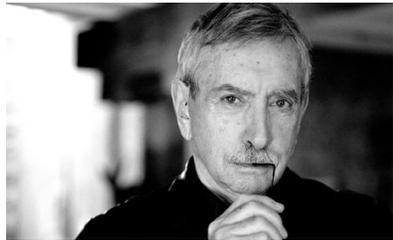


# Michael Hall Recalls Celebrities Who Visited Caldwell between 1975 and 2009

George Abbott presented me with the George Abbott Award in person on stage at the Parker Playhouse, dropping his cane as he did so, and allowing me to pick it up. When I directed *Lettice and Lovage*, he came to see it, went backstage and talked to the actors and was bright as a button at age 100+.



## Edward Albee

I met Mr. Albee three times, first while we rehearsed *Boys in the Band/The Normal Heart* in an empty Lori's Dress Shop in the downtown Boca Raton Mall. At the time he was a guest of the theater department at Florida Atlantic University. I invited him to join me for a conversation about life in the theater with my leading men Tony Newfield and Craig Wroe. He didn't converse much, but had a good time playing footsies under the table. The next I saw him was in the Miami airport waiting for the arrival of our Mizner Festival concert artist. He was the first person off the plane. I went up to him and said, "You're not Sarah Vaughan." He returned the volley. "And you're not Harold Prince," he said. Third time, I introduced Tom Disney and his then-wife Donna Kimball to Joe Allen's in New York. As we left the restaurant, I spotted Mr. Albee seated at a table. "Well hello!" I said. He remembered me and took time to chat. Outside, the astonished Tom and Donna said, simultaneously, "Is that - ???" And I casually replied, "Oh yes. It's who you think it is. A friend of mine."



## Bobbe Arnst

Bobbe (pronounced like the boy's name Bobby) retired from a 1920 -1940 Broadway career to an enchanting little house in Silver Springs near Ocala. A great friend of Frank Bennett's, she mentored me as I began my directing career with the Marion Players in Ocala, then played Abby in *Arsenic and Old Lace* for me, and gave me original photographs of her Broadway shows including *Rosalie*, *Simple Simon* and *I Married An Angel*. She accompanied Frank's wife Lorraine to our 1975 opening night of the Caldwell Playhouse. Among other fascinating facts, Bobbe was the first Mrs. Johnny (Tarzan) Weissmuller (photo at right) and introduced the Gershwin song "How Long Has This Been Going On" in *Rosalie* in 1928.



## Paul Harvey Aurdnt

The great William Morris agent Gilbert Parker sent me the script *Burton*, a play about actor Richard Burton. I loved it. Gilbert invited me to meet the director and actor attached to the project, Leon Major and Timothy Nolen. As we sat in the lobby of the Marriott Marquis I knew it was a good fit. After I said, "Let's do it," I asked if Mr. Aurdnt was related to the famous radio celebrity Paul Harvey. "His son," they said. The younger Paul Harvey attended many rehearsals and became one of my all-time favorite people. He loved the production and the Caldwell. When I'm in Chicago I make a point of visiting him and his delightful lady Dina Kinnan.



### **Mikhail Baryshnikov**

One of my actors in Love! Valour! Compassion! had worked with the great Baryshnikov in New York. When it was announced that Baryshnikov's group would play West Palm Beach while Caldwell produced LVC, my actor extended an invitation to "Misha" and the touring company members. A few minutes before curtain time, a "dark night" for the ballet troupe, in walked the great Russian celebrity with

several fellow dancers. They moved quickly in and out of the auditorium so audience members couldn't delay them for autographs and photos. I watched with fascination as one of the world's most famous people attended the Caldwell.



### **Ray Bolger**

At our theater at the College, a loyal patron invited me, Pat, my parents and Maxwell McKnight to meet a celebrity friend who was visiting her and her husband. The only movie that my dad ever insisted we see together was Where's Charley? with his favorite actor, Ray Bolger. Imagine Carl Hall's joy when he heard he was going to meet Ray Bolger in person! It was an enchanting party. Ray cavorted as only Charley's Aunt and the Scarecrow could. My dad just beamed.



### **Helen Gurley Brown**

The lady who became an international sensation with the book Sex and the Single Girl, and later put a photo of a naked Burt Reynolds in Cosmopolitan, called the box office to order tickets for our production of Jerry Herman's Showtune. Helen Gurley Brown and her husband David

Brown, the man who produced and/or co-produced the films The Sting, Jaws and Driving Miss Daisy, were visiting in the area. As they knew the composer and loved his music, they wanted to see our show. They were charming to me and Pat afterwards – and most complimentary of the production.



### **Ann Hampton Callaway and Liz Callaway**

The Callaway sisters entertained at one of our fund-raising parties at the Boca Raton Hotel. Our unsophisticated crowd didn't appreciate the sisters' unique approach to good music, but the Callaways performed valiantly and professionally. And they were good sports. Both sisters continue to enjoy remarkably successful careers.

### **Len Cariou**

Len picked up the telephone one day and called me at home. He happened to be in Texas. "Mike?" he said. "This is Len." Pause. "Cariou." Pause. "You know the play Papa, right?" I said yes, shaken. I was talking to Sweeney Todd, a man I only knew from the Broadway stage! "Can you say fuck in your theater?" he asked. "Yes," I said. "Can you say shit and motherfucker and all kinds of foul stuff?" Again I said yes. "You're sure?" I told him I had done several plays that shocked people, but audiences kept on coming.

"You know John deGroot, right?" Fort Lauderdale writer John deGroot wrote Papa about Ernest Hemingway and I had been on a panel in Tallahassee that awarded grants to promising playwrights. While there I met deGroot, a grant applicant. "I'll come and do a reading of Papa at your theater," Cariou



said. "If it goes well, will you produce it?" I thought to myself that I'd produce the telephone book if it starred Len Cariou, but I only said "Yes!" "Great," he said, "We'll be in touch." And Sweeney Todd hung up the phone.

Papa was an enormous success. Our production moved to the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami. Caldwell's version won Carbonell Awards as Best Play and Best Actor. Through another producer it moved to off-Broadway where it was watered-down and didn't last very long, but Papa cemented a relationship between Cariou, his wife Heather Summerhayes and Pat and me. Len returned a few seasons later to play James Joyce in the premier of the play-with-music, Himself! for which he won another Best Actor Carbonell Award. Len is currently appearing in the very popular television series Blue Bloods.

### **Vinnette Carroll**

Wonderful Vinnette was the first African-American woman to direct a play on Broadway, *Your Arms Are Too Short to Box with God*. When we were in the Boca Mall, she was struggling to keep the Vinnette Carroll Theatre alive in Fort Lauderdale. I knew Vinnette from statewide auditions and Florida Theatre Conference meetings, and we shared dozens of laughs at the expense of unprepared actors and dreadful audition material. Vinnette was an opening nighter at my first production of *Bent*. As the stunned audience left the theater, she threw her arms around me and said, "Honey, you've got balls!"



### **Carol Channing**

Dolly Levi came to see a play at Caldwell but unfortunately I wasn't at the theater. (I think the show was *Take Me Out*.) She came with Miami Herald theater writer Christine Dolen. Actors told me she went backstage and in her incomparable voice said, "My goodness! What a good show!"



### **Van Cliburn**



Paul Harvey Auerant and Van Cliburn studied piano at the same school and became best friends. When Caldwell produced Paul's play *Burton*, Paul invited Van to come from his home in Fort Worth to attend the opening night. I was standing in the lobby prior to the performance as a volunteer lady pianist hammered away on the Steinway that Frank gave to the theater. She wasn't very good but she was trying. In walked Van Cliburn. When she saw him she nearly fell off the piano stool. After I chatted with the great man, without my prodding, he went over to the poor woman and said, "Very nice!" It made her day. What a charming, polite and gifted celebrity!

### **Barbara Cook**



There were many great nights on Caldwell's four stages, but perhaps the most magical was the night Barbara Cook and accompanist Wally Harper gave a concert on stage at our Levitz Plaza location. It was part of a Mizner Festival celebration including star Beth Fowler in *Oh Coward!* I met Miss Cook and her son Adam Grant at the Sheraton Boca Raton when they arrived. I said, "Miss Cook, we have a mutual friend in Bee Crews." Her face lit up and she said,

“Bee Crews!! Where is he?” I told her he was teaching at Auburn University and that he introduced my entire Highlands Playhouse summer stock company to her now-legendary “Barbara Cook at Carnegie Hall” album. “He made us your biggest fans,” I said.

The next night, just before her concert, she summoned me backstage to her dressing room. I thought, “Oh-oh, here it comes. Problems!” I knocked on the door, she said, “Come in.” I waited for the ax to fall. She looked at me and said, “My hair won’t curl!” From that moment on, we were best friends. She and accompanist/arranger Wally Harper attended our party in the lobby after their brilliant, unforgettable concert. Wally is gone but, as of October 2012, Barbara Cook is still going strong, having just done another Carnegie Hall concert. At age 85.

### Carole Cook

Wife of actor Tom Troupe, Carole Cook visited Caldwell while Tom appeared in *The Subject Was Roses* for guest director Charles Nelson Reilly, and again when he was in *Over the River and Through the Woods* directed by Ken Kay. The glamorous redhead, fun, funny and fabulous, is a protégé of Lucille Ball and appeared with her in *The Lucy Show* and *Here’s Lucy*. On Broadway she appeared in the musical *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, starred in *Auntie Mame* and also *Mame* and was the first to replace Carol Channing in *Hello Dolly!* Her films include *Sixteen Candles*, *American Gigolo*, *Summer Lovers* and the cult classic *Can’t Stop the Music* with her friend Barbara Rush. She makes the best collage birthday cards! I have several!



### Jean Dalrymple



Jean Dalrymple, the woman who was instrumental in founding the New York City Center and who presented major revivals of important Broadway plays, was a friend of early Caldwell patron Evelyn Williams. Evelyn brought Jean Dalrymple to Boca as one of our first Footlight Party dinner guests. This charming woman, whose career as a producer, manager, author and playwright, took time to meet our student interns at the College of Boca Raton and give them advice about the future. She also took me to Palm

Beach to meet her friend Sheilah Graham, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s mistress who wrote the best-selling *Beloved Infidel*. Jean, Sheilah, Evelyn and I spent an entire (unsuccessful) afternoon trying to find Miss Graham a suitable new condo or apartment in Palm Beach or Boca. In New York, Jean Dalrymple took me to the old Russian Tea Room (her favorite) and introduced me to kasha varnishkes. Lovely lady! I have three of her books, *September Child*, *Pinafore Farm Cookbook*, and *From the Last Row*, all personally autographed.



### Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee



When Charles Nelson Reilly debuted his one-man *The Life of Reilly* on our stage, his friends Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee caught a performance. They could not have been more appreciative and accommodating. I was honored to meet them and join Charles as they “talked shop.”



### Phyllis Diller

For **Mardi Gras**, another fund-raiser at the Boca Raton Hotel & Club, we contracted Fang's wife Phyllis Diller to be our celebrity guest and entertainer. The lady with frightful hair was hilarious; in person, charming, delightful, and attractive. (No wonder actor Tom Troupe adored her.) Here I am in my full Indian headdress as Caldwell's "Chief" with the ground-breaking comedienne and the lady I call "Divine," Carol Hanson, former mayor of Boca Raton.



### Charles Durning

As he was appearing with Julie Harris in the Charles Nelson Reilly production of **The Gin Game** at the Royal Poinciana Playhouse in Palm Beach, Charles Durning was able to attend our Spotlight Award tribute to Julie Harris. Here he is on the Caldwell stage with Burt Reynolds, Roberta Peters, Miss Harris and Mr. Reilly. A great actor and a very nice man.



### Beth Fowler

I met the glorious Beth Fowler through Jim Morgan and Mary Jo Dondlinger when the York Theatre production of **Sweeney Todd** moved to Circle in the Square. "Invite her to do a show at Caldwell," said Jim. And I did – three times. The versatile lady played Judith Bliss in **Hay Fever**, Julie Cavendish, the actress-daughter in **The Royal Family**, and the leading lady in **Oh Coward!**

Fun, down-to-earth and wildly talented, Beth is one of my all-time favorite people. She knocked out Broadway theatergoers as Peter Allen's mother in **The Boy from Oz**, starring the incredible Hugh Jackman as the songwriter/performer. Beth Fowler, major celebrity.



### Betty Garrett

An agent who attended Caldwell asked me if I would host actress Betty Garrett for a book signing. I said yes and the star of Broadway's **Something for the Boys** and Hollywood's **Take Me Out to the Ballgame**, **Neptune's Daughter** and **My Sister Eileen** came to our theater, gave a delightful talk, and sang a song or two, including "In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening" which she performed originally with Red Skelton in **Neptune's Daughter**.



### Sharon Gless

The one half of **Cagney and Lacy** and the star of **Queer As Folk** came to see her friend Charles Nelson Reilly when he performed his one-man autobiographical show. She went backstage to say hello, of course, and was very complimentary about the theater and the production. Nice lady, loves live theater.



### Julie Harris

When the great American actress Julie Harris was ready to be seated in our theater to enjoy the Spotlight Award program that Charles had put together to honor her, she asked me to hold her hand. All I could think of was “You’re one of the greatest influences of my life! You and James Dean were in *East of Eden!* You did all those magnificent ‘live’ shows on early television! I saw you on Broadway in *Forty Carats* and *The Belle of Amherst* and *Lettice and Lovage!* Julie Harris just asked me to hold her hand!” Ever the trouper, she was performing *The Gin Game* in Palm Beach but didn’t flinch at spending her Monday night off at the Caldwell. And she remembered meeting me at Charles’ house in Hollywood when he brought me and my *Middle Ages* cast to the Westwood Playhouse. Julie Harris, American icon! She actually wrote me a Thank You note for honoring her.

### Paul and Angel Harvey



Prior to the opening of their son’s *Burton*, Paul and Angel Harvey flew to Florida from their home in Chicago and hosted an enormous (and expensive) press party for Caldwell at the Boca Raton Hotel & Club. They attended the first night with Paul and Dina, Van Cliburn (in the photo behind Dina), Leon Major (director) and other guests. Radio and television announcers were thrilled to meet the man with the famous voice. Paul Harvey and his wife were true celebrities, gracious and warm.

### Israel Horowitz

Most every time the playwright visited our area, he stopped in to pitch his latest script. He knew we had produced his *Chopin Playoffs* and *Park Your Car in Harvard Yard* – the latter with particular success – and he always hoped we’d do one or two more.



### Barry Humphries

The actor famous for becoming Dame Edna visited the Caldwell to see the Clive Cholerton-directed *Dangerous* and went backstage to meet the cast. I wasn’t at the theater that night, but actors said he was absolutely delightful.



### Judy Kaye

Although she was doing eight shows a week on Broadway (*Ragtime*), Judy flew to Ft. Lauderdale on a Sunday night to appear as a surprise guest at our Spotlight Award ceremony to honor her good friend Len Cariou. She arranged with me to hide in the upper section of the theater at Old School Square where we held the event. Mid-way through, she started hollering in Cockney, rushed up onto the stage, pounded a stool (which made dust fly into the air), and sang one of Mrs. Lovett’s songs from *Sweeney*

**Todd.** As she ran down the aisle, I heard Len say, “What the fuck?” Afterwards, she came to my house for a party for Len and Heather, along with Jerry and Elaine Orbach. Later, when Judy played a condo show in South Florida, she and husband David Green took Pat and me to lunch. Judy was brilliant as Florence Foster Jenkins in *Souvenir* where she had to sing off-key, and as the lady in *Mamma Mia!* who stops the show with “Take A Chance On Me.” She recently won a Tony for *Nice Work If You Can Get It*.

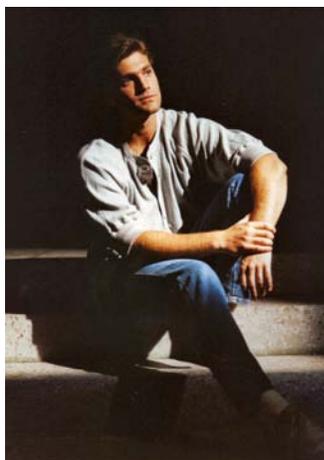


### Florence Klotz

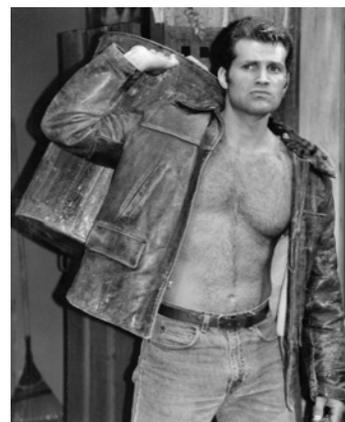
The famous costume designer was with Harold Prince’s party to see Len Cariou play Ernest Hemingway in *Papa* at Caldwell. She won six Tony Awards for her costumes for Hal Prince productions on Broadway, including *Follies*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *A Little Night Music*.

### Marc Kudisch

Marc, who is from Ft. Lauderdale, studied theater at Florida Atlantic University in Boca. He auditioned for me and I gave him his Equity



card to play the young student in A. R. Gurney’s *Another Antigone*. Determined to become a star, Marc went to New York, studied voice and soon landed major roles in Broadway musicals including *The Wild Party*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Bells Are Ringing* among others. He returned to Caldwell for a Theater For Schools production of *Picnic* where he played Hal Carter. His career has taken him all the way to the top.



### Greg Louganis

Greg trained at Mission Bay in Boca Raton when the Aquatic Center was active. After winning Olympic medals, he was back in Boca and accepted an invitation to attend our production of *The Heidi Chronicles*. He was looking toward an acting career. It didn’t hurt that he’s mentioned as “Greg Louganis, diver / dancer” in Wendy Wasserstein’s witty play. After the performance, he met and talked with the cast in the lobby. Nice guy. That night, however, very shy.

Taking him back to his hotel, I asked him what it was like to hit your head on a diving board in front of the entire world. “Pretty embarrassing,” he said.

### Joe Masteroff



Judy Weiner, a long-time Caldwell patron, is playwright Joe Masteroff’s niece. With her help, Joe agreed to come to Boca to see our production of *She Loves Me* and accept our Spotlight Award. With help from the cast, I put together a program honoring the man who wrote *The Warm Peninsula* and books for *Cabaret* and *She Loves Me*. Here he is with cast members backstage celebrating his birthday. Lots of famous show folk sent emails and letters of tribute and congratulations.

## Dina Merrill

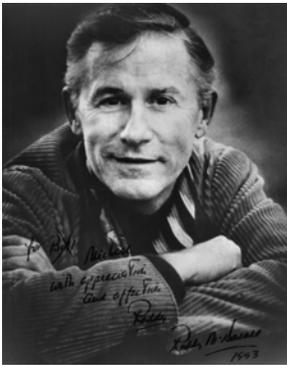


When I asked Dina if she would attend a Mizner Festival party as a special guest, she said yes, then added, “May I bring my husband?” As she was married to Cliff Robertson at the time, it was an opportunity to meet the actor again after Caldwell honored him at a similar affair several years earlier. Dina and Cliff arranged to meet the guests in the Boca Hotel where our dinner party took place. I was late – I was in a slow-moving antique car with a group of guests. When I

walked into the empty ballroom, there was this gorgeous couple sitting all by themselves. And they were charming. I love watching Dina in the film *The Player*.



## Roddy McDowall



John Patrick gave me Roddy’s telephone number in L.A. (Roddy appeared in Patrick’s play *Good As Gold* many years ago and the two stayed in touch.) Roddy accepted my invitation to receive our Spotlight Award and said it would be a nice opportunity to see Patrick again since the playwright had moved to Boca. On the night of the awards, I introduced Roddy – he agreed to show slides of his famous photographs of major celebrities. He took the podium. As I walked back to my seat he said, “Thank you, Bill.” I kept walking. Again he said, “Thank you, Bill.” I stopped, turned around, and

realized he thought my name was Bill. It became a standing joke. When I bought all four of his *Double Exposure* volumes, he autographed them (and the photo above) “To Bill.” When we produced *Burton*, I asked Roddy if we could display his photos of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. In his inimitable way he said, “Dear boy, I never engage in gossip.” And I respected his feelings. More than anyone in the world, he probably knew more about Liz and Dick (and most of Hollywood) than anyone in the business.



## Maureen McGovern



They don’t get any better than Maureen McGovern, not for talent, versatility, or just plain nice. When Maureen rehearsed at the big FAU Auditorium for one of our Mizner Festival events, her hand-held microphone stopped working. Instead of demanding another, she just said, “Give me one with a cord.” The night before she came to the theater to see Beth Fowler in *Hay Fever*.

Her concert was phenomenal, with lots of Gershwin. Of course she sang her “disaster movie” hits from *The Poseidon Adventure* and *Towering Inferno*. Great lady. Major talent.

## Julia Meade



I met Julia when she played the mother in *Butterflies Are Free* for me at the opening of the Edyth Bush Theatre in Orlando in 1973. We became fast friends. When someone complimented the color of her hair she said, "Want the recipe?" When we were invited to a Halloween party, she told the host, "I'll come as Julia Meade." A standing joke between us: She called the host "Princess Panzini." Julia was our special guest at the opening of the

Caldwell at the College of Boca Raton. She returned for a fund raiser when we raised money to move to the Boca Mall and appeared there with her daughter Caroline in *The Reluctant Debutante*. Julia became famous as the pitch-woman for *The Ed Sullivan Show*.



## Patrice Munsel



The smart, attractive lady who moved from opera to musical comedy came to the College to perform a backer's audition for a musical about Dorothy Parker. We used it as a social event for the Caldwell. Along with co-star Bob Wright, her evening of new songs by Paul Williams delighted our patrons. Patrice stayed at a nice hotel on the beach in Delray, visited with our *Hedda Gabler* cast, and joined Connie and Ernie Nelson and some of us from Caldwell on a boat party on the Intracoastal.

## Paige O'Hara



Paige Helmitoller from Ft. Lauderdale chose the surname O'Hara when she was still in high school. As the leading drama student at a local arts-oriented school, she captured the role of Maria in a production of *The Sound of Music* that I put together for a summer-long run at Theatre Helen in the little Alpine village of Helen, Georgia. Paige went on to become the voice of Beauty in Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast*, recorded several albums, married actor Michael Piontek (who had played at Caldwell before their meeting) and shares

billing with him in Las Vegas engagements. Talented lady!

## Jerry Orbach



The acclaimed Broadway actor and star of television's *Law and Order* came to Florida with his wife Elaine to attend and participate in our Spotlight Award tribute to his friend and buddy Len Cariou. At my party afterwards, I stood outside my house on the patio and looked into the big room we call "The Ballroom." There was Len Cariou, Jerry Orbach and Judy Kaye, three great talents, engaged in a lively conversation. Wow.

## John Patrick

In the late Sixties I directed a wildly popular production of John Patrick's farce-comedy *Everybody Loves Opal* for Ocala's Marion Players. When it was accepted as part of the annual, week-long Florida Theatre Conference theater festival in Daytona Beach, I found an address for the playwright in a Who's Who book and wrote a letter inviting him to be our special guest. He returned a telegram. It said WHY NOT? JOHN PATRICK. When I sent flight information booking him from Newark to Jacksonville, he wired WILL BE WEARING DARK GLASSES AND TRENCH COAT LIKE SPY. Thus began a decades-long, on-again, off-again friendship with the man who won a Pulitzer Prize for adapting *Teahouse of the August Moon* to the Broadway stage.

When he agreed to let me write his biography as my Master's thesis for the University of Florida, he also invited me to spend a month at his estate in Suffern, New York, where he installed me in his carriage house called Hasty Hill. (Photo at left is Patrick with one of his many German shepherds in a canoe on his man-made lake in Rockland County.) Later, I visited him in St. Thomas when he and his dashing partner Bill Myers bought a former sugar plantation in the Virgin Islands.



He visited Boca Raton for our production of *The Hasty Heart*, then moved to Boca a few years later. He spoke to our Theater For Schools students when we produced *The Curious Savage*, and hosted a fund-raising party at his Boca residence. (Here he is with me and my college buddy Joe Warik who directed *Heart* and appeared in *Savage*.)



Despite his success as a screenwriter (*Three Coins in the Fountain*, *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, *Some Came Running*, *Les Girls*) he never trusted his friends or acquaintances and often turned on them. He could be refreshingly funny and sweet, but moments later he could become bitter and off-putting. When Bill died, Patrick moved into assisted living in Delray Beach. Desolate, friendless and miserably unhappy, he put a plastic bag over his head and stopped breathing.



## Nehemiah Persoff

In our Boca Mall location, plastic surgeon Dr. Myron Persoff and his then-wife Lynn were steady patrons of the theater. Myron suggested we contact his uncle, Nehemiah Persoff, the actor who appeared in many films including *On the Waterfront* (he's the taxi driver) and *Yentl* (Streisand's father) to ask him to bring his one-man *Sholem Aleichem* to our theater. I called and he said yes! His performance was so popular he returned twice more for sold-out engagements. My dad Carl was spellbound by this great actor but couldn't pronounce the name of the show. Nicky (as he insisted we call him) said to my dad, "Just say 'Show Them, I Like Them' and you'll be close." Nicky is also a gifted watercolor artist. Pat and I each have some of his original works.



## Roberta Peters



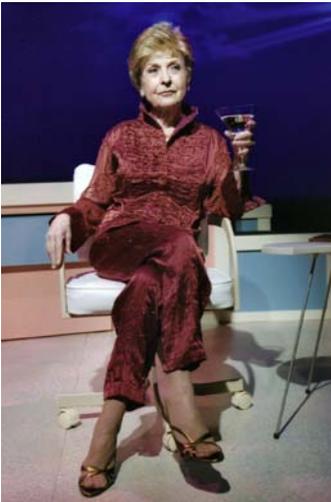
Retired and living in Boca, the opera star and her husband Bertram Fields attended the Caldwell on several occasions. She agreed to appear (and sing) when her friend (and most ardent fan) Charles Nelson Reilly directed our Spotlight Award tribute to Julie Harris. Her only demand? A Steinway piano. Not an inexpensive rental when a Yamaha was offered free of charge, but of course we had a Steinway delivered. She sang like an angel. Charles was thrilled. Julie was too.

## Harold Prince

Not only did the great Broadway director come to see Len Cariou at our theater, he sent me a heartwarming tribute to be read aloud when we gave Mr. Cariou our Spotlight Award. He sent another when we honored Joe Masteroff.



## Rosemary Prinz



The queen of the soaps and the stage actress who originated the role of the mother in *Steel Magnolias* agreed to come to Caldwell to appear in our original production of one-act plays called *Under the Bed*. Rosemary Prinz proved to be a first-rate star and exemplary professional. She had a one-person monolog in *Under the Bed*, the finest twenty minutes in this uneven work, and found every nuance imaginable in playing a wealthy woman who is having an affair with a bisexual man. At one point she asked me if I wanted her to cry in the scene. I told her it was her choice, that it depended on how she felt each time she played it. "Out of which eye?" she asked. I started to laugh until I looked at her. The soap queen was serious. She had the ability to cry out of the left or the right or out of both eyes.



## Ronald Reagan

As my dad, his buddy Maxwell McKnight, Michael Grosz, Ray Chandler and Michael Meath finished building the add-on platform stage in front of the "mini-stage" at our College venue, who was the first person to set foot on it in front of an audience? None other than Ronald Reagan seeking the nomination to become President of the United States. I wrote a note to him and gave it to one of his bodyguards. As my Uncle George Sproul went to school with "the Gipper" in Dixon, Illinois, I wondered if the former movie star would remember my relative.



A few weeks later, I got a formal note signed by Reagan. Yes, he did remember the "Spruill family." I'll never know whether this was the secretary's misspelling of the name Sproul or if our president made it up just to be nice.

Four years later, Reagan once again sought the nomination and made a stop in Boca. I didn't see him that time, but he held a press conference near the Fifth Avenue Plaza. I was nearby looking for a shop where I could buy needle and

thread for Pat to sew a button onto my sport coat. (We were invited to dinner that night at Ken and Mary Miller's. He was our theater's chairman of the board.) As I got out of my big yellow Volkswagen van with the words CALDWELL PLAYHOUSE and comedy and tragedy masks painted on the side, I was surrounded by cameramen and reporters who had stopped to have lunch nearby before getting back on the presidential bus. "Help us!" they cried. The presidential bus had left without them and was on its way to the Palm Beach Airport. Throwing money at me, they said, "Please, please! Drive us to the airport. Fast! We have passes! You won't get stopped! Drive right onto the tarmac!" (Airport security was different back then.)

They piled into the back of the van with their heavy camera equipment. Off we tore, arriving on the tarmac just in time. They threw more five-dollar bills at me, screamed "Thank you! Thank you!" and boarded the plane. For at least two and a half hours, Pat wondered if I had fallen down a rabbit hole. I arrived at the dinner party with an unbuttoned sport coat.

### Rex Reed



Needing a guest star for a lecture for one of our Mizner Festivals, I called my friend Jeanette Gardner who had been an actress in several of my summer productions in Highlands, and now had her own talent agency. "Rex Reed is available," she said. Yes! The writer, movie critic and star of *Myra Breckinridge* was perfect.

I picked him up at the Fort Lauderdale airport. He was ghost white and weary. Depositing him for the night in the Boca Raton Hotel, he gave me his complimentary gift baskets and champagne and said, "See you tomorrow." Next morning I picked up a handsome, tanned, well-rested man who looked every bit The Star. Rex Reed was a Southern charmer. He spoke at length at a seminar in our theater and appeared for our flapper-style dinner party that night with his school friend Sarah Pollack, society reporter for the Boca Raton News.

Next day, as Frank and I arranged to drive him to the airport, he said, "Ever been to Tea Dance at the Marlin Beach?" Well, I knew where it was. Imagine walking into an outdoor pool party at a gay hotel accompanied by Rex Reed in a white planter's suit and hat. There must have been a thousand on-lookers, and most of them knew who he was. We then went to dinner at a Cajun restaurant where he talked about his friend Elizabeth Ashley (originally from Ocala where Frank and I knew her relatives) and other famous people who opened their hearts to him and later read about it in his books and columns. I last saw him during rehearsals of *Fortune's Fool* when he simply walked into my rehearsal hall unannounced and said hello. The actors (including John Felix and Geoffrey Wade) were dumbstruck. "That was – !!!" Yes, that was Rex Reed.

### Christopher Reeve



With money from the Palm Beach Tourist Development Council, we brought Superman, Christopher Reeve, to Caldwell for an informative and exhilarating evening of talk and discussion about the importance of professional regional theater. Although best known for his films, Reeve loved the stage and longed to return. (I



saw him in *The Fifth of July* with Swoozie Kurtz and Jeff Daniels.) Following a cocktail reception, about six of us took him to dinner at Ernie's in Delray Beach, then I returned Superman to his hosts Bob and Mary Montgomery in Manalapan. All of us who spent time with this major star were horrified when his riding accident left him paralyzed and later ended his life. This was a great and glorious man. (Photo: Pat Nesbit, appearing at the time in our production of Gurney's *Later Life*, and I talk to Christopher Reeve. He admitted to having "a bad hair day.")

### Burt Reynolds

Speaking of hair, Mr. Reynolds, sporting an excellent new hair piece, deigned to attend Caldwell's tribute to Julie Harris, and arrived after it began. I don't think Burt really liked me as I ran a rival theater when he had his Burt Reynolds Dinner Theatre, and during that time I won a Best Director Carbonell Award in competition with him and Edward Albee. Years earlier, I was in the lobby at the Highlands Playhouse in North Carolina watching my production of *The Boy Friend*. A handsome man suddenly appeared in that lobby. "I just want to watch for a few minutes," the man said. I got on the headset in the office and told the stage manager there was a very familiar looking man in the lobby. I described him. "That's Burt Reynolds," he said. "He's nearby shooting a film called *Deliverance*." Yep, that was Burt Reynolds all right!



### Charles Nelson Reilly

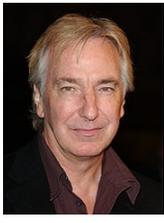


Interesting that CNR should follow Burt Reynolds in this alphabetical memory. Burt is responsible for bringing Charles to South Florida where CNR taught at Burt's "academy." Charles came to Caldwell to see our production of *The Middle Ages* because he knew Patricia O'Connell, one of the four actors. He called the box office later and asked to speak to me. Thinking it was a hoax, I accepted the call with good nature, and listened as a voice invited me to dinner at the Marlin Beach Hotel to discuss details of moving *The Middle Ages* to the Westwood Playhouse in Los Angeles. As it turned out, it *was* the voice of CNR, and we *did* take the production to L.A. He met our plane at LAX and insisted we go to his house for a spaghetti dinner. We wanted to go directly to our

hotels, but you didn't argue with CNR.

Once inside his living room, Julie Harris was sitting on the floor talking to Nancy Reagan's hairdresser. On opening night he brought Julie backstage and walked into the ladies' dressing room *before the show began*. He was dressed as a bellboy and greeted dozens of the most famous people in Hollywood who were his opening night guests. We were terrified the whole night.

Years later, Charles directed *The Subject Was Roses* at Caldwell and debuted his one-man *The Life of Reilly* here. Like playwright John Patrick, CNR was a complex, troubled man, hilariously funny one minute and impossibly difficult the next. My favorite CNR story: Moving stage props and set dressing for *Middle Ages* from Boca to L.A., Frank's plaque of stuffed fish, which he proudly displayed on his award-winning country club set, got lost in the shuffle. Frank fretted and fumed. CNR took Frank to one of the largest prop houses in Hollywood and found an even better fish display. On opening night CNR wrote a note to Mr. Bennett. It said, "Here's your fuckin' fish."

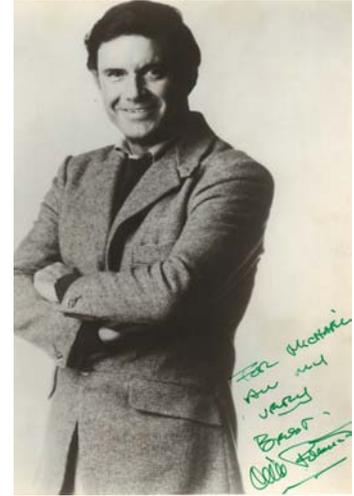


### Alan Rickman

The tall actor with a unique look came to Boca to see Jackie Carpenter when she appeared in *The Women*. Jackie knew him from past shows. I wish I could see him today to tell him how brilliant he was in the Broadway revival of *Private Lives*. He played Elyot opposite Lindsey Duncan as Amanda. Unforgettable. Today, people know him from the *Harry Potter* films.

### Cliff Robertson

Before Cliff returned to Boca with his then-wife Dina Merrill, he visited us at a delightful Friends of Caldwell event and posed for endless photos with theater patrons. I reminded him that I first saw him at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh when he stopped by the drama department while promoting the film *Gidget* or *The Naked and the Dead* or both. Later he became major star with films including *PT 109* in which he played the young Jack Kennedy and the drama *Charly* for which he won an Oscar as Best Actor.



The book *Indecent Exposure* chronicles his involuntary involvement in an illegal scheme by David Begelman of Columbia Pictures to cheat him out of money and then blacklist him. Nice guy, Cliff Robertson. He came out a winner.

### Judy Shepard



I am proud of many things, but my production of *The Laramie Project* often flies to the top of the list. I was home in front of the television in my underwear one night when *Laramie* was onstage. My phone rang. It was Pat. “You’ll never guess who’s outside our theater,” she said. “Judy Shepard. She wants to meet the cast.” I flew into my clothes and rushed to the lobby. Once the play

ended, Judy Shepard and a colleague from the Matthew Shepard Foundation entered the lobby along with my entire cast and crew. When someone asked if she had seen the play, she said, “No. I lived it.” When she met the actor Mark Rizzo who played one of Matthew’s killers, she said, kindly, “Your ears aren’t big enough.” A few nights later, I attended her appearance at a Stop Hate Crimes event in West Palm Beach. (That’s why she was in the area.) Every night at Caldwell during the run of *Laramie* we raised money for the Matthew Shepard Foundation. I cherish a letter I received from her, voicing her gratitude.

### Beverly Sills



The opera star was another Mizner Festival guest. She appeared at a luncheon at the Polo Club and spoke warmly and intelligently about the need to support the arts, theater included. I was visibly nervous when I went to pick her up at the Bridge Hotel. This was one of opera’s most famous divas! What would I say to her?

Photo: Beverly Sills with Lucille Barton and Henrietta, Countess de Hoernle.



I entered the lobby. In front of me, sitting on her luggage, was Miss Sills. “Beverly?” I said. “Michael?” she answered. And

from that moment, we never stopped chattering about her career, the arts, the Caldwell, her family – her brother attended our theater as he lived in the area – and the struggle to raise funds for our projects. Classy, tenacious, brilliant lady.



### The Stanley Twins

I remember my friend Bobbe Arnst talking about the identical dancing stars The Stanley Twins long before they walked into the Caldwell and long before I got to know them at Ziegfeld Girls fund-raisers at the Boca Raton Hotel. Loretta and Lorraine Stanley could still kick high over their heads when they

performed at the benefits. Full of life and show-biz pizzazz, they endeared themselves to all of us who met them. In the photo at left they are honoring a male Ziegfeld star during one of our Mizner Festival events. In sepia, here they are during their famous era as Follies stars.



### Beatrice Straight



A Caldwell board member, Margaret Damen, called a former Washington D.C. arts employer to ask for available guest speakers for a Friends' luncheon. He suggested the Oscar-winning actress Beatrice Straight. I met the lovely lady at the West Palm Beach airport, but one of the first things I said was "I got stung by a bee!" She was immediately concerned as my finger was swelling by the minute. I got to a doctor in time, the finger returned to its normal size, and Beatrice Straight was an absolute love. She spoke to a large luncheon crowd at Brooks in Deerfield Beach. Later, she invited Frank and me to attend a performance of her husband's play at a small theater in Los Angeles. "You will stay with us," she said.



"In the Hollywood Hills." Of course we went. The play was dismal, but the party afterwards was filled with every star in the firmament and breakfast the next morning included no mention of the play. (Sadly, her husband, the original Morris Townsend on Broadway in *The Heiress*, was suffering from the beginnings of Alzheimer's.) At breakfast, Miss Straight and Mr. Bennett had an animated discussion about berries and clotted cream. I excused myself at one point, went into the living room where the window faced Hollywood, took her Oscar from the mantle and held it in my hands. The gracious lady won that Oscar for *Network*. I put it back on the mantle before anyone caught me.

*Photo:* Beatrice Straight with me and Friends of Caldwell president Nony (Nina) Lendry.



### John Tartaglia

Angie Radosh and her husband Ed secured a ticket for me to the off-Broadway run of *Avenue Q* starring Angie's multi-talented son John. I sat three seats to the right of Texas politico Ann Richards who was loving every minute of it. It was an "Equity Fights AIDS" night at the theater so I met John in the lobby as he collected donations. "Do you realize you're

going to be a great big star?" I said to him. "What a nice thing to say," he said. Well, I was right. *Avenue Q* moved to Broadway, won all sorts of awards, and made John famous. He's a puppeteer who sings, dances and acts. He came to Boca to see Angie in my production of *A Delicate Balance* and we continue to talk about doing a show with all three of us together.

### Norma Terris

Broadway's original Magnolia in *Show Boat* divided her retirement years between a home in East Lyme, Connecticut, and a condo in Fort Lauderdale. As a friend of Caldwell patron Patrice Cobb Cooper, Norma began to attend the Caldwell on a regular basis, always on "Patrice's Night," which was the next performance after the formal opening, and always accompanied by a party for the cast, with champagne, macadamia nuts, pizza and cookies topped with green icing. (There is no explanation for this, except that Patrice was Irish and always wore green, and that she ordered pizza because "actors are always hungry.")



Anyway, Norma seldom shared stories about her legendary career, but one night she backed me into a corner of the small second lobby in our Boca Mall venue and said, "Would you like to hear my songs from Mr. Ziegfeld's show?" Of course I said yes, and, just for me, she sang "Make Believe" and "Why Do I Love You" with all the 1927 hand and facial gestures intact. In the photo above, she's on stage with me in 1980 celebrating the re-opening of our theater after the Boca college closed our doors.



### Marlo Thomas



Danny Thomas' celebrity daughter made a surprise visit to Caldwell one day. Pat remembers that she was looking for a theater to premiere a play or produce a benefit or something, and I haven't been able to locate a photo that shows her with our then-publicist man Chris Cooper. I wasn't there, but everyone said Marlo was a doll.



### Tom Troupe

As Tom and his wife Carole Cook knew Charles Nelson Reilly, Tom agreed to appear in *The Subject Was Roses* when CNR directed it for Caldwell. Both he and Carole became friends of Pat's and mine. Tom returned to Boca to appear in the Ken Kay-directed *Over the River and Through the Woods* and won more fans and friends. He has appeared in countless films and television shows. He made his Broadway debut as Peter in *The Diary of Anne Frank* with Joseph Schildkraut playing Otto.



### Mark Van Epps

The great artist Mark Van Epps designed the comedy and tragedy posters for Caldwell that enhanced our lobbies and offices for many years and remain in our homes as personal treasures. We introduced these colorful posters at a Mizner Festival party at the Sheraton Boca Raton. We pretended that Mark and I had a "live" televised conversation and discussed his art work in front of dozens of on-lookers in front of a television set. In truth, we taped his answers, left space for me to ask the questions, and fooled some of the people some of the time. Mark often used masks as an artistic theme. Before he died he

presented Pat and me with signed prints of what he called his Angel Mask.

### Sarah Vaughan



Edward Albee exited the plane from New York before Sarah Vaughan, but soon after the Albee/Hall exchange, Divine Sarah appeared. She appeared to be in a foul mood and said almost nothing before I deposited her into a pre-arranged limo that rushed her to the Boca Raton Hotel & Club. I knew that our group sales director Kathy Walton had delivered the required bottle of Remy Martin to her room earlier, and I didn't bother her the next day. The limo driver knew she was due at the FAU Auditorium a little before 8 p.m. I put her concert fee payment in a sealed envelope and left it in her dressing room, then took a seat in the auditorium as the brilliant Count Basie Orchestra began the first act. Nervous, I went backstage before intermission. She was there, but in a rage. She had demanded another bottle of Remy-Martin, this one to be placed in her dressing room, and sent Kathy Walton flying out into the night to find a liquor store. Then Miss Sassy turned on me. She waved her check in my face. "Anyone could have stolen this!" she cried. When Kathy returned with the second bottle, Divine Sarah poured two tumblers and gave one to me. "Here!" she said, "Drink this!"

I asked the Basie band leader to start the second act without her, which he did. She didn't budge. Her mood, however, changed. "Whaddya wanta hear?" she asked me. I hadn't heard her sublime "Send in the Clowns" at that time so without hesitation I said, "Misty." She didn't respond but simply walked into the wings, entered the stage to thunderous applause, and grumbled about our "wrong placement" of her water, her Kleenex and her microphone. I rushed to my seat. Totally at ease with the Basie band, she began to sing. Vocal perfection!

For an encore she asked the audience "Whaddya wanta hear?" People shouted out their favorites, "Tenderly," "Broken Hearted Melody," and other Sarah Vaughan hits. "No, no," she said. "This is for my friend." She sang "Misty." I still get goosebumps thinking about it.

The star didn't appear at the Patron's Party afterwards but it really didn't matter. People had witnessed the Divine Sarah on stage and she had delivered the goods.



### Elizabeth Wilson

Another fan of Mr. Cariou's, Elizabeth Wilson, came to see Len in *Papa*. This versatile actress wanted to appear in our production of *The Cocktail Hour* but timing didn't work out. We tried to work together in a new play by Israel Horowitz but that also fell victim to scheduling and prior commitments. She appears as Franklin D. Roosevelt's mother in the film *Hyde Park on Hudson*.



### Nancy Wilson

Stylist Nancy Wilson was a doll, but her odd performance caused people to leave the auditorium soon after she appeared. She was preceded in Act One by the Duke Ellington Orchestra and the audience loved it. She appeared for the second half, but it was clear she was not compatible with the orchestra. For some reason she waved her microphone left and right in front of her face, and half her words disappeared. People couldn't hear her. And they said so out loud.

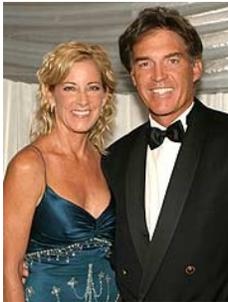
Poor dear saw ticket holders rush to the exits, tried to hold them with an a capella song, failed to bring them back, and said an early but pleasant “Good night.” She posed for this picture with Pat and me. She said nothing about the concert except “I knew I should have gone on before the band.”



### Fay Wray

Susan Riskin played one of the four roles in Edward J. Moore’s play *The Bicycle Man* during the summer of 1983 and her mother came to see her. I happened to be in the box office when a beautiful lady walked up to the window and said “Hello, I’m Susan’s mother.” (Susan’s mother, Fay Wray, had just arrived.) She stayed for several days and attended a party given by my friend Gladys Cole for the cast and crew. The legendary Fay Wray was happy to talk to the press, and did so, but with one request. “No questions about *King Kong*,” she said.

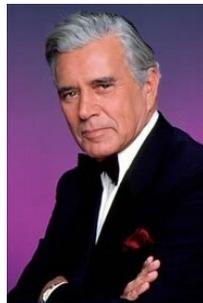
In the Nineties I accepted an invitation from Chris Evert to emcee her annual Pro-Celebrity fundraising event at the Polo Club. I took my then-publicist Joe Gillie with me. We met:



Chris Evert  
with Andy Mill



Whitney Houston



John Forsythe



Linda Evans



Chevy Chase

Chris Evert ran the event with an iron hand. She looked great with Andy Mill. Whitney Houston was shivering from air conditioning, so I tracked down a manager who tried to warm it up. Whitney sang, then quickly disappeared. I talked to John Forsythe about John Patrick. (The *Dynasty* star originated the role of Captain Fisby on Broadway in Patrick’s *Teahouse of the August Moon*.) Linda Evans was charming. When it came time to introduce people, I couldn’t get the crowd to quiet down. From in back of me someone shouted, “Quiet folks! This man is trying to get your attention!” I turned around. It was Chevy Chase. The room silenced. I made introductions.

But there was one more celebrity: Buddy Hackett. He wouldn’t keep his hands off maids and waitresses. I asked Joe to get management to lock him in a room until it was time for him to perform. They complied.

