

San Francisco Chronicle



TheatreWorks' retreat seeks to foster new works

By David Wiegand

TheatreWorks is holding its fourth annual writers' retreat this week to support the incubation of new works for the theater. Productions in the works this year include "Asphalt Beach" by Peter Spears and T.C. Smith, with music by Andrew Lipka; "Big Red Sun," book by John Jiler and music and lyrics by Georgia Stitt; "Meet John Doe," book and lyrics by Eddie Sugarman and music by Andrew Gerle (yes, based on the Capra film); "The Golden Door," book by Peter Glazer and music and lyrics by Melanie O'Reilly.

Two veterans of the San Francisco Mime Troupe are guest artists this year at San Francisco State University's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Dan Chumley and Joan Holden have been working for a year with a group of writers and actors over the age of 50. The group will offer its first original play, "Subversion at Sunset Acres," in a free workshop production at the Mime Troupe studio, 855 Treat St., on Feb. 3, 4 and 5. For information, call (415) 405-7799.

American Conservatory Theater has announced casting for the premiere of this year's "First Look" series of plays in development. Anne Kaufman will direct Adam Bock's "The Shaker Chair" at 8 p.m. Feb. 3 and 4 at Zeum Theater, featuring three of the area's better-known performers: Frances Lee McCain, Joan Mankin and Linda Hoy. For tickets, call (415) 749-2228.

By the way, ACT's Young Conservatory Director Craig Slight e-mailed to point out that Aaron J. Albano, one of the cast members of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," which is heading toward the Post Street Theatre, is an alum of the conservatory and went on to study at the University of Cincinnati's musical theater program.

Over the weekend, San Francisco Symphony Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas was on hand for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts and was presented with the Arison Award for career achievement. Past winners have included Placido Domingo, Quincy Jones and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Thomas was honored for his work as a music educator, particularly as the music director of the Miami-based New World Symphony, which offers education and training for gifted music conservatory graduates.

Two Bay Area ensembles have been honored by Chamber Music America during its annual awards presentation. The Del Sol String Quartet, a San Francisco mixed repertory group, and Babatunde Lea Quartet, a Vallejo-based jazz ensemble, were among 12 groups receiving CMA/ASCAP (Chamber Music America/American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) awards for adventurous programming in a ceremony Sunday in New York City.

The San Francisco Free Civic Theatre will hold auditions for its remaining two productions of the season. Auditions will be held this week through Friday from 7:30 to 10 p.m. Call (415) 337-4713 for information. Volunteers will also be needed for production work, design and publicity. The theater is sponsored by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department.

Auditions will be held for "Fiddler on the Roof," the 93rd season of the Mountain Play. Auditions will be held for non-Equity performers from 8:30-11 a.m. and from 1:30 to 3 p.m. for Equity performers on Jan. 28 at the College of Marin, Fine Arts Building. Callbacks will be held Feb. 5. For information, call (415) 383-1100, or log on to www.mountainplay.org.

San Francisco Choral Artists, a 24-voice chamber choir performing 20th and 21st century works, has openings for tenor and low bass voices for the spring season. For information, call (415) 979-5779.

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This article appeared on page E - 2 of the San Francisco Chronicle