

show bulletin

IGUAL QUE USTED: MUCH LIKE YOU

Improvisational Theatre and Disability Awareness in Monteverde

By Luis Dario Villalobos Castro

After the Costa Rica Musical Theatre Connections Camp ended last August, two dedicated volunteers remained in Monteverde carrying out Far Corners Community Musical Theatre's mission: Rachel Bingman and Tricia Wagner.

Rachel Bingman, FCCMT's Outreach Educator, was the stage manager for 2011's production of *Little Shop of Horrors*. Tricia Wagner is a music and theatre teacher at the Monteverde Friends

School and a key collaborator for FCCMT. For the past two months, the two have been working with a group of teens from all over through an improvisational theatre troupe. As an avid performer and longtime FCCMT participant, I was eager to join in.

Early on, we had our first public performance during the town-wide celebration of Costa Rica's Independence Day, September 15. We created a spontaneous improvisation skit about people standing up for others and creating change, which we performed from within the

crowd. Not only was it very successful in shaking things up and getting other young people talking about the issues, but no one even realized that it was all a performance!

About a month ago, Patricia Jimenez—a local poet, artist and community leader—asked the troupe to put on a program for APAPEM, an organization which represents the handicapped community in Monteverde and promotes awareness about different types of disabilities. We started to look for a piece to perform. Back in 2009, I had the opportunity to see a one-act play at the high school in the town of Oregon, Wisconsin, where I spent a year as an exchange student. The Drama Club's show, directed by Kathleen Tissot, had many small scenes that explored different disabilities, including Down's syndrome, blindness, deafness, dyslexia, and many more. Poems, songs, and monologues were also a part of the piece. This show—*Much Like You: A Show About Disability Awareness* by Ronald Parker—seemed a perfect fit for our troupe and for APAPEM's needs.

After we got the rights to the show, we translated it into Spanish so that our community could fully understand it. We also changed some scenes slightly so that they would be more appropriate for our town. As I write this, our actors are having a great time turning this script into a full-fledged production. Our actors are learning all about different disabilities.

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We had a guest with epilepsy talk to the cast about how he deals with his diagnosis and some of the hard moments he has had to go through. We had an expert in Costa Rican Sign Language (LESCO) come in and show some of our actors how to sign, since in one scene the actor needs to sign a speech to the audience. The students have also been challenged as actors to portray different characters that require careful study of actions and gestures. For example, one of our actors is playing a kid with Tourette's syndrome, so he is learning how to bring the character to life and create a believable performance.



The cast of *Igual Que Usted*

We are now in the final countdown until opening night—December 3, 2011—at the Centro Comercial Monteverde, the same venue where our production of *Little Shop of Horrors* debuted this summer. We expect a big crowd

to come and see this powerful show. We are very excited for this new production, and hope that it will help everyone see that the amazing people who live with disabilities deserve to be noticed and respected.

La Tiendita de los Horrores: **How a big empty mall became the *Little Shop of Horrors***

By Christine Gordon

Imagine this: a girl walks into the jungles of Monteverde, Costa Rica, machete in hand. She attacks the bamboo, hacking off several stalks. After she is satisfied, she hauls her bounty into the back of a pickup truck and drives to what was once intended to be a mall but is now just a big, empty concrete building with soaring ceilings. She is ready for the real work to begin. You may be asking, what did she use her wares for? She built a giant, man-eating, talking plant puppet out of them, that's what! Thus begins the tale of how a big empty mall became the *Little Shop of Horrors*.

In the summer of 2011, Far Corners Community Musical Theatre returned to Monteverde for their fifth production there: *Little Shop of Horrors*. For those of you who are not familiar with the show, *Little Shop of Horrors* is the story of Seymour who works in a flower shop in Skid Row, a run-down urban neighborhood during the 1960s. He obtains a rare Venus Flytrap, a plant so special that it's out of this world—literally. The plant brings Seymour everything he ever wanted, but ultimately leads to his demise, consuming everything that matters to him.



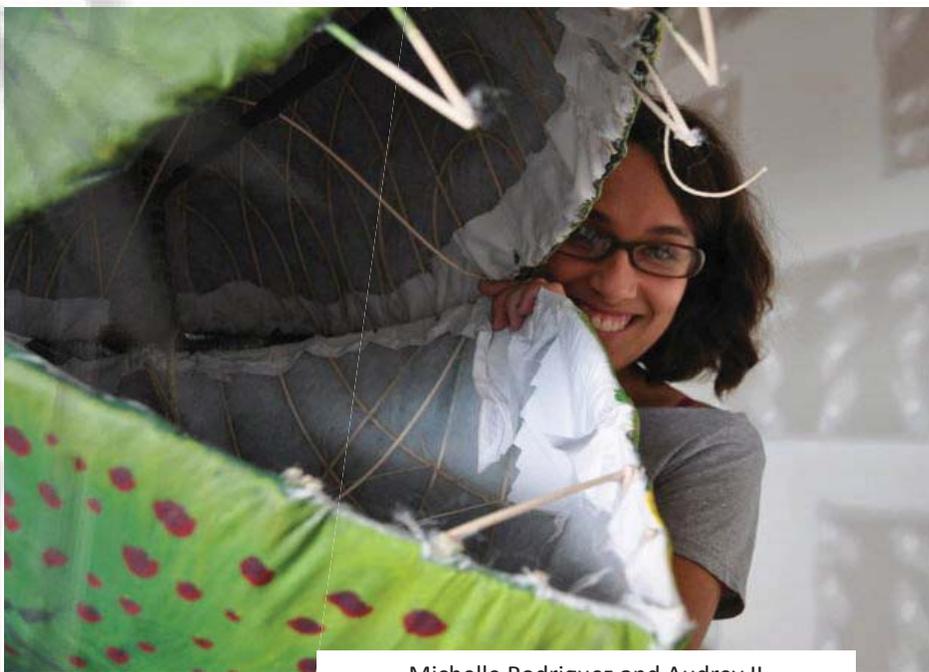
Little Shop of Horrors teaches us not to be seduced by fortune and fame because it can eat you alive. Although the nature of the material is quite serious, LSoH approaches the topic with humor and a lively score influenced by musical styles of that era (Rock n' Roll, Doo-Wop, and Motown). It has been a favorite of community theatre for years. I spoke with Erin Lafferty, the show's choreographer, about her experience in Monteverde. *Little Shop of*

Horrors was her second production with FCCMT. As a seasoned dancer, her choreographing duties were no sweat...okay, maybe a little sweat! The bilingual college student, who had been choreographing for about five years, was fortunate in having a very talented cast. “They all worked so hard,” she said of the cast of 28, ranging in age from 11 to 18. She was particularly impressed with the three doo-wop girls, Ronette, Crystal, and Chiffon. “They learned a three-minute dance in two hours,” she raved.

I asked Erin what was challenging about this particular show, and she told me what it took to create the performance space. “It was supposed to be a mall,” she said, but they ran out of money and the project stalled. What remained was a large empty building, and they needed to use the biggest room possible for *Little Shop of Horrors*—the food court. Cement floors, extremely high ceilings, and drywall. “Not the best acoustics,” she lamented. In the space, the team constructed a sturdy stage and transformed the space into a performance hall.

All shows come with their challenges, but compared to FCCMT’s previous shows, *Little Shop of Horrors* was challenging in a whole new way—it required several intricate puppets, ranging in size from house plant to giant monster. In June, puppet designer Michelle Rodriguez joined the FCCMT team, and things started falling into place. Michelle researched Audrey II in the bogs of western Massachusetts before making her way to Costa Rica. There, she used basic materials to construct Audrey II, including flexible round reed, flowerpots, acrylic paint, papier mâché (flour, water, and newspaper) and, yes, bamboo. In order to accommodate the various incarnations of Audrey II (there were four), Erin, Michelle, and the other volunteers built a puppet studio in one of the rooms in the mall. Right before the performance, more volunteers started “falling out of the sky,” Erin said. They and the kids, using a whole lot of papier mâché, were able to finish the puppets on time. It wasn’t until July, however, that a puppeteer was finally cast—Andrey, a member of the cast from *Oliver!*, the previous year’s production. Together, he and Michelle worked

to bring Audrey II to life. One of FCCMT’s goals is to use this experience as a mechanism to promote growth and instill confidence in young people. One of Erin’s favorite moments was when she and the performers participated in a discussion led by 18-year-old Antonio about the relevance of the show’s premise to their lives. Musical theatre has been integral to her life, she said, and it was great to “bring art closer to the community.” FCCMT has built a strong relationship with the community. Monteverde thrives on tourism, and before FCCMT, there was not much to do for local kids after school. The kids really wanted to establish this program, and their community was nothing but supportive. “The people



Michelle Rodriguez and Audrey II

who support us are fantastic,” Erin said. During her first year, when she served as Outreach Coordinator, she worked with the schools to set up auditions for the students. The church and other community establishments also lent nearly a hundred of chairs to the organization to fill the auditorium. FCCMT volunteers will be returning to Monteverde this June for another summertime show. Musical theatre is transformative in nature. It turns bamboo sticks into a human-sized puppet and a wannabe mall food court into a performance center. More importantly, a musical theatre production is a transformative experience for all those involved, performers, parents, and volunteers alike. It allows you to be something you’re not while simultaneously becoming a more authentic, vibrant self.

Kids

HAVE A LOT TO SAY!

By Rachel Bingman

Kids have a lot to say! In order to express themselves, they need opportunities to explore their ideas. Since September, 2011, I have been working with kids and teens in Monteverde, Costa Rica, helping them to write and perform original plays about important social issues.

My first attempt at this kind of work was with the public elementary school in Santa Elena, Costa Rica. From the very beginning, the director of the school was very supportive. He was excited to have a drama program coming to his



school, and he said that he would even organize a group of kids for me. All I needed to do was come in the following week, and I would have a class waiting for me. It sounded a little too good to be true, and it turned out that it was. When I arrived the following week, there was no class waiting for me, nor was the director anywhere to be found! His secretary didn't seem to know what I was talking about, and the teachers weren't sure what to think of me. I felt frustrated, but ultimately decided to organize the program myself. I worked with teachers and parents, and after a couple of weeks, the program finally started.

I had one other challenge in beginning the program: I spoke limited Spanish. That is where Ileana Garcia came in. Ileana is an amazing fifteen-year-old student who speaks much better English than she likes to admit. She assisted



Students from the Santa Elena Elementary school plan and rehearse their own play.

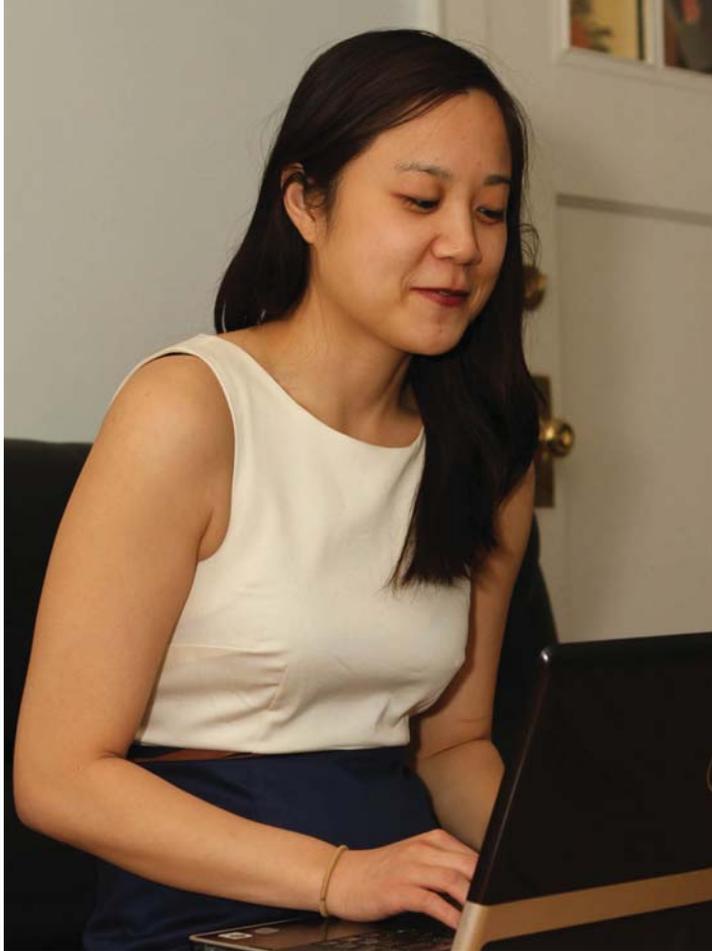


me in implementing the program, and I really don't think I could have done it without her. She was able to communicate ideas to the girls in Spanish when I just didn't have the vocabulary to do so. Day by day, we worked on creating an amazing play. In the beginning, I read books about different social issues to the girls to initiate discussion. Leading the discussions was challenging for me because of my language barrier, but at my request, the girls slowed down when talking and clarified their thinking. Ileana also translated various words. After many theatre games, children's books, and conversations about scriptwriting, the girls chose to focus their play on the theme of poverty. Eventually, they developed a complete story, with a beginning, a problem, and a solution, along with characters and emotions. They wrote the dialogue and designed the backdrops for the three different settings in their play.

One Tuesday afternoon, we finally performed our little play about poverty. Twice! Our audiences included members of two different classes, the director, teachers, community members, and families. Before the show, the girls explained the whole process of writing the play to the audience. The girls felt extremely proud of their accomplishments, and their parents were so appreciative that their daughters had the opportunity to be in a real play.

This experience has taught me a lot about kids and what kind of teacher I want to be. I am currently working with the CEC, a private school in need of a theatre program. The high school students just wrote and performed a play about teenage drinking and negligent parents. I am so proud of them! Soon, I will begin working with the elementary school. I can't wait to see what they come up with.





*Sara Clark,
FCCMT
Volunteer
Coordinator*

Sara Clark is the Volunteer Coordinator for Far Corners Community Musical Theatre. She's the one who keeps track of all of FCCMT's volunteers. This is no small matter, because FCCMT is a global operation! This Boston-based college grad works with people from all over the world.

Sara's job, unlike jobs for some of the other volunteers, requires a year-round commitment. "We are always looking for people," she says, "and sometimes we don't even know that we'll have a use for someone until someone applies and we see a certain skill set." She told me of one person in particular who applied for a web position; when she reviewed his resume, Sara saw that he also had years of public relations experience. Another volunteer was recently hired to launch the Chinese website, and it just so happened that this person lived in China! In addition to designing the site, this volunteer was able to perform translation services for some of the text. Having such a diverse

Profile: Sara Clark **Volunteer Coordinator**

By Christine Gordon

Contacting the volunteers isn't the most difficult part of Sara's job. Not only does she have to manage her own time, she also has to get the volunteers to work with each other. "It can be challenging," she says. "Most of the time, we're talking about connecting individuals over thousands of miles and through several time zones. In addition to the logistics of time, all of the volunteers are busy with full-time jobs or being a full-time student. But it is important to have the volunteers aware of each other and collaborate, because organizations can only truly flourish with the cooperation of all of their members."

group of volunteers has its benefits, but it also presents several challenges. Beyond tracking and connecting volunteers in various locations with vastly differing skill sets, Sara is often asked questions that she doesn't know the answer to. However, FCCMT has been extremely fortunate in finding some incredibly dedicated volunteers who are also problem solvers.

"The best volunteers," Sara says, "are the ones who not only eagerly take on a task assigned to them, but also make suggestions and ask questions. It's amazing to have volunteers that grow alongside the organization."

MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER: A Conversation with *Patti Lafferty*

By Robin Richardson

Patti Lafferty, an accountant from Texas, is a mother, a dog-lover, and an avid knitter. She is also the newest member of the Board of Directors of Far Corners Community Musical Theatre. Read on to learn how Patti Lafferty became involved in the performing arts, how she discovered FCCMT, and what she brings to our program.

“We Sat In Theatres.”

Patti’s two daughters—Megan, and longtime FCCMT volunteer Erin Lafferty—have been dancing since they were young. Patti spent much of her daughters’ childhoods ferrying them to rehearsals, working backstage, and cheering on her children at performances and competitions. “Some people sit at football fields,” she said. “We sat in theatres. It was much more pleasant!” After Erin’s freshman year at Santa Clara University, she was looking for a summer internship that would allow her to share her love of dance, choreography, and the performing arts. On a trip to the university to see one of Erin’s shows, Patti happened across FCCMT at a

summer opportunities fair. “I saw your request for a Spanish speaking choreographer—it was a coincidence I couldn’t ignore.” We’re glad she didn’t ignore it! Patti connected us with Erin, who is now planning her third summer in Costa Rica working for Musical Theatre Connections: Costa Rica.

“Giving Back Is Incredible.”

Through Erin, Patti saw some of the many opportunities FCCMT provides for young people to learn, grow, and give back to the community. Seeing Erin “giving back some of what the art world has been able to give her is incredible,” Patti says. Working with young people from Costa Rica, Erin was able to share her passion for dance and help make our full-length musical productions (in the middle of a cloud forest, no less!) a reality. It was a true learning experience as well. Far from home, and with limited resources, Erin learned how to “make do and make it work.” This, Patti reflects, “was way more valuable than anything she could have done at home in Fort Worth.”

“I’m There.”

When Patti learned that FCCMT was holding Board elections, she saw her chance to give back as well. “As a mother,” Patti said, “if there’s an opportunity to help out or get involved in something my children are passionate about, I’m there.” Patti also lends her considerable talents as an accountant, serving as the Treasurer of FCCMT’s Board of Directors, and has helped invigorate our internship program for college students, reminding us of the impact that volunteering with FCCMT can have on young adults: “Having this experience of teaching and volunteering is starting to help Erin formulate what she wants to do with her life,” Patti says. Reaching out to other college students “not only helps sustain our programs, but also provides young people with the kind of experience” that Erin has enjoyed. Young people truly are the heart of FCCMT’s mission, and Patti joins the rest of the Board in helping young people to become change agents in their own communities.



Patti Lafferty with daughter Erin

“I am a very proud supporter of the arts, a longtime backstage mom, and provider of food, extra bobby pins, and properly tied bows. I have an accounting background, and have handled accounting and finance for our businesses for over 20 years.”

“I first discovered FCCMT when my daughter Erin was looking for volunteer opportu-

nities. Since then, I have seen my daughter become more passionate about FCCMT and the opportunities that it provides her. I am excited to see an organization offer the arts to kids who don’t have the opportunities that my girls did, and it’s even better that you offer the chance for people like Erin to give back in a very big way.”

Elda Gui was introduced to Far Corners Community Musical Theatre in her native China. FCCMT's production of *Fiddler on the Roof* was Elda's first time acting in a musical, but her hard work allowed her to obtain a lead role in the

several monologues for her classmates. She worked hard and earned high scores in that class, particularly for her performance of "Far From The Home I Love," a song from *Fiddler*. Elda also got to see a Broadway musical, which

Alumni Update: *Elda Gui*

By Jasmine Burroughs



show—Golde. "Lisa and Rachel taught us how to sing in musicals, how to dance in the show, how to be united, and how to conquer all the difficulties," says Gui. "I can never forget the beautiful music in this show, and I can still sing some songs very well without sheet music and lyrics." Elda's experience fostered a new passion for musical theatre.

was her favorite experience while in the United States. "That was my first time seeing a Broadway show. I was deeply attracted to the music, the lights, the stage, the costumes, the excellent performances of the actors and actresses," she said. Elda hopes to see more shows on Broadway in the future.

Recently, Elda spent six months as an exchange student in the United States. As part of her studies, she took an acting class and performed

Currently, Elda is teaching Chinese in Thailand. While she is there, Elda hopes to use her passion for both musical theatre and teaching to provide a similar opportunity for her students. "I really like musical shows, so if possible I hope to do a show in Thailand with my students," says Gui. She hopes to pass on to her students what she learned at Far Corners Community Musical Theatre, so they might some day discover a love for musical theatre.

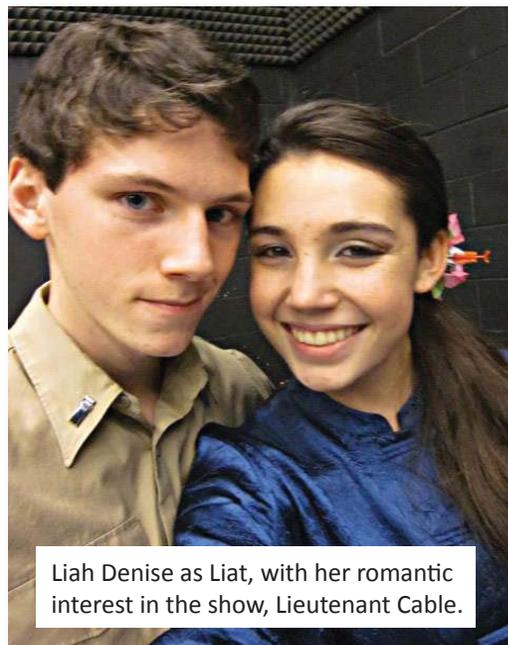
Liah Denise Mata already had a deep connection to musical theatre before coming to Far Corners Community Musical Theatre. Her experience in FCCMT's production of *Oliver!* was an opportunity for her to expand on her musical theatre experience. She was surrounded by great teachers and mentors who trained her in every aspect of theatre. "I love theatre. The techniques and methods I have learned with the FCCMT Community have helped me grandly," says Mata. She eagerly explained to us about her recent experience in *South Pacific*. Liah talked about putting together a performance for such a large crowd. "My experiences with *South Pacific* were wonderful, not only

did I meet a ton of new people, but I was able to work in an actual play production, and present to hundreds of people in just one night," says Mata. "Just the thought of being able to enter and participate in that kind of a thing is just awesome."

I asked Mata about her plans to pursue musical theatre in the future and in college. While musical theatre will always be near and dear to her, she said, she's not sure if she will pursue it as a career. However, with all of the exposure and training that Mata has received, she just might explore theatre in some form in the near future.

Alumni Update: *Liah Denise Mata*

By Jasmine Burroughs



Liah Denise as Liat, with her romantic interest in the show, Lieutenant Cable.

Volunteers and Interns needed!

Do you love musical theatre? Join us and make an immediate difference in the lives of Costa Rican teens who share your passion.

We need energetic, creative individuals to assist with Musical Theatre Connections, an intensive summer theatre program for teens. Join us in a breathtakingly beautiful environment as we put on a full production of a musical with a fantastic, diverse group of youth. We also offer drama mini-camp for younger children.

We still need college interns and adult volunteers to help out on-site in Costa Rica. Available positions include:

- Stage Manager
- Assistant Director
- Assistant Producer
- Children's Program Director



See our website for details on how to apply:
www.farcornersmusicals.org/summer-internships.html

No time for an international trip, but still want to help?
We need cyber volunteers to assist with writing and editing,
web development, translation, online research, and more!

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Far Corners Community Musical Theatre



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Donating to Far Corners Community Musical Theatre (FCCMT) helps us to provide performing arts opportunities to youth in under-served communities.

Donations can be made by credit card online through our website:

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