

THE BACKSTAGE CONNECTION

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2021 ~ Issue 29



COLLEGE CONNECTION



Cindy Samuelson
Stagedoor Manor
Camp Owner

Maggie Samen
Stagedoor Manor Studios

Hayley Samen
The College Connection

Rob Scharlow
Stagedoor Manor & Studios
Director of Education
Newsletter Design & Editor

Konnie Kittrell
Alumni Communications
Contributing Writer
Newsletter Consultant



DO YOU HAVE EXCITING UPDATES?

CLICK THE ICON ABOVE AND EMAIL US TO SHARE WHAT YOU'RE UP TO. YOU MIGHT JUST SEE YOUR NEWS MENTIONED IN AN UPCOMING NEWSLETTER.

Words from the Editor



"New year—a new chapter, new verse, or just the same old story? Ultimately we write it. The choice is ours."

~ Alex Morrit

Happy New Year, everyone!

Here we are venturing into a brand new year which will hopefully lead us each to new and exciting adventures. I'm sure many of us are glad to see 2020 in the rearview mirror and looking forward to what this upcoming year has to offer. It's a time to start making resolutions, new choices and new memories.

As we put the past year behind us, we start the journey forward in hopes that we may finally start to see things slowly, but cautiously, return to some semblance of normalcy. We are beginning to see things start up again in the world of the performing arts. Theatre companies that are able to abide by rules of social distancing, cast and crew bubbles, health and safety requirements, and the precautions it takes to keep everyone safe (like outdoor performances), have finally started to bring back live performances. Which in and of itself is quite a thrilling thing to see happening. It's still unbelievable to think Broadway is still shut down, but baby steps. We'll get there and it will be better than ever when we do.

Just like so many of these companies that are finding the proper ways to offer some form of arts entertainment to a live audience, we at

Stagedoor Manor are working diligently to put the proper guidelines into place so that we may bring back the magic of the summer again. Our administration has been meeting nonstop and discussing how we can provide the safest experience for all those that would like to come "home."

In the meantime though, we have had some unbelievable online programs occurring and more are still to come during the winter and spring months. January brought three outstanding "Zoomformances" as well as the start of another 6-week section of Vocal Coaching. We've also begun our 4th Annual Playwrights Workshop which will wrap up the first week of February with a reading of 6 new 10-minute plays as well as two more dance classes that have just begun (6 weeks of Fosse and Contemporary Jazz). The month of March will bring us a brand new workshop for College Connection (*more info on page 2 regarding that*) and there might be a few other surprises on the horizon, so stay tuned.

It's understandable that we're all itching to get back on stage, direct, design, tech a show, sing, dance and just connect to those that share our passion. The wonderful thing is that so many of you have found creative ways throughout this past year to accomplish those wants and needs. Keep doing what you're doing! Find ways to create that new chapter, that new verse and discover something that perhaps you didn't know was there. We'll all be back at it soon enough, and when we are, it'll be like we never left.

Welcome to 2021!

~ R.S.

THE STAGEDOOR MANOR APPAREL STORE IS OPEN AND HAS ALL THE SWAG YOU NEED TO START THE NEW YEAR!

Click the **Buy Now** button or visit www.apparelnow.com/stagedoor-store-apparel





COLLEGE CONNECTION



We are **THRILLED** to introduce to you our faculty for our next **College Connection Workshop** starting in March 2021!!! Our incredible staff includes Quae Simpson (*top left*), Maggie Savoie (*top right*), Marcus Baker (*bottom left*) and Justin Amillio (*bottom right*)! To learn more about the College Connection program you can:

- ★ Click the **Enroll Now** button below to enroll
- ★ Visit our website at www.stagedoormanoronline.com
- ★ Email Hayley Samen directly: hayley@stagedoormanor.com



Our Winter “Zoomformances” took place during January. We wanted to give a huge “congratulations” and “thank you” to all those who took part in a tremendously successful evening of performances.



The cast and crew of *Almost Maine*. Directed by Nick Hrutkay and Stage Managed by Megan Pelaccio



The cast and crew of *In the Wake*. Directed by Marie Nicole and Stage Managed by Jessie Higgins



The cast and crew of *Mac Beth*. Directed by Chris Tyer and Stage Managed by Abby Austin



2021 SESSIONS NEW DATES

Session 1

June 21 - July 10, 2021

Session 2

July 13 - August 1, 2021

A TOTAL THEATRE IMMERSION!

Click the Stagedoor Manor logo for more Info or email: INFO2021@STAGEDOORMANOR.COM

CURTAIN RISING



What started as an interest in pursuing acting and singing, quickly developed into a love of dance thanks to a performance of A Chorus Line. This month, Rachel Levitt shares with us her journey in the world of dance. She opens up about quitting dance performance in 2017, walking away from the industry altogether, but finding her way back and reigniting that love of choreography after returning to the dance scene as a teacher. She tells us where her inspiration is pulled from, how working via Zoom has changed her approach and much more.

Tell us a little bit about where you grew up and where you went to school.

I grew up in a suburb of Toronto, and began training in dance at the “late” age of 14. Primarily, I focused on ballet and classical styles during the school year and musical theatre during the summers. In college, I graduated from dance programs at George Brown (dance performance preparation) and Centennial (commercial dance) in Toronto as well as the Broadway Dance Center (ISVP – concentration in ballet and musical theatre) in NYC. My schooling wasn’t super conventional since I also worked in the Toronto dance scene between programs. That taught me a lot too. Working in the performance industry is so humbling and truly a type of education unto itself.



Rachel in-studio. Taking class at Pineapple Studios.

When did you first realize that dance was something that was important to you and when did you transition into choreographing?

For starters, anyone in my family will tell you that I never stopped dancing everywhere from a young age. I just loved to move. Strangely, I was more interested in pursuing acting and singing career-wise until I was about thirteen and saw *A Chorus Line*. This was the moment something clicked and I thought “oh, that is what I was born to do!” The next year, I began my formal training and my life began.

Transitioning to choreography came quite a bit later. We had a lot of choreo workshops in college, so I had experience in it but no passion. When I quit dance performance late 2017, I didn’t want anything to do with the industry. I worked a “normal” job and took dance class almost every day and that was it. Then, in 2018 I returned to the dance scene as a teacher and in 2019 took an assistant choreographer position at Stagedoor Manor so that I could pursue teaching further. Unexpectedly, I wended up absolutely falling in love with choreography! That has been my primary career focus since.

When choreographing a piece (or a show) how do you approach the creation process? What, or who, do you draw inspiration from?

My process for choreographing a piece versus a

Interview continues on following page

show (or piece for a show) are usually quite different. Using Stagedoor examples, my class choreo is usually based on images and concepts. I've used orbs of light, beach parties, robots, Holbein portraits, train stations and more to influence the movement of standalone works.

When I am choreographing for a show, I ask myself a lot of questions while I work. Where does this song fall in the show? How does this affect the story? Who are my dancers in the story? How do they move? What is important to carry the through line of the show? For example, in "Blue Suede Shoes" for *All Shook Up*, this is the first time we see Natalie as Ed. That's a BIG moment, so the dance had to be big. Lifts, fancy formations, legs in the air, and lots of footwork to draw attention to the shoes were the tools I used to shape that piece to contribute to the overall arc of the show.



The Mayor's Newham Show in London, England

Do you find that you enjoy the performing aspect of dance over actually choreographing a show or dance piece? Or do you enjoy splitting your time evenly between the two?

When I was performing, I was laser focused on performing. Now that I'm teaching and choreographing, I'm laser focused on those. I never really juggled both of those lives at the same time - they're very separate for me.

How does being a dancer yourself affect your work as a choreographer, both in what you create and how you interact with those that you are teaching? Do you create things you'd like to do yourself?

Even though I quit performing, being a dancer by taking regular classes and experimenting with improvisation always updates what I have to offer my students. I try to consistently broaden my range so that I'll never run out of material to teach and incorporate into choreography. Additionally, a lot of the "tough love" I experienced as a dancer is something I tend to give back to my students. My

teachers weren't big on having us only practice what we could do or only what was "popular", they always pushed us beyond our physical and creative limits. It was humbling, it was grueling, but it was worth it. They did it because they believed in us and I do it because I believe in my students.

In terms of if I'd like to do my own choreo: absolutely. If I'm bored creating it, my students and my cast will be bored, and then the audience will be bored. Dance should always be exciting and expressive, which is what I love to watch and love to do.

You have worked for Stagedoor Manor for the past several years. What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of being both a counselor and assistant choreographer during the summer months?

As a counselor, you get to be a big sister! It is so rewarding to get to know your kids and form bonds from hearing about their day, sharing stories and getting to support them through any problems that may arise at camp. That last one can be tough, but it feels good when you are able to help. All of this makes saying goodbye so hard though. I'm usually a crying mess on changeover day.

As an assistant choreographer, the most rewarding aspect on shows is when the kids accept the challenges and my no-questions, no-talking, just work attitude. Especially for Sunday rehearsals with me...that's practically boot camp. I really push for everything. Technique, character, story, dynamics, the whole pre-Broadway shebang that I believe they can do. Seeing how they transform and become these characters through movement by the final performance always leaves me a little breathless by the end of the final show. In terms of classes, I don't make it easy on my students and I will push them if I believe they can accomplish more. The most rewarding aspect of that is seeing the dedication these SDM students put into the challenges and how



Horror dance Film – She Was Never Here, short dance film for Dance : Corps



they can do things by class five that they couldn't do class one. Also, how much they bring of themselves to the dances. Class choreo is usually more personality based than story based, so getting to know them through their dancing is truly a very special bond.

This past year, we've all been faced with new ways of teaching and interacting with others in the performing arts...virtually! You have been part of our Stagedoor Manor Online Programming and you're teaching Fosse again this winter. How do you approach the process of teaching online and what makes it so unique to actually teaching in person?

The biggest difference, aside from camera angles and technicalities, is that I let kids ask me more questions. The jaws of all my SDM casts and students have probably just dropped since "no questions, let me watch and tell you if there's a problem" is usually my number one rule. But I just can't see students on Zoom as well as I can in the studio, so I need more input from them. I also find talking a little by asking "what is one thing you want to improve today?" at the beginning and "what is one thing you did well and one thing you want to do better next class" at the end helps strengthen teacher/student and student/student connections. A screen is a big barrier so a little extra back and forth becomes crucial to building a comfortable class environment as well as an engine for motivation and perseverance.

Also adapting to everyone's unique space is a biggie. I don't always know everyone's set ups pre-class so have to ensure that all my students feel they can achieve their maximum limit no matter their room and floor situation.

What have been some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a choreographer?

Well, it's pretty hard to beat the COVID-19 pandemic! I run a small dance company here in Toronto called Dance : Corps, and we were faced with the decision to either quit making art until things went back to normal or adapt to the times. Without studio space, I had to learn how to teach choreo on Zoom. Without ideal filming locations, I had to transform my dancers' homes into film sets and make them part of the story through the choreo. Without being able to have dancers in the same room, I had to find a way to weave stories together that felt like a group piece instead of an eternal round of solos. It was tough, but we did it.

I am very proud of what both myself and some of the other choreographers I work with at Dance : Corps have created during this time. We have put on three

online shows (*Another Day in COVID-19 Land*, *Our Stories* which featured a piece by Maggie Savoie, and *Not Quite Nutcracker*), produced dance films for Convergence Theatre's Covid Commissions and Grey Area Collective's Art in Isolation, plus my work *Normal People* has been booked for both livestream (Jan 2021) and live performance (tbc) at Theatre Foolscape's Window of Opportunity Festival.

See, this is why I love challenges. You truly learn what you are capable of through them.

If you had to start all over, what job/career would you want to do?

The same job/career I have now. Seriously. I tried working in PR at one point during an "identity crisis", but every day for six months I never felt like myself. I love PR, it's fun and challenging and exciting, but at the end of the day I'm only me when I'm dancing. And I can't change that.



Photo by Rony Cadavid in Florence, Italy



ALL FUN AND GAMES

SNOWFLAKE SUDOKU

Instead of numbers, use these letters to fill in the grid just like a regular sudoku:

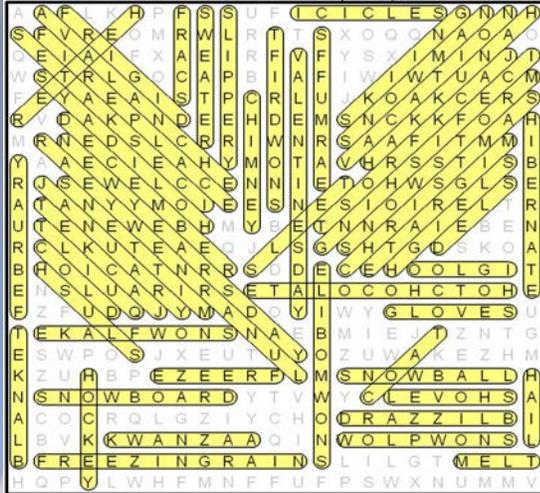
S N O W F L A K E
.....

There is only one rule to sudoku: Every row, column and box of 3x3 cells must contain each letter shown above exactly once. Good luck!

		E				K	A	
A			K				O	
	O		E			L		F
		W		F			N	
E		L	S	N		O		K
				O				
	N	F		W		E		
	A				O	S		
S					L			

ALL FUN AND GAMES

Answer key from the December 2020
Winter Holiday Fun Word Search



GHOST LIGHT



WRAP UP

ALUMNI, STAFF, & CAMPER NEWS

Congrats to Stagedoor camper, Katherine Rauscher, who played Mrs. Cratchit in the East End Players radio drama of *A Christmas Carol*.

Congrats to Stagedoor camper, Adrian Matthew Escalona on being cast in the HBO reboot of *Head of the Class*.

Congrats to Stagedoor alum, Sebastian Amoruso, cast in the Amazon-Sony reboot of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Filming begins this summer.

Congrats to Stagedoor alum, Derek Speedy, who was up for a nomination in the production of *A Lifespan of a Fact!*

Congrats to Stagedoor alum, Amandalyn McLellan, winner of Best Actress at the Grove Film Festival 2020 for the film *Fair Haven*

We know that many schools and current/upcoming productions have either been canceled, postponed or have moved online, but be sure to reach out to us and share what you've been up to. We're always thrilled to hear about any exciting news you may have to share!

SOCIAL MEDIA CORNER



STAGEDOOR MANOR

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STAGEDOOR MANOR STUDIOS

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Stagedoor Manor ~ www.stagedoormanor.com ~
info2021@stagedoormanor.com
15 Stagedoor Drive, Loch Sheldrake, NY 12759 ~ 845-434-4290

Stagedoor Manor Studios & College Connection
www.stagedoormanoronline.com

Maggie Samen (Stagedoor Manor Studios)
maggie@stagedoormanor.com

Hayley Samen (The College Connection)
hayley@stagedoormanor.com

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