

In The Spotlight

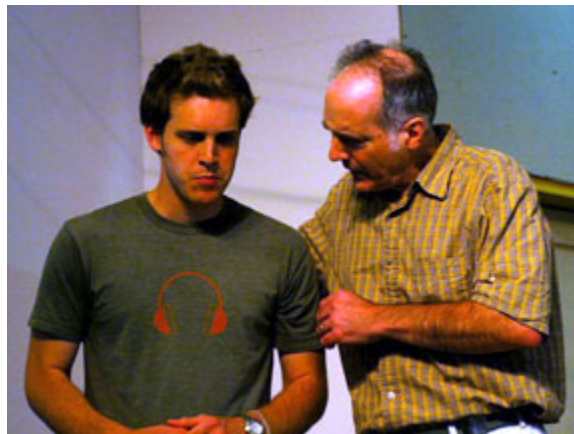
(By Cathy Shane, The Ellsworth American June 27, 2007)



Bill Raiten (left) directs Julian Chapman and Shari John in a rehearsal.—PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSS BELL

Scholarship Could Make One Actor's Dream Come True

BLUE HILL — Since he was in seventh grade, Julian Chapman, a resident of Brooksville, has spent all his summers in theatrical rehearsals and performances under the careful tutelage of the spirited Bill Raiten.



Julian Chapman rehearses with his father, Ralph Chapman, for “Lend Me a Tenor.”—PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSS BELL

Now 18 years old, Chapman has never been able to work a full-time summer job because of the numerous hours he dedicates to his performances in Raiten's New Surry Theatre (NST) summer sessions.

But for this George Stevens Academy graduate, holding down a job to make money for college tuition won't be a problem. Bennington College in Vermont has awarded him a \$47,000 scholarship.

And he says he owes not just the scholarship, but a lot of his success to Raiten.

"Bill started out as one of those crazy old men," Chapman said, laughing with Raiten one afternoon before the rehearsal of their latest production, "Lend Me A Tenor." "Now he's like a father figure; a role model."

"Yeah, and he's going to have to thank me when he wins an Oscar," said Raiten, chiming in. (For those who don't know him, Raiten has an easy wit and is quick with the one-liner.) The two appear more like an amusing sitcom act than actor and director.

Even in rehearsal the chemistry between the two is undeniable. Raiten and Chapman work on stage directions together, twisting their bodies this way and that to find the angle where the audience can see the action best.

"See, oh — that looks great!" cheered Raiten as Chapman and actress Jennie Smick practiced a very comical kissing scene.

Raiten has known Chapman since he was 2 years old through Chapman's father, Ralph, and his wife, Becky Poole. Ralph and Becky had been taking acting classes at the NST, the theatre and acting school Raiten founded in 1972.

It wasn't until the summer before Chapman entered the seventh grade that he officially began working with Raiten, sparking an acting career that would take him to places like Paris with the New York University's Tisch School of the Arts for a theatre workshop.

He owes this part to his father and stepmother, who urged him to attend Raiten's summer camp for theater even though at the time Chapman didn't want to.

"We are happy to encourage our kids," said Ralph. "We will give that extra nudge."

IF YOU GO

What: "Lend Me a Tenor" by Ken Ludwig.

When: Opens July 6 with performances on July 13, 14, 15, 27, 29 and on Aug. 11, 12, 17 and 18.

What: "The Gin Game" by D. L. Coburn.

When: Opens July 8 with performances on July 20, 21, 22, 28 and Aug. 3, 5, 10.

Times: Friday and Saturday performances at 7 p.m. Sunday matinees at 3 p.m.

Where: Blue Hill Town Hall.

Tickets/info: Tickets \$18. Call 374-5556 or check newsurrytheatre.org.

After that first day, Raiten said he already saw something in Chapman. Before leaving camp that day, he had Chapman read some of the script for the play “Lost in Yonkers.” He knew right then that Chapman had a gift.

“He was such a talent from the get-go,” said Raiten. “I thought, ‘Ralph, this is your son?’”

The two have worked together ever since. Raiten has directed Chapman not just at the NST, but as the drama coach in acting classes at the GSA.

Chapman has played in a variety of roles including both Rodolpho and Eddie Carbone in separate performances of “View from the Bridge” and Ronnie Shaughnessy in “House of Blue Leaves.” Chapman’s most recent performance was with the GSA drama club in “Waiting for Lefty,” at the Maine Drama Festival where he and the rest of the players were named to the Festival’s All-Star cast.

Playing characters such as these is actually what got Chapman his scholarship when he submitted a 16-minute DVD of acting clips taken from his NST performances.

His next performance will be the role of Max in the NST’s “Lend Me A Tenor,” a comedy that opens July 6. Max is a generally shy and nervous character who falls in love with the daughter of the character Saunders. To make this production a family affair, Chapman’s father is the understudy for Saunders.

“We have a great time at finding the truth,” said Raiten looking at both Julian and Ralph, “and having the audience feel what the author wanted them to feel.”

During his first year at Bennington, Chapman wants to focus on theater and photography. He says he is not yet set on what he wants to major in, but will take a broad range of courses that include theater-oriented classes. The very modest, slightly bashful Chapman says that his plans are unclear at this point, but if he were to “someday make it on stage” that he would try his hand at acting on the silver screen.

It’s quite an exciting time for Chapman, his family and his friends. He said theater has taught him a lot about how to handle tough situations and how to interact with all sorts of people in the world. He said it even helped him take his driving exam and present his senior project debate.

But it’s Raiten who will get a huge thank you when he wins his Oscar.

“I know him so well,” said Chapman. “He taught me everything I know.”