

Published by
California School for the Deaf, Fremont

The California News

Volume 122 • Number 3 • October 13, 2006

**CSD students, staff,
and family members
star in the production
of “Silent Salzburg”**

Photographs by Darren Frazier





Megg Davis, professional deaf actress and director of “Silent Salzburg,” during a rehearsal for the dramatic play.



Miranda Medugno gets made up by Megg Davis before the performance.



Cast and Crew

SILENT SALZBURG

a play featuring CSD students, staff and families

“Silent Salzburg” is a new play about an Austrian Christian family that goes into hiding, in 1940, to protect their deaf teenage son from sterilization—or worse—by the Nazis. The play received a work-in-progress staging at the California School for the Deaf’s Little Theatre on September 22, 23, and 24. A special encore performance was provided for students, during the day, on September 27.

The play written by Richard Medugno (*author of “Deaf Daughter, Hearing Father”*) is a drama that features six characters, two of which were deaf and played by the CSD’s high school students Dack Virnig, a senior, and Miranda Medugno, a sophomore.

Serving as director of the production is professional deaf actress, Megg Davis, whose young daughter is also a student at CSD. A veteran of the National Theatre for the Deaf and Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, Ms. Davis helped make the play accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences by using ASL interpreters to shadow the hearing actors.

Medugno was inspired to write “Silent Salzburg” when he thought about Anne Frank and her family, and how using sign language in a hiding situation could be a huge benefit. “I also thought about the irony of a Christian family who might have been supporters of the Nazis, and Hitler being confronted with a difficult choice when their own child is marked for treatment or extermination because of a disability,” said Medugno.

The original version of “Silent Salzburg” was written in 2000, and Medugno has been trying to stage the show since then, without success, until this year. “It just all came together this summer with the right people being available and interested as well as the cooperation and support of the school and DCARA (*Deaf Counseling Advocacy and Referral Agency*).” Most of the proceeds from ticket sales benefited DCARA, which hosted the play at CSD.

In addition to the CSD students, several of the other actors have Deaf community connections. Heidi Burns, a CSD elementary school science teacher, played the key role of a mother, who at the beginning of the play doesn’t know sign language, but learns it after she goes into hiding with her family. She spoke of the challenge of acting in the show: “One of the reasons I took the job at CSD was the school’s reputation for having a strong ASL environment: all signing, all the time. Because I have been in this environment for the past five years, taking a speaking role was a little unsettling.”

“What got me over that initial discomfort was the message of the play. I was given the opportunity to step into the shoes of a mother who was unable to communicate directly with her son; a heartbreaking situation that is far from fictional for many families. If this play helps parents take that first step toward learning ASL—well, my discomfort is a small price to pay.”

Michelle Foletta, a senior at Washington High School in Fremont, played the role of the sister who acts as the interpreter for her deaf brother. Miss Foletta had perhaps the most difficult role of learning her own lines as well as the lines of the other characters, so that she could sign or voice to facilitate family communication.

Michelle has been acting since junior high, but had never before been in a show that was totally accessible to her deaf sister Monica, a recent graduate from CSD. “I really enjoyed doing this show because I like the message of the play and I got to improve my ASL,” reported Michelle.

David Auerbach, who played the father, came to the show after responding to a *Craigslist.org* ad looking for middle-aged male actors. David has had a great deal of interest in the deaf community since he lost 40% of his hearing and wears hearing aids. Ironically, playing a father who doesn’t want to learn sign language,

“Silent Salzburg sincerely touched so many issues and so many hearts.”

—David Keim
CSD staff member

“Thank you Richard for coming up with such a profound script; and Megg for directing, to make sure the story reflects the real experience of deaf persons and families in that setting. It was really a privilege to watch the performance. It should go on Broadway! The play appeals to BOTH hearing and deaf audiences beautifully.”

—Bridgetta Bourne-Firl,
Coordinator of Outreach, CSD

“I just wanted to tell you again how much I enjoyed the play. It was great! I enjoyed the references to *The Sound of Music* too. I thought it brought a nice bit of comic relief.”

—Lisa Matovich
Parent of CSD Alumna

“BRAVA! Wonderful play and performance. Your play really brought that time, place, and people to life. I was a little embarrassed when I started to cry, until I heard sniffing coming from around the room, and saw other damp eyes when the lights came on. I was particularly impressed at the way the deaf spirit was captured in the character of Hans through your writing and Dack Virnig’s acting. It would be fantastic if you could get sponsorship to show it at all the mainstream high schools. The play teaches a lot of lessons in a non-threatening way. Thanks for a wonderful evening that I won’t forget soon.”

—Margie Cooper, DCARA

“I felt so privileged to be part of an appreciative audience at your fantastic production. You brought us into a beautiful silent world that is generally unknown to hearing folks. The play is rich with complicated layers of conflict that ring so true. And your cast is superb! Every individual was thoroughly convincing—but of course, I was most impressed by the talented students and the very thoughtful direction. You call it a ‘work in progress,’ but we all agreed it is ready to go on the road and should be given greater exposure. Congratulations! You and your family must be very proud!”

—Elyce Melmon,
Pear Ave. Theatre,
Playwrights Group Member

“I was really moved by your play. The acting was all very good, especially Hans—what a force on stage! And your daughter is absolutely lovely. Their scene together was so touching. I’m wondering if you could take that production to other high schools in the area. It certainly deserves to be seen, and I think because it is so much about a teenager and tolerance that it should be seen by high schoolers...Wonderful work.”

—Sharmon Hilfinger,
Pear Ave. Theatre,
Playwrights Group Member

“I watched your play, and I liked it. It was a good production. I liked the actors Michelle Foletta and David Auerbach the best—no offense against the others. I liked everybody’s acting. They have a lot of talent...all of them.”

—Sarah Lui,
a sophomore at CSD

“Whew... Really enjoyed the play. I think it was best I have ever seen.”

—David Fair,
Pastor to the Deaf Mission
Springs Community Church



Heidi Burns and Michelle Foletta (*mother and daughter*) look on as Dack Virnig (*son*) argues with David Auerbach (*father*).

David wants to learn ASL and was delighted to pick up some sign language during the rehearsal process.

When asked about directing such a challenging drama, director Megg Davis stated: “This experience was wonderful, challenging, and at the end, it became so rewarding! I cannot be much prouder from the hard work of the actors, team, crew, and interpreters. I’ve always dreamt of directing a play with a mix of hearing and deaf actors. Most of my experiences have been directing deaf children’s plays.”

She goes on to say, “I’ve really enjoyed this experience. We faced some barriers such as budget limit, set limit, and a few more bumps. However, it forced me to find new ways of making this play work and it challenged my creativity as well. I absolutely loved that!!

Making the play accessible to the deaf audience was paramount. “I wanted to play with the interpreters more on stage, but the time was short. It was hard to find volunteer interpreters who were available for the show; however, we were so lucky with the people who came in and helped us on such short notice.”

Ms. Davis goes on to say, “The actors did such a great job connecting with their characters and bringing them on stage...so alive. Thank God for this

amazing group of talents! They were such a joy to work with!”

When asked what it was like directing both deaf and hearing actors, Megg said, “The only challenge was to talk and sign at the same time, but it was a good time to practice my speech. I was very lucky that my actors and team understood my vision and directing, when English is my second language. There were times when I had a hard time expressing my vision in English/verbally; it would have been easier to express through ASL.”

How did she feel about directing a play connected with the school where her daughter goes? “It’s so exciting and it feels like home. CSD is really good about that, and that is one of the reasons why I wanted my daughter Yamila Rose to attend CSD. Her father and auntie also graduated from CSD, so it’s nice to be a part of that experience with her. I so cannot wait to direct my daughter one day. I know she has that talent inside of her that is dying to come out.”

Following the September 27 performances for CSD students, a panel discussion took place between the actors, the director, the playwright, and the audience. One of the first to speak was CSD teacher David Call, who applauded the show for its realness. He said he was raised in a



**Dack Virnig and Michelle Foletta
are brother and sister.**

very similar family situation to the deaf boy in the play.

When asked about how they got involved in the production and how they felt about the show, Dack Virnig said, "Megg begged me to do the role of Hans because she believed that I could play Hans as 'Hans' and not 'Dack.' Because she believed in me, I took on the role. When I first read the script, I cried. I said to myself, 'I'm gonna do it.' I told Megg it's a yes!"

Miranda Medugno was asked why she wanted to be involved in a play written by her father. She responded with a joke about not wanting to see another girl kiss Dack Virnig. Getting serious, she said, "I've never been in a real play before and I wanted to have that experience."

"I am very satisfied. And people who know me well will say that's very rare," said Richard Medugno about the production of his play. "I knew it would be a good show for the community but I am a little surprised by the overwhelming positive feedback. I am so glad we persevered when we could have easily just given up."

"This play really wanted to be born at this point in time and in its own way. There's nothing like being at a birth and in many ways that's what this whole process felt like. The most memorable days of my life are the

ones when my kids came into this world. The premiere of 'Silent Salzburg' is an event I will never forget. I felt more like the father than the writer. I created it, but when others got involved it took on a life of its own. That is the beauty and magic of Theatre!"

Richard and Megg are hoping to arrange for more encore performances in the next few months, maybe at Ohlone College. They are also looking into taking the show down to Southern California, in the spring, for a short tour. "It will be a huge challenge to get everyone down there and pay for expenses, but if we keep the faith and have the will, I am sure we'll get a sponsor and be able to make it happen."

At the very least, Mr. Medugno says he is planning to publish the script in the next few months. He hopes to include a behind the scenes article about how this premiere production came about and the audiences' responses. "I will, of course, have a dedication page naming the cast, crew, and the CSD community. It is a small way of saying a big thank you to everyone who supported us and came to see the show."

*Richard Medugno
CSD Parent*

"FANTASTIC!!! That's what I have to say about the play... I absolutely LOVED it and found it so moving and thought provoking. Thank you, thank you for bringing this wonderful piece to the stage."

—Amy Toth, CSD staff member

"I was moved by your play, Silent Salzburg, both by the material as well as by the audience's reaction to it. It was my first time seeing a play with ASL interpreters. I am studying documentary cinema at SFSU—as well as ASL, which is why I came to see the show. The reason for taking the ASL class is because I have an interest in the deaf community. Being a documentary film student, of course, I would ultimately like to do a piece about the deaf community. Having studied acting for years, seeing your play brought up new interests and questions about deaf theatre. Please extend my praise to the rest of the cast and crew. It was a wonderful introduction to deaf theatre, as well as CSD."

—Charlie Vaughn

"Just coming home from your play, my eyes are still moist! Congratulations, what an incredible performance and I think you can be very happy with the turnout. We brought a couple hearing friends of Ben's, both Washington High School students as well. They are in ASL 1 there, also in drama. They both said they never expected such a professional show. I certainly have no idea how you can make something like this happen. You can be very proud of your cast."

*—Susanne Joss,
mother of a CSD
middle school student*

Stone Leiker proudly presents his clue to Dr. Klopping.



Purple Teammates (*Omar Cisneros, Megan Booth, Raven Lynch and Shelby MacDonald*) read their first clue together.

PE Secretary Linda Cease passes out the next clue to teams arriving at her office.

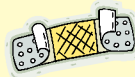


The Amazing 2nd Grade Location Race

By Theresa Grushkin, 2nd Grade Teacher

To kick off our year with social studies, the 2nd Grade Team decided to have a scavenger hunt on campus. Students were all assembled in one place outside our classrooms to explain the race. Students were split into four groups: Purple Team, Blue Team, Red Team, and Green Team. Teams were then given their first clue. They were instructed to read it together and decide where they were supposed to go next in search of their next clue. Such excitement!!! Students had a fantastic time! They worked together so well in reading their clues and working with their teammates. One of the final clues brought the children dashing madly into an unsuspecting Dr. Klopping's office where he gave out the final clue that sent them back to the classrooms to see who was the winner. Read below to see if you can figure out the clues the students had to work with:

Clue #1: This smiling woman will give you a band-aid



for a little boo-boo.



Clue #2: If your boo-boo is too big



or when you are very sick, you need to go here.



Clue #3: This is the place to go for Little Eagles



who love to read.



Clue #4: Feeling hungry?



Here's the place to go for



delicious and healthy food!

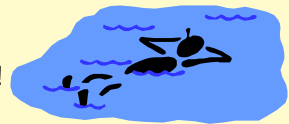
Clue #5: This is a great place to run



and jump



and swim!



Clue #6: He is the big boss!



He works hard for each of you!



Clue #7: Congratulations! Now get back to class! Your hunt is done. Time to see who won!



The answers??? **Clue #1:** Ms. Suzie Jacobs, Elementary Secretary; **Clue #2:** Student Health Center; **Clue #3:** Library; **Clue #4:** Cafeteria; **Clue #5:** PE Office; **Clue #6:** Dr. Klopping; **Clue #7:** 2nd Grade Classrooms

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