

Unusual Times

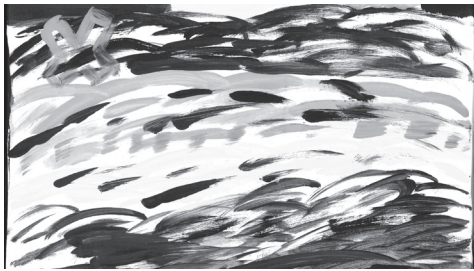
Art Inspires ART

BY JENNIFER FUKUTOMI

Swooping strokes of paint. News headlines transformed into collage. Anime-inspired renderings. The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company not only sets the stage for great storytelling but also gives participants the opportunity to explore other creative disciplines such as visual art. Oftentimes, the characters and stories created in the theatre process inspire paintings, sketches, and collages.



The GRYD production *Life is a Journey* inspired collaboration with youth in Youth Speak! Collective's GRYD mural painting class to create the eagle backdrop.



Teaching Artists encourage participants to express their feelings through visual art as an exercise. For Pacoima GRYD youth Jennifer Lemus, painting has become an outlet for expressing her range of emotions where each color represents a particular mood. Two of her pieces were purchased at the Fall 2010 "Page Play" performance of *Life is a Journey*.



The set and backdrops of The Unusual Suspects performances are a natural medium for participants to explore visual art. Brian Tamura, a youth participant, was able to showcase his talents with aerosol painting for the production of *Life on the Offbeat* at Narbonne High School.



The stories and characters in each Unusual Suspects play often lead to the creation of profound visual art. Inspired by Dani and the Shadow, two characters in *Chasing Dreams & Casting Shadows*,

San Fernando High School students Mariana Mora and April Moran created symbolic renderings of Dani's struggle with the Shadow. "The shadow is Dani's subconscious," said Mariana. "She feels guilty for leaving her best friend behind, but knows that she has to pursue her dreams."

Zev Yaroslavsky and Roma Maffia

CREATE A WORLD OF POSSIBILITY

BY AMY ELLENBERGER



The success of The Unusual Suspects theatre program depends upon the advocacy of its supporters. Advocacy can come from various groups including volunteers, teaching artists, community partners, and public officials. At The Unusual Suspects Third Annual Benefit, "Creating a World of Possibility" on May 19, 2011 the organization will honor two important public figures that have been strong advocates for underserved youth in Los Angeles. The honorees include L.A.

County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and actor Roma Maffia, who have contributed to The Unusual Suspects in two different yet very important ways.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky has been an important voice in local government for The Unusual Suspects as well as the youth it serves in foster care and the juvenile justice system. He has been a key sponsor for the organization's work in L.A. County Probation

[continued on page 3]

Letter from the Executive Director



The Unusual Suspects

is expanding to South L.A.! This spring marked an important milestone for The Unusual Suspects as we "broke ground" on our new theatre arts mentoring and community building initiative in the Florence-Firestone neighborhood of South L.A. With support from L.A. County, The Resnick Foundation, and in collaboration with Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP), we were thrilled to bring our award-winning program to Fremont High School, where the dropout rate is nearly 50%. Our first

group of students from the high school is currently meeting twice a week to write an original play.

The Florence/Firestone initiative is patterned after The Unusual Suspects innovative community building model in Pacoima, which has been developed over the past three years. In collaboration with local city and county prevention initiatives, this model includes sequential arts learning opportunities, leadership opportunities, and multi-generational programming. Through this process, we have seen how our theatre company is able to bring family and community together by offering a safe forum to explore solutions to intractable social

issues such as gang violence and poverty.

As the Florence/Firestone initiative develops, parents will also have the opportunity to write and perform their own play through Fremont's extended learning center in the months to come. I hope you will join us in celebrating this new program by attending one of the many upcoming and inspiring performances in Florence/Firestone. You'll be glad you did!

Sally Fairman

Turning the Tide on Prison Reform

BY AMY ELLENBERGER

The economic crisis has become an unexpected ally in the fight for prison reform. According to the Pew Center on the States, corrections has become the second-fastest growing spending category for states costing taxpayers over \$50 billion a year. Struggling to cut budgets, even so-called conservative states are forced to consider alternative corrections solutions and progressive programs like The Unusual Suspects.

Texas, notorious for tough justice, is leading a new movement in prison reform. Since 2003, the state has implemented

such policies as reducing sentences for minor drug offenders, allocating funds for treatment programs for nonviolent criminals, and increasing resources for reentry services. Texas has applied the same reform philosophy to juvenile corrections by investing in probation programs that reduce the number of repeat offenders. According to the Right On Crime website these programs "focus on treatment, community service, and strengthening the family."

California, in the midst of the worst corrections crisis in the country, is coping with serious overcrowding and spiraling spending. The state is making small steps toward reform in the areas of performance-based probation funding and geriatric parole. However, California has a long way to go. According to the Justice Policy Institute, California is home to 10 out of the 50 largest jails in the country. Los Angeles

County, which houses nearly 20,000 inmates daily, recently received the Young Offender Reentry Planning Grant (YORPG) from the Department of Labor in order to develop a blueprint that addresses reentry issues for young offenders in the county. The blueprint released in February 2011 outlines strategies to start rehabilitation for youth while they are incarcerated, in addition to facilitating support from community-based organizations for one year after incarceration.

The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company has been on the forefront of finding alternative solutions for the juvenile corrections system in Los Angeles County. The organization's award-winning mentoring program provides intervention services at such sites as L.A. County Probation Camp David Gonzales as well as prevention services that use theatre as a tool to build and heal communities.

WELCOME ABOARD!

The Unusual Suspects is proud to announce the addition of three new members to its Board of Directors. Please join us in welcoming, **Stephen Carroll** (VP, Senior Labor Relations Counsel, for Warner Bros. Pictures), **Ann Houlihan** (Corporate Financial Controller, Business Consultant), and **David B. Wescoe** (Executive Administrative Director of the Motion Picture Industry Pension and Health Plans) to The Unusual Suspects family. The Unusual Suspects also extends its deepest gratitude and congratulations to Founder Laura Leigh Hughes, recently named Board Member Emeritus.

JOIN THE BOARD!

The Unusual Suspects Board of Directors is a group of dedicated volunteers who oversee and support the non-profit organization's mission of improving the lives of at-risk youth. The Unusual Suspects Board of Directors is currently seeking new board members who have experience in any of the following areas: **community-building, finance, fundraising, government, human resources, juvenile justice, marketing/ public relations, and/ or technology.** For more information, please contact Amy Ellenberger at (213) 488-8488 x206 or via email at board@theunusualsuspects.org.

meet THE new SUSPECTS



Zach Brown
Teaching Artist

Zach studied Theatre at Marymount Manhattan College and has been a teacher of art, dance and theatre for Resonate studios and the Texas Children's Choir. He has performed in over 50 productions including *West Side Story*, *The Wild Party*, *Rhinoceros* and *Swing!* He has appeared in short films such as *Nine Lives of the King of Cats*, and *Fruitland Road*.



June Carryl
Teaching Artist

An actor, writer and director originally from Denver, June is a member of the Actor's Studio and the Director's Lab. She has worked with the Blank, Mark Taper's Taper, Too, Berkeley Repertory, ACT, San

Zev and Roma continued from page 1

Camp David Gonzales which is known for its innovative intervention programs including arts programs like The Unusual Suspects. When The Unusual Suspects received the 2008 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, Yaroslavsky helped increase the visibility of the organization by honoring The Unusual Suspects with a commendation from the L.A. County Board of Supervisors. Having a voice in local government from such esteemed leaders as L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky is essential to the growth of The Unusual Suspects.

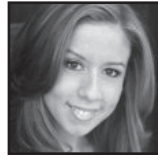
Dedicated volunteers, like celebrated actor Roma Maffia of *Nip/Tuck* fame, are the backbone of The Unusual Suspects Theatre

Francisco Shakespeare, City Garage, and Odyssey as well as TV and film projects.



Maya Parish
Teaching Artist

An actor, dancer, writer, and fledgling choreographer, Maya has been a volunteer mentor for three US performance programs. For the last six years, she has been a company member of the Elephant Theatre Company. She produced and starred in the feature film, "Midnight Son" which premiered at Cinequest in March.



Tiffani Sierra
Teaching Artist

An Actor and Latin Dancer, Tiffani studied Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York and also graduated from the Second City Training Center in Los Angeles. As a stage actor she has performed in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. She is also currently training for International Latin Ballroom Competition.

Program. Maffia began volunteering with The Unusual Suspects over 11 years ago at Central Juvenile Hall. Since then, she has donated her time and celebrity to advocate for the organization with donors, volunteers, youth, and the media. She has mentored youth to a brighter future as well as attracted many new supporters of the organization. The Unusual Suspects relies on strong voices like Roma Maffia to share its message in support of the most vulnerable youth in Los Angeles.

For ticket and sponsorship information regarding The Unusual Suspects' Third Annual Benefit "Creating a World of Possibility" please visit www.theunusualsuspects.org or contact Jenelle Pope at 213-488-8488 x205 or jenelle@theunusualsuspects.org.

Pacoima youth in the GRYD program used collage to explore the themes in *Love Has No Gender* which dealt with gender identity, immigration and drug abuse.



THANK YOU THANK YOU

Gifts from February 2010 to February 2011

UNUSUAL SUSPECTS GIFTS OF \$50,000 or MORE

The Resnick Foundation

TOP SUSPECTS GIFTS OF \$20,000 - \$49,999

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Los Angeles County Arts Commission • National Endowment for the Arts

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Chasing Dreams & Casting Shadows

Written & Performed by San Fernando High School Students

APRIL 7TH - San Fernando, CA

Pacoima Community Performance

Written & performed by Pacoima Residents as a part of L.A. County's Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project

JUNE 11TH - Pacoima, CA

"PAGE PLAY" Series

Original plays written by youth

Performed by Hollywood actors with scripts

Pacoima GRYD - MARCH 25TH

Fremont HS - MAY 5TH (NEW)

Camp David Gonzales* - MAY 14TH

*Reservation Required by May 10th

SPRING 2011 SEASON

OUR mission

The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company's mission is to empower youth in underserved and at-risk environments with the means and methods necessary to explore personal and social conflicts and develop self-esteem, communication and coping skills to make positive life choices and to be productive members of the community.

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Joe Quintero
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Tiffani Sierra
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Hilary Ward
Rain Wilson
L. Trey Wilson

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Natalie Camunas
Lorene Chesley
Feodor Chin
Karen Cobarruvias
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Lynne Conner
David Dastmalchian
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Amilia Fite
Henry Fries
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Misha Malis

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Lydia Chung

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 by emailing us at:

admin@theunusualsuspects.org

or write **US** at:

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