



PLAYHOUSE WEST QUARTERLY

Volume 1, Issue 2

June, 2006

"Welcome Home, Soldier" Has Its 15th Anniversary

On Saturday, June 3rd, the award-winning production, "Welcome Home, Soldier" celebrated its 15th Anniversary, continuing its reign as the longest running play in Los Angeles. The play opened the first Saturday of June, 1991, and has given hundreds of PW students the opportunity to practice their craft onstage, including Ashley Judd, James Franco and instructor, Mark Pellegrino, one of the original cast members and a member of the play for years.

Created, directed and co-written (with Robert Carnegie) by Artistic Director, Tony Savant, the play has become an anthem of healing for veterans. Saturday night's show was performed in front of a sold out house, as most shows have been over the years, and former cast members and audience traveled from as far as Seattle and Texas to be in attendance.

"These actors are my heroes," said Vietnam Vet, John Pagel, a regular attendee. "They are not just saying lines. They do their parts from their hearts. It's real for them, as if they've become their parts."

"It's a great thing," said Veteran Glen King. "This play completely changed my life."

For reservations and the schedule of future shows, go to www.nlavhousewest.net.

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Tickets On Sale For The 10th Annual Playhouse West Film Festival

Tickets for the 10th Annual Playhouse West Film Festival, held July 14, 15 and 16, will go on sale Saturday, June 10th. Full Festival Passes, which admits you to all events are \$70. Single event tickets (\$10-\$20) will go on sale June 24th. Tickets may be purchased by credit card on our website (www.pwff.net), or through Festival Director, Tony Savant (cash only).

The three day festival, which begins on a Friday evening and runs from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, will for the second year in a row, be held at the beautiful and historic El Portal Theater on Lankershim Boulevard, right in the heart of the NoHo Arts District.

The Film Festival Committee has selected 20 shorts and 3 features from the 57 films submitted to this year's festival. Though the total number of submissions is half of last year's record of 109, the ratio of quality films was greater than ever before,

so this year's festival should prove to be one of the most educational and inspirational do date. Selections will be posted on the website by June 7th, and the full schedule of events should be posted by June 15th.

The Festival will get kicked off Friday night with the feature film, *The Sisters*, starring Maria Bello, Mary Stuart Masterson and Erika Christianson. Director Arthur Allan Seidleman, a student of Sandy Meisner's, and Producer Matthew Rhodes, President of Persistent Entertainment and a former PW member, will be on hand for a Q&A following the film. Matt is considered to be one of the top independent producers in Hollywood and is on the Daily Variety list of the top 50 people to know in Hollywood.

Are featured speaker this year will be director Joel Schumacher, who just recently wrapped shooting on *The Number 23*, a thriller starring Jim Carrey, and co-starring PW staff member

Mark Pellegrino (see article below). He should prove to be a dynamic and insightful guest and we are very excited to have him.

We will also be presenting the world premiere of *Good Time Max*, a feature film written, directed and starring PW member James Franco, along with a cast almost exclusively comprised of fellow PW members.

The Film Festival is the biggest event and primary fundraiser of the year for our school, and proceeds benefit the theater company, as well as to maintain and upgrade the equipment at our studios. Last year we used the proceeds to turn Studio Two into a screening room. It is also the most inspirational event of the year, and we hope that all PW members will not only join us at the Festival, but will spread the word to industry friends and family alike.

You may keep up-to-date on the Festival by going to www.pwff.net.

PW Instructor Mark Pellegrino On Working on the Mystery-Thriller, *The Number 23*, With Jim Carrey and Director Joel Schumacher

Our staff member, Mark Pellegrino, has appeared in over 43 films and 27 television shows. He recently wrapped shooting *The Number 23*, directed by Joel Schumacher and starring Jim Carrey. Fellow staff member, Sean Barnes, caught up with him at a local diner to get the scoop.

SB: Tell me about the film and your role in it.

MP: A man (Carrey) becomes obsessed with a book that appears to be based on his life but ends with a murder that has yet

to happen in real life. I'm a professor of psychology and the author of the book, titled "The Number 23". I can't say much more about my part without revealing too much as I'm part of one of the twists in the story.

SB: Tell me about Joel Schumacher's directing.

MP: I got the sense that he loves actors, and just wants you to be comfortable. He clears the set completely, gives you as much rehearsal time as you need. He doesn't want you thinking of anything technical. He moves the



cameras and the technology around your natural movements and your sense of the scene.

SB: Wow. In your experience is

he more the exception or the rule?

MP: Exception. The majority of directors out there are technicians, especially in T.V., due to the hectic schedule, and the actor to a degree, becomes a bit of a dancing bear to them.

SB: How do you work with that?

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Pellegrino *continued from page 1*

MP: With experience I learned to either do what a director asks me to fully, or politely sit down and say, "Here's what I think." You end up being more satisfied with your work when you do that. Some directors I never questioned, I just did what they said. David Lynch said, "I just want you to stand there and exude happiness." So I translated that into something I could do and did it.

SB: Let's talk about Jim Carrey.
MP: He is very sensitive. He comes to work and you can see a great focus in him, and enthusiasm for what he is about to do. He's improvisational and plays with it. He definitely changed it up. But he's been around the block enough, to know what he wants. He is very driven to get to what-

ever he is trying to get to in a scene. It kind of worked out for both of us because we are both perfectionists in a way. So we kept asking for take after take. Joel had to reassure both of us that what we were doing was reading very well and working well. That was kind of reassuring to know that someone who makes 20 or 30 million a movie deals with the same insecurities, is fallible and can be unsure about what's happening. Even if you're older and wiser, you can still tend to idealize a person and think they can do anything. Not that you are reassured at their lack of anything, but at their humanity.

SB: Advice from the trenches for the students?

MP: What I've loved in certain actors like Jeff Bridges, Naomi Watts, and Philip Hoffman is something I'd like to transmit to the students; it's a childlike willfulness to do and play. You develop a technique to the point it becomes a part of you, but you must never cling to a technique. In the end you just let go and do. I don't care how good a technician you are, if you can't play, you're done.

SB: And?

MP: The one thing you can say

in general terms is, go for the truth in whatever you do. Stand by your integrity in what you know to be right as best you can. Acting is always on a case-by-case basis, with the only thing governing you is trying to get to the truth.

SB: And?

MP: A faculty of self-esteem is important. Whether you believe it or not, you matter. What you do and say matters. So treat yourself like you do. And I don't mean in a narcissistic way, or like a self-absorbed person, or at the expense of others. But the overwhelming majority of actors end up being cannon fodder because they go into an audition, and their primary interest isn't just getting the scene, but getting out of there quickly and quietly and not disturbing people.

"You must never cling to a technique. I don't care how good a technician you are, if you can't play, you're done."

Treating yourself like you matter lends a weight and significance to what you do and say.

Go into an audition or even a scene, knowing as unashamedly as possible that this is your time. And everyone there is your advocate. They want to be done with their workday. They want you to be it. People will treat you like you're invisible if that's the way you treat yourself. Life is your advocate if you are your own advocate. And it carries with it a certain dignity.

SB: Nice.

Mark co-starred in last year's in the Academy Award-winning film, Capote, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman (Best Actor Oscar). Most recently he could be seen in episodes of "The Unit", "Without A Trace" and "C.S.I."

The Number 23 is scheduled to be released in February 2007

Graham Elwood

An Excerpt of an Interview with the Actor / Comedian / Filmmaker On His 2nd Visit Entertaining Troops In Afghanistan

PB: Let's get started. I told a filmmaker friend that I was going to interview you after you got back from doing stand up for the troops in Afghanistan, and he said "MAN! That's a great idea for a documentary!" Did you know going into Afghanistan the first time that you'd be doing a documentary?

GE: The first time was really about going over there to do the shows, and my writing partner (Tim Bennet) said to bring a camera and shoot to see what would come out of the experience. I agreed to it, and figured I'd try to make a documentary out of it. The first time I just started shooting everything, and in the middle of being over there I got kind of freaked out, and thought there was no way we'd be able to make anything out of it. I didn't know if it would work out, but I wanted to try.

PB: What motivated you to go to Afghanistan this second time around? I know the first time was sort of like "I've heard about it, this is interesting, I'll try it out." Why did you want to go back?

GE: Since I've been back this year and a half all the soldiers I've spoken to, and Vets from any war, have told me how much they appreciated performers performing for the troops. A student at Playhouse West, fairly young, came up to me after the film festival last year and said he was stationed in Afghanistan. He told me Joan Jet came to visit while he was there, and I thought...this continued on page 3

WANT PRIVATE COACHING FOR AUDITIONS?

For many years now our teaching staff has been helping to coach actors privately for auditions, as well as for film and television roles. This service has been handled on an individual and private basis, though many students at the school have been unaware that our teaching staff makes themselves available for such help. However, we felt it was time to advertise this service to all the students at the school.

Even though we believe the work being taught and learned in the classroom prepares our students and provides them with an excellent approach to working on roles and auditions, some people may still prefer outside guidance or help. Our teaching staff is comprised of the most professional and well-trained people with a great deal of experience. Below are the teachers who wish to make themselves available for such a service and how to contact them. Rates and payment will be worked out individually.

Holly Gagnier: 818-505-8905

Andrea Martin: 310-720-7187
andreaelene3@yahoo.com

Susan Han: 323-687-1116

Kathleen Lambert: 310-383-1811

Tracy Aziz: 818-903-7992

Michael Bender: 310-447-8521
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Jennifer Lambertus:
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Eric Edwards: 818-486-0429
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Sean Barnes: 818-416-7993
smabarnes@yahoo.com

Chris Liebe: 818-469-8222

Industry News

PLAYHOUSE WEST STUDENTS AT WORK

Ashley Judd starred in *Bug* with Harry Connick, Jr. which was just shown at the Cannes Film Festival in May. She also starred in *Come Early Morning* with Diane Ladd which was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. Playhouse co-founder **Jeff Goldblum** is working on the television show *Raines* where he will play the title character. Instructor

Chris Leibe and writing partner **Michael Zussman** just wrote and shot the first episode of *Frat Boys*, a series for Podcast, starring many Playhouse students. **Shawnee Smith** is currently filming *Saw 3*. **James Franco** is currently filming *Spiderman 3* and also *The Dead Girl* with Toni Collette and Marcia Gay Harden.

Scott Caan is currently filming *Ocean's 13*. **Jamie Brown** was in *Steel City* which was nominated for a Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. Her soon-to-be husband and classmate, **Marshall Allman** is a regular on Fox's *Prison Break* with **Wentworth Miller**, another past Playhouse student. **Josh Cooke** has another TV series lined up for next season, *A Day in the Life*. **Ian Nelson** can be seen in upcoming Haylie Duff movie, *Legacy*.

Graham Elwood in Afghanistan
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kid wouldn't even know who she was...let alone buy a CD, and now he's a fan. H.T. Link (The Director of Communications for the American Red Cross) said when he was in Vietnam, he was at a small fire base (19 or 20 year old)...and Martha Ray came to visit. He said she didn't even do a show...she just helicoptered in to this small little base, brought a bunch of vodka with her and sat around drinking with the guys and telling stories. He remembers this 30 plus years later. I've never found more appreciative audiences anywhere.

PB: Did you film this time around to get more footage for "Laffghanistan?"

GE: I did. I didn't shoot as much...um...but I did shoot more specifically. I interviewed a number of Soldiers. There's a section in the documentary where we re-cap all the people that I've met, and you hear them talk about what personal things they really miss back home. I got a lot of interesting answers.

PB: How long have you been at Playhouse West?

GE: Ten years.

PB: Do you feel that it's important to give your time in doing good works?

GE: You mean volunteering? YES! I've been Red Cross Disaster Volunteer for the last four and a half years. I'm also an instructor with the Red Cross, and am part of their speaker's bureau. That's a big part of my time. I also belong to a half dozen...hippie environmental organizations...(sarcasm) tree people...

PB: Do you think that being involved, and being aware of what's happening politically, has helped to make you a stronger, deeper actor?

GE: Yes...because it's so easy to get caught in the bubble of Hollywood, where the only people you talk to, or hang out with are involved in this industry. I think you have to comment on society, and on life, and you can't comment on it if you aren't living it. I've seen things and met people I NEVER would have met had I not been a Red Cross Volunteer. I've helped build shelters, I've been near the fire lines on brush fires, I've talked with people whose houses have burned to the ground and tried to help them get back on their feet...and I NEVER would

have met those people had I not been a volunteer. The majority of the volunteers are people I never would have met, had I stayed just being an actor and comedian in Hollywood. Going to Afghanistan? I NEVER would have met those people. The military are from all walks of life. And I met people from Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and Romania, and England, and civilians, and soldiers working in all these different areas, and I NEVER would have met them had I not volunteered my time. It has totally deepened what I'm able to bring to my work on stage. It puts things in perspective too. Acting isn't the only thing out there. It's so easy to become self absorbed, and focused on finding a job and an agent...blah, blah, blah...

PB: Do you think that being at Playhouse has also helped you zone in on deeper things, or the more important things in your work?

GE: You mean as opposed to the training I had before Playhouse? Oh, absolutely. PHW is a place where I've learned, and grown, and been allowed to really explore. I don't think I'd have been able to do a work like *Brothers* (a one-act play co-written with Mike Barber and produced at PW) unless I was at this school. The freedom that Mike and I were given to work on that in class, and then to write it and put it up? I mean...that one-act started out of improvisations in Sean's (Barnes) class, and I don't know of another place where that would have been possible. I certainly don't feel that I could have done deep work like that on my own.

PB: Going back...what are the plays that you've taken part in? I've heard about *Light Sensitive*, was in *Cash Flow* with you, and watched you develop *Brothers*. Have there been any others?

GE: I did *Speed the Plow* which wasn't at PHW, but it was done with all PHW Students (and directed by PW Artistic Director, Tony Savant). But the first dramatic play I ever did was *Light Sensitive*, and that was at Playhouse.

PB: When you started out, you were in college?

GE: I was a film major, and took some theatre classes...took part in a sketch comedy group and started doing stand up.

PB: Back in the day when you

were in college, did you anticipate involving yourself in everything you have? Did you know what direction you'd need to go to become a better performer? Did you know what you wanted to be?

GE: When I was 18? I don't know...I was probably pretty stupid when I was 18. Early on I just wanted to be a comedian, and do movies. That was about it...The volunteering didn't come until much later when I stopped being a selfish kid. I just realized that I needed to give back.

PB: Is that what led you to being a Game Show Host? You knew that was part of your destiny?

GE: (laughter) NO! NEVER occurred to me. I love all those old Game Show Hosts with their skinny microphones, and their perfect teeth and hair though...um...but the Game Show thing for me just sort of fell in my lap. I had heard that the producers of a pilot called "Strip Poker" were looking for comedians...and I wasn't in the Union...so I thought...why not? I'd been busting my rear in comedy clubs, and my name came up during their search. I'll never forget the audition day either. I had three that day, and it was the last one of the day. I kept thinking this was some stupid Game Show, and went in as a complete wise ass...making fun of the producers...

PB: So you were true to yourself?

GE: YEAH! (laughter) And they called me back!

PB: Did your opinions about politics, the troops, or the war change after having gone through this? Have your feelings been impacted?

GE: I wouldn't say my opinions have changed, but they've certainly been impacted. My opinions have sharpened, and become clearer. As a kid growing up in the 70's in post-Vietnam America I'd always felt that taking it out on the troops was wrong. How the troops were treated was just wrong. I remember being so angry about that as a kid. If you don't like McDonald's corporate policy for example...you don't take it out on the kid working there who

makes five dollars an hour. I've ALWAYS felt that anyone who signs up to serve this country deserves respect, and that was really reinforced for me after going over there. Politically, I think going there was necessary. After 9-11 the Taliban had a lot of power, Afghanistan was giving them safe haven, and it was important for the US to invade. I don't like war, and want to live in a world where war isn't necessary, but I'm not naive. There are evil people in the world, and you've got to deal with them. I don't like how we got into Iraq, not a fan of Bush, I still don't think there's an exit strategy, but I'm glad Saddam Hussein is out of power. I want in 20 or 30 years to be able to go and visit these places because they're free functioning Democracies. Being there, and seeing what positive things are happening, has actually reassured me.

PB: What were the things you didn't get on film that you wished you had?

GE: Wow...um...the first night in Afghanistan...after I'd done my first show...I went to the MWR tent (moral, welfare, and recreation) that they have on every base; some have pool tables, or dvd's, they play poker. I decided to leave my camera behind and just hang out with the guys telling stories. We were illuminated by just this red light bulb. Everyone was just b.s.'ing, and telling stories, and it was pretty amazing. There were a lot of those types of stories that I'd like to have for the documentary, but I guess...out of respect I didn't shoot them. They told me a lot of personal stories about things they'd seen. When you're going there as an entertainer you're more than that to them... you're a friend, you're a therapist, you're a witness and a journalist. It's much more than just putting on a show.

PB: Where do you think your documentary is taking you now?

GE: Doing it has pointed out several things to me. First of all, in terms of putting a perspective on things, I know I really want to make movies. I've always wanted to, and that desire has only gotten stronger. Ultimately I want to make films, do good

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work, and work with people I respect. If it's in film, television, or a play...I want to do work I'm proud of. If I have to keep hustling to raise money for the next thing...that's what I'll do.

PB: Would you go back?

GE: Yeah.

PB: Are you going back?

GE: I don't have anything planned, but I will. If I'm offered the trip, I will go. This time was more...well...we saw crazier things than the first time...but I'd still go back.

PB: That's about it for my questions...

GE: Is that it?

PB: That's it for me today.

GE: Well I'll tell you this...one last thing. What became the most clear, after having done this, is that I'm a liberal...but I definitely love this Country. And now I'm not afraid to say that.

-Paisley Baker

Writer Dave Garrett Says, "Be Personal"

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 60 percent of Americans are overweight, and of these, more than 30 percent are obese. Fortunately, the experts say, there is a simple cure for this epidemic--thirty minutes of exercises three times a week. That's only 90 minutes. Fewer than thirteen minutes a day.... Thirteen minutes? That's easy then. Problem solved! America's fit! Right? Right.

But wait, America isn't fit. It's getting fatter. So the question is: If getting fit is so easy, then why aren't people doing it? The answer is very simple. Because, it's a lot easier to do NOTHING than it is to SOMETHING, even a *little* something. And the reason usually given is, "I don't feel like it."

An artist isn't allowed to say, "I don't feel like it." The reason being: we as artists often do our best work when we feel the worst. It is at these times that we are most in touch with our innermost hopes, fears, desires and insecurities. It is at these times when our deepest creative energies are most accessible. We just have to force ourselves to tap them...But,

how? A friend's situation comes to mind...

When he was 19-year-old, this friend was working on a horse farm in Iceland. He had been clearing out a barn and got a skin infection on his face. He woke up in the middle of the night scratching his cheek, thinking he had a mosquito bite. He looked down at his hand and saw chunks of skin. The next morning he attempted to shave and literally, shaved half his face off. Panicked, my friend went to a doctor, who, judging by the horrified and puzzled look on her face, had never seen anything like it. It was diagnosed as a form of the flesh-eating virus.

So, while lying on a hospital gurney getting pumped up with antibiotics and wondering whether he was going to have a face when all this was done, my friend had a terrible thought. What if he hadn't been able to get to a hospital? What would he have done? He asked for a pad and pen and, still attached to the IV, started writing a screenplay about a group of college kids with exactly that same problem.

That guy was Eli Roth, and that screenplay became known as *Cabin Fever*. Not only did Eli's face eventually clear up, but *Cabin Fever* become a huge hit in 2002, allowing Eli to write and direct *Hostel*, an even bigger hit, with Quentin Tarantino producing.

If anyone had an excuse to do nothing, it was Eli. His face was falling off for crying out loud! But he didn't make excuses. He used his pain and adversity to fuel his creativity. The most successful artists do this. Samuel L. Jackson's break-through performance came straight out of rehab in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*. Sting wrote his biggest hit, "Every Breath You Take", during a terrible break-up.

When you're boyfriend/girlfriend breaks up with you, or you get fired from your job, or you've been told your career is over because you're most recent movie bombed horribly after receiving awful reviews and five Razzie nominations, rather than putting all that self-pity to waste, sit down and write a screenplay about it. The worst that can happen is that writing will force you to stop focusing on how miserable you are and make you feel like you're at least accomplishing something in the meantime. The best that can happen is that you will come up with a really

heartfelt, emotional story that everyone can identify with.

I've noticed that my best work has come during some emotionally wrenching episode. A couple of years ago, I was on the receiving end of the terrible break-up of an even worse relationship. So terrible that I often found myself watching *What's Love Got to Do With It* and thinking, "If only my relationship could be that good." Amid my wallowing, I got a sick idea: could you do *What's Love Got to Do With It* as a comedy? With, say Jack Black and Reese Witherspoon? Set it in the 70's, but reverse it. Make Jack Black the one who gets taken off the street, transformed into a star and then beaten up by a power-hungry Reese Witherspoon, his beautiful but sadistic Svengali. It would be "Sonny & Cher" meets *War of the Roses*. Of course, I could just incorporate all of the fights I had with my ex into the script. Not only would it be therapeutic, it also made writing dialogue so much easier! Brilliant, I thought! I'll steal her evil words and make money off it! So, my partner and I pitched the idea to Jack Black, who loved it, and we ended up having several studios bidding on it. Boy, did I feel better!

"Well, Dave, we can't all just call up Jack Black and pitch him our idea." And there was a time when I couldn't call up anybody famous to pitch an idea, but I wrote anyway, and out of that came *Sundays Game*, which led to the next step up the ladder, and so on. This is important: You can commit your idea to paper--even if it's bad. I always say, "An executed bad idea is better than an unexecuted good one." My whole career is the living embodiment of that. Just get something on paper, and you never know who out there will make it, or even better, buy it.

Okay, Dave, I broke my leg, my girl dumped me, I defaulted on my student loans, my best friend crashed my car and my apartment burned down. I think I'm feeling crappy enough. Now what? Just begin the process no matter how daunting it may seem. Don't worry about writing a whole screenplay; just think of writing one scene at a time, one line at a time, even one word at a time if that helps. (Remember, even if you just wrote one page a day, you

would have 3-4 screenplays in a year.) And don't get discouraged. I believe it was me who was told by one of the top directors in town: "There's not one useable line in this script past 'Fade In'". If I could keep writing after that, anybody can. I still keep plugging away. And so should you!

About the author:

David Garrett (with writing partner Jason Ward) has sold feature film pitches to DreamWorks, Disney, Paramount, Sony, Universal and Revolution Studios. With Ward, he recently completed the feature screenplay Foreign Exchange for MTV Films. In 2004, he co-wrote Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo, starring Rob Schneider. In 2005, David sold the 1970's musical comedy Do That To Me One More Time to Touchstone Pictures, with Jack Black attached to star and produce. In addition, Garrett has authored screenplays for directors Ivan Reitman, Tom Shadyac and Peter Segal.

David has written and produced pilots/series/specials for ABC, NBC, CBS, WB, UPN, HBO, Showtime and Fox. In 2000, he produced the award-winning short Sunday's Game which earned him and Ward a two-pilot deal at Fox Television. In 2001, Garrett co-wrote and produced "The Kronenberg Chronicles" for FX with director John Landis. In 2003, he co-wrote "The Hatfields & McCoys", a dramatic mini-series for the USA Network. He also co-created the sit-com "Living with Fran" with Fran Drescher, which ran for two years on the WB. Dave recently produced the short film, Model Family, starring Jamie Kennedy, recently acquired by 20th Century Fox, and completed The Dysfunctional, a pilot script for NBC. He also has a development deal with Paramount Television.

Dave and Partners, Gregg Rossen and Brian Sawyer will be giving an all day writing workshop on June 11th at Studio #2. Since the workshop sold out before many classes were able to be informed about it, they will do one more T.B.A. So keep an ear out for the announcement!

Dave is a long-time PW student who is currently still in class.