

Kids take 'Center Stage' with Broadway actors at premiere theater school in Westport

Center Stage Theatre Company, a new theater school in Westport, is taking both children and parents by storm.

"We're not the real world," says the school's founder, Jill Jayson. "We work with each child individually, help them discover their own unique strengths, and ultimately showcase their talents 'center stage.' Every child always has a leading role."

The result is one of total empowerment. One mother comments, "My daughter has been so positively affected by Center Stage. The experiences have propelled her growth, opened her up and increased her confidence, and on top of that she has so much fun. In addition, Center Stage has made her a better speaker and, surprisingly, a better writer. Her grades have gone up across the board."

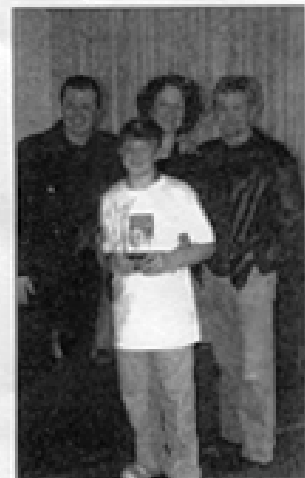
Jill brings a diverse background to Center Stage. She is a communications strategist and founder of Optimum Edge, an actress, and a former stockbroker. She is also a board member of the National Music Theatre Network and just recently chaired the opening gala of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, which has been referred to as the "Sundance of Musical Theatre." It is Jill's vision that each student learn the art of acting as well as how to become a better communicator.

"Center Stage offers theater for life. Our vision is for our students to bring their newfound knowledge and confidence with them into the real world."

To accomplish this, the school has assembled the finest Broadway actors, award-winning directors, filmmakers, voice coaches, dancers, and composers. On

any given day, one can see such Broadway talents like Tony Award winner Eugene Brancoveanu (Marcello) and Charlotte Cohn (Musetta) from *La Bohème*; Ivan Rutherford (Jean Valjean) from *Les Misérables*; Michelle Millardi (Belle) from *Beauty and the Beast*; Bill Youmans (The Goat) from *Wicked*; Penny Ayn Maas (Fraulein Kost) from *Cabaret*; Jason O'Dell Williams from The National Shakespeare Company; Larry Rosen, the co-orchestrator of *Aida*; and the list goes on.

"Learning from these professionals and being surrounded by their positive support is priceless. We see a dra-



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Cameron Nadler, foreground, a student at Center Stage, holds a Tony Award won by Eugene Brancoveanu in 2003 for his role as Marcello in *La Bohème*. Background, from left, are teachers Brancoveanu, Terry Edlin, who was Carlotta in *Phantom of the Opera*, and Ivan Rutherford, who played Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*.

matic increase in each student's ability, as well as their level of confidence. They truly become impacted for life."

For instance, when Eugene Brancoveanu taught a master voice class, he took a picture with each student holding his Tony Award, and stressed the importance of each of them following their dreams.

An important goal of Center Stage is for each student to reach new heights individually, while rising together within the context of his/her own class. The children learn that life is much more rewarding when one is positive and supportive of their fellow students as opposed to being back-stabbing and self-serving. "A person can only give of themselves when they possess a true sense of self. At Center Stage, I'm hoping to make the world a better place, one child at a time, by giving them each the gift of confidence."

Jill's premise extends beyond the borders of Center Stage. "Our school is comprised of teachers, students, parents, and the communities of Fairfield County. Our door is always open." For example, the Staples High School fall musical was *Cabaret*. Some students came to Jill and expressed a need to familiarize themselves with the specific dances from the show. Within weeks, Center Stage brought in three of the dancers from Broadway's *Cabaret* and featured a July dance workshop over several weekends. Children from all over Fairfield County enjoyed the workshop.

"We take pride in the fact that our students come from over 10 towns in Fairfield County. Many new friendships have been formed over the past several months."

From time to time, Center Stage will also feature free events for the enrichment of Fairfield County. On Wednesday, January 12th, the composer and playwrights of the Broadway musical *Brooklyn*



Contributed photo

Kids take 'center stage' at commercial casting and audition workshop.

will speak, entertain, and interact with both children and adults. This is a rare opportunity to meet the creators of a Broadway musical before seeing the show. (Seating is limited. Call to make a reservation.)

The winter/spring semester begins January and February and lasts until the middle of May. Center Stage offers age appropriate classes, from grades K-12 in theater, dance, improvisational technique, auditioning, and filmmaking. The winter schedule will include **BROADWAY AUDITION** taught by Michelle Millardi, (Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*) in which each student will learn to audition a song by capturing its essence and becoming one with its message. During the second half of the program, students will showcase their work in front of cast members from *Wicked*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Producers*, *Rent*, and *Pfister on the Roof*. **FINDING, PERFORMING, AND PERFECTING THE MONOLOGUE**, is a workshop in which each student will walk away with a dramatic, comedic, and classical monologue that they can feel confident performing and auditioning at a moment's notice.

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN, is a hands-on how-to for budding screenwriters.

ACTION is an on-camera audition technique class.

CHICAGO CELL BLOCK TANGO is a program in which each student will receive a monologue from the Broadway play *Chicago* — complete with choreography. Other classes include **THE ART OF THE IMPROV**, **MASTERING MIDDLE SCHOOL**, **LIVING THE ROLE**, **FROM DREAM TO STAGE**, **I CAN DO THAT**, **COMMERCIAL DANCE TECHNIQUE**, and a musical for grades three through six, as well as **60890**, an original musical premiere for grades six through twelve, written and composed by the co-orchestrator of *Aida*.

Center Stage welcomes phone calls. Jill Jayson is known to make house calls or get together with new students at the local Starbucks to get to know them more personally so that she can learn how to best meet their individual needs.

"I consider each child to be my own during the hours that they attend our school. Nothing is more rewarding than to witness each and every one of them awakening their dreams."

For further information, call Center Stage at (303) 341-9699 or log onto their website at www.CenterStageTheatreCompany.com.