



*The National Society of Arts & Letters*

# *President's Newsletter*

## *July 2012*

Dear and Valued NSAL Members,

As your new National President, I am excited to give you an update on our Convention in El Paso, Texas as well as news of some of our past winners. Please be in touch with me if you have any member news, past winner news, or suggestions to share. I welcome hearing from each of you.

### **National Convention 2012**

The National Convention in El Paso was a wonderful event. Thank you, thank you to all the chapter members who worked so hard to make us all feel welcome and comfortable. The hospitality was exceptional. Particular thanks must go to the convention co-chairs Michael Bernstein and Linda McClain. They and their committee saw to every detail, making sure each well-organized event went smoothly and that we felt warmly welcomed.

We thoroughly enjoyed dining at the El Paso Museum of Art and seeing the special exhibit, "Diego Rivera and the Cubist Vision." Another highlight was the private tour of the beautifully restored Plaza Theater which first opened in 1930. With its seating capacity of 2,410, it was promoted as the largest theater of its kind between Dallas and Los Angeles. The interior is intricately decorated with painted ceilings, mosaic tile floors, decorative metal railings, and sconces all in the Spanish colonial, rococo style. The elaborate interior earned it the nickname "The Showplace of the Southwest." It also was a treat to hearing the theater's original, restored Wurlitzer organ which cost \$60,000 back in the 1930s.

A special thanks must go as well to El Paso Chapter President, Mary Jo Melby, who invited convention attendees to her historic home where we were treated to a panoramic view of downtown El Paso and the surrounding mountains, margaritas, a delicious Mexican dinner, a rousing Old West gunfight, and a guitarist who performed traditional old west and El Paso songs.

All aspects of the complex musical theater competition (singing, dancing, acting) were a superb success thanks to the professionalism and hard work of chairs Ray Fellman and George Pinney.

## Competition

Eighteen chapters sent contestants who danced, acted, and sang their best for us. Here's what Pat Davis, outgoing president of the Virginia/North Carolina Chapter wrote, "There were eighteen competitors from all over the United States, including institutions such as Curtis, Indiana University, Juillard, and Carolina School of the Arts. Each [contestant] possessed something special (the young man from Curtis, for example, had a "killer" baritone voice and did a fantastic rendition of "Where is the Life That Late I Led?" from *Kiss Me Kate*). Jim Davidson Goza from Little Rock - at age 27 the oldest person in the competition - made me weep with his brief dramatic monologue (he won 2nd place) and looked like Owen Wilson in *Midnight in Paris*."

For the dance segment of the competition, judge Lainie Munro, a New York-based director, choreographer, and performer, put the contestants through their paces and impressed us all where her energy, creativity, and verve.



Karen Mason at the NSAL Awards Banquet.

Actress and singer **Karen Mason** led the master class with, gentle, and insightful guidance. It was incredibly thrilling to see the transformation in each contestant's performance after taking in Mason's advice, and moving to see the frisson the contestants felt as they realized how much better these coached performances became. Some were brought almost to tears of joy.

The unexpected surprise of the master class was a question/answer session with **Megan Hilty**, the first place NSAL musical theater winner from six years ago. Since winning our competition Megan has gone from strength to strength in her career. She starred as Glinda in *Wicked* on Broadway, as

Doralee in *9 to 5*, and most recently on television in the role of Ivy in NBC's hit show, *Smash*.

Megan sat on the rim of the stage and for a full hour answered every question the contestants asked. As Pat Davis wrote, "She is a publicist's dream, warmly communicative, funny, down-to-earth, articulate, and gorgeous! She never talked down to the contestants, was quite realistic about what they are facing in a very tough game, and laid out some concrete suggestions for how to face the challenges. I felt quite privileged to be among the audience for I learned a lot about 'life!'"



Megan Hilty posed with the contestants - and later went dancing with them in the hotel bar.

## 2012 Musical Theater Winners

Although chapter members are justifiably delighted and proud when their contestant wins or places in the competition, every member in the organization can celebrate the success of these

very talented young people. As active members of NSAL, each and every one of you played a role helping each of these special contestants. The winners were as follows:

- \$10,000 First Place Mollie Davis Nicholson/  
Francesca Nielsen Award Fund: Allan Kameron  
Washington, representing the Virginia/North Carolina  
Chapter
- 2nd Place Award of \$8,000 in memory of Wilford I.  
Thunhurst, Jr.: Charnette Batey, representing the  
Bloomington Chapter
- 3rd Place Award of \$5,000 in memory of Estelle  
Cambell: Jim Davidson Goza, representing the Little  
Rock Chapter
- 4th Place Award of \$4,000 in memory of David E.  
Albright and Paul R. Brockman: Dene'e Benton,  
representing the Pittsburgh Chapter
- 5th Place Award of \$2,000 in memory of Lora Shiner  
Wong: Nyla Noreen Watson, representing the Ohio  
River Valley Chapter
- 6th Place Award of \$2,000 in memory of Anne  
Martorelli: Chloe Jenna Dolandis, representing the Boca Raton Chapter
- 7th Place, \$1,500 appreciates the generosity of El Paso Chapter members Carole and  
Michael Bernstein: Ashley Jini Park representing the Mid-Michigan Chapter
- 8th Place, \$1,500 honors Dorothy Nicholson Stabell, founder of the Washington, D. C.  
Chapter: Jimmy Thomas Mavrikes representing the Washington, DC Chapter
- 9th Place, \$1,000 celebrates the life of Mrs. Ruth Ann Ramsay: Brittany Elise Dye  
representing the Central Illinois Chapter

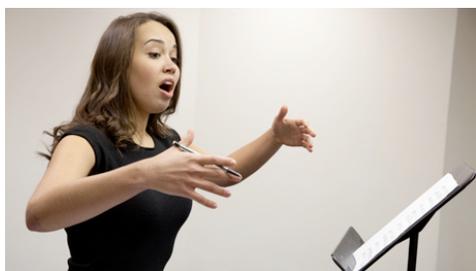


Contestant Dene'e Benton with Megan Hilty. Dene'e, who represented the Pittsburgh Chapter, won 4th place.

In total, this year we awarded \$35,000, the most we have ever given. All contestants - AND members of NSAL - are to be congratulated!

## News of Past Winners

Dorothy Lincoln Smith reports that she saw a production of Mozart's The Magic Flute in San Francisco. She was delighted that the role of Papageno was sung by **Nathan Gunn**, one of our voice judges in 2008 in Bloomington. Joshua Kosman, the San Francisco Chronicle's music critic reviewed the production, saying of Gunn, "Baritone Nathan Gunn was a first-rate Papageno singing with new vigor and tonal robustness."



Nadine Sierra, 2008 National second place voice winner.

Playing opposite Gunn in the role of Papagena was **Nadine Sierra**. She was the 2008 NSAL National second place voice winner representing the Boca Raton Chapter. (Nice that she's now performing with one of the people who judged that competition.) The year after our National Voice Competition, she won the Metropolitan



Baritone Nathan Gunn who was a judge for our 2008 National Voice Competition.

Opera Council Auditions finals. She is currently the Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera company. Nadine performed at the award ceremony hosted by the Boca Raton Chapter when the chapter awarded the NSAL Gold Medallion to Roberta Peters.

**Megan Hilty** (First place Musical Theater 2006) has a starring role in the NBC hit television series *Smash*. For those who have missed the program, which follows a theatrical team who is mounting a Broadway musical about Marilyn Monroe, you can watch all the Season 1 episodes online. Season 2 will begin in September.



Megan Hilty enjoys the Awards Banquet.

In May, Megan played the role of Lorelei Lee in the Broadway Encore production of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. *New York Times*, theater critic Ben Brantley wrote, "Megan Hilty achieves the unlikely



Don Lystra, Megan, and Doni Lystra. National President Doni worked hard to bring Megan to the Convention. Having Megan there was a wonderful surprise for everyone

feat of wrestling Lorelei from the hands of Monroe and Ms. Channing to make the character entirely and originally hers. ... And there is of course Lorelei's great solo "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend." As performed by Ms. Hilty, that much-performed number becomes a realist's "what I believe" anthem that finds the spirit of steel beneath Lorelei's flirty glitter. By the time Ms. Hilty finished her third encore of that number, the audience had all but bloodied its hands from clapping. And had there been Olympic judges among us, they would each and every one have turned up a card reading '10.'" Here are some links to see

interviews with Megan and the cast as well as snippets from the production: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b45bLSm7FGk>. And here she is singing "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwHH7mbGjBc>



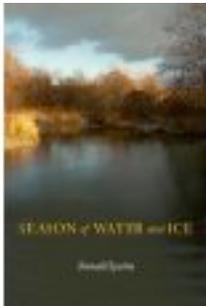
Playwright Kara Revel won 7th place in NSAL's 2010 short story competition.

**Kara Revel** (7th place in 2010 Short Story - one judge had her in first place, but the others didn't agree) is flourishing as a playwright, and Carey Wall believes she is someone to watch with strong potential. Kara recently sent Carey an update about a reading in a New York City theater of *Marvelous Country*, a play she co-wrote with her writing partner Sherry Bokser. In 2009, Kara and Sherry were members of the U.S. Delegation to the Women Playwrights International Conference (WPIC) in Mumbai, India, where *Marvelous Country* was showcased. In 2010, *Marvelous Country* was named a Finalist in Castillo Theatre's Mario Fratti-Fred Newman Political Play Contest; chosen for further consideration for Playwright's Week at the Lark Play

Development Center; and Kara and Sherry were chosen for New Perspective Theatre's Women Work Lab. In 2011, *Marvelous Country* was chosen for further consideration in Heiress Productions Playwriting Competition and named a Semi-Finalist in Reverie Production's Next Generation Playwrights Contest. Regarding the recent New York City reading of *Marvelous Country*, Kara wrote, "The Public Theatre sent a producer to see it, and a member of the Atlantic Theatre Company (David Mamet's company) wants to take it to the Artistic Director. A couple other Off-Broadway houses expressed interest in the concept, as did the Odyssey Theatre here in LA. Our director is also well-connected and will be taking it to another NYC off-Broadway house and theatre in Boston that focuses on politically-driven plays."

Things look promising for Kara, who is very good about keeping in touch with NSAL, a quality in past winners we need to encourage and value.

## Member News



While at the Convention in El Paso, I learned that **Doni Lystra's husband, Don Lystra** has written a published novel called *Season of Water and Ice*. **Charles Pridgeon**, our National Secretary told me he uses the book as a text for his literature classes. That intrigued me, so I got a copy and read it. Those of you who know that Don and Doni spend their summers on a farm in northern Michigan won't be surprised to know the story takes place in that part of the world in the late 1950s. Narrated in the voice of 14-year-old Danny DeWitt, it is sad, moving, beautifully told tale.

On the Amazon.com site, Don's "From the Author" message says, "Most people think of the 1950s as a time of blandness and conformity, but my recollection is that it was far more interesting than that; full of cross currents and struggles and doubts. Certainly that was true if you were a young person then. The country was in the aftermath of two great traumas, the Depression and the Second World War, and it was in the early years of the nuclear age. People have forgotten, but the prospect of nuclear annihilation was very much on peoples' minds. In the face of all of that, I think there was a desire to make everything seem normal, even if it could only look that way on the surface. But underneath---in peoples' lives---there was much ferment and struggle.

"So I was just trying to tell an honest story about people and a time I cared very much about---because it was my own time and my own people, I suppose. And in the process I hoped to say something true about human beings and their relationships and life in general."

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At the Awards Banquet in El Paso, then NSAL **President Doni Lystra** presented **Alyce Erickson** of the Boca Raton Chapter with the first annual NSAL Arts Advocate Award, given to an NSAL member who has a long history of outstanding service to the Arts.

In her thank you letter dated May 18, 2012, Alyce wrote, "Thank you, thank you, thank you for kindness, love, and friendship. Thank you for honoring me with NSAL Arts Advocate Award. I am humbled to be the receiver of this prestigious award, and the opportunity of supporting the talented youth of the world. Warm regards, Alyce Erickson



Chevalier Donald Mandich presents Dame Alyce Erickson with the NSAL Distinguished Service Award for Leadership at the Boca Raton Chapter 2011 Red Rose Dinner.  
Photo by: Barbara and Ronald McCormick

Alyce's active service to the Arts and to her community has garnered her many awards in appreciation for all she does. In addition to the recent NSAL National Arts Advocate Award, she is the 2011 recipient of the Boca Raton Chapter's Distinguished Service Award for Leadership. The city of Boca also has acknowledged her many services to the community. According to an article in the May 11, 2011 Lynn University newsletter, Alyce was awarded a, "star on the Boca Raton Historical Society's Walk of Recognition recently. The Walk of Recognition, located in Royal Palm Plaza, honors people who have "demonstrated a significant long-term commitment to

serving in the interest of Boca Raton and have enriched the lives of our citizens. Alyce has "immersed herself in the Boca Raton community since the early 1980s," the society said in a press release.

"Her involvements include Lynn University, National Society of Arts and Letters, Boca Raton Children's Museum, American Red Cross, Florida Symphonic Pops, Boca Raton Museum of Art and Florida Atlantic University. She was awarded the Junior League of Boca Raton Woman Volunteer of the Year Award in 2009."

That's all for now. Stay cool this summer!

Catriona

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catriona".

NSAL National President

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