



## Taking on a *Tuna* Role

Perhaps the most famous small town in theatrical literature is Grover's Corners, a fictional place in New Hampshire invented by Thornton Wilder for his play *Our Town*. Close behind

in fame must be Tuna, Texas, which came from the minds of two Austin actors as entertainment at a party in the fall of 1981.

By 1985, *Greater Tuna* had opened in Austin as a play, become a huge hit, gone to New York, gotten even more famous, and in that year, emerged as the most produced play in the United States. Now, as Unity Theatre opens its production, it is theatre legend, a Texas institution, and a national franchise, spawning three sequels: *A Tuna Christmas*, *Red, White and Tuna*, and *Tuna Does Vegas*. The creators, Jaston Williams, Joe Sears,

and Ed Howard, could hardly have imagined the success of their original offering, which brought to them a year's run off-Broadway, an HBO special, an invitation to perform at the White House, a 1995 Tony Award nomination, and an entire career spent performing their show and the many memorable characters they had created.

All told, between its various incarnations, the original stars have embodied their characters through more than 5,000 performances and numerous cross-country tours. These characters are so vivid and their portrayals so memorable, they have become familiar to anyone who has seen them. Thurston Wheelis, Arles Struvie, Petey Fisk, Didi Snaveley, and Yippy the Dog have become as well known to some as Stanley Kowalski (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman*), or James Tyrone (*A Long Day's Journey into Night*). They are certainly far funnier.

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## For Me and My Gala

Unity Theatre held its Annual Fundraising Gala on September 9 in its Church Street facility, raising over \$62,000 in seasonal operating funds, an all-time record. Attended by more than 170 friends and supporters, the Gala celebrated Unity Theatre's 15 years of bringing professional theatre to its community.

Entitled "Opening Night," the evening attempted to capture some of the glamour and excitement that is generated by that very special occasion of attending the theatre. It was a time to dress up, to see, and be seen, and the "Opening Night" crowd looked the part. The Theatre was all decked out, with tables beautifully decorated and flowers in profusion. Dining was provided in various rooms named after famous New York eateries, like Tavern on the Green and the 21 Club.

Cocktails were served beginning at 6:00 pm from an open bar, with a live saxophone player providing the musical backdrop. Entertainment and a live auction took place in the auditorium between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm. Celebrated pianist Rob Landes, assisted by the vocal talents of Chesley Krohn and Adam Gibbs, took attendees on a "Stroll Down Broadway," recounting the his-

tory of American show music from its beginnings in operetta, through the innovations of Show Boat and the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, up to the music of today. Donald Ahrens was the auctioneer in a lively series of bidding wars over weekend getaways, cooking classes, and gourmet dinners.

The evening finale was a sumptuous feast, fine wine, and engaging conversation. Those who were there agreed that it had been a lovely evening.

Those who have given dinner parties know how much planning and coordination must have gone into such an event. It was months in the making, with the hard work and combined efforts of many people. Heading the task was Unity Theatre's Gala Committee, led by its Chair, Elen Moncrieff, and with the combined support of Penny Bryant, Katie Cron, Carole Henry, Cissy Kopycinski, Jayme Ponder, Cindy Rollins, Nancy Shoup, Jane Womack, Leslie Wood, and Patti Wooten.

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# ON THE INSIDE

## Tuna Role

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Many comedians are known for the characters they created. Fanny Brice is remembered as Baby Snooks, Jonathan Winters was known for Maude Frickert, and Lily Tomlin became famous for her telephone operator, Ernestine. It is hard to imagine anyone ever attempting to embody those characters but their creators. Some actors have become identified with specific roles, particularly in films, such as Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski, Vivien Leigh for Scarlett O'Hara, or Gregory Peck playing Atticus Finch. These personalities and the characters they played became so entwined in memory, it is difficult to picture anyone else in these parts.

However, it is simply the nature of live theatre that characters in plays will eventually be performed by someone else. If a play outlives its author or the actors grow too old to continue in their

roles, the parts go to new actors. Great parts attract other actors who want their crack at it. Each new performer brings something new and different to the character, and no two performances are ever the same.

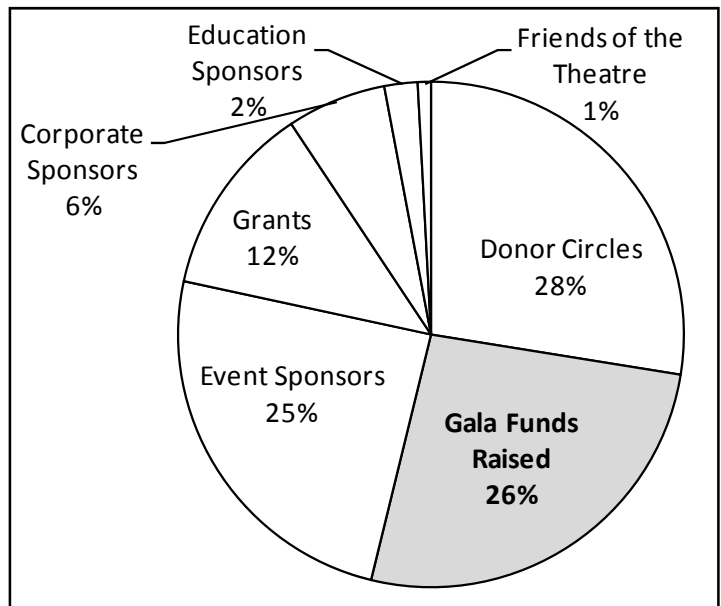
When we experience a play, the strongest elements (be it actor, setting, costumes, etc.) tend to remain in our memories as *the way it was meant to be*. Another production may not live up to our expectation, based upon prior experience. Another actor may pale in comparison to the way you remember or imagine it done. In theatre, that's just the way it is. Theatre-goers are forever comparing one Hamlet to another, one production to the next, this experience to that. This isn't wrong; it's very right. It's part of the joy one has from attending more than one production of the same play, experiencing more than one portrayal of the same part. You will enjoy comparing and contrasting. You will have your favorites. You will prefer one over another. You will enjoy sharing your opinion.

It's what makes horse races and exciting theatrical experiences!

## My Gala

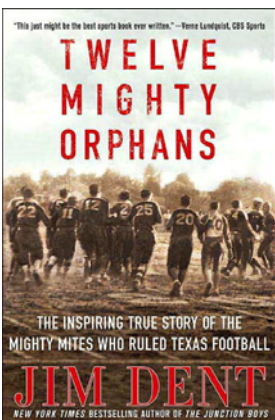
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Of course, the idea is to provide a delightful evening to all who attend, but the greater goal is to raise the funds necessary to keep Unity Theatre an artistically ambitious and financially solvent institution. Thanks to the good will and generosity of those who underwrote the Gala, who donated their services, lent their talents, and reached deeply into their pockets, we can report that the evening exceeded our expectations. In this one evening, Unity Theatre was able to raise approximately one-fourth of this season's anticipated contributed income.



The chart above shows the various anticipated sources of donor support compared with the realized funds from this year's Gala.

## Washington County Reads



As part of the 2nd annual "Community Read" in Washington County, sponsored by Lifetime Learning, Unity Theatre's "Living Literature" series will present a staged reading of portions of this year's book selection, *Twelve Mighty Orphans*, by author Jim Dent.

The event begins at 7:00 pm on November 1, and it is free and open to the public.

"Coach Rusty Russell and the Mighty Mites will steal your heart as they overcome every obstacle imaginable to become a respected football team. Take an orphanage, the Depression, and mix it with Texas high school football, and Jim Dent has authored another winner, this one about the ultimate underdog."  
— Brent Musburger, ABC Sports/ESPN

# UNITYTHEATRE REFLECTIONS

A publication for the curious theatre-goer. Fall 2010

## *From the Executive Artistic Director,*

Last week, auditions were held for our upcoming production of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. This will be the fourth time I have directed this charming little play. Every production has been unique, with its own set of surprises and special moments. I can't wait to experience the joyous message of Christmas with yet another group of children — with 32 kids and 6 adults, this will be the largest cast ever!

The mission of Unity Theatre is achieved not only by the plays we offer you, but through education and training. From the beginning, it has been my intention to place learning at the core of everything we do. This newsletter, our *Preview Talk-back* sessions, the *Second Saturday Director Chat* before the show — all these things are offered to enlarge your perspective of the play and enhance your theatre experience.

Since the success of last summer's Drama Camp, families have been watching for further educational opportunities, and we are meeting those expectations with new programming. After the Christmas play, there will be winter classes in musical theatre dance; in the spring, we plan to tour in a play intended just for younger children; in June, we will continue to offer our college-level apprenticeships; in July; the Drama Camp will return. Also in July, I will be directing a second play (soon to be announced) that will put more children and amateur adult actors on our stage.

The little girl who played the lovable "Gladys" in our 2002 production of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* is now in college. But I already know she will be in the audience this December, supporting another generation of "Herdmans" and cheering for a new cast of talented kids. Won't you please be there, too?

*~ Teresa Beckers*

## The Best Christmas Pageant EVER!

December 1 - 5, 2010

Tickets go on sale November 1



2002



2003



2004

# Come Together at Unity



Last year, Unity Theatre launched the Players Club, the social arm of our organization. Its purpose is to enhance the communal aspect of an evening at the Theatre, to provide a place where subscribers and contributors could meet one another, and where our actors and technical artists could interact with loyal patrons. Every Friday and Saturday of any Unity Theatre event, before the show, during intermission, and following the performance (exclusive of Opening Nights), the Atrium Lounge is available to Club members.

This year, we have initiated "Social Sundays." It is our attempt to reach out to potential single ticket buyers and individual subscribers who would otherwise not attend, because, quite simply, they "don't like to go to the theatre alone."

We recognize that theatre is a shared experience. An audience is a group of friends and strangers who sit together to enjoy the magic of live performance. It is a wondrous chemistry that unites members of an audience with one another and connects them to the actors on stage. It is an intricate and rather mysterious kind of communication.

We want more people to share in that experience, to allow them-

selves the opportunity to join with their neighbors in a community of theatre-goers and be affected — to laugh, to feel, to be touched in ways that only a live experience can offer.

"Social Sundays" will be offered the first Sunday of each production. If you are an individual ticket-buyer, at no additional cost, you may attend a reception, with complimentary refreshments provided, 45 minutes prior to the show, to meet and make friends with other single people. Afterward, you can attend the show as part of the "Social Sundays" group. All you have to do is inform the box office when making your reservation for the first Sunday performance that you would like to join us.

For *Souvenir*, Social Sunday will be February 6 at 3:15 pm. Call our box office at (979) 830-8358 or visit us online at [www.UnityBrenham.org](http://www.UnityBrenham.org) for more information.

UNITYTHEATRE REFLECTIONS

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