



June 2-15, 2011

## Arts & Entertainment

### The Theatricum Botanicum You Don't Know

By Flavia Potenza

Theatricum Botanicum, Topanga's renowned repertory theater, kicked off its 2011 Summer Season with a fundraiser, Sunset and Theatricum by the Sea, hosted by Amy Madigan at her Malibu home for the third year. Appearances by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I and her favorite playwright, William Shakespeare, hosted a sampling of this year's plays: **The Merry Wives of Windsor**; **A Midsummer Night's Dream**; **Tartuffe**, **Richard III**; a limited engagement (five performances) of the controversial play, **My Name Is Rachel Corrie**; and The West Coast premiere of **Rose Cottages**, that also debuts a young actor, Graco Hernandez, gleaned from City Hearts and chosen by Artistic Director Ellen Geer to perform with this year's repertory company.

Theatricum by the Sea was just one of many formal fundraisers that will dot the theater's performance landscape this summer to keep the many aspects of Theatricum alive. Belt-tightening is nothing new to this crowd and even an informal yard sale has popped up roadside near the theater grounds to bring in money.

This is the Theatricum you think you know but there is so much more that deserves to be acknowledged. It is one of Topanga's treasures that spreads its riches throughout Los Angeles, but especially here in our hometown.

In addition to the six plays in the Repertory Season, Theatricum offers a variety of satellite programming this summer that we highlight here.

#### Dinner and a Show



Elizabeth Tobias & Ted Barton

Photo by Katie Dalsemer

Pre-show dinner buffets complement three plays: On two Fridays, July 22 and 29, British fare is paired with **The Merry Wives of Windsor**, on Friday, July 22 and Friday, July 29.

Mediterranean buffet Dream Dinners are served with a costumed cast of fairies in attendance, every Thursday in August (August 4, 11, 18, 25).

A French Provencal buffet celebrates **Tartuffe** every Friday in September (September 2, 9, 16, 23, 30).

All dinners take place in the adjacent gardens at 6:30 p.m. followed by an 8 p.m. performance (separate

admission, or combo packages available).

#### City Hearts Presents "The Shakespeare Challenge," June 4

City Hearts: Kids Say Yes to the Arts, L.A. County's preeminent arts education organization for inner city youth, is hosting its second annual "The Shakespeare Challenge" on Saturday morning, June 4. The recital is open to the public from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on the Theatricum stage.

The event is designed for students to challenge themselves rather than compete with each other as Shakespeare students from some of L.A.'s poorest communities perform scenes and monologues for judges. Ellen Geer, Theatricum Artistic Director, will be one of the panel of judges, along with John Sandoval, one of City Hearts graduates who is now in his 30s.

It is the culmination of 12 years of providing the highest quality arts education in some of the most economically deprived communities in southern California. Students take on an entire field of study and body of work that stimulates and inspires them to enhance their academic, literacy and higher order thinking skills. City Hearts provides after-school Shakespeare classes to approximately 30 children per week as part of a multi-component project.

"Our students do not come to the study of Shakespeare with preconceived fears or disinterest," says City Hearts founder Sherry Jason. "They approach this material with joy, enthusiasm and excitement. They are ready to show what they have learned, some after only a few hours of classes, others with an entire semester of twice-weekly classes under their belts."

One of last year's challengers, Graco Hernandez, was selected by Geer to receive a scholarship to Theatricum's Youth Drama Camp and was invited to join the 2011 repertory company in Rose Cottages. Hernandez began studying Shakespeare with City Hearts at his school, Academia Avance in Highland Park, three years ago.



Graco Hernandez (center) with mentors Bob and Sherry Jason of City Hearts

Photo by Katie Dalsemer



J. Steadman & D.J. Harner reading.

Photo courtesy of Botanicum Seedlings

### "Botanicum Seedlings" Free Sunday Readings of New Plays, June 5, 12, 19

"Botanicum Seedlings," The Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum's development series for playwrights, has selected three diverse female voices for the 2011 spring readings showcase: Fengar Gael's *The Gallerist* on Sunday, June 5; *The Versailles* by Erica Jones on Sunday, June 12; and Lucile Lichtblau's *The English Bride* on Sunday, June 19.

The program continues its history of supporting exciting new plays by women in the upcoming Spring Play readings. "We don't intentionally look for female playwrights," says Theatricum playwright-in-residence Jennie Webb. "But as it turns out, over half of the plays we support are written by women – this at a time when only 20 percent of the works on Los Angeles stages are female-authored."

Last year's recipient of the second annual "Izzy" award of \$250 was *The Territory of Dreams* by Velina Hasu Houston that was presented as part of last year's spring play readings. The Izzy is named for Theatricum's late dramaturg, Israel Baran, who passed away in 2007.



Leslie Josette, Janet Song, Tippi Thomas, Monette Magrath, Peter Jones in last year's reading of Velina Hasu Houston's "Izzy" award-winning "The Territory of Dreams."

Photo courtesy of Botanicum Seedlings

All readings begin at 11 a.m.; admission is free. No reservations are necessary.

### "Take Note!" Holiday Performances

Those who saw "Momentum Place" on Mother's Day, the first of this series, may want to stay in town over the July 4 Independence Day and September 5 Labor Day weekends to catch the remaining holiday offerings.

Marshall McDaniel and the Pescatori Trio take the stage on Monday, July 4, Independence Day, 4 p.m., in a rare concert experience that will include Haydn, Beethoven and Lalo. McDaniel literally grew up on Theatricum's stage and has composed memorable scores for *Othello* and

*Dracula*. He returns to his roots from Berlin, Germany, as part of The Pescatori Trio, first prize

winners (chamber music) at the International Brahms Competition in Portschach, Austria. Note: concert program is subject to change. Lower Tier Tickets: \$25/Upper Tier: \$20

Inara George's Tribute to Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Monday, September 5, Labor Day, 2 p.m. International recording artist and Topanga native Inara George has assembled some of L.A.'s finest performers to interpret the songs of Bacharach-David. "Walk on By," "What The World Needs Now is Love," "Wishin' and Hopin'" and many others that became major hits. Now in the seventh year, George's tributes are always hot tickets, so order early for this most uncommon mix of sound and musical style. Lower Tier: \$40/Upper Tier: \$25.

### "Under the Oaks" for July

Escape mid-week to Theatricum's intimate S. Mark Taper Youth Pavilion under the serene California oaks. All performances begin at 8 p.m. Tickets: \$10 per person; \$30 for all four Thursdays.

Off The Grid, June 23, 30, July 14, 28 - Ian Flanders directs Theatricum's improvisation troupe, "Off the Grid," in its second season of hilarious antics. The troupe anticipates more audience participation and live music for an evening filled to the gills with a wall-to-wall laugh fest. Expect anything, says Flanders. "You know improv - we really don't know what the hell we are going to do until we do it."

Pete Mitchell of "No More Kings," July 7 - An intimate evening with singer/songwriter Pete Mitchell, who first made a name for himself with the band "No More Kings," best known for their hit song and video, "Sweep the Leg." Mitchell is also a gifted visual and performing artist who brings great depth and humor to all of his work. July 7.

Peter Alsop, July 21 - Peter reveals his latest adult album, "Disciples of PerFection," in an evening of song and irreverent, insightful humor as he turns his eye on adult relationships and societal foibles.

### Family Fundays On Sundays

Every Sunday (and three Saturdays) at 11 a.m., June 5 through October 30, Creative PlayGround presents The Legends of King Arthur, Ferdinand the Bull, Aesop's Fables, Three Tales by Hans Christian Andersen, The Velveteen Rabbit, and holiday Fundays Dia de los Muertos: Cuentos de mi Familia on Saturday, Oct. 29, and Halloween Stories, Sunday, October 30.

Series founder Peter Alsop and his Kids Konzerts presents Rhythm Child, Lucky Diaz & the Family Jam Band, Barney Saltzberg, Aaron Nigel Smith, Gwendolyn & The Good Time Gang, Stephen Michael Schwartz, Egg, The Sunshine Sisters, and Randy Kaplan. Visit [Theatricum.com](http://Theatricum.com) for dates and times.

### Academy of the Classics

The Academy was founded in 1975 to nurture a love of heightened language and to provide an active "gymnasium" for artists, students and Bard lovers to practice techniques for classical theatre. Committed to the idea of "company" rather than "celebrity," Theatricum is home to a close-knit troupe of actors who strive to create exciting theatre in the true repertory tradition.



Actor **Michael Thatcher** teaching Shakespeare

Photo by Ian Flanders

Professional classes and seminars provide actors at all levels with Shakespeare Intensives, Scene Study & Technique, Master Classes, Private Coaching and more. There are classes for adults, youth and teens, college classes and summer camps.

Programs for teachers provide them with discounts and LAUSD salary points and the School Days field trip program brings school children and their teachers to the Theatricum grounds to experience Living History



Cameron Walsler & Carolyn Marie Wright

Photo by Kim Zanti

with the appearance of Queen Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare, technique workshops and a question-and-answer session after performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

### **Improvisation Classes**

Ian Flanders has been teaching improvisation and theatre games to children, teens and adults for more than 25 years.

He is the founder of The Red Headed Step Children Improvisation Troupe and has performed extensively with SCAP "slow children at play" in North Hollywood. He has directed countless Shakespeare plays for young people at Theatricum Botanicum, and has performed in the repertory company. He is also General Manager of Theatricum.

"Although it's helpful for actors to know how to improvise," Flanders says, "it works for life in general. It's a safe place for people of all ages to experiment with characters or emotions that daily life suppresses. I see my students gain confidence, conquer fears and express their feelings. This is useful whether you are a teenager, a high-powered executive or a working mother or dad."

© 2011 Phoenix Rising Inc.,  
[www.TopangaMessenger.com](http://www.TopangaMessenger.com)



**Ian Flanders** teaches improvisation classes in both the Youth and Adult Academies.

Photo by Ian Flanders