

# NYer of the Week

## TOP STORY

### Mehr Mansuri and Roya Movafegh, Getting Kids to Act Out



May 24, 2000

Mehr Mansuri says "Alright, everyone say one of their lines from the show, any one line."

Her actors aren't professionals-- they're kids. And it's almost showtime for the members of the Children's Theater Company, created by Mehr Mansuri and Roya Movafegh.

Mehr says "It was a survival mechanism a few years ago in L.A., sitting around, not starving as an actor, but finding that my soul was starving."

Mehr and Roya started auditions for children 4 to 13-years old last August at a school in the Bronx where Mehr worked as a language arts teacher.

One of the actors musters up his line: "I'm Yertle the Turtle, I'm marvelous me, I'm the ruler of all I see."



But their vision goes beyond performing Dr. Seuss's "Yertle the Turtle." So they include quotes

throughout the show from famous people. Another child recites "'You'll be disappointed if you fail, but you'll be doomed if you do not try,'" quoting Beverly Sills. The lines also include letters to God written by the children.

One child says "At school we don't always have the same money, but we all get along, why can't the world be like that. God send me an answer soon."

And of course as young performers, there's a lot of singing and dancing.

Mehr and Roya have paid for everything from costumes to sets. They are now applying for grants so the show can go on.



Roya says "If we really realized what we were getting into and how much it was going to cost, and how we were going to get it, I don't know if we would've done it, but we went in there 'cause we love these kids."

Their contributions have inspired others to do the same: like the Baha'i Cultural Center in Lower Manhattan, which donates the performance space, to parents and teachers who volunteer their skills.

Kamal Sinclair is the dance instructor. Kamal says "I find myself here all day long, and so involved. They've really re-taught me the purpose of the arts."

They rehearse for nine Saturdays, with two performances for parents and the public. Kids come from all over the city, but mostly from the Bronx. The message is clear.

As one child says "Perform for other people to make sure they know what's going on in the world from, like, our point of view--."

So for showing children the magic of theater, **Mehr and Roya are our New Yorkers of the Week.**

