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**Arts & Entertainment**

**No Handicaps in Premiere Stages' 2012 Play Festival Winner**

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

UNION—Winner of the 2012 Premiere Stages Play Festival at Kean University, *Handicapped People in their Formal Attire*, by playwright Kathryn Grant, opened on July 13, offering an insightful glimpse into a different era. The 1968 setting of the play is decades before Americans' consciousness was raised about politically correct language and accommodations for people with a physical or mental disability. There were not laws to assist people with disabilities until 1990 with Congress voting in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The setting of this intriguing two-act play is a black-tie fundraiser of the Delaware Association for the Handicapped. Agnes Sheehan (Rachel Pickup), a quadriplegic and founder of the organization that gives a voice to the disabled, is being honored as Delaware's Handicapped Person of Action and Purpose. The scene opens on a handsome set designed by Joseph Gourley that houses a corner of the wood-paneled ballroom, the dais and a cleverly-designed pocket door that slides to reveal a bar, a ladies room or a phone booth.

Theresa (Lori Hammel), Agnes' able-bodied sister, is slugging down Harvey Wallbangers at the affair. The two sisters have not seen each other in almost a year because of Theresa's busy life with six children. Agnes herself is kept occupied with an insurance business that she heads. Theresa, a sarcastic woman who was kicked out of a Catholic high school for flunking Latin, is in an ongoing fight generally with God and specifically the Catholic Church embodied in the figure of Monsignor Cooke (Ed Setrakian).

Ms. Hammel is spectacular in this role. The chip on her character's unhappy shoulder is as big as the Rock of Gibraltar. Ms. Hammel causes chills when she spits out the line, "...I got myself into this mess where I am running through life like a wind-up doll, with a game face and a black heart." Another marvelous performance is Mr. Setrakian's as the tipsy Monsignor who shares a few too many secrets of his own with the gala's audience.

One of Agnes' staunch supporters is co-worker and maimed Korean veteran Eddie (David Harrell) who breaks bleak news to Agnes that their



Photo courtesy of Roy Groething

**LISTEN CAREFULLY...** Agnes (Rachel Pickup), Eddie (David Harrell), and Lori Hammel (Theresa) listen to Monsignor Cooke (Ed Setrakian) address the ballroom in Premiere Stages Production of *Handicapped People in their Formal Attire* by Kathryn Grant, directed by John Wooten.

fundraiser/gala is not working out as expected. Many of the donors either did not show up or did not deliver their anticipated fat checks. Lighting up the dance floor, though, is Princeton graduate Raymond (John McGinty), a young deaf man who adores Agnes. Mr. McGinty steals scenes in his ruffle-shirted tuxedo and contagious smile that belies the depth of his character's secret.

While 1960s instrumental music of "Chooch and the Even Tones" plays in the background, Reverend Biggs (Roland Sands), Agnes' black van driver, is "working the room" for donations for his storefront mission. Mr. Sands makes the Reverend a bigger-than-life figure that sports a wide grin to mask his resentment. His wife, Cordelia, who normally is the female assistant for Agnes, is at home with their 15-year-old unmarried daughter who is in labor. So stepping into the assistant's job for the night is Agnes' sister, Theresa, who proves herself nothing like the saint by the same name.

Throughout the evening as people drink and lay their inhibitions aside, layers of raw emotion, pent-up resentment and guilt among the characters unfold like pedals of a wilting corsage. While tensions fester inside the ballroom of the Hotel duPont, they erupt outside on the streets of Wilmington. America was flooded with a nationwide tidal wave of riots in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

But do not be fooled; this is not an historical play. It is an intimate story told lovingly of an able-bodied woman and her strong sister trapped in a helpless body. There are no pitying looks for Agnes in her wheelchair, though. She is an angel-faced lady of steel who knows how to get what she needs and wants. The connection between Ms. Hammel and Ms. Pickup is insightful, bringing near perfection to their roles. The lovely Ms. Pickup delivers a heart-breaking interpretation of a woman racked with pain from Cerebral Palsy, yet one who needs to keep up appearances of strength with freshly done makeup, hair and nails.

Under the stellar direction of John Wooten, the actors tell Ms. Grant's

fascinating tale through sympathetic characters who draw in the audience with their credibility. Mr. Wooten never lets the characters run away with the pacing, but allows for normal, natural pauses and a tempo that feels so right.

Out of 400 entries of the 2012 Premiere Stages contest, Ms. Grant is a winner for the second time, the first being with *The Good Counselor* that won in 2010. The team of Grant and Wooten is a winning one presenting her play that tells us to listen for music that others do not hear and dance when the world says you can't.

**Handicapped People in their Formal Attire**

Thursdays and Fridays at 8 p.m.  
Saturdays at 3 p.m.  
Sunday at 3 p.m.  
Zella Fry Theatre in the Vaughn Eames Building at Kean University  
Box office: (908) 737-SHOW  
Through July 29

**Continuo Arts Foundation To Present Willy Wonka**

WESTFIELD - The Summer Musical Theater Conservatory offered by the Continuo Arts Foundation is currently rehearsing for its upcoming shows. The performances include *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and *A Rising Star Showcase* with Junior and Senior Divisions featuring selections from *The Lion King*, *Wicked*, *Annie*, *Hairspray* and more.

Audiences will be delighted with music spanning the Broadway spectrum and enter a world of pure imagination with Willie Wonka, the Candy Man, Oompah Loompas and friends. Participating in this three-week intensive performing arts experience, young artists are learning about the key elements of musical theater while working with an experienced, professional staff. Twenty-seven conservatory participants ages 7-18, represent area communities of Summit, Westfield, Short Hills, Chatham, Madison, Berkeley Heights, New Providence, and Skillman. Rehearsals take place at historic Twin Maples in Summit, and the Saturday, July 21, performances will be at Temple Emanu-El in Westfield.

Directing the 2012 Conservatory is Owner and Founder of the Marrocco Academy of Dance/MAD Dance, Cherilyn Marrocco. Mrs. Marrocco is a Miami/New York-based choreographer, director, instructor and performer with over 25 years of dance training, 12 years of dance instructing, and a Bachelor's Degree in Music Theater/Drama Education. She brings with her a diverse set of skills and talents, an understanding for children and their different learning styles, and a life-long passion for the beauty, creativity and freedom of dance.

Tickets are \$5 for children/students/seniors and \$10 for adults. To purchase tickets, call (908) 264-5324 or visit [www.continuoarts.com](http://www.continuoarts.com). Temple Emanu-El is located at 756 Broad Street, Westfield.

**Yoga and Healing Center to Host Fundraiser to Benefit The Retreat Project**

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Yoga and Healing Center of Scotch Plains is holding a fundraiser on Friday, August 17, at 6:30 p.m. to benefit The Retreat Project, an organization that brings yoga and other mind and body modalities to low-income, underserved women touched by cancer.

The documentary film "Yogawoman" about how women are changing the face of yoga, followed by a question and answer session with one of the movie's contributors, Tari Prinster, cancer survivor, yoga teacher, and co-director of OM Yoga Women Cancer Survivors Teacher Training program.

A donation of \$20 will be accepted at the door, all proceeds to benefit The Retreat Project. A raffle drawing will also be held for great prizes.

For more information, or questions, contact The Yoga and Healing Center at 1744 East 2nd Street, Scotch Plains, (908) 322-0003 or visit [www.yogaandhealingcenter.com](http://www.yogaandhealingcenter.com).

**Hooray for Hollywood! And Hooray for Everything Else in L.A.**

By FRED T. ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

There is something both very glamorous and a bit seedy about Los Angeles—that sprawling city of nearly 4,000,000 where fame and fortune, as well as dashed dreams are on stark display. And that duality—the opulence and extravagance of Beverly Hills alongside the gritty underbelly of Hollywood—makes it one of my favorite places to visit in the United States.

While San Francisco is truly beautiful and San Diego is unbeatable for the climate, L.A., to me anyway, trumps all of California's great cities. It is so big (nearly 500 square miles; Manhattan, by comparison, is barely 22 square miles) and so varied—and picturesque in so many spots—that you can visit the City of Angels once a month and easily plan your time around a different part of town on each trip.

For now, however, we will try to fit in as much as we can into a thousand or so words, so let's begin on iconic Sunset Boulevard, which runs from downtown L.A. all the way to the Pacific Ocean, 24 miles away. Start out in Brentwood, a mostly residential area just west of the 405 Freeway (numbered highways are referred to not as Highway 405, but as the 405, the 110, the 5, etc.).

First, two bits of advice: you will need a car in this auto-centric city and you will need to always budget extra time for travel because there can be traffic anywhere and at any time. A 10-mile drive on the freeway from the airport to your hotel can take 10 minutes, as it did on one visit, or more than an hour, as it did on another trip.

Head east on Sunset, crossing over the 405 and then into Westwood and Bel Air. Sunset Boulevard is quite winding in this area and there are a few sharp curves so stay alert on this at times fast-moving roadway that is also a lot of fun to drive, once you get comfortable and especially with good music blaring from your radio. Along the way, you will take in some of wealthy L.A.'s lovely and lush residential properties.

Before you head into Hollywood, take a left off Sunset onto Benedict Canyon Road and zip up into the hills to check out the neighborhoods. If you have a fascination with Hollywood's morbid side, turn left onto Cielo Drive and head up this very narrow street to a private drive-

way across from Bella Drive. The most recent street number on this private drive is 10066; it was here, at the far end of the driveway, that the Manson murders took place in 1969.

Back down on Sunset, take another detour, turning right onto Beverly Drive, and cruise along this wide and very pretty thoroughfare through some very affluent neighborhoods lined with very tall palm trees and very large estates. Turn right onto Santa Monica Boulevard, then left onto Rodeo Drive and into one of the more expensive shopping districts you will likely see anywhere. Cartier, Dolce and Gabbana, Barney's, Louis Vuitton, Hugo Boss and a slew of very pricey boutiques line the street, which is a shrine to conspicuous consumption.

After abusing your credit cards on Rodeo, get yourself back up to Sunset Boulevard and head first into West Hollywood, where the street is referred to as the Sunset Strip. You will pass by some legendary nightspots like the Whiskey-a-Go Go and the Roxy. Gigantic billboards advertising everything from fashion to movies to recording artists loom above the Strip. Here you will also find the foreboding castle-like Chateau Marmont, a celebrity hotel where numerous stars have often sought refuge from the pressures of being famous and from the paparazzi.

Above the Strip are the Hollywood Hills, home to many celebrities and a challenging drive for the uninitiated as the narrow and twisting streets follow the contours of the hills and are laid out in no particular pattern, making it quite easy to get very lost and disoriented, even for those with a great sense of direction.

Further down on Sunset is Holly-



Fred T. Rossi for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
**HOORAY!...** The iconic Hollywood sign in Los Angeles was originally a real estate developer's advertisement.

wood itself—do not expect to be wowed by movie stars and glamour. They are not here—except for the occasional movie premiere and the annual Academy Awards.

On the other 350 or so days of the year, Hollywood is mostly filled with tourists seeking out the elusive celebrity but having to mostly settle for countless souvenir shops, second-rate museums, retailers, tour buses and Hard Rock Café-like eating spots. Tucked in among the newer buildings are the occasional crumbling ones still sporting rusting signage from their glory days of yesteryear—hotels and the like that were probably hotbeds of activity in their heyday—that harken back to when Hollywood itself was the place to be.

From this area, you can see Hollywood's most iconic image—the 45-foot tall white letters of the Hollywood sign high above the Hollywood Hills in Griffith Park.

Another L.A. icon is the cylindrical Capitol Records building, located near the equally iconic corner of Hollywood and Vine. And while you are strolling along Hollywood Boulevard, look down at the sidewalk at the nearly 2,500 stars that make up the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

After the faux glitz of Hollywood, make your way up to Griffith Park a

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**EXTENDED CONTRACT...** New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO) Music Director Jacques Lacombe, right, has extended his contract through the 2015-16 season, the Orchestra has announced. The acclaimed music director, who began his tenure with the NJSO in 2010, will continue in that capacity for three years beyond his current contract, which expires at the end of August 2013.

**Lacombe Extends Contract As NJSO Music Director**

NEWARK — New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO) Music Director Jacques Lacombe has extended his contract through the 2015-16 season, the Orchestra has announced.

The acclaimed music director, who began his tenure with the NJSO in 2010, will continue in that capacity for three years beyond his current contract, which expires at the end of August 2013.

"My experiences as Music Director of the NJSO over the past two seasons have been both enjoyable and creatively stimulating," Mr. Lacombe said. "I have relished the opportunity to bring this great Orchestra to venues throughout and beyond New Jersey, and I have appreciated the chance to become familiar with wonderful, diverse communities across the state. I am thrilled to extend my relationship with the NJSO, and I look forward to continuing to present captivating programs and to interacting with the audiences and communities of New Jersey."

Since becoming the NJSO's Music Director in October 2010, Mr. Lacombe has garnered praise from critics and audiences for his creative programming and his talents on the podium. Under Lacombe's leadership, the NJSO has presented daring new programs and engaged in inspired collaborations with other institutions in New Jersey and beyond.

Highlights of the NJSO's "Man and Nature" Winter Festivals have included performances of Tan Dun's Water Concerto, Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*—with a realization of the composer's "color organ"—and the commissioning of the Francesca Harper Project to create original choreography for Beethoven's ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*.

NJSO Board Co-Chair Ruth Lipper stated, "Jacques has invigorated the Orchestra both on and off stage, with fresh takes on beloved orchestral music, an investment in new and deserving works and a desire to be a part of the New Jersey communities in which the NJSO makes its home. We are thrilled that he will continue to lead the Orchestra beyond next season."

Lacombe created an ambitious multi-year initiative that the Orchestra began in the 2010-11 season, his inaugural season as Music Director. Through the New Jersey Roots Project, the NJSO has performed the music of composers who were born in New Jersey or whose artistic identity was shaped by their time spent in the Garden State. The Orchestra has presented multiple premieres through the project, including George Walker's *Sinfonia No. 4 (Strands)* and Robert Aldridge's *Suite from Elmer Gantry*.



Photo courtesy of Roy Groething  
**SURVEYING THE SCENE...** Sisters Agnes (Rachel Pickup), left, and Theresa (Lori Hammel), survey the dance floor in *Handicapped People in their Formal Attire*.



**SWEET FUN...** *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and "A Rising Star Showcase" will be presented on Saturday, July 21, by Continuo Arts Summer Musical Theater Conservatory. Performances will be held at Temple Emanu-El in Westfield at 4 and 8 p.m. Pictured, left to right, are Oompah Loompas Arwen Portilla of Summit, Sarah McRae of Berkeley Heights, Maggie Bergin of Westfield, PJ Allen of Westfield, Morgan McEvoy of Summit, Adrian Gomes of Summit, Allison Salvetti of Berkeley Heights and Katie Evenson of Summit.



**OMMM...** Tari Prinster, co-director of OM Yoga Women Cancer Survivors Teacher Training program, will be on hand at The Yoga and Healing Center of Scotch Plains' fundraiser on Friday, August 17, at 6:30 p.m. to benefit The Retreat Project.