

**Bill Rauch – Margo Jones Medal (10/24/2009)**

***Introductory Remarks by Jonathan Barlow Lee***

I've been asked to say a few words to introduce tonight's honoree to all of you – which is a little ironic, considering that most of you know him much better than I do. So I'll share a personal reminiscence.

I've been the production manager at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles for 21 years, which, in terms of longevity, puts me about 8 years behind Tom Knapp.

In that professional capacity, I've had the pleasure of working with Bill Rauch on two occasions – once in 2000, when we presented, on the Taper stage, a Cornerstone production entitled “For Here or To Go, A city-wide, jumbo-sized, extra value holiday show,” and later, for a production of Lisa Loomer's wonderful play “Living Out.”

Unfortunately, I never got to see “For Here or To Go” – I underwent some surgery just before they went into rehearsal -- I'm happy to say that I eventually recovered, but not before the show closed – so I missed it.

But I vividly remember the pre-production process.

“For Here or To Go” involved a cast of 42 (which I believe holds second place in the overall Mark Taper Forum cast size sweepstakes). It was a freewheeling modern adaptation of a satirical verse play written originally by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries. It was set against the backdrop of four holidays, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Ramadan and Hanukkah, and somehow involved fast food. The show was created and performed with the combined efforts of fourteen of the communities from the greater Los Angeles Area which had participated in several previous Cornerstone shows. Those communities were, in alphabetical order:

Angelus Plaza Senior Center  
Arab Americans  
Baldwin Hills  
Beverly Hills  
Boyle Heights  
The Bus Riders Union  
Chinatown  
The Los Angeles Police Department  
The Los Angeles Public Library  
The Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
Pacoima  
People who were born on June 30  
United States Postal Service, and  
Watts.

Bill Rauch has a passion for harnessing the creative efforts of diverse groups of people toward a common artistic and social purpose. And just a list of the groups who were reined together for this humongous project should tell you how ambitious Bill is about accomplishing that goal.

My job, as we anticipated this production, was to inject reality into our conversations - saying things like, "That idea is fabulous, but the fire marshal will never let us do it," or, "That wall is beautiful, but it's too big to fit into the building."

Sadly, that's often the production manager's role in the creative process -- which is, essentially, to stifle it.

But Bill was irrepressible. His optimism was infectious. He was a passionate advocate for his creative vision, but in an open-minded style, which saw compromise as an essential element of collaboration and as a window to greater creativity.

He impressed me from the start (and in subsequent experiences with him at the Taper) as being one of those forces of nature which leaps over obstacles and brings new plays to life.

And he did all of this while also impressing me as one of the most genuinely nice people I've ever met, and I don't believe that I'm alone in having that impression.

A Google search of the phrase "Bill Rauch" and "Nice" produces 55,500 hits.

By contrast, a Google search of "Bill Rauch" and "Jerk" produces only 186 hits. So the statistics seem to back me up.

Bill Rauch is a person who inspires creativity and risk-taking – and creates an environment where people can do their most inspired work.

That's why I was thrilled when the Margo Jones Committee, some of whom are members of my immediate family, selected Bill Rauch for this honor.

I cannot imagine a person more appropriate to celebrate the drive and optimism which characterized the woman for whom this award was named. And I'm happy that Bill now has the fertile environment of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to propagate his enthusiasm.

So, to present this year's Margo Jones Medal, here again is the Curator of the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute at the Ohio State University, Nena Couch.