

# Academy Awards Benefit Party a 'Star-Studded' Success

By Lisa Garcia  
Staff Writer

The Brenden Theatres in Concord hosted its fifth annual Academy Awards Benefit Party on Sunday, which included a live simulcast of the ceremony on one of their big screens.

The gala was complete with a red-carpet entrance, golden statues and adoring fans cheering each party attendee.

"Everyone coming up the red carpet felt like a star," said Jerry Olivarez, director of public relations at the theater, "and they're all just having a good time for a good cause."

All of the proceeds from the benefit went toward the STAND! Against Domestic Violence program. The goal of the program, according to Patty Lincoln Cawood, donor development officer for the program, is to increase awareness of domestic violence issues. It has been in place for 27 years, though the organization

changed its name six years ago to encourage more people to "stand with them."

"Domestic violence is such a prevalent and complicated problem," said Cawood, "and we just want to get the message out that this is a big issue and that we are doing what we can to help bring a solution to this problem."

According to Olivarez, CEO Johnny Brenden had always supported STAND! and suggested hosting the Oscars party to raise money for the program. Officials said the first year the theater hosted the benefit it raised \$135,000.

Because of that type of success, Olivarez says she hopes to have two auditoriums for next year's Academy Awards gala.

Attendees had the choice of either wearing casual attire or dressing like a star. Prizes were awarded to the "Best Dressed" male and female at the event. There were ladies in fine gowns, an Elvis impersonator, ladies with

large feather boa hats and even some in "comfy" casual wear.

Twenty-five local restaurants catered the event, each one donating either an appetizer or a dessert. The theme of the buffet was "Tour de Contra Costa," and participating restaurants included Rocco's in Walnut Creek, La Salsa in Concord and Red Lobster. There was also bottomless champagne for only \$15.

"We just wanted people to know that this is an entirely volunteer event," said Cawood, "and just a really great way to have fun and watch the Academy Awards."

Starbucks Coffee provided 15 volunteers for the event and also helped advertise the gala by posting flyers in all its branches.

"This would not have been as big of a success without the generous donations made by each of the sponsors," said Daniella Halperin, a volunteer for the party.

"We did a lot of canvassing of businesses for this event,"

said Halperin, "and this is such a great event for such a worthy cause."

The event also featured a raffle and silent auction. The raffle packages were based on four themes: Best Actor, which contained products for gentlemen, including Golden State Warrior tickets; Best Actress, which had pedicure and manicure certificates fit for any leading lady; Best Director, which included items for the creative genius; and Best Picture, which featured a gift pack from MGM Studios containing 10 DVDs — all Best Picture winners from past Academy Awards ceremonies.

The silent auction prizes included T-shirts from various films; a press kit from the new film "Son of the Mask," an advanced release of the original movie soundtrack from "Ocean's 12," a leather bomber jacket donated from Paramount Pictures and the grand prize, a two-night stay at a Lake Tahoe lodge.

# High Energy Performance for Opening of 'Into The Woods' Audience Members Said To Be 'Moo-ved'

Kwesi Wilson  
Staff Writer

The Cal State East Bay theatre and dance department kicked off its five-day presentation of "Into The Woods" in front of a large audience on Friday and Saturday.

"Into the Woods," a musical, was directed by Kelly Ground and choreographed by Joe Giuffre, with Marianna Wolfe as the music director.

Some audience members said they were impressed by the energy the cast members exhibited.

"There is a lot of energy in their act," said Molly McKenzie during the intermission. "They seem to be enjoying their performance and I am really enjoying it, too. They have wonderful voices."

McKenzie's husband, professor Brian McKenzie, of the CSUEB marketing and entrepreneurship department, enjoyed how a flat character stole the show.

"I thought it was amazing that a cow with no lines could steal the show," he said.

According to Ground, the group practiced three times a

week, beginning on the first Wednesday of this quarter and four times a week in the days leading up to the commencement of the show.

*"They seem to be enjoying their performance and I am really enjoying it, too."*

Molly McKenzie

"It took a lot of work," said Ground.

Ground is used to high workloads. She currently teaches at Contra Costa College, Diablo Valley College, The Academy of Art University, as well as CSUEB.

Asked what was next on her to-do list, she said she was "flying to Florida to go rehearse for a show in San Francisco."

Some audience members said they were there to support family members and friends who were performing.

Russell Micek, who came to see his son, Jesse Micek, play the piano, expressed his admiration for his son with just a few words.

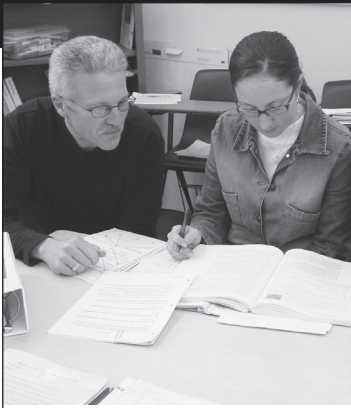
"It is very rewarding," he said.

Based on his book, the musical was originally directed by James Lapine on Broadway. Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics.

"Into The Woods" will be presented again Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m.

General admission is \$14, \$10 for faculty and staff, as well as children, and \$8 for CSUEB students. Reserve tickets at the CSUEB box office by calling 885-3261.

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