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# 3A

## Action

### *Credentialing and Certificated Assignment Committee*

### **Request for Consideration of Eminence Credential**

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**Executive Summary:** This agenda item presents a request by resolution from the Governing Board of Palisades Charter School in Los Angeles County to the Commission for the issuance of a credential, based on Eminence, in the subject of Drama to Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla.

**Recommended Action:** Staff historically does not make a recommendation on Eminence Credentials.

**Presenter:** Erin Skubal, Program Analyst, and Terri H. Fesperman, Director, Certification Division

#### **Strategic Plan Goal**

##### ***I. Educator Quality***

- ◆ Continue to emphasize teaching as a profession and encourage highly talented individuals to enter the education profession.

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# Request for Consideration of Eminence Credential

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## Introduction

The Governing Board of Palisades Charter High School in Los Angeles County, by resolution, adopted on December 13, 2012, in accordance with Education Code section 44262 recommends to the Commission the issuance of a credential based on Eminence in the subject of Drama to Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla.

## Background

Education Code section 44262 authorizes the Commission to issue an Eminence Credential to any person who has achieved eminence in a field of endeavor commonly taught or a service practiced in the public schools of California. Eminence credentials are issued in the specific content or service area requested. Each Eminence Credential is issued initially for a two-year period and may be renewed for a three-year period by the Commission upon the request of the governing board of the school district. The initial two- and subsequent three-year credentials are restricted to the recommending employer. Upon completion of the three-year renewal period, the holder of an Eminence Credential is issued a clear credential which is no longer restricted to an employer.

Title 5 section 80043(a) defines an eminent individual as one who is recognized as such beyond the boundaries of his or her community, has demonstrably advanced his or her field, and has been acknowledged by his or her peers as beyond the norm for others in the specific endeavor. The pertinent Education Code and Title 5 sections are included on pages 6 and 7.

The Commission has determined that an individual who has achieved eminence in their field in the three areas defined above would meet the following requirements:

**The individual is recognized as eminent beyond the boundaries of his or her community:** To meet this requirement the individual must be renowned outside their geographical community with more merit given to interstate and international recognition.

**Demonstrably advanced his or her field:** To meet this requirement an individual must provide documentation of advanced degrees and/or distinguished employment in the field/endeavor. Contributions to the field include evidence of authorship or research indicating a high level of expertise.

**Acknowledged by his or her peers as “beyond the norm” in the specific endeavor:** To meet this requirement the employing agency and the candidate must submit all of the following:

- 1) Letters from former employers, professional colleagues and other experts in the field, relating to the individual’s recognized expertise or position of prominence in their field.
- 2) Documents evidencing extraordinary ability worthy of distinction.
- 3) Evidence of major, national or international awards recognizing uncommon achievement in and advancement of a particular field or endeavor.

- 4) Evidence of significant contribution to the field.
- 5) Authorship of a new or unusually successful method of educating children or the public in the field or endeavor.
- 6) Extraordinary success in their field

The following table outlines the documentation submitted by Palisades Charter High School and Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla, nationally and internationally known professional writer and actor.

<b>Education</b>		
Hofstra University, New York	Bachelors of Fine Arts Degree, Performance	1981

<b>Evidentiary Materials Presented By Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla</b>	<b>Recognized Beyond Boundaries</b>	<b>Advances Field</b>	<b>Acknowledged as Beyond the Norm</b>
<b>Authorships: Published Plays, Screenplays, and Television Pilots</b>			
<i>Tony n' Tina's Wedding</i> Published Play	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<i>Bubba the Cowboy Prince</i> Published Play	<b>X</b>		
<i>Vicki Oberjeune: Alone in the Night</i> Screenplay; co-authored	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<i>Devil and Daniel Webster/No Shortcut to Happiness</i> Produced Screenplay; co-authored and starring Anthony Hopkins, Alec Baldwin, Amy Poehler	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<i>Tony n' Tina Pilot and Pilot Presentation</i> Castlerock Entertainment/20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Distinguished National and International Theatre Productions and Performances</b>			
<i>It's a Lovin' Thing</i> , The Ballroom, NY, NY			<b>X</b>
<i>Very Vicki Christmas</i> , The Ballroom, NY, NY	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<i>TNT Telethon</i> , Waverly Theatre, NY, NY	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<i>Tony n' Tina's Wedding</i> , NY/CA	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Tennessee Williams' <i>The Dog Enchanted by the Divine View</i> , World Premier, MS	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>

<b>Evidentiary Materials Presented By Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla</b>	<b>Recognized Beyond Boundaries</b>	<b>Advances Field</b>	<b>Acknowledged as Beyond the Norm</b>
<b>Letters in Support of Eminence</b>			
Alec Baldwin, Actor	X	X	X
Tim Halkin, COO Tandem Communications	X	X	X
David Kaplan, Hofstra University Professor; Curator, Provincetown Theater Festival	X	X	X
Larry Pellegrini, Producer/Director	X	X	X
Stephen Holden, Film and Cabaret Critic, The New York Times		X	X
Janis Hirsch, Executive Producer			X
Mark Nassar, Writer			X
Joshua White, Television Director, Retired	X	X	X
Bill Condon, Screenwriter and Director		X	X
Jeff Greenstein, Writer, Producer, and Director	X		X
Mark L Campbell, LA Leadership Academy High			X
<b>Press Reviews and Articles</b>			
1991 <i>The Compass</i> , Janet Coleman, University of Chicago Press			X
1990, <i>Cassaro says I do to Castle Rock</i> , Fox, Lisa de Morales, The Hollywood Reporter	X		
1990 <i>Nancy Cassaro and the Artifice of Intelligence</i> , Tom Provenzano, Drama-Logue	X	X	X
1989, <i>We do We do!</i> Steven Mikulan, LA Weekly	X	X	X
1989, 'Tony n' Tina': <i>Married to Their Work</i> , Barbara Isenberg, Los Angeles Times			X
1988, <i>I Do, I Do- or What?</i> , Cynthia Heimel, Details Magazine			X
1988, <i>Holy Matrimony!</i> Michael Small, People			X
1988, <i>Avant-Garde Antics for Fearless Audiences</i> , Stephen Holden, The NY Times		X	X
1987, <i>Comedy Actress Parodies 50's-Style TV</i> , Alvin Klein, The New York Times			X
1987, <i>A Valentine Show That Shoots Arrows Tipped With Satire</i> , Stephen Holden, The New York Times			X
1987, <i>Artificial Xmas</i> , Martin Schaeffer, New York Native			X
1987, <i>Artificial Intelligence</i> , Stephen Holden, The New York Times		X	

<b>Evidentiary Materials Presented By Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla</b>	<b>Recognized Beyond Boundaries</b>	<b>Advances Field</b>	<b>Acknowledged as Beyond the Norm</b>
<b>Professional Affiliations</b>			
Screen Actors Guild of America (SAG-AFTRA)			<b>X</b>
Writers Guild of America (WGA)			<b>X</b>
<b>Distinguished National and International Television and Film Performance</b>			
Nip/Tuck (TV series, 2003-2004) Episode – Julia McNamara Episode – Mrs. Grubman Episode – Antonia Ramos Episode – Sofia Lopez II Episode – Mandi/Randi	<b>X</b>		
Grounded for Life (TV series, 2002-2004) Episode – Me and Mrs. O Episode – Racketman Episode – Your Father Should Know: Part 2 Episode – Swearin' to God Episode – Eddie Said Knock You Out	<b>X</b>		
Getting Personal (TV series, 1998) Episode – When Co-Workers Attack Episode – Milo Does the Darndest Things Episode – Guess Who Else Is Coming to Dinner? Episode – Sam I Am Episode – My Best Fling's Wedding Episode – Raiders of the Lost Watch Episode – Chasing Sammy Episode – The No Joy Bad Luck Club Episode – Bring in 'Da Milo, Bring in 'Da Robyn Episode – The Date After Episode – Fix Me Up, Tie Me Down Episode – The Doctor Is In Episode – There's Something About Rhonda Episode – The Wedding Zinger Episode – Midnight Milo Episode – Last Three Temptations of Robyn Buckley Episode – Saving Milo's Privates	<b>X</b>		

<b>Evidentiary Materials Presented By Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla</b>	<b>Recognized Beyond Boundaries</b>	<b>Advances Field</b>	<b>Acknowledged as Beyond the Norm</b>
<b>Distinguished National and International Television and Film Performance (continued)</b>			
Family Album (TV series, 1993) Episode – Will You Still Feed Me? Episode – Salon, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehn, Goodbye Episode – Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall All You Gotta Do Is Call... Episode – Guardian Angel Episode – Sibling Revelry Episode – Pilot	<b>X</b>		
Goodfellas (film, 1990)	<b>X</b>		
<b>Awards and Honors</b>			
New Yorker Cartoon, 1993			<b>X</b>
George Estabrook Distinguished Service Award, Hofstra University, 1991			<b>X</b>
Chaplin Comedy Award, 1988			<b>X</b>
Drawn by Al Hirschfeld for the New York Times Weekend Section, 1988			<b>X</b>

Appendix A contains a sampling of materials provided by the applicant, Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla, as documentation of her Eminence in the field of Drama.

## **Education Code and Title 5 Regulation References**

### *Education Code section 44262*

Upon the recommendation of the governing board of a school district, the commission may issue an eminence credential to any person who has achieved eminence in a field of endeavor taught or service practiced in the public schools of California. This credential shall authorize teaching or the performance of services in the public schools in the subject or subject area or service and at the level or levels approved by the commission as designated on the credential.

Each credential so issued shall be issued initially for a two-year period and may be renewed for a three-year period by the commission upon the request of the governing board of the school district. Upon completion of the three-year renewal period, the holder of an eminence credential shall be eligible upon application for a professional clear teaching credential.

### *Title 5 Regulations*

#### *Section 80043. Statement of Employment and Verification of Qualifications*

(a) When considering an application for an Eminence Credential, the Commission shall be guided by the following definition of an eminent individual: The eminent individual is recognized as such beyond the boundaries of his or her community, has demonstrably advanced his or her field and has been acknowledged by his or her peers beyond the norm for others in the specific endeavor. The employing school district shall demonstrate how the eminent individual will enrich the educational quality of the school district and not how he or she will fill an employment need.

(b) Pursuant to Section 44262 of the Education Code, issuance of an Eminence Credential shall be based upon a recommendation from the governing board of the school district, a statement of employment, submission of the fee(s) established in Section 80487 and a verification of the applicant's eminence qualifications.

(1) The Statement of Employment in the district shall include the proposed assignment of the credential applicant, and a certification of the intention of the district to employ the applicant if granted an Eminence Credential.

(2) The verification of eminence qualifications of an applicant for an Eminence Credential shall include:

(A) Recommendations, which may be from, but need not be limited to, the following: professional associations; former employers; professional colleagues; any other individuals or groups whose evaluations would support eminence; and

(B) Documentation of achievement, which may include, but need not be limited to, the following: advanced degrees earned; distinguished employment; evidence of related study or experience; publications; professional achievement; and recognition attained for contributions to his or her field of endeavor.

(3) The Commission shall provide notice to the public of those individuals for whom it is considering issuing Eminence Credentials. Any association, group, or individual may provide the Commission with a written statement regarding the qualifications of an individual under consideration for an Eminence Credential.

(c) The Commission may assign certification staff the authority to review eminence applications to determine if an individual meets the definition of eminence pursuant to Section 44262 of the Education Code and (a) above.

(1) If staff concludes an applicant meets the definition, staff shall forward the application to the Commission for review and action at the next available meeting.

(2) If staff concludes an applicant does not meet the definition, staff shall deny the application.

(A) If the staff denies an application for eminence, the employing school district requesting the Eminence Credential may request that staff reconsider its determination upon submission of new evidentiary material relevant to the reason(s) for denial, that was not available at the time the application was initially submitted to the Commission.

(B) If staff determines that, based on the new supporting information, the applicant now meets the definition of eminence, staff shall forward the application to the Commission for review and action at the next available Commission meeting.

(C) If upon review of the new supporting information, staff determines that there is no new evidence that provides additional support of the applicant's eminence, the district's eminence application will be placed on the Commission's consent calendar with a staff recommendation for denial.

Note: Authority cited: Sections 44225 and 44253.9, Education Code. Reference: Section 44262, Education Code.

#### *Section 80044. Scope of Eminence*

A person may obtain an Eminence Credential if the subject or service in which the work is determined to exhibit eminence is one which a school board wishes to have taught or practiced in its district.

Note: Authority cited: Section 44225, Education Code.

#### *Section 80045. Renewal of Eminence Credential.*

(a) The Commission staff shall renew an Eminence Credential for three years upon receipt of an application for renewal with a written statement of support from the governing board of the school district adopted in a public meeting and submission of the fee(s) established in Section 80487.

(b) The Commission staff shall issue a Professional Clear Eminence Teaching Credential at the end of five years of possession of the Eminence Credential with a written statement of support from the governing board of the school district adopted in a public meeting, submission of an application and the fee established in Section 80487.

Note: Authority cited: Section 44225, Education Code. Reference: Section 44262, Education Code.

# Employer Recommendation



**RECOMMENDATION FOR A PERSON OF EMINENCE**

The governing board of the Palisades Charter High School

school district, by resolution adopted on December 13, 2012, in accordance with  
*Date*

California Education Code, Section 44262, recommends the issuance of a credential based on eminence to  
Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla

*Candidate's Name*

in the subject of Drama

Eminence was determined on the basis of: \_\_\_\_\_

Ms. Cassaro-Fracchiolla's impressive twenty-five year career as a professional actor and writer  
 as well as her powerful and effective work teaching theatre and art within the Palisades Community  
 over the past twelve years.

The above named applicant will be employed in this school district to serve as a  
Drama Teacher at the Secondary level.  
*Teacher (include subject), Administrator, Other* *Elementary or Secondary*

Signature of District Superintendent: *Pam Magee*

Date: December 13, 2012 Telephone Number: 310.230.6623

Email Address: pmagee@palihigh.org

The individual is recognized as eminent beyond the boundaries of his or her community, has demonstrably advanced his or her field, and has been acknowledged by his or her peers beyond the norm for others in the specific endeavor.

1. The following affirmations of eminence are attached:

**16 letters of unanimous, enthusiastic support from industry professionals**  
**(including Alec Baldwin, Oscar winner, Bill Condon and NY Times Critic, Stephen Holden)**

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2. The following documentation of achievement (advanced degrees, distinguished employment, publications, other) are attached:

Theatre, television and film resumes for work as writer and actor. Proof of authorship including "Tony N Tina's Wedding" the longest running comedy in Off-Broadway history. BFA Performance from Hofstra University and Alumni achievement award recipient. LA Drama Critic's Circle Award, Charlie Chaplin Comedy Award. Various and assorted press from prestigious publications such as The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, LIFE magazine, People Magazine, The Hollywood Reporter, Variety and Details.

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3. Please provide an explanation of the individual's effectiveness as a teacher:

**Ms. Cassaro-Fracchiolla's knowledge and experience is extensive. What's more, she has a natural ability to communicate and share this knowledge with students in a positive, humorous way. Her students love her and are inspired by her passion, professionalism and work ethic.**

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4. Attached are the following miscellaneous items the district feels support eminence:

**Letters of support from educators and parents all citing her ability to create work with students as a rare and special gift. Newspaper articles about her work in the Palisades Charter Complex.**

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5. Attached is a letter from the applicant describing his or her accomplishments that support a claim of eminence.



Dr. Pamela A. Magee  
Executive Director and Principal  
(310) 230-6630 [pmagee@palhigh.org](mailto:pmagee@palhigh.org)

December 16, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing  
Certification Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

Dear Commission on Teacher Credentialing,

It is my pleasure to write on behalf of Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla, applicant for an Eminence Credential in Drama. During the two years that I have served as Executive Director/Principal at Palisades Charter High School, I have been very impressed with Ms. Fracchiolla's dedication to our school, her involvement with school programs, and her ability to work effectively with students. In addition to her many hours of volunteer service to the school and drama department, she has served as a long-term substitute since the beginning of this school year when the drama teacher unexpectedly resigned. Ms. Fracchiolla was able to calm students and parents who were very concerned about the future of the PCHS drama program by listening compassionately and by immediately engaging students in relevant, meaningful instruction.

In the short time that she has been on staff, Ms. Fracchiolla has already positively influenced the Visual and Performing Arts department as well as the Pali High culture. Ms. Fracchiolla brings vast professional experience to her classroom and students. She is able to share a unique and rare perspective that our students are extremely privileged to experience.

I fully endorse Ms. Fracchiolla's Eminence Credential application. She is an exemplary educator and professional; I hope to work with her on the Palisades Charter High School faculty for years to come. Please feel free to contact me if any additional information is needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Magee, Ed. D.  
Executive Director & Principal  
Palisades Charter High School  
1577 Bowdoin Street  
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272

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# Applicant Letter and Qualifications Summary

Commission on Teacher Credentialing  
Certification, Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

December 8, 2012

Dear Commission on Teacher Credentialing,

First and foremost, thank you for your time and consideration. I am well aware of the amount of work it takes to review a potential candidate and deeply appreciate your consideration. I am confident that I am eminent in the field of Drama. It is now my strong desire to share my experience with high school students.

In my life and career, there was always a teacher.

My love of theatre, my first experiences being a part of a creative community, my first sense of self as a person with something unique to contribute, all began with great teachers. When I was in seventh grade at J. Lewis Ames Jr. High in Massapequa, New York, my life was in free fall. The war zone at home combined with the usual middle school angst had me lost and at risk. Then an art teacher, Constance Arena, asked me -- no, actually coerced me-- into auditioning for a play that my friend Tim Halkin (letter attached) had written. After that first performance I was hooked. I had found my people, my community, a home and in some ways, my salvation. I became an official theatre rat, living for the next play, dying for the next chance to perform. In high school, the fire to create was stoked by Sister Brian Delamer, a quirky nun with a penchant for Shakespeare and Noel Coward. In college, there were two motivators: Dr. Richard Mason, a chain-smoking wiry man, who planted the seed about environmental theatre and Prof. Seigmund, who sported a red checkered shirt every class and held me and all his students spellbound, lecturing on plays and playwrights from the Greeks to Sam Shepherd. But graduation was not the end of great teachers.

When I left college I moved to NYC and the stars were quickly dashed from my eyes. I began working days at an entry-level job in advertising. Working as a Talent Coordinator at BBDO gave me a unique opportunity to learn the business from the other side of the footlights. The high-pressure, fast-paced world of advertising gave me the chance to develop business and production skills, which served me very well later in life. But I had a night life, too. During this period, I would leave my cubicle at closing time; take the subway down to SoHo and dive into the world of another great teacher, David Kaplan (letter attached). With David, I immersed myself in the joy of creating innovative theatre alongside a community of vibrant, talented people, doing work as varied as Genet's *The Screens* in an abandoned coffin factory (we were young) to adapting Eudora Welty for the stage.

Late nights after class, we would hang out in a local dive and create all sorts of characters trying to outdo each other for laughs. On a dare a friend challenged me to perform a

midnight show at an East Village Club. I said yes. Terrified, I started writing material and much to my surprise, it worked. The audience thought I was funny. The club owner asked me to headline my own show. I said, "yes" again --and again, and again. I quickly developed a name for myself in the Downtown scene. I decided to form a theatre company, we called ourselves Artificial Intelligence, and it proved to be one of the most life-altering and powerful decisions of my life. Our company really started to get noticed when I created a show around one of my favorite characters, a pill-popping Judy Garland/Peggy Lee hybrid named Vicki Oberjeune. The idea behind *The Vicki Shows* (press attached) was that we invited the audience into the world of a live television show circa 1964 with the real-life audience "playing" the role of the studio audience. The whole concept proved fertile ground and we created four shows with this premise. A producer came to see one of the *Vicki* shows and invited our group to perform in a Comedy Festival at The Ballroom, a prestigious nightclub and performance space on West 28<sup>th</sup> street. We were particularly nervous and excited as it was the first time my company was going to be reviewed... and by the NY Times no less!!

We received a rave from Stephen Holden of the Times, (letter and reviews attached) then every other major NY paper (attached) and we quickly became the toast of the town. It was and remains one of the most treasured times in my life. Stephen Holden proposed to do a cover story in the weekend section of the Times about myself and Artificial Intelligence (attached). During our interviews, I told Stephen about another environmental piece I had created called *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*. He was intrigued by the concept of "audience participation" and told me that if I mounted a production he would give me critic's pick of the week in the NY Times. How could I refuse? We mounted it, he gave us the press (attached) and the show sold out its run in two hours. The producers kept adding dates, the show kept selling out, and eventually we mounted an open ended run that turned *Tony n' Tina's Wedding* into the longest running comedy in Off-Broadway history. I never thought that this crazy idea I had about a mock wedding would afford me the opportunity to teach my show to artists all over the world!

In 1987, I left my job in advertising having finally realized my dream of becoming a working actor. One day my agent called with big news: Martin Scorsese wanted to see me for his new film, *Good Fellas*. Thanks to Mr. Scorsese, I was able to get my SAG card and begin my work in television and film. In 1989, Artificial Intelligence moved to Los Angeles to open *Tony n' Tina's Wedding* in Hollywood. It was surreal to be performing the show, with many of my industry idols participating in the fun. I was then offered a production contract at Castle Rock Entertainment. There I had the great good fortune to have Rob Reiner and Christopher Guest as my new, and very inspirational teachers. (*Spinal Tap* and *Waiting for Guffman* still remain comic genius in my eyes). The experience at Castle Rock bred more work and I was happily employed as an actor and writer in Hollywood for over twenty years, working with the likes of Robert DeNiro, Alec Baldwin, James Franco, Bill Condon, Ryan Murphy, Christopher Guest, Anthony Hopkins, Stephen Bocchco, Vanessa Redgrave, Jennifer Aniston, Matthew Perry, Lily Tomlin, Jon Cryer and Eugene Levy to name a few.

I have loved working in the industry and am very proud of my accomplishments. But truly, what I am about to share is the work I am most proud of.

You see, in 2000, I started what I consider to be my second career, teaching theatre. Taking my cue from the old Judy Garland/Mickey Rooney movies I decided to do a summer theatre for neighborhood children in my friend's backyard. There was a silly book that my son and all his friends were crazy about called *Super Diaper Baby*. I decided to write a stage adaptation as a way to get the children in our neighborhood excited about theatre. It worked. Later, when my son entered elementary school, I was troubled by the lack of arts education so I met with the faculty and asked if they would be open to my doing some theatre with the children. They could not of been more enthusiastic. I did a Reader's Theatre, teaching children how to adapt a story for stage. The performance included their artwork projected on a screen as well as orchestra students playing live music. My son's fifth grade teacher Nicole Sheard (letter attached) then asked if I would help her find an exciting, new way to teach the state standards for history. The result was *The Radical Voice of Freedom*, a play which I wrote and directed, and continued the mount for five successive years at the school. During this period I was also asked to develop a fall fundraiser for the school. In response, I created *Yee Haw Days*. Like *Tony n' Tina* and the *Vicki Shows*, we created a world into which we invited the community to participate. *Yee Haw Days*, which remains a major fundraiser at the school, turned the campus into a western town complete with a Grand Ole Opry performance of a new musical called *Bubba the Cowboy Prince*. Based on the popular children's story, *Bubba* was written and directed by my partner and me, and proved to be so successful with children and adults that it was performed for several years and eventually published by the world-renowned theatrical house, Samuel French. I will never forget the look on the children's faces when they saw their names listed in the published version as the original cast! *Bubba* is now licensed through Samuel French and enjoys productions all over the United States.

At Palisades Elementary I also created a visual art program called Art Cadre, also now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year (articles attached). The idea behind Cadre was to provide an environment where children could think outside the box, encouraging them to create installation art based upon work by such diverse artists as Andrew Goldsworthy, Eric Carle, Robert Rauschenberg and Dale Chihully. The Art Cadre program was cited as one of the contributing factors in the school's receiving the California Distinguished School award in 2005.

When my children matriculated to middle school, so did I. Recalling my trying middle school days, I became passionate about establishing a theatre community for students there. However, I noticed that there was a precipitous drop-off with young boys and theatre in middle school. The fear of not "looking cool" in front of their peers was a big issue for them. I remember thinking, "what if I created a show that made them look 'cool'?" And that is where *Friday Night Live* was born. Based on format made famous by *Saturday Night Live*, we remounted classic sketches from the show and also original work, including digital shorts. We even had a live rock n roll band play- and middle

school students performed all this! I am pleased to report that the boys stayed on after *FNL* and thrived in our Spring Musicals!

And then one day, I got a fateful phone call. My agent had a job offer in New York. It was a nice job, for good money and the studio was willing to fly me out. To my surprise, I found myself explaining to my agent that I couldn't take the job because I had a show opening at the middle school and that I needed to be there for the children. Suffice to say he was extremely upset. He shouted, "What are you, a teacher or an actor?" I answered, "Both", but the truth was told by my decision to stay. I knew my heart was with my students and with my work teaching theatre.

This past fall, the day before school was to start, the drama teacher at Palisades Charter High School abruptly resigned, leaving the department in chaos. There was a groundswell of parents, students and staff encouraging me to step in. I did so, and have found myself falling in love with the school and the students. In the three months I've found that I particularly love the challenge of finding new and creative ways to teach the state standards. I've been able to create two shows with the students, *Twilight Zone* for Halloween and *City of Dionysia* for the freshmen drama pod. In another class I was able to take five students to the August Wilson monologue competition at Center Theatre Group, and one student is advancing to the semi-finals! We also took over 100 students to the Drama Teachers of Southern California Festival Competition where we garnered one first place prize as well as several honorable mentions. We're starting a lunchtime comedy troupe and I'm hoping to direct them in *Tony n' Tina's Wedding* some day. Things seem to come full circle in wonderful ways.

I respectfully submit my package with the fervent hope that you will see fit to grant me eminence in drama. To see the visual learner, or student with an IEP triumph on stage is priceless to me. To push students to do more than they think they can-- and see them surprise themselves—is golden to me. To see natural raw talent soar... this is the work I want to do with the remainder of my life. It is work that is truly important and powerful. I am excited about providing more opportunities for students to explore who they are, more environments in which they can thrive, and a vibrant, fulfilling community to which we can all belong. I can do this by creating theatre.

In my life and career there has always been a teacher. Now, with your support, I want to be that teacher for many others.

Respectfully,



Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla  
Drama Teacher  
Palisades Charter High School

# Application for an Eminence Credential in Drama

Submitted by Palisades Charter High School on behalf of Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla

## **SUMMARY**

The governing board of Palisades Charter High School, by resolution adopted on xxxxx, in accordance with the California Education Code, Section 44262 recommended the issuance of a credential based on eminence to Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla in the subject of Drama.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation from the governing board for an Eminence Credential is based on guidelines submitted in CL-226 issued by the State of California, Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The candidate, Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla, has met or exceeded all documentation requirements for verifying eminence in the field of English- Theatre including receiving recognition as eminent beyond the boundaries of her community, being demonstrably advanced in her field of writing and performance, and being acknowledged by her peers as beyond the norm for others as an actor and writer.

Documentation verifying such achievement included in this packet:

## **A. RECOGNIZED AS EMINENT BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF HER COMMUNITY**

### **1. Letters:**

**Alec Baldwin**, Actor producer, New York, New York

**Tim Halkin**, COO Tandem Communications, Munich Germany

**David Kaplan** Director, teacher; curator, Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival, New York, New York

**Larry Pellegrini**, International director, Big Island, Hawaii

### **2. International and National Distinguished Employment**

#### **a. Theatre Resume**

**Artificial Intelligence Theater Company, New York/Los Angeles**  
**As Founder and Artistic Director. I created and starred in the following work:**

*Be My Valentine*

*Spring Catharsis*

*Leanne Thuna Center*

*It's a Lovin' Thing*

*Very Vicki Christmas*

*TNT Telethon*

*Choraleers*

*Tony n' Tina's Wedding \**

*I Want to Tell You*

*The Art of Inner Bubby*

Darinka NY, NY

Jasons Park Royale NY, NY

Jason's Park Royale NY, NY

The Ballroom NY, NY

The Ballroom NY, NY

Waverly Theatre NY,NY

Various

NY/LA

HBO Workspace LA, CA

The Comedy Store LA, CA

*Canopy of Care*  
*Enlightened Whistle Stop Tour*  
*Saturday Night at San Gennaro*  
*Hunger is the Best Sauce*  
*Afterbirth*  
*I Didn't Sign Up for This*

Ivar Theatre LA, CA  
 The Improv LA, CA  
 Hollywood & Highland LA, CA  
 Hollywood & Highland LA, CA  
 M Bar LA, CA  
 M Bar LA, CA

**Starring role in the World Premiere of Tennessee Williams':**

*THE DOG ENCHANTED BY THE DIVINE VIEW* Boston  
 Provincetown Theatre Festival  
 Mississippi

\*longest running comedy in Off-Broadway history

**b. Television and Film**

I received my SAG card when Martin Scorsese cast me in *Good Fellas*. I have worked in over 45 film and television projects for over 20 years and have performed for and with the following talent: Robert DeNiro, Alec Baldwin, James Franco, Bill Condon, Ryan Murphy, Christopher Guest, Stephen Bocchco, Vanessa Redgrave, Jennifer Aniston, Matthew Perry, Lily Tomlin, Jon Cryer, Eugene Levy, Elliot Gould.

**Filmography from IMDB (Internet Movie Data Base)**



<b><u>Dirt</u></b> (TV series)	2008
Character: Perri Tatum	
Episode: <u>In Lieu of Flowers</u>	
<b><u>Running with Scissors</u></b> (Movie)	2006
Character: Christy - 1978 Poetry Club	
<b><u>Clubhouse</u></b> (TV series)	2004-2005
Character: Gwen	
Episode: <u>Stealing Home</u>	
Episode: <u>Spectator Interference</u>	
Episode: <u>Trade Talks</u>	
<b><u>Nip/Tuck</u></b> (TV series)	2003-2004
Character: Suzanne Epstein	
Episode: <u>Julia McNamara</u>	
Episode: <u>Mrs. Grubman</u>	
Episode: <u>Antonia Ramos</u>	
Episode: <u>Sofia Lopez II</u>	
Episode: <u>Mandi/Randi</u>	
<b><u>Grounded for Life</u></b> (TV series)	2002-2004
Character: Connie O'Keefe	
Episode: <u>Me and Mrs. O</u>	
Episode: <u>Racketman</u>	
Episode: <u>Your Father Should Know: Part 2</u>	
Episode: <u>Swearin' to God</u>	
Episode: <u>Eddie Said Knock You Out</u>	
<b><u>Newton's Law</u></b> (Short Film)	2003

Character: Mrs. Butler <b><u>NYPD Blue</u></b> (TV series)	1997-2003
Characters: Gloria / Kristi Haines	
Episode: <u>Nude Awakening</u>	
Episode: <u>It Takes a Village</u>	
<b><u>Without a Trace</u></b> (TV series)	2003
Character: Wedding Planner	
Episode: <u>There Goes the Bride</u>	
<b><u>Deuces Wild</u></b> (Movie)	2002
Character: Esther	
<b><u>The West Wing</u></b> (TV series)	2002
Character: Janet Price	
Episode: <u>Night Five</u>	
<b><u>The District</u></b> (TV series)	2002
Character: Toni	
Episode: <u>Russian Winter</u>	
<b><u>The Mayor of Oyster Bay</u></b> (TV movie)	2002
Character: Lenore	
<b><u>Providence</u></b> (TV series)	2001
Episode: <u>Exposure</u>	
<b><u>The King of Queens</u></b> (TV series)	2001
Character: Mrs. Horowitz	
Episode: <u>Hi-Def Jam</u>	
<b><u>Bull</u></b> (TV series)	2001
Character: Sarah Rutigliano	
Episode: <u>The Quick Hit</u>	
Episode: <u>To Have and to Hold</u>	
<b><u>The '70s</u></b> (TV movie)	2000
Character: Flora	
<b><u>Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place</u></b> (TV series)	2000
Episode: <u>Another Moving Script</u>	
<b><u>The Sopranos</u></b> (TV series)	2000
Character: Joanne Moltisanti	
Episode: <u>From Where to Eternity</u>	
<b><u>Hefner: Unauthorized</u></b> (TV movie)	1999
Character: Tour Guide	
<b><u>The Nanny</u></b> (TV series)	1999
Character: Libby	
Episode: <u>The Baby Shower</u>	
Episode: <u>California, Here We Come</u>	
<b><u>DOA</u></b> (HBO Pilot)	1999
Character: Toni DiNovi	
<b><u>Getting Personal</u></b> (TV series)	1998
Character: Shelly Tucci	
Episode: <u>When Co-Workers Attack</u>	
Episode: <u>Milo Does the Darndest Things</u>	
Episode: <u>Guess Who Else Is Coming to Dinner?</u>	
Episode: <u>Sam I Am</u>	
Episode: <u>My Best Fling's Wedding</u>	
Episode: <u>Raiders of the Lost Watch</u>	
Episode: <u>Chasing Sammy</u>	
Episode: <u>The No Joy Bad Luck Club</u>	
Episode: <u>Bring in 'Da Milo, Bring in 'Da Robyn</u>	
Episode: <u>The Date After</u>	
Episode: <u>Fix Me Up, Tie Me Down</u>	

Episode: The Doctor Is In  
 Episode: There's Something About Rhonda  
 Episode: The Wedding Zinger  
 Episode: Midnight Milo  
 Episode: Last Three Temptations of Robyn Buckley  
 Episode: Saving Milo's Privates  
 Episode: Midnight Milo  
 Episode: The Wedding Zinger  
 Episode: There's Something About Rhonda  
**Cybill** (TV series) 1997  
 Character: Salesperson  
 Episode: The Big, Flouncy Thing  
**Temporarily Yours** (TV series) 1997  
 Character: Anne Marie  
 Episode: By Design  
 Episode: In the Same Boat  
 Episode: Independence Day  
 Episode: The Voice of Reason  
 Episode: Temp-tation  
 Episode: Pilot  
**Murphy Brown** (TV series) 1996  
 Character: Mohawk Secretary  
 Episode: Defending Your Life  
**Hope & Gloria** (TV series) 1996  
 Character: Simone  
 Episode: Tainted Love  
**Murder One** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Mona Feigenbaum  
 Episode: Chapter Twelve  
**High Society** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Paula, the Director  
 Episode: We Ought to Be in Pictures  
**Lois & Clark** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Michelle Sitkowitz  
 Episode: Just Say Noah  
**Partners** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Oh, my God! Jerry!  
 Pilot Episode: Oh, my God! Jerry!  
**A Mother's Prayer** (TV movie) 1995  
 Character: Sophia  
**Northern Exposure** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Angela Cusomano  
 Episode: Little Italy  
**Platypus Man** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Angela  
 Episode: The Apartment Show  
**Madman of the People** (TV series) 1995  
 Character: Florrie  
 Episode: Truths My Father Told  
**Friends** (TV series) 1994  
 Character: Shelly  
 Episode: The One Where Nana Dies Twice

<b><u>Dream On</u></b> [TV series]	1994
Character: Nancy Caruso	
Episode: <u>The Homecoming Queen</u>	
<b><u>The George Carlin Show</u></b> [TV series]	1994
Character: Alice	
Episode: <u>George Looks Down the Wrong End of a .38</u>	
<b><u>Family Album</u></b> [TV series]	1994
Character: Sheila DeMattis	
Episode: <u>Will You Still Feed Me?</u>	
Episode: <u>Salon, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Goodbye</u>	
Episode: <u>Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall All You Gotta Do Is Call...</u>	
Episode: <u>Guardian Angel</u>	
Episode: <u>Sibling Revelry</u>	
Episode: Pilot	
<b><u>Civil Wars</u></b> [TV series]	1993
Episode: <u>Alien Aided Affection</u>	
<b><u>Casualties of Love: The L.I. Lolita Story</u></b> [TV movie]	1991
Character: Maria	
<b><u>Goodfellas</u></b>	1990
Character: Joe Buddha's Wife	

### c. Writer

#### 1. Published Plays - see section B3, Authorship Activities

- a. *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*
- b. *Bubba the Cowboy Prince*

#### 2. Screenplays

- co-written with Bill Condon:

- a. *Vicki Oberjeune: Alone in the Night*
- b. *Devil and Daniel Webster/No Shortcut to Happiness* [produced] starring Anthony Hopkins, Alec Baldwin, Amy Poehler, Josh Hartnett & Bobby Cannevale
- co-written with Randall Thropp
- c. *A Feast Story* commissioned by Doug DeLuca, Exec Producer *Jimmy Kimmel Live*

#### 3. Television Pilots

Development Deals at Castlerock Entertainment and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.

- a. *Tony n Tina Pilot*
- b. *Tony n' Tina Pilot Presentation*
- c. *Untitled Nancy Cassaro Project*

### 3. Press [attached]

- a. "Broadway's Brightest Lights" Business Week June 19, 1989
- b. "I Do, I Do, or What?" Details June 1988
- c. "Theater Party" Life Magazine May 1988
- d. "Holy Matrimony! The Irrepressible Tony and Tina" People Magazine April 18, 1988
- e. "Off-Broadway, Nuptials With Guest Stars" The Washington Post July 10, 1989

## **B. DEMONSTRABLY ADVANCED IN HER FIELD**

### **1. Degrees and Education:**

Hofstra University, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Performance, 1981

### **2. Letters:**

**Bill Condon**, Academy Award winning writer and director, Los Angeles, CA

**Jeff Greenstein**, Emmy Award winning writer and exec producer, Los Angeles, CA

**David Kaplan**, Internationally acclaimed theatre director and teacher, Curator Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival New York, NY (Letter attached in Section A.)

### **3. Authorship Activities:**

a. *Tony n' Tina's Wedding* – cover attached as evidence of publication

b. *Bubba the Cowboy Prince* – cover attached as evidence of publication

c. *No Shortcut to Happiness* aka *The Devil and Daniel Webster*  
Writers Guild of America Credits (Letter attached)

d. *A Feast Story* – Writers Guild of America (Registration attached)

### **4. Evidence of high level of expertise:**

Work referenced in the following book:

a. *The Compass: The Improvisational Theatre that Revolutionized American Comedy*,  
Janet Coleman, pg. 300

### **5. Professional Associations:**

SAG-AFTRA, Screen Actors Guild of America Member, 1988 -current

WGA, Writers Guild of America Member, 1990 -current

### **6. Awards and Honors Received**

Chaplin Comedy Award, 1988

LA Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1990

Drawn by Al Hirschfeld for the New York Times Weekend Section, 1988

New Yorker Cartoon, 1993

Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS Fundraising Award, 1989

Hosted the LA Weekly Theatre Awards, 1991

George Estabrook Distinguished Service Award, Hofstra University, 1991

### **7. Press**

a. "Nancy Cassaro and the Artifice of Intelligence" Drama-Logue, Jan. 4-10, 1990

b. "Cassaro says I do to Castle Rock, Fox" The Hollywood Reporter, Aug. 6, 1990

- c. "Tony n' Tina as a Sitcom" The New York Times, Jan. 11, 1991
- d. "Comedy Actress Parodies 50's-Style TV" The New York Times, Feb.1,1987
- e. "Artificial Xmas" New York Native, Dec. 21, 1987
- f. "Sending up Yule schmaltz" New York Post, Dec. 4, 1987
- g. "Ballroom, NY" Variety, Dec. 30, 1987

**C. ACKNOWLEDGED BY HER PEERS BEYOND THE NORM FOR OTHERS IN THE SPECIFIC ENDEAVOR**

**1. Letters from former employers, professional colleagues and other experts in the field, relating to the individual's recognized expertise or position of prominence within the specific field.**

- a. **Stephen Holden**, Critic New York Times, New York, NY
- b. **Jeff Greenstein**, Emmy Award winning writer/ executive producer Los Angeles, CA (previously listed in section B.)
- c. **Janis Hirsch**, Award winning writer and executive producer Los Angeles, CA
- d. **Mark Nassar**, Award winning writer and filmmaker, Chicago, IL
- e. **Mark Campbell**, writer/teacher, Los Angeles Leadership Academy, Los Angeles, CA

**2. Documents evidencing an extraordinary ability worthy of distinction such as written advisory opinions from a peer group, national, international organization representing the field.**

**a. Letters**

- 1. **Joshua White**, Visual artist and director
- 2. **Mark Nassar**, Award winning writer and filmmaker (previously listed in section C1)

**b. Press**

- 1. "A Valentine Show That Shoots Arrows Tipped With Satire" The New York Times, Feb. 6, 1987
- 2. "Critic's Choices" The New York Times, Jan. 31, 1988
- 3. "Artificial Intelligence" The New York Times, Jan. 8, 1987
- 4. "Tony n' Tina : Married to Their Work" Los Angeles Times, Oct. 8,1989
- 5. "We Do, We Do! A Queens wedding grabs LA by the bells" LA Weekly, Jan. 1990

**3. Evidence of a major, nationally or internationally recognized award. These awards should be of the type recognizing uncommon achievement in and advancement of a particular field of endeavor**

[previously listed in section B6]	
Chaplin Award	1988
Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS Fundraising Award	1989
LA Drama Critics Circle	1991
George M Estabrook Award, Hofstra University	1991
Founders Day Award Palisades Elementary Charter School	2005
Founders Day Award Paul Revere Charter Middle School	2009

#### 4. Evidence of any extremely significant contribution made to their field.

##### a. Creator and star of *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*

The longest running comedy in Off Broadway History [22 years] has enjoyed over 100 productions worldwide including Japan, Australia, Germany, Bahamas and Puerto Rico. 1988-current

##### b. Letters:

[previously listed in above sections]

1. **Stephen Holden**, Critic, *The New York Times*
2. **Larry Pellegrini**, International theatre director, Big Island, Hawaii

##### c. Press

1. "Avant-Garde Antics for Fearless Audiences" New York Times, Feb. 5, 1988
2. "Accept this 'Wedding' invitation" LA Herald Examiner, Oct. 16, 1989
3. "This 'Wedding' takes the cake" LA Herald Examiner, Oct. 19, 1989
4. "Tony n' Tina's Anniversary" New York Post, Feb. 6, 1989
5. "On the Track of the Next Big Thing" Los Angeles Times Oct. 29, 1989

#### 5. Authorship of a new or extremely successful method of educating children

##### a. Letters, followed by production stills

1. **Justin Koretz**, Co-director, Personal Enrichment Program
2. **Eileen Heisler**, Parent and exec producer of *The Middle*
3. **Nicole Sheard**, Principal Topanga Elementary Charter School
4. **Kim Masters**, Parent, Editor at Large, The Hollywood Reporter
5. **Jim Hake**, Parent, Founder and CEO Spirit of America

##### b. Work authored and produced for education in the Arts

<i>A Very Scary Halloween</i> [original]	1999
<i>Super Diaper Baby</i> [adaptation]	2000
<i>Bubba the Cowboy Prince</i> [adaptation, published] - production still attached	2001
<i>The Empty Pot</i> [adaptation]	2005
<i>The English Roses</i> [adaptation]	2005
<i>Yee Haw Days Grand Ole Opry</i> [original]	2002-2007
<i>Radical Voice of Freedom</i> [original]	2004-2007
<i>Dainty Mabel</i> [original] - production still attached	2008
<i>Tardy Sweep</i> [original]	2010

<i>City of Dionysia</i> (original/adaptation)	2012
<i>Twilight Zone/ Goose Bumps</i> (adaptation)	2012

**c. Direction of School Productions (including all of the above)**

<i>Crazy for You</i>	2012
<i>Bye Bye Birdie</i>	2011
<i>Little Shop of Horrors</i>	2010
<i>Bugsy Malone</i>	2009
<i>Friday Night Live</i>	2004-2012
<i>42<sup>nd</sup> Street</i>	2006
<i>Singin' in the Rain</i>	2003

**d. Art Cadre Installations**

I created and taught The Art Cadre Program, an environmental approach to the visual arts. I received a Founder's Day Award in 2005 due to the success of the Art Cadre program, which was cited as a contributing factor to Palisades Charter Elementary School receiving California Distinguished School Award.

We encouraged students to embrace the innovative style of celebrated installation artists such as Dale Chihuly, Andrew Goldsworthy, Eric Carle, Robert Rauschenberg, Wayne Theibaud, Claes Oldenburg, George Rodrigue, Louise Nevelson and Andy Warhol.

**1. Press (attached)**

- a. "Elementary Students Create Crystals to Find Inner Light" Palisadian Post January 8, 2005
- b. "Pali Elementary Kids Fashion Chihuly Art" Palisadian Post June 2, 2005

**6. Extraordinary success in their field (Humanitarian)**

**a. Letter:**

**Debbie Barnett**, Director of Operations IN ONE INSTANT

**b. Humanitarian Projects:**

- 1. **The Choraleers** A satirical singing/comedy troupe that visited AIDS Hospices, Children's Hospitals, battered women's shelters and homeless shelters during the holidays. New York/Los Angeles
- 2. **TNT Telethon** A twelve hour "mock" telethon that raised money for Equity Fights AIDS NY. Our efforts garnered the 1<sup>st</sup> place prize for fundraising in 1989. [previously listed in section B6]
- 3. **Mardi Gras LA** In response to Hurricane Katrina, we created a street festival in the style of the Big Easy that raised funds and awareness for The Awesome Girls Foundation in the St. Marks District of New Orleans. Awesome Girls serves "at-risk" African American girls between 9 - 19 years old who are in distress.

**4. Palisades Charter Complex Fundraising:** Over the past 15 years, I have worked diligently to create new and innovative approaches to fundraising in our public schools. Below are a few examples of projects:

- a. **Yee Haw Days** Celebrating it's 10<sup>th</sup> year, *Yee Haw Days* is a community family fundraiser that takes place in the fall with Western games, Grand Ole Opry entertainment and a chili cook-off!
- b. **Live Auction Shows** By writing and producing quality entertainment for our annual auctions, we were able to bring our net profit for the night over the \$100,000 mark consistently. 2004- current.
- c. **Nightmare on Bowdoin Street** With the recent budget cuts, the Palisades Charter High School Principal asked me to help with a short video for Back to School Night. I wrote and directed *Nightmare* and we raised \$25,000 in one night for the Palisades Education Fund.

**5. In One Instant** I wrote and produced interactive safe-driving assembly for Freshmen and Sophomore classes 2009, 2011.

**c. Awards**

Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS Fundraising Award	1989
Founders Day Award Palisades Elementary Charter School	2005
Founders Day Award Paul Revere Charter Middle School	2009

# Authorships

*Nancy*  
**TONY N' TINA'S  
 WEDDING**

by ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

CONCEIVED BY  
 NANCY CASSARO

CREATED BY

THOMAS MICHAEL ALLEN,  
 JAMES ALTUNER, MARK CAMPBELL,  
 NANCY CASSARO, PATRICIA CREGAN,  
 ELIZABETH DENNEHY,  
 CHRISTOPHER FRACCHIOLLA,  
 JACK FRIS, KEVIN A. LEONIDAS,  
 MARK NASSAR, LARRY PELLEGRINI,  
 SUSAN VARON and MOIRA WILSON

Originally Produced by  
 Joseph and Daniel Corcoran  
 in association with Artificial Intelligence



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**BUBBA THE COWBOY  
 PRINCE**

by  
**Nancy Cassaro  
 and  
 Randall Thropp**

Music by  
**Matthew Cassaro**

Based on the book by  
**Helen Ketteman**

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**BUBBA THE COWBOY PRINCE**  
 By Nancy Cassaro and Randall Thropp  
 Music by Matthew Cassaro  
 Based on the book by Helen Ketteman

*Musical / Flexible casting - 10 m., 8 f. / Unit Set*

Yee Haw! A darn tootin', rip roarin' cowboy musical for the whole family! Bubba lives on a ranch with an unscrupulous family of desperados. Their idea of fun is tippin' cows and robbin' banks. When Miz Lurleen, the richest gal East of the Brazos, throws a hoc down everyone is invited except Bubba. After an encounter with a fairy god-cow, Bubba is transformed for one night into a sod bustin', cowboy prince and wins Miz Lurleen's heart.

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## About the Show Tony n' Tina's Wedding

The Longest Running Show in Off-Broadway History!



Since opening February 14th, 1988 in New York City this unique theatrical experience has won over the hearts of thousands of people, in over 100 cities worldwide, including Japan, Australia and many European cities.

At *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*, audience members actually play the roles of *Tony n' Tina's* family and/or friends. These are roles we have all been practicing, every time we go to a real wedding. This universal familiarity with the union of two individuals from 2 distinct families, regardless as to

where you are from, will take you back and forth between fantasy and reality throughout the entire evening. For the ultimate experience... eat, drink, dance, converse and allow yourself to be caught up in the activities. This all inclusive evening of entertainment will be something you and your friends will be talking about for many years to come.

All prices are in lieu of a gift to the happy couple and include the show, dancing, and dinner although menus may vary depending upon the specific venue in which you are attending. To buy tickets, visit our [Buy Tickets page](#) or select from the locations links above.

### The Birth of the Show

The idea for *Tony n' Tina's Wedding* was originally conceived at Hofstra University while Mark Nasser and Nancy Cassaro (the original Tony n' Tina) were undergraduates. Both in the drama department from 1977-1981 they made up these characters and would often improv with each other, acting out the roles of two Italian boyfriend-girlfriends from Queens, just for fun. As their professional relationship continued (after both moving to New York), after graduating from Hofstra, their characters continued to develop as well. Soon after the idea to present an interactive wedding, where the audience played the guests, was proposed and in 1985, was acted upon. Three performances were planned, actors invited their friends and family, and at this point it became clear to Joe Corcoran that this was an "event" that would appeal to an audience, well beyond traditional theater goers. Well, the rest is history. Joe Corcoran mounted another production of the show, this time for several weeks, where it caught the eye of People Magazine, then The New York Times, Time Magazine, followed by hundreds of media outlets throughout the world that had immediately embraced this simple, yet genius, concept to create a familiar environment where audiences could eat, drink and dance...all while interacting with characters that seemed oh so familiar.

In February 1988 the first commercial production was capitalized and presented by Joe Corcoran and his London based brother Dan on Waverly Place (in Greenwich Village) with the church ceremony taking place at St. John's Church on Christopher Street. As the audience attended the church service, then walked all together, with the cast, across 7th Ave to Waverly Place the show became a fixture of the Greenwich Village neighborhood, running at that location for the first 11 years.

Since opening countless notables have been among the hundreds of actors who are part of the Tony n' Tina "family", including:

Lee Mazzilli Tony Meola | Aida Turturro | Sharon Angela | Dan Grimaldi  
Phil Rosenthal (original priest and Creator of "Everybody Loves Raymond")  
"Stuttering" John Melendez | Mark Nasser | [Kevin Alexander](#) | Nancy Cassaro  
Domenica Scorsese | Kenny Kramer | Vito Antefuerno | Diego Serrano  
Patrick O'Neil | Reid Hutchens | Robert Cea | Christine Nagy | Monica Horan  
Mike Straka | Rob Carniletti

### CREDITS

*Tony n' Tina's Wedding* was originally created in 1988 by (listed alphabetically):

Kevin Alexander | Tom Allen | James Altuner | Elizabeth Dennehy  
Mark Campbell | Nancy Cassaro | Chris Fracchiolla | Jack Fris  
Mark Nasser | Patricia Cregan Navarra | Larry Pelligrini  
Susan Varon | Moira Wilson

## Photo Album



### QUOTES [More quotes >](#)

"Audaciously imaginative!" *The New York Times*

"It's a wedding to remember!" *New York Post*

"Get yourself invited!" *Joel Siegel, WABC-TV*

"'Wedding' proves to be wonderfully wacky amid perfect backdrop!"

*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

"Just like a real wedding ... only funnier!" *Chicago Tribune*

"The audience got down and partied hearty!" *Baltimore Sun*

[More quotes >](#)

### MENU (This will vary from show location to show location)

**Friends Seating (General admission ticket):**

Champagne, bread, salad, pasta, and dessert.

**VIP Seating:**

Some shows offer VIP treatment. Please view the specific show's webpage to see if the show does.

### ATTIRE FOR SHOW

Guests are invited to dress from wedding formal to business casual.

Note: For those not appropriately dressed...you won't be denied entrance to the wedding, but you will have to answer to Mrs. Vitale, Tina's mom.



Tony n' Tina's Wedding Theater Show | Tony and Tina's Wedding  
info@tonylovestina.com | 2007-2010 © Tony n' Tina's Wedding

Since Opening in 1988:



75,512 lbs.



February 26, 2002

Nancy Cassaro

[Redacted]

PACIFIC PALISADES, CA 90272-3820

MEMBER SERVICES  
PH 323. 782. 4747  
FAX 323. 782. 4816  
memberservices@wga.org

GERRY DALEY  
COUNSEL  
gdaley@wga.org

JEFF MANDON  
CREATIVE RIGHTS COORDINATOR  
jmandon@wga.org

Dear Nancy:

The Guild has determined the writing credits for *THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER*. The final writing credits as determined on 2/13/2002 are:

Screenplay by Pete Dexter  
and Bill Condon & Nancy Cassaro  
Screen Story by Pete Dexter

We would like to remind you of your post-production creative rights. Below is a summary of those rights:

**Viewing Cut:** All participating writers have the right to view a cut of the film in sufficient time to allow the writers' suggestions to be implemented, if approved.\*

**Sneak Preview:** All credited writers will be invited to the first sneak preview if it is held in L.A. county. If possible, the Company should give them five days notice.

**Premiere/Festival, and Press Junket:** All credited writers will be invited to the domestic premiere or film festival at which the film is first exhibited, and the domestic press junket, unless notified otherwise by the Company. The Company will furnish first class transportation and accommodations for up to two such writers if they are required to travel more than 150 miles to attend.

**Press Kit:** The identity, background and filmography of the credited writers must be included in the standard print and electronic press kits as well as the DVD, if such information about the director is also included.

Writers Guild of America, west, Inc.

7000 WEST THIRD STREET, LOS ANGELES, CA 90048 • PH 323. 951. 4000 FAX 323. 782. 4800 • WEBSITE www.wga.org

AFFILIATED WITH: WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, EAST, INC. WRITERS GUILD OF CANADA THE AUSTRALIAN WRITERS GUILD NEW ZEALAND WRITERS' GUILD (INC)  
SOCIÉTÉ DES AUTEURS DE RADIO, TÉLÉVISION ET CINÉMA THE IRISH PLAYWRIGHTS AND SCREENWRITERS GUILD THE WRITERS GUILD OF GREAT BRITAIN

C&CA 3A-30

June 2013

Nancy Cassaro  
February 26, 2002  
Page Two

**Final Shooting Script and Videocassette:** All participating writers are entitled to a copy of the final shooting script. Credited writers must be furnished, at no cost, a videocassette of the movie when videocassettes are made.

### **Creative Rights Survey**

Only by careful, complete, and accurate monitoring of Company compliance will we succeed in changing the industry culture to one of greater respect and creative participation for writers. To this end, I am enclosing a creative rights survey for you to complete. You may call me with your responses or simply fax the completed form to 323-782-4816. This information will help the Guild assess how well the Companies are honoring the personal commitments of their CEOs to implement these new provisions.

### **Successful Writer-Director Collaboration**

Since many of these rights depend on writer-director collaboration, we also would like to hear from you regarding your successful collaboration experiences, so that they may be shared with others. These statements may be used in *Written By* or *Written By Member News*. We encourage you to describe methods of communication and working together that you feel contributed to this successful collaboration, and the resulting benefits to the project. These statements can be faxed to me at the above number in any legible form, or sent via E-Mail to [jmandon@wga.org](mailto:jmandon@wga.org). Please include your name, the project, and a number where we can reach you to confirm your submission.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or require any assistance from the Guild in exercising these important creative rights.

In solidarity,



Jeff Mandon  
Creative Rights Coordinator

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\* For movies-of-the-week and mini-series, the Company shall invite all participating writers to view the "Director's cut" within 48 hours following the Company's viewing; or if, in lieu of a viewing, the Company is provided a videocassette copy of the cut, the participating writers will simultaneously receive a copy.

# Letters in Support of Eminence



October 16, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

To the Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification,

I have known Nancy Cassaro for over thirty years and I sincerely believe that she is an excellent candidate for an Eminence Teaching Credential in Drama. I offer my full support and encouragement to Nancy in any future endeavors in the field of education.

Nancy's talent is formidable. In fact, I was so taken with her starring role as Vicki Oberjeune in *Vicki's Lovin' Thing* that I brought the project to HBO and signed on as a producer to make a film version of the piece. I was also one of the first producers to help call attention to her ground breaking production *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*. The original production took New York by storm and its 22 year run there and the over 100 productions worldwide speak to the power of her invention.

Nancy is a uniquely funny woman. I pitched Lorne Michaels the idea of hiring Nancy for *Saturday Night Live*, but the timing didn't work out, due to the birth of Nancy's son.

Nancy has an engaging and innovative voice, which can only be a great asset in the classroom. I can think of no one better than Nancy for this position. Coming from a family of educators, I admire her decision and know that she will be a remarkable teacher enriching the lives of many students in the state of California.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Alec Baldwin

October 22, 2012

**To the Commission on Teacher Credentialing,**

My name is Tim Halkin, I am the COO and Partner of Tandem Communications in Munich, Germany. Tandem develops, produces, markets and distributes high-quality television programming for the worldwide market including the groundbreaking Emmy and Golden Globe nominated series, *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End*.

I am pleased to write you today about one of my oldest friends, Nancy Cassaro. Nancy and I met in first grade, and even then I was impressed with her drive. In fourth grade Nancy actually directed a production of *Cinderella*, and in seventh grade she starred in a musical I wrote called *Goldiggers of '73*. This was her first stage performance and what I witnessed that night was thrilling. A star was born. She had stage presence and a comedic gift that was remarkable. It only got better after that.

Her years in New York were particularly exciting. She used her skills as an actor, producer, director and leader to enlist scores of talented people for her many Off-Broadway theatrical pieces like *Vicki's Lovin' Thing* and *A Very Vicki Christmas*. These were groundbreaking works that introduced the main stream New York theatre scene to a new genre, environmental theatre. Exhibiting her trademark drive, Nancy conceived, produced and starred in *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*, a landmark in environmental theatre for which she marshaled the talents of over thirty actors, artists, designers and musicians. The play became the longest running Off-Broadway comedy in history and has delighted audiences all over the world-- even here in Munich. And I always get a kick out of seeing her American television work here in Munich with her voice dubbed into German!

Nancy is an original. She has a heart and passion for theatre that is deep, and is matched only by her compassion and love for people. I know that she will be of immeasurable value to the education system of the State of California, and especially to any student lucky enough to have her as a teacher.

Sincerely,



Tim Halkin  
COO Tandem Communications



October 15, 2012

To the Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification.

It's my pleasure to write to you about Nancy Cassaro, the creator (and star) of the long-running stage show *Tony N Tina's Wedding*, who was for several years an acting student of mine in New York City, and with whom I had the pleasure to work professionally 20 years later. Among the several hundreds of my students from over 30 years of teaching Nancy is unique.

Let me put that in perspective: I've been teaching since 1980, around the world, most recently in Mexico, Italy, NYC and in Uruguay. I've taught at Rutgers, Bard College, Hofstra, NYU, the Hong Academy of Fine Arts, the Moscow Pedagogical Institute (Samara Branch), the Siberian Far East College of Fine Arts in Ulan Ude, The U of the South in Sewanee TN, Delta State in Greenville MS, the U of New Mexico in Albuquerque and at my own studio in Manhattan for two decades. My students have won the Tony, Emmy, LaWee and several other awards. My former students teach in high schools, colleges, and universities throughout the world.

Again: Among my hundreds of students over 30 years of teaching Nancy is unique.

*Tony N Tina's Wedding* is, in itself, a unique achievement: a 22 year run (years!) in New York, productions of the play in over a hundred other locations world-wide. The length of the New York run is more than impressive: Nancy invented a genre.

More, Nancy has had to train other people to perform the show – for decades. To do so she had to devise her own method of passing on what is seemingly impossible to pass on: the fresh immediacy of improvisation, and a spirit of ensemble faithfully dedicated to telling a story.

More, what the show and each ensemble Nancy has created shares is a celebration of family and love, and that these manifest themselves in all people old, young, pretty and not so pretty, with what passes for good taste, and a lot of what is bad taste: that is to say each time the show is performed it as open-hearted as its ensemble – and Nancy, its creator.

Separately from *Tony N Tina's*, the company Nancy formed, Artificial Intelligence, created the Vicky Oberjeune Holiday Specials – with its hard-working show biz mama and talent-free children another celebration of love and family in odd places. On her own, she is an accomplished actress. Six years ago when I was directing the world premiere of Tennessee Williams' first version of *The Rose Tattoo* (titled *The Dog Enchanted by the Divine View*) I asked Nancy to come from California to create the role for performances in Boston, Provincetown, and the town in Mississippi where Tennessee Williams was born. In all those places she was acknowledged for her craft.

What Nancy combines is the experience of having done something with the knowledge of how she got it done. Add to that her proven ability to pass on what she knows. That's very special. And having her pass on what she knows about theater, art, and the necessity of craft to channel passion towards performance would be a valuable contribution to students in the state of California.

David Kaplan

PO Box 1721 • Provincetown, MA 02657 • 866-789-TENN • [iwptown.org](http://iwptown.org)

David Kaplan | Curator

Jef Hall-Flavin | Director

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification

Assignment and Waivers Division

Box 944270

Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

October 11, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I have worked with Nancy Cassaro Fracchiolla for the last thirty years. It has been three decades of dynamic, interactive theatre from an original viewpoint that is the true vision of Cassaro's.

In the *Vicki Shows* in the mid eighties and *Tony N' Tina's Wedding* in the late eighties, we created a world and invited the audience in. This environmental approach proved very successful for Nancy's theatre company, Artificial Intelligence. It propelled us as writers, actors and directors to a new level of artistic work that was performed and celebrated on the New York stage for the first time. I imagine that Nancy's approach to education would be to bring this creativity to the classroom making theatre come alive in a unique way for students. This approach is valuable on many levels but most significantly for its originality and hands on approach to understanding theatre as a communicative art form.

Having been a student of Cassaro's for many years, I can tell you that she will have a powerful effect on high school students much in the same way she had an effect on the many companies of *Tony N' Tina's Wedding* that have performed around the world. The international success of *TNT* is among the greatest of any performance piece in the history of theatre. We have had first class productions in Australia, Germany, Austria, Japan, Puerto Rico and Bermuda.

Nancy Cassaro is engaging, creative and her unique and innovative voice will be a great asset to any classroom. She will instill freedom in the creative thought process encouraging students to think outside the box. Her sense of humor is large and expansive and will accompany learning in a powerful way.

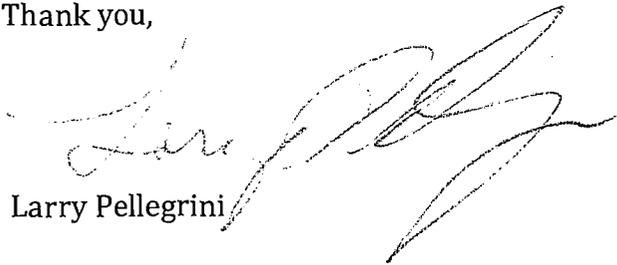
Nancy and I have worked together in varied environments and venues. We have done many different kinds of comedy. We analyzed and spoofed the iconic Telethon and Award Show. Both were quite successful, satirically layered and crafted with an educated awareness of how those events established themselves in our pop culture. We wrote and performed intimate evenings of comedy in nightclubs in New York City. We were fearless, using Nancy's unique eye to guide us on a decade long journey.

In Los Angeles, we worked at Castle Rock Entertainment and wrote television pilots for Fox and CBS adapting to the corporate science of national TV. At the same time, we created shows at the world famous Comedy Store on Sunset Boulevard that skewered the self-help guru culture in *The Art of Inner Bubby*.

Nancy's sincerity in the execution of her art often took the audience on a journey where they gladly gave up their own truth for Nancy's truth.

Nancy is a great teacher and the school of comedy she created is now a part of our rich theatrical history.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Pellegrini", written in a cursive style.

Larry Pellegrini

# The New York Times

620 Eighth Avenue  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10018

October 24, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento CA 94144-2700

Re: Nancy Cassaro

To Whom It May Concern:

Nancy Cassaro is a significant theatrical innovator. As an arts critic for the New York Times, I had pleasure of reviewing her and her theater collective Artificial Intelligence in one the most groundbreaking environmental theater pieces of the 1980's. "Vicki's Valentine Thing" was a hilarious, brilliantly acted fake live variety show that affectionately spoofed family TV specials in which a celebrity and her dysfunctional brood gathered in front of the television camera for a cozy evening as technicians scurried around the theater setting up cameras and lighting. Audiences got to see the drama in front of the camera and behind the scenes, as Vicki (Ms. Cassaro), a tipsy Judy Garland-like star embraced her flock, and family members sang period late-60's songs.

Nancy and the group went on to stage the even more influential "Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding," a make-believe Italian wedding ceremony in an actual church followed by a reception in which baked ziti was served along with cheap champagne, and little dramas "spontaneously" erupted all around. This off-Broadway comedy hit inspired a subgenre of environmental theater pieces in which the audience became part of the action and the lines between performer and spectator blurred: all in good fun.

These pieces, which belong to the deadpan comedy tradition of spoofs like the movie, "This Is Spinal Tap," placed Nancy and Artificial Intelligence at the forefront of American theatrical satire. Her influence remains incalculable.



Stephen Holden  
Film and cabaret critic

September 27, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA. 94244-2700

To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to be writing on behalf of Nancy Cassaro Fracchiola and a little envious of any student lucky enough to have her as a Drama Teacher.

I first worked with Nancy twenty years ago. She was writing a television pilot for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and as a writer-producer on the lot, I was assigned to supervise her. It was a joy from start to finish, and may I say that in my experience, helping writers re-write their work is not usually anything in the "joyful" family.

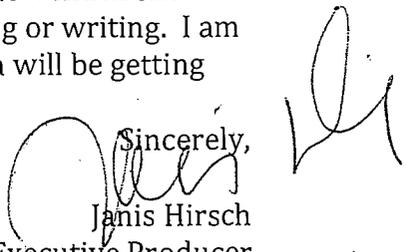
During that time, Nancy never used the deadly phrase "yes, but" – she heard every suggestion, even my most-boneheaded and was excited to give them all a try. In doing so, she inspired me to be better at my own job and that's a pretty neat trick.

Since our first encounter, I've hired Nancy as an actress and again, she didn't just rise to the occasion, she rose above it with a great spirit and hard work.

When a producer asked me to be involved in a monthly salon in which well-established LA writers read stories they've specifically written for her subscribers, I wasn't being modest when I said that Nancy would be far better than I; I was being honest. And I was right. Nancy brought the house down.

As Nancy and I have become closer I'm blown away when I see her eclectic, inclusive and ever-expanding group of friends. Theater friends, mom friends, Church friends, neighborhood friends, childhood friends, young friends, (really) old friends: Nancy has never met a stranger.

Last year, I wrote my favorite middle school teacher and told her how much she meant to me, how she is still the voice in my head when I'm reading or writing. I am absolutely certain that in 20 or 30 years, Nancy Cassaro Fracchiola will be getting those kind of letters on a daily basis. She is that special.

Sincerely,  
  
Janis Hirsch  
Executive Producer

10/16/12

To Whom it May Concern,

Nancy Cassaro is someone I hold in high esteem. Her talent and imagination were the spearhead for one of the longest running shows in New York theater history, *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*. Her production of a *Very Vicki Christmas* preceded the TNT commercial production. It was so unique and inventive it led the New York Times critic Stephen Holden to become a huge fan of hers and of *Artificial Intelligence*, the creative force behind both projects. Because of Stephen's excitement over the piece we were able to get the funding for TNT and the rest is theater history.

Nancy's talent and formidable funny-bone made her my favorite writing partner in my thirty year history in show business. I can unequivocally say the same about her as an acting partner. She played "Tina" to my "Tony" for more than a couple of years in TNT. It was the happiest and most rewarding acting partnership of my career.

Besides her talent and love of children, I believe Nancy would bring a number of elements to the classroom that would be a blessing to any school. Her imagination is formidable, contagious and expressed in a simple and understanding way. It was not easy, back in the day, to convince and teach professional actors the rudiments of environmental/interactive theater. Making the audience performers in a show, seamlessly, had never been done before. Taking away the fourth wall from an actor is very scary to them and many found it hard to comprehend. Nancy's imagination and enthusiasm helped the skeptical over the hurdle.

Nancy's sincere enthusiasm for projects she undertakes is inspiring and she has the capacity for it beyond any person I know. As it did for the professionals we worked with, it should rally the students to new heights for any project they may undertake. Nancy will jog their imaginations not just for specific projects but for what is possible in their futures no matter what they undertake, beyond the constraints, rules and expectations that are part of any profession.

What makes Nancy the whole package is her hard work. She will not rest. When we were working long days on a project and were ready to call it a day she wanted to put in more hours, with or without us. Because she works so hard she can expect it from others. The students will intuitively understand this. Some may resist of course, but they, like we did, will go along and get the most important lesson in the value of hard work.

Even in my most recent professional endeavors I often ask myself, "Am I working as hard as Nancy Cassaro would?" and it spurs me on.

Sincerely,



Mark Nassar

**JOSHUA WHITE**

NEW YORK, NY 10003

[www.joshualightshow.com](http://www.joshualightshow.com)

Hello,

My name is Joshua White. I'm a working artist and a retired television director. My dear friend Nancy Cassaro asked me to write a few words to you on her behalf. I am very pleased to do so.

Having been in a position similar to yours, reading letters of recommendation, I've come to appreciate brevity.

So...

Nancy is one of the most original creative minds I've ever met. We worked on many theatrical projects together over the last quarter century.

I met her when she was quite young. With her friends, Nancy created a theater company called Artificial Intelligence. They would conceptualize, develop characters and find a plot line, always with great wit. Then, they would perform this theater at every available opportunity.

Eventually, this "improvisation" technique that they shortened to "prov" evolved into the legendary, highly successful immersive theater piece known as *Tony & Tina's Wedding*.

During my lifetime, I've seen and participated in many living theater experiences including the actual Living Theater, but never, ever, to the degree and depth that Nancy and the group were able to achieve.

The *Tony & Tina* experience drew the audience in from the moment they entered the space. What I found so personally compelling was that all the characters, the actors, were inherently sweet natured, funny and most important treated you like an old friend. You watched the ceremony and then sat down to a "wedding banquet". Slowly the audience became totally integrated into the evolving scenario. Eventually, it was hard to tell the actors from the viewers. In spite of the appearance of free form, *Tony & Tina* was highly organized and disciplined. The techniques they developed were brilliant.

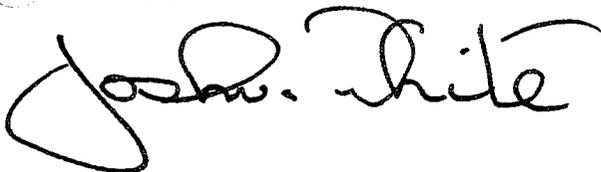
Over many years, I participated in many "provs" with Nancy. Often, they were done simply for the sake of stretching the form and engaging the cast. One particularly memorable experience involved creating a faux telethon that lasted for twelve hours. At times, there were only two people in the audience, but that wasn't the point. The point was to do it and we did, with great satisfaction.

My point is this; Nancy Cassaro possesses a unique and unusual gift. She can take ingredients, a diverse group of people, find a common language and make a unique form of theater. In her hands, ideas become real and the process happens quickly.

I have worked with many talented people over the years, but never with anyone who can do what she does. The result is a robust, totally immersive and highly witty theatrical experience.

Nancy would be a wonderful asset and I highly recommend her.

Sincerely yours,



October 22, 2012

October 22, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

Dear Commissioners,

I first knew Nancy Cassaro as a fan. In the mid-1980s she conceived, co-wrote and starred in a series of shows celebrating the character of Vicki Oberjeune, a faded Hollywood diva with a wicked tongue and an unfortunate fondness for alcohol, pills and inappropriate men. The shows were satirical recreations of the seasonally-themed variety specials that were staples of network television in the 1960s. They were incredibly funny and often moving, but what was truly remarkable was the way Nancy took her theatre history background, and specifically the ideas of avant-garde artists like Antonin Artaud and Peter Brook, and applied them to a purely populist work. The theatre became a television studio, with cameramen running down the aisles and backstage crew visible -- increasingly so as Vicki veered out of control. Crucially, the audience was asked to play its own part, that of the audience at the taping of the show in the 1960s. The anything-can-happen sense of controlled chaos was electric, and something I've never forgotten.

Nancy and the company she created, Artificial Intelligence, broke more new ground with their next show, "Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding." When something becomes phenomenally successful it's easy to forget how stunning and original it was for people experiencing it for the first time. Once again Nancy was influenced by her deep knowledge of the environmental theatre movement. This time, however, she became an indelible part of that history, laying out a new path that has been explored by countless other artists over the last two decades. It's a good example, I think, of what has become a familiar pattern in Nancy's life -- the drawing of inspiration which she then passes on to others...the student becoming the teacher.

I contacted Nancy a few years after that, still a fan but also hoping to become a collaborator. Over several years we worked on a number of scripts and several short films which we co-wrote, with Nancy starring and me directing. This collaboration stands as one of the creative high points

of my career. As you know, screenwriting is the most analytical of pursuits, with structure playing an even more important role than plot, characterization, and dialogue. Nancy's vast knowledge of drama, and her seemingly effortless ability to turn theory into action, made her an extraordinary partner and yes, an invaluable teacher.

Soon after completing one of our shorts, I got funding for a script I'd written, "Gods and Monsters." Nancy acted as a crucial sounding board during the making of that movie, and played a similar role on "Chicago," "Kinsey," "Dreamgirls," and even the recent "Breaking Dawn" films.

As you can probably tell by now, I believe Nancy has near genius-level gifts as a performer and writer. But I can't complete the picture without trying to describe the friend. I met Nancy soon after she had her first child, and worked with her while she was pregnant with her second. It's been a privilege to watch motherhood make an already large soul even more vast. Wisdom, loyalty, humor, and deep compassion are qualities that have always defined who Nancy is, and they have only deepened across the years.

More to the point, through her children Nancy has discovered the joys of teaching. It's been such a pleasure to see her make the transition from the stage to classroom, where she brings the same spirit of openness and appetite for collaboration that she brought to her theatre work. I can only express my envy for the students who get the benefit of Nancy's experience, as she takes all her brilliance and applies it to this new arena. It's the same kind of controlled chaos I first experienced twenty-five years ago in that small theatre in New York, and just as unique and effective.

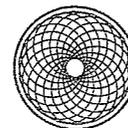
In my opinion, the CTC stands to gain immeasurably from granting Nancy Cassaro eminence, for her extraordinary achievement in, and deep knowledge of, drama and theatre arts.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sincerely,



Bill Condon,



Jeff Greenstein

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

September 25, 2012

Dear people,

Studio City, California 91604

My name is Jeff Greenstein. I am a television writer, producer and director whose credits include *Friends*, *Will & Grace* and *Desperate Housewives*. And that concludes the part about me, because the purpose of this letter is to inform you of the excellence of my longtime friend and colleague Nancy Cassaro Fracchiolla.

I first became aware of Nancy in *Family Album*, a comedy from the creators of *Friends*. I was immediately struck not only by Nancy's exemplary comedic skills, but her ability to be funny without mortgaging emotion—she was always, no matter how zany the moment, grounded and real. It's a rare quality in an actress, especially—all right, I'm just going to say this—a *pretty* one, so I resolved to keep an eye on Nancy Cassaro.

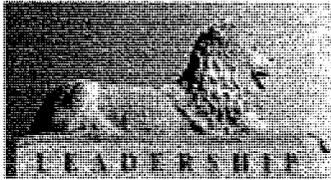
A few years later, when I created a show called *Partners*, there was a small but crucial guest-star role in the pilot episode. Even though the part was small, I knew I needed a home-run hitter, so I asked Nancy if she'd do it. Much to my delight, she agreed, and she delivered—Nancy gave us the biggest laugh and the most memorable moment in the pilot, the one that likely got the show picked up by the Fox network for the 1995-96 season.

At that point, Nancy became my good-luck charm—I put her in every pilot I wrote. She guest-starred in *The Homemade* for NBC, once again taking something small and making it unforgettable, and so the following year I decided I had to make her a series regular in something. That led to Nancy's starring role in *Getting Personal*, which ran for two seasons on Fox, and during the years we worked together I was reminded time and again of her talent, her warmth, and her extraordinary generosity as a collaborator. I am not surprised to learn she's found success as a teacher—those same skills make her ideal to share her talent with young actors, ones who will hopefully emulate Nancy's passion, unselfishness and discipline.

And I haven't even talked about *Tony and Tina's Wedding!* Nancy's amazing! Come on, we don't even need to talk about this anymore. She's a treasure.

Sincerely,

Jeff Greenstein



## LOS ANGELES LEADERSHIP ACADEMY HS

Established 2002 • WASC Accredited

October 6, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, California 94244-2700

Dear Sir or Madam:

I write this letter to acknowledge my belief in the abilities and knowledge base of Ms. Nancy Cassaro as regards her position as Drama Teacher at Pacific Palisades Charter High School. Nancy's expertise in the field of drama is extensive and our relationship, both professionally and artistically, has been and continues to be, a long and productive one.

Before becoming an educator, I spent twenty-five years in the theater arts and entertainment fields where I had the pleasure to work with Nancy collaboratively in both, first as a member of Artificial Intelligence, an improvisational comedy ensemble whose interest lay in the writing and performing of extended, comedic theater pieces, written in a collaborative process of which Nancy had oversight. One of these pieces was "Tony and Tina's Wedding," the second longest running play in Off-Broadway history. The initial idea was Nancy's as was the steering of the creative process. I functioned as one of the company's writers and actors as well as wearing other hats when necessary. The resulting success of the play led to a television contract with both the Fox television network and Castle Rock Entertainment, where I again served as one of Nancy's partners.

It goes without saying that Nancy is one of the most highly creative and enthusiastic people I have yet to encounter in my life. She is by nature a truly collaborative artist, genuinely interested in the ideas of others, how those ideas might bring a creative enterprise to fruition, and how culling the talents of those around her can bring satisfaction to both artist and audience. Although I have not seen Nancy work in the classroom or on stage with students, I can only imagine that she brings the same qualities to it as she did in the work we did together. On that same note, I can only imagine that young people bring out the best in her, what with her generous spirit and willingness to communicate what she believes and why. Thinking how students think in order to teach them well is a crucial skill set that a teacher must have to perform to their optimal capacity and something I believe Nancy possesses inherently.

I can think of no one better than Nancy for this position. She possesses years of acting and writing experience, considers the theater her second home, derives great joy and inspiration from young people, brings a mirthful approach to life and her work, and knows that the best drama derives from an environment of collaboration and respect.

224 East Avenue 22 Los Angeles CA 90021-1027 • Phone (222) 227-7710 • Facsimile (222) 227-7721



## LOS ANGELES LEADERSHIP ACADEMY HS

Established 2002 • WASC Accredited

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

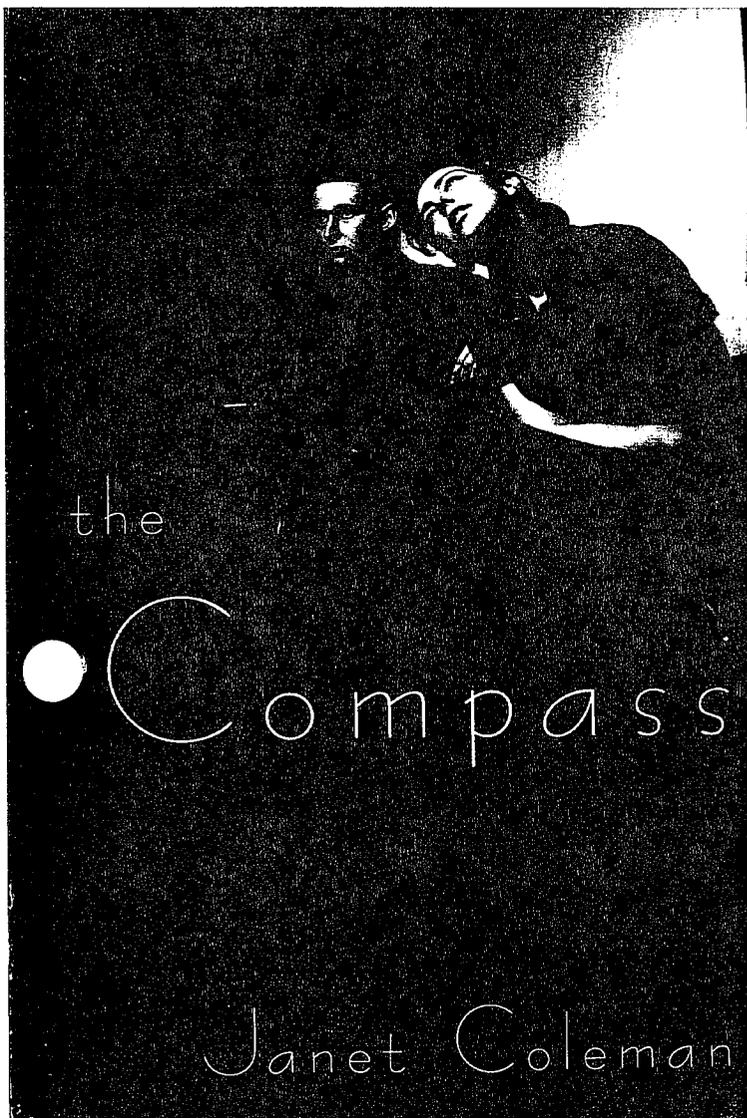
*Mark L. Campbell*

Mark L. Campbell  
English Language Arts Department

# Press Reviews and Articles

The Compass, by Janet Coleman  
University of Chicago Press 1991

Mentioned as a notable performer and writer to emerge from the improvisational theater scene.



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THE COMPASS

Thus, some of our most gifted, daring, and hilarious performers, directors, teachers, and writers have emerged from the improvisational scene. These names and more deserve to be mentioned:

Dan Aykroyd, Peter Aykroyd, Louis Arquette, J. J. Barry, Bernadette Birquette, Karen Black, Ann Bowen, Valri Brownfield, Hamilton Camp, Sondra Caron, Nancy Cassara, Sandra Danz, Bob Dishy, Robin Duke, Peter Elbing, Michael Elias, Nancy Fish, Joe Flaherty, Leigh French, Martin Harvey Friedberg, Michael Gellman, Nancy Giles, Whoopi Goldberg, Gerrit Graham, Judy Graubart, Charma Halpern, Sandy Holt, Tino Insana, Bruce Jarchow, Robert Klein, Tim Kazurinsky, Linda Lavin, Emily Levine, Eugene Levy, Lynn Lipton, Shelley Long, Andrea Martin, George N. Martin, Robin Menken, Ira Miller, Michael Mislove, John Monteith, Mary-Elaine Monti, Catherine O'Hara, Julie Payne, Barry Primus, Gilda Radner, Harold Ramis, Suzanne Rand, David Rasche, Rob Reiner, Eugenie Ross-Lemming, Billy Saluga, Frank Shaw, Martin Short, Betty Thomas, Dave Thomas, Peter Torokvei, Nick Ullett, Marcia Wallace, George Wendt, Debby White, Joshua White, Tamara Wilcox-Smith, Fred Willard, Paul Willson, Alex Zail, and the late John Brent.

Since its birth in Chicago three decades ago, this form of theatre, like psychotherapy and oat bran, has become a regular part of life. And Compass continues to provide a format in which distinctive individuals can play onstage together, as perhaps they never have before or will again, in an atmosphere where it is a virtue to risk and human to fail.

Remembering the improvisational theatre he first saw on Fifty-fifth Street in the back room of the Compass Tavern, Aaron Asher (U. of C. '52) says, "I suppose you always hear this from someone who saw something in its earliest days. But it was better then."

Unlike America's other spontaneous native art form, jazz, there is a paltry recorded history of the early improvised theatre. Most of the great improvisations at the Compass were not recorded on the spot but only after they were "set." The few existing scripts and audiotapes insufficiently document what is essentially a visual form. These artifacts indicate that the Compass had some shortcomings: it was crude. It was loud. The scenes went on too long. It got boring. Not all the actors knew how to act. Yet it seems to have been vastly more thoughtful and complex than its suc-

# THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

## Cassaro says I do to Castle Rock, Fox

By LISA de MORAES

~~After spending the past three years getting married,~~ Nancy Cassaro has cut a deal with Castle Rock Entertainment to develop TV series, and has another first-look deal with Fox Broadcasting Co.

— continued on page 2

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THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER, MONDAY, AUGUST 6, 1990

### Cassaro

*continued from page 1* —

Cassaro is founder of Artificial Intelligence, the six-member theater company that created, and until recently starred in, the much-talked-about play "Tony & Tina's Wedding."

The offbeat production, in which the audience is the wedding party, opened in February 1988 in New York City's Soho district.

It's still playing in New York, and in Los Angeles, where a version opened in October.

A Toronto "Tony & Tina's Wedding" recently closed, but another has sprung up in Baltimore. The Philadelphia production, meanwhile, has moved to Trump Plaza in Atlantic City for the summer, while plans are in the works for productions in Boston and San Francisco.

Cassaro, better known as blushing bride Tina, said her group decided to open and star in the Los Angeles production, specifically with a view toward breaking into television.

They talked with several studios,

but only Castle Rock understood that Artificial Intelligence doesn't do scripts — it does timelines.

"They said 'Oh yeah, that's the way they did 'Spinal Tap'," said Cassaro.

Six-year-old Artificial Intelligence also includes Chris Fracchiolla (who played the father of the groom), Larry Pellegrini ("Tony & Tina" director), Mark Campbell (the best man), Jack Fris (Tina's ex) and James Altuner (an usher).

Cassaro said "Tony & Tina's Wedding" will not become a series, but another of her creations, Vicki, may. Vicki is the singing star of a 1960s TV variety special, "Vicki's Valentine Thing," which got rave reviews from the New York Times when she opened in New York's Ballroom cabaret in 1987.

That production was followed by "A Very Vicki Christmas."

Castle Rock partner Glenn Padnick said the Fox deal is "tantamount to a pilot arrangement," but given the unusual way in which the group performs, without scripts, AI will instead act out for Fox executives sequences from

shows being proposed.

"I'm delighted to find a different manner in which to develop shows," Padnick said, "and obviously what results will be a show that skews different than a typical show."

Initially, the group will star in anything they create. While they're focusing on television now, they have some feature films in mind too.

AI's agent at Agency for the Performing Arts said the group has a first-look deal with Castle Rock for feature film development.

Cassaro said that, while the nature of television will prohibit them from continuing to do environmental work, she still hopes to find a way to translate the spontaneity of their theater work to the small screen.

She also said that TV, in some ways, is more liberating than environmental theater. She confesses she was tired of worrying every night whether some smart aleck in the audience was going to speak up when they got to the part where the minister asks if anyone knows of any reason why Tony and Tina should not marry.

## NANCY CASSARO

Continued from page 11

and '60s. We made her a blonde, I'd never been blonde and I didn't want it to be too Garland." Though as she momentarily transforms into Vicki, a boozy Garland's voice is instantly recognizable.

Then a news item gave her the final key to creating a show around Vicki. "Debbie Reynolds was doing *Woman of The Year* on Broadway. The *New York Post* had this wonderful headline saying, 'Debbie Reynolds Suffers Global Amnesia.' She was on stage and something awful happened. The headline inspired me: 'Global Amnesia?'"

"Vicki is this actress whose career is on a bit of a bender and her press people decide to say she had suffered from global amnesia. The first time I did Vicki was in a club in the East Village. It was her come-backs after global amnesia. She talked about that, then sang the name game only using the names of mass murderers."

Cassaro and her gang developed a "Rat Pack" of celebrities with mob connections. They did improv to create each character. Some of these improv got them kicked out of restaurants, but they never broke character.

They did three Vicki shows, the group growing stronger and working together better. Then being invited to three weddings started her mind working on the concept for *Tony n' Tina*. A very successful workshop version led to a bigger production.

Cassaro contracted Actors' Equity very early, telling them, "I'm doing this play, I think it's a play, it's about a wedding, no stage, you're a part of it. The guy at Equity said, 'It sounds too bizarre; just keep it below 14th street.'"

The group started growing and doing what the *New York Times* called *Environmental Comedy Theatre*. The show started to make a lot of money and the union became interested. "I had 12 union members in the show. They started getting cease and desist letters which would kill my company. The union decided they wanted to make sure the actors were protected and wanted their cut or whatever."

"It's been scary, but a great learning process for us. Equity has recognized we are something different and

ground-breaking theatre. They are going to start an 'environmental theatre' code. Right now they are showing us into a cabaret contract because at cabarets they serve food."

Currently the show is running in three major American cities, but Cassaro has plans for several more companies.

Cassaro is immune to boredom. When she finds herself getting restless or depressed she finds more work instantly. When it became clear company members were getting homesick over Christmas, she initiated a choral project.

She and husband Chris Fracchiolla (who plays Tony's father) were out shopping. When the third department store played "I'll Be Home For Christmas," they broke out laughing and knew what they had to do.

The company has formed a choir to sing in hospitals, AIDS hospices and women's shelters. "I don't want to be like Pollyanna, but to go see people who are really suffering and put it in perspective. We're homesick, but we have it pretty good."

"You don't want it to be condescending like 'Here we are to sing for you because you're sick.' We decided to inject it with some humor. We decided to conceptualize it in a way that would be funny for those who got it and those who didn't would be, at least, interested. We are a high school. Everyone has a character."

Cassaro made the mistake of choosing a character that all the others enjoy picking on. All of a sudden she is getting back much of what her bitchy character of Tina has been giving the other actors for the past year.

With all that is happening with this suddenly very successful company, how does Cassaro define her role as artistic director? "I'm responsible for what goes out. I am not at the top. It's like a triangle that goes out from the bottom point, there are so many people I am trying to support. The collective karma, energy of the company is what I feel most responsible about keeping everybody together and unified. Keeping the work pure and free and being fair and democratic. We vote on everything sometimes to a fault. If people are going to commit themselves to the company it has to be something they feel very strongly about. So far I have had the initial idea for a show and we create it together." ☆

**THEATER**

BY STEVEN MICULAN

**We Do, We Do!**

*A Queens wedding grabs L.A. by the bells*

Few things bring more joy to Southern Californians than watching loud New Yorkers make fools of themselves. Tony's *Tina's* Wedding, the creation of New York's Artificial Intelligence theater company, is a mock Italian-American marriage ceremony and reception that has become a long-running off-Broadway hit because it shows New Yorkers that a flamboyant part of their urban life, so ingrained in their public psyche, is almost a repressed memory. Like the Brooklyn Dodgers. The show's recent success in L.A. is due to very different factors. These involve both the love-hate relationship that unites, for better or for worse, the two coasts, and a structure that engages the audience as have few other theater productions. The show has given Angelenos their most lavish spectacle since *Tamara* first opened.

Like *Tamara*, *Wedding* uses a local architectural landmark — the Coolidge-era Park Plaza Hotel, across from MacArthur Park — for its evening of environmental theater. And as in *Tamara*, audiences mingle with the cast as numerous mini-dramas unfold. The two plays also have their differences: *Tamara* requires audience members to visit, at their own choosing, any of several rooms located in Hollywood's American Legion Headquarters to view the play's many simultaneously enacted stories, while *Wedding's* guests are confined, one place at a time, to two areas — the outdoor nuptial courtyard and the reception ballroom. And while it would take several visits to get a Mercator projection of *Tamara's* Byzantine plot, you leave *Wedding* knowing everything you'll ever need to about the married couple, their family and friends, and the petty fights and machinations that have transpired. These are the ephemeral similarities and contrasts between the two big-ticket productions. What fundamentally divides them is their treatment of their audience. *Tamara's* tale of lust and political intrigue has Hollywood stamped all over it; it is an overacted spectacle with cut-and-dried characters, starkly simple emotions and cinematic extravagance. Despite its participatory, site-specific character, *Tamara*, like conventional theater, relegates audience members to the status of spectators who are allowed to eavesdrop on the story's characters.

*Tony n' Tina's* Wedding, on the other hand, absorbs the audience into its very mise en scene, using us as both backdrops and ancillary characters. While no viewer is coerced into an uncomfortable interaction with the show's actors, everyone is funneled toward the inevitability of contact with the make-believe. "Sit happens" is the evening's most frequently uttered observation; and the disintegration of the barrier between actor and audience is, formally speaking, *Wedding's* most significant happening. There are other points of convergence and departure between the two produc-

tions. *Tamara's* characters are Italians living in the relatively distant past (under Mussolini's reign), and the play is staged in a coldly classical, tile-skinned building. The L.A. version of *Wedding* is contemporary and involves members of a Queens, New York, Italian-American neighborhood transplanted to Los Angeles; it is staged under the less intimidating Romanesque archways of an old hotel. The wedding ritual lends a sense of intimacy and belonging to *Wedding*, while the voyeurism of *Tamara* imparts a feeling of estrangement and aloofness. And yet there is a subversion in our co-optation into the wedding party, and this dark side of *Tony n' Tina's* Wedding gives the production its ultimate appeal.

Family, religion, neighborly friendship — these are the traditional pillars of the Italian-American community and the qualities that are so scarce in the social arroyo that is Los Angeles. When we attend the wedding of Valentina Lynne Vitale and Anthony Angelo Nunzio (wonderfully played by Nancy Casaro and Mark Nassar), we are suddenly made part of the kind of communal nucleus missing in Southern California life. It's a great feeling at first. Memories from a collective. Back East unconscious emerge: Sunday visits to relatives down the expressway, the smell of overripe fruit at an aunt's apartment, the gathering of neighbors inside a screened porch on a humid July evening.

Just as we become reacquainted with all this, however, the cracks begin to appear in the brownstone. Father Mark, the apostle of a new, folksy Catholicism, spends the reception nursing a drunken headache; blushing bride Tina coasts into her new life on a cloud of cocaine; jealousies intrude; fights erupt. Even the reception's setting, a banquet room called the Pompeii Court, is named

after the site of a disaster.

Clearly, the reception's disruptions are not simply paint strokes to a portrait of the archetypal wedding bacchanal. They portend more, both for the traditions they affront and for the married couple they surround. The evening ends somewhat abruptly as groom Tony denounces the distortion of harmony that his wedding has become, then drives off into the uncertain night with his bride. The center has not held, and the kind of social anarchy An-

gelinos take for granted seems ready to descend. In this way Southern Californian audiences have it both ways: they are

*Tony's* Italian (has moved) — and, through improv, acquired the reflex responses of fish conspicuously out of water.



Tony n' Tina pose with Conan & Red Sox: The American Dream against the backdrop of the American theme park

brought into the middle of a caring community generally unknown to these parts, only to see it begin to crumble under the weight of its conflicting interests — confirming, in a pathological way, the inevitability of our own atomized modus vivendi.

**When we attend the wedding of Valentina Lynne Vitale and Anthony Angelo Nunzio, we are suddenly made part of the kind of communal nucleus missing in Southern California life.**

*Tony n' Tina's* Wedding would not be half as successful, however, were it not for a cast (the original N.Y. ensemble) that's so completely imbued with the nuances of the play's milieu. When the show's actors arrived in L.A. they were confronted with the problem of adapting their personae to an environment entirely different from Queens. As part of their acculturation process, cast members grouped at various locations — LAX, the Highland Gardens Motel (where many of them were staying), a nightclub in Aaus (the town to which

To get a feel for what was required for this effort, I went along with the core cast members one afternoon on a visit to Universal Studios. The experience was one of seeing a strange city through the eyes of visitors. It was dead hilarious. All the characters were completely believable: Tina in her Madonna T-shirt, Tony with his what-the-fuck? fatalism, incontinent Uncle Louie, ineffectual Sister Albert Maria. Amid all the off-color remarks, fag jokes, bummed cigarettes and cracks about the old country, there arose a sarcastic perception of our town that was difficult to refute, as yuppies in Jeeps minced in and out of traffic while talking on cellular phones (the cast drove about in typically big cars — New Yorkers, Monte Carlos, etc.) and pink-necked WASP families shuffled, sombielike, along the studio tour.

The effects resonated deeper than the actual Park Plaza show, which by necessity could only skim the feelings its characters displayed at Universal. In both venues, however, the viewer felt a loss when the show was over and the characters had departed, and in both places was witnessed an innocence about to be blunted by time, just as surely as the camaraderie of New York's ethnic neighborhoods has given way to fear and paranoia. As Tony would say, shit happens. ☐

**TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING**  
 Directed by TONY MICULAN  
 Starring NANCY CASARO  
 and MARK NASSAR  
 at PARK PLAZA HOTEL  
 100 S. Park Ave. #1  
 (213) 461-1767

MARK HUSHMAN

STAGE

# Tony n' Tina': Married to Their Work

Improvisational wedding satire that's an off-Broadway hit is planning an L.A. ceremony

By BARBARA ISENBERG

**H**ere comes the bride. And the groom. And the singing nun, tipsy priest, lecherous father-in-law, stripper and rest of the bridal party.

Tina Vitale and Tony Nunzio, who have already gotten married more than 400 times in New York, start taking their vows in Los Angeles on Oct. 10. For \$55 apiece—and \$65 on weekends—total strangers can attend the wedding, then head over to the reception for baked ziti, drinks and dancing.

It isn't your traditional evening of theater, but thousands of theatergoers have helped turn "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" into one of the hottest tickets off-Broadway. Aided by a media blitz that could well make actors Nancy Cassaro (Tina) and Mark Nassar (Tony) the most recognizable bride and groom since Charles and Di, the show has been so successful that producers are opening new productions this month in Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

This is user-friendly theater, wrap-around entertainment like "Tamara," the long-running show at Hollywood's American Legion post and New York's Armory. But "Tony n' Tina" goes one step further. In "Tamara," you move from room to room listening as actors talk and interact with one another; in "Tony n' Tina's Wedding," the actors are still in character but they're improvising with audience members as well as with one another.

Previews start this week at the Park Plaza Hotel, a beautiful but weathered old building that faces MacArthur Park, and where a ballroom and patio area are being turned into a garden wedding setting. "When we walked in," says Cassaro, "I said 'perfect.' It had a grand elegance of the '20s, but it was definitely lived in. There were cigarette holes in the carpet and broken chandeliers. You could see that people have definitely partied down in this place."

**A**t "Tony n' Tina's Wedding," the bridesmaids wear red lace and come down the aisle chewing gum. The unmarried maid of honor is very pregnant, and the mother of the bride is in black. The best man hands out coke (fake coke) and the grandmother gives away grocery coupons. One of the ushers stops by to say he has VCRs for \$25 apiece that fell off a truck, and the photographer hobbles up and down the aisle like his ankles are shackled.

The wedding reception starts with a toast "wherever you go, there you are" and ends down with the bride and bridesmaids doing lip-synch to Michael Jackson's "Bad." When her frail grandmother faints on the dance floor and is carried off, Tina sneers:



Mark Nassar and Nancy Cassaro play the happy couple in "Tony n' Tina's Wedding."



The bride and groom mingle with guests—actually members of the audience—at the wedding reception, before the honeymoon ends.

"She wants attention." And before the play ends, the groom shoves cake in the bride's face, the bride shrieks "I hate you," there's a barroom brawl and the bride knocks all the wedding gifts to the floor.

The audience is part of the action, and nobody stays a wallflower for long. Audience members are asked if they are guests of the bride or the groom, and then are escorted to their seats by ushers. There's a

receiving line after the ceremony—"Isn't he as cute as I told you?" the bride asks one total stranger after another. And at the reception, where audience members are seated at assigned tables, the bride and groom make the rounds.

The "guests" sometimes get too involved. Set designer Randall Thropp plays Vlasik, a Russian emigre waiter, because, he says, "people take everything. We used to have stuff in the bathrooms but people trashed them. Once the show opened, I realized I had to be around all the time. This is a hands-on show."

On the other hand, people also bring things, many of which are now part of the New York set. The piano in the back of the hall displays actual congratulatory cards, and the bar area is decorated with such wedding gifts from audience members as a painted velvet Elvis and a cherub fruit stand.

**I**t all started five years ago when Cassaro went to four weddings in two weekends and got to thinking about their dramatic potential. Besides doing performance art in Greenwich Village, Cassaro, 30, and Nassar, 31, had been doing improv for years about an old Italian married couple. So, says Cassaro, "I asked him, 'Why not take that couple to when they were young, in love and got married?'"

They rounded up friends and classmates from Hofstra University and acting class, borrowed \$1,000 from Cassaro's parents, and put on a show at an American Legion hall in the Village. After a second, slightly longer outing, Nassar's pal Joseph Corcoran, a Wall Street bond trader who was playing an usher, suggested bigger things. Corcoran, 29, and his brother Daniel, 26, also a bond trader, got together backing for a show in February, 1988, that they thought was going to be just a six-weekend run.

"Tony n' Tina's Wedding" has been going ever since, except for a month or so last year after Cassaro married Chris Fracchiolla, who plays the father of the groom. While the real wedding couple was off honeymooning, their colleagues moved the show into its current New York digs: St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church for the ceremony portion, then a three-block walk along busy Village streets to the reception hall.

The New York reception hall, like its counterpart at the Park Plaza Hotel ballroom here, was essentially a big empty room that designer Thropp turned into a gaudy bridal palace. Vinnie Black's Coliseum ("The Cadillac of Caterers") was based on real places in Queens, says Thropp, from

Please see Page 83

STAGE

## Married

Continued from Page 4

the decor to the bric-a-brac. The baked ziti—27 pounds of it for every performance—comes from Gus' Place, the Italian restaurant downstairs.

"Tony n' Tina's Wedding" is the latest creation of Artificial Intelligence, an improvisational collective, of which Cassaro is the artistic director. Several group members brainstormed their own experiences at weddings, says Cassaro, and such story material as the priest's banal wedding sermon and the bride's propensity for cocaine came from direct observation.

Nearly all of the original 31 cast members are coming to Los Angeles with the show. That includes not just members of the bridal party but also the caterers, video man and musicians in the Donny Dulce and Fusion band.

One of the people in the audience last December was Douglas Urbanski, a 31-year-old Broadway producer relocating to Los Angeles. It was a rainy night, he had jet lag and the flu and he was only trekking down to the Village to make his girlfriend, Diane, happy. "But inside of 10 minutes, my flu was gone," he remembers. "I was up on my feet and I was saying 'I gotta do this show!'"

Urbanski, who has also produced at the Ahmanson, contacted Joseph Corcoran who, as it happened, was then looking for a Los Angeles partner. A number of people wanted to co-produce the show here, say the Corcorans, but Urbanski was ready to move on it right away.

It took a while to find proper housing for the \$300,000 production, given that everything had to happen under one roof here. In New York, says Urbanski, "you can walk three blocks, but in Los Angeles, you can't expect people to get in their cars. It was hard to find a place that could do both."

Appropriateness was also important. "We found a church at one point, but Tina would never do a party in a church basement," sniffs Cassaro, whose own wedding took place at a Buddhist Temple, followed by a reception at her parents' country club.

Enter the Park Plaza Hotel, an art deco showplace in a somewhat seedy neighborhood. The hotel, which originally opened in 1925 as an Elks Lodge, today has both student housing and 100 rooms going for \$35 single, \$40 double. Its gym was turned into jail cells during the filming of Sylvester Stallone's film "Lock Up" and its lobby, grand stairway and ballrooms have appeared in numerous TV shows, movies and commercials. The Park Plaza has also been a popular site for various rock music nightclubs.

Thropp, who researched Los Angeles hotel ballrooms much as he had Queens wedding palaces, spent the latter part of September turning a Park Plaza ballroom and

adjacent patio area into the World Famous Pompeii Court of Hollywood. Wedding guests will be surrounded by walls transformed into what Thropp calls "a big lattice nightmare," plus Astroturf walkways and ample plastic plants.

The groom will still make what actor Nassar considers one of the best entrances in the business—in New York, he shows up at the church in a toilet paper-decorated station wagon—but details of his arrival at the Park Plaza are being kept secret. "What's really crucial in environmental theater is the environment you create," says Cassaro. "The show totally changed even when it moved from one church to another."

The producers aren't just moving the Nunzio and Vitale families from Queens to the Coast, says Urbanski. "It's got to be as home-grown as possible if it's to work here. So many New Yorkers have seen it and said it will never work in Los Angeles. It needs a spin on it, not just that Tina lives in Woodland Hills."

In this version, Tina, Tony and Tony's father live in the Los Angeles area, but most of the bridal party will be flying in from New York. Tony's brother will drive across country, however, so cast member Eli Ganius who is really driving across country will pick up tourist information along the way that he can work into his improv.

The New Yorkers will carry on much as they do in the New York version—and Nassar plans to keep Tony's Queens accent because "it will probably be even funnier out of its environment." But the caterers, band and such will be California-ized. Band members did research on local bands, for example, and costumes for actors who are supposed to be from here will be purchased locally.

How do you rehearse a show like this? Company members expect to go in character as tourists to Universal Studios, Disneyland and the beach, maybe take over a restaurant and go bowling. Slipping in and out of her Tina character during an interview, Cassaro says she'll be busily trying to impress her "family" about all the stars she knows.

But whether playing Greenwich Village or the Mid-Wilshire District, "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" has a universal story. "It's amazing how many people say 'I see my family's wedding here,'" says director Larry Pellegrini, confiding that there was a major family fight at his own brother's wedding. "Not every wedding is like this one, but if it were a fairy-tale wedding, I don't think people would find it interesting."

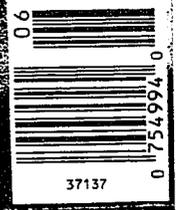
While Nassar concedes that they reuse lines that work, much is still improvised even in New York. One night, for instance, a policeman friend of Nassar's drove by in his squad car when Nassar was outside the church, "said there was a warrant out for me, searched me, and said he'll get me later. He drove away and one audience member said, 'What a budget!'" □



# DETAILS

JUNE 1988

PRINTED IN CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY



37137

Photographed by Jackie Nickerson

# I DO, I DO— OR WHAT?

A WEDDING AS PERFORMANCE

Cynthia Heimel

Mr. Nightlife was waiting outside Washington Square Church when the bride came walking down the street, smoking a cigarette. At the church steps, she threw down her cigarette and told Mr. Nightlife, "Do me a favuh," so he obligingly and happily stepped on her cigarette.

When Ms. Moodswing pulled up in a cab and said, "Don't talk to me, I have PMS," Mr. Nightlife hugged her and said, "This is the greatest. We already love this," and pulled her into the church to watch *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*.

Ms. Moodswing grumbled until an usher started flirting with her. Mr. Nightlife was rapt in contemplation of Tony's father's girlfriend's hairdo. The wedding service was a peculiar suburban Italian riot, complete with gum-snapping bridesmaids in red, a cousin/nun, many loopy family members and an uninvited drug addict.

"When they come into the church it's very safe," says Tony (Mark Nassar, pale, wry and handsome).

"We get them primed by the slow warm-up," says Dominick the usher (James Altuner, brown-eyed, bearded and sweet).

"They don't have to interact yet, they just sit and watch," says Tina (Nancy Cassaro, dark, pretty and piquant). "I mean, we never want anybody to feel pressured to be involved. Although in the reception line, I don't care, I kiss everybody. Usually I tell them, 'Your hair looks good like that.'"

"You know what Tina just whispered to me in the reception line?" Ms. Moodswing said as they tried to find a taxi to Carmelita's Reception House, "Get me a drink and a jay."

"Is a jay a joint?" asked Nightlife.

"Oh come on," said Moodswing.

"I'm loving this," said Moodswing at Carmelita's. They were sitting at one of the numbered tables, basking in the glowing tackiness of Carmelita's, surrounded by revelry, listening to the sounds of Donny Dulce and Fusion, finishing plates of baked ziti. Carmelita herself was there, she and her husband wore matching red coifs.

The Nightlife/Moodswing table had just been photographed with the bride and groom, the photographer made them say "sex" as he snapped. Madeline Monroe, the groom's father's girlfriend, was threatening to perform an "exotic dance." The drug addict seemed to be puking in the corner. The priest, drunk and happy, had a gold lamé glove on his head.

"You can't tell who's the audience and who's the cast," said Nightlife, surveying the room. The grandmother had just collapsed. Donna the bridesmaid was flirting with Donny Dulce. Connie the pregnant maid of honor was staggering off the dance



*The knot is tied*



*Uncle Louie*

*Suddenly, this Section*

floor into an audience member's lap. The best man was asking a miniskirted girl if she was "with anyone."

"Oh look!" said Moodswing, "Dominick's snorting cocaine!"

"Yeah, I do some wheeling and dealing around the room," says James Altuner.

"They like his friendly scariness," says Nancy Cassaro.

"But one guy," continues James, "I'm in character, trying to sell him coke, but he gets all red. He thinks this actor is running around dealing drugs. I laid off."

"But sometimes someone in the audience is auditioning for us and pushes it too far," says Nancy, "You know—I'm your cousin, I'm your aunt."

"Once some jerk with a cigar was really being an asshole," says Mark, "grabbing the girls. So I go up to his table, say to his date, who I've never seen before in my life, 'All the years I know you, you bring an asshole like this to my wedding?'"

"You know when I run into the bathroom after Tony pushes cake in my face?" says Nancy, "Invariably someone follows me in and says, 'How many times you been married this week?' You know, wink, wink. I say, 'Once in a lifetime, asshole.' Tina's tough. Insecure, but tough."

"But usually they're great," says Mark. "They can talk to us, ask about the plot anytime. There was one guy here once, I think he was the loneliest guy I ever saw in my life. 'I never been to a place where I talked to so many people I didn't know,' he said. So touching."

"The family's so outrageous it's infectious," says James.

"These characters have long histories together," says Mark.

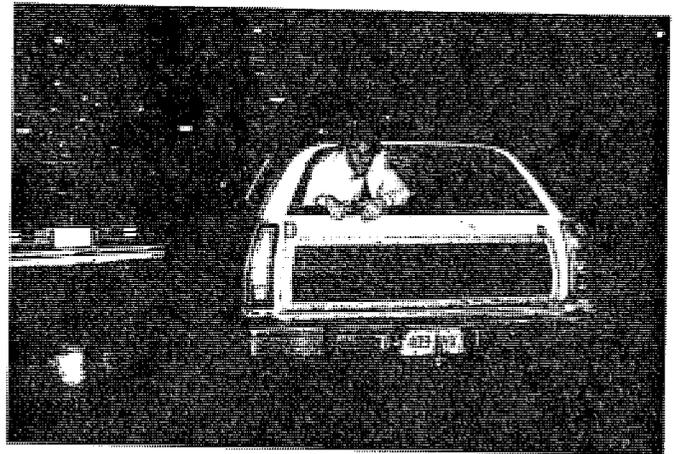
"Tina's father is dead, we did the wake," says Nancy.

"That was too heavy," says James, "A *New Yorker* reporter was there."

"We went bowling together. Had a pajama party," says Mark.



*I do, I do, I diet!*



*Just what?*

At the end of the evening, after the drug addict made a huge scene and everybody fought with everybody and then made up and put their coats on, Dominick walked up to Nightlife and Moodswing. "Come over some time, will ya?" he said wistfully, his eyes friendly and puppylike behind the tough guy expression. Then it was over. Nightlife and Moodswing were walking down 14th Street.

"Here's why I loved it," said Ms. Moodswing, "It was totally realistic, every little detail, down to the nasty caterer and even Donny Dulce's business card. It was really smart, really funny, and it wasn't mean. The whole thing was done with total affection. I love that. And don't we really feel like we were at a wedding? I mean, it was synthetic life for alienated jaded Manhattanites."

"Here's why I loved it," said Mr. Nightlife, "Because I had the best time I've ever had in my life."

*Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding* is performed by Artificial Intelligence, an environmental theater group. The last show you may have seen was *A Very Vicki Christmas*, at the Ballroom. There are at least twenty-five cast members, all loyal. Nancy Cassaro is the artistic director and has finally quit her day job. The core group is James Altuner, Mark Campbell, Chris Fracchiolla (Nancy's fiancé, they're being married in a Buddhist temple), Jack Fris and Larry Pelligrini (the director).

They are performing until September (reservations 212-279-4200, \$40—including the ziti—"in lieu of gift"). Then they go to LA, but promise they won't go Hollywood.



*Mama Mia!*



Tony (Mark Nassar), Tina (Nancy Cassaro) et al. celebrate at New York's Washington Square United Methodist Church.

## Stage

### HOLY MATRIMONY! AN ACTING TROUPE JOINS TOGETHER, IN BONDS OF SATIRE, THE IRREPRESSIBLE TONY AND TINA

As anyone who knew the families could tell you, it was bound to be a day to remember when Tony Nunzio married Tina Vitale. The reception was held three years ago at an American Legion hall on 14th Street in Manhattan, and old Grandma Nunzio passed out on the dance floor. Then Father Mark, having joined the happy couple, got drunk and abusive. And after the sixth fight between the newlyweds, Tony and Tina, the bride fled to the bathroom and refused to come out. A Legionnaire who sneaked in to cadge a few drinks clearly enjoyed all the commotion—but when he came back the next afternoon and found the same bunch at the same reception acting just the same way, he felt as though he had blundered into *The Twilight Zone*. "What the hell's going on?" the baffled visitor asked the groom. "Wasn't it official the first time?"

Well, no, it wasn't. In truth, *Tony 'n Tina's Wedding* was the work of the Artificial Intelligence comedy troupe, a piece of living theater in which members of the audience played the roles of guests. The trial run of the show proved a hit; now crowds are flocking to a new, open-ended engagement of *Wedding*, which is performed four times a week at a Methodist church, with the reception—cash bar—at a catering hall. As goofy as this fudging of artifice and reality is, members of the company take it all very seriously. "You go a centimeter away from reality, and you can point out what's really funny about a wedding," says Mark Nassar, 30, who plays Tony. "Because they're always balancing between reality and a play, the audience has a dazed look, like they're on some sort of trip."

As if real life didn't offer enough

weddings to attend, 80 or so audience members pay \$40 apiece to play along. Most stay in character, going through the reception line, dancing with the bride and sometimes even bringing such gifts as a crock pot and vase full of heart-shaped soaps. "Most weddings are a boring imposition," says James Cohen, 41, a Connecticut attorney who brought his wife and two children to the nuptial drama. "But this is great, like being a participant and voyeur at the same time."

The wedding itself fairly groans with clichés. During a frighteningly folksy folk mass, bridesmaids weep genuine tears, just about everyone in the wedding party chews gum, and Tina mumbles her way through a chillingly dreadful Rod McKuen poem that includes the lines, "Love is a thing that needs to grow/ Feed it jellybeans/ Treat it kind."

Photographs by Elliott Landy

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**Adding to the general madness, a tattooed, unwed and pregnant maid of honor, Connie (Moira Wilson), gums up her relationship with best man Barry (Mark Campbell), her lover.**

**Stage**

The festivities continue at nearby Carmelita's Reception House, a relentlessly overdecorated place where the ceiling, lighted with flashing lights, drips with plaster stalactites. A group called Donny Dolce and Fusion plays—badly—the theme from *Rocky* as the bride and groom make their entrance. There is even an overripe wedding toast, shortly before spat No. 6 sends Tina in retreat to the john.

All of these touches are scripted, though conversation with guests is ad-libbed. "We write a time line," says Nancy Cassaro, 28, who plays Tina. "I know just when I confront my mother about there not being any prosciutto in the ziti. And then I have to get to the gift table, where my former boyfriend, Michael, is going to start a fight." To prepare for their roles, the cast even improvised a series of scenes—including a pre-wedding breakfast and a meeting with the caterer—to provide their characters with a common history.

"My concern is that everybody be as real as possible," says director Larry Pelligrini, 32. "I can find a person in my own Italian family to match up with each one of these characters." The results are all too convincing, but the ghastly foibles on parade transcend ethnic boundaries: This is Everyman's family. Lubricated by beer and ersatz cocaine, the characters even blurt out family secrets about an affair between Tina's gay brother and the cameraman who's pretending to film a home movie of the wedding, as well as the sexual adventures of Tina's cousin, a nun.

Tony and Tina were conceived while Cassaro and Nassar were studying theater together at Hofstra University on Long Island. Neither Nassar, a wide-receiver on the football team, nor Cassaro fitted into the mainstream theater crowd even then. "People would say to me, 'Oh, you're so funny,'" says Nancy. "But they didn't consider me a serious actress." To vent their unusual talents, Nassar and Cassaro became Tony and Tina in their dorm rooms, borrowing traits from relatives and people they knew. After graduating in 1981, the two found an appreciative audience when they presented Tony, Tina and other characters at New York nightclubs. Finally, after attending a series of weddings that seemed eerily like imitations of art, Cassaro recruited friends from acting classes (including actor Brian Dennehy's daughter, Elizabeth), formed Artificial Intelligence and worked up a ceremony.

When Cassaro herself is married this May—to Chris Fracchiolla, who plays Tony's dad—she'll have a plain Buddhist ceremony with a country-club reception afterward. There will be, she is confident, no problem with the ziti, no violence at the gift table and no dustups with a troublesome groom. Not that the guests would necessarily object. Most of the audience at Cassaro's rowdy theatrical nuptials leave with nothing but the fondest memories. At one show in January, a guest even stepped in to comfort Mama Vitale after she had a fight with Papa Nunzio. "I told her not to worry about anything that went wrong," said businessman Tom McCardle. "I told her it had been a great wedding and I enjoyed myself." —By Michael Small



At the reception the festivities include a traditional arched-arms salute, top, a Santa Lucia sing-along, left, and a receiving line where the bride meets paying guests.

# Weekend

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1988

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The New York Times

C1

Film: 'Unbearable Lightness' (Page C8) West Coast Jazz Stars (Page C23)

## Avant-Garde Antics for Fearless Audiences

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

**I**S it possible anymore for an audacious theater artist to go "too far"? As experimental theater and performance activity reaches a peak of excitement around Manhattan this weekend, performers will be flinging down the gauntlet to fearless, inquiring audiences in work that tests as many different kinds of limits as there are artists willing to defy convention.

Their techniques range from dissolving the fourth wall (the environmental comedy troupe Artificial Intelligence), to gender bending (the playwright Holly Hughes, the character comedian Jeffrey Essmann, Mabou Mines' gender-reversed "King Lear") to food and obscenity slinging. At the Kitchen, the notoriously sloppy Kipper Kids will anoint each other with food and explosives, while at Performance Space 122, Karen Finley will level the world with torrential profanities. At La Mama, Ellen Stewart, the godmother of experimental theater, is presenting "Mythos Oedipus," a "nonverbal" dance opera she has conceived and directed. At the Performing Garage, the Wooster Group is performing Richard Foreman's "Symphony of Rats," a futuristic political pageant featuring giant rat puppets. Meanwhile, at Dance Theater Workshop, Ann Carlson's "Animals" offers a beatified vision of relationships between man and beast.

In a cultural climate where cable television helps propel talented cult performers into the mainstream in record time, at least one or two of these artists are likely to achieve national recognition within a year and become stars whose reputations transcend the downtown scene. Eventually, one can expect large cultural institutions like Lincoln Center and the Brooklyn Academy of Music to include some of this border-crossing work in their programming.

One of the main hubs of avant-garde activity this weekend is P.S. 122, which is holding its seventh annual benefit celebration, with four different "all star" shows that blend music, theater, film and performance. Another is La Mama, where in addition to the first performances of "Mythos Oedipus," the high-minded comedian Jeffrey Essmann and the acclaimed Brazilian actress and mime artist Denise Stokios are offering solo performances.

"This year's benefit features a larger than usual number of 'new music' artists," Mark Russell, the director of P.S. 122, said the other day. They range from the accordionist Danny Mydack to the pop band They Might Be Giants to the gospel-rap of the trio Thought Music.

In theater and performance art, one of the high points of P.S. 122's shows this weekend will be an excerpt from "Lear," a cross-dressed version of "King Lear," by the experimental theater troupe Mabou Mines. "Lear," directed by Lee Breuer and featuring Ruth Maleczek as the aged king and Greg Mehlren as a drag-queen Fool, has created some excited word of mouth since early work-in-progress performances began at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, N.J. Other high points of the marathon are likely to be Karen Finley performing an excerpt from her scabrously obscene monologue "The Constant State of Desire," the Alien Comic (Tom Murrin) dressed as an electrified lemon tree, and an appearance by David Leslie, the Evel Knievel of performance artists. Mr. Leslie has been known to wind himself in bubble wrap and then jump from a three-story building onto a steel plate.

"This year's programs



Playgoers visit Washington Square Church and a reception hall with Marc Nassar and Nancy Cassaro, above, and Artificial Intelligence for "Tony and Tina's Wedding." Ron Vawter, below, is in Richard Foreman's "Symphony of Rats," at the Performing Garage.



The Alien Comic, above, will perform at P.S.



THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1988

## Avant-Garde Antics For Fearless Audiences

Continued From Page C1

have Sarah Skaggs, an improvisational dancer whose work is very lyrical."

Given the exceptional range of limits being tested on Manhattan stages this weekend, the lines one chooses to consider crossing come down to matters of taste in genre, language and sex.

Adventurous playgoers interested in experiencing a total theatrical immersion that is entirely benign in spirit might wish to attend the three-and-a-half-hour event known as "Tony and Tina's Wedding," which begins at Washington Square Church in the West Village and winds up at Carmelita's, a reception hall at 150 East 14th Street. The event, created by the 25-member comedy troupe Artificial Intelligence, begins with an actual church ceremony uniting two fictional characters, Valentina Lynn Vitale (Tina) and Anthony Angelo Nunzio (Tony), portrayed by Nancy Cassaro and Marc Nassar. The full-scale reception at Carmelita's that follows the ceremony features food, wine, dancing and entertainment, but don't expect the luxurious fare to be had at "Tamara." Baked ziti is the order of the day.

What a spectator will find at "Tony and Tina's Wedding" is a contemporary Italian-American soap opera with multiple dramas crackling on all sides. After a while, the line between theater and life begins to blur.

### 'Became So Real'

"'Tony and Tina' evolved when Marc and I were in college and found ourselves the outcasts of the drama department," said Ms. Cassaro, the company's guiding spirit as well as the blushing bride to be. "We were doing improvisations of a young couple having a fight, and they became so real that the dorm master called wondering what was the matter. It snowballed as we enlisted other friends who created other characters."

The latest incarnation of the wedding involves some 25 performers, each playing a character with a fully imagined personal history.

"Tina comes from a middle-class family in Elmhurst," Ms. Cassaro explained. "When her father made it big in the trucking business, the family moved to Floral Park." Among the other characters are Tina's gay brother, who is an aspiring video director; her former boyfriend who has recently returned from a drug rehabilitation clinic; her pregnant maid of honor, and the groom's father's stripper girlfriend.

During the reception, guests are encouraged to dance with the bride and pin dollar bills on her gown as the band plays "We Are the World." In various corners of the room, friends of the couple discreetly sniff cocaine (the white powder the actors use is actually a baby laxative).

Ms. Cassaro emphasized that the troupe's attitude toward the world of Tony and Tina is affectionate.

"What we're satirizing is the real world," she said. "If you don't believe me, just hang around the Queens Center Mall and listen and look. It's wild, and it's real."

while studying drama in London (Mr. Von Haselberg is German, and Mr. Routh English), and quickly discovered they had identical alter egos, which they named Harry and Harry Kipper.

For several years they lived roles that have been called "a scatological Laurel and Hardy." Their stage attire consists of tie-dyed jock straps, shower caps and large false noses. In a famous routine that has been incorporated into their new show, they smash eggs on each other's heads, douse themselves with flour, paint and canned spaghetti, and top it off with swirls of whipped cream that are exploded with firecrackers. They have been known to leave a mess on audiences as well as themselves.

"It's not a chaotic food fight, but a very carefully choreographed ceremony," Mr. Von Haselberg said of their food-and-firecracker routine in a recent interview. "We're very specific about the food we use and its color and texture. It is a ritual we perform with the seriousness of a priest performing a religious ceremony, though the intention is completely silly."

"Into the Box" includes iconoclastic performances of several songs from "West Side Story," accompanied by rude, explosive sound-effects. They also perform songs made famous by the 30's English music-hall team of Flanagan and Allen.

When the Kipper Kids became the scourge of the New York performance-art circuit during the 1970's, some critics labeled their work Dadaist and compared them to Marcel Duchamp and Alfred Jarry.

"Though we won't reject the comparisons, we never sat down and consciously tried to revive the Dada movement," Mr. Von Haselberg insisted. "Being a Kipper is the most creatively satisfying and therapeutic thing we know."

Recently, the duo was discovered by cable television. They have formed a production company, and next month work will begin on what they hope will turn into a continuing comedy-adventure series for Cinemax. They are also featured guests on Bette Midler's upcoming Home Box Office special "Mondo Blando." Mr. Von Haselberg happens to be married to Ms. Midler.

# Comedy Actress Parodies 50's-Style TV



James Altuner and Nancy Cassaro in "The Vicki Oberjeune Valentine's Day Special."

By ALVIN KLEIN

**A**CCORDING to her résumé, the fictitious Miss Vicki Oberjeune became a movie star as a child — "many moons' ago" — in "X Marks the Spot," a tap-dancing musical comedy about "a young teen-ager and her love for her dog, Spot."

Soon to be married for the seventh time, the 34-year-old "Miss O," as she is called, "blossomed into television work," first in a short-lived series, "The Unreachables" (a female version of "The Untouchables"); then with her own talk show, "Cocktails With Miss O," in which she "chatted with every guest imaginable."

The creator of "Miss O" — and the writer of her résumé — is Nancy Cassaro, a 27-year-old performer from Massapequa. The live musical comedy revue, "The Vicki Oberjeune Valentine's Day Special," is a one-hour sendup of 1950's and 1960's-style television party/family/at home/hit-parade-type shows.

It was conceived and co-written by Miss Cassaro and is being performed by Artificial Intelligence, an 18-member comedy theater troupe, of which she is a founding member. Artificial Intelligence took up residence as one of four comedy attractions at a Manhattan cabaret restaurant, the Ballroom, 253 West 28th Street, during a monthlong comedy festival that ended yesterday.

Because of enthusiastic critical and audience response, Miss Cassaro — who plays Miss Oberjeune — and company will return to the Ballroom from Tuesday through Feb. 14, playing Tuesdays through Saturdays at 9 P.M., in the retitled revue, "Vicki's Valentine Thing."

In performance, Miss Cassaro's comedic beginnings can be traced to the revue "Gold Diggers of '73," which she also wrote, in the eighth grade while attending J. Lewis Ames Junior High School in Massapequa. Then, as now, much of her material was inspired — or thrust upon her — by family experiences. "When your brothers tease you and your sister drives you crazy with a dopey song, you have to develop a sense of humor," she said.

The song with which her sister,

Alice, now a music teacher in Massapequa, taunted her — "Bluesette," with its simplistic lyric "Poor little bluesette/Sad little bluesette/Don't you cry/Don't you fret" — is one of the intentionally insipid numbers in the Vicki Oberjeune show.

And "Little Sister Syndrome," an account of growing up with five siblings, was one of Miss Cassaro's made-up songs when she appeared as a standup comedian in an East Village club in Manhattan in 1982, after she graduated from Hofstra University and worked as a waitress in a Hicksville restaurant for one year.

Miss Cassaro's family includes her parents, three brothers, two sisters — as Vicki, she wears her older sister Judy's old dresses — "and 10 nieces and nephews, with one on the way," she added, counting names on her fingers. They live in various parts of the Island: "Commack, Garden City, Seaford," she said, again counting. Her father, Dr. James Cassaro, has been practicing medicine in Massapequa for 35 years.

Apart from family influences, Miss Cassaro has had her theatrical mentors: Hofstra University's Dr. Richard Mason, with whom she studied environmental theater, and, after graduating, David Kaplan, a teacher and director in New York, who emphasized the techniques of episodic theater. Thus, her orientation toward comedy is rooted in character and context.

With a group of Mr. Kaplan's students, she formed Artificial Intelligence in 1985. Rather than set routines or sketches, the company chooses to create an event and elaborate upon it in terms of a whole environmental theater piece, in which rituals are satirized, with a tone ranging from nostalgia to savagery.

For its first show, Artificial Intelligence staged a wedding party. Titled "Tina-n-Tony," it has been performed in a SoHo loft and a Greenwich Village church and has evolved into a screenplay, "Tony-n-Tina Forever," which is about a wedding in Massapequa. And just as Vicki has her résumé, Tina has a wedding album, replete with such photos as the bride and bridegroom covered with dollar bills, which they charged their guests to dance with them.

The environment for the Vicki

Oberjeune revue is a television studio, an idea that, Miss Cassaro recalled, came while "looking through a picture book by Desi Arnaz."

"There was the 'I Love Lucy' set," she said, "then suddenly another picture showed the crew and then the audience, and the perspective of the Ricardos in their living room changed. It was a whole fake world, and I thought, 'So, that's really what's going on!'"

From there, Miss Cassaro's fancy, and that of her co-author and director, Larry Pellegrini — took flight. One character, Fritz Freund, is named after Karl Freund, who was the actual cameraman on the "I Love Lucy" shows. Another character, Jack Peters — played by James Altuner — is intended to be a satirical cross between the singers Jack Jones and Robert Goulet.

The Vicki Oberjeune revue begins with the crew setting the stage for a television show. An "applause" sign lights up, getting the live audience prepared to act as a television audi-

ence. The frenetic goings-on include a tippy star ("the incomparable Vicki") teetering about, making off-camera advances to the cameraman (her next husband), competing for on-camera attention with her sultry daughter and singing a love ballad to her innocent son. The singers and dancers are forever out of step, out of tune and out of synch. The result is sheer madness.

Explaining the Artificial Intelligence comic style and credo, Miss Cassaro said: "We create the contradiction between what they're doing for the camera and what they're really doing — like maybe they're hitting each other. When we thought up our name, we hoped to be taken seriously — but we never want to take ourselves too seriously. We're just a bunch of writers and actors with a sense of how absurd things are."

"We like creating a theatrically entertaining world and asking the audience to come into it. Maybe we can give people a different way of looking at television shows and weddings." ■

# Weekend

The New York Times

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1987

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## A Valentine Show That Shoots Arrows Tipped With Satire

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

**W**HEN the Ballroom, a staid restaurant-cabaret in Chelsea, recently decided to present comedy as well as music on a regular basis, a brilliant, virtually unknown 18-member troupe of satirists calling themselves Artificial Intelligence stole the show at the club's opening-night marathon. Impersonating a film crew from the fictitious Beacon network and swarming through the club

with video equipment, the troupe turned the Ballroom into a make-believe television studio, where it "filmed" (though no film was actually rolling) a 1967 variety show entitled "Vicki's Valentine Thing."

The 65-minute show, which the Ballroom is presenting through March 21, is the hilarious comedy-theater equivalent of the sorely missed "SCTV" series and of Rob Reiner's rock documentary spoof, "This Is Spinal Tap." It distills with deadpan accuracy the essence of the tacky thematic variety specials that proliferated on prime time during the 60's. Even more, it captures the mood of television — and of American popular culture — at the precise moment when flowery Mod fashions and slogans of peace and love were just beginning to invade the mass media and to commingle with entrenched show-business glitz.

At the center of a show in which every character, right down to the last technician, has a fictitious personal history is its star, Vicki Oberjeune (Nancy Cassaro), a tipsy, pill-popping singer-actress in her late 30's who is attended by her sixth husband, Mickey Styles (Jack Fris); her two children, Gina Anthony (Monica Horan) and Nicholas Frank (Eli Gantias), and a backup group called Tracey and the Truth, led by Gina's boyfriend. The audience, which is encouraged to participate with an applause sign, gets to glimpse two worlds — the heartwarming scenes of familial togetherness enacted before the camera and the frantic, behind-the-scenes chaos in which everyone's personal life, and indeed the show itself, is on the verge of collapse. But the show does go on. And among other tarnished pop nuggets, it resurrects such vintage musical fare as "A Man



Swope Associates/Linda Alaniz

Nancy Cassaro of Artificial Intelligence plays the star of "Vicki's Valentine Thing" at the Ballroom.

Continued on Page C5

# A Valentine Show Shoots Satirical Arrows

Continued From Page C1

and a Woman," "The Look of Love," and "The Rain, the Park, and Other Things," all performed with period 60's television-style arrangements. In one uproarious dance number, a peace symbol is hoisted to the top of a maypole as the cast whirrs giddily to the strains of "Love Potion No. 9." A more solemn note is struck when the representative of a historical society arrives to display one of the world's oldest valentines onto which the drunken star accidentally empties her drink.

## Young and Brash

Like the members of the "SCTV" troupe and the original cast of "Saturday Night Live" in the mid-70's, the members of Artificial Intelligence are young and brash. Ms. Cassaro, who conceived the show, is only 27 years old. She and most of her cohorts were in early grade school when "flower power" swept the media. Today, along with several other members of the troupe, she works in advertising, as a talent coordinator for Batten Barton Durstine & Osborn.

"Nowadays, I don't watch a lot of TV, but when I was younger I used to live in front of the set," she recalled the other day. "To research this show, I studied a lot of old variety programs at the Museum of Broadcasting. It's amazing to realize that people actually watched programs like that and thought it was real. The character of Vicki is a hybrid of Judy Garland and Peggy Lee with a little Connie Stevens. I'm not trying to denigrate the character. I really respect that image and what it meant to the American public 20 years ago."

Ms. Cassaro, who grew up in Massapequa, L.I., and majored in drama at Hofstra University, was particularly inspired by a class in theater styles where she learned about "environmental theater," and the work of Julian Beck and Joseph Chaikin. After moving to New York City four years ago, she met the core of the group that became Artificial Intelligence in classes taught by the director David Kaplan.

"David's philosophy is that there's nothing you can't do — the wilder you are the better," Ms. Cassaro said. "We were tired of going to auditions and so we formed a group and began

performing our own material in East Village clubs. Our first major piece, 'Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding,' was a full-scale Italian wedding that involved 23 actors and 80 invited guests. The piece was performed twice, the second time in an actual church, with the reception in an American Legion hall. The details extended to sending out engraved invitations and having special matches made."

## Cost Just \$1,500 to Produce

"Vicki's Valentine Thing," which cost only \$1,500 to produce, evolved out of a 1965 Christmas show that the troupe created for the same character. Its director, Larry Pellegrini, an aspiring writer of plays and musicals, works as the booking agent for Jason's Park Royal, an Upper West Side cabaret where the troupe once appeared.

"Nancy called me last August and asked if I would direct the Christmas special," Mr. Pellegrini said the other day. "She put together the cast, and we met at my apartment, where we rehearsed the whole thing. Everybody came in character and stayed in character. Even though Vicki Oberjeune hates the director, it was actually easier dealing with everybody as their character than as themselves."

Artificial Intelligence has a growing list of possible future projects. One is a "Reincarnival," a holistic health fair with booths, bands and performance groups, which they would like to do at the Central Park Band Shell during the summer. Another is a 24-hour telethon. A third, which may be presented in the spring, is a company picnic followed by a wake the day after one of the revelers dies of a heart attack.

"In everything we do, whether it's a wedding, a TV show or a wake, we invite the audience to re-examine the ritual," Ms. Cassaro said. "Because they know it's theater, they get a different perspective on it. We never want an audience to feel threatened. We create a world first and then invite other people to come and play in it."

The Ballroom is at 253 West 28th Street. Performances through Feb. 14 are Tuesday through Saturday at 9 P.M.; the show will then run only Fridays and Saturdays at 11 P.M. There is a \$15 cover charge and a two-drink minimum. Information and reservations: 244-3005.

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 N E W Y O R K  
**NATIVE**


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NEW YORK NATIVE/DECEMBER 21, 1987

# Artificial Xmas

by Martin Schaeffer

**A**bout one year ago, an extraordinarily gifted comedy troupe burst upon New York's cabaret scene. The group was called Artificial Intelligence, the venue was the Ballroom, and the show was *A Vicki Oberjune Valentine's Day*. Artificial Intelligence has returned to the Ballroom, through December 30, with *A Very Vicki Christmas*, which is one of the most delightful, original, and inventive of comedy revues.

The show is a recreation of a late 1950s/early 1960s TV Christmas special starring America's sweetheart, Miss Vicki Oberjune, a brassy blond just this side of Ann Miller, with a voice reminiscent of Judy Garland and two semi-adorable and questionably talented children. Miss Vicki also has a slight addiction to Christmas "cheer," which tends to slur both her speech and singing in the course of this "live" and "at home" holiday special.

In the spirit of the times, Vicki's guests include a wacky singing and comedy duo who remind us of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, two blond, blue-eyed singers from California who perform in the style of the Everly Brothers, and a sort of semi-

talented Marcel Marceau doing mime. There's also, of course, a crackling fire, falling snow, and lots of last-minute TV glitches.

Nancy Cassaro, who stars as Vicki and also wrote much of the material, has established herself as one of our great new comics. There's a bit of Carol Burnett, Lucille Ball, and more than a touch of the late Judy Garland to Cassaro's performance. She's most ably supported by the talented cast, composed of Tom Allen, James Altuner, Mark Campbell, Joanna Cocca, Juan de Armas, Liz Dennehy, Eli Ganas, Jack Fris, and Monica Horan, to name only a few members of this large troupe.

Perhaps the most important aspect of *A Very Vicki Christmas* is its on-target recreation in both theme and texture of those tacky TV specials which ran rampant during the early '60s. The humor is full of the platitudes and conventions of the period. The behind-the-scenes *kvetching* and the on-camera love provide hilarious counterpoints, while contemporary-style music and traditional Christmas carols add a final dash of nutmeg to this eggnog mixture of '60s holiday cheer.

New York Times January 8, 1987  
First review for Artificial Intelligence

# The New York Times

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 1987

## Artificial Intelligence

By STEPHEN HOLDEN



The marathon's most exciting discovery was Artificial Intelligence, a troupe of media satirists who create what might be called environmental comedy theater. The troupe, which was formed just a year ago, turned the Ballroom into a fake TV studio; a camera crew from the fictitious Beacon Network shot a trashy make-believe TV variety show, "The Vicki Oberjeune Valentine's Day Special," set in 1967.

Conceived by Nancy Cassaro, who plays the show's increasingly tipsy star, and directed by Larry Pellegrini,

"The Vicki Oberjeune Valentine's Day Special" brings the sort of television satire pioneered by SCTV to theatrical life, as cast members decked out in mod clothes, love beads and vintage hair styles re-create the moods and rhythms of vintage TV variety shows. Singers limply tootle the theme from "A Man and a Woman" and groan through "The Look of Love" and other detritus from 20 years ago, all with a vengeful accuracy. Was the 60's "love culture" this savagely vulgarized on network television in its time? Not quite, perhaps, but almost. An applause sign draws the audience into the uproariously chaotic spoof.

**"An Exhilarating  
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The Writers Guild of America, west, Inc. issues this certificate to:

NANCY E CASSARO

for the material entitled:  
A FEAST STORY

by the following:

NANCY E CASSARO - Writer  
RANDALL DEAN THROPP - Writer

Registration #: 972171  
Material Type: SCREENPLAY  
Registered By: NANCY E CASSARO

Effective Date: 01/28/2004  
Expiration Date: 01/28/2009

The New Yorker Magazine May 31, 1993

# THE NEW YORKER



*"Didn't we get sopped the last time we went to Tony n' Tina's Wedding?"*

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November 22, 1988

PAST "CHARLIE" COMEDY  
AWARD WINNERS

6th Annual Awards

Best Comedian - East Coast: Stephen Wright  
Best Comedian - West Coast: Louis Anderson  
Best Female Comedian in NY: Rita Rudner  
Best Male Comedian in NY: Mario Cantone  
Most Promising Female Comedian in NY: Patty Rosborough  
Most Promising Male Comedian in NY: Colin Quinn  
Best Comedy MC: Larry Amoros  
Lifetime Achievement Award for Comedic Excellence in Film, Stage & TV: Soupy Sales  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: Tom Eyan  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: John Waters  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: Del Close  
Sustained Excellence in the Field of Comedy: Dudley Riggs  
Best Book on Field of Stand-up Comedy: Phil Berger  
Best Book on Field of Improvisational Comedy: Jeffrey Sweet

5th Annual Awards

Best Male Comedian - East Coast: Jay Leno  
Best Male Comedian - West Coast: Gary Schandling  
Best Female Comedian in NY: Margaret Smith  
Best Male Comedian in NY: Dennis Blair, Joe Bolster (tie)  
Most Promising Female Comedian in NY: Joy Behar  
Most Promising Male Comedian in NY: Frankie Pace  
Best Comedy Group: Chicago City Limits, The First Amendment (tie)  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: Charles Busch  
Best in the Comedy Business: Jack Rollins  
Special Comedy Club Award: Caroline's  
Best Comedy Lyricist: Ira Glassman

4th Annual Awards

Best Male Comedian: Gilbert Gottfried  
Best Female Comedian: Pudgy  
Most Promising Male Comedian: Bob Bertlett  
Most Promising Female Comedian: Rita Rudner  
Best Comedy Group: 1st Amendment "Strictly Improv"  
Best Comedy Master of Ceremonies: J.J. Wall  
Exceptional Contribution to Art of Comedy: Harvey Fierstein

3rd Annual Awards

Best Male Comedian: Richard Belzer  
Best Female Comedian: Adrienne Tolsch  
Most Promising Comedian: Mark Weiner  
Most Promising Female Comedian: Carol Leifer  
Best Comedy Group: Weeden, Finkle & Fay  
Best Comedy Master of Ceremonies: Dennis Wolfberg  
Special Contribution to Comedy: John Vaccaro  
"Best Looking in Trashcans & Gowns": Holly Woodlawn

2nd Annual Awards

Best Male Comedian: Gilbert Gottfried  
Best Female Comedian: Elaine Bosler  
Most Promising Comedians: Larry Miller, Jerry Synfeld  
Best Comedy Group: Hi-Holed Women  
Best Comedy Master of Ceremonies: Jimmy Brogan  
Special Contribution to Comedy: "Uncle Floyd" Vivino  
"Best Stand-up Comic in a Dress": Charles Pierce

1st Annual Awards

Best Male Comedian: Chris Rush  
Best Female Comedian: Nancy Parker  
Most Promising Comedian: Larry David  
Best Comedy Group: First Amendment Comedy Troupe  
Best Comedy Master of Ceremonies: Richard Belzer  
Special Contribution to Comedy: Charles Ludlam  
"Most Fabulous Star of the Decade": Divine

TONIGHT'S WINNERS

Lifetime Achievement Award for Comedic Excellence in Film, Stage & TV: Imogene Coca  
Best Male Comedian - East Coast: Gilbert Gottfried  
Best Female Comedian - East Coast: Judy Tenuta  
Best Male Comedian - West Coast: Bob Goldthwait  
Best Female Comedian - West Coast: Rossanne Barr  
Best Male Comedian in New York: Bob Nelson  
Best Female Comedian in New York: Carol Leifer  
Most Promising Male Comedian in NY: Fran Solomita  
Most Promising Female Comedian in NY: Nancy Shayne  
Best Comedy Group in New York: Artificial Intelligence  
Best Comedy Clown: Bill Irwin  
Best Comedy Performance Artist: Paul Zaloom  
Best Comedy Lyricist: Gerard Alessandrini  
Best in the Comedy Business: Lorne Michaels  
Funniest Show Off-Broadway: Sandra Bernhard ("Without You I'm Nothing")  
Funniest Show on Broadway: Jackie Mason ("The World According to Me")  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: Minnie Pearl  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: John Epperson  
Special Contribution to Art of Comedy: Peter Allen

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# Weekend

The New York Times

C1

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1988

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Nancy Cassaro in "Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding":  
*"At my real wedding it was funny because we had all spent so much time with each other in character. We had to re-evaluate the way we were acting and even dancing."*

nine-month national tour before settling on Broadway in 1990.

That's the word, but Cameron Mackintosh, who produced the London version, isn't commenting.

### The Invasion Continues

One more from across the water — "Hapgood," the Tom Stoppard thriller that played in London's West End earlier this year, is scheduled for Broadway next August. James Nederlander, who is producing with Robert Fryer, said Roger Rees, one of the three original stars, would be coming over, as would Peter Wood, the director. The other two leading roles, a man and a woman, will be played by Americans. The show will arrive here after 10 weeks in Los Angeles, produced by the Center Theater Group.

### Chris 'n' Tina's Wedding

A couple of years ago, Nancy Cassaro went to four weddings within a few weeks, two of them at the same Long Island club.

"It was like a 'Twilight Zone' experience," recalled Miss Cassaro, known to guests at "Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding" as the not-so-blushing bride, Valentina Lynne Vitale Nunzio. "I became almost obsessed with weddings, what goes on in the family, the crazed girlfriends, the surprise party, the showers, everything."

The experience, in a sense, led Miss Cassaro and Mark Nasser, a former classmate at Hofstra College, to a new direction in their improvisational act, which had until then had featured an older Italian couple. Together with Mark Campbell, they created a complete wedding.

Miss Cassaro said that when her relatives heard of the proposed show, they suspected something more than mere theater was behind her interest.

"They thought putting it on was a reaction to the frustration of my not being married," she said. So they were as thrilled as Miss Cassaro when, a short time after opening, the real thing happened, with a slight difference. She married Chris Fracchiolla, who plays the father of the groom, at a ceremony in a Buddhist Temple.

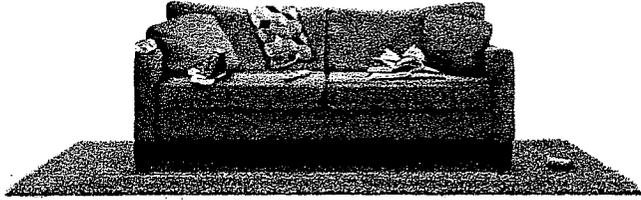
"At my real wedding it was funny because we had all spent so much time with each other in character," she said. "We had to re-evaluate the way we were acting and even dancing."

### Message for the Young

"Positive Me," a 50-minute musical drama about AIDS, aimed specifically at young people, opens Thursday for three days only at the Club at La Mama (74A East Fourth Street). Book, music and lyrics are by Lisa Edelstein, choreography has been contributed by the New York City Ballet principal Robert La Fosse, and Heather Watts has designed the costumes. Ethan Silverman, the direc-

# Materials Verifying Excellence as an Educator

# the middle.



Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

October 9, 2012

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of Nancy Fracchiolla, who is being submitted by Pali High for an eminence credential.

I have worked for more than twenty years as a writer/producer/executive producer in Hollywood... on such shows as Murphy Brown, Roseanne, and many others. I'm currently in my fourth season as Executive Producer of The Middle, starring Patricia Heaton, an ABC comedy which I created. Needless to say, in all these years of working in comedy – hiring writers, directors, actors, etc., I have learned to spot true talent when I see it. Nancy Fracchiolla is such a talent.

She has all the qualities that make up your favorite teacher – knowledge, humor, the aforementioned incredible talent, enthusiasm, and the ability to adjust her teaching skills to different students to bring out the best in them. As a mom, I have seen this first hand. My son Justin performed in the past two student musicals at Paul Revere – Bye Bye Birdie, and Crazy for You. Before I even go into the incredible quality of these productions, I have to say personally that she was phenomenal with my son, who is high-functioning on the autism spectrum. Nancy was wonderful – always encouraging and inspiring him... even deftly dealing with an ongoing situation when my son was laughing on stage upon his entrance. Nancy was intuitive and creative, and figured out a way to help him beat his problem while never dinging his confidence or embarrassing him, or making him feel self-conscious. Not only did she instill in him confidence, she appreciated him for who he is – and brought out of him a wonderful performance.

Now let me speak of these productions that she directed – they were amazing, and I am a tough critic. In a time when so many students are coddled, Nancy demanded excellence from these kids and achieved it. I'm certain these are the best productions these students were ever fortunate enough to appear in. They rivaled high school productions in their technical achievement, acting, singing, dancing wardrobe, sets, props... etc. The audiences went crazy. The kids loved her. She is a teacher that matters... the kind who touches your life in such a way that you never forget her. I know my son never will.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Burbank, CA 91505

It would be an absolute tragedy if Nancy were not allowed to continue teaching at Pali High. What she brings is so very rare -- the ability to fire up students and make them learn while having fun and achieving at the top of their ability. Her years of professional experience as a writer, actor, and director make her more than qualified for an eminence credential.

I do not throw around superlatives lightly, and there simply aren't enough to describe Nancy Fracchiolla.

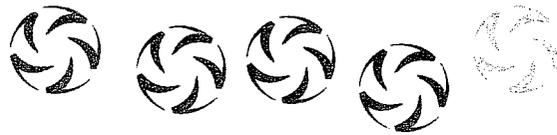
Please grab this amazing talent and allow her to continue doing what she is passionate about and what she does best. The school is lucky to have her. In a time when arts education is struggling -- Nancy is a rare gem who will inspire and leave an imprint on these children that will be life-changing. Do not let her get away.

Sincerely,



Eileen Heisler  
Executive Producer/The Middle

[REDACTED] \* Burbank, CA 91505  
[REDACTED]



## Personal Enrichment Program

Paul Revere Middle School – 1450 Allenford Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90049

**e-mail:** [info@reverepep.org](mailto:info@reverepep.org) **phone:** 310.358.5008 **website:** [www.reverepep.org](http://www.reverepep.org)

October 4, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to recommend Nancy Fracchiolla for the position of drama teacher at Palisades Charter High School. I am fortunate enough to have had the pleasure of working with Nancy over the past six years at Paul Revere Charter Middle School. Nancy is one of those special individuals that has a positive impact on almost everyone she encounters. She is enthusiastic, highly motivated, creative, and incredibly funny. Nancy is knowledgeable in all aspects of a theatrical production. She has a strong work ethic and is quite passionate about the overall development of her students.

She has been fundamental in coordinating the drama program at Revere M.S. During the last few years, she played a major role in every production at the school site. Besides being an integral component of Revere's drama program, Nancy was instrumental in revitalizing the after school theater program. Nancy volunteered to take over the after school program when the school did not have a qualified instructor. She directed and produced Friday Night Live (a hilarious comedy sketch), that is now an annual event at Revere. The production invigorated interest from several students to get involved in other aspects of the after school drama program. She was able to work with students with different ability levels, making sure that each individual reached their ultimate goals. During the past four years, she established an enjoyable and positive learning environment that not only resulted in amazing productions, but experiences the students will remember for a lifetime.

My very high regard for Nancy is not just as a colleague or friend. She is an extraordinary person. She leads by example. I do not know many people who have had such a positive impact on so many people. Nancy has always been able to not only "do the right thing" but lead others to do the same. While teaching a diverse group of young adolescents, she instilled important character traits and necessary life skills that is lacking in today's younger generation. She also encouraged others to take responsibility for their actions and think everything through before getting involved in something. She has continued to instill this sense of individual responsibility into everyone she meets. She is certainly one of the finest and most inspiring individuals I have ever encountered. Given her moral courage, creativity, and passion, along with her genuine sensitivity – few people are as sincere and determined as she – it is no wonder that she is so well-liked and highly respected by both her colleagues and students.

I highly recommend Nancy Fracchiolla to teach drama at Palisades Charter H.S.

Sincerely,

Justin Koretz  
Co-Director,  
Personal Enrichment Program



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***Topanga Elementary Charter School***

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**NICOLE SHEARD**  
*Principal*

September 28, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to endorse Mrs. Nancy Fracchiolla as an extraordinary performing arts teacher. I had the pleasure of working directly with Mrs. Fracchiolla for many years at Palisades Elementary Charter School where she volunteered her time to lead many groups of students through a successful performing arts program.

When Mrs. Fracchiolla's son was in my 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, she approached me about a way we could incorporate more theater arts into the instructional program. Her goal was to use drama as a means for the students to learn history by recreating a part of it through theater. I was excited and inspired by her proposal and welcomed her idea with open arms. With her motivation and creativity, Mrs. Fracchiolla not only directed, but personally wrote a script for our class play entitled "*The Radical Voice of Freedom*." The content was drawn directly from our social studies curriculum and California State Standards. The students performed various acts relating to significant events in our country's history. Not only did they learn a tremendous amount through this approach, I know that it is an experience that they will never forget.

The play proved not only to be fun for the class, but a successful method of educating the students. Mrs. Fracchiolla volunteered many hours to bring into being such a successful production. Her dedication to the students was admirable and it was obvious that she loved every minute of it. She seamlessly orchestrated every detail of the play from choreography, sets, costumes, music, lighting and more. Even after her son had graduated from the school, Mrs. Fracchiolla continued to come back for many years to direct the play for future 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Working with Mrs. Fracchiolla and participating in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade play was something that many students would look forward to as they matriculated through the grades.

As a fellow educator, I fully support Mrs. Fracchiolla being granted an Eminence Credential. Theater is her passion and working with children is obviously enjoyable and rewarding for her. I am confident that Mrs. Fracchiolla would be an asset to any organization that selects her to join their team. Please don't hesitate to contact me should you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Nicole Sheard, Principal

*"We are an elementary school in a natural mountain setting within an urban public school system. Through collaboration between community and school our mission is to educate, challenge and inspire each person. We will foster the esteem of self and others, respect for the environment, and love of lifelong learning by providing a safe and nurturing school community."*

# **THE REPORTER**

Kim Masters  
Editor at Large  
Hollywood Reporter  
[REDACTED]  
Los Angeles, CA 90036

October 2, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing with gratitude in support of Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla, who worked with my daughter at Paul Revere Middle School. As students, parents, friends and family know, Nancy works magic with the students. With her help, they learn how to mount brilliantly staged musicals with wonderful singing, choreography and production values. These experiences also taught my daughter invaluable lessons about teamwork.

Nancy pushes the kids to do their best and exceed the limits that they thought they had, but she remains upbeat and encouraging. She goes more than the extra mile to get great costumes and props. Parents are inspired to construct set and help with the hair and makeup because they know they will be part of a very special experience.

When we posted a clip from last year's show online, friends from around the country were amazed. "Professional enough for Broadway", one wrote. "Like no middle-school production I've ever seen!"

After the last performance of Crazy for You last year, my daughter burst into tears because working on the show had been a happy, fulfilling experience that made everyone involved feel proud. Any student who has the opportunity to work with her is fortunate indeed.

Sincerely,

*Kim Masters*

Kim Masters



October 14, 2012

Commission on Teacher Credentialing Certification  
Assignment and Waivers Division  
Box 944270  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2700

Dear Commission,

I have witnessed the extraordinary work of Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiola since 2000. It is my pleasure to give her my highest recommendation for an eminence credential.

Nancy has created and produced numerous Pacific Palisades community productions, mainly through our community's public schools: Palisades Elementary, Paul Revere Middle School and Palisades High. With children of every age and ability she has created an environment that is nurturing, creative, demanding and confidence building for the children. The work that her students have created under her tutelage – *Bubba*, *Radical Voices of Freedom*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Friday Night Live (FNL)* - is not your ordinary elementary or middle school fare. Every one of Nancy's that I have seen – and I have seen many – has received a standing ovation. Every one. I have often sat in disbelief wondering how Nancy, in such a short time, could get so much out of people so young – and have them love her for helping them do it.

My recommendation is also personal. Nancy gave my two sons an experience of theatre that changed their lives. One son worked on two of Nancy's productions in a support role, working with props and stage management. Only when she instinctively knew he was ready in a production of *Bye Bye Birdie*, did she give him a gentle push to try acting. Under her guidance he became one of the musical's main characters. His transformation from shy props man to singing, dancing lead was one of the most remarkable things I have ever witnessed. The experience gave my son an inner confidence that shaped his high school and college years. My other son was part of Nancy's *Friday Night Live (FNL)* and *Little Shop of Horrors* productions at Paul Revere. With *FNL* Nancy saw in him a comedic talent that no one else perceived. And she brought it out in him. She spent extra time outside of theatre helping my son develop his sketches and running lines with him. The result was amazing. My son's performances were hilarious. I still laugh. More importantly, working with Nancy my son gained self assurance and courage that will be with him forever..

Nancy goes so far beyond what is required - time, hours, attention, coaching, encouragement – it is a great understatement to say she gives her students 100%. I think it is fair to say that there is nothing she wouldn't do to help her students reach their potential in the performing arts – whatever that potential may be.

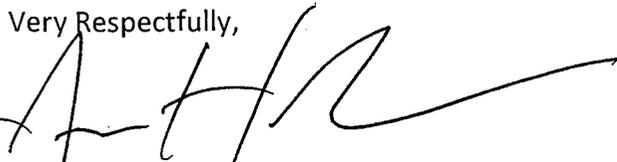
*Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiola, page 2*

Nancy is not only "creative." She is a creator. Beginning only with her imagination she has successfully created great commercial successes like *Tony and Tina's Wedding* and productions like *Radical Voices of Freedom* that met the specific educational needs of our Palisades community. Nancy has created so prolifically that it is almost easy to overlook. But it is an extremely rare gift.

Thus, she is able to offer her students more than her expertise in the techniques of theatre and the performing arts. Nancy is able to expose them to, and directly involve them in, the process of creation. Because of that she is able to help students connect with and express their inspiration.

A true commitment to helping others develop their full potential is the highest form of humanitarian work. In my work at Spirit of America, I have worked with many of the finest who have ever served the United States. Nancy's initiative, creativity and commitment to others are second to none. The State of California and its children are lucky to have Nancy. If she is awarded an eminence credential, I have no absolutely no doubt that she will serve California and California's children with the highest distinction.

Very Respectfully,



Jim Hake  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer





streetwise media

## IN ONE INSTANT

School Safe Driving Program

November 10, 2012

To the Commission on Teacher Credentialing,

I am pleased to write this letter in support of Nancy Cassaro-Fracchiolla receiving an eminence credential. I had the pleasure of working with Ms. Fracchiolla over the past two years, as she was instrumental to the success of our *In One Instant* program at Palisades Charter High School. Our program is delivered through a gripping, dramatic reenactment of a reckless driving collision due to drinking and texting, and how - In One Instant - an entire community is devastated. At Pali High our program was geared to upper classmen so we asked Nancy, given her theatrical expertise, to develop an interactive assembly for our freshmen and sophomore classes. With no funding, she was able to put together a powerful program that included short films, relevant speakers (a CHP Officer and an ex-drag racer who lost his best friend to reckless driving) and an audience participation segment.

Her assemblies hit the over 1400 students on a profoundly emotional level, which resonated long after its conclusion. All this was executed in a timely, professional and seemingly hassle-free fashion.

Thanks to Nancy's humanitarian efforts, she helped us to empower all Palisades drivers to understand the role they play in creating safe roads and in saving lives.



Debbie Barnett  
Director of Operations  
Streetwise Media

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# Palisadian-Post

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28 PAGES

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50¢

## Pali Elementary Kids Fashion Chihuly Art

"Arts are so important for our kids because it uses both sides of their brain," Saliann Kelly says in explaining why she agreed to co-chair Art Cadre at Palisades Elementary with Nancy Fracchiolla. In addition to art in the classrooms, this program strives to take the fine arts to a deeper level for first through third grades.

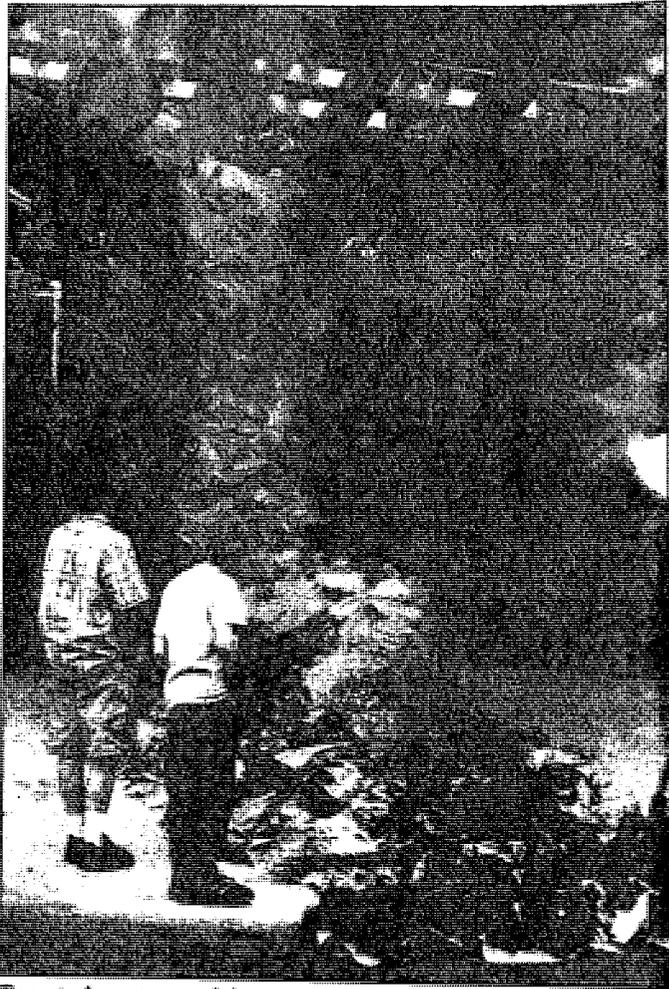
The theme of Art Cadre this year was "The Soul of Art." The first project was designing peace birds which were three-foot sculptures made from wood and cloth. The children were asked to name the bird "peace" in different languages.

The most recent project was based on artist Dale Chihuly's glass sculptures. His public displays have graced the canals of Venice, the Hotel Bellagio in Las Vegas, as well as Union Station.

Former high school art teacher Debra Demontreux helped coordinate the 25-foot flower sculpture, crafted by 200 students and currently on display in the Lori Petrick Garden on campus.

The sculpture consists of 400 flowers, made with coffee filters, contact paper and acrylics. The papers were then pulled through chicken wire forming a flowing carpet of visual beauty.

**UPDATES**



Two students try to pick out their individual flowers from the Dale Chihuly-like sculpture on display in the Lori Petrick Garden at Palisades Elementary.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

# Elementary Students Create Crystals to Find Inner Light

By SUE PASCOE  
Palisadian-Post Contributor

The stage at Palisades Elementary was turned into a crystal room last Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as part of a project for the art cadre program. Parent Nancy Fracchiolla started the program as a way to take the fine arts to a deeper level in first through third grades. The theme for this school year's cadre is Unity.

"When I was a little girl, I would go to my grandmother's apartment in New York and I would look up at her crystal chandelier and watch as the light reflected and sparkled," Fracchiolla said. "It's the time of year when the daylight hours are the fewest and most cultures celebrate some sort of winter solstice with a lighting ceremony."

Those thoughts led Fracchiolla to suggest having the students make crystal ornaments. Luckily, a new parent, Cynthia Dresser, who is from France and is also a jeweler, had crystals flown in from Austria. Each child in first through third grade was given a large crystal and a smaller one, in addition to several plain crystals and wires so that they could design their own unique ornament.

All of the crystals were hung from the ceiling on the stage at Palisades Elementary. The stage was closed off with dark blue curtains on all sides and a soft carpet was laid on the floor.

Celtic harpist Lisa Lynne played for the children as they watched their crystals dance in the light. Lynne is a self-taught musician and was the first ever musician-in-residence at City of Hope Medical Center in L.A. Her music is played in hospitals and is a favorite with massage therapists for its relaxing and calming effect.

This reporter was amazed to watch the children's transformation. As they approached the auditorium, they were laughing and talking loudly. After they took off their shoes and lay down on the carpet, listened to the music and watched the crystals, you could see their faces relax. Although designing crystal ornaments was a first-through third-grade project, every class in the school spent 15 minutes in the room.

"I feel so peaceful in here," one fifth grader commented. Another said, "I feel the weight lifted off me."

As a bonus, for Jackie Sidman's special-needs class, Lynne brought in nine harps. Each student in the class had the opportunity to play one. Principal Tami Weiser said it was amazing to watch the class



Lisa Lynne plays Celtic harp music on the stage of Palisades Elementary as second graders stare at crystals that twinkle and make rainbows. The crystals were designed by children in first through third grades.

Rich Schmitt/Steff Photographer

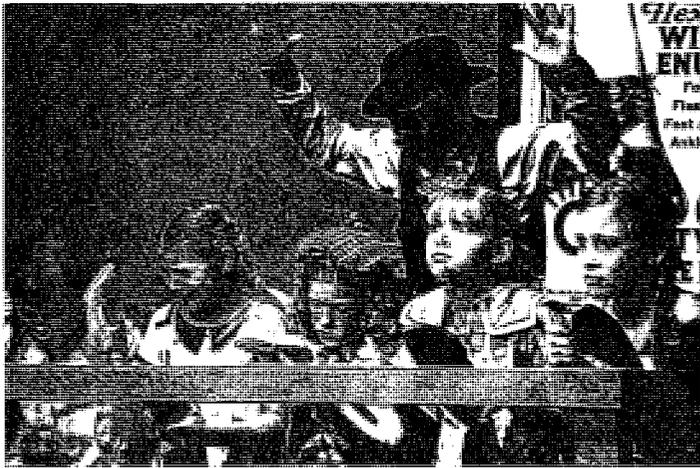
respond to tactile sensation as well as auditory and visual.

Principal Weiser has nothing but praise for the parents at the school. "My daughter is at a public high school in the Valley and this morning we looked at a private school," Weiser said. "I asked the director what the difference was between my daughter's

California Blue Ribbon high school and the private school and the director told me 'Public schools don't have a soul.'

"I thought about that on the drive over here," Weiser said. "What people love about Palisades Elementary is this school has a soul; the kids feel it and the parents feel it."

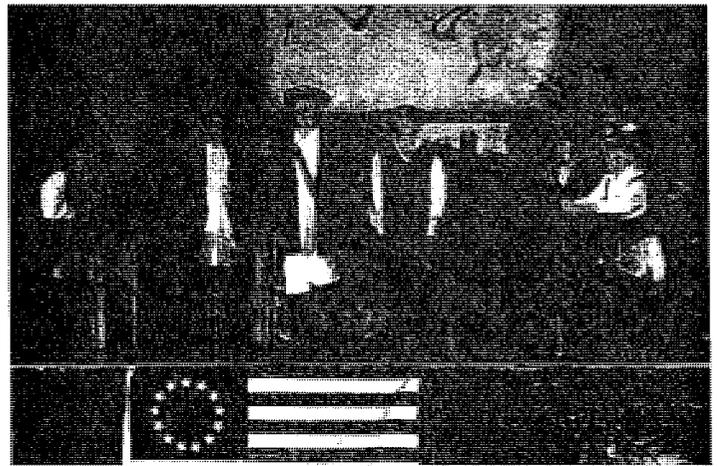
Dainty Mabel July 2008  
Theater Palisades Grades 3-9



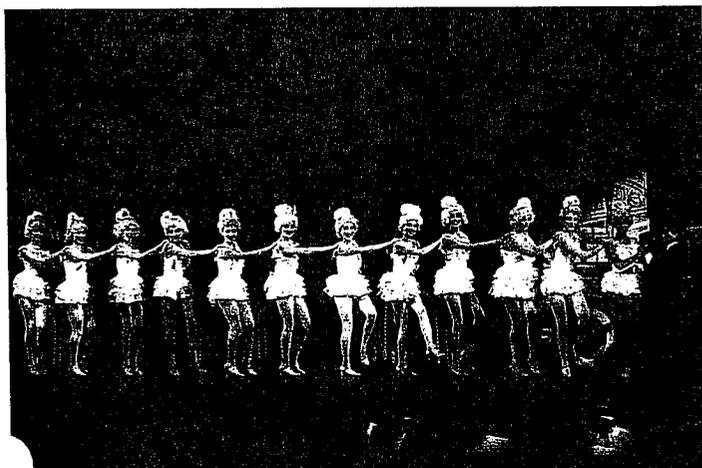
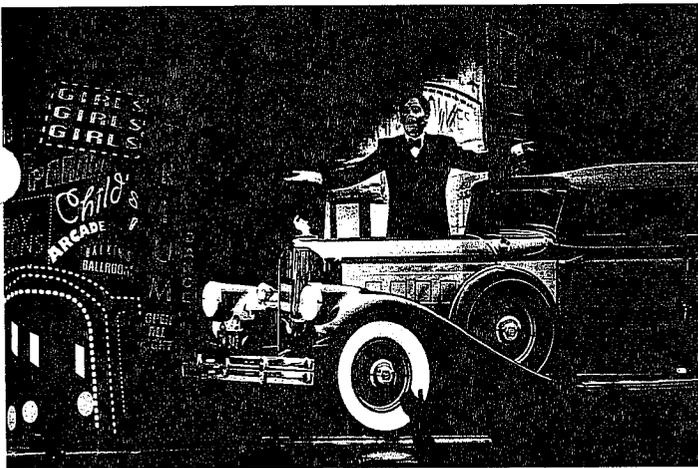
Bye Bye Birdie May 2011  
Paul Revere Middle School Grades 6-8



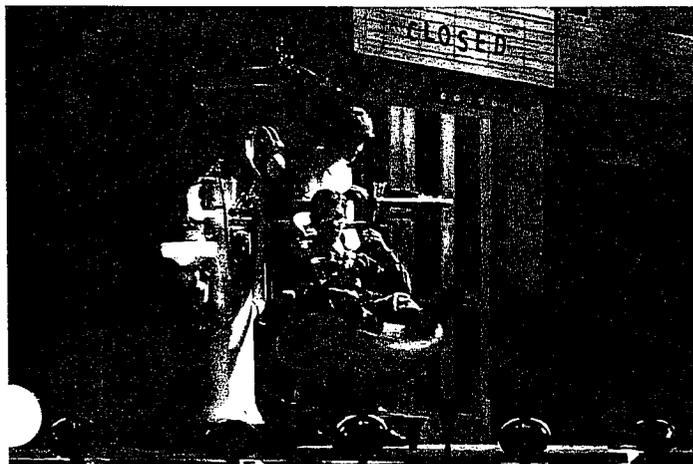
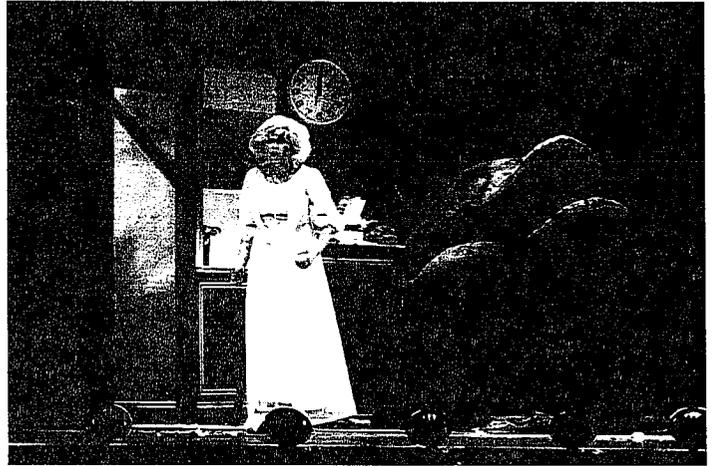
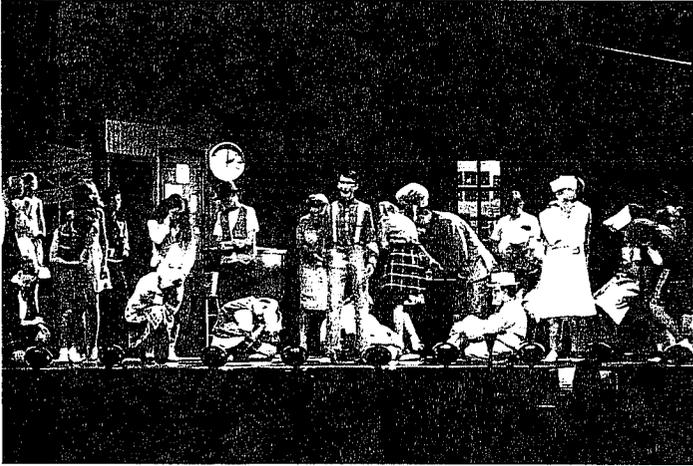
Radical Voice of Freedom April 2004  
Palisades Elementary School Grade 5



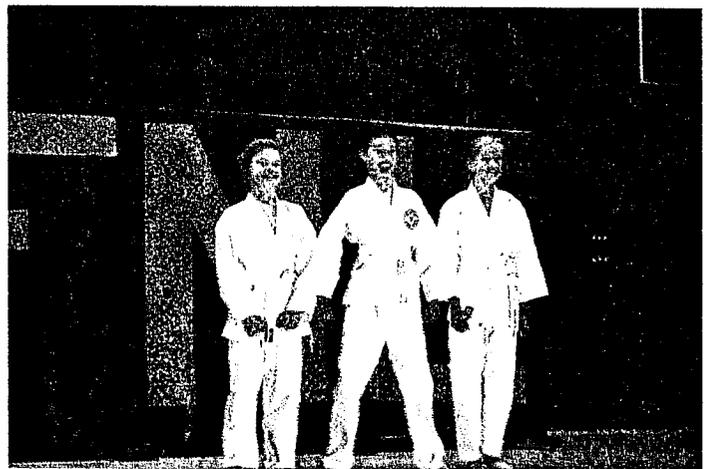
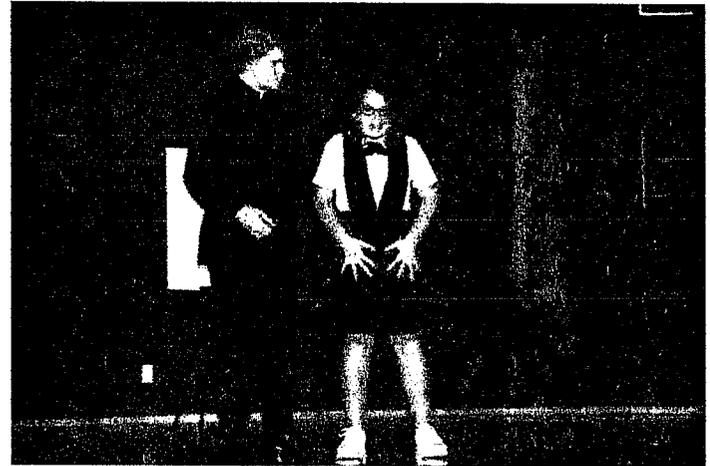
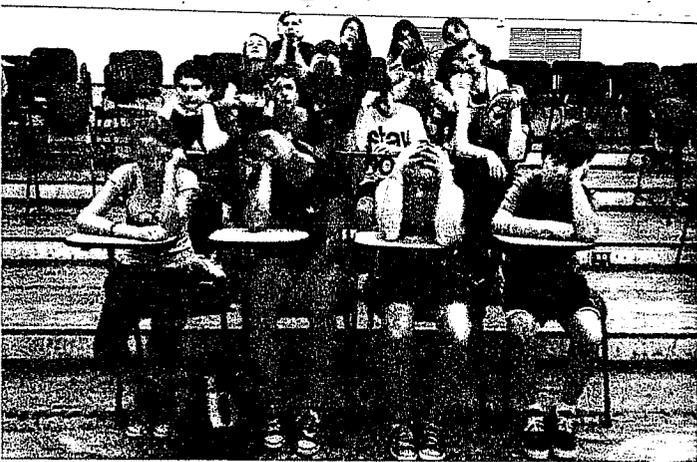
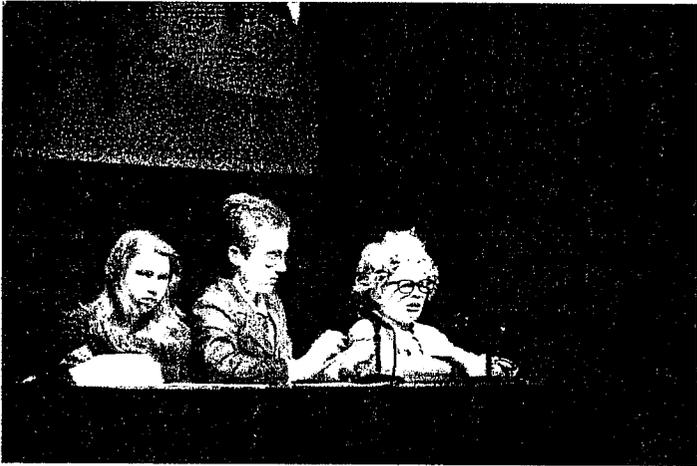
Crazy for You May 2012  
Paul Revere Middle School Grades 6-8



Little Shop of Horrors May 2010  
Paul Revere Middle School Grades 6-8



FNL Fall 2009  
Paul Revere Middle School Grades 6-8



Bubba The Cowboy Prince Fall 2001  
Palisades Elementary School Grades K-5

