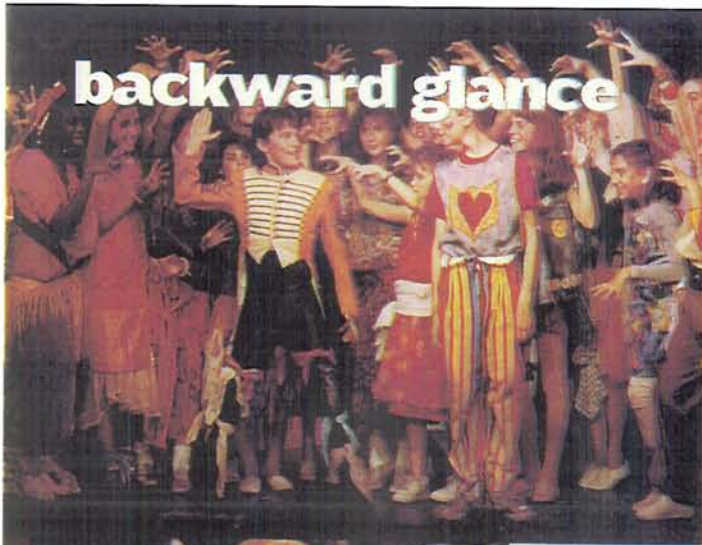


backward glance

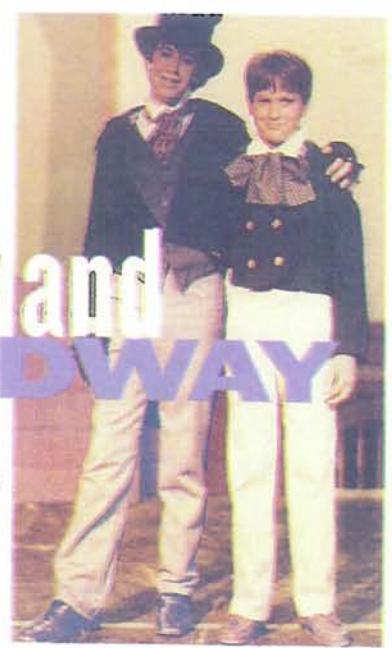


SING OUT JONNY!
The author performs in a Stagedoor production of the musical *Working*, in 1982.

bugspray and BROADWAY

One famous alum tells why there are no people quite like Stagedoor Manor people.

By **Jon Cryer**



MANORISTS

Stagedoor Manor (left) has been a factory for famous performers. Clockwise from above: Josh Charles (right) in *Oliver!*, 1985; Bryce Dallas Howard and buddy Natalie Portman; Bijou Phillips; Zach Braff (center) in *Godspell*, 1988.

Stagedoor Manor is not the typical camp experience. Once, a friend of mine invited me up to her cabin in the woods. I asked, "What's it like?" And she said, "Did you go to summer camp?" And I said, "Yes—this is going to be great." So we go up there, and the cabin is four walls, with no windows, just holes. And I said, "What camp did you go to? This is horrible! My camp had maid service!"

Stagedoor Manor was an old Borscht Belt resort, and it had the faded grandeur of an old hotel that was definitely past its prime. They now have a state-of-the-art theater, but when I was there in the late '70s and early '80s the space was an actual barn that later burned down. There were two pools and volleyball nets; nobody used either. I remember Linda the swim teacher, God love her—how she tried to convince these kids to try to do something other than musicals.

We were pretty much the kids that nobody knew what to do with. Before Stagedoor, I would play games like *Careless Gas Station Attendant*, which entailed putting Ronsonal lighter fluid in a line up your pants leg, pooling it

nearby and having a friend drop a cigarette in the pool so that the lighter fluid ignites and races up your leg and... oh, what fun to be had as you pat out your flaming pants! For some reason my mother thought I needed help after that.

My first show at Stagedoor was *Oliver!* I was Third Urchin from the Left. Even in a camp where there were 40 guys and about 270 girls, and every guy got a good part, somehow I managed to be Third Urchin from the Left.

I was in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. I did Sid Sorokin in *The Pajama Game*—Jeanine Tesori directed that production, as a matter of fact. One summer, I was Pippin in the worst production of *Pippin* ever staged. That particular summer they had no guys who could sing—including me—and so I was thrust into a lead part in a musical, which I was not comfortable with. I threw all the charm I could at it, but it was just a

fiasco. I remember it fondly, though—that's the amazing thing. Sometimes I remember the fiascos more fondly than the ones that took flight.

There was much summer loving. I don't want to give the camp a bad name, but the kids were very, very randy. I had my share of crushes, some of which have not gone away to this day. The ratio of boys to girls was such that it was like fish in a barrel.

One of my closest friends just sent his son there. My own son is only four, and I have a feeling he isn't going to be in the business. But if he shows just a little bit of desire, just "Hey Dad, let's put on a show"—Bing! I'll drop some money to send him to Stagedoor. But my biggest fear is that he'll be playing *Careless Gas Station Attendant!*

Stagedoor Manor performing arts camp celebrates its 30th Anniversary this summer (stagedoormanor.com).

contributors



JON ROBIN BAITZ

"Sometimes I have to write for other people in order to make money," says Baitz, the author of *The Substance of Fire*, *Ten Unknowns* and, currently, *The Paris Letter*. "Other people being movie and TV studios, for instance." His Hollywood credits include the screenplay for *People I Know* and episodes of *The West Wing* and *Alias*. But his heart belongs to the theater. "It's important to be part of a community that cherishes writers, and actors, and words, and ideas," he says. "Plus I'm getting older. And less easily distracted by glitter." He explains that last thought in Playwright's Corner (page 20).



CHARLAYNE WOODARD

"Getting fired is a devastating event in anyone's life," says Woodard, who shares a particularly rough—and funny—experience in *Actor's Nightmare* (page 14). Still, the actress, who has written and starred in the one-woman shows *In Real Life* and *Neat*, didn't let it get her down—at least not that much. "If it happens to you," she advises, "take time to grieve the loss of your part for no longer than a week. Then stop talking about it and get back to the work of auditioning, taking classes and basically proving to yourself that you are an artist, since that's what really matters."



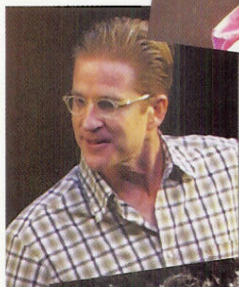
NICOLAS WAGNER

Wagner, who hails from Burgundy, France, views photographing celebrities as a challenge. "It's never about me, or my vision," says the lensman, who contributes to *Interview*, *Flaunt* and *Blackbook*. "It's about them, and the character they want to portray on the day of the shoot." And while he successfully captured a variety of personalities and characters for *Show People's* "High 5" portfolio (page 24), he confesses that he responded to one star's character in particular. "Parker Posey was full of energy and filled up the studio with her vibrant personality. You instantly want to be her best friend." Looks like she felt similarly.



JON CRYER

"It really prepared me for the business," Cryer says of Stagedoor Manor, the former resort (celebrated in the 2003 movie *Camp*) where he spent four summers (Backward Glance, page 62). "I started working when I was 18, only a year out of camp, mostly because I was psychologically prepared for it," says the actor, beloved for his turn in *Pretty in Pink* and the current star of the CBS sitcom *Two and a Half Men*. "The love of theater was so important at that place. And that changed my life."



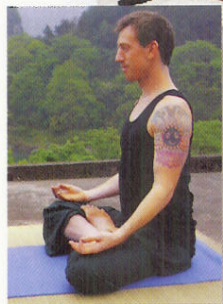
MATTHEW MODINE

It's hard to imagine what was going through Modine's mind as he rehearsed *Finishing the Picture*, which turned out to be Arthur Miller's last play. Miller denied that the play was autobiographical, but it was difficult to ignore the uncanny similarities between him and Paul, the earnest screenwriter he handpicked Modine (*Full Metal Jacket*) to play. As it turns out, the late legend was quite a mensch, as Modine recalls in an excerpt from his journal ("Picking Up the Pieces" page 36). "This page from my diary is an example of human generosity and kindness," he says fondly. "We all make mistakes. It's helping each other up that makes humanity."



BRIAN BOWEN SMITH

"Even after a whole morning in line at the DMV, doing phone interviews [about *The Pillowman*] as he waited, Billy Crudup did everything I asked and more," says Bowen Smith (pictured with wife Shea) of *Show People's* free time-starved summer cover star ("Billy's Private Parts," page 40). Even though the photographer, who started his career as an apprentice to Herb Ritts, publishes his work frequently in *Vogue*, *In Style* and *Esquire*, he confesses he had a few butterflies before shooting Crudup. "It's always nerve-racking to meet someone you respect because you hope they are nice to you," he says. The verdict? "Billy was awesome."



RICHARD BAIMBRIDGE

When not working as a travel and culture writer for publications such as *Condé Nast Traveler* and *China Airlines Magazine*, Baimbridge runs a school for martial arts and yoga in a China river town called Yang Shuo. Returning to his former home of Beijing to cover the opening night of *Casablanca* (*Off the Beaten Track*, page 55) at Tiananmen Square's Great Hall of the People was surreal. "Chinese theater traditions are very different from ours," he says. "It's totally acceptable to chat or shout things during a Peking Opera performance. All around me, people were talking on their cell phones and commenting on the show."