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Affordable Theater, Inc.

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This newsletter is for members and friends of Affordable Theater, Inc. of Los Altos, California. If you would like to receive a copy of your own, please contact us at musings@affordabletheater.com

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10 Things You Didn't Know About...

Oscar Wilde

10. He once wrote a letter to the editor to a paper in France, which caused the reformation of the prisons of England.
9. His middle name was Wills.
8. His mother was an Irish revolutionary who wrote articles under the name of John Fernshaw Ellis and Speranza.
7. The poem *Oh Who Is That Young Sinner* by A.E. Housman is written about Wilde.
6. His middle name was O'Flahertie.
5. The lead character of *Patience*, Reginald Bunthorne, is based on the character of Oscar Wilde. Wilde thought this was funny.
4. His godfather was the King of Sweden.
3. His middle name was Fingal.
2. Though *The Importance of Being Earnest* continued to play to packed houses, Wilde's name was taken off all the posters when he was sent to jail.
1. Wilde's *The Duchess of Padua* was written after he had been given a \$1,000 advance, and had been promised another \$4,000 on delivery. Sadly the play was so bad that it was rejected. Wilde himself later referred to it as "really unfit for publication". Nevertheless the play has been produced, twice, unsuccessfully. The NYC production never mentioned the author's name, and was billed as *Guido Ferranti*

Up and Coming

Auditions

Performance Date:

Tuesday 8:30am-9:30am
May 11, 2004

Auditions:

Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 6pm-9pm
March 16, 17, and 18, 2004

Rehearsals:

Wednesdays/Thursdays 6pm-9pm
March 25, 31; April 1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29; May
5, and 6, 2004

Auditions and Rehearsals will be held at Vallco Fashion Park; Suite 106 (lower level); 10123 N. Wolfe Road, Cupertino, CA.

The Play: *The Moral of the Story*

Characters (in order of appearance):

Myth (Narrator)

Legend (Narrator)

Fable (Narrator)

Rabbit

Turtle

Fox

Stork

Man

Boy



Plot: Based on the fables of Aesop and Remus, this show uses familiar characters to teach familiar lessons. Children will follow the tortoise and the hare on their amazing race and will learn from the characters they meet along the way.

If you are interested in auditioning, please make an appointment via email at moral@affordabletheater.com or by calling 650-949-1720. Appointments are ½ hour each, beginning at 6pm. Please plan on arriving at least 15 minutes early.

Bring an audition monologue (does not have to be memorized), and, if you have one, a copy of your theater resume.

For more information visit

www.affordabletheater.com/moral/

Musing on Boards

If At First You Don't Succeed

by Twink Lynch

Recently, I received a plea for help from the President of a young group struggling for survival. Five years ago he and "a few remnant members of a recently defunct company" decided to start a theatre company in his town (population 90,000, county population 500,000 with lots of other theatre available). He says their productions are basically successful, but they "have no foundation for day to day operations." They have no annual budget and never manage to stay within individual show budgets. They started with a 5-person board, which is now down to three members. They have received their 501(c)(3) status from the IRS. He's concerned that no one on the Board understands the value of fundraising, and no one has the connections they need to get to the people with the funds anyway. They had to cancel half their dinner theatre season last year because of lack of volunteers. The President basically runs the place except for directing shows. He's in charge of "production, marketing, fundraising, advertising, set construction and praying." At one point they tried to change the format of the operation, to forcibly involve volunteers who just like to act in other aspects of the program. He says, "We are seriously confused about what community theatre is and what a board of directors does." While he has considered giving up and walking away, he loves the theatre -but simply doesn't know how to go on from here. We used to say all it takes to do theatre is "two actors, four boards and a passion." If that 's all there is, developing an ongoing organization is going to be tough. We need passion, yes -but many more volunteers than two actors, and a much larger stage than four boards, if we really want to create a viable theatre company for the benefit of our community. Our struggling President needs to find additional resources (I'm sure he 's trying). His organization obviously has people to mount productions but no one - except himself --to handle business and administrative functions. His theatre 's long-term success will ultimately rest on his ability to recruit board and committee volunteers with the skills to handle royalty negotiations, develop budgets and budget controls, make deposits, pay the bills, keep accurate records, prepare financial reports, do publicity, handle reservations and ticket sales, write playbills and newsletters, and even clean the johns, if necessary. Not to mention people able and willing to do fundraising and offer legal and accounting assistance. And what about their audience? Is this theatre company filling a need in

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If At First You Don't Succeed (cont)

the community? Do they have a core group that will develop into a dependable, loyal following? What is their niche? Is there a marketing plan? The President has apparently been doing all of the fundraising and will need to continue to find donors like underwriters (co-producers), annual donors (contributing members), and granting organizations (state arts council, foundations). However, we know donors don't usually just send money out of the blue – they need to be asked – and he needs others to help him ask. A big resource needed is space (borrowed, rented or owned). This group has worked in a banquet room of a restaurant for their dinner theatre season and currently has access to a space in a big entertainment facility. But there 's more to theatre than those four boards we mentioned. Every group needs a space to build and store sets and equipment and an office-type space to answer inquiries, make show reservations, pay the bills, and keep the records and cash in a secure manner. Some groups also need additional space for rehearsals. Another resource needed is equipment (borrowed, rented or owned) – tools for building and painting sets, lighting equipment, sound equipment and hopefully access to a computer for generating and storing lists of potential audience members, vendors, and volunteers. The group will need phone service, an answering machine, and perhaps the use of a truck. Last but definitely not least; upfront cash is needed for those initial expenses like royalties, scripts and/or music scores, rent, set, costume and office materials, printing and postage, etc. It helps if this cash is a gift, not a loan. How in the world can a fledgling theatre access such resources if there isn't a core group from the very beginning of the enterprise dedicated to doing anything and everything necessary for the good of the whole? If such people aren't available (or only want to act), then I think it will be very hard to establish an ongoing theatre organization. I do not believe founding and operating a community theatre is a one-person job. Even with Mickey and Judy, the kids "got together" to put on a play. Once the President has recruited additional volunteers (especially for management tasks), I would strongly suggest the group follow the "Five Functions of Management" model: planning, organizing, "staffing" (with volunteers and/or paid personnel), supervising, and evaluating. Since their theatre already exists, they need to start with an assessment of where they are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and build a plan to increase those strengths and minimize the weaknesses. Remember that planning is the keystone of good management. Every theatre group needs to write down their purpose, their mission, their goals and objectives, and their initial program (production, readers' theatre, workshops). They need to write down job descriptions for all jobs needing to be done. They need to organize the work into do-able

pieces – that 's what committees, task forces, and crews are for. They need a clear "chain of command" (usually done as an organizational chart) so people will know to whom they are accountable. They need to recruit people and match them up with appropriate jobs, including board positions - it's really just like casting a play. They need to orient and train them as needed. Then they need to recognize them for their good work and encourage them as they develop new skills. They need to give their volunteers additional responsibilities as warranted. At the end of the season, they should evaluate once again and revise their plan accordingly. This is a huge undertaking and will take significant time. Especially when there 's been some negative water under the bridge, it takes boundless enthusiasm and diligent effort to re-group with a new game plan. Some of the volunteers who joined the group initially may find all the meetings and paper work boring and unnecessary, especially if they really just want to do a show. Unfortunately, it may not be possible to meet all their needs – but the founding of a community theatre should transcend individual needs in order to meet the greater good of the community. While it is true that some "vanity theatres" exist and will continue to pop up from time to time, those theatres tend to die off when the founding group gets older, moves away or passes on to those "four boards" in the sky. That 's not necessarily a bad thing, but how much more of a contribution to community life is a true community theatre, which creates quality productions and other programs that nurture volunteers, audience members and staff and that help to develop each individual 's creative potential using the skills and imaginative possibilities of theatre and the performing arts (adapted from the mission statement of the Olney Theatre, the State Theatre of Maryland). I hope this group will "try, try again."

Break a leg!!

Twink welcomes comments, discussion, and questions about her articles. Contact her at twinkt@cox.net

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Twink Lynch is a past president of AACT and past administrative director of the Topeka Civic Theatre & Academy. She works as a consultant with theatre boards all over the country.

AACT Update

Immediately after sending out her introductory email, Charlotte began receiving replies from AACT theatres across Northern California. One of the reoccurring themes in these messages is the desire to see more interaction between local theaters.

No theater operates in isolation, though sometimes it may feel that way. Local theaters share actors, audience, and community resources. Those that have formed a partnership of sorts may share equipment, staff, or even rehearsal and performance space. No matter how good the current arrangement is however, any theater can benefit from an expanded network. That's where AACT comes in. In the first few months as AACT Northern California representative, Charlotte has talked with some of the small theaters and groups of theaters in the area and is working on connecting all of these communities into one large Northern California network.

Not only do you need support from other theaters, you also need support from your community, and your government. Along these lines Charlotte has received a request from a member theater to look into California's support, at a government level, of amateur theatre. With the California Arts Council (CAC) facing its current financial crisis, now is the perfect time for proposing alternate solutions. This will involve research into the councils that existed before the current incarnation, and the development of a proposal to be made to the CAC.



How You Can Help

All contributions, whether goods, services, monies, or time, are deeply appreciated. At the moment, however, our primary need is a home.

To this end we have begun applying for grants. Grants come in many forms, and are found in many different places.

Starbucks' Grants for Giving we discovered while getting our morning coffee. While we found out about the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley while surfing the web. Perhaps you've seen an advertisement for a grant, or your company has a community giving program. Drop us a line, and let us know. Affordable Theater is actively searching for grant funding to augment the private donations you already provide.

Please contact us at giving@affordabletheater.com. Affordable Theater, Inc is a non-profit corporation under tax code 501(c)(3). As such, all contributions qualify you for a tax deduction, as well as our undying gratitude.