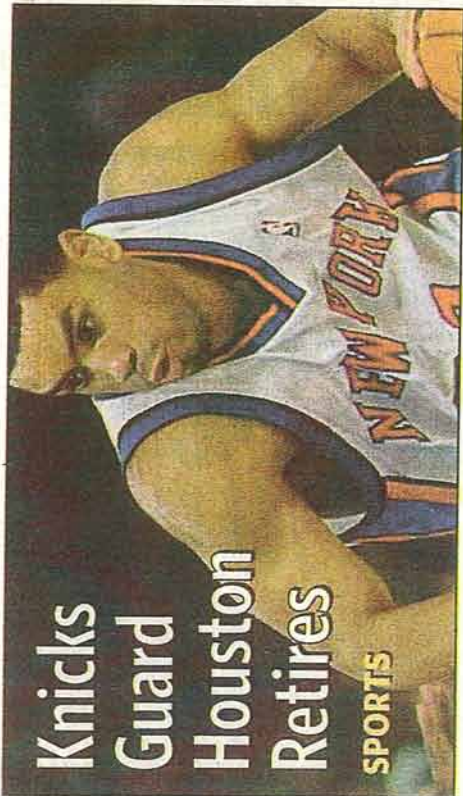
Gazette

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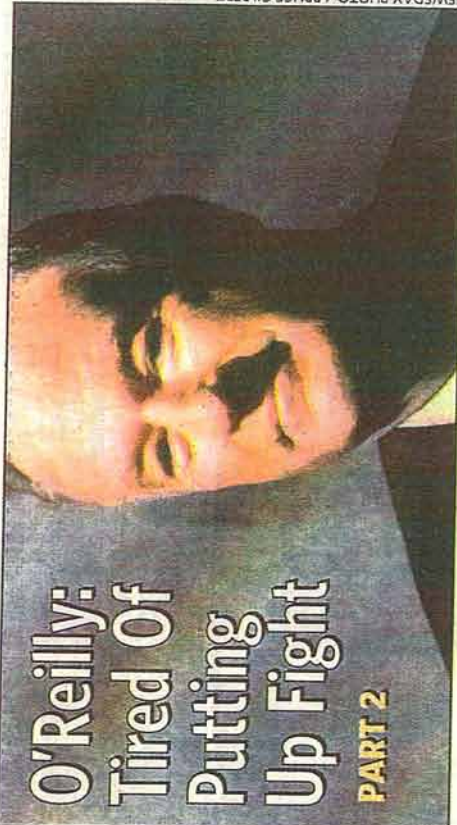
The Weekly Community Publication Dedicated To Bringing Our Readers A Vital Locally-Oriented View Of The News



**Knicks
Guard
Houston
Retires**

SPORTS

NEWSDAY PHOTO, 2002 / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.



**O'Reilly:
Tired Of
Putting
Up Fight**

PART 2

NEWSDAY PHOTO / BRUCE GILBERT

NEW YORK CITY **25¢**

Newsday

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TUESDAY, OCT. 18, 2005 | CITY EDITION



NEWSDAY PHOTO / ALAN RAIK

TARYN DRONGOWSKI

Special projects manager at non-profit Social Science Research Council and new executive director of the Astoria Performing Arts Center Inc. (apacny.org).

BIOGRAPHY

26 and a native of Columbus, Ohio. Graduate of Kenyon College. Moved to New York City in 2001 and continued her studies at the Atlantic Theater Company Acting School on West 16th Street in Manhattan. Single and lives in Astoria.

GOAL

"To create a permanent institution in Astoria that is considered a landmark in the neighborhood and the New York theater in general. I want something that celebrates and enriches the community at the same time. Every production we do is sort of a love letter to the neighborhood, but it is also an attraction that brings people in. As a resident of Astoria, I love introducing people to the neighborhood. To say that it is multicultural is a real understatement. And it's not so much a blending of these cultures, but having them loudly expressed right next to each other. There is a vibrant nightlife that I think a theater could add to."

FOCUS

"We don't have a permanent home as of yet, but we received capital funding from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and [City Councilman] Peter Vallone Jr. [D-Astoria] for the purchase of a space in Astoria. It's not enough — we need to raise the rest of the money — but it's a start. At the same time we have a full season of shows going on, including two that are oriented toward youth. One is an original children's show that we will bring to day care centers, parks and churches. Another is the 2006 Summer Stars program, which gives musical training to kids. This year we're also starting Senior Stars!, a program that brings musical theater training to seniors."

COMMITMENT

"APAC truly values the artists. It's a really nurturing organization and every production brings a different group of people together. APAC has always treated the performers, writers and directors with an amazing amount of respect and, in response, it puts on the highest quality productions. I love the artistic processes that goes on in the theater, and whether you're an amateur or a pro, young or old, the process is essentially the same. That's why it's so gratifying to be contributing to the organization and, in turn, to Astoria."

— SHEILA MCKENNA

ASTORIA Times

50 CENTS

Thursday, June 17, 2004

THE NEWSPAPER OF ASTORIA & L

Vol. 7, No. 25

80 Total Pages

Astoria theater sets sights on new home

Executive producer vies for City Council, borough president's office grants for permanent location

By MATTHEW MONKS

The Astoria Performing Arts Center is ready for the big time.

Launched three years ago in the auditorium of a 33rd Street church, the civic theater has become a recognized training ground for burgeoning actors and technicians and a respected venue for quality shows.

Its founder now wants to take the company to another level and is looking for funds to buy the center a permanent home.

"I call it a mini Lincoln Center — that's our goal. And I really think it's going to happen," said Sue Scannell, executive producer of the theater.

The former television actress is vying for grants from the City Council and the borough president's office, hoping to eventually garner \$5 million for a property.

"It's being realistically discussed," Scannell said. "We're looking for space."

And if they find it, it will be the total fruition of a dream Scannell began pursuing a half decade ago: to establish a full-scale cultural and performing arts center in the neighborhood.

Thanks to a passionate group of volunteers and overwhelming support from the community, she said the dream has been coming along nicely.

"We do really, really quality stuff and that's because we've had so much support from the community," Scannell said.

Relying on city grants and discounts

from local supply companies, the theater stages five productions a season, a summer children's theater and an annual play-writing competition.

Recent shows have included "Is There Life After High School?" based on the book by Jeffrey Kindley; "As You Like It," by William Shakespeare; and "Love Jokes," a one-woman musical starring Scannell.

Scannell, who appeared on television shows "Dynasty" and the "A-Team" in the 1980s, said she started the center as a place to give new actors and technicians a place to hone their skills and build a resume while bringing quality theater to the neighborhood.

As the center has grown, Scannell said it has become cramped in the auditorium of the Presbyterian Church of Astoria, which it occupies rent free. It shares the space with the church day care, meaning the crew has to move baby furniture for rehearsals.

"They definitely need their own space or some space because in terms of their sets and props it's very difficult to store them," said Church Pastor Don Olinger.

The center is gearing up for its annual Summer Stars Program, a seven-week music theater for 13- to 18-year-olds. Auditions will be held June 26 from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the center, located at 31-30 33rd St.

For more information, call 917-701-8670.

Reach reporter Matthew Monks by e-mail at news@timesledger.com or call 718-229-0300, Ext. 156.

AMERICAN THEATRE

JANUARY 2006 THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

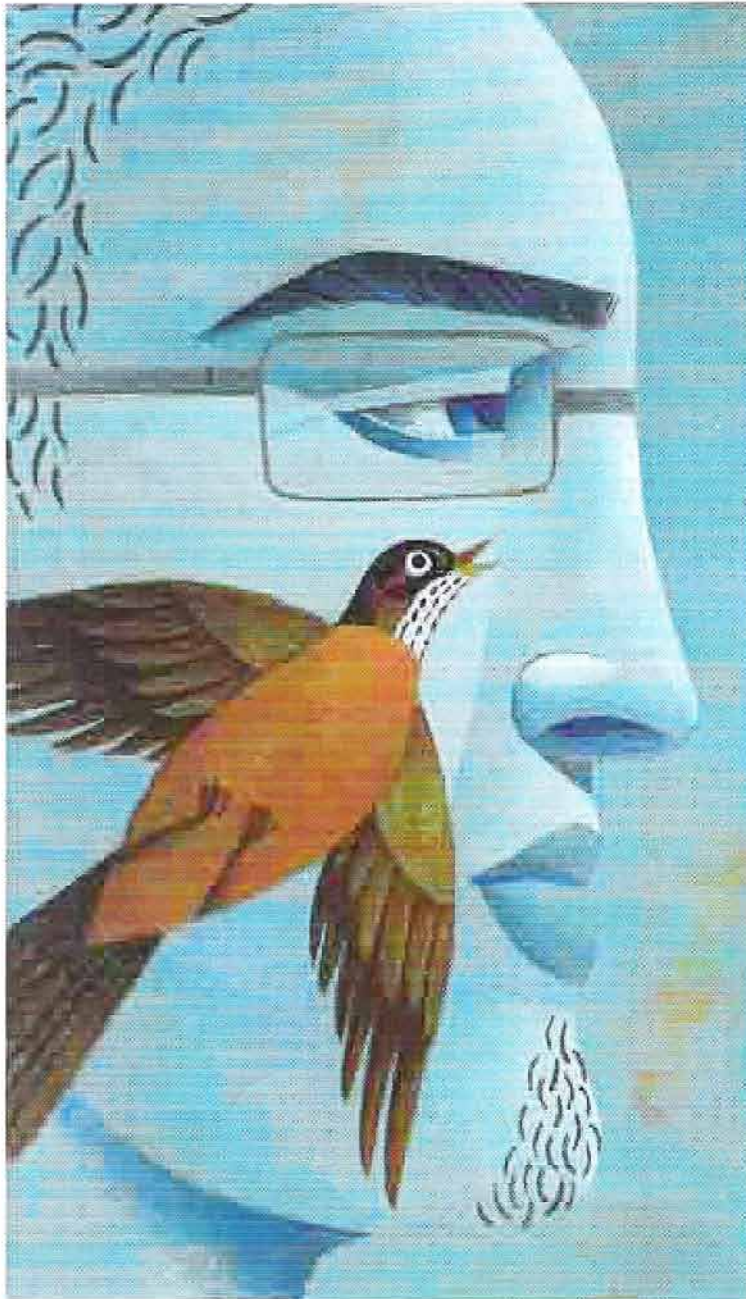
APPROACHES TO
THEATRE TRAINING
On Mentoring

PLUS:

Articles by and about
Anna Deavere Smith,
Yussef El Guindi, Karen Zacarias,
Howard Stein, Richard Gilman

ENTRANCES & EXITS

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **Taryn Drongowski** succeeded **Susan Scannell** as executive director of the Astoria Performing Arts Center this past October. Scannell, who founded the center to provide high quality theatre at an affordable cost for local communities in Queens, will remain on the board of directors. Drongowski will also serve as artistic director of new programming.

THE QUEENS

COURT

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PULL-OUT
STATION

May Means Music, Mystery

Musical comedy and lighthearted mystery are notable entries on the playbill this May. The Astoria Performing Arts Center presents "Forever Plaid" while the Spotlight Players in Ozone Park offer a charming who-dunit.

Located at 27-18 Hoyt Avenue South, APAC's intimate venue keeps everyone just feet from the performers. On opening night, the audience was treated to a well-acted, intelligent glimpse into changing American musical moods. Frankie Sparky, Jinx, and Smudge (Frederick Hamilton, Shad Olsen, Ryan J. Ratliff, and Joseph Torello) represent the demise of 1950's four-part harmonies. However, a traffic accident before their big break at the airport lounge in the 1960's ends their dreams. Luckily, a glitch in nature's programming has returned them to the present for their debut as...FOREVER PLAID.

With childlike honesty, the guys confess their dreams and shortcomings. They play musical spoons, use Christmas lights as props, and manage to produce stunning harmonies. Of course it's all clever satire with countless double meanings and extremely sharp wit. After all, the accident that

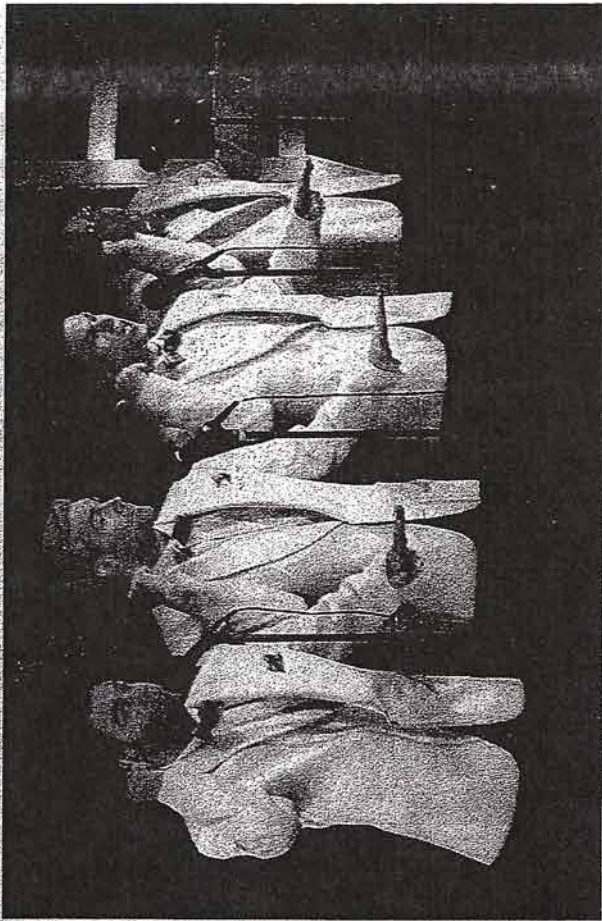
signaled the start of the British musical invasion and the fickle public's latest musical affair.

It helps if you have some knowledge of Perry Como, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Ed Sullivan, and the Four Lads but it isn't mandatory. Just sit back and enjoy "Catch a Falling Star," "Sixteen Tons," "Love is a Many Splendored Thing," "Moments to Remember," and many others.

Director/choreographer Brian Swasey showcases each performer's singing and satirical talents as their emotions intertwine. Musicians Jeffrey Campos and Byrne Clay deserve their own applause as well. Executive Director Taryn Drongowski is a charming successor to the celebrity dynamos who preceded her.

FOREVER PLAID is on a very limited run. Call (718) 393-7505 for tickets or check their website at www.apacny.org for information.

Meanwhile, the Spotlight Players who perform at the GLC Community Center (85-10 101st Ave., Ozone Park) are an established troupe whose projects include musicals and drama. This spring they have decided to involve the audience in a murder mystery. The premise? A movie director has come to



Ryan J. Ratliff, Shad Olsen, Frederick Hamilton, Joseph Torello

latest production. Before long, the night has taken a deadly turn in "Audition for Murder."

At Saturday night's performance, about one hundred sleuths of all ages tried to unmask the killer. The clues appeared from every direction. A delicious hot buffet with outstanding desserts helped keep everyone in focus. The ensemble, representing the requisite philandering and/or jealous signif-

cations this spring. As always, say

For information on the Spotlight Players, call (718) THEATER. That (718) 843-2837.


There are quite a few community pro-

Forever Plaid**Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC)****Astoria, NY - May 2006****Reviewed by John Kenrick****Ryan J. Ratliff, Shad Olsen, Frederick Hamilton and Joseph Torello in APAC's *Forever Plaid*.**

Most any theatre company can stage an enjoyable revival of an established hit, but it is a rare thing indeed to find a revival that actually matches the excitement and energy of the original -- and that is exactly what the Astoria Performing Arts Center is offering in its superb new production of *Forever Plaid*. What makes it all the more delicious is that they are doing this in a Queens basement. Yes, great theatre *can* happen anywhere!

Its been a challenging year for this spunky little theatre company, which has kept up an ambitious production schedule despite administrative changes and the loss of its longtime theatre. APAC's current performing home is a cellar theatre in a townhouse right beside the Triborough Bridge -- the sort of cozy, improvised space where off-Broadway companies used to work magic in days gone by. Well, thanks to APAC, the spirit of those days lives again, and the result is two of the jolliest hours I've spent in any theatre this year.

Stuart Ross's *Forever Plaid* is deceptively simple. A male pop quartet killed in a 1964 car crash (en route to their first professional gig) has been stuck ever since in some kind of limbo. They return to earth for one night only, in order to give their concert and fulfill their dream, filling the stage with hokey comedy, endearing personal revelations, and tons of gorgeous close-harmony singing. Filled with classic period hits ("Three Coins in the Fountain," "Rags to Riches") and bolstered by affectionate tributes to such cultural icons as Ed Sullivan and Perry Como, *Forever Plaid* is a sure-fire audience pleaser for most any age group. As a result, many amateur and professional productions have assumed that all this show requires is four good singers and some accompaniment -- quite forgetting that the long-running original production relied on creative staging and performers with extraordinary comic instincts.



The men of *Forever Plaid* show off their long dreamt-of LP covers.

Fellow Plaid fans will be delighted to learn that APAC puts this loveable show back into top-notch working order. Director **Brian J. Swasey** has the good sense to respect the key routines built into the show, but he goes the extra mile by throwing in plenty of ingenious touches and selecting a cast of gifted singing actors. No "going through the motions" here -- this is as real and fresh as a brand new hit. With solid support from musical director **Jeffrey Campos**, a simple but handsome set by **Ryann D. Lee**, and extremely creative lighting by **Erik J. Michael**, Swasey & company deliver a swift-paced, utterly disarming *Forever Plaid*.

The four fictional troubadours is given a clear and immediately recognizable personality, and each gets ample opportunities to shine. By the final number, you feel a genuine affection for this quartet, and a genuine regret that the fun is ending. (And when was the last time that you *really* regretted that a show was over?) Every cast member is a potential show-stealer, so its a good thing they are evenly matched. **Frederick Hamilton** is a handsome and hilarious Frankie, **Joseph Torello** makes the bass-singing Smudge a loveable teddy bear, **Ryan J. Ratliff** is an adorable and daffy Jinx, and **Shad Olsen** is irresistible and charming as Sparky. I watched an audience that ranged in age from seniors to school kids fall head over heels in love with this show and give this cast that rarest of honors -- a genuine, cheering, standing ovation at a neighborhood theatre.

What a pity APAC's *Forever Plaid* only runs for three weeks -- otherwise, I would go back time and again just to revel in it all. Kudos to APAC for carrying on its six year tradition of quality theatre in Astoria. Would that all of the outer boroughs could boast productions as delightful as this! ***This production is sceduled to close on May 14, 2006.***

THE QUEENS

COURIER

QUEENSCOURIER.COM



Senior Stars perform a cabaret program

BY JESSICA LYONS

jlyons@queenscourier.com

Senior residents of Queens showed that you're never too old to shine during the cabaret show "Each Tomorrow Morning: Memories and Songs of a Lifetime."

This show was the culmination of six weeks of training provided by the Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) as part of its first-ever Senior Stars Program, which was designed to give the age group a chance to show their talents. It featured seniors from all over the borough with varying entertainment backgrounds.

Albert Cole, a 72-year-old resident of East Elmhurst, plays the saxophone and sings. He frequently performs in senior centers and libraries, as well as in his church. Cole said that he wanted to get involved in the program because he likes to participate.

Woodside resident Helen Gambichler, 60, said that she had no prior performance background but that it was something she always wanted to do.

"This is my debut," said Gambichler, who still works in the Queens Criminal



The Astoria Performing Arts Center's Senior Stars Program gave Queens residents a chance to perform, make new friends and learn about what goes into a performance.

Queens Courier/Photo Courtesy APAC

Court. "I can't sing or dance but I sure like to entertain. I'm having a ball."

The cabaret had 20 seniors singing songs such as "Oh What a Beautiful Morning," "Que Sera Sera," "Twist and Shout," "Mack the Knife" and "Born

Free."

"The highlight of the whole thing is being with people who are still excited about living and doing what they like to do," said Gloria Stark Williams, a Rochdale Village resident who has

been a member of the Ebony Eumerical Ensemble for 18 years.

Jamaica Estates resident Audrey-Barbara Wheeler said that she has already been recommending the Senior Stars Program to others.

"Contrary to what so many people say, getting old isn't so bad," Wheeler said. "It's kind of fun."

While many of the seniors said they learned a great deal from the experience, director Sandra Bargman said that she also learned something.

"I've learned that at every turn just to have a good time and at every turn enjoy the moment," she said. "They are inspirations in that category."

Due to the initial success of the program, APAC plans on doing it again in the future.

"We will look forward to doing the program," said Taryn Drongowski, APAC's executive director. "The response we received was overwhelming and very telling - clearly, this program filled a need."

To find out more about the Astoria Performing Arts Center and its programs, visit www.apacny.org or call (718) 393-7505.

THE QUEENS

COOPER

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CLASSIFIEDS

Caruso on stage

Broadway celebrates its triumphs with the Tonys. If only there was an awards night to honor Queens performers. A top nominee would certainly be Walter Jalbert's tour de force, "Caruso, His Master's Voice."

Presented by APAC (Astoria Performing Arts Center), and housed at 27-18 Hoyt Ave. South.

(The Greek Cultural Center), it is a brilliantly woven visit to the maestro as he reflects on his life in words and music.

Caruso enters "stage left" and begins slicing fresh tomatoes. He mixes a savory sauce that he toasts with Chianti and continues preparing before our eyes. A slide presentation appears on the rear wall. At times, it takes us to beautiful Italian villas, offers headlines from his era, or becomes a window overlooking the Brooklyn Bridge as if we, the audience, were in Caruso's 1920s apartment. The stage is furnished with antiques from the early 1900s including an RCA "Victrola" which plays Caruso's beloved solos.

A reporter occupies a stool as the maestro defends his tumultuous private life, scoffs at his ailing health and confesses how deeply his marvelous musical gift defines his life's mission. Naturally, there is no reporter. It is merely a device to cover the audience

on the evening's journey. Jalbert, who also wrote the play, generates the imaginary dialogue masterfully. Director Jacquie Young guides her husband in an affectionate tribute to one of the greatest singers of all time.

Jalbert's voice and stage presence are magnificent, especially in APAC's cozy venue that offers an excellent view of the actor's every emotion. Haunting renditions of "O Sole Mio," "La Donna e Mobile," "Ave Maria," and "Vesti La Giubba" are a few of Jalbert's flawless vocal tributes to the master. Bravo!

Supporting staff includes musicians Richard Danley and John Cook, light design by Erik J. Michael, graphic design by Daniel McMahon and stage management by Rebecca Lundgren with Kristen Zurek. Naturally, Executive Director Taryn Drongowski and Artistic Director Brian Swasey maintain the troupe's high standards. Founder Sue Scannell is often on hand for support.

What about the troupe's past commitment to kids? This important aspect of APAC's mission is in process with preparations for this year's "You Can Be A Star."

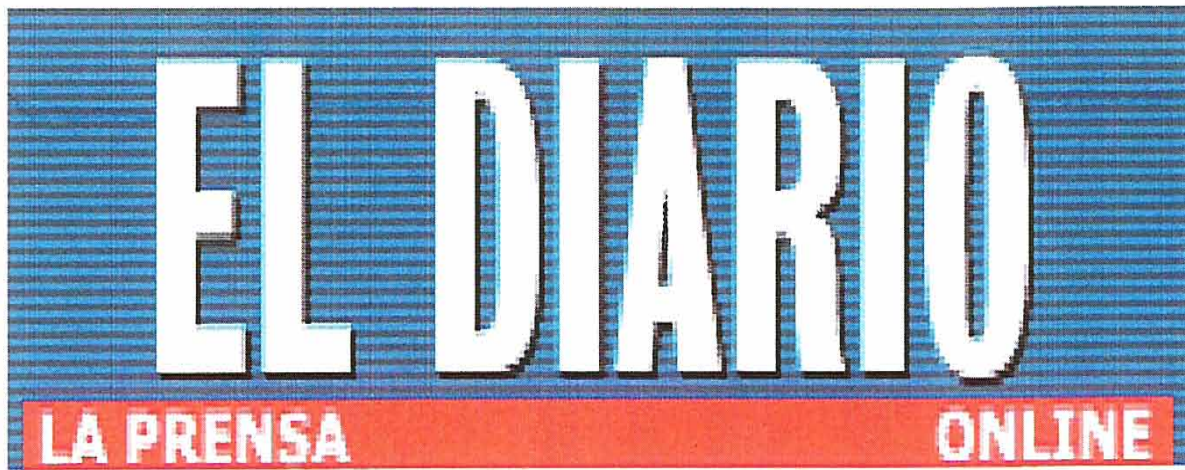
The project resulted in a great performance last summer and promises to attract fine talent again. Those inter-



Photo courtesy APAC
"Caruso, His Master's Voice," presented by APAC (Astoria Performing Arts Center), is a brilliantly-woven tour de force.

ested should be elementary school students from 4th to 8th grade. Jacquie Young had done choreographer's duties and city politicians have previously shown their support. For a continuing schedule of

APAC's ongoing and artistically ambitious projects call (718) 393-7505 or visit www.apacny.org. As always, save me a seat on the aisle.



Mirador cultural

ARTE Y CULTURA - 06/04/2006

La voz de Caruso. **The Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC)** presenta un show unipersonal con Walter Jalbert que explora la vida y la obra de Enrico Caruso los días 8, 10 y 11 de junio. Jalbert interpretará muchas de las arias favoritas de Caruso, mientras explora el colorido legado y la pasión por el arte del gran cantante. 27-18 Hoyt Avenue South Astoria. Junio 8 y 10 a las 8:00 p.m. Junio 11 a las 6:00 p.m. Costo: \$15. Informes y entradas en 718-393-7505 or e-mail tickets@apacny.org.

Newsday

06/23/06

KIDS' HIGHLIGHTS

THE CHEERLEADER AND THE PLAYER

The Astoria Performing Arts Center presents "The Game Plan," a children's show that promotes acceptance and tolerance. It portrays Bobby, who wants to be a cheerleader, and his friend Katie, who wants to play football. They support each other and prove that girls and boys can be who they want and that others shouldn't judge them. The free show, at 2 p.m. tomorrow, is at the Steinway Reformed Church, 21-65 41st St. at Ditmars Boulevard in Astoria. Call 718-393-7505, or visit www.apacny.org.

TIMES *Ledger*

Arts & Entertainment Calendar

06/22/2006

Kids

The Game Plan - The Astoria Performing Arts Center presents an original children's show to encourage acceptance and tolerance of others. June 24, 2 p.m. Free. The Steinway Reformed Church, 21-65 41st St. at Ditmars Boulevard, Astoria.

Western Queens Tribune

VOL. 36 No. 25 JUNE 23-29, 2006

Queens Tribune

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Middle School Plays

The Astoria Performing Arts Center announced that the Astoria Branch of the Queens Library would accept into its permanent collection the complete series of plays written by the APAC Playmaking Program middle-school students. This single bound volume of 15 student-written plays will be made available to the public signaling the library and community's support of Queens's youth writing.

The APAC Playmaking Program is built around a specific method of teaching playwriting to children. Consisting of two five-week cycles of after school classes with an end result of each student having written one short play, the new works are then directed and performed by adult, professional actors.

"Everything about APAC's Playmaking Program is about validating the importance of kids finding their own voices," said APAC Executive Director Taryn Drongowski. "They put a lot of work into their plays, and that work is honored with attention from a lot of adults, including teachers, volunteers, actors, directors, community leaders, audience members – and now the library. The message to the students is clear – use your imaginations, work hard, be yourselves and have fun!"

The second round of plays, eight in total, will be presented to the public – free of charge – in a staged reading by professional, adult actors and directors on Tuesday, June 27 at 6 p.m. at the Albert Shanker School for the Visual and Performing Arts (IS 126). This performance will be followed by an encore presentation at the Astoria Branch of

the Queens Library this summer in celebration of the student's 15 complete new works being accepted into the library's permanent collection.

For more information regarding the APAC Playmaking Program or any other of APAC's theatre and performing arts programs, visit www.apacny.org.



Gazette

Vol. 25 No. 26 June 28, 2006

APAC Plays Added To Library Collection

The Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) has announced that the Astoria Branch of the Queens Borough Public Library will be accepting into its permanent collection the complete series of plays written by middle-school students in the APAC Playmaking Program. This single bound volume of 15 student-written plays will be made available to the public, signaling the library's and community's support of the writings of Queens youths.

"The Queens Library is delighted to house a collection of plays written by the APAC Playmaking Program middle-school students," Thomas W. Galante, library director, said. "The Queens Library takes pride in the enrichment of children's lives by providing invaluable programs and services. We are excited to add this series of plays to our diverse collection of materials here at the Queens Library."

The APAC Playmaking Program is built around a specific method of teaching playwriting to children. During two five-week cycles of after-school classes, each student writes one short play. The new works are then directed and performed by adult, professional actors. Developed by Daniel Judah Sklar, author of *Playmaking: Children Writing and Performing Their Own Plays*, the program came to life at The 52nd Street Project, a Manhattan youth arts organization. Results of the program have shown that children given focused attention by a teaching artist and supported by adult volunteers are able to build their self esteem as they develop new skill sets through playwriting. The classes are a mix of theater games, improvisations and writing.

"Everything about APAC's Playmaking

Program is about validating the importance of kids finding their own voices," Taryn Drongowski, APAC executive director, said. "They put a lot of work into their plays, and that work is honored with attention from a lot of adults, including teachers, volunteers, actors, directors, community leaders, audience members, and now the library. The message to the students is clear—use your imaginations, work hard, be yourselves and have fun!"

With the support of City Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., APAC was given a CASA Award from the city Department of Youth and Community Development to start a playwriting program at I.S. 126, the Albert Shanker School for the Visual and Performing Arts in Astoria. APAC extends special thanks to Vallone Jr. for his constant support.

"I'm so proud of these kids and all the work that APAC does," Vallone Jr. said, "It's also good to know that if I happen to miss a show I can always go to the library and check out a copy."

The second round of plays, eight in total, was presented to the public free of charge in a staged reading by professional, adult actors and directors on Tuesday, June 27 at 6 p.m. at I.S. 126. This performance will be followed by an encore presentation at the Astoria branch of the Queens Borough Public Library this summer in celebration of the students' 15 complete new works being accepted into the library's permanent collection. The first round of plays, seven in total, was presented in April.

WHAT'S THE **buzz**

ARTS ★ CULTURE ★ ENTERTAINMENT ★ DINING

FIVE SHOWY YEARS



APAC celebrates run of community entertainment

During the 2004-2005 season, APAC performed "Lucky Stiff."

Photo courtesy APAC

BY JESSICA LYONS

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The Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) is celebrating five years of bringing quality, affordable entertainment to area residents.

Following a career as a television actress, Sue Scannell eventually started working with children at a local school and came up with the idea of creating a summer theatre program for children. When the students didn't quite take to it, she decided to form an adult theatre program instead.

"I really think APAC was meant to be," Scannell said.

As she began to form the organization, which was founded in 2001, she received a great deal of support from local residents, businesses and her friends.

Three years after its founding, APAC launched Summer Stars, a free, seven-week program for children. This past summer, for the first time it held a similar program for senior citizens called Senior Stars. They also offer programming to promote new works.

Scannell, who describes herself as a "proud mama" when it comes to APAC, retired from the organization due to health problems. She has recently recognized for her efforts during

a celebration held Wednesday, September 20.

"APAC would not be where it is today without her hard work and endless dedication to making her dream a reality," said Brian Swasey, APAC's artistic director who has been with the organization since its inception.

Taryn Drongowski became the executive director in August of 2005 and was described by Scannell as "the answer to our prayers." Drongowski said that she immediately discovered the vast growth of APAC.

"When I became familiar with the organization in the summer of 2005, I was astonished with what they had accomplished in four years," she said. "It gave me an indication of the kind of pace that APAC has."

Councilmember Peter Vallone, Jr. has been a longtime supporter of APAC. He met Scannell on the street and said that he could tell any project she was involved in would be a success. Vallone said that it was only recently that Astoria began to get more cultural activities and described APAC as being at the forefront of that effort while also saying that he is proud of the organization.

Scannell said that her hope is to one day see a "mini-Lincoln Center" in Astoria. Funding has been secured to create a performing arts center, although those involved are still

looking for a building to purchase or one where they could enter into a long-term lease.

"We've been lucky enough to secure \$1 million, which has been sitting in the budget for three years now as we attempt to locate a space," said Vallone, who participated in an APAC show as an actor when they performed shows written by children. "If anyone has any ideas, we're open to them."

Drongowski said, "Once you have four walls, you can do so much."

APAC will continue with its 2006/2007 performance season in October and November with "Picasso at the Lapin Agile" by Steve Martin. Performances of the show will take place on October 27 and 28 and November 3, 4, 10 and 11 at 8 p.m. and October 29, November 5 and 12 at 6 p.m. It will take place at The Variety Boys and Girls Club of Queens, which is located at 21-12 30th Road in Long Island City.

In May, APAC will perform the musical comedy "A New Brain" by William Finn. Shows will be May 4, 5, 11, 12, 18 and 19 at 8 p.m. and May 6, 13 and 20 at 6 p.m. The location for the performances has yet to be determined.

For more information on the Astoria Performing Arts Center, visit www.apacny.org or call 718-393-7505.

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Confidential



APAC Celebrates Fifth Anniversary

The Astoria Performing Arts Center will celebrate its fifth birthday this month and honor its founder, Susan Scannell, for bringing theatre and entertainment to the Astoria and Long Island City community through the group.

"Sue's unsurpassing energy and dedication to the performing arts has helped to elevate awareness and the level of cultural programming in Astoria, as well as the borough of Queens," said Queens Council on the Arts' Queens Community Arts Fund Director Lynn Lobell.

APAC opened its doors in September 2001 in the aftermath of the events of Sept. 11. Hundreds of performers turned out for the first audition, seeking both to get their minds off the recent events and to take an opportunity in being a part of something which had long been missing from the Astoria community—theater. APAC's mission is to be professional theater

dedicated to community outreach and to youth and seniors in particular. Since the foundation of their theater company, other companies with similar strategies (arts tied into community) have followed suit and taken root in the area.

"Saying a neighborhood should have a theatre and actually creating a theatre in a neighborhood is very different and it takes a special person to realize the vision and make it a reality," said Queens Theatre in the Park Executive Director Jeffrey Rosenstock. "Sue Scannell is that special person and clearly the results speak for themselves in terms of not only a theater being born, but doing so much to impact all segments of the community it serves; she knows that theatre can touch people's lives, as it touched hers, and has been tireless in ensuring APAC plays a vital role in the Astoria community."

APAC has undergone several changes in the

last five years. After performing for four years at Presbyterian Church, the group lost its lease and was required to find new space for productions. A new Executive Director, Taryn Drongowski, joined the group in the last year and continues to forward Scannell's vision.

APAC is launching its sixth season with a showcase entitled *A New Generation of Song* – *The Future of Musical Theatre* and the Steve Martin play *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, and the musical comedy, *A New Brain*, next spring. In addition, Senior Stars cabaret, the Astoria Playmaking Program, and the highly-anticipated annual Summer Stars children's musical theatre program will be making a return this season. For performance announcements visit APAC at www.apacny.org.

—Iman Khan

APAC Presents: Stories in Song

It's Friday evening. A late summer lownpour hasn't dampened the spirits of APAC's talented singers and their loyal audience. The cabaret at Mezzo-Aezzo, 31-29 Ditmars Blvd. in Astoria is their venue. The intimate setting is enhanced by a fireplace, rustic tonework and a castle watchtower that serves as the miniature's backdrop.

Directed by Brian Wasey, the evening offers a series of crisp musical stories by four young, talented singers. Guided by every capable musical director Jeffrey Campos, the troupe appears repeated-

ly without change of costume but with powerful characterizations. Selections are unusual, with two songs written by members of the show.

Michael Marcotte is convincing as he sings wild-eyed about the Jerusalem syndrome. This ailment strikes tourists who visit Jerusalem and become convinced they are bona fide biblical characters. Joining in the tongue-in-cheek madness are Kimberly Chesser and Sarah Orr. The next scene introduces Chad Olsen who portrays a victim of this malady serenading another pilgrim.

Moving from poignant, to bawdy to serious, the more than a dozen melodies strike a chord in everyone's psyche, no matter what your emotional baggage.

Lyrics such as "I don't need Xanadu...I don't need angels in disguise...to love you any more than I do" reveal a welcome maturity beyond the youthful singer's years.

Wisely, the foursome abandons the microphone as the program progresses. The two final songs, "The Smallest

Hope," and "Worthy of the Crown" boasting music by Campos and lyrics by Olsen fare better when not overwhelmed by electronics. Other impressive deliveries bring "Kea's Ark," "Waiting for Ben," "Irresistible" and

"Joey Runs" to an appreciative audience. After just an hour, more than a dozen melodies have been shared with honesty and integrity. APAC's autumn season has begun with class and charisma.

The Astoria Performing Arts Center is celebrating five years as a member of Queens' creative community.

Overall, they are unmistakably in the vanguard of youthful, energetic and passionate performers who will continue to strive for excellence until their voices are heard on Broadway and beyond!

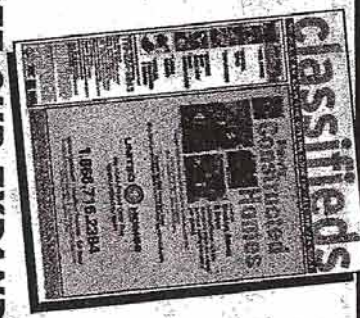
Contact APAC at 718-393-7505 or visit their website at www.apacny.org for their upcoming schedule. As always, save me a seat on the aisle.

a view
from the **CLIFF**
by **CLIFF KASDEN**

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Astoria Troupe Finds New Home at Boys & Girls Club

By Kenneth Jones
October 24, 2006

The Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC) in Queens has a new home for its latest production: The Variety Boys & Girls Club of Queens.

The five-year-old theatre began in a church gym in Astoria, across the East River from Manhattan. The troupe recently began a search for permanent new digs.

The Broccoli Theater space within the Variety B & G Club was recommended to them, artistic director Brian Swasey told Playbill.com. APAC will offer Steve Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* there Oct. 27-Nov. 12.

"APAC and the Variety Boys & Girls Club have many mutual friends, including Council Member Peter Vallone Jr., who secured funding for *Picasso*," said APAC executive director Taryn Drongowski, in a statement. "I was really impressed when I first walked into the Broccoli Theater, and when [APAC's producing artistic director] Brian Swasey confirmed for me that the space would more than meet the needs of the production, and the Variety B & G's Club executive director Tracie Van Dina and director of performing arts Adam Herzig were supportive of us producing there, it all just came together for us."

APAC looks forward to continuing the new friendship through the spring. APAC's mainstage programming has always been complemented with community outreach efforts, including theatre training for children.

"There are many natural ways for the two organizations to collaborate, and we look forward to discovering them, and making something great happen," Swasey said.

The Variety B & G Club is at 21-12 30th Road in Astoria. For more information, visit www.apacny.org.

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Given its proximity to Manhattan, the relatively low rents in the borough, and the access to cheap and fast mass transit, Queens has remarkably few professional Equity theatre operating in its borders.

Send questions and comments to the Webmaster
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APAC Showcases Einstein, Picasso Comedy

Undaunted by a frustrating search for a theatrical home, the Astoria Performing Arts Center continues to produce top quality productions with outstanding performers.

The current offering is Steve Martin's brilliant comedy, "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," where a Parisian saloon is the site of a chance meeting between geniuses. Albert Einstein before his theories, Pablo Picasso before his famous canvasses and a ghostly Elvis forge a unique brotherhood.

On opening night, The Broccoli Theatre in the Variety Boys and Girls Club was transformed. A dozen deliberately unmatched wrought iron and wooden chairs, a beautiful wood planked bar and numerous, imperfectly aligned paintings provided palpable support for the unusual story that followed.

Albert Einstein (Jordan Kaplan) is played with a great combination of wit and physical humor, including an obviously false moustache and a womanizing attitude. Yet he is humbly puzzled by the "high I.Q." inspirations that constantly flood his head. Pablo Picasso (Rafi Silver) mirrors Einstein's qualities but with a greater artistic flourish. He is wittier, more physical and pursues the opposite sex with broader strokes.

Freddy, the bartender (Alex Pappas) is sometimes clueless but his flashes of insight still endear him to his girlfriend, the wisecracking Germaine (Meryl Bezruczyk). Her vocal inflections, facial and physical reactions are consistently well done despite the changing dialogues that surround her.

My personal favorite is sarcastic, grizzly Gaston (Ray Arrucci) who describes himself as "newly old." He fills the stage with paradoxically self-deprecating yet arrogant observations of women and the world. If every character onstage is some part of Steve Martin's psyche, then Gaston is his clearest voice.

Suzanne (Elizabeth Wirth) is Picasso's stunning, mesmerized coquette. She waits breathlessly, with a painted smile until the artist appears. Naturally, he has forgotten her. She is just one patch in his multi-colored palette of beautiful conquests. Righteously indignant, her anger fades as Picasso's superstar continues to shine charismatically.

Other geniuses include the great Schmendiman (Timothy J. Cox) and the Visitor (Jason Winfield). Schmendiman wears a very loud red striped blazer, with equally loud vocal chords. He represents every self-important bombastic personality. The Visitor, who is clearly the spirit of Elvis, grinds and gyrates. Nonetheless, he demonstrates the same humble sense of

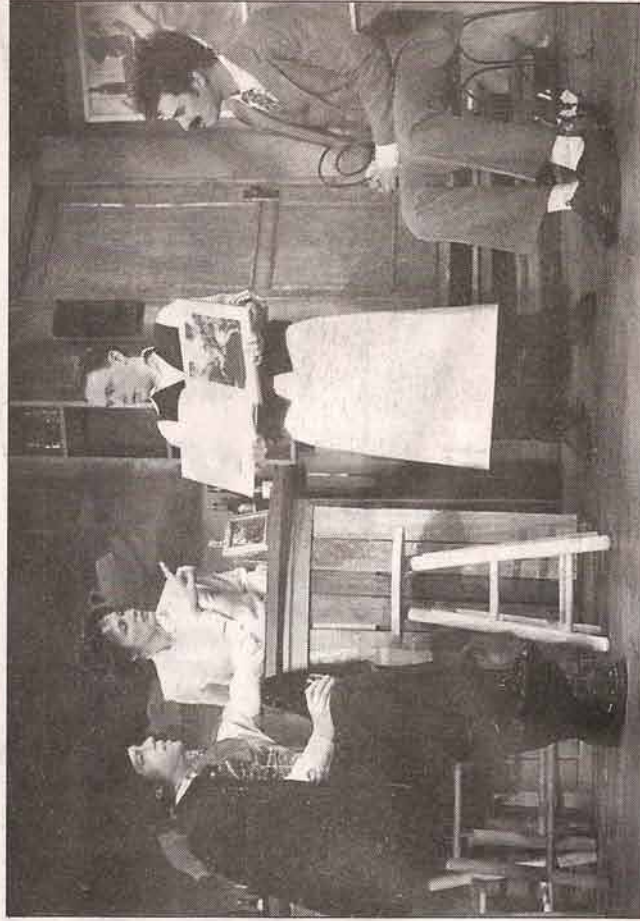


Photo courtesy APAC

APAC offers up Steve Martin's comedy "Picasso at the Lapin Agile,"

awe in his own talent that shines in Einstein and Picasso.

Finally, jaded art dealer Sagot (Jimmy T. Owens) and the Countess/Admirer (Holly Vanasse) are groupies. Sagot follows genius for financial gain. Vanasse's character are enthralled by the hype that surrounds superstars.

This irreverent comedy is directed by Lawrence Lesher with artistic and execu-

tive direction by Brian Swasey and Taryn Drongowski respectively. Kudos to Michael P. Kramer (set design), Erik Michael (lights), Hilary Noxon and Bdwy Wig design (costumes/wigs), Michael R. Mele and Christine Goutmann (stage mgmt).

Located at 21-12, 30th Road in Astoria, call 718-393-7505 for directions. As always, save me a seat on the aisle.