



## Random Farms Kids Theater Promotes Growth and Fun

by *Morey Storck* | JULY 3 2011

The theater bug bit Anya Wallach at age 12, after seeing a live performance of "Annie" at the Tarrytown Music Hall. Four years later in 1995, Wallach produced her first show, 'A Broadway Musical Revue', at the Random Farms clubhouse in Chappaqua. That first curtain was made with bed sheets and shower rings from Caldor's, sewn together. It featured 13 local kids, ages 8-12, performing in front of a cheering audience of very supportive parents.

Today, the RFKT is the resident children's theater group for the Tarrytown Music Hall, and has recently signed a lease for 6,000 square feet at 77 Executive Boulevard in Elmsford. The site, known as the Random Farms Performing Arts Center, will be used for workshops, rehearsals, voice and dance lessons, as well as individual classes in drama and improvisation. Auditioning students, plus those in special workshops, come from the entire tri-state area and some from even farther away. Their ages range from kindergarten through college.

The Random Farms Kids Theater is still run by Wallach as producer and artistic director. But now, she has three additional directors, who also have individual teaching specialties in voice, acting and dance. They provide help with the huge rehearsal and performance schedules, plus the ever-growing list of specialty workshops.

There is a common thread that runs through the Random Farms' astonishingly complete live-theater preparatory program, which aims at developing the actors' self-esteem and assuredness and providing the tools that will allow them the ability to grow to the full potential of their talent.

"Children's theater (that is, theater performed by children) adds a whole new dimension to an already complex business. Dealing with rejection, learning to perform confidently on a stage in front of hundreds of strangers, or working as part of a team made up of people you have never met before is hard enough for adults," said Wallach. "Helping children cope with these issues is challenging, but in some ways easier. Kids are resilient and often much more open to criticism and change than grown-ups."

Starting from the bottom rung of the ladder are the Workshops for Jellybeans. This program is devoted to kids from kindergarten through second grade. Rehearsals are once a week for an hour and 15 minutes and have a greater emphasis on creative drama and improvisation. Every child gets a part with speaking lines and solos.

The Workshop Intensives are comprised of approximately 10 sessions, each two hours and 15 minutes long, and are geared for grades 2-8. Cast size is limited to 22-25. The program boasts full days packed with rehearsals, dance training, commercial audition technique, improvisation, stage makeup, etc. At the end of each workshop the show is presented on stage at the Tarrytown Music Hall for family and friends to watch.

Main stage productions are large-scale, big-budget, commercial productions that are put on twice a year, winter and summer. They run for two weekends at the Tarrytown Music Hall. Participation is by audition only, but they are open to anyone in elementary school through college. No prior experience is needed, and possibly because of that, an estimated 150 to 300 actors usually show up for auditions. Four casts of 35 actors are selected for the show.

The EDGE is for high school and college students only and offers instruction and performance in a professional setting. The material is challenging and directed toward the serious actor. Accepted members, in addition to acting, work on productions in a technical capacity, develop new programs, learn marketing, publicity, fundraising and production. Some will serve as assistant directors, stage managers and associate choreographers.

Random Farms' newest innovation is Kids Who Care, involving those students who want to make a social difference, to use their skills and talents to send a message for change. It is open to grades 2-8 by audition only. Four casts of 10 performers each will meet once a week. Once ready, the show will take to the road and will be performed at venues such as nursing homes, children's hospitals, local events and schools. The New Kid is in the audition phase now. It is directed toward the issue of bullying and has been featured on WABC Channel 7 Eyewitness News' special segment.

"At Random Farms, we want to expose kids to a professional process, and our goal is to do it in a supportive, positive and nurturing environment," Wallach emphasized. "It's incredible how much young people are capable of if they are learning, growing and having fun."