



a rising

STAR

By Brian Kelley '97

RIDER'S THEATER PROGRAM STAGES ITS GREATEST REVIVAL

In theatrical terms, a revival is defined as the return of a play or musical to the stage, usually with some changes to make the work fresh or bring it up to date. By that definition, Rider's theater program is clearly in the midst of a revival that looks to enjoy a long, successful run.

The most recent achievement for the Rider theater program is the much-needed renovation of the studio—or "black box"—theater that took place this summer in the Fine Arts Center on the University's Lawrenceville campus, thanks in large part to a gift from **John Spitznagel '63 (journ.)**.

To celebrate the completion of the studio theater project, Rider is hosting a reunion of theater alumni and Alpha Psi Omega—the national honorary theater society—on November 19. The evening will include an exciting revival of Rider's 1991 production of the rock musical "Hair" (please see side bar on page 3).

The studio theater also represents the latest milestone for a Rider theater program that began in the late 1950s. "There was a group of students here

known as Theater '59 that set the standard for the future," said **Patrick Chmel**, chairman of Rider's fine arts department. "They staged productions that were absolutely fantastic."

The early days of Theater '59 are recounted in the book, "Rider College: The First One Hundred Years," by **Dr. Walt Brower '48 (bus. ed.)**. Rider began its formal theater program in 1959—hence, the name—under the direction of English professor **Lee R. Yopp**.

"It was a Rider program, but it was also community theater," said **Joe Teti '65 (bus. admin.)**, who is now president and chief executive officer of Triangle, the printing company based in Lawrenceville. "We staged the musicals in Alumni Gym because that was the only place to do them at the time. When I got to Rider in the fall of 1961, we did a landmark production of 'West Side Story.' We used the stage and about half of the gym for that one. It was quite a production."

In 1963, Theater '59 was chosen by the U.S. Department of Defense to make an eight-week overseas tour to perform for the armed forces personnel in Europe. Two years later, Theater '59 was one of eight collegiate theater

groups selected by the National Theater Association and the American National Theater and Academy to perform at the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, DC, according to Brower's book. The group made another overseas trip in 1966 to entertain the troops in the Far East and the Pacific Islands.

Also in 1966, Theater '59 christened Rider's Fine Arts Center with a production of "Carousel" starring **Gordon MacRae** as Billy Bigelow, a role he played on Broadway and in the show's film adaptation. The production's choreographer was an up-and-coming Broadway dancer by the name of **Tommy Tune**, who would go on to win nine Tony Awards as a director, choreographer and actor (see "Other Thoughts" by Dr. Brower on page 36 of this issue for more about the opening of the Fine Arts Center).

"With Professor Yopp, it had to be Broadway quality," said Teti, who added that Yopp is still directing shows near his home in North Carolina. "If he needed a 50-year-old guy for a part, he would get a 50-year-old guy rather than have a student play that age. It was a great learning

experience because you could learn from experienced actors."

But Teti's theater experience taught him much more than acting skills. "It's served me well in my career," he said. "It gave me the confidence and skills needed to make strong business presentations. I use those skills every day of my life. It was a big part of my life and my maturation."

Through the years, Rider continued to stage high-quality productions. However, enrollment in the program began to slip. "I remember in the early 1980s, we had very few students who were theater majors," said Chmel.

Realizing something needed to be done to breathe new life into the theater program, Rider instituted its acting scholarship program in the late 1980s. "The anchor of our theater program is the full-tuition acting scholarship," Chmel added. "Every March, we have mass auditions for the region's high school seniors who are aspiring actors. Each year, we select two, who over a four-year period of time, become part of an anchor of eight actors. These eight students serve as a kind of magnet because talent attracts talent."

One "magnet" from the 1990s attracted more than just new talent. **Jennifer Makris Hill '97 (fine arts)**, who would later make television appearances on shows such as "Live! With Regis and Kathy Lee" and the NBC daytime drama "Another World," made headlines by being named Miss New Jersey in 1995 and subsequently finishing as second runner-up in that year's Miss America pageant. She also placed in the top 10 in the Miss USA pageant in 1997. Her appearances in productions at Rider generated quite a buzz for the program.

Over the years, we have attracted some incredible talent from the tri-state area ★

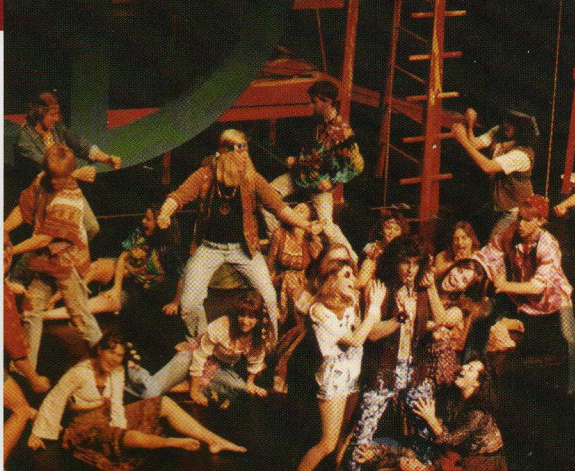
"Jen's success in the beauty pageants brought the Rider theater program into the national spotlight," said Chmel. "It increased the public's awareness of the quality of the productions being staged at Rider."

With a steady stream of strong, young actors and actresses coming to Rider, the undergraduate theater program is again being recognized as one of the finest in the region, according to Chmel. "Over the years, we have attracted some talented young actors from the tri-state area, especially. And more and more, we're getting inquiries from kids in Connecticut and Maryland high schools," said Chmel, who also praised his theater colleagues **Tharyle Prather**, director of theater facilities; **Richard Homan**, professor; and **Miriam Mills**, adjunct assistant professor, for their roles in the program's recent success.

What has also aided the program's revival is a physical transformation of the Fine Arts Theater, refurbished and rechristened as The Yvonne Theater in 2000—thanks mostly to a gift of more than \$330,000 from Spitznagel and his family in honor of his late wife, **Yvonne Alexander Spitznagel '64 (journ.)**.

Spitznagel's gift was a key event in the more recent growth of Rider's theater program. "It was a turning point when John became our benefactor," said Chmel. "Now our theater program is state of the art. Along with a very, very talented and dynamic faculty, The Yvonne Theater serves as another magnet for talent."

Things have definitely come a long way since the early 1980s. "Today, we have 60-70 students concentrating in theater in a department that has



Age of Aquarius Returns to Rider

To celebrate the renovation of the studio theater in the Fine Arts Center on the University's Lawrenceville campus, Rider is staging an exciting revival of its 1991 production of the rock musical "Hair" in conjunction with a Nov. 19 reunion of theater alumni and Alpha Psi Omega, the national honorary theater society.

"This will be a celebration of the ongoing work of the Alpha Psi Omega chapters from about 50 years ago to the present," said **Patrick Chmel**, chairman of Rider's fine arts department. "Alumni from the recent past are helping to put this whole thing together and it should be a fascinating event."

Chmel is hoping to attract some of the program's "founding spirits" back to campus for the celebration. "It's the students from the 1950s and 60s to whom we are reaching out. We really hope they will take part in this reunion."

The renovation of the studio—or "black box"—theater is an important milestone in the history of Rider's theater program, which dates back to 1959. The facility hosts classes, student productions and more experimental performances. Along with the renovation of the Fine Arts Center's main theater in 2000, the studio theater project completes the physical renewal of the Rider theater program. "Just as The Yvonne Theater has state-of-the-art technology on a large scale, we'll now have state-of-the-art technology on a smaller scale right across the hall in the studio theater," said Chmel. "Not only can we have some of our acting classes in that space, but we can also use that space the way a scientist would use a lab, exploring new forms, new methods and different ways of performing." ★

See page 34 for reunion details.

grown to 120-130 majors," said Chmel. "During this growth, the fine arts department has also added a fourth concentration in the area of dance through our relationship with the Princeton Ballet School." (See page 9 for more on the fine arts department's dance concentration.)

Another exciting development for the theater program is the increased interaction with students from Westminster Choir College's musical theater program. "Our musical productions have benefited greatly from the talent on the Princeton campus,"

said Chmel. "For example, our production of 'Sweeney Todd' a few years ago was only possible with the incredible voices from the Princeton campus. And we continue to use those voices whenever our calendars allow us."

The relationship between the two campuses also adds to the cultural experience for the Rider community. "The musical theater program at Westminster is now performing twice a year in The Yvonne Theater," said Chmel. "And our theater program regularly holds workshops or performances on the Princeton campus."

With modern performance and classroom facilities, a constant stream of talent and a dynamic faculty and staff, the future of the Rider theater department appears brighter than ever. "The theater program has never been more vital," said Chmel. We have great young student-artists on board and their enthusiasm is electric. There are great years ahead for Rider theater!" ★

For a full schedule of theater and musical performances at Rider, please turn to page 32 or go to www.rider.edu

STAGE PRESENCE

BELOW IS JUST A SAMPLING OF RIDER ALUMNI WHO HAVE GONE ON TO SUCCESS IN THE WORLD OF PERFORMING ARTS.

★ Ronn Carroll WCC '56

Carroll has appeared in numerous stage productions on and off Broadway, including "Oklahoma!" and "Annie Get Your Gun." He was also seen on movie screens as police officers in the horror films "Friday the 13th," "House" and "House 2."

★ Brian Delate '75 (fine arts)

A Vietnam veteran who came to Rider after the war and discovered a love for acting and directing, Delate has written, directed and/or appeared in numerous films. He also has played roles in several television programs and stage productions. Delate is probably most well known for playing the title character's father in 1998's "The Truman Show," starring Jim Carrey. He also spent the summer of 2000 as the owner of the Queen of Hearts Cafe on ABC's long-running daytime soap opera, "All My Children." Other notable film roles were as a guard in 1994's "The Shawshank Redemption" and as Col. Marshall in 2001's "Buffalo Soldiers," starring Joaquin Phoenix, Ed Harris and Anna Paquin.

★ Katierose Donohue '03 (fine arts)

A 2003 recipient of the Rider University President's Award, Donohue was selected to study at the Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University—becoming the first graduate in the history of Rider's theater program to study at Harvard. She recently appeared in an episode of HBO's "The Comeback," starring Lisa Kudrow.

★ Jennifer Larmore WCC '80

A world-renowned mezzo-soprano, Larmore made her professional debut in 1982 and began her rise to international fame with a series of successful performances with the Nice Opera in France during that company's 1986-87 season. She went on to make her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1995 and was invited to sing the "Olympic Hymn" during the closing ceremonies of the 1996 Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta. Larmore, who can be heard on more than 60 recordings, has appeared on television and hosted her own radio program, "Backstage with Jennifer Larmore," on XM Satellite Radio Network's classical music channel. She returned to Westminster in May 2005 to receive an honorary doctorate of arts and letters and serve as Commencement speaker.

★ Jennifer Makris Hill '97 (comm.)

While a student at Rider, Hill gained notoriety by being named Miss New Jersey in 1995 and finishing third in that year's Miss America Pageant. She later finished in the top 10 in the 1997 Miss USA Pageant. Hill appeared in numerous productions at Rider and went on to play the role of Elena Lopez on the NBC daytime drama, "Another World." She has since formed Makris Consulting, a firm specializing in coaching potential beauty pageant contestants and enhancing communication skills.

★ William Mastrosimone '74 (fine arts)

Mastrosimone wrote "Extremities" for both the stage and screen, with the 1986 film version garnering a Golden Globe best actress nomination for Farrah Fawcett as an intended rape victim who turns the tables on her attacker. In addition to a number of stage plays, he has also penned the screenplays for the 1994 feature film "With Honors," starring Brendan Fraser and Joe Pesci, and the Steven Spielberg-produced 2005 TNT miniseries "Into the West."

★ Ron Melrose MM '90

Melrose is a hugely successful Broadway music director, a role he served for the original musical comedy "The Scarlet Pimpernel." He was the associate conductor and vocal arranger for "Jekyll & Hyde" and handled the dance arrangements for the 1987 revival of "Cabaret."

★ James Mount '95 (fine arts)

Mount has appeared in a number of stage productions as well as television programs since 1996. He played Steve from 1999-2001 on ABC's long-running daytime soap opera, "All My Children," and had an uncredited role in the 2002 film, "Maid in Manhattan," starring Jennifer Lopez. Mount has also appeared in episodes of "One Life to Live," "Law & Order," "Ed," and "Upright Citizens Brigade."

★ Tom Papa '90 (comm.)

After bringing power to serious roles in "Equus" and Arthur Miller's "All My

Sons" on the Rider stage, Papa went on to become a successful stand-up comedian and actor. A frequent guest of the late-night talk show circuit, Papa appeared in the Billy Crystal film, "Analyze That," and the NBC sitcom, "The Colin Quinn Show." He then went on to be star, writer, producer and co-creator of his own four-episode NBC sitcom, "Come to Papa," which aired after "Friends" during the summer of 2004. Papa has also toured with comedian and television icon, Jerry Seinfeld.

★ Anwar Robinson WCC '01

Robinson entered the national spotlight in early 2005 as one of the 12 finalists on FOX's "American Idol" and made it into the top seven before being voted off the show April 19. After a surprise appearance in Lawrenceville for Rider's 140th Commencement, the West Orange, NJ, middle school music teacher spent his summer touring the country with other "American Idol" contestants in a live series of arena concerts. Robinson was a member of the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the Jubilee Singers while he was a student on Rider's Princeton campus. He is a featured soloist on the Jubilee Singers' recording, "A Celebration of Spirituals, Hymns and Gospel Songs" (available at Westminster's online store, www.westminsterchoircollege.org).

★ John Walker WCC '73

Walker serves as senior producer for music for the series, "Great Performances," on the Public Broadcasting System.