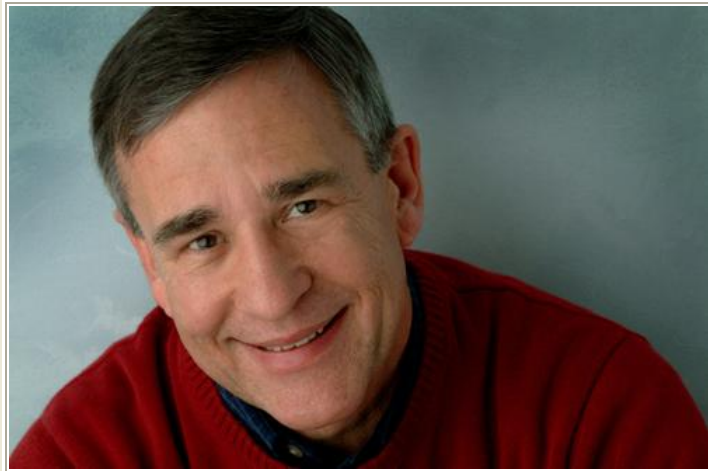


## LET THE “FAMILY STAGES” SHOW BEGIN!

Meet the star of the show, Steve Seyfried, a man with a deep, mellow voice and a warm, welcoming smile. Steve is the writer, director, actor, producer, costume designer, sound engineer, and overall creative mind behind the theatre enterprise called “[Family Stages](#)”. Art-Reach is excited to have Steve and his company as a roster artist with the In-Facility Program. I met Steve and he helped to “set the stage” for my understanding of his professional voyage. Now, allow me to “draw back the curtain” for you so that you may clearly envision his work.



*Steve Seyfried*

The story began more than thirty years ago. Having earned a college degree in speech and drama, a young and energetic Steve began applying his education by teaching in Atlanta, Georgia. To supplement his income, he acted in dinner theatres in Tampa, FL and Knoxville, TN and subsequently met his wife-and-artistic-partner-to-be, Elise. Originally from Indianapolis and Manhattan respectively, Steve and Elise were not at all disappointed when they were offered jobs touring with a children’s theatre into New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. They quickly fell in love with the Philadelphia area and decided this would be their home. Itching for creative independence, they soon formed their own two-person acting company, which they appropriately named “Duet Productions”. With two boxes of costumes and a modest Chevette, they ambitiously took on the challenges of producing and acting in their own plays, adaptations of children’s stories and folktales from around the world. They toured schools and libraries, churches and synagogues...any soil rich with children’s imaginations. That was 1980.

Two years later, Steve and Elise extended their artistic reach, and the plot of their story thickened. Along the Delaware shore they began what was to become a long-term and very fulfilling commitment: a summer theatre at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. The shows, geared toward both children and their families, required only a humble hall for a venue. Eventually, this project evolved into a broader undertaking, including summer camps and workshops for young, enthusiastic thespians. This endeavor has proved to be so successful that this summer will mark

their twenty-ninth season of entertaining families and encouraging children in their appreciation of theatre. Appropriately, Steve asks rhetorically of his audience: “When was the last time both you and your kids laughed at the same thing?”

Meantime, “Duet Productions” continued to expand its audiences in the greater Philadelphia area. The Church of the Brethren in Ambler, PA provided their stationary stage, but touring continued as well. While the demands of raising five children thrust Elise into daily and real-life drama, Steve continued developing the company, with his wife’s support when needed. In 1996, “Duet Productions” registered as a non-profit organization, moved its home to Oreland, PA and changed its name to “[Family Stages](#)”, reflecting both the intergenerational audiences and the flexible venues that together have come to characterize this organization.

Today, “[Family Stages](#)” is a thriving enterprise. Focusing on material from fairy tales to historical legends, Steve has adapted more than forty plays for the stage. The wide range of his subject matter appeals to all ages: there is fact and fancy, humor and history, and always the creativity to engage any audience. Some scripts are playful comedies, such as the musical “Little Goldie and the Three Riding Bears”. Written in collaboration with a trusted composer, who generated the musical score, and talented Elise, who wrote the lyrics, Steve adapted and then integrated three favorite children’s stories: “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, and “The Three Little Pigs.” Some productions are more serious in tone, such as “Seeds of Freedom”, a historical play about General Kosciuszko, a friend of Thomas Jefferson who was a Polish military engineer at West Point. The play is a loving tribute to these men but simultaneously raises issues of moral inconsistency that challenge their friendship. Then there are those scripts such as “The Trail West”, a play that imaginatively combines a history lesson extracted from the journals of women riding the Oregon Trail, with the whimsy of an unusual narrator, Arthur the Ox.



Just two years ago, “[Family Stages](#)” added senior residences to their tour route, pleased to discover a new and appreciative audience in senior adults with intellect, sophistication, and a seasoned sense of humor. Now, with a rotating crew of local professional actors, a garage packed with colorful costumes and inventive props, and a repertoire of successful plays and musicals,

Steve and his “[Family Stages](#)” perform all around the Delaware Valley, from Springhouse Estates for seniors, to The Kingsway Learning Center for children with disabilities, to the very public Independence National Park. Steve also leads spring and summer workshops and camps at Christ’s Lutheran Church in Oreland. Joined by members of his creative team, he nurtures budding talent by introducing children to the art of playwriting, acting, and filmmaking. In whatever project they undertake, “[Family Stages](#)” is devoted to its mission: “to provide entertainment, enrichment, and education to family members of all ages.”

After learning all about Steve and his work, I was ready to witness a show and subsequently attest to the quality and range I was expecting from “[Family Stages](#)”. I saw their lively production of “Puss in Boots”. At ten o’clock that morning, more than 140 people flooded the spacious hall at Christ’s Lutheran Church. Many were excited nursery school students accompanied by their teachers, and others were even younger guests led by their moms and dads and grandparents. Eager for the play to begin, the school children held hands as they paraded to their collective seat: a clean, woven carpet on which they sat and waited expectantly. Folding chairs offered adults a heightened view of the stage with its simple set: a hand-painted backdrop and one versatile trunk. The constant din in the room conveyed audibly the sense of anticipation the children exuded physically. When the impressive spotlights suddenly illuminated the stage, the children cheered and clapped, and the show was underway. Two actors played all the parts, changing costumes, adjusting voices, and manipulating demeanor to suggest new characters. Sensitive to the limited attention span of children and their need to move about, Steve built into his play an interactive segment with audience participation. The children were divided into three groups and on cue pretended to be hay-mowers, fishermen, and wood-cutters while clutching imaginary scythes, reels, and axes. With similar awareness of children’s imaginations, the actors baited their impressionable audience. When the evil ogre lurked menacingly and stealthily from behind the lovely, vulnerable princess, the children intuitively warned “look out!” Later, when the ogre identified his stew ingredients as “marinated snake bellies, ground beetle wings, and honey-coated beef jerky sticks”, a contagious “ee..yewwww...” spread rapidly through the repulsed young crowd. Lest the adults be excluded, Steve’s clever writing provided subtle puns and contemporary allusions only those mature members of the group could fully appreciate. After her father, the king, bemoaned his daughter’s disinterest in marriage, the princess boldly proclaimed, “I don’t want to get married...I want a career!” Even Puss’s booted image, created by the melded forms of the Pink Panther and the Cat-in-the-Hat, led to literary chuckles when the feline’s breakfast is “green eggs and ham”. Indeed, when the show ended, everyone in the audience, young and old alike appeared happy.



*Photo from Family Stages' Performance of Peter Pan*

It is easy to see why Steve identifies “the intergenerational response” as one of the greatest rewards he feels from his job. Despite the challenge of “keeping all the pieces together...keeping track of it all”, Steve is excited about adding another detail to his busy schedule by joining the Art-Reach team. “It’s a chance to touch audiences we might not ordinarily reach...to bring our services to a wider audience”, he observed. “We are helping those who cannot otherwise access theatre; we can bring theatre to them!”

Steve reflected that “Seeing [the audiences] get excited about the show is terrific. It’s great to feel that we are making a difference!” I believe that “[Family Stages](#)” will make that difference in many more lives as they combine their goals with the mission of Art-Reach.

Now... the stage is set. The curtain is drawn. Let their show begin!

By Barbara Speece

Barbara is a [Special Projects Ambassador](#) with the [Art-Reach Ambassador Program](#)