

# Pushcart Players

## HISTORY, MISSION, GOALS & ACHIEVEMENTS

*Pushcart Players' mission is to provide professionally produced theatre, workshops, and residencies for K - 12 students to foster in-depth understanding, discovery, participation and life long love for and support of the arts.*

The artistic philosophy of Pushcart Players is rooted in the belief that the arts – “an inseparable part of the human journey” – are an essential component of the educational process in that they help children grow intellectually, socially and emotionally and provide a powerful tool in reaching one’s unique potential.

### HISTORY

Pushcart Players was founded in 1974 as a professional ensemble of artists and educators (teachers, writers, musicians, actors, designers and directors) whose primary goal was to increase the aesthetic world of children by introducing and involving them in the arts in their schools. Traveling *to* schools and theatres throughout the nation was and continues to be a high priority so that *all* children in a given community have the advantage of arts programming prepared, conducted and presented by outstanding professionals in the field. Because theatre is a synthesis of all the arts and provides an excellent vehicle for the introduction of music, dance, poetry, prose and other artistic expression, it became the centerpiece of many innovative residencies and workshops offered in Pushcart’s Arts In Education programming.

#### *Pioneers In Arts Basic To Education*

Pushcart Players has been a pioneer in the development of Arts programming in NJ since 1974, providing leadership in creating the concept and language that drives *literacy in the arts* as well as *arts across the curriculum*. The company has been a role model for artistic excellence and educational soundness in all material and programs prepared for students and teachers. The ensemble has mentored and nurtured many of the fine NJ companies that currently serve young audiences with arts programs. Pushcart has provided leadership in advocacy for the arts and arts education in NJ through active participation in the New Jersey Theatre Alliance, New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, Newark Arts Educators Roundtable, and organizations such as ArtPRIDE, Arts Council of the Morris Area, and by serving on the Education Committee of NJTA and on the Educational Advisory Boards of Paper Mill Playhouse and NJPAC.

### **ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

Pushcart Players’ artistic achievements include:

1) The artistic impact and inspiration for more than 250,000 children each year across the state, nation --and internationally as well,-- who experienced the arts, many for the first time, through Pushcart Musical Theatre, Educational Workshops, Artists Residencies and Classes.

2) New material and expanded roster generated by Pushcart's artistic team including in-roads in Holocaust Education through the arts with gentle introductions to this difficult subject. Our current production, "*The Last . . . Butterfly*" is an innovative and artistically beautiful production, linked to an Artists Residency and features an exhibit of art work by the children of the Terezin Concentration Camp and a structured discussion following the performance. It provides ample testimony to the power of art to engage and convey information.

3) Peer recognition of outstanding work resulting in selection for numerous national showcases (including the prestigious PACT and ARTS PRESENTERS showcases in NYC) that have led to national tours and a high profile of our work.

4) Pushcart's leadership role in collaborative efforts with other key arts in education organizations designed to maximize artistic strength and minimize duplication of effort. Over the past several years Pushcart has collaborated on large and small projects with NJTA Stages Festival in South Jersey and other areas of the state; Paper Mill Playhouse on developing Sensory Friendly Performances for children on the Autism Spectrum and with other special needs, Arts Horizons, Passage Theatre in bilingual productions, Newark Museum, Forum Theatre Group, The Bickford Theatre as well as with colleagues in other Arts organizations such as NJ Symphony Orchestra at JF Kennedy School in Newark.

5) Innovative and increasing outreach efforts, including the development of a Bi-Lingual (Spanish/English) musical play, "Cuentos Del Arbol" in collaboration with NJ Theatre Alliance and follow-up workshops by Playwrights Theatre.

6) International recognition and acclaim, including a highly successful tour of the Czech Republic in June, 2002 and arts education for teens in Ethiopia in 2006.

#### *Additional Highlights and Achievements*

Since 1974, Pushcart has developed hundreds of replicable arts residency and workshop programs and written and produced twenty-seven original musical plays that address culturally diverse issues and make history and social studies vivid and relevant for students. The company has traveled more than two million miles to bring these programs to 10 million young people in every county of NJ and to 34 states (and counting!) across the U.S.

In 1991 Pushcart brought word of the Arts in NJ to the former Soviet Union in a highly successful performance tour for which we were commended and recorded in the Congressional Record for ". . . their contribution to a greater understanding between our two cultures." U. S. Senator Frank Lautenberg stated, "Pushcart Players has proven how art can transcend cultural barriers."

Other highlights include an EMMY award nomination for outstanding children's programming following two prime time specials on WCBS-TV, the Governor's award for outstanding theatre for children following performances at Wolf Trap (and again to Ruth Fost in 2007) and two performances, by special invitation, at The White House. Over the years, Pushcart has received standing ovations in very special places such as the PNC Bank Arts Center, Performing Arts Centers in Cape May, Camden, California and Skokie, IL; Dock Street Theatre in Charleston, The Cape Cod Playhouse, DuPont Playhouse in Delaware, American Place Theatre and Tribeca Theatre in NYC, Paper Mill Playhouse, The Shakespeare Theatre of NJ, NJ Performing Arts Center, Performing Arts Center of Tampa Bay, The Zeiterion Theatre, NJ Theatre Jubilee as well as in inner cities and small school houses in remote parts of the state and country!

### HISTORY/HIGHLIGHTS OF PUSHCART PLAYERS

**1974** - Pushcart Players was founded, "Three Apples Fell From Heaven" premiered at Avon Avenue School in Newark; performed at World Trade Center.

**1975** - "The Lightest Baggage Of All," - folk tales from around the world.

**1976**- "American Sampler," American history to celebrate the Bicentennial

**1977** - "Once Upon A Feeling," inspired by "I'm O.K., You're O.K."

**1978** - "Stretch, Grow, Here We Go," on emotional growth. WCBS-TV pilot



1977 - Music Rehearsal for "This Time Feelings" TV special  
L-R Jason Alexander, Rona Birnbaum, Darrell Carey, Ernie Semento, Sarah Cloud

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**1979** - "Play It In The Key Of Me," on self-acceptance, opens.

**1980** - Explored friendships/relationships in "Sidekicks."

**1981** - Pushcart goes Equity. "That's Me," a self affirmation musical opens.

**1982** -Pushcart turns full-time. Shows offered: "Sidekicks" and "That's Me."

**1983** -First major tour--3 weeks in South Carolina-- revised "American Sampler"

**1984**- "What's The Story?" -- a compilation of short stories by classic authors.

**1985** -Revival of "American Sampler" and "What's The Story?" 1<sup>st</sup> perf at GSAC

**1986** - "Three Cheers For U.S." Wolf Trap, Gov's award for outstanding work.

- 1987** - "Who Cares" based on wellness curriculum by Janet Foord; NJTG Jubilee  
**1988** - "A More Perfect Union." Mini-Series. 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala at Newark Library  
**1989** - All-new "American Sampler." "...Baggage" in Orlando, Fla. WPIX Special.  
**1990** - "Betwixt 'n Between" about problem-solving and decision-making.  
**1991** - Became Int'l company with tour of former Soviet Union - "Three Cheers"



*1991 – Tour of former Soviet Union  
 The Pushcart Players at the St. Basil's Cathedral - Moscow, Russia*

- 1992** – 350 performances of "Are We There Yet, Mr. Columbus?" 2 perfs at White House.  
**1993** - "A More Perfect Union," "Rainbows" Arts-in-Ed in high gear, pARTnerships.  
**1994** - Opened "Dear America"--cutting edge musical to celebrate ethnic diversity  
**1995**- "American Sampler," "Chasing Rainbows," "Once Upon A Time," "Stone Soup." 1st season of TheatreFest for Kids  
**1996**- Dear America" revived for brief run, followed by "Betwixt 'n Between"  
**1997** - "The Last . . . Butterfly" (Holocaust Ed); "Three Cheers," Story Theatre; Gala '97  
**1998** - "Butterfly" on nat'l tour (CA) "Dear America" and "Mr. Columbus?"  
**1999** - "Wow! What A Century!" and Wow! What a year! "Century" is *sold out!*. New production of "Peter and The Wolf," "Butterfly" and Story Theatre series; Arts-in-Ed programming expanded to fulfill Goals 2000 objectives for schools. Gala '99.  
**2000** - "...Century" to Colorado & Wyoming. "Peter and the Wolf," "Once Upon A Time," "Stone Soup..."  
**2001** - "...Century," "Peter and the Wolf," "Stone Soup..." "Once Upon A Time" expanded to four-person show, re-named "Red Riding Hood and Other Stories."

**2002** - Opened “Fiddler Tales;” “Butterfly...” on tour to Terezin in the Czech Republic.



*“The Last, The Very Last...Butterfly”*  
L-R Ruth Fost, Tricia Bart, Terrence Burnett,  
Mona Hennessy, Harry Patrick Christian

**2003** – Opened bi-lingual piece, “Cuentos Del Arbol” (“Tree Tales”) for Family Week, March. Show added to repertoire.

**2004** – Brought back “American Sampler” for mainstage. Opened “Not Quite Hamlet,” added to repertoire. Formed partnership with 12 Miles West Theatre in Bloomfield, NJ (using some storage and rehearsal space, starting a weekend matinee series, there.)

**2005** – Record number of shows available throughout entire year (9)! Participated in NJTA’s *ARTS ALIVE* Conference. Opened new multicultural holiday musical, “A Season of Miracles,” Show added to repertoire.

**2006** – Brought back “Are We There Yet, Mr. Columbus.” 7 shows available locally. National touring on the rise, including combined tours of “Peter...” & “Cuentos...” (MN, FL, WI)

**2007** – Brought back “Wow! What A Century!” 7 shows available locally. Combined “Peter...”/“Cuentos...” tours to IN, OH, AZ, CA, VT, NH. “Cuentos...” to NC. “...Butterfly” to CA. “Stone Soup and Other Stories” being expanded into a larger, four-person show for national touring in ’07-’08 (in combination with “Red Riding Hood...”); Ruth Fost received NJ Governor’s Award for Excellence in Arts Education.

**2008** – 8 Shows available locally/nationally. “Stone Soup...”/“Red Riding Hood...” combined tours to CA, AZ, ME, NH, VT. NJTA Achievement of Excellence Award.

**2009** – Opened new show, “Happily Ever After ~ A Cinderella Tale.” 8 Shows available locally/nationally. Combined “Peter...”/“Cuentos...” tours to AZ, CA, MD, TN. Other shows to FL, VA, VT, ME, OH, CA. Record breaking fund-raising Yard Sale.

**2010** – 8 Shows available locally/nationally. National touring with SMG Artists even busier. “Happily Ever After ~ A Cinderella Tale” to AZ, WA, CA, MN, WI. “Stone Soup...” to ALASKA! Showcased “Let Freedom Ring” (formerly “American Sampler” at APAP for the 2010-2011 season. Expansion of Arts-In-Education Workshops and Residencies.

**2011** – Again, 8 Shows available locally/nationally, this year including “Peter and the Wolf”/ “Cuentos del Arbol” for combined tours. Also opened “Let Freedom Ring” and offered “Stone Soup...”, “Red Riding Hood...”, “The Last...Butterfly,” “A Season of Miracles” and “Happily Ever After” at various intervals throughout the year. Reached every county in NJ and many schools in tri-state area. Nat’l tours took us to CA, WA, AZ, NM, MD OH, NC and MT.



*“Stone Soup & Other Stories”  
L-R Christina Gordon & Oscar Castillo*

**2012** – “Let Freedom Ring” in large demand throughout NJ and on tour. “Cuentos del Arbol” paired with “Peter and the Wolf” for extensive 3-week tour in many California locations. In repertory – 8 productions at various time periods. Record number of performances in March (total of 42!!) including “Cuentos...” at Passage Theatre and many South Jersey locations. Pushcart Gala a grand success at the Montclair Art Museum: A performance of “Happily Ever After...A Cinderella Tale” followed by *A Royal Tea Party at the Palace Reception*. A fabulous event, enjoyed by young and old and everyone in between!

**2013** – All productions (“Peter and the Wolf” “Cuentos del Arbol,” “Let Freedom Ring” “Stone Soup...”, “Red Riding Hood...”, “The Last...Butterfly,” “A Season of Miracles” and “Happily Ever After... *A Cinderella Tale*”) available for touring. “Happily Ever After...still in large demand and “Season of Miracles” sold out well before opening in Nov/Dec. Opened an all new show, “Celebrating New Jersey” in anticipation of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of New Jersey 2014. Large interest and many engagements for this show as well as “Let Freedom Ring.” Other shows booked in rep as in past seasons.

**2014** – Became more “efficient” and streamlined by taking a few productions out of repertoire and having certain shows available in fall/winter and others in spring/summer. Took “Happily Ever After...” out of rep and added an all new original Pushcart production, “Alice in Wonderland...A Journey of Self Discovery.” “Alice...” opened in November and was off and running, generating great interest and feedback from schools as well as major performance venues across the country. A book was published in conjunction with the performance for further reading and enrichment.



*“Alice In Wonderland”  
Paul Whelihan and Susie Paplow*

**2015 /16** – “Streamlined and efficient” roster working well, helping re-build and strengthen scheduling and artistic focus. “Alice In Wonderland...” still going strong – many engagements throughout NJ from Newton to Ocean County, from Bayside to Mahwah. “Alice...” traveled the state as well as in tours to Iowa, California, Nevada, Wolf Trap, and Virginia. On tour for a week at Anchorage Junior Theatre in Alaska and then to Santa Rosa and Lancaster California. “Kids Do Broadway” programming in NJ and beyond (AZ, Breezy Point, Wayne, Caldwell, Boonton). “A Season of Miracles” once again sold out in December. “Stone Soup...,” “Peter and the Wolf,” and “Butterfly” available and nicely booked in spring, 2016. “JFK Kids Onstage” Project for students on Autism Spectrum and other special needs culminating in performances for invited audiences in February drawing high praise for astounding outcomes; and new production developed and added to repertoire: **“Ellis Island: Gateway to America”** Recent showcase at APAP drew great interest and praise for it’s timeliness and touching story line about the immigrant experience. It is already booking well for 2016-17.



*Audience at JFK Kids Onstage Project*

Pushcart’s co-founder, Ruth Fost retired after 42 years with the company. Actor, director, playwright, stage manager and producer, Paul Whelihan took the helm and began guiding the

company in a refreshed direction, deepening the diversity of the performing ensemble and the programming.

**2017-2018** – Pushcart introduced the all new production, “The Velveteen Rabbit” (Book by Paul Whelihan, Music & Lyrics by Paul Farinella, Orchestrations by Larry Hochman, and it became an immediate best-seller with schools and theaters nationwide.

Education programs were deepened and broadened with the second year of “Page to Stage,” a storytelling residency at The Learning Center for Exceptional Children in Clifton NJ (fully funded by Pine Tree Foundation of New York). Also in its second year was the program at JFK School in Newark, NJ, wherein during a nine month period, Pushcart teaching artists lead the creation, rehearsal and presentation of a musical theater piece with children on the Autism spectrum and with other cognitive disabilities.

In a new program, Pushcart served as the not-for-profit arts organization partner with MLK School 6 in Passaic, NJ. This after school project was a story-telling initiative, wherein Pushcart teaching artists provided the theatrical expertise for ELL and ESL (English Language Learners and English as a Second Language) students in this Title I school.



*“The Velveteen Rabbit”*

Pushcart welcomed four new board members from the educational, legal, and corporate sectors, and began the planning process of developing the next Long Term Strategic Plan, bringing the organization to new directions in the coming seasons.

