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ARTS & CULTURE

youngARTS Week
A First Person Perspective

By Aaron Glickman

youngARTS is the core program for the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts and identifies the nation's most talented high school seniors in nine different disciplines in the performing, literary and visual arts. The students are flown to Miami to engage in master classes taught by the literal masters of their specific discipline.

Past masters have been Edward Albee and Frank Gehry, to name only two. This year legendary pop artist, James Rosenquist, taught the master class to the visual arts and photography youngARTS winners and was honored with the Arison Award at the *An Affair of the Arts* performance and gala.

Coming from a theatre background, and by that I mean I worked on stage professionally for more than a decade, I chose to attend the theatre showcase held at the Colony Theatre on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach.

The showcase was the culmination of the workshop and featured each of the 21 actors performing a solo piece that was either a monologue or song. The showcase began with a theatre game that starts with one actor coming center stage and performing a recurring motion with a sound element. Another actor then joins the first with a different movement and sound. The "machine" builds from there with each of the actors joining in, one after the other, until all 21 are engaged as a single unit, each with their own movement and sound. It's very cool, both to do and watch, and in many ways a metaphor for a cohesive acting company.

Following the ice-breaking exercise, the actors sat in pre-set chairs and awaited their turn to perform. Many of the pieces were wonderful and some clearly stood out from the rest. Tucker Worley from Denver School of the Arts performed the tap number "I Can Do That" from A Chorus Line and was lights out. Adam Anderson from Alexander W. Dreyfoos, Jr. School of the Arts in West Palm Beach performed a section from Jesus Hopped the "A" Train and displayed a wonderful stage presence and understanding of the material; while Miami native and student of the New World School of the Arts, Khadijah Rolle, sang "Daddy's Son" from Ragtime. Her voice encompassed the theatre and evoked an honest and visceral response from the packed house.

The show concluded as it began with the company engaging in another theatre game that demonstrated a unified group comprised of talented individuals.

Three days later I attended the *An Affair of the Arts* performance and gala and had the opportunity to talk shop with James Rosenquist during the extended cocktail hour. While sitting on the rooftop terrace adjacent to the Glimmer Ballroom at the Fontainebleau, and overlooking the Atlantic Ocean on a brisk winter evening, Rosenquist enlightened me on the "trade secrets" that he has employed throughout the past five decades – the same "trade secrets" that he presented to the visual arts students of youngARTS.

"I taught the students about a professional studio and professional techniques so that they can do some huge amazing things," he said in a rather matter-of-fact, gruff cadence that distinguishes itself throughout his speaking.

"When I was a teenager," he continued, "I painted outdoor billboard pictures, and if I didn't do it good enough, I'd get fired. Then I worked in Times Square in the '50s... I painted with old, old painters and I learned a great deal from these old guys... I used to experiment on huge billboards with color, but that experience is not available anymore because everything is photography."

Rosenquist continued with more fascinating stories about painting



James Rosenquist receives the Arison Award, presented by Christina DePaul of youngARTS



Tucker Worley



Adam Anderson



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cigarettes and whiskey bottles for hire before explaining the artistic approach that led to his stardom.

"You need to invent your own game and be the star of it because no one else knows how to play," he said. "I used commercial painting techniques to put elements in a picture plane so that the largest was so big that it would be recognized last. It was sort of a trick, and I had my first show in '62 and sold out. The second show was at the Museum of Modern Art. In '65 was my F111 painting that is now in the Museum of Modern Art, and so on and so on...I worked like hell, but I've been very lucky, extremely lucky."

The gala itself was well produced and incorporated live performances from youngARTS' alums and projected video pieces. The highlight of the presentation was when all of the students from each of the disciplines stood in two rows across the entire width of the stage with new youngARTS president and CEO, Christina DePaul, standing in the center.



Khadijah Rolle

The visual was inspiring, and as I looked at the young faces of these aspiring talents, many with a hue of innocence and optimism, I harkened back to my own experiences as a young student of the arts and remembered how fortunate I was to have teachers that took an interest in me. youngARTS took an interest in each of these high school seniors, and no matter where their destinies lead, they will have the exciting experience of youngARTS Week from which to build.



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