

GOOD TIMES

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Thirty & Thriving

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Cabrillo Stage's Lile Cruse and Jon Nordgren open up the theater company's milestone season.

Plus: a look back at how it all began.

Lile Cruse. Jon Nordgren. They are the two masterminds behind Cabrillo Stage. Cruse is the founding artistic director of the much-admired local theater company and Nordgren is the current artistic director. And they're both in the spotlight as Cabrillo Stage celebrates its 30th anniversary this year.

On the roster: "The Full Monty" (June 24-July 17), "The Last 5 Years" (July 8-Aug 14) and "Hairspray" (July 22-Aug. 14).

For Cruse and Nordgren, the time is rife with memories.

Cruse launched the company at the height of state budget cuts back in 1981, and held his post (in addition to providing music direction for all productions) until 2003. Skip Epperson, long-time Cabrillo Stage set designer and Chair of Theatre Arts at Cabrillo College, then stepped into the artistic director position for two years and in 2006, Nordgren, a professor at the school, took the reigns. With his new vision, the company has expanded to produce four shows per year (three in the summer and one in the winter).

What's particularly interesting is that Cruse and Nordgren go way back—all the way to when Nordgren (who is now 53) was in high school, and would play in the Cabrillo College jazz band, helmed by Cruse.

No doubt these two musical maestros have much to say about the 30th anniversary.

Particularly noteworthy is a strange cycle that has occurred. When Cruse created the company, he did so by taking what was then a summer college program and transforming it into a professional theater company, even in the midst of drastic budget cuts. Now, Nordgren might very well be facing a similar crisis. The impact of state budget cuts (and hence Cabrillo College budget cuts) is impending. While Cabrillo Stage doesn't know what the outcome will be for its company, there are rumblings that suggest challenges ahead. A formal announcement will occur later this year, but audience members should know that the company plans to stay afloat after several very financial successful seasons.



On the eve of this milestone season—opening night is June 24 when "The Full Monty" comes to life—GT sits down with Cruse and Nordgren and lets them converse with each other. Of particular interest is their unique take on the company and much more.



Jon Nordgren: So, I heard that the origin of Cabrillo Stage was a summer theater, a typical community college theater production that was de-funded?

Lile Cruse: Summer theater existed here

30th Anniversary Season **June 24 through July 17**

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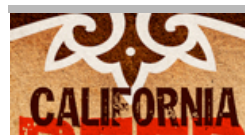
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in the mid-'60s and when I came here in 1970 it was known as Cabrillo College Summer Theater and was run through Community Education.

JN: It wasn't professional yet?

LC: [Not yet.] They had set aside some money to hire equity people (at that time). They always did one musical and three stage plays, but the musical is what they

hung their hat on. There was a pretty good tax base through Community Education.

JN: But with Prop 13 that money went away. Sounds familiar. Where did you get the idea for Cabrillo Stage?

LC: To have it continue on as summer theater, and then become one of the appendages of the performing arts division.

JN: You were head of that division?

LC: I was chairman of the performing arts. No one wanted anything to do with summer theater, so I took it on and found a name for it. Cabrillo Stage (officially) came about years later in 1981 with the production of "Chicago."

JN: During your time at Cabrillo Stage between 1981 and 2003 there was steady growth.

LC: I had a concept in mind, which I tried to adhere to. We alternate between traditional shows as well as contemporary shows. It may sound silly, but I felt I had a responsibility to educate the community. "Sweeney Todd" was one of the five or six strongest shows ever done here, but people didn't understand it was melodrama, and it didn't sell well.

JN: I envy him (Cruse) being able to do that. I felt more and more that I picked shows on what would be more successful. It's hard to put up a show that an audience would have a hard time with.

LC: People still bring up the topic of "Sweeney Todd."

JN: My mom loved that show.

LC: It wasn't gruesome.

JN: During those years, who stands out as one of the most talented individuals in terms of cast?

LC: That's really difficult to say. There wasn't one particular person that stood out. ... When we did "South Pacific" people told me time and time again that they remembered that and enjoyed the singers. ... You can teach people to act but you can't teach them to sing in a short matter of time.

(This year, Cruse will musical direct "Hairspray" and Janie Scott will direct the show. Nordgren will play in the orchestra for that show.)

JN: We just expanded to four shows last year. It's hard, because we're going into an era of budget cuts. We may need to reinvent the company in some way because of the possibility of losing support from the college and tax payers. The role of artistic director has changed. I have to be in charge of a whole season and decide the artistic concept and tie the shows together. When I hire a director, I turn them loose. I can't keep a thumb on them the whole time.

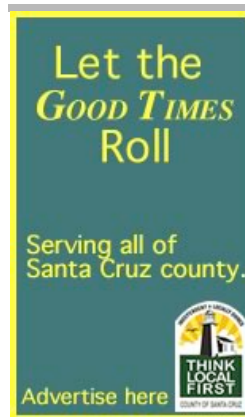
LC: Jon is a friend of mine, but he's also a music educator, and I respect that. There are not a lot of music educators these days.

JN: I think Lile will be known for the music and theater renaissance of the '70s and '80s in this county.

JN: What do you hope to see as the future of Cabrillo Stage?

LC: There are some devastating things going on. The wolves are at the door with Cabrillo Stage and all the arts programs at the college.

JN: I think the public doesn't understand one thing about the budget cuts—they may feel that it's hard to get into this class or that class, but what's going to happen this next year is way beyond anything that has happened. They (the state) are literally dismantling the college system. People will see devastating cuts starting in the spring of 2012. If these massive cuts happen, we will need to re-invent Cabrillo



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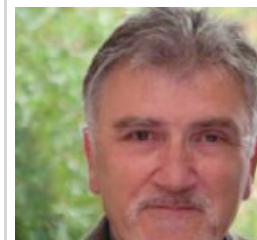
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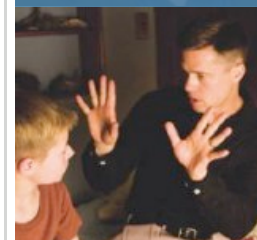
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In Search of the Light



Sweet Mystery of

Stage, like how Lile re-invented a program that became Cabrillo Stage in 1981. For more information on this year's shows, and more, visit cabrillostage.com.

A Robe by any Other Name

It's not just part of the wardrobe. Cabrillo Stage's Gypsy Robe is a colorful scrapbook of the company's vibrant history.

Joseph had an amazing technicolor dreamcoat—a “coat of many colors.” Cabrillo Stage has its own version with a robe but it's nothing like the terry cloth version you don after taking a bath. The professional musical theater company's “dreamcoat” is in fact called a “gypsy robe.” Based on a long-time Broadway tradition, a superstar chorus member of every show is handed down a colorfully decorated robe to wear before every performance and then is required to fulfill a certain number of duties. Cabrillo Stage has two gypsy robes, which collectively hold 35 years of the company's memories. They are, in essence, a scrapbook comprised of trinkets, writings and more—all thrust upon an article of clothing. The first robe dates from 1976 to 2005. It was so full that it was retired and a new robe was introduced in 2006.

This year, as Cabrillo Stage celebrates its 30th season, it's fitting to take a look at the robe, its origins and how it factors into the creative mix at the professional theater company.

Opening night for Cabrillo Stage's 30th season is June 24 when the comedy “The Full Monty” is unveiled. On that day, a new person will don the gypsy robe. The cast will gather at 7 p.m. that night and Matt Dunn, winner of the gypsy robe for “Scrooge” (the company's winter show) will show up in the robe. “They (the cast) has a circle,” says Jana Marcus, Cabrillo College marketing and communications coordinator, and also the robe's caretaker. “It's like a football huddle. The director says goodbye and the gypsy (Dunn) will give a little history of the gypsy robe. He will know the winner.”

Per tradition, Dunn will string out the announcement of who the winner is, and eventually approach the person, hug them and pass on the robe to them. A plaque will be presented, and more often than not, a few tears are shed.

“It makes them feel all the hard work they have done has been worth it,” Marcus says.

That hard work includes stepping up to the plate and going above and beyond in helping out with the production. The robe is an award that recognizes this kind of hard work, and it's usually given to a chorus member. At times, it's given to a lead actor. After Dunn hands over the robe to its new recipient, in a short matter of time, the new gypsy—before the show starts in less than an hour—needs to fulfill his or her duties, including circling the stage three times, touching the props, hugging the actors and serving as a general good luck charm to the night's production. During the course of the following weeks, as the show plays out, the gypsy will do this before every performance. When the next show is put on stage, the ritual will resurface and another person will be awarded the gypsy robe. (In this case, most likely the tradition will skip straight to the company's other summer show, “Hairspray,” since its third offering this season, “The Last Five Years,” is a two-person show.)

The tradition of the gypsy robe has been with Cabrillo Stage since its inception (and even five years prior to the company's official professional theater company status), and Marcus ensures the whereabouts of the robe, and even sometimes has to hunt it down if a particular gypsy forgets to return it. She's also considered the “archivist of the company.”

“The robe is never supposed to leave the theater,” Marcus notes. One year she had to almost stalk a gypsy to get that person to return it after staff realized it had gone missing. They gypsy in question hadn't gotten around to putting a trinket on the robe.

That's another ritual involving the robe. Each gypsy must attach something to the robe that carries with it a memory of his or her experience in that show. “The beauty of the robe is that it's one of the richest pieces of history we have, there's something on it from every show,” Marcus says.

The robe includes such things as crystals, a flying monkey stuffed animal, black stockings from “Chicago,” and a letter that was used in the show, “Man of La Mancha.”

This year, in celebration of the anniversary, there will be a special event honoring the robe and its history of gypsies. Of the 39 gypsies that have been a part of the tradition, three of them have passed away. Out of the remaining and living 36 gypsies, 25 of them will be present on opening night.

“At the end of ‘The Full Monty,’ the (new) gypsy will come out in the robe and the past 25 gypsies will



Plantronics Hits the Big 5-0

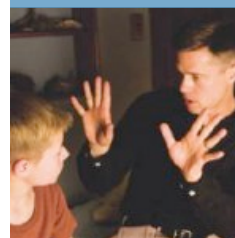


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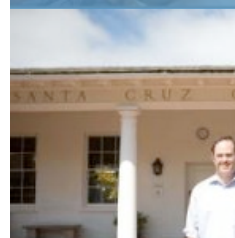
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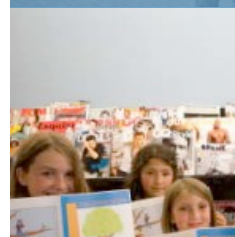
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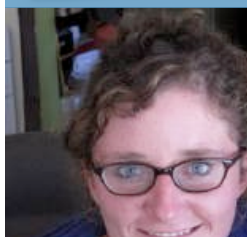
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Fox had her usual



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Back in 2000, when



stand and take a bow," Marcus says. "The robe is about tradition and history. For me, as someone who can look back and remember every show in so many different ways, with different producers, having that piece of history secured and archiving that piece of history ..." She pauses seemingly in memory, before going on. "Here we are, 30 years later. We're a thriving company that is doing better than we ever have before."

And while budget cuts may be on the horizon, the gypsy robe isn't going anywhere—it will continue to collect and store memories, and hang right there at Cabrillo Stage.

where ARE THEY NOW?

In honor of Cabrillo Stage's 30th birthday, GT takes a look at some of the past actors, dancers, chorus members and staff. Where are they now? Jana Marcus, marketing and communications coordinator for Cabrillo College, reports back and tells us of their whereabouts.

Andrew Roubal

Andrew Roubal, who was a Cabrillo Stage

chorus member for many years and then starred as the Tin Man in "The Wizard of Oz" in 2009, is currently in the Broadway touring company of "A Chorus Line."

Adam Campbell

Adam Campbell, who played Jesus in "Jesus Christ Superstar" (2008) and Frank Butler in "Annie Get Your Gun" (2005) has just been cast in the national tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar," playing the role of Peter and understudying for Ted Neeley. Campbell joined the national tour in November 2008 and toured through July 2010.

Katie Webber

Katie Webber has been in many Cabrillo productions including, "The King & I" and "Oliver," but will always be remembered for her incredible dancing as Velma in "West Side Story." Katie went on to perform on 2005's American Idol and was one of the top 16 contestants. She performed at the 2004 "Latin Grammy Awards," and can be seen in the film Rent. She has recently made her Broadway debut in "Wicked."

Ricky Tripp

Who could forget those fabulous tap-dancing gangsters in "Some Like It Hot" (2002) led by Ricky Tripp? Tripp can now be seen on Broadway in the 2008 Tony award-winning musical, "In The Heights."

Chelsea Stock

Chelsea Stock played the title role in our 1999 production of "Annie." Today, Stock is on Broadway playing the understudy for Ariel in "The Little Mermaid."

Thomas G. Marquez

Award-winning costume designer Thomas G. Marquez learned his trade at Cabrillo Stage in the late '70s. His career has included costume and design for regional theater, movies and television. Marquez returned to Cabrillo Stage to costume both "Guys And Dolls" (2006) and "Kiss Me Kate" (2007). He won the 2007 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award and appeared on Project Jay, a spin-off of Project Runway. He currently designs on the ABC television show Brothers and Sisters.

Belle Callaway

Cabrillo Stage's first production was "Chicago" in 1981. It starred the amazing Belle Callaway, who currently has the distinction of having played more performances of Roxie Hart (standby) in the Broadway production of "Chicago" than anyone else.

Valerie Marcus Ramshur

Valerie Marcus Ramshur was a chorus member in the early years of Cabrillo Stage and has gone on to become an award-winning Broadway costume designer. She returned to Cabrillo Stage in 2005 to costume design "The Fantasticks." She recently was the associate designer on the Broadway production of "Lombardi and The Motherf**ker In The Hat," starring Chris Rock, which was just nominated for four Tony Awards.

As told to Christa Martin

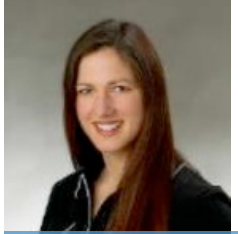
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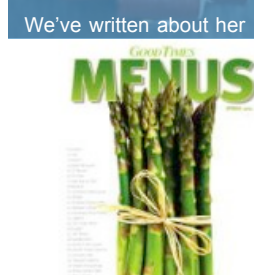
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