

MUSINGS OF A DISTRACTIBLE MIND BY HOPE H. OZER

Are you as overwhelmed as I am with the noise of the news bombarding us daily? I assure you that there is *some* good news in the world! It's about those who go above and beyond for the sheer joy of contributing to the community. They make our world a better place. They do not expect or seek recognition. They are rarely if ever honored.

In the world of theatre, actors receive recognition with curtain calls, applause, hoots and hollers. The orchestra, however, is acknowledged merely by a motion from the cast in the direction of the orchestra pit. Musicians are rarely seen or acknowledged beyond that. Not so at Valley Youth Theatre!

At its recent "VYTal Affair" gala, in addition to presenting the 2016 VYTality Awards (*Valley Youth Theatre Applauds Leadership Impacting Today's Youth*) to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona (organization) and Kari Yatkowski (individual) for their devotion in making a difference in the lives of children for many years – three orchestra members were visibly stunned to be called into the bright lights of the stage to accept awards for their long time devotion to VYT. Although VYT's orchestra is comprised predominantly of young people, these three adults have been dedicated volunteers since the turn of the century – each having played in more than 20 productions! Resident Musical Director Mark Fearey clearly took enormous pleasure in presenting engraved crystal "Star Awards" to musicians Cassi Bussma, Suzanne Johnsen and Jesse Winters.

Not only musically gifted, but one who thinks fast on his feet, Jesse later told me, "When I was seated in seat 1 row 1, I figured I'd better be ready to give a speech. So, I started taking notes on my phone until the lights went down. I only had enough time to jot down a few key phrases, and I had to 'wing it' for most of the speech." Fortunately, his daughter Jesse Marie recorded her dad on her iPhone – thus we have a transcript! Gotta love technology! It is truly my pleasure to share his thoughts with you. Sorta says it all:

"Well, I had to quickly come up with a speech so I had to consult with Ivanka's speech writer:

"Four score and 7 years ago I played my first VYT show, West Side Story. Little did I know it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

"We have nothing to fear except fear itself, but we always have Hope...Ozer. Hope, thank you for all the years you've made it happen at Valley Youth Theatre. We surely

could not have done it without you.

"Yay, though I walk through the valley of youth, I shall fear no Cooper. Truly, Bobb and Karol Cooper have put on some of the most amazing shows that I have ever been privileged to be a part of and we are all lucky that we have Valley Youth Theatre here in Phoenix, Arizona.

"Last, I must say I am very grateful to be considered a friend of Mark Fearey, who is a consummate pianist and the best musician I have ever met. I have been very lucky to have played under his direction, and I am very grateful to have been a part of all these shows.

"Thank you very much, Mark, Bobb, and all the sponsors who make this happen, and to all the great kids who have enriched my life."



Valley Youth Theatre Resident Musical Director Mark Fearey praises Star Award recipients Suzanne Johnsen, Cassi Bussma and Jesse Winters.

Jesse later wrote to me, his sense of humor previously unknown to me, "It's been an honor and a pleasure to be associated with an organization that has done so much for so many young people. I cherish the memories of every song and every player. I have learned one thing: There are no small parts, just a small orchestra pit, and an even smaller percussionist."

There's something else I didn't know about Jesse. The signature on his email reads: Jesse Winters, Enchanted Garden Landscape, www.enchantedgardenAZ.com.

If one day you see a note on the wall of a restroom that reads, "For a magical landscape that will be music to your eyes, call Jesse!" it will most likely have been written by me!

P.S. The VYTal Affair netted over \$180,000 to support the non-profit theatre and its extraordinary offerings for the coming season. *Charlotte's Web* opens October 7. Visit www.vyt.com for tickets. I'll see you at the theatre!

Hope H. Ozer is founder and Publisher Emeritus of CITYSunTimes and Chair Emeritus of Valley Youth Theatre.

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