

## Registration Scheduled for WYACT's Professional Performing Arts Classes

**WESTFIELD**—The 13th season of professional classes in the performing arts has been revealed by Cynthia Meryl, Broadway performer and Artistic Director of the Westfield Young Artists' Cooperative Theatre (WYACT) and stage director of this summer's production of *West Side Story* at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and the Algonquin Arts Theatre.

The Union County Educational Services Commission and Superintendent Ed Hartnett has made it possible for WYACT to continue offering acting, musical theatre and dance classes at Centennial High School, 728 Westfield Avenue in Westfield.

Registration will be held in the school's gymnasium from Monday to Wednesday, September 8 to 10, from 4 to 8 p.m.

WYACT's Beginners, Intermediate, and Advanced Acting classes concentrate on improvisation, character development and scene study. Three levels of Musical Theatre focus on song selection and interpretation, ensemble work, voice and musical theatre movement.

Meryl, a professional actress in the New York and national theatre arena for over 25 years, will oversee all classes and instruct Advanced Acting, all Musical Theatre Classes and private voice.

New additions to the WYACT facility include Radio City Rockette Michelle Tolson, who has been dancing for 19 years and teaching for 13 years. She will teach Tap and Funk, a combination of hip-hop and jazz.

When she is not performing at Radio City Music Hall, she teaches the Rockette Experience in New York and across the country, judges dance competitions and is an adjunct professor in the musical theatre department at

Wagner College in Staten Island. She also coaches young women in the Miss New York, Miss New Hampshire and Miss Massachusetts pageant system for Miss America. Tolson is a

graduate of Montclair State University (MSU). Brown holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Acting and a minor in Musical Theatre. She received the first Musical Theater Award from MSU.

Having performed beside Kim Zimmer of CBS' "Guiding Light," and Leslie Uggams, Brown has been seen on stage and has played the keyboard throughout the state in *High Spirits*, *Master Class*, *Nunsense*, *Fiddler On The Roof*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *An Empty Plate In The Café Du Grand Boeuf*, *Titanic*, and *Bourgeois Gentleman*.

Jonathon Ponder will teach Stretch/Aerobics, a class designed to stretch the bodyline, strengthen and tone the muscles, combined with a low-impact cardiovascular workout.

Ponder dances with the Hudson Repertory Dance Theatre (HRDT) and has toured with HRDT in New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and The Caribbean. Besides his performances with HRDT, he is currently teaching West African, tap

and modern dance at the school to children and adults. He is the first recipient of the school's Teacher of the Year Award.

Dan Barris will share the Tap and Funk responsibilities with Tolson. In addition to teaching for WYACT and judging dance and talent competitions nationwide, he will host the New York Dance Experience, a company designed to send choreographers and dance educators around the country, providing all-day workshops to students nationwide in the most current styles of dance.

Barris' students have performed and studied with Ann Reinking, the late Gregory Hines, the Alvin Ailey Company, the Joffrey Ballet and the Governor's School for the Arts. Currently performing on tour in South Africa, Kimani Fowlin, professional dancer and choreographer and African Dance instructor at Rutgers, will return to teach the Tuesday Hip-Hop class.

Heather Bialy, choreographer and ballet instructor for the Performing Arts Program at Somerset County Vocational-Technical School, will teach WYACT's Jazz and Ballet classes.

Elaine Molinaro, director and professor at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, will teach Intermediate I Acting.

Meryl stage-directed and, with her husband, Ted Agress, WYACT Executive Director and Broadway veteran, produced the troupe's 27 productions, including *Carousel*, *Oliver!*, *Brigadoon*, *Once On This Island*, *South Pacific*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *The Children's Hour*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *The Gay Divorce*.

Meryl designs the WYACT classes to prepare the young performer for auditions and the professional stage. She said that she would like to see young performers develop the commitment and discipline to learn an artform well, whether it be in music, dance, or drama; and in doing so, build the confidence they need not only for a career in theatre, but to face any challenge in life.

For more information about WYACT's performing arts program and registration, please call (908) 233-3200 or e-mail wyact@erols.com.



DANCING AT THE GYM... Riff (Todd Kubrak) and Graziella (Eileen Cole) were swinging and swaying in WYACT's summer production of *West Side Story*.

pageant winner and was crowned Miss New Hampshire in 1996 and competed in the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City.

Actress, singer and pianist Blair Brown will teach Beginners I & II Acting and will be Musical Director of the Musical Theatre classes.

Brown began studying music and piano at an early age and drama and musical theatre with Meryl at 11. That year, she played an original composition at Carnegie Hall before composing a musical score for WYACT's first full production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which she played "Philstrate." She also played "Terry" in WYACT's production of *Stage Door* at the Union County Arts Center.

### POPCORN™

## Open Range: Back In the Saddle Again



One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER  
3 popcorns

Chances are Kevin Costner's *Open Range* is for you, pardner, if you like cowboy movies, enjoy a good character study or two, including an endearing paean to friendship, if your sense of romance dictates that true love can blossom under the most trying of circumstances and you have a particular fondness for evocative cinematography, specifically of the vanishing west, and being socially conscious, appreciate a movie with metaphoric value.

Directing himself as former gunslinger Charley Waite, aided and abetted by Robert Duvall as Boss Spearman, his cowboy mentor, Costner asks us to return with him to the past. But you wonder: "Will this be the self-indulgent Costner? After all, that could be such a lonesome trail. Or, will this be the wonderfully effusive, acceptably schmaltzy Costner?"

The methodically woven tale, adapted from Luran Paine's novel by Craig Storper, starts off slowly. There is attention to detail, specifically as regards the filigree of relationships. Costner wants us to know that cowboys were just people. So cowboys banter and hide, even if it has no immediate effect on the plot.

The dramatic payoff comes when harm befalls any of those characters that have been made human to us. The realistic portrayal, managed without excusing any of the mythic qualities that make westerns so enchanting, is a cross between Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, but without the extra-strength moralisms, and Robert Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, but without the desperate naturalism.

All told, it eventually turns into quite a ride, capped off by an action-packed finale the likes of which we haven't seen since any of the dozen or so versions of "Gunfight at the OK Corral." But this is far more brutal. While it probably only takes up about 15 taut minutes of celluloid, the superbly choreographed fight scene reminds of the advice that screenwriting professor Robert McKee (Brian Cox) gives a distraught Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) in *Adaptation*: "Wow them in the end." That it does.

We are introduced to Boss Spearman and his younger sidekick, Charley Waite. During a rainstorm that confines them and their two helpers, Mose (Abraham Benrubi) and Button (Diego Luna), under a lean-to for 24 hours, a few of their horses abscond in fright. In tight quarters, Costner etches the interrelationships.

When the sun arrives, Duvall's cattleman stoically sets after and then returns with the equines. Upon

witnessing this, Costner's Charley both installs a sense of pageantry and ennobles his partner's thus established character by enthusiastically remarking: "Boy, ain't no one can cowboy like Boss Spearman." We need no more proof. Charley's character isn't so quick to develop. And that's just the point. He's the pivotal one. Sure, Boss has a past, as well as a real first name. But we suspect his resume isn't quite as dark as the one Charley hasn't chosen to divulge up until now. Naturally, since this is how plots usually work, that's all about to change.

Push comes to shove in the form of a range war, but not the more traditional sort we've come to know, between the sodbusters and the cattlemen. Instead, we are made privy to a gray area of land ownership and jurisprudence that once existed. For as the title of *Open Range* intimates, here it's the emerging cattle barons versus the dwindling free grazers.

Nasty Denton Baxter, portrayed convincingly by Michael Gambon, represents the former. Our guys are the latter. An interesting little conundrum is presented.

For obvious dramatic reasons, the two sides are hardly weighted evenly. Not only is Baxter a mean cuss who probably came by his land and fortune by evil means, but also a foreigner with an accent. Because he has the cowardly Sheriff Poole (James Russo) in his pocket, how he makes a sham of democracy and due process renders him even more distasteful. What we probably find most resentful is what his example bodes.

One suspects wise old Boss knew this day was coming. Representing the soul of the emerging nation, the cowpoke might even be able to reconcile the reality of it all. But also true to that soul, he won't be pushed around. There is a flame in Boss that simply can't be extinguished — his sense of right and wrong. It is an identifying resolve. It says he will survive. You see, he just has to because democracy is the last, and most important, bastion of the dream. Otherwise, it is all for nothing.

So in *Open Range*, when Baxter begins his bullying, it's no wonder that Boss and Charley have no recourse but to fight the good fight. Which, when combined with a surprisingly effective love story involving Annette Bening, leaves us movegoing tenderfoots no choice but to throw our 10-gallon hats up in the air with approval and yelp. "Yippee-i-o-ki-ay."

*Open Range*, rated R, is a Touchstone Pictures release directed by Kevin Costner and stars Robert Duvall, Kevin Costner and Annette Bening. Running time: 145 minutes.

# Arts & Entertainment



## My Take on It

With Kerriane Spellman Cort

### Soggy End of Summer Makes Fall Most Welcome

By KERRIANNE SPELLMAN CORT  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

It's a rainy Labor Day and I sit here at my computer contemplating the universe. My dog is soaking wet after his morning walk and he just jumped up on the couch, muddy paws and all. I swear he was smiling as he nimbly leapt onto my *Wizard of Oz* blanket, spiting me, as if I had ordered the inclement holiday weather.

I live a block from the beach and I can smell the ocean as the breeze wafts into my window. The usual rowdy kids in their convertibles on the way to Sandy Hook are absent from my street today. I'm sure that countless holiday travelers are cursing Mother Nature right now, but I find it rather nice.

While the end of summer doesn't officially happen until the fourth week of September, Labor Day has always signified the end of beach season. And I say hooray.

I have sat in traffic on my way home from the city on a Friday evening for nearly two hours. I have waited for over an hour for a table at a waterside restaurant that isn't that spectacular. My electric bill doubled in the months of July and August. And all because it is summertime.

Don't get me wrong. I love summer. I'm a self-proclaimed mermaid and if I couldn't at least glimpse a bit of the water everyday, I'm sure that I would shrivel up and die. But there is still something so wonderful about the end of this season.

While autumn in fact signifies the slowing down of life, trees lose their leaves, it gets colder and the days grow shorter, I actually view autumn as a sign of renewal. I think of the thrill of the first day of school. Going off to college for the first time. New shoes.

My nephew, Tyler, is starting fifth grade next week and his excitement is contagious. He can't wait to see who will be in his class. He is particularly optimistic that his new teacher this year is actually someone

who taught me third grade, way, way back when. He hopes that she will cut him some slack because she knew his aunt. I told him not to count on it. Tyler's enthusiasm made me start to think about all of the things that I have to look forward to. True, I am not going back to school, praise the Lord, but there are many, many wonderful things that the changing of the seasons will bring me.

My dog will no longer come home from a hike in the hills covered with ticks. My electric bill will stabilize allowing me to buy more shoes. The new fall line-up on television is exciting for all, but for me, it also can indicate more acting work.

I look forward to the smell of wood burning in a fireplace on a Sunday afternoon while grown men scream and yell at the television, chicken wings flying in every direction. I can make baked ziti again! If I gain a pound or two, I can hide it with a big, fuzzy sweater. I am sick of salads. I want some pasta.

I am so happy right now, sitting here on this rainy holiday. I awoke somewhat sad when I saw the gloominess outside my window, but my mood soon changed. It's not a bad day. It's just a wet day. The end of a season? Maybe. But the start of a new one, as well. Life continues on, whether we like it or not. I think it is best to seek joy wherever we can find it, whether it is a sunny summer day or a crisp October afternoon. It is, as they say, all good.

## Trent Johnson

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school college succession. "I took off three years after high school just to study the piano," he explained. "I studied religiously." People warned him he would never go to college if he didn't go right away. "It was a tremendous time for me. I showed myself to be responsible," he said.

Later, he proved his critics wrong by graduating the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University and the Julliard School.

An active organ recitalist, Johnson has given recitals in major churches in New York City, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Boston and northern New Jersey.

Recently, he was commissioned by the Colonial Symphony in Morristown to write a new work for orchestra to be premiered in April 2004. It is a piece for viola and string orchestra, and songs set to poetry of Stephen Crane.

When not making music of some sort, Johnson loves to scuba dive off the New Jersey/New York coast.

"There are a number of shipwrecks there that people don't know about. It's simply fascinating," he shared.

Fascinating is a word that could be applied to this artist.

"The creative process is what always pushes me," Johnson said of his composing. "Although I appreciate all kinds of music, serious music speaks to me and that's where my talents lie."

## Pen & Ink

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she offered. A tweak here, an Adobe Photoshop trick there, and voila! A once-revered image might become open to perverse interpretation.

Using technology, such as Elins employs in his pixel painting methods, he knows he is afforded the opportunity to "be outrageous more effectively." While "outrageous" is surely an understatement with respect to *GQ's* assignment, Elins has built a rather prestigious career manipulating images to accompany the words of an editor or journalist in a bounty of notable media. And, his illustration for *GQ* is not his first lampoon of George W.

*Emmy* magazine procured Elin's illustration of Bush as a paddle-toting fraternity brother. *George* magazine paid Elins for his picture of Bush and Al Gore sparring, dressed like two little boys with propeller-topped hats. NBC's cast of "Seinfeld" became bobble-head dolls, Enron's Ken Lay was Pinocchio, and heavy-weight and Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura turned into Christopher Columbus for *The New York Times*. These images Elins used in all of these illustrations were hardly scathing or so sacred that Christianity might become the sole butt of the jokes.

Did Elins go too far? To some extent, by the tone of his voice last week, I think he realized that the use of certain images in his illustrations could have consequences. Before he left on vacation, those consequences began to reverberate loudly, and have been unrelenting as the September issue of the magazine, which is as weighty as *The Bible*, sits on newsstands. Because of these consequences, *GQ* has endured interviews with "The Today Show's" Matt Lauer and countless others, all the while not admitting full responsibility for the illustration that has offended many.

Sure, Elins could have said "no" to the assignment. However, I have deduced that he was just doing the task he was given. While I wouldn't kill the messenger, I would hope, in the future, the artist considers what message he is allowing his art to stand behind.

"I feel bad if it offended people," Elins confessed with responsibility in his voice.

As for *GQ*, we know Who will have the final word.

## S. Allyn Schaeffer Will Teach Pastel Techniques On Sept. 17

**SCOTCH PLAINS**—The Scotch Plains and Fanwood Arts Association (SPFAA) will begin its fall season on Wednesday, September 17, when Fanwood's renowned artist S. Allyn Schaeffer presents a still life demonstration in pastels.

The event will follow the organization's 7:30 p.m. general meeting at the Fanwood Community Center on North Avenue in Fanwood.

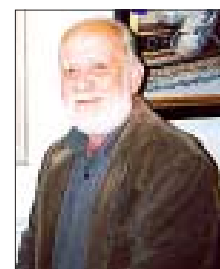
A lifetime member of the Pastel Society of America (PSA), Schaeffer was awarded the title of Master Pastellist in 1988. He is a member of the Salmagundi Club and Hudson Valley Art Association. He has also been included in the *Who's Who in American Art, 21st Edition*.

Schaeffer's artwork is included in collections of Schering-Plough in Madison, PSA in New York, New Jersey Sports & Exposition Authority in East Rutherford, Monmouth Park and Oceanport, as well as The New Jersey Bell Telephone Company in Newark.

His commissioned works include his well-known racing paintings at Monmouth Park. Schaeffer has exhibited from New York to Florida, published in many art magazines, and locally taught painting and anatomy figure drawing.

The public is encouraged to attend the free demonstration, which is sponsored by the SPFAA.

For more information, please call Thomas Yeager at (908) 322-5438.



S. Allyn Schaeffer

## Trevis Publishes Consumer Book

**CRANFORD**—Local resident, Robert Trevis, has authored "Keep Your Hands Out of My Pocket," a book published by iUniverse, Inc.

The book is designed to give people the negotiation skills they need to become expert shoppers. According to Trevis, it takes simple, everyday actions and focuses them into powerful negotiation tools.

"Most people fail to prepare themselves when shopping for a car, for example," said Trevis, a Cranford resident. "They go into expecting to get the best deal by accident. These same people wouldn't consider trying their favorite weekend sport skills against a professional, and yet they go up against the professional car dealers without a clear idea on how to get the best deal."

Trevis holds a Master of Business Administration in Management for Managers of Technology. He spent almost 25 years in business working for both IBM and in management for Siemens.

"Keep Your Hands..." was published in July. The book is available through www.iUniverse.com at \$24.95 (hardcover) and \$14.95 (paperback).



## Local Stars S. Plains Resident Authors Novel Featuring First Ladies

**SCOTCH PLAINS**—Scotch Plains resident Feather Foster has written "Ladies: A Conjecture of Personalities," a novel in which first ladies tell their own stories in their own words and styles.

Through dialogue-boxes, first ladies like Martha Washington and Mamie Eisenhower, converse to each other across eternity. The modern first ladies, from Jacqueline Kennedy to Hillary Clinton participate in commentary.

"The old gals talk to the reader and they talk amongst themselves," said Foster. "They talk about their husbands, and their children, and the White House, and the times they lived in. And, of course, politics."

"It's not just the stories of their lives—it's an opening into what they were like as people. They were definitely not the "non-entities" that history usually calls them," she said.

Foster has been an "amateur" presidential historian for three decades. Following a career in advertising and having written many children's musical shows, the author decided to draw on her thousand-volume personal presidential library and her love of history by penning this book.

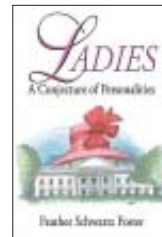
"Of course 'Ladies...' is a work of fiction," noted Foster. "After all, it is truly a

conjecture of their personalities. But, it is all based on the facts of their lives, the lives of their husbands and the times they lived in."

"Most biographies of first ladies are dull," she added, "full of 'almanac stuff.' This book livens things up, especially when the ladies cross the centuries through eternity to talk to each other."

The 255-page book is published by PublishAmerica of Baltimore, Md. and retails for \$21.95. The volume is available at all major booksellers' websites,

www.amazon.com, www.bn.com, www.publishamerica.com or visit the author's web page, www.a.u.t.h.o.r.s.d.e.n.c.o.m/featherschwartzfoster.



The Arts & Entertainment section of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* brings readers exclusive profiles about residents with exceptional creative talent, critiques on productions by local theater groups, reviews of concerts by area musicians, and art show coverage. Every week, editorial columns address the latest issues facing our community, which is rich in culture, while mothers and young readers turn to the Book Nook column to learn about literature to fill their libraries and expand their minds. As a member of our area's creative community, your advertisements would be widely noticed by a readership of tens of thousands both in print and on the Internet.

For Additional Information call:  
The Westfield Leader & Times of Scotch Plains Advertising / Marketing Department  
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