



TEACHING ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

AESTHETIC EDUCATION PROGRAM



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MARK ALMY

At age seventeen, Teaching Artist Mark Almy determined he would become an opera singer. Despite vigorous dissuasion on all sides, he pursued this goal with single-minded obstinacy, eventually maintaining a career in opera that took him to numerous stages throughout the United States and abroad. In total he trained his voice under nine teachers, among them nationally recognized experts in the field such as Richard Owens, Richard Best, and Dewey Camp. Ultimately, however it was Janet Parlova of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music – herself a pupil of legendary French Baritone Martial Sangher – whose teaching unlocked Mark's full potential. The soundness of her principles and her zen-like approach to teaching are carried forward by her legions of students, Mark among them. Coaches have included L.A. Opera's William Vendice and San Francisco Opera's Mark Haffner, and he attended the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, on scholarship. His European debut came courtesy of the Opera de Toulon, France. Among the hordes of operatic characters he has inhabited (around 80) are Don Giovanni, Figaro, and Rigoletto. Since moving to our valley, he has extended his repertoire into the area of music theater, with runs at Palm Canyon and McCallum Theatres as Don Quixote, Sweeney Todd, El Gallo, Emile DeBeque, Captain von Trapp, King Arthur, and Jekyll/Hyde.

As an educator, Mr. Almy has taught singing at University of Redlands, Riverside Community College, and California State University San Bernardino, as well as College of the Desert where he has for around 15 years helped singers unlock their own potential. He has also directed operas at the last-named institution, an effort which has not gone unnoticed by the Desert Theatre League. At Idyllwild Arts Academy, he helps shape high schoolers from around the world into adept music theater singers. And of course, for McCallum Theatre Education, on whose faculty he has proudly served since its inception, Mark has created and facilitated inquiry-based workshops in the disciplines of music, theater, visual arts, and yes dance, in classrooms throughout the Coachella Valley and beyond! It has also been his privilege to serve on a national team of Teaching Artists during a two year program, whose itinerary took him all over the continent. Even more recently, he has served as a consultant for Lincoln Center Education in New York City. These consultancies, exciting excursions into the training of Teaching Artists worldwide, have taken him to places as diverse as Hong Kong, Manitoba, and Seoul.



KAREN RAE KRAUT

Everyone loves a love story. Teaching Artist Extraordinaire Karen Rae Kraut fell in love with storytelling in 1990 – and storytelling has been loving her back ever since. The relationship has been nourished by a steady diet of one-woman variety shows in schools, libraries, theatres, clubs, churches, universities, museums and senior centers from California to East Tennessee. Along the way, this respected professional has toured for the Smithsonian Institution, presented – twice! – for the National Storytelling Conference, and been featured in Riverside's First Sundays season, first with the Riverside Public Library and more recently with the Riverside Art Museum, since 1997. In addition to touring for the McCallum Theatre, she has, in the last couple of years, been touring with musician Jay De Angelo. The result? Rave reviews praising the pair's unique blend of theatre, music and song. If your interest in Ms. Kraut's musical side has been piqued, you should know that she trained as a singer in her younger years and even sang opera! Besides that, she performed in more than a hundred plays and musicals.

Back in those early stages, too, Karen Rae trained as an actor in New York with one of the lions of the American stage – Miss Stella Adler. If that name rings a bell, it should. Ms. Adler was one of the great teachers of the thespian art often mentioned alongside such luminaries as Stanislavski and Strasberg. Karen Rae earned her Bachelors Degree in Drama from the University of Southern California, and her Masters Degree in Storytelling from East Tennessee State University. She is also a graduate of the California Arts Council/Coro Southern California Arts Leadership Program. And – drumroll – Karen Rae has studied creative dance with Ann Green Gilbert, internationally respected choreographer, teacher, and author of *Creative Dance for Children* (a classic in its field).

Miss Karen, as Coachella Valley students know her, has a CD, too. You should check it out. *National Parenting Publications* did, and they chose it for their Honors Award. *Cooler Water Cora and Other Stories* also handily scooped up an iParenting Media Award for Audio Excellence. For this member of the National Storytelling Network and the American Orff-Schulwerk Association, such accolades are by no means rare. What's rare is a day off. Because when she isn't telling, touring, singing, or dancing, she is teaching! The UC Riverside Early Childhood Education Certificate Program and the Osher Institute both benefit from her skills in this area. Riverside and San Bernardino County Arts Foundations have engaged her to teach creative dance in the schools. And we get to claim her as one of our own at McCallum Theatre Education, where her disciplines include theater, music, and dance – and where her deep thinking, integrity, and joyous sense of fun endear her to all.



CALVIN LARSON

Teaching Artist Calvin Larson declares he “feels a natural resonance with the educational philosophy of Aesthetic Education.” Indeed, his view of life as interdisciplinary nicely mirrors McCallum’s Theatre Education approach to education and the arts. He finds that the collaborative nature of students’ experience within the Aesthetic Education model leads naturally to a widening of perspective, of which empathy and tolerance are the logical outcomes. Calvin’s journey as an educator has included designing and implementing arts programs in schools and mental health facilities. In doing so he has set into motion situations in which students can be at the center of their learning experience, something he also finds true in his work for McCallum Theatre Education. In these kinds of experiences, he has set students free to make their own authentic and individual explorations, with creativity as the lynchpin, and a positive sense of self within the world as a goal for each participant. Given these ideas, it should come as no surprise to learn that Calvin’s degrees are in Arts Education and Psychology.

His preferred mode of artistic expression is in the visual arts. The range of areas he explores – painting, drawing both technical and creative, photography, print-making, Tiffany-style glass work, pottery and sculpture – makes him a kind of Renaissance man in terms of visual arts, wouldn’t you say? In recent times, he has focused on the application of acrylic paint to canvas in work that centers on the human form. He’s finding his own way to interpret the body “exploring life’s dichotomies by juxtaposing the acute contrast of sharp geometric lines and shapes to the lyrical form that is then accentuated by a vivid palette.” Intrigued? Well, his oeuvre has been shown and sold in galleries and restaurants, and he has also produced works on commission.

Never one to rest on his accomplishments, Calvin has studied ballet, jazz dance, and theater. On stage, he’s appeared in the role of Baby John in *West Side Story*, and Lamar in the inaugural Winn 10 Theater production of *Godspell*. And of course, we know him for the able Teaching Artist he is in the disciplines of visual arts, dance, and theater.



DENIS McCOURT

In his youth, McCallum Theatre Education's newest Teaching Artist studied bagpipes and also rose to national ranks as a Scottish Highland dancer! He further developed his breath control by taking up the flute, and went on to play both flute and bagpipes in orchestras, marching bands, and solo performance. Considering he comes from such a musical background, you'll be interested to learn that he later segued into a theater career, an example of an artist whose artistry blooms in more than one discipline. His work on the professional stage has earned him union membership with Actors Equity and Screen Actors Guild, while his university studies in the thespian arts have led to a BA in theater and MFA in acting.

Most intriguingly, Denis writes lyrics for songs that have been performed in the Southern California region, and crafts scripts for musicals. He calls these pursuits his "guilty pleasure," but if any sense of guilt attaches to worthy endeavors like those, surely there is only virtue where his community outreach work with at-risk populations is concerned!

A native New Yorker, Denis moved to California in 2008 to helm the Long Beach Shakespeare Company as co-Artistic Director. Additionally he created the Public Theatre of Southern California and served as Associate Chair of the Acting Department at the New York Film Academy's Los Angeles campus. At the latter institution over the course of nine years, he helped thousands of students from around the world hone their skills in both film and theater acting while infusing the work with his own love and dedication. During his years in that metropolis to the west, he directed hundreds of productions and looks to continue that calling as he settles into his new home in the Coachella Valley. He counts developing new works for the stage as a specialty, and is bringing all that he is as artist, creator, and educator to his work with McCallum Theatre Education.



HOLLY O'FARRELL

Teaching Artist Holly O'Farrell is a choreographer-director, whose body of award-winning work continues to grow and gain in distinction throughout Southern California. Now you may wonder just what a choreographer-director is. Well, we're talking about a special hybrid – not just a director, nor just a choreographer, but an amalgam. Jerome Robbins and Susan Strohman are further examples. Currently putting her stamp on the Theater Department of Mount San Jacinto College, Miss Holly has in recent times helmed productions of *Chicago*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Cabaret*, *Blockbusters & Small Wonders*, *Wonderful Town*, and *A Class Act*. She is herself, of course, a class act, as anyone who partners her knows. Among those partners are the Hemet Unified School District, for whom Holly facilitates after-school programs – and the Idyllwild Arts Summer Program, where as a member of the faculty she designs and teaches Children's Center dance programs. Additionally, she runs studio dance programs in modern, jazz, tap, and hip-hop. And – she is yet another member, along with Teaching Artists April Rhodes and Sue Roginski, of P.L.A.C.E., the Riverside County performance co-op. With the three of them involved, things must be lively! Holly, we know, is developing a dance-centric musical revue for the organization. On another front, we want to mention that during her seasons on the Idyllwild Arts Academy faculty, Holly taught movement and dance – and choreographed productions of *Three Penny Opera* and *The Boyfriend*. Altogether, she has racked up an impressive 15-plus years as dance/arts educator – so far!

And what about her own performing? Among the many credits, her stint as lead dancer with the Rocky Mountain Dancers certainly stands out. This respected American Folk Dance Company represents the United States at international festivals worldwide. She also served as Artist-in-Residence with Riverside Arts Council for four years. And for sheer fun factor, can anything top her recent assumption of a leading role in a rollicking Idyllwild production of *Murder at the Howard Johnson's*.

Looking to the future, she is continuing her academic/professional goals by pursuing a credential in Dance and Movement Therapy. Her disciplines as a Teaching Artists with McCallum Theatre Education: dance, theater, and music.



APRIL RHODES

Where dance intersects with visual arts, theater, writing, and site-specific work, look for Teaching Artist extraordinaire, April Rhodes! Early forays into academia included theater work, both as performer and director. There is however practically no success story the academic world revels in so much as that of the returning student, the truly engaged learner who resumes, after time away, the educational journey with renewed purpose. For April, this meant venturing into the world of experimental choreography at University of California, Riverside, Department of Dance – Class of '02. There, working with the likes of choreographers Susan Rose and Wendy Rogers, as well as Jawole Zolar of Urban Bush Women, Blondell Cummings, and Ann Carlson – a very forward looking bunch! – April found herself moving past the limits of mere dance technique. Spend ten minutes in conversation with her on the subject and you'll find yourself swept away by her enthusiasm and passion.

As choreographer and dancer, April cites work at Mt. San Jacinto College, UC Riverside, and McCallum's Choreography Festival as standouts. As Teaching Artist, she's given liberally of her skills to the former Art Council for San Bernardino County, and Riverside Arts Council. And that aforementioned strain of unconventionality? Well, look no further than her recent collaboration with performance collective P.L.A.C.E. which matches up dance with non-traditional performance space. Or how about Taskforce, a Stephan Koplowitz project in Idyllwild, California, which cultivates site-specific work? And then there's her engagement as performer in The Mom Salon at the former Sushi Gallery, San Diego, the contemplation of which credit raises all sorts of pleasurable questions. Nor do we want to omit mention of that true walk on the wild side, a collaborative work with Karen Rae Kraut called Vaudeville Mystery Tour (which this observer recalls as enchanting). Finally, there's her stint at Palm Springs Desert Museum where she combined creative movement and visual art during First Sunday projects, as well as serving as summer camp performing arts instructor for three years. Lucky them!

Lucky us, too, because Ms. Rhodes has graced the Teaching Artist faculty at the McCallum since 2002. Equally adept in the Teaching Artist disciplines of dance, theater, and music, April applies her probing intelligence to the ever-deepening collective understanding of what Aesthetic Education can be, to the benefit of all her colleagues.



SUE ROGINSKI

Teacher. Choreographer. Performer. Teaching Artist Sue Roginski, one of the newest additions to the McCallum Theatre Education faculty, comes to us borne aloft by an impressive body of work in the field of dance. Her range is wide – and nothing she does sounds the least bit conventional or dull. Just consider some of her projects. For example, she co-directs and organizes Trolley Dances Riverside, an innovative program in which audiences are transported from dance site to dance site via, you guessed it, trolleys! She also helped found, and remains an active member of, P.L.A.C.E. Performance, an IE/Riverside County dance collective that carves out opportunities for local dancers to dance – and choreographers to make those dances. And lest you think we Southern Californians get her full time, you'll be interested to know that her work oftentimes takes her up to the San Francisco Bay Area, where for ten years she maintained a career dancing and collaborating with the highly regarded Margaret Jenkins Dance Company. Other locales in which Sue has shared choreography include Los Angeles and Pasadena, the latter in connection with ARC: A Room to Create – a state of the art facility for dancers, choreographers, teachers, lecturers and dance enthusiasts.

Think you'd like to take a Modern Dance workshop? Get in line. Ms. Roginski facilitates a unique series of improvisational explorations, and the group – called Counterpoint/Shift – has performed at such venues as the Riverside Art Museum, Long Night of Arts and Innovation, and Culver Center of the Arts. Dancers can also develop their craft under Sue's instruction at Mt. San Jacinto College. Her own educational journey garnered her a BA in Dance from Wesleyan University, Class of '87, and an MFA in Dance (Experimental Choreography) from the University of California-Riverside in 2007.

Besides her time with Margaret Jenkins, Sue also improvised and performed with Susan Rose and Dancers for eight years. Possessing a generous spirit and a modest air that belies her wealth of accomplishments, she has made space in her life for performance projects to benefit Project Inform, Breast Cancer Action, and Women's Cancer Resource Center. Sue says she "is privileged to be a Teaching Artist for McCallum Theatre Education," but of course that's a two-way street!



GWENDOLYN ROSE

Many visual artists are content to work in formats and techniques established by other trailblazers. Not Teaching Artist Gwendolyn Rose! For her, the development of a technique, hitherto unknown, almost takes precedence over content. Indeed, where does the line lie between technique and content in her unique work? She shares with us that her approach has developed over many years of experimentation with a wide variety of media. Her most recent work poses – and responds to – the question: where does painting end and sculpture begin? The paintings and three dimensional sculpture that constitute this latest output aim to bridge the gap traditionally maintained between these different forms. Consider her materials: plastic, fabric, wire, paint, light, mirror, glass, and reflective papers. These last three media, in particular, lend her work a kinetic quality. She builds many layers of color and textures that dramatically change with lighting. “I like to invite the viewer to really look into the depths of the work,” says this innovator. “When they do they will take a visual journey and will discover many surprises.” Her educational credits include study at the University of Wisconsin and a degree from Chapman University, but the work itself needs no imprimatur from academia, exhibited as it has been throughout the United States and abroad.

So what is this serious and probing visual artist doing kicking up her heels in the world of Terpsichore? Well, she has a second passion, it turns out, and it's in the field of ethnic dance. Polynesian. Middle Eastern. Flamenco. She's devoted extensive study to each – and under the tutelage of well known teachers such as Patrick Makuakani, Mahealani Uchiyama, Miguel Santos of Teatro Flamenco, and Dahlena of Chicago. So, it seems only fitting that Gwendolyn should, in turn, teach dance herself, something she has done for over twenty years in the valley. As a Teaching Artist for the McCallum, her disciplines include not only visual art and dance, but theater and music as well.