

Historian's Corner: My Tribute to a Beloved Friend

It feels a little strange writing an installment of the Historian's Corner. Somehow I don't feel worthy. After all I've only been a member for a mere 17 years, unlike the um-teen years of our dear charter members. But as I reflect upon the time I've belonged to OP (which has gone by in a snap, I'll have you know), I can't help but wax a little nostalgic about a dear man who was taken from us far too young – Maury Rosenberg.

Maury was a super talented guy. Director, choreographer, comedian, dancer. It seemed like there was nothing Maury couldn't do. Maury was one of the first people I met with the Players. A few weeks after I was married I auditioned for him for OP's *No, No, Nanette*. Maury directed that production and even in the first round of auditions I was struck by his ability to think out of the box. I arrived at auditions thinking for sure I was perfect for the lead and right away he had me reinvent my audition song in an entirely different way. His point was to ascertain whether I might fit the bill for a radically different character from the ingénue, specifically "Flora from Frisco", a seemingly ditzy blond bombshell attempting to innocently abscond with Jimmy's fortune. I had never encountered someone in community theatre who could look beyond the obvious in an audition. What a breath of fresh air! I knew then and there that I DEFINITELY wanted to work with this director.

Well, Maury didn't disappoint. The things I have learned from him have lasted me throughout my performing career. In addition to showing me how to look beyond the obvious, one of the most important things he taught me was the importance of detail. How each and every little thing you do in a movement, with a prop, and in your body language fleshes out a character. Simply put, how each and every thing you do on stage matters. You may not think audiences catch everything, but they do. Your speech, your inflection, your stride, your interactions with other characters – all of it makes up the final product and the final impression. No one I'd met before Maury had ever bothered with the little things like that.

Maury keenly understood the art of comedy in a way I rarely see. He knew it never works unless it is delivered honestly. He knew that as soon as you try to be funny, you aren't funny. He recognized the power of the body to make comedy work. He showed you how the simplest gesture or movement could be hysterical. Gosh, how I miss that.....

Maury always found a way to make me feel important. And I think he was good at that. Regardless of the size of your role, he deemed each and every actor an integral part of the production. So once again, every little movement, interaction, dance step, etc. really mattered to him. You couldn't help but appreciate and respect that. He wanted each of his performers – from the leads to the chorus members – to be the best they could be, and if that meant smelling only one flower instead of two, by golly he would tell you that and WHY it made such a difference.

Finally, Maury understood that if you aren't having fun, you shouldn't be doing this. He knew you could focus, learn something about the theatre, get dance steps down, and simultaneously have a blast. And Lord knows I will be forever grateful to him for bringing me to a cast and a theatre group where I have made some wonderful friends and had wonderful times. Those of you who had the pleasure of knowing Maury realize that I could probably write a couple more pages in his honor. (There's so much to say!) Inasmuch as our space is limited, however, allow me to close with this thought. As you raise a glass to toast the New Year, toast the theatrical mentors you've had in your life. And for those OPers who had the blessings of Maury in your lives, say an extra thank you that he brought his talents and *joie de vivre* to our little community theatre. I know I will.

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