



2022 GALA

PRESS KIT

Feb. 18, 2022

## CONTENTS

### Gala Information

- Event Press Release
- Gala Performer Bios
- Links to [Head Shots](#) & [Headliner B-Roll](#)
- Gala Sponsor List

### Academy Editorial Background:

- Academy Mission
- Board of Trustees/Link to Bios
- Artistic Advisors/Working-Artist Quotations
- Facility/[Link to renderings & plans](#)



**FOR RELEASE FEB. 18, 2022**

Contact:  
Dylan Ladd, 847-691-6063  
[Dylan.ladd@artsacademyil.org](mailto:Dylan.ladd@artsacademyil.org)

**Stars of the Stage & Screen Gather in Naperville  
*Performers Display Their Support for Arts Education***

NAPERVILLE, IL (Feb. 18, 2022) – An all-star Gala concert is being held tonight at North Central College’s Wentz Concert Hall in Naperville. The event is presented by AARP to support the Academy of the Arts, a new, west-suburban, non-profit academic and art school projected to open in fall 2025. The playbill features stars from some of Broadway’s biggest shows.

“We are thrilled to see this level of support from the Broadway arts community for this event and our mission,” said Academy co-founder Dylan Ladd. “We are seeing strong support from the business community, with the AARP sponsorship of this event along with other corporate sponsors, plus local, west suburban community support as well.”

That local support is tangible with an event of more than 150 guests and the sales of tickets at \$100 each, plus donations for more than 40 Gala silent auction items – ranging from sports memorabilia such as photos and jerseys autographed by Walter Payton, Gale Sayers, Mike Ditka, Tom Brady, Kobe Bryant, Patrick Kane, Anthony Rizzo, and performing artists memorabilia autographed by Adele, *The Avengers* cast and the *Star Wars* cast, to works by local artists donated by the Naperville Art League and a Napa Valley wine tasting experience.

Ladd’s mission is to build and open the school for grades 6 through 12, offering the core academic areas of math, reading, language arts, social studies and science, along with a range of visual arts and performing arts programs, by the 2025-26 academic year.

“We have a lot of work ahead before we have our [state-of-the-art facility](#) and our first class of full-time students,” Ladd said. “And that work moving forward is funding the project.”

The facility is a planned world-class arts center: A 1,200-seat auditorium with a proscenium stage, fly loft and orchestra pit, an outdoor amphitheater and a modular black box theater; dance recording, art and film studios, editing suites, flexible classroom spaces, innovative common spaces and academic classrooms.

The non-profit Academy's year-one fundraising goal is \$2 million from which it anticipates building momentum toward the \$80 million needed to break ground and build the new facility.

"Community support is critical to meet our goal to fully open in fall 2025," Ladd said. "It sounds lofty, but we've done the research and have the data: This is the right location with the level of community engagement needed to bring this asset to the families of Naperville and surrounding suburbs."

Learn more about the Academy, its gala and other opportunities to support its mission at [www.illinoisartsacademy.org](http://www.illinoisartsacademy.org).

###

2022 Gala Performers

**SOLOISTS BIOGRAPHIES**



## CATHY RIGBY



Award-winning actress and two-time Olympic gymnast, Cathy Rigby is the co-founding owner of McCoy Rigby Art, and Co-Producing Director of The McCoy Rigby Broadway Series at La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts (La Mirada, CA), along with her husband Tom McCoy.

Rigby – quite literally – soared while creating unforgettable stage moments and memories for generations during her 3,000 Broadway performances as *Peter Pan* which earned her a Tony nomination. For

her performances as an Olympic gymnast and Olympic sports commentator, she was named one of the 25 "Most Influential Women in Sports" by ABC-TV's Wide World of Sports, and later was inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame.

With a strong passion for Youth Arts Educational Outreach, fundraising for children's needs, and advocating for anything that helps improve the children's self esteem, Rigby continues her mission to teach children the importance of hard work, grit, commitment and determination in her weekly classes and through private lessons as a certified Acrobatic Arts instructor.

Rigby and her team also have created an award-winning competitive MRA Dance Company, offering classes in all areas of the arts including dance, musical theater, puppetry, acting, tap, adult classes and classes for performers with special needs.

Along with a love for cooking and spending quality time with her children and grandchildren, Rigby enjoys creative expression through interior design, and finds relaxation in gardening.

Rigby attributes her success to remembering that we are all creative in our own right; imagination and creativity are absolute necessities in making major breakthroughs no matter the industry. Every student she helps learn and understand how to best express their creativity is another student that will more successfully share their voice and light with the world.



***Downloadable gala performer headshots can be found [here](#).***

***B-Roll footage of headliner Cathy Rigby can be found [here](#).***

## JULIA MURNEY



Julia Murney last appeared on Broadway as Elphaba in *Wicked* after playing the role on the national tour for which she received an Acclaim Award. She earned Drama Desk nominations for her performances in *The Wild Party* and *Falling*, and a Lucille Lortel nomination for *Time and Again*.

Other New York credits include *Lennon*, *The Vagina Monologues*, *A Class Act*, *The Landing*, *Saved*, *Crimes of the Heart* and *Queen of the Mist*.

Performing in regional shows all over the United States – Signature, Muny, Williamstown, Reprise!LA, Sacramento Music Circus, NCT, Lyric, Rubicon and Goodspeed, to name a few – Murney also has performed solo concerts in New York City at such renown venues as Feinstein's/54 Below, Birdland, Joe's Pub & Ars Nova, and made symphony appearances from Carnegie Hall to the Kennedy Center, from Caramoor to Town Hall, from Malaysia to Maui, and many places in between.

Among her TV credits are *Madam Secretary*, *30 Rock*, *Sex and the City*, *Elementary*, *Brothers and Sisters*, *Ed*, *NYPD Blue*, *First You Dream*, all the *Law and Order* series, and “about a gazillion” voiceovers.

A Syracuse University graduate, Murney’s recordings include the original cast albums of *The Wild Party* and *A Class Act*, the Grammy-nominated Actors Fund Benefit of *Hair*, and her first solo album *I’m Not Waiting*, which is available on iTunes & on her website, [www.juliamurney.com](http://www.juliamurney.com).

Follow Murney:

- Twitter: @juliamurney
- Instagram: @pepamama



**Downloadable gala performer headshots can be found [here](#).**

**B-Roll footage of headliner Cathy Rigby can be found [here](#).**

## KAREN MASON



Having most recently played Mrs. Marsh on Ryan Murphy's *Halston* on Netflix, Karen Mason is a widely recognized actor. She was last seen on tour in the role of Madame Giry in the North American Premier of *Love Never Dies*, Andrew Lloyd Webber's epic sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera*.

On Broadway, Mason starred as The Queen of Hearts in *Wonderland*, and originated the role of Tanya in *Mamma Mia!* for which she earned a 2002 Drama Desk nomination for Best Actress. Mason's other leading roles include Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*, on Broadway and in Los Angeles for three years; Velma von Tussel in the final Broadway company of *Hairspray*; and "Monotony" singer, Mazeppa in *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*.

In regional theater Mason starred in *Chasing Rainbows* at The PaperMill Playhouse; *A Christmas Story* in the role of Miss Shields; *White Christmas* with the St. Louis Muni Opera; *Side by Side by Sondheim* at the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Florida; *Gypsy* at the Sundance Theatre in California; and *Company* at Boston's Huntington Theatre.

Mason won the Outer Critics Circle Award for her off-Broadway performance in *And The World Goes 'Round* and is a 14-time MAC Award winner, culminating in her receiving the 2019 MAC Lifetime Achievement Award. She also has won three Bistro Awards.

Mason's extensive list of recordings is highlighted by the single, *It's About Time*, written by Paul Rolnick and Shelly Markham and her 2009 MAC Award-winning *Right Here/Right Now*.

Other recordings include *The Sweetest of Nights*; *When The Sun Comes Out*; *Christmas! Christmas! Christmas!*; *Better Days*, featuring the 1998 Emmy Award-winning song *Hold Me*; and *Not So Simply Broadway*. She also is part of the original cast recording of *Wonderland*; and has recording credits for the film *Jeffrey* (Varese Sarabande) and for the JAY Records *Wonderful Town* (JAY Records); the cast album of *And The World Goes Round* (RCA Victor). [www.karenmason.com](http://www.karenmason.com)



**Downloadable gala performer headshots can be found [here](#).**

**B-Roll footage of headliner Cathy Rigby can be found [here](#).**

## ZONYA LOVE



When a country girl from the Carolinas who grew up singing in church secures a Broadway role within three months of arriving in New York, that's Zonya Love.

After earning her B.F.A. in acting from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and her M.F.A. in acting from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Love headed to Broadway, securing the role of Celie in the original Broadway production of *The Color Purple*. Since, she has traveled the United States performing regionally in various theater productions and concerts.

Some off-Broadway credits include the role of Gary Coleman in *Avenue Q*, and Britney in *Emma & Max*. She also was part of the first national tour of *Avenue Q* and held roles in *The Devil's Music* at Milwaukee Repertory Theater; *Dreamgirls* at Theater Under the Stars; *Lights Out: Nat King Cole* at People's Light and The Geffen Playhouse; *The Parchman Hour* at The Guthrie; *Sister Act*, *The Wiz*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Show Boat* and *Little Shop of Horrors* at Broadway at Sacramento; *Intimate Apparel* and *Twelfth Night* at Nevada Conservatory Theater; and, most recently, in Jocelyn Bioh's adaptation of *Merry Wives* at the New York Shakespeare Theater Festival.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, Love created and performed *Spiritual Uprising- a virtual concert of Negro Spirituals* reimaged for People's Light Theater's 2021 Virtual Concert series.

Love's television credits include *Bull*, *Blue Bloods*, *Smash* and *The David Letterman Show*. She is a proud and active member of BOLD and Broadway Inspirational Voices.

Follow Love:

- Twitter and IG: @lovezonya @iamaboldwoman @bivoices Romans 8:38!



**Downloadable gala performer headshots can be found [here](#).**

**B-Roll footage of headliner Cathy Rigby can be found [here](#).**





## MEECAH

Since the age of three years old, Meechah has been performing on stage and in the church constantly sharpening her skills. Under the mentorship of legends like *Marc Shaiman, Quentin Earl Darrington, Robert Hartwell, Schele Williams* and many others, Meechah's blossoming career has become one to witness. After playing Zindzi Mandela in several workshops of the musical *Mandela*, Meechah is currently cast on the Philip Tour of *Hamilton* as their Principal Standby. Her first love however, will always be singing. It is believed to be her "direct gift from God". Meechah has two EP's on all platforms, and a fan-favorite single that is climbing charts daily.

Representation includes: CGF and CLA Partners. Romans 8:38.  
@Meechah



**Downloadable gala performer headshots can be found [here](#).**

**B-Roll footage of headliner Cathy Rigby can be found [here](#).**



## CHADAÉ NICHOL

Chadaé Nichol is a Broadway performer and arts educator from Joliet, IL, and currently is based in Los Angeles. Nichol made her Broadway debut in *Motown the Musical*. She was most recently seen in The Lyric Opera of Chicago's productions of *Oklahoma* and *Showboat*.

Regionally she was part of productions of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Cabaret* and *The Wiz*. Nichol has also starred in productions at Disneyland in California.

Currently, Nichol is the Education Manager for The Broadway Collective. She earned her BFA in Musical Theatre from Ball State University.



**Downloadable gala performer headshots can be found [here](#).**

**B-Roll footage of headliner Cathy Rigby can be found [here](#).**

2022 Gala

**MUSIC STAFF BIOGRAPHIES**



## VALERIE GEBERT

### Conductor



A music director, keyboardist and conductor for over four decades, Gebert has been performing with national and international touring productions since 1989.

Gebert's most recent U.S. tours include *Anastasia*, *Finding Neverland*, *Cinderella*, *The Addams Family*, *Wicked* and *The Lion King*. Her numerous regional theatre appearances include The MUNY, Sacramento Music Theater, North Shore Music Theater; she served as conductor and music director for the University of Michigan Music Theater Program 2000-2001 academic year.

## DARRYL ARCHIBALD



### Music Supervisor / Orchestrator

Darryl Archibald's credits include: *Encore!* (Disney+); *Passion* (Boston Court); *Little Shop Of Horrors* with M.J. Rodriguez (Pasadena Playhouse); *The Color Purple* (2015 Revival) Broadway tour; *Motown The Musical* on Broadway 2016 and national tour; *Memphis* Broadway tour; *Dreamgirls* national tour (associate conductor); Disney's *The Lion King* Broadway tour (vocal coach/assistant conductor); *Wicked* at the Pantages Theater (substitute conductor); *Beauty And The Beast* (McCoy/ Rigby); *Ragtime* (Pasadena Playhouse); *The Wiz* (The Muny); *Dear World* with Tyne Daly (VPAC); Jonathan Dove's *Innocence* (Banff Centre and Manhattan Theatre Club); *Nightmare Alley* - workshop (The Geffen Playhouse); *In The Heights* (TUTS); *Swing!* (Sacramento Music Circus); *Smokey Joe's Café*, *Serrano* – workshop with James Barbour and directed by Joel Zwick (El Portal Theater); *I Married Wyatt Earp* - workshop with Carole Cook and Carol Lawrence

(Wadsworth Theater); *In The Heights*, *The Producers*, *Legally Blonde*, *Kiss Me Kate* with Davis Gaines, *White Christmas*, *Funny Girl*, *Gypsy*, *A Chorus Line* directed by Kay Cole, *The King and I* with Deborah Gibson (Cabrillo Music Theatre); *Swing!*, *Next To Normal*, *The Buddy Holly Story* (McCoy/Rigby Entertainment); *Merry Me A Little* – revised version (Celebration Theater); *Two By Two* with Jason Alexander and Faith Prince, *How To Succeed In Business...* with John O'Hurley, *Carousel* with M. Emmet Walsh, *The Fantasticks* with Eric McCormack, *Once On This Island* with Ledisi, *Li'I Abner* with Cathy Rigby and Fred Willard, *Merrily We Roll Along* with Teri Hatcher, *I Do! I Do!* with Diana Canova and Harry Groener (Reprise); *Great Expectations*, *My Fair Lady*, *1776*, *Little Shop Of Horrors*, *Camelot*, and *Forever Plaid* (Utah Shakespearean Festival); *A Christmas Memory* (Laguna Playhouse); *Loving Repeating*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Raisin* with Nell Carter (ICT); *The Fix*, *Kiss Of The Spider Woman*, *Lady In the Dark*, *Sail Away* (Musical Theater Guild); *Ragtime*, *Silk Stockings*, *Never Gonna Dance* (Musical Theatre West). Arrangement and orchestration credits include: the prime-time television special *A Hollywood Holiday Celebration* (ABC-TV), *The Wiz* (2018 new orchestrations for the Muny), *Standard Time* (Mark Stuart Dance Theatre), *Passion* (chamber orchestration for Boston Court), *The Fountain Show* and *Christmas Trolley Show* (The Grove Los Angeles), *Great Expectations* (Utah Shakespearean Festival and Blackpool, UK).

## ORCHESTRA MEMBERS

- Piano: Kyle Schneider
- Guitar: Patrick Jansen
- Bass Guitar: Patrick Williams
- Drums: Jimmy Bonaparte-Coggins
- Violins: Karla Galva\*, Brandon Lamm, Rachel Handlin, Betty Lewis
- Violas: Anny Moravec, Hannah Lamm
- Cellos: Mark Lekas, Michael Beert
- Trumpets: Roger Ingram, Dave Katz
- Trombone: Mike Joyce
- Flute/Piccolo: Susan Saylor
- Clarinet: Patrick Rehker
- Horn: Pete Jirousek
- Harp: Nanette Felix
- Percussion: Jim Conley

\* Concertmaster

## **GALA SPONSORS**

Presenting Sponsor: **AARP**

Corporate & Local Business Sponsors:

- **Molina Healthcare**
- **Alden Management Services**
- **Naperville Bank & Trust**
- **La Borra Café**

Hotel Partner: **Hotel Arista**

Print Sponsor: **Sir Speedy – Naperville**

Banner Sponsor: **JAM! Graphics**

Media Sponsor: **Naperville Magazine/Tribune Publishing**

Marketing Sponsor: **The Branch**

Food & Beverage Sponsors:

- **Belgio's Catering**
- **Le Chocolat du Bouchard**
- **Party Can**
- **Momentum Beverage Team**
- **MolsonCoors**

Silent Auction Sponsors:

- **Colbert Custom Framing**
- **North Central College**
- **Catch 35**



Editorial Background:

*Mission/Board of Trustees*

*Artistic Advisors/Celebrity Advisor Quotations*

*Facility*



ACADEMY  
OF  
THE ARTS



**ABOUT** Academy of the Arts:

Academy of the Arts is a new, west-suburban, non-profit academic and art school for grades 6 thru 12 projected to fully open in fall 2025. It began offering master classes in December 2021, and will offer evening and weekend programming at 2135 CityGate Ln., Naperville, IL, in fall 2022.

It is committed to providing a high-level arts curriculum while engaging students in a rigorous academic education, based on the belief that creativity and the quest for innovation will foster individuality, allowing the holistic development of each artist.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

ACADEMY Co-Founders:

- Dylan Ladd
- Julie Hindenburg
- Kirsten Garrigan

BOARD Members:

- Daniel Beetstra
- Cyndi Conley
- Brian Lynch
- Chadaé Nichol
- Laurinda Paschal-Dodgen
- Bonnie Spurling
- Keelan Witmore

BOARD Advisors:

- Mary Ann Bobosky, Ed.D.
- Alma Jones

[See Board Biographies.](#)



#### ARTISITIC Advisors:

The Academy has engaged [working artists](#) in the areas of music, dance, theatre and industry to guide its mission. It currently is seeking a visual arts advisor.

#### MUSIC Advisors:

- **Alex Lacamoire:** Composer and arranger, *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *In the Heights*  
*“As an alumnus of arts schools in Miami, I can attest to how rewarding an experience it is for students who are trained in these unique institutions. Being surrounded by music, art, dance, theater on every school day shaped me as an artist and as a person, and I owe all my accomplishments to the teachers and peers that inspired me along the way.”*
- **Taylor Dayne:** Pop icon with 1987 debut single *Tell It To My Heart*  
*“When a child is given the opportunity to study a passion they can see, hear and perform, it puts their lives in their own hands and gives a wonderful sense of freedom. That’s the beauty of the arts – you can be and see who you want to be.”*

#### DANCE Advisors:

- **Jack Sippel:** Associate choreographer, Netflix’s *The Prom*  
*“Arts education is one place where young students have the ability to express themselves and be who they really are. Creative outlets like arts education have proven to drastically improve development of motor skills, language skills and social skills amongst all ethnicities as disabilities. It’s the one universal line of connection and communication that brings us all together.”*
- **Keelan Whitmore:** Dance soloist with Germany’s TanzTheatre Muenster  
*“On a deeply human level, art is the universal mother tongue that unifies the different cultures of the world. Protecting this international language is essential to protecting our humanity. This begins with an inclusive and equitable approach to arts education. Without experiencing this type of rigor in my life with teachers who truly cared, I would perhaps be lost.”*

#### Theatre Advisor:

- **Stephen Wallem:** Actor and singer best known as Thore for seven seasons on *Nurse Jackie*  
*“It wasn’t until I was an adult that I realized how fortunate I was as a Midwestern kid to have gone to a performing arts school. I was the textbook “artistic” child with zero interest in sports. Not only did that program give me a safe and nurturing environment to grow as a person, it also gave me invaluable early training for my 35 years as a professional performer.”*

#### Industry Advisor:

- **Eden Alpert:** Daughter of musician and A&M Records co-founder Herb Alpert  
*“The arts and music are a form of therapy and expression. To have a space that provides compassion and creativity in our society is a gift all children deserve and need.”*

[See advisor biographies.](#)



## **CURRENT & FUTURE FACILITIES**

The Academy of the Arts will launch its fall programming at 2155 CityGate Ln., Naperville, IL, in a space to accommodate evening and weekend classes. It's mission to open a full academic and arts institution for grades 6 thru 12 involves construction of a state-of-the-art facility in the western suburbs. The Gala, other fundraising efforts, private, corporate and government donations and grants are needed to raise the funds to finalize site selection.

The planned facility is a world-class arts center: A 1,200-seat auditorium with a proscenium stage, fly loft and orchestra pit, an outdoor amphitheater and a modular black box theater; dance recording, art and film studios, editing suites, flexible classroom spaces, innovative common spaces and academic classrooms.

[View & download proposed floor plans and renderings.](#)

