

BACKSTAGE

Discover How Community Service and Volunteering Make the Holidays Brighter

By Amelia David

November 21 – 27, 2003

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL: Service with A Smile

Each year, as we present to you both established and grassroots organizations, we try to spotlight at least one up-and-coming theatre group benefiting children, where volunteering and performance go hand in hand during the holidays and throughout the year. Whether you volunteer there or use the group as a model for your own theatre-oriented community outreach, you'll soon see why "Good Morning America" and NY-1 News, along with performers like James Earl Jones, Wynton Marsalis, and Michael Douglas, are excited about the Children's Theatre Company.



Inspired by the concept of "artists-in-service," CTC Artistic Director Mehr Mansuri observes, "CTC has redefined for me the purpose of the arts. I was indeed

starving as an actor, but not physically starving, rather, spiritually starving." CTC choreographer and NYC Rockette Karida Griffith adds, "To work, whether paid or as a volunteer, with a spirit of service to community, gives purpose and meaning to life."

Rooted in the belief that early experiences with the arts have a profound effect on children's development, the CTC nurtures children's participation in their life through the performing and visual arts, combined with community-service-oriented volunteering. Utilizing a model called "Assets-Based Community Development" (ABCD), CTC sees artists and families, not agencies or institutions, as the primary builders of community. The group also views its audience as playing a vital role in helping to raise these young performers, because ticket donations help to fund classes and performances that raise children's awareness of how they can give back to the community.

In four years of service and performance, this celebration of volunteerism has performed with statesmen, speakers, and storytellers as diverse and venerable as Nelson Mandela, Harry Belafonte, and the cast of "Sesame Street." You may recently have seen CTC performers (ages 4-17) in NYC participating in their Cans Instead of Candy food

drive during Halloween (benefiting City Harvest). CTC's holiday calendar is inspired by the United Nations' theme calendar (it features Human Rights Day, World Habitat Day, Race Unity Day, Women's Rights Day, etc.). The children participate in a multidisciplinary program of drama, dance, music, and art, culminating in a performance showcase and full art gallery exhibition. The oldest (ages 15 to 17) also participate in the CTC teen internship program, offering two hours of community service and helping in stage management, production design, and production assistant duties, all under the supervision of professional artists.

Now in its fourth year, the company's Winter Showcase, opening Jan. 17, will include a live orchestra and highlight the best of CTC. "Three by Dr. Seuss," a collection of one-act musicals based on stories by the famed author, offers "The Lorax" and "Yertle the Turtle," both with original music by Lory Lazarus (composer for PBS' "Barney"), and "The Sneetches." Theatre space for this production and for CTC is donated by the Baha'I Unity Center in NYC.



The Children's Theatre Company welcomes inquiries from artists, children, families, and audiences who wish to be of service within this framework of artistic collaboration, expression, and service. Volunteer positions are available in every area of production and administration. For more information about the Children's Theatre Company, please visit its website at www.childrenstheatrecompany.org, or call its administrative office at 1-212-633-6629.

If your favorite organization isn't on our list, its volunteer shifts might have already been full, or it might not have gotten information back to us by press time. Remember, groups are hard at work in the field, so it may take them a while to return your calls and emails; you may need to try again. If you don't see programs here that are a perfect fit for you, many volunteer coordinators are open to fashioning jobs to fit a volunteer's interests. As always, BackStage wishes you all the warmth of this holiday season and a great New Year!



Children's Theatre Company cast helping to refurbish the gardens at the he Brooks Memorial Home in Harlem.