



The **Unusual Suspects Theatre Company** in association with **New Roads Community Partners** and **Optimist Youth Home and Family Services** invites you to our original youth theatre productions:



With youth from **Camp David Gonzales Residential Treatment Program**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20 AT 1PM
1301 NORTH LAS VIRGENES ROAD
CALABASAS, CA 91302

And youth from **Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11 AT 12PM
6957 NORTH FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CA 90041

Reception and awards presentation to follow each performance. These plays are the culmination of separate 12-week sessions at each facility with US.



by **November 10** for Camp Gonzales and by **December 3** for Optimist Youth Home to Sally Fairman at 310.558.3190 or sally@theunusualsuspects.org

FOR MAPS/DIRECTIONS & MORE INFO, GO TO THEUNUSUALSUSPECTS.ORG OR CALL US AT 310.558.3190.

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TO OUR VALUED SUPPORTERS,

Happy Holidays!

Thank you for supporting our teens for the past 12 years. We hope you will continue to empower youth by supporting US as we enter our 13th year! **Please take a moment and send in your tax deductible contribution today in the envelope provided.**

Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to you.

From all of us at The Unusual Suspects



OUR mission

The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization of professional artists. We exist to bring theatre arts to youth, ages 12-21, from the foster care and juvenile justice systems. Our programs cultivate pride, racial tolerance and social consciousness.

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We want to hear from you!

Please share your thoughts about any **US** performances you've seen, ideas about the program or comments about the newsletter on the Message Board on our website: **www.theunusualsuspects.org**

or e-mail **US** at: **unusualsuspects@sbcglobal.net**

or write **US** at:
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Unusual Times

Letter from the Executive Director

"You've achieved success in your field when you don't know whether what you're doing is work or play." – WARREN BEATTY

As we approach the end of 2004, and my first year at the helm, there is much we can celebrate: Our 3-year strategic plan we developed by consensus to focus our efforts; our new formal curriculum addressing the State Standards for the Arts approved by the LA County Arts Commission with inclusion in their resource directory; a comprehensive training of our artists; a new partnership with UCLA School of Social and Public Policy to evaluate our programs; a new on-going program at Camp Gonzales with new partner New Visions Foundation; a new on-going program at Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services; a successful film program through a partnership with Deborah Lintz and SerenDebitly films at Aviva girls' foster care group home; a coalition of arts groups that work with youth in institutions which may yield future contracts; a spring Fundraiser sponsored by David Henry Hwang raising \$24,000; and over \$100,000 raised for

our programs through the combined efforts of the board and staff. You can read about all of our accomplishments in these pages. We have come a long way, but still have a distance to go.

As we close out the year we step up our programs and efforts; however, our costs have increased as well. In the current political climate health care and insurance costs are rising out of control for small non-profits like ours. Our workman's compensation cost alone for just 2 employees is almost \$4000/year. Funding sources have dried up around the state as government agencies balance their deficits by cutting the arts, while private foundations shift their dwindling funds to cover larger non-profits hit by the budget cuts. We heard from many of the foundations that gave us money in the past that they have changed their focus to cover these larger institutions. We are \$60,000 short of covering the matching funds needed for our programs next year.

What happens if we don't do these programs? Each year youth violence costs \$700 million in medical costs to LA County. Incarceration of one juvenile until age 25 averages \$7 million.

We need your help! As this year ends please step up your support of **US** with a generous donation. Half our programs are matched by the site. That means your \$500 will pay for a whole scholarship to our 12-week program for one youth. Sponsor a youth or two to go through our program. Our program can make the difference between a successful productive career or a life of crime. Help us make a change in these young minds, often broken down by neglect and abuse, while they can still be reached. Art heals!

ZOOT VELASCO

PROGRAM news

By SALLY FAIRMAN

US Announces Two New Partnerships This Fall



At Camp Gonzales: Zoot, Marlene, Russell, John, Jamie, Sally.

US is lucky to be working with many talented youth this fall at two new program sites: Camp David Gonzales (in association with New Roads Community Partners), a residential treatment center of probation housing

over 100 boys sentenced there for petty crimes, and Optimist Youth Home and Family Services, serving nearly 200 boys mainly referred by probation.

At each site, we started out by introducing our program in an assembly format, where Executive Director Zoot

Velasco mesmerized the kids with his robotic break-dance getting a great response. Since those assemblies in early September, a team of lead artists and volunteers has been working with each group of 20-30 youth twice each

week nurturing an ensemble of young performers that are now in the throes of writing and getting ready to perform their own stories on November 20 (Camp G.) and December 11 (Optimist).

At Camp Gonzales in Calabasas, we meet every Thursday and Saturday in the gym, where we have the privacy and freedom to create and make fools of ourselves for a couple of hours. There are no windows in the gym, but we prop the doors open so the sunlight and sounds of the other wards in the yard and the intermittent loudspeaker drift in. At this writing, the



(continued on page 2)

guys are nearly finished with their script and buried in their work. They seem like old pros. But then Oscar, a quiet kid with no theatre experience, who is a natural at improvisation, asks me, "So, what are we going to do?" He means on November 20. "Oh," I say, "You're going to perform your play." "How?" he wonders. I explain. I'm not sure if his nodding is to tell me he understands or to convince himself that this is possible. Of course, I know that not only is it possible, but that the audience will love him, and that this experience may be life-changing. I also know that all he can do right now is go forward with blind faith.

At Optimist Youth Home, we meet every Wednesday and Friday in a large, modern conference room with the youth and three expressive arts therapists from their staff, who join our team in making up the ensemble. The youth are on a first name basis with each other there (at Camp only last names are used with a few exceptions, such as our group), and the culture is one in which the youth are encouraged to be in touch with their feelings. Although the two facilities differ in atmosphere, once we get down to work with the kids, the process is the same and every session they surprise us with their creativity. So far, in the improvisations, we have seen talking mannequins, a laundromat that specializes in

washing celebrity briefs, a young couple deciding to give away their newborn baby, a punk rock trio, a son buying drugs from his own father, a "spot on" impression of Bill Cosby and many more colorful and heartbreaking characters. This week, the youth will be voting on the final ideas for their play on December 11 and delving deeper and deeper into their characters and story lines.

We are fortunate to have wonderful partners in Camp Gonzales through New Roads Community Partners and in Optimist Youth Home and Family Services, and to work with so many talented youth. We are moved to laughter and tears every week by their stories and we know you will be too!

Nestled in the hills of Highland Park, Optimist Youth Home and Family Services is a unique residential program for teen boys 14-18 years old providing culturally sensitive comprehensive treatment, specialized education,

Optimism Not Prison

BY MICHAEL SPILLERS

and support services to abused, neglected, or at-risk children and youth. It's also the latest stop for The Unusual Suspects, and I'm privileged to be one of the volunteers who are bringing theatre arts to the talented and enthusiastic young men who have enrolled in our program. The residents are referred mainly by probation to Optimist, which provides an alternative to prison.

When I arrived for our opening day at Optimist, the first thing I noticed was the inviting setting – how the woody hillside kind of "hugs" the offices, schoolrooms and dorms, which are built on terraces along a little trail that leads up to a modest hilltop chapel. The stair-step courtyard was bustling with activity when I arrived for our first workshop, with orderly groups of young men filing from class

to class, or to and from the dorms. Right away I ran into two residents on their way to our program. I could tell that Harry (shy), and Jessie (not shy at all!) weren't sure what to expect from The Unusual Suspects, but they were willing to give it a shot and join our warm-up circle as we prepared for our first session.

The last time I volunteered for the Suspects was in the spring of 2002, and those first days with a new group of kids can be pretty daunting. In some of our programs (not this one), participation is court-ordered, so the youths' enthusiasm is not always up to speed the first few days. It can be tough – even intimidating – to work through all that resistance, and it takes a little patience and backbone to bring the kids to the next level.

But as the rest of the young men arrived to complete our first warm-up circle, I noticed something exciting. Optimist is a therapeutic setting, and The Unusual Suspects work closely with three Optimist staff Expressive Art Therapists – Amy, Anita & Megan – who are uniquely qualified to help the youth process issues that come up during our workshops. The boys are expected to participate fully, and encouraged to express their feelings openly and build each other up. Sure, there were a few participants who decided they didn't really want to be there – it always happens. But for the most part, that "period of

resistance" hardly even happened with this group of funny, articulate young men who are excited about the possibilities of theatre!

There's one youth whose oddball comedy and hilarious impressions keep the group rolling with laughter. There's another who has grown from a shy, resistant loner at the start of the program to slowly coming out of his shell and taking risks, finding the courage to be just as silly and theatrical as the rest of us. And one with a talent for playing the drums and an intense interest in politics and world events. He has been slowly building the courage to kick-start his gift for spoken-word poetry and



At Optimist. Back row: Dance Therapist Anita, Vivianne, John, Sally, Calvi, Zoot. Front row: Michael, Guillermo.

rap. I invite everyone to meet this great group of kids on December 11 when we present our live performance. I've had a great time working with them and connecting with the dedicated staff. I know you will be able to see and share that energy when you meet them as well.

Eye on the Ball

BY JAMIE DIAMOND,
*Workshop Volunteer/Writer for
The New York Times*

It's 96 degrees in the parking lot of Camp Gonzales, dry heat radiating off the boulders. As I walk from my car, the first sign says,

"Beware of rattlesnakes." The second: "High Alert. Make sure doors are securely closed behind you." In the staff bathroom, the hooks

used to hang purses from the doors have been removed: Weapons? This is my first day as a volunteer.

Our group of incarcerated boys is to meet in a windowless, concrete-block gymnasium. Five of us arrange folding chairs into a circle and wait. The boys file in, wearing baggy orange

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shorts and damp white tee-shirts. Most of their heads are down, shaven heads. As the boys take seats, few make eye contact with us. One draws his hands all the way inside his tee-shirt. Undeterred, our leader greets them all with good cheer: "How great to see you. We're all so excited about working with you." The boys perk up a bit, heads and eyes raised, but just slightly.

After introductions, we stand to do an exercise: walking and then suddenly freezing in place. The boys seem less tense now, they're walking around like human electrons in some peculiar former-gang molecule. Some boys are smiling. This might be fun. This is not home-

work. If these adults want us to walk and then stop, who can fail?

Our next warm-up involves throwing and catching tennis balls, faster and faster, until there are 5 or 6 balls crossing in the air. Now the boys are really smiling. In five minutes, we've become a team; trust established through the ritual of throwing, and catching, a ball.

When we sit in our circle again, there is a tangible hum of energy. Next we'll do some theater games. Who wants to volunteer? Three or four hands shoot up. These guys are eager. They don't pull their arms inside their tee-shirts. For this exercise, the group asks questions of a boy whose is playing a 2000-year old man. He answers in gibberish and a second boy translates, improvising the answers himself.

What was food like 2000 years ago? What did you do for shoes then? Someone calls out: What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you? The kid delivers his gibberish and the translator says immediately, "Meeting Michael Jackson." Everybody in the circle laughs. And it strikes me that even though these boys are in a locked-down facility where they are accustomed to saying, sir do I have permission to speak, sir, we've given them a place and a space – albeit a dark gymnasium – where for a short time, they are not in prison, they are using their imaginations, they are in a different world, an outside world. And these boys, who do not know each other's first names, are making one another laugh.

US Youth Inspired Her to Teach

BY MARLENE LINDNER



Suspect's Name:
Denise Martinez

Suspect's Profile:
Costume Designer.
Works on Film & TV.
Most notable: *Austin Powers* Movie. Most recent: *Carnivale* HBO series.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE
interview

How long have you been with US?

About 8 years.

How did you get involved with the Unusual Suspects?

I was working with a group called Free Arts for Abused Children. They told me that Unusual Suspects needed a costume designer for their upcoming show.

Were you nervous the first time going to juvenile hall?

Yes, I had apprehension about what I could give them, if I would be able to get through my own preconceived ideas and be authentic with them. As soon as I started to talk to them, it melted away immediately.

Do you have a memory of working with the kids that stands out for you?

Yes, I remember when we were in juvenile hall. We always rehearsed in the chapel there. The first time we rehearsed in the gym, the kids were all hanging out, they were playing with the

props, just goofing around, having sword fights with the props. And they just looked like kids playing, I saw them as children, just kids being kids and forgetting where they were.

How do the kids respond when you come in with all your different costumes and wardrobe?

They get really excited. I remember one time at juvenile hall; I fitted a boy for a suit. He was really nervous as they often are at first. Someone told him to look in the mirror and he started to cry. He had never seen himself in a suit before. When you put these kids in certain clothes it's often the first time they see themselves as something else, not just gang members or poverty stricken but as someone outside their normal world. Working with the kids made me love costuming again. They are so appreciative and excited. It's such a genuine thing with them

What is the best moment for you during the shows?

When the kids are most proud of themselves, when they light up and get recognition for the work they did.

How has working with the kids affected you?

It made me want to go back to school and get my teaching degree. To give children a voice and love of knowledge. I'm back in school and plan to teach at Title One schools.

YOUTH interview

at Optimist Youth Home and Family Services with

Randal



Suspect's Name: Randal / **Age:** 17

How did you join the Unusual Suspects?

They came to Optimist to start the first workshop, and I jumped on the train.

What were your thoughts when you came to the first workshop?

It was going to be a very fun and insightful experience.

Have your thoughts changed in any way over the last few weeks?

I love these guys!

What has your experience been like in the program so far?

I learn so much from great teachers who are really invested in helping me.

Do you think the program is changing you at all?

Definitely. I've learned a great deal, and I'm getting better at my acting each time.

What are your plans for the future?

To become an actor and share my talents with the world.

Any shout-outs?

Shout-out to the whole Unusual Suspects organization, and anybody who believes in magic!

ALUMNI updates: *Where are they now?*

Andres



AGE 23
1997-98 ALUMNUS
(Age 15-16)

He works two jobs at St. Agatha's in the office and also is in charge of the youth group and confirmation classes.

Andres served in the Marines for the last 4 years and was in Iraq during the war. He has a \$50,000 scholarship from the military and plans on going to UCLA. He would like to major in psychology and minor in criminal justice. He eventually would like to be a detective.

He has kept in touch with many of the kids from US.

Vanessa



AGE 18
1997-98 ALUMNUS THROUGH FOSTER CARE
(Age 15-16)

Vanessa now attends Los Angeles Community College and is getting her Associates Degree. She is in the gospel choir and teaches vocals and 3rd grade religious education at St. Agatha's. She works as a TA and tutors 5th and 6th grade.

"The Unusual Suspects was a really fun experience. I learned so much about opening up to others. It is a good way to keep teens in something positive. The volunteers are really nice and they get to know us on a one-on-one basis. It is nice to have someone you can rely on with advice."

Daniel



AGE 18
1998 ALUMNUS THROUGH A FOSTER PROGRAM (Age 12)

Currently he is attending Pasadena City College and forming a band for his solo music project. He is getting ready to leave the foster care system and is seeking employment. Anyone interested in helping with his music career would be welcome.

"The Unusual Suspects have helped me realize my talents and helped me learn how to make a negative situation positive. Over the last 5 years, they have helped me through the ups and downs while in the system. Be it music equipment or information. Had it not been for them, I wouldn't be in college, and trying to pursue a music career. I truly value them being a part of my life."

His email address is Black@egoth.com

Jasper



AGE 21
2001 ALUMNUS (Age 18)

Jasper was in our juvenile hall program in February 2001. He played two roles in "The Eggs Weren't Mentioned 'Til the End." Since our program, he was tried as an adult and is now serving time at Avenal State Prison. On the inside, he has completed his GED, and when he is released from Avenal State Prison in December, he plans to go to college. About The Unusual Suspects, he says, "I am thankful that y'all had faith in me and gave me an opportunity of a life time. It really felt good to be a part of something. Teens are in gangs because they want to feel a part of something. I hope that I can be a part of the group once I am a free man because I really want to give back as much as I can." Jasper turned 21 on March 15th.

KIDS' POETRY

RAP

By Bikram, Age 17

Sad to see young people hating one another
 Need to lift each other up
 Jealousy, envy you get smothered
 by hatred
 Life is just what you make it
 Mad because we're different,
 but someday we should face it.
 So why do we classify each other
 in different social groups
 Unity is good for the soul
 Like your mama's chicken soup.
 But sometimes it's hard to see through
 the facades and the lies
 Crucify the weak for the way
 they're livin' their lives
 Need to unify ourselves
 The black and the brown
 The slim and the round.
 Help it up
 Instead of puttin' it down.

HOW CAN ONE SURVIVE WITHOUT LOVE?

By Jasper, Age 21

How can one survive without love?
 If it's possible how can it be?
 I can't bear to measure ...

How can one survive without love?
 For love is the essence to life,
 For without it you're alone...

How can one survive without love?
 I wonder, because we all need it,
 While without it, a heart only
 can turn cold...

How can one survive without love?
 For it is special, but yet controlling,
 Desirable, but yet with satisfaction...

How can one survive without love?
 For you can't buy happiness but,
 Love is priceless so ...

How can one survive without love?



WORDS

from the kids

YOUTH interview

at Camp Gonzales with
Unusual Suspect **Bikram**

BY MARLENE LINDNER

Suspect's Name: Bikram / **Age:** 17

What made you join The Unusual Suspects Theatre Program?

It was something to do. I figured it would be one of those things where I'd show up once and then not come back again.

What made you come back?

It was a lot of fun. I had a good time.

What do you like most about it?

I like doing the improvs. It makes me feel like I'm good at something.

Is there any improv that is most memorable for you?

I liked when I played the delusional old man who thinks he's Jesus. It was fun to really get into the character.

You're a natural. Had you had any previous acting experience?

I played a tree in third grade.

Is there anyone who's an inspiration to you?

My 7-year-old nephew is the funniest person I know.

What did you think of the adults the first day?

They were really fun. They weren't like authority figures, they were having fun too.

Has the program affected you at all?

It gets out all my sugar in my tank. I'm really hyper, and it helps me express myself.

How long have you been at Camp G?

6 months.

Do you think you'll continue acting at all?

I plan to go to college. If there's some sort of theatre there, I might do it. But what I want is to get a record deal.

The past six or seven weeks I've been attending a theatre program that has been very interesting. Theatre is something that on the outs, I would not even think of joining. In September, Zoot and Sally came here to camp and gave us a performance that I really liked. After their performance, I thought about joining just to help make my time go by faster. During the first meeting, we were all introduced, and since then we've been having fun. Fortunately, I've become one of the writers, and it's been pretty good for me 'cause I get all kinds of help from all the volunteers of Unusual Suspects.

– Jeff

Hello, my name is Kevin. I've been part of the Unusual Suspects for over a month now. It is a very exciting group with many loving, caring, and optimistic volunteers as well as participants in this wonderful organization.

The Unusual Suspects is a place that makes me feel enthusiastic and also like I am doing something phenomenal in my life. I have done much acting in my life but, this is definitely the most exciting acting I have done. I feel it boosts my self esteem, and I think that everyone should come to see our play!

– Kevin

Hello. Since this group (The Unusual Suspects) commenced, my involvement as well as the rest of my peers has been greatly appreciated and recognized by the fellow volunteers. The enthusiasm which the volunteers have inspires me to explore the art of acting. I realize my creative side is needed during the two hours which we all have together. I like that, due to the fact that I'm living in a re-hab center it feels good to look into that side of me. I can also say the embarrassment that I came with into this program, has been decreased due to the exercises and warm-ups we participate in. I do not feel threatened by ridicule at all in any situation. Personally, I appreciate the fact that they acknowledge and take into consideration our thoughts and feelings. My participation in The Unusual Suspects has been amazing, incredible, realistic and an absolute grateful joy. During the days which I am not attending The Unusual Suspects I look forward to it no doubt. In addition, I feel solidarity between me and the volunteers. Acting is so much fun. I am grateful that this program is working with me. Much support is provided by the staff. I see they try to make our involvement as comfortable as possible. I share the same interest. Oh, this is the easy way out of this unreasonable world!

Thanks all of you guys,
Alex

THANK YOU THANK YOU

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Space doesn't permit us to acknowledge every donation, but THANK YOU VERY MUCH to everyone who has made donations to support The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company.

How a Butterfly Helped the Homeboys

By ZOOT VELASCO



Awardees: Boardmember David Henry Hwang & Founder/Boardmember Laura Leigh Hughes with David's wife Kathryn

On Friday, June 4th at 6:00 p.m., Playwright David Henry Hwang hosted A Special Preview Performance of his Tony Award-winning play *M. Butterfly* to benefit The Unusual Suspects. The group presented an award to Mr. Hwang for his years of dedication as a board member and a surprise award to Laura Leigh Hughes for founding the Suspects twelve years ago. The event took place at East West Players David Henry Hwang Theatre in Little Tokyo.

Guests enjoyed cocktails and sushi from 6–8 PM as former cast members from the National Tour of *Miss Saigon* sang. The evening also featured a Silent Auction by The Andrew Weiss Gallery, where attendees bid on 20th Century master's artworks.

The awards ceremony featured proclamations signed by LA City Councilwoman Janice Hahn; LA Mayor James K. Hahn, Culver City Councilwoman Carol Gross and Culver City Mayor Steve Rose; and Assemblyman Herb Wesson, with a presentation by his deputy Anna Brathwaite.

Celebrity presenters and attendees included Edward Asner, Roma Maffia (*Nip/ Tuck*), Tony Okungbowa (DJ, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*), Broadway star Lea Salonga, and Film star Alfre Woodard.



Presenter/host Edward Asner with Alumni Sophia Sou

We grossed \$24,715 on our fundraiser. After our expenses of just over \$12,500, our net was just over \$12,000. Sally Fairman did a fantastic job coordinating the event. She is the real hero of this event and proved to be a great asset in event production.

We have to thank our volunteers: Ada Luz Pla, Anna Pheil, Calvi Pabon, Christina Faulkner, Denise Martinez, Elizabeth Logun, Kathryn Arnold, Marlene Lindner, Russell

Bell, Summer Mahoney, and Vivianne Nacif. Our alumni: Benny Wong, Daniel Jackson, Dina Fuentes, Freddy Membreno, Sophia Sou, Tameka Smith. Our Hosts and Celebrity Assistants: David Henry Hwang, Laura Leigh Hughes, Edward Asner, Mariska Hargitay, Roma Maffia, Tony Okungbowa, Lea Salonga, Roderick Spencer, Alfre Woodard and our celebrity bartender Carl Capotorto. Our Performers: Rob Kendt and Monette Velasco.



Zoot with Board member Roderick Spencer and Alfre Woodard at benefit

Our Sponsors: Phillip Yi at Sushi Central; Hugh Armel at Trader Joe's; Steve Krizek @ KES Mail; Thomas Reed and Affiliated Financial Services; Miki at CAA Foundation; Lily, Talya and Olivia at Andrew Weiss Gallery; Miguel Mendoza at Monarch Printing; Merrick Velasco, our webmaster; Lydia Chung, our graphic designer; and Mary Ann Cyphers and the Volunteer Center of the South Bay. Our Production Committee members: Kristen Kirchner and George Abou-Daoud.

UNUSUAL NEWS

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR GREAT PATRONS

Every organization's growth is characterized by a recipe of water, sun, and the soil that makes it grow. The people – a great board, great volunteers and staff are the sun that warms the organization with heart and soul; the great programs are the water that nourishes and brings purpose; and great steady patrons are the nutrient-rich soil that helps it spring from the ground and thrive. An organization grows poorly without this mix. Here at The Unusual Suspects we have always had the heart and soul of great staff, volunteers and board members. We have always created excellent, pure and organic programs, keeping the organization healthy and vibrant. But for many years the soil was thin and poor with constant bouts of drought. It has been the work of one special foundation, **The Burke Foundation** and the people behind it – **James E. & Diane W. Burke**, their son **James Burke**, and their wonderful administrator **Mary Ann Hagerty** – to provide the soil for our growth. In three consecutive years, the Burkes have nurtured us with over \$55,000 total, allowing us the money to grow our staff and programs and produce a strategic plan for the future. This funding has allowed us to hire a full-time executive director and project manager with the experience to take **US** to the next level. It is all the funders listed in this newsletter that makes us who we are, and we are thankful for the vision and commitment of philanthropists like the Burkes who provide seed money and make small groups with a great idea into serious community tools of peace and harmony. Thank you for your commitment to **US**.

US WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER

US would like to welcome **Roma Maffia** to our board. Roma has been a long-time volunteer with The Unusual Suspects, dedicating many hours over many years to our programs. She has always been there when we needed her. She began her career studying acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute and the City College of New York. After seeing her perform Off-Broadway, Ron Howard cast her in *The Paper*.



Roma Maffia works with an Unusual Suspect.

In 1993, she was cast as Michael Douglas' lawyer in the film *Disclosure*. At the same time, she starred in TV's *Chicago Hope*. She has appeared in many other features and is known for her TV roles in *Profiler* and her current hit series *Nip/Tuck* on FX network. In her leisure time, she enjoys charity work, writing, running on her treadmill, and playing ping-pong; and she confesses to maintaining a large collection of shoes. Shortly after joining the board, she was instrumental in selling the most tickets to our June fundraiser and providing our celebrity bartender, Carl Capotorto of the *Sopranos*, for the event. She brings great new enthusiasm to the board. "It's great having a long-time volunteer as a board member," said Zoot Velasco, "and it doesn't hurt that she is so successful in her craft!" We are excited about Roma's plans to compete in a celebrity poker tournament in the future on behalf of **US**.

US INTRODUCES LEAD ARTISTS

For this fall's programs, **US** is pleased to be working with three exceptional lead artists: Guillermo Avilés-Rodríguez, John Freeland, Jr., and Marlene Lindner. All have previously volunteered with **US** and bring over 30 years of professional and volunteer experience creating theatre with teens from foster care and juvenile justice.



Guillermo Avilés-Rodríguez is a National Hispanic Scholar born and raised in Watts, Ca. He holds a BFA from the Actors Training Program at the University of Utah and an MFA from the

UCSD Theater and Dance department. He has collaborated with theater collectives in Cuba, Utah and Los Angeles. In 1999, he earned the distinction of being the first Chicana/o ever to

star in a main-stage production at the University of Utah. Guillermo's experience as a director and playwright spans nine years including residencies with LA's Best, Building Up L.A., L.A. Bridge, and The Unusual Suspects. He has worked with the Nationwide ArtsBridge outreach program, and Global Artways an arts education program that brings arts education to low income students in Salt Lake City UT. He has served as the assistant director of the La Jolla Playhouse Summer Theater Program and currently serves as the education coordinator for the Watts Village Theater Co. and a traveling drama specialist for the MudTown Arts.



John Freeland, Jr. is a member of the Actor's Studio and has appeared on stage in the Other Voices Project and New Works Festival at the Mark Taper Forum. Theatre credits include

The Last Outpost (NAACP Theatre Award Best Supporting Role nomination), *A Soldier's Play* (Drama-Logue Award Best Actor), *The Father* (Strindberg Festival: Stockholm, Sweden), *Of Mice and Men*, *The Misanthrope*, *Three Sisters*. T.V. & Film credits include *Amateur Detective* (Pilot); *The Best Damn Sports Show!*, *The 60's* (Mini Series), *Mad About You*, *The Steve Harvey Show*, *General Hospital*, and American Film Institute's Academy Award Nominated short film *Cadillac Dreams*. In addition, John has 20 years of experience working in Arts in Corrections, including correctional institutions, foster homes, and placement facilities, using theatre games and improvisation techniques to teach acting and writing for performance. The Unusual Suspects is his longest affiliation of eleven years.



Marlene Lindner joined **US** in 1994 through Free Arts for Abused Children. An experienced children's theatre artist, she has worked in theatre, television and film for over 10 years.

Before becoming an actor, she worked in production at SONY Pictures. Her volunteer activities also include work at a women's shelter and at the Boys and Girls Club in Seattle.