



Theater Company Provides Stage for Teenagers Who Stutter

by Mary M. Annett

On Saturday afternoons in Manhattan, a newly formed theater company provides an opportunity for teenagers who stutter to study with professional artists and learn to express themselves through performance. Our Time Theatre Company—which has just begun a pilot program in New York City—brings area high school students together to study the basics of acting, dance, singing, drumming, and playwriting. They will use these skills to create and develop an original play that they will perform before the public at the end of the school year. The group is also planning to share their talents through a performance at the 2002 convention of the National Stuttering Association.

“We are very excited about creating an artistic home for people who stutter, a place where their confidence and self-esteem can blossom,” says Taro Alexander, Our Time’s artistic director and primary teacher. Alexander is a cast member of “Stomp” and is the coordinator of the Manhattan chapter of the National Stuttering Association. He has stuttered since he was a child and has found a way to clearly express himself through the arts. He hopes that “performing will do for these students what it did for me—inspire confidence.”

The program is free and stu-

dents need not audition, but they must maintain at least a C average in school and must commit themselves to working hard as a member of the ensemble, Alexander says. Our Time is an outreach



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program of the Naked Angels Theatre Company, a non-profit theater group dedicated to creating new work.

Alexander reports that several speech-language pathologists—including Phillip Schneider, Betty Horwitz, Catherine Montgomery, Carol Manly, Arnold Shapiro, and John Haskell—have been very helpful and excited about Our Time.

“I think what we are doing at Our Time complements the work of SLPs,” Alexander says. “I look forward to building relationships with more SLPs. I think it is vital for everyone in the stuttering community to support each other’s work. It is only together that we can truly help people who stutter.”

The Our Time group meets every Saturday afternoon. Alexander reports that the first Our Time workshop, held Oct. 20, was a “powerful experience to be in a room where no one was interrupting each other.”

“Where everyone had as much time as they needed to speak. Where being a stutterer was normal.”

Alexander feels it is important to keep the group small so that everyone gets personal attention. He reports that “four fantastic teenagers” have signed on for the year—and one travels each week from Albany, NY, about a three-hour trip each way.

Future plans for Our Time include having guest artists—including James Earl Jones, Jesse L. Martin, Jane Alexander, Ed Sherin, Everett Bradley, and “Stomp” cast members—come in to work with the students. And, beginning Jan. 14, Our Time will also include an adult group that will meet Monday nights to write and perform their own original play. Alexander hopes that the New York Our Time group can be used as a model for future programs in other parts of the country.

For more information about the Our Time Theatre Company, contact Alexander by phone at 212-674-9632 or by email at tarofunk@aol.com.