

Building
California's
Home for
the Classics

A NOISE WITHIN

Capital Campaign News

ISSUE 2/SPRING 2009

From the Artistic Directors

WE ARE HAPPY to announce that *A Noise Within* has raised over \$9 million toward our capital campaign to build a permanent home for the classics in Pasadena. This is truly a milestone in the campaign, and we are grateful for the generosity of our supporters. We are thrilled to be in the middle of this exciting stage of the organization's growth and development.

For 18 years, we have provided a creative home for artists, an inspiring venue for audiences, and an atmosphere of enrichment for students. It is now—during a period of change, during difficult economic times—that the arts sustain us more than ever. We firmly believe that *A Noise Within* plays an integral role in our community—especially now, when our schools are losing their funds for arts education, when our community needs a strong cultural institution to provide an imaginative and intellectual outlet.

Thus far in our project to build a permanent home, a small group of individuals and foundations have made significant commitments. These generous individuals and foundations have launched us. Now we need full participation from all of you who know and value *A Noise Within*. The company currently operates out of a building that is privately owned; while the owners have been gracious enough to let us stay here for 18 years, this option will not be available to us forever. This project will ensure the very future of the theatre. We absolutely need the support of everyone who comes to this theatre and who believes that our community is a better place because of *A Noise Within*.



ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT FRANK

And we assure you that *A Noise Within* is a sound investment. For 18 years, this organization has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the preservation of classical theatre and a steadfast dedication to providing educational opportunities to students. Our history is one that is both inspiring and responsible. *A Noise Within* has always taken pride in its fiscal discipline; we have always presented award-

winning theatre without incurring debt.

With our sound financial history, we also recognize the challenges of executing a capital campaign in the current economic climate. We are taking a proactive approach to address these economic circumstances, and we assure you that a permanent home *will* be built. *A Noise Within* will realize significant savings on construction in the current market, and we are considering a "phased-in" approach for the new facility if it becomes necessary.

During this time of immense company development, we often reflect on *A Noise Within's* first production of *Hamlet*. At the end of the show, we imagine the audience was quite unsettled when Geoff, who had just died as Hamlet, popped up from the stage to speak. He would say to our audiences, "If you like what you've seen here tonight, please help ensure that we are here next year as well." Eighteen years later, we say the same thing to you: if you like what you've seen at *A Noise Within*, please do your part to help ensure that we are here for generations to come. ■

Julia Rodriguez-Elliott and Geoff Elliott
Founders & Artistic Directors

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Stage Right An Interview with Deborah Strang

YOU MAY KNOW long-time resident artist Deborah Strang best through her extraordinary work on-stage—portraying Ibsen’s controversial Mrs. Alving, Shakespeare’s complex Gertrude or sprightly Titania. Get to know the voice at the end of the box office phone as Box Office Manager Deborah Strang discusses her history with *A Noise Within*, her love for the theatre, and her goals and hopes for the company’s future. Learn more about what *A Noise Within*’s new facility in Pasadena will mean for her.

ANW: How did you first become involved with *A Noise Within*?

DS: I came to *A Noise Within* the same way I have come to so many things in my life: I just tripped over it when I was looking in another direction. I was in the process of getting out of the business because I just wasn’t finding it fulfilling anymore. Joel Swetow, fellow *A Noise Within* resident artist and the love of my life for almost 26 years now, had been cast as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* in the spring of 1992. I auditioned the next fall only on a whim and ended up being one of the Roman senators in *Coriolanus*. I started the character off as a street walker and ended her as a corporate business woman. Bill Hunt played the same role when we revived it 12 or so years later.

What was it like being involved with *A Noise Within* during the company’s early years?

I remember getting up in the morning to bake brownies for concessions, then going to work for a couple of hours in the box office (a job I shared with Artistic Director Julia Rodriguez-Elliott), then cleaning the bathrooms and doing the show. We had work calls where we would paint the sets. I still have my “painting” T-shirt with flecks of color from all our shows, the walls, the bathrooms. It’s actually quite beautiful.

What is it about *A Noise Within* that has kept you with the company for so many years?

A Noise Within has given me an artistic home. I can’t begin to tell you how rare and valuable that is. I know I’ve grown so much as an actor over these 18 years, in craft and confidence and fearlessness because of that security. Geoff and Julia have given me the opportunity to play such a variety of roles, almost unheard of for a woman of a certain age. Joel and I are working together on stage for the first time in many years in the production of *Ghosts*, and it’s been so revealing to see how much our process has changed. We are bolder, more relaxed, more giving of ourselves, more thorough in our research and in our exploration of the characters. I’ve also been given a unique

opportunity to teach in our conservatory, which has taught me more than my 45 years of performing. I also run the box office, which has made me acutely aware of how what we do on the stage affects lives. I had never even used a computer when I took over the box office, and now I have a system that I designed. But what makes *A Noise Within* truly special is the incredible dramatic literature that we wrap ourselves in on a daily basis. It keeps us and our audiences in touch with our humanity.

As a resident artist, what would you say are the limitations of the theatre’s current space?

There is no wing space (the area just off the stage), so making entrances and exits sometimes means running an obstacle course. Because some shows use sets that go all the way to the back wall, if you make an exit off the stage right side, you have nowhere to go until you enter again, no access to bathrooms, etc. I’ve spent many shows hunkered down just off stage right. Also, without wing space, it’s difficult to change over the sets since we can’t just “fly” them out. For example, the second show of this season, *Ghosts*, only had four days on the set before our first performance.

How will the new space affect you as a resident artist, and what will the new facility mean for *A Noise Within*’s productions?

Rehearsal space, classroom space, showers, fly space, wing space, better accessibility, a scene shop, parking, an integrated computer system, a hearing-assistance system, costume storage, prop storage, faster and easier set change-over that will allow for a more consistent repertory schedule, more exciting design elements, better sight lines, a living wage for all artists including health coverage and pension.

As Box Office Manager, what would you say are the current limitations to audience growth and development?

We just don’t have enough seats. We turn away so many people. Some have a problem with the stairs, so there are often accessibility issues. The space limits our ability to have a top-of-the-line hearing-assistance



Deborah Strang as Mrs. Alving in the spring 2009 production of Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts*.
PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

system for our patrons. Because of the difficulty of changing over the set, we have to close down sometimes between shows in order to put up the next show. Someone can read about *The Taming of the Shrew* and call to buy tickets, only to find out it doesn’t play again for three weeks. Also, a recurring limitation is parking.

What will the new theatre mean for the future of the box office?

The new facility will provide more seats to sell with better sight lines, yet the theatre will still maintain that wonderful intimate feel. It will mean not having to say “Sorry, we’re sold out!” so often. It will provide better accommodations for our patrons with disabilities. But the biggest change will be the opportunity to invest in new technology that will enable us to integrate all of our data systems. This will allow our subscribers to monitor their tickets and seats online, make exchanges from home and renew their subscriptions easily, yet still have the opportunity to call and speak with a person whenever they wish. I don’t ever want to lose that personal connection we have with our patrons.

What about the new space is most exciting for you?

I’ve loved our time in Glendale. We’ve watched our neighborhood grow, and we’ve seen the children of our neighbor merchants grow up. The De Pietros have been warm, loyal friends, as well as generous patrons and benefactors. The Masonic Temple will always occupy a special place in my heart. However, our new space in Pasadena will mean that we finally get a home of our own. ■

A Noise Within provides unique opportunities for students across the Southern California region to experience the immediacy of live theatre, and assists teachers in integrating live theatrical performance and artist workshops into their classroom curriculum.

Chris Schulte, an educator at Los Angeles's Marymount High School, has a long history with the company. He has been bringing his acting classes to *A Noise Within* at least twice a year, almost every year, to experience the thrill of live, classical theatre. Schulte has relied on *A Noise Within* to provide his students with a special experience that they cannot get anywhere else. "What's special about *A Noise Within* is the variety. We can see Moliere, Shakespeare, Dickens..." Schulte explained, noting the relevance of the theatre's productions to his classes, and the company's commitment to performing classical dramatic literature.

For Schulte's students, the *A Noise Within* experience is "always memorable." His in-class discussions are enriched with the live theatrical experience, as well as the post-show talk-backs with the artists. "It is monumentally different for the students to witness the plays they are studying," he explained. ■



Oliver Twist. (Photo by Craig Schwartz)

During the 2008-2009 season alone, *A Noise Within* has served over 100 schools across Southern California. Students who attend *A Noise Within* productions come from middle schools, high schools and universities from across 22 unified school districts. To learn more about *A Noise Within*'s education programs, which serve approximately 10,000 students annually, and the future growth of these programs to serve new communities with the resources of the new facility, please visit www.anoisewithin.org/education.html.



The site of *A Noise Within*'s new facility, at the former Stuart Pharmaceutical Building in east Pasadena.

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT FRANK

The Ahmanson Foundation Features *A Noise Within* in Annual Review

A Noise Within is honored to have been featured in The Ahmanson Foundation's Annual Review. The Ahmanson Foundation contributed a generous lead gift to the theatre's capital campaign and recognizes the organization's steadfast persistence in seeking out a permanent home for the classics. The Annual Review cites *A Noise Within*'s new location in east Pasadena's former Stuart Pharmaceutical Building as "the company's ideal home," and notes the positive impact the organization will have on both the Pasadena community and in the broader Southern California region. "The project is a boon to the City of Pasadena, which has gained a prestigious new theatre, a creatively adapted historic treasure, and a highly desirable new residential community—all within walking distance of the Sierra Madre Gold Line Station," the Annual Review states.

Pasadena Residents Alice and Joe Coulombe Host *A Noise Within* Event



Andrea Van de Kamp, Artistic Director Geoff Elliott and Pasadena resident Ginny Cushman mingle at the home of Alice and Joe Coulombe.

PHOTO BY TAMAR BROWN

ALICE COULOMBE, President of La Canada-based Metropolitan Associates, participates in *A Noise Within's* capital campaign by introducing the company to members of the community. A Pasadena resident, Coulombe hosted an intimate event at her home on February 22, inviting *A Noise Within's* Board of Directors, staff and actors to introduce themselves and the company's mission to Pasadena community members.

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"It's really a special kind of theatre."

Coulombe's enthusiasm for *A Noise Within* stems not only from her love for the theatre, but also from her personal connection to the people involved with the company. "Over the years, I got to know [Founders and Artistic Directors] Geoff [Elliott] and Julia [Rodriguez-Elliott]—and I knew Art [Manke]—and it just made sense to host an event," Coulombe explained. "*A Noise Within* needs to get to know their community."

The Sunday afternoon event featured a reception with Joe Coulombe's famous wine selection and hors d'œuvre, as well as a presentation of selected scenes from classic dramatic literature performed by four *A Noise Within* resident artists. The artists, along with Artistic Directors Elliott and Rodriguez-Elliott, noted the theatre's solid history of professional, classical theatre, as well as the company's wide-reaching,

comprehensive educational programs—and the impact the theatre's programs will have on the Pasadena community.

Introductory and fundraising events, like this one, are intended to bring together members of the community to engage in the opportunity to learn more about the theatre's history, mission and upcoming move to Pasadena. Mrs. Coulombe herself was introduced to the theatre by a friend who served on the theatre's Board of Directors. "Metropolitan Associates was encouraged to take a look a long time ago—since then, we've been hooked!" she mused. For Coulombe, it has been the quality and the immediacy of the productions that keep her coming back to *A Noise Within*. "It's really a special kind of theatre," she said.

Mrs. Coulombe continues her involvement in *A Noise Within's* project to build a permanent home because she recognizes how the new facility will transform the company. "The community needs to be aware of how convenient and accessible the new space will be," she explained. "Plus, it may be a selfish reason," she added, "but I just really love the theatre."

To learn more about how you can host a similar introductory or fundraising event at your home, please contact the Development Department at 818.265.7959. ■

Stephen Godwin & Sally Smythe

CONTRIBUTING FOUNDERS

For Sally Smythe and Stephen Godwin, *A Noise Within* represents a connection with a strong theatrical tradition and a vision for a true community of artists. Like Founders and Artistic Directors Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, Smythe was an actor at the American Conservatory Theatre (ACT) in San Francisco in the early 1980s, while Godwin was across the bay at Berkeley Rep. It was while the pair was involved in the Seattle theatre scene that *A Noise Within* was gaining its footing in Los Angeles, and during a trip to L.A. they visited the theatre to see Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*.

"It reminded me so much of what went on at ACT and of the rich heritage we all shared there," Smythe remembered of her first experience at *A Noise Within*. "It was a time when theatres employed companies, and actors were given a home and the opportunity to grow their craft. It was wonderful to witness at *A Noise Within* a place that aspired to that traditional model."

Smythe was happy to discover that *A Noise Within's* vision strongly incorporated ACT's approach to theatre. "I liked that they were a company of actors performing extraordinary plays, and that those same artists were involved in the conservatory training of younger actors," Smythe explained. "I liked that they employed wonderful designers that were able to bring the best out of a lean budget, and that everyone in the production, from the ushers to the box office, seemed enthused to be a part of the life at *A Noise Within*."

After their two oldest boys went off to college, Smythe and Godwin moved to Los Angeles with their daughter and had the opportunity to become more involved with *A Noise Within*. In 2007, Smythe joined the company for the production of *Dear Brutus*. "I witnessed first-hand the warmth and supportive comradeship of the fellow players, and the integrity and passion with which the story was directed," Smythe said. "I also witnessed the genuine fondness and appreciation that Geoff and Julia and the company hold not only for the fellow artists but for the entire community of subscribers, volunteers, and patrons. There is a general air of thankfulness for being able to do the work that they do."

After seeing *Oliver Twist* in December 2008, Smythe and Godwin chose to participate in *A Noise Within's* capital campaign. "We decided that it was our turn to give back," Smythe explained. As residents of South Pasadena, they are looking forward to welcoming the classic theatre company into their neighborhood.

The pair has high hopes for the future of *A Noise Within*. "This is a company that will continue to prosper because of its dedication to great storytelling, its love and care for its artists and its desire to serve their audience," Smythe said. "They richly deserve our support."

Leonard Pronko & Takao Tomono

CONTRIBUTING FOUNDERS

Leonard Pronko's involvement with and love for *A Noise Within* stems from his own passion for theatre, particularly the classics. A Distinguished Professor of Theatre at Pomona College, Pronko teaches dramatic literature and kabuki and also directs plays, both classic and modern, at the college. His background in and knowledge of theatrical history make him a solid critic of the dramatic arts—and a staunch supporter of *A Noise Within*.

When Pronko first experienced an *A Noise Within* production during the second year of the company's history, he was first and foremost struck by the quality. "When doing the classics, it's nothing without the quality," he mused. "The actors understand the idea that one must have a good grasp of style—and it's nice to see that in the States."

Familiar with the European theatre circuit, Pronko has been impressed to witness an American theatre company present, appreciate and honor the classics. "I love dramatic literature and I know it well, but I hardly would get to see the classics except in England," Pronko explained. "It's fun to see classic productions here, and I'm glad they are committed to doing that." Among his favorites were Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *Life is a Dream* and N. Richard Nash's *The Rainmaker*. "Calderón was done really well—it was rare and astounding," Pronko said. "And *Rainmaker* was beautiful, really a worthwhile production for all of us."

The Professor lends his expertise to *A Noise Within's* Scholar's Society, an engaging literary club for the theatre's patrons, by hosting talks and facilitating discussion on the company's plays. "It's fun doing the Scholar's Society; I enjoy talking with interesting people, hearing interesting comments about the plays," Pronko explained. "It's important to really get into the plays before seeing them."

Pronko chose to participate in *A Noise Within's* capital campaign because he understands the importance of the company's mission to preserve classical dramatic literature. "No one else is doing what *A Noise Within* is doing," he said. "I love what they do and it's so important to support that." Enthusiastic for the company's move to Pasadena, Pronko is looking forward to the theatre's new location in a city that staunchly supports the arts, in a town where the company can join a solid theatre community.

DID YOU KNOW... Many corporations provide a matching gifts program for their employees. Matching gifts can often double or triple your contribution—and increase your positive impact on *A Noise Within*. Check with your company to find out if a matching gifts program is available.



Playing A Part

All contributors are partners on our journey to *Build California's Home for the Classics!* Help us carry out our mission to deliver professional, classical theatre productions and provide enriching educational experiences for students across Southern California. *A Noise Within* is dedicated to providing our supporters with an insider's experience, giving you the opportunity to truly become a part of the *A Noise Within* community.

In each issue of our newsletter, we will highlight the benefits of different giving levels. Discover the exclusive benefits of donating at the **SILVER FOUNDERS** (\$50,000-74,999) level:

- ❖ Lifetime access to The Balcony, *A Noise Within's* VIP intermission lounge
- ❖ Invitation to dinner with the Artistic Directors and artists during the inaugural season
- ❖ Invitation to a "choose your seat" breakfast at the theatre
- ❖ Pre-opening facility tour led by *A Noise Within* staff
- ❖ Founders Wall recognition

...and more!

If you are interested in learning more about *A Noise Within's* capital campaign or would like to make a contribution, please contact the Development Department at 818.265.7959 or kendra@anoisewithin.org.



A Noise Within gratefully acknowledges the following patrons for their capital campaign contributions. Gifts are in descending order of gift valuation as of April 9, 2009.

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