

Movieline's

10 WHO TONE
HOW ANGELINA, HALLE
AND USHER DO IT

Exclusive:
Kim Novak
Opens Up

Hollywood Life

JULY / AUGUST 2005

**JESSICA
SIMPSON**
IN HER OWN
WORDS

**POKER
FACES:**
AFFLECK,
MAGUIRE,
DICAPRIO
AND MORE
ARE ALL-IN

16 PAGES OF OUR
**Young
Hollywood
Awards!**

**STARS GALORE, CANDID
TALK, LOTS OF FUN**

**Hollywood
Wives**

**THE YEARS OF LIVING
DANGEROUSLY**

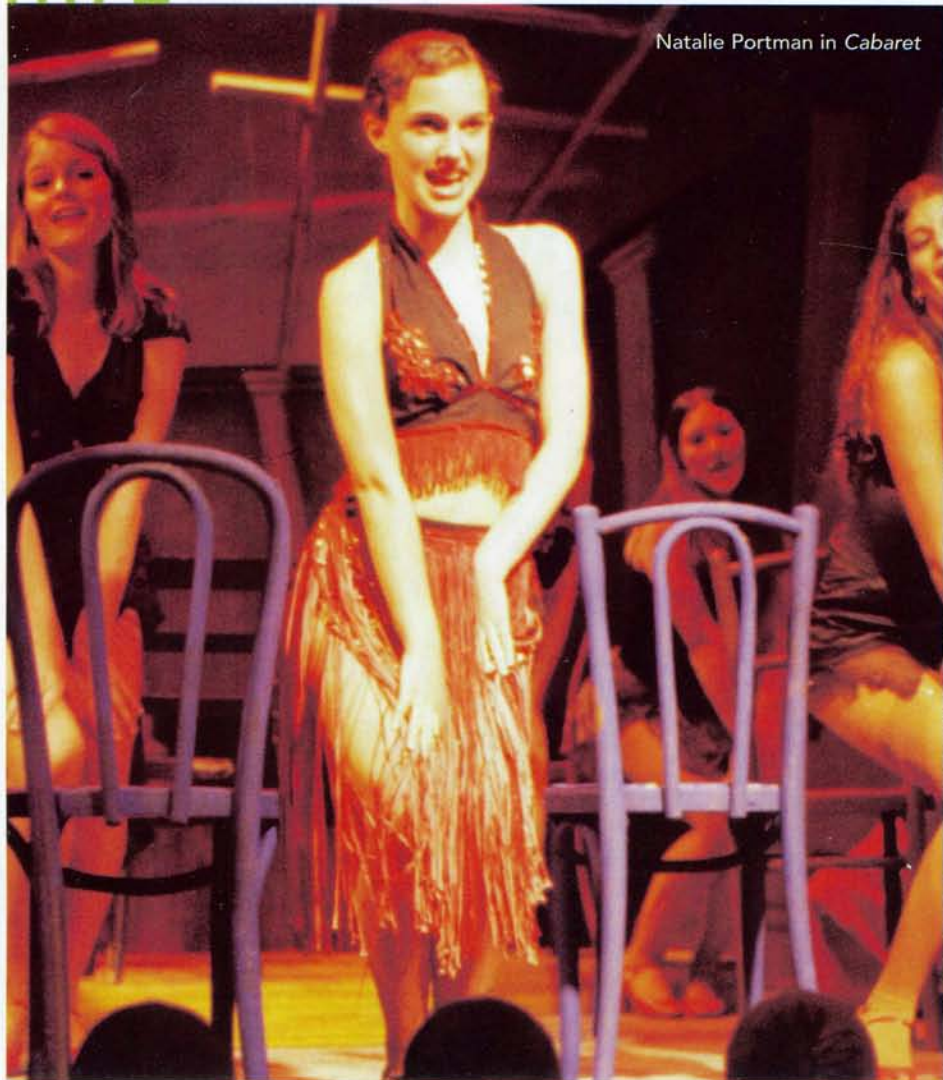
PLUS:
MICHAEL CAINE,
JULIAN McMAHON,
HILARY DUFF,
JESSE BRADFORD,
ELIZABETH BANKS,
AND WHEN STARS
WERE YOUNG

\$3.99US \$4.99CAN



0 71658 01795 5

HYPE



Natalie Portman in *Cabaret*



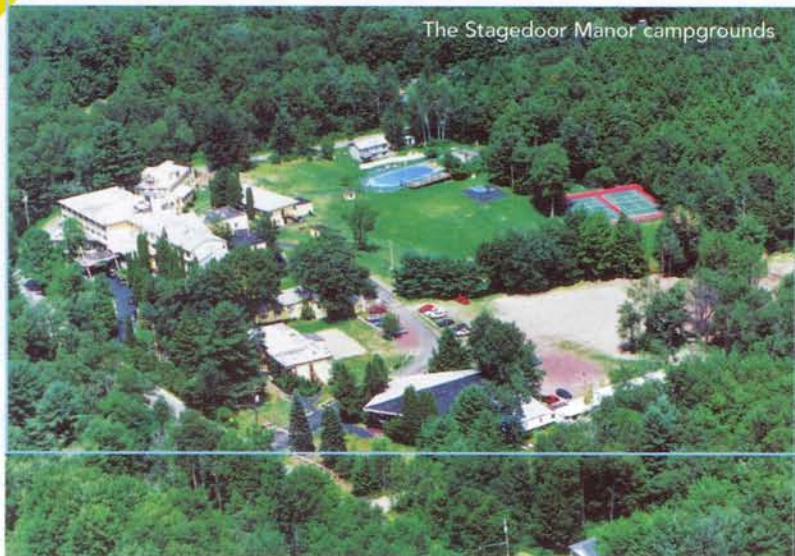
Josh Charles (right) in *Oliver*



Campers making their entrance for an outdoor production of *Hair*

Camp Superstar

STAGEDOOR MANOR, A SUMMER THEATER CAMP TUCKED IN THE CATSKILLS, CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF NURTURING THE TALENTS OF FLEDGLING PERFORMERS—AMONG THEM NATALIE PORTMAN, ROBERT DOWNEY JR., MANDY MOORE AND ZACH BRAFF. **BY ANDRE CHAUTARD**



The Stagedoor Manor campgrounds

WHEN NATALIE PORTMAN WAS 13, she begged her parents to let her attend an unusual sleep-away camp tucked away in the Catskill Mountains that she'd read about in *The New York Times*. It was the renowned Stagedoor Manor, an intensive summer theater program for performing arts-minded kids and teens with an impressive list of alumni (including Robert Downey Jr., Jennifer Jason Leigh and Jon Cryer).

Her parents said yes, and Portman—who by then had already filmed her first feature, *The Professional*—enjoyed it so much that during her second summer there, she called up her mother from the office, crying. "She wanted to stay another [three-week] session so badly, and her mother was telling her she had a photo shoot in Milan or something," remembers Konnie Kittrell, Stagedoor's production director and associate producer, who has been with the camp for 23 years. "Natalie was saying, 'Can't they postpone it?' This was so much more important to her." Portman got to stay, and that session she played one of the leads in an outdoor staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alongside another future leading lady, Bryce Dallas Howard.

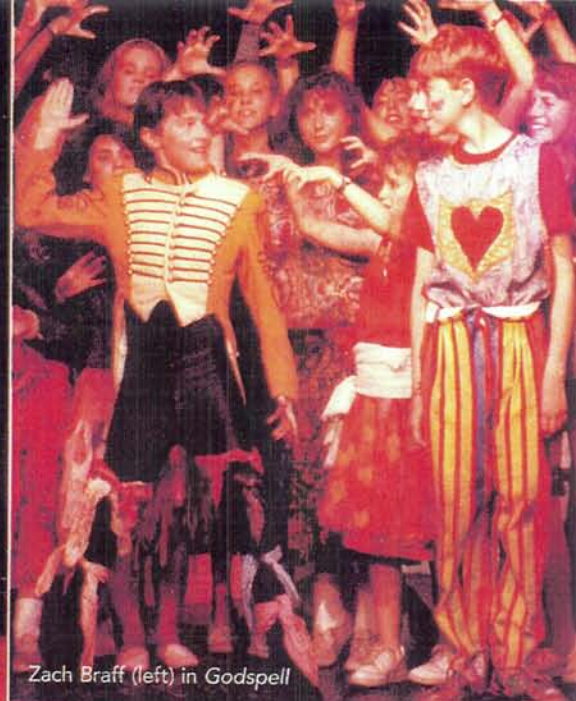
All photos courtesy of Stagedoor Manor



Mandy Moore



Bijou Phillips



Zach Braff (left) in *Godspell*

summer of my life," says Howard, whose two younger sisters have also attended the camp. "My desire to be creative, to perform had always seemed like some secret addiction of mine, something that I should never admit out loud. At camp I found myself watching a group of adolescents so charismatic, self-possessed and determined...I fell in love with actors and acting that summer."

Of course, at Stagedoor—which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year—palling around with celebs-to-be comes with the territory. The lengthy roster of one-time campers also includes Zach Braff, Mandy Moore, Felicity Huffman, Bijou Phillips, Josh Charles, Mary Stuart Masterson, Cole Hauser, Helen Slater, Mia Tyler, Ally Hilfiger, Rumer Willis and director Shawn Levy—not to mention the offspring of Glenn Close,



Bryce Dallas Howard and Natalie Portman in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Richard Dreyfuss, Joan Lunden and Robert Kennedy Jr.

They all spent summers learning to sing, dance and emote in fun but rigorous classes right out of *Fame* against a leafy, idyllic backdrop of a 15-acre converted hotel resort in Loch Sheldrake, two hours north of Manhattan, complete with swimming pools, tennis courts and horseback riding. Today, a dozen productions are mounted at the seven fully staffed theaters on the campgrounds during each summer's three three-week sessions. The 250 campers, ages 8 to 18, enthusiastically take on not just youth-friendly staples like *Annie*, *Oliver!* and *West Side Story*, but considerably more challenging material, from Brecht to Beckett, Sondheim to Shakespeare.

"The same part a Broadway actor or actress might learn in months, these kids are learn-

ing, uncut, in two-and-a-half weeks," says camp owner and producer Cynthia Samuelson. "It's very demanding." And potentially star-making. Casting agents regularly come calling, so many that the camp has to stagger their visits. Braff was scouted



Robert Downey Jr.

at Stagedoor and signed by a talent agent who booked his first commercials, and Moore landed a recording demo and contract after receiving vocal training at the camp.

Kittrell remembers Moore as a "very sweet, quiet little thing with a huge smile and a big ol' voice. She wasn't going for a career [at the time]. She was just a kid who loved to sing." Howard, Kittrell says, "was hugely popular with everybody. She's very funny, a practical joker. Most likely to put shaving cream in your bed—that kind of personality." Of Braff, who starred in camp productions of *Godspell* and *Once Upon a Mattress*, she says, "He was a comedian. I

continued on page 108

"That summer at Stagedoor when I was 15 was perhaps the most influential of my life. I fell in love with actors and acting that summer."

—Bryce Dallas Howard

Michael Caine

continued from page 71

Q: You starred in one of director Oliver Stone's early films, *The Hand*. Any memories of working with him?

A: Oliver is a very good director, but he was nervous and determined on that picture—a very excitable man. He tired me out because he was very particular, but I would love to work with Oliver again.

Q: What's the best and worst of Michael Caine on screen?

A: The best is *The Quiet American*. Everything from the script to my director to my costars were excellent. That's probably the purest acting—by that I mean no actor's tricks—that I've ever done. The worst is *The Swarm*. It was a big-budgeted Hollywood film with great actors like Henry Fonda and Fred MacMurray, and everyone in the cast got upstaged by the bees. Irwin Allen, who directed the movie, had just produced *The Poseidon Adventure*, which was a big hit disaster film. *The Swarm* was just a big flop disaster!

Q: Since *The Swarm* was so bad, why did you work again with Irwin Allen on *Beyond the Poseidon Adventure*?

A: [Long pause] I truly don't recall making that movie. [Big laugh] I'm going to contact my accountant tomorrow and see if he ever deposited the check!

Q: Is there anything you won't do on screen?

A: Full-frontal nudity. Bogart never did that, which used to be my excuse. Now I won't do it because [laughs] I'm scared enough when I see myself naked in a mirror!

Q: Bogart never did a character in drag, either, but you did in *Dressed to Kill*.

A: That was my double who did most of those scenes, which allowed me not to be there on the film for a while and still get paid, which I think would have pleased Bogart.

Q: Did you ever get depressed by the business to the point where you thought of giving up acting?

A: [Long pause] I was living in Miami and running a restaurant that I owned. I wasn't happy with the roles I was getting and didn't need to do bad roles in order to make a living. Then [director] Bob Rafelson and Jack Nicholson came to Miami to make [1997's] *Blood and Wine*. They met with me and asked me to do their film. Jack's enthusiasm and commitment to the picture was inspirational. Jack was key in restoring my faith in acting. Unless he reads this I don't think he was ever aware of what he did to motivate me creatively.

Q: Anything else you remember about working with Jack?

A: He had the most interesting perspective on life. [Laughs] When things got tedious he'd point to [costar] Jennifer Lopez and say, "Doesn't she have a great ass, Michael? And just think, we're getting paid good money just to watch it and do what we love to do and get a terrific tan!" ■

Camp Superstar

continued from page 33

remember him very vividly as a bundle of energy. He was a great singer, too." And about Portman: "What a lot of people don't know about her is that she was a dancer first—she's had quite a bit of ballet training. She was also popular, but shy in a way. What I remember most about her is that Stagedoor was her opportunity to just be a kid. I heard her say that on many occasions.

"I remember [one summer] she was trying to decide whether or not to do *Star Wars*, because she had been approached about a role in *The Horse Whisperer*," Kittrell continues. "She was like, 'Horse Whisperer is such an incredible book,' and the kids were going, 'Are you crazy? You have to do *Star Wars*!'"

Certainly, most Stagedoor campers aren't dealing with professional dilemmas of that order; although some kids do arrive with Broadway credits on their résumés, many come to camp with little or no experience at all. "Stagedoor isn't about the most talented kids—it's about the kids who love theater," says Samuelson, whose parents, Carl and Elsie, founded the camp in 1976. In their hometowns, campers often feel like misfits for preferring showtunes to MTV, but at Stagedoor, "when they're walking down the street singing or they're doing a dance step, everybody thinks that's normal. Out in the rest of the world they don't have this camaraderie."

Admittance to Stagedoor is first-come, first-serve and does not require an audition. Before passing away last year, Carl Samuelson said, "What I look for is a desire. I'm not looking for 250 stars every summer. But I'm looking for 250 kids who love theater, because then I know magic will happen." Instruction is offered at beginner to advanced levels (plus select master classes), and campers study everything from improvisation, stage combat and modeling to behind-the-scenes crafts such as directing, playwrighting, choreography, set decoration, costume design, makeup and lighting design, all taught by working professionals. With a staff of 135, all this specialized attention doesn't come cheap (\$4,195 for one session, or \$9,495 for all three), but parents find it well worth the cost—a majority of campers each summer are returnees.

Todd Graff, who was both a camper and later a counselor, looks back on his Stagedoor days as so formative that he wrote and directed the indie *Camp*, a fictionalized take on his experiences there that played at the Sundance Film Festival in 2003 and later opened to warm reviews; Alexandra Shiva's *Stagedoor*, a documentary about the camp, is traveling the festival circuit this year.

Still, with all the talent on display at Stagedoor, only a small percentage of alums become bona fide actors; some find work in other areas of the entertainment industry like casting, directing or publicity. "My dad always said we do produce more doctors and lawyers than we do Broadway professionals," says Cindy Samuelson, "but that's the nature of the world. They can't all make it. But even the kids who decide this isn't what they're going to do with their life professionally get a self-confidence and a stage presence that will do them well in whatever career they choose."

Kittrell stresses that meeting with casting agents who come to the camp is completely optional for the campers, and many choose not to. "A lot of times they will say, 'No, I want to be a kid as long as I can.' I actually hear that quite a lot, and quite often from the kids who know they have a lot of talent. We have a lot of people who were stars at the camp but just decided not to follow through. There are people who I was absolutely certain were going to be huge, and they just disappeared."

"Each summer, when I get the list of new kids, I always wonder who's gonna be the star," says Cindy Samuelson. "It's not necessarily the kid who's a star at home or in their school play. Do you know for sure they are going to make it? Will talent always prevail? You never know. But, boy, they blew away the audience at Stagedoor, that's for sure."

For more information, call 1-888-STAGE-88 or visit www.stagedoormanor.com.