



FAIRYTALE ENDING... Teenagers from the local area participate in yearlong community workshops, often with revolving casts, affording multiple opportunities to perform. Above is a recent production of *Cinderella* by Pineda Summer Conservatory, performed at the Cranford Dramatic Club. Pictured, left to right, are: Aleta Nadolny, fairy godmother; Cara Costa, Cinderella; Zach Love, Prince Charming; Ryan Kiel, the King, and Liz Griesmer, the Queen.

TAKE THE STAGE

WF Dad Plays Evil Evremonde On Broadway in *Tale of Two Cities*



By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD—Westfield resident Les Minski has traded in his self-proclaimed moniker of "Mr. Mom" for the title "The most evil man in France." As the Marquis St. Evremonde in Broadway's *A Tale of Two Cities*, the musical that premiered in Manhattan on Tuesday, August 19, he plays a man who, in Mr. Minski's words, "has no redeeming qualities whatsoever."

Before this Broadway debut, however, Mr. Minski did not fully pursue his passion for drama. "You can't plan on supporting a family if you are a full-time actor," he told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* in a telephone interview during a rehearsal break days before the opening.



Westfield's Les Minski

The dream of doing professional theatre faded into the background with the responsibility of supporting a wife, Ann, and two daughters, Elizabeth and Katherine.

He stayed home with their two girls and worked in construction, doing repair jobs both big and small. "I guess I really was Mr. Mom," he said.

Mr. Minski's circuitous journey to the Great White Way started approximately four years ago when the Westfield resident was invited to go to a reading of the Charles Dickens classic.

"Broadway shows very often begin in this way with a series of readings," he said. "After I was introduced to it, I told my friend, producer Ron Sharpe, that I just had to be a part of the musical."

"I said to him, 'I'm an actor, I do voices; I'll move scenery or even pass out programs,'" he explained. During the four years of readings

before the show's premiere, Mr. Minski got to read the narration and played various roles to help the potential backers of the show get the flavor of the musical.

"We held the readings at the Marriott Marquis in NYC and other venues on Monday nights, the evening that in the theatre is traditionally 'dark' so that professional actors, recording artists and night club performers could lend their talents," he said.

After the producers heard Mr. Minski's different voices, he was invited to formally audition for the Evremonde role, which he secured for the Saratoga, Fla., out-of-town premiere last spring.

Evremonde, evil personified, represents the worst of the aristocracy during the French Revolution. Mr. Minski predicts audiences will hate his character, but will fall in love with the lyrics and music written by Jill Santoriello.

"If you are a human being, you'll be moved by this story," he said.

"When I heard the ensemble sing their first song, my jaw dropped," he said. "We have incredible leads — James Barbour, Natalie Toro, Gregg Edelman and Aaron Lazar — but this ensemble will elevate the show; there are incredibly talented, motivated people here."

Despite portraying a despicable character, Mr. Minski, extremely affable in real-life, has invited Union County residents to meet him after performances at the stage door to say hello.

A number of websites are now offering preview prices for *A Tale of Two Cities*, so take advantage and see your Westfield neighbor on the Broadway stage before the September 18 opening night.

Another suggestion concerned preparation of the cheese platter.

"Cheeses must be removed from the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before serving so that they reach room temperature," she said.

Ms. Tisdall also reviewed how to serve cheese, from what to serve it on, what entrees to pair it with and how to cut it.

Part of her presentation concerned how to select a wine to complement the cheese on the cheese platter.

"There are no rules when it comes to pairing wine and cheese," she said, adding that it is mostly a matter of personal taste.

For the person who absolutely doesn't know where to start, Ms. Tisdall suggests selecting a wine that comes from the same region as that of the cheese.

"This way, the grapes and the grass the cow, sheep or goat has grazed on have been exposed to the same atmosphere," she explained.

Because municipal regulations prohibit open bottles of wine in the library, Ms. Tisdall used unopened bottles to demonstrate wine and cheese pairings. She suggested a white wine like a Sauvignon Blanc with goat cheese, a fruity Zinfandel with an aged sheep-milk cheese and a full-bodied wine like a Merlot to accompany a full-flavored cow's-milk cheese.

"The main thing to remember is that neither the wine nor the cheese should overpower the other," she said.

FML's next "Do you know how?" event will occur on Thursday, September 4, from 7 to 8 p.m.

On that evening, FML Director Dan Weiss will present "Do you know how to read a graphic novel?"

For more information about this event, contact FML at (908) 322-6400.

Performing Arts Classes At NJ Youth Theatre in Fall

AREA — Following successful summer runs of the musicals *1776* and *Midnight Madness* at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), Cynthia Meryl, artistic director of the New Jersey Youth Theatre (NJYT), is proud to announce NJYT's 17th season of professional classes in the performing arts beginning the week of October 14.

NJYT will hold registration sessions for drama, voice, musical theatre and dance classes at its studio at 172 West Westfield Avenue in Roselle Park on Wednesdays and Thursdays, September 3, 4, 24 and 25 from 4 to 8 p.m.

NJYT's beginner, intermediate, and advanced acting classes concentrate on improvisation, character development and scene study. The program offers three levels of Musical Theatre instruction focusing on song selection and interpretation, ensemble work, voice and musical theatre movement.

Ms. Meryl, a professional actress in the New York and national theatre arena for 35 years, oversees all classes and teaches advanced acting, all musical theatre classes and private voice.

James Campodonico returns to NJYT as musical director and piano accompanist. Mr. Campodonico taught vocal music for 33 years in the New Jersey public school system and acted as musical director to over 100 musical productions. An accomplished composer, his musical *Between The Lines* premiered at Luna Stage in Montclair and received the New Jersey "Tony" Award for "Best Musical Score" of the year from drama critic Peter Filichia of the *Star-Leader*.

Corinne Mucha will teach ballet and jazz at NJYT for her second year. Trained in ballet at The Princeton School of Ballet and American Repertory Ballet (ARB), Ms. Mucha's ARB credits include

Silkscreens by Graham Lustig, *Nightingale in the Nutcracker*, *Concerto Borocco* by George Balanchine, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, choreographed by Septime Weber.

Evan Edwards, NJYT tap instructor, has studied, performed and taught theatre arts all over the U.S. and Europe. His performance credits number more than 60, and include the premiere cast of *Miss Saigon* (in Germany) and the North American premiere of *I and Albert*.

Kathryn Cuca returns to NJYT for her fifth year as an acting instructor. A graduate of Boston University, she currently teaches theatre workshops for children, young adults and adults, and participates in independent theatre projects and films. Ms. Cuca presided over Boston-based theatre group Athena's Players from 2000-2003 and led the company to a number of awards and recognitions.

Along with NJYT executive director and Broadway veteran Ted Agress, Ms. Meryl has stage-directed and produced more than 35 NJYT productions.

NJYT has won a number of awards including: the New Jersey "Tony" for "Best Musical Revival"; "Best Stage Director of a Musical," and Music Theatre International Award of Excellence. NJYT receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and from the N.J. State Council on the Arts.

New Jersey Youth Theatre classes are designed to prepare young performers for auditions and the professional stage.

Students develop the confidence and tenacity needed not only to pursue a career in theatre, but also to face any challenge in life. For information on NJYT, visit njyouththeatre.org, call (908) 233-3200, or e-mail at info@njyouththeatre.org.



PIANIST PRODIGIES... The New Jersey Workshop for the Arts Music Studio offers Kids on Keys, a unique beginner piano experience for students ages 4 years and older. This accelerated program uses the exciting and innovative Musique Rapide method to help students learn the fundamentals of reading music.

NJ Workshop Announces A Variety of Fall Programs

WESTFIELD—More than 30 highly skilled music educators and professional artists will help students develop their musical talents as the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA) Music Studio begins its fall semester on September 8.

"What makes our studio unique is the faculty," said Ted Schlosberg, founder and executive director of the NJWA. "They have the knowledge and experience to accurately evaluate each student's ability and design instruction to fit the individual needs of the learner."

Both children and adults can enroll for vocal and instrumental music lessons at The Music Studio. The fall session, which begins on September 8, includes lessons in voice, strings, guitar, woodwinds, brass, percussion and piano, taught by a staff of more than 30 professional music educators.

Kids on Keys helps children learn the fundamentals of playing the piano.

Susannah Marks will begin teaching the program on Sunday, September 7. Other classes will take place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Two new courses are specifically designed for children ages 5 to 7. Young Voices is a group vocal lesson, which teaches children the correct techniques of singing, and Experiencing Guitar is group instruction for novice guitarists. Nicole Signorella will teach both courses.

The Music Studio also offers many opportunities for area musicians to play in its many performing ensembles, bands and orchestras, among them the Concert Band, the Training Chamber Orchestra, the Rockin' Jazz Ensemble, Simply Strings, the Alphon Ensemble, the Full Count Big Band and the NJWA Summer Symphony.

Young children, ages 3 to 5, can join Kids 'n' Arts, an art, music and theatre craft experience offered on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. or 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. Diane Burkam and Maureen Monroe will teach the drop-off classes, which begin on October 14.

Two new 10-week courses in the theatre department are being introduced this fall. Spontaneity Studio, taught by Irene Ulesky, is an improvisation course for students in grades six to eight. This improvisation class will begin on Tuesday, October 7. Beyond Broadway will be directed by Liz McConahay, a Broadway veteran. This class, which begins on Monday, October 6, will include instruction in singing, dancing and acting for aspiring actors in grades six through 12.



MEDIAEVAL TIMES... Westfield performers put on *Henry IV, Part 1* at the Westfield Memorial Library during a "Know The Show" presentation. This raucous comedy follows Prince Hal and the ever-fallible Sir John Falstaff.

Henry IV Promises Sword Fights, Kilts, Ancient Music

WESTFIELD—Troupe of Friends, a local non-profit theatre company composed largely of Westfield residents, is presenting its third annual production of free Shakespeare in the Park. This year's show is the raucous, historical/comedy, *Henry IV, Part 1*, and it will take place this weekend.

William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* follows the apprenticeship of good Prince Hal, a young man slated to become king, and his incorrigible and lovable scoundrel knight, Sir John Falstaff. Set in medieval times, when the actual events took place, the production features traditional medieval clothing, men in kilts, sword fights, and ancient Welsh, Scotch and English music.

Director Joe Penczak has gathered together 21 actors to produce an array of beautiful costumes, gorgeous scenery and comic characters who tell the story of Hal and Falstaff as they fight for truth, honesty and the occasional mug of wine.

Memorial Field in the Memorial Pool Complex on North Scotch Plains Avenue in Westfield will serve as the stage for *Henry IV, Part 1* on Friday, August 22, at 5 p.m. and at 4 p.m. on Saturday, August 23, and Sunday, August 24. People are encouraged to bring picnic blankets and chairs for this free event. Admission is free, and the rain location is the community room in the Westfield Town Hall at 425 East Broad Street.

POPCORN™

Pineapple Express: Punch Drunk



By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 and 1/2 popcorns

Lest you fear that *Pineapple Express* and other films of its ilk are signs that the apocalypse is nigh, take heart, Pops. Yep, we've been here before. What's old is again new. While I'd like to take credit for dubbing this stuff "The New Raunchiness," those with a little historical insight know that it's really the "New Burlesque."

Only the vulgarity has been ratcheted up. For to be edgy, to provide that occasional segue from the propriety that we otherwise aspire to, the naughtiness must be allowed to take one good-sized giant step out of the box.

Director David Gordon Green, working under the aegis of Judd Apatow (*Knocked Up*), a sort of Fagin to young filmmakers cutting their teeth on these little epithet-spewing eyebrow-raisers, establishes a cadence. Like a charismatic orator, he builds slowly, drawing us into what will soon catapult completely out of control.

We are introduced to the rather ordinary Dale Denton (Seth Rogen), a stoner who finds being a process server offers life's path of least resistance, "for now." Take two baby steps, though, and the 25-year-old visits his girlfriend, Angie (Amber Heard), at her high school. OK, she's eighteen. But how would you feel if it were your daughter?

Yet, a la Isaac and Tracy in *Manhattan* (1979), 'tis the younger one who seems to have all the sense. Serious Angie makes Seth Rogen's semi-slacker swear that he'll come over tonight for dinner and meet her parents. Hmm...that seems kind of normal. But wait. A stop-off at his drug dealer will change that.

Ensnared in his den, pot purveyor to the local demography, is James Franco's Saul Silver. He is a throwback, cultivated either through a studied delve into method acting or a trip in a time machine to the 1960's, but probably both. What ensues is a flirtatious dance, a satiric metaphor that might apply to any business transaction.

Indeed, product and currency are exchanged, but not before each sizes up the other for potential friendship. This includes chiding balanced by compliment; challenge succeeded by accommodation, and finally a cautious reserve followed by an uncomfortable laughter. A master in the language of the deal, Silver's rap is to English what scat is to singing.

Whether by destiny or happenstance, the two fates will soon intertwine and Denton will be making with the hip bon mots, too.

But for now, he's just enjoying this week's special, the *Pineapple Express*, before serving the day's last subpoena. Arriving at the residence, he witnesses a murder. One of the culprits is a cop. In his haste to flee, he drops a roach.

Now, if the reefer were anything but *Pineapple Express*, it wouldn't matter, my dear Watson. But considering the ultra potent properties and bouquet of said boutique weed, it soon dawns on Denton that the murderers, high muckamucks in the pot world, will be able to trace it back to Silver. He figures he owes the dude a heads up.

Thus, the groundwork is laid for the freaked out version of what Rick in *Casablanca* (1942) termed "the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Grabbing a few bags of the title marijuana, they take it on the lam. This leads, just for starters, to a night in the woods and a donnybrook with middleman Red (Danny R. McBride). There will be blood.

It is at this point that the movie abandons any semblance of good taste and takes its scandalous behavior to the next level. The language had been growing increasingly foul, but what now surprises is the progressive intensity of violence.

While the Keystone Kops may have been the first to mix the bopping of heads with laughter, this is a quantum leap.

It makes for strange brew as the comic and brutal natures of the film never really meld, but rather more resemble two parallel running trains that continually crisscross. Rapt viewers won't be able to help, but alternate from laughter to abashment, and back to laughter. Other screwball aspects interject, making the carnage seem all the crazier.

Having already logged numerous hours as the schlemiel forced to navigate challenges and opportunities outside of his sloth-inspired bailiwick, Seth Rogen manages the aforesaid insanity without ever breaking character. And though Mr. Franco complements with Vaudevilian aplomb, it's not quite certain which is Abbott and which is Costello.

Fact is, even with its bizarre, alchemical mix of drollery and violence, Mr. Green's shock and awe farce utilizes a traditional, albeit flimsy, structure for its plot. Only the times and what the traffic will allow have changed. And yet still, even if viewed with that open-minded spirit, you can't help but feel that *Pineapple Express* is as nutty as a fruitcake.

Pineapple Express, rated R, is a Columbia Pictures release directed by David Gordon Green and stars Seth Rogen, James Franco and Danny R. McBride. Running time: 111 minutes.

'All Points' Bulletin (see page 16)



Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood