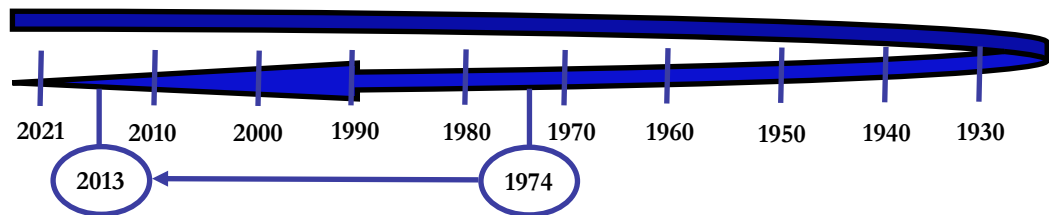
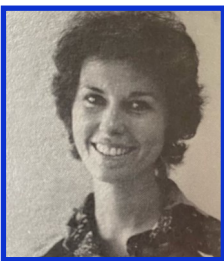


Stage left...a historical look back at TX...



In 1974 the St. Xavier Drama Club performed in what was then known as the “senior smoking lounge.” The drama club affectionately referred to it as “The Pit.” Over the years “The Pit” changed form as St. Xavier added a couple of classrooms, the band took over and today you’ll see students working out in what is now the wellness center...a far cry from the “senior smoking lounge.” Linda Donahue was one of the directors during the infamous “pit” years impacting hundreds of lives as the drama club creatively found ways to add special effects to an area that some would consider not so special. The actors and the crew would whole heartedly disagree. Linda was hired by Father Nastold, S.J. and was mentored by Father Michael Sparough, S.J who soon changed the name from the St. Xavier Drama Club to Theatre Xavier. She held that position for 10 and a half years, hired Michele Mascari as her understudy in 1982 and bequeathed the program to Michele in 1984. Linda left St. Xavier and spent 13 years in a number of roles with AT&T, then spent seven years with Atos Origin as a training consultant for Proctor and Gamble and then 11 years as a sales training manager for American Modern Insurance Group. Ironically, Linda said training sales people are just like training sophomore boys!



Linda Donahue then...



Linda Mace now...

Michele captained the ship that navigated many changes over the years. The performances moved from “The Pit” to the St. Xavier chapel then, while the chapel was being converted to Xavier Hall, to the cafeteria and Berning gymnasium. In 1982 Xavier Hall was finished and held all TX performances for the next 21 years. In 2003 the Walter Deye Performance Center was built which is arguably the best facility in the state of Ohio.



Michele Mascari then...



Michele now...

You have probably heard the phrase, “if these walls could talk, they would tell you the story.” Unfortunately the walls of “The Pit,” the chapel, the cafeteria, Berning gym and Xavier Hall can’t talk, so they can’t tell you the story, however, the gifts of Linda Donahue, now Mace, and Michele Mascari can talk, and their stories are tremendous. We recently sat down with Linda and Michele to reminisce, tell some of those stories, celebrate 40 years of the St. Xavier Drama Club and Theatre Xavier, and thank them for the incredibly positive impact they have had on thousands of young people’s lives.

How did your careers in theater begin, and what brought you to St. Xavier High School?

Linda: As a child, my father was a Theatre Stage Crew worker working with the spotlights. My cousin, Elaine Stritch was an actress. She played the role of Alec Baldwin’s mother on 30 Rock in 2007, and performed in Stephen Sondheim’s musical company with Diana Ross and Carol Channing. I grew up in theatre. In my early career, I worked at Badin High School and, at the time, pay raises were based on a scale that gave single women a 3% increase, single men 5%, married women, 7% and married men 10%. I immediately applied at the Archdiocese and St. Xavier responded. Father Nastold hired me in 1974 and I was fortunate to work with Michael Sparough the first year.

Michele: I wrote my first acting “scene” in 5th grade. I don’t remember much of it, other than there was conflict between two boys, and retribution was called for!! And one of them caught a pie-in-the-face. I directed again in the 6th grade on a comedy printed in a national student magazine. I was praised, mainly because the entire 6th grade was dismissed from afternoon classes to attend!! I felt certain I would be involved with theatre for life!!

I was informed by a friend who was video-taping TX’s production of “Flower Drum Song” in the spring of 1982 that there would be an opening in English and in assisting with TX the next fall. He called me at intermission and informed me how strong the production was, and that Linda was talented and an exceptional director. I called the following school day and was able to schedule an interview. I had been directing at Newport for six years and had built a thriving performing extracurricular there. However, I needed to move forward and outward, and found this opportunity at St. Xavier.

Although this is an “unfair” question, what were a few of the most memorable moments during your St. Xavier careers?

Linda: During my 10 and half year career at St. Xavier, I fondly remember the time the cast and crew of *Mr. Roberts* (1978) giving me a puppy after the performances. I also enjoyed the Thespian Society, the Ball State competition and going to New York City for Make-Up under Make-up artist, Ben Nye (1978). In 1981, we performed *No Time for Sergeants* and the students did not want to get their hair cut. We found a stylist that convinced the guys that it wouldn’t be that bad and ended up cutting their hair for free. In my last year (1984) we performed *The Diary of Anne Frank* and had a WWII Jewish prisoner of war come out to speak with the cast. It was very moving.



Linda with the Thespian club

Stage left...a historical look back at TX...

Michele: There are too many memorable moments to talk about – as every director and teacher and coach will tell you when asked this kind of question. A “few” is not enough! Here are some.

Working with Andy Blankenbuehler, Broadway choreographer of *In the Heights* – *Bandstand* – *Cats* (revival) – *Annie* (revival) – and the amazing *Hamilton*. All four years, Andy performed with TX, and choreographed in his junior and senior years. He began as a company member in the 1986 *Godspell* and ended as The Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*. In that same cast, there were two other performers who became Broadway performers/musicians/conductors and who toured with musicals – Jessica Hendy, and David Kreppel. Others from that same production who were and are successful performers are Kevin Allison, Stephen Bolte (dec.), Shaun Powell, Ingrid Werner. TX was ripe with talent! And still is.

Memorable in the EXTREME: 1) Opening a new performing space in the spring of 1986. The school’s large chapel was renovated as a 400+ seat theater. It was dubbed Xavier Hall. It was an amazing step up from where performances formerly were staged.

That year TX performed its fall play in the Cafeteria. That called for removable stage seating, lighting, props, and all technical equipment after each performance!! Memorable! 2) Opening an entirely new building addition which housed a full equipped professional-standards theater, in the Fall of 2004, and TX’s current home. TX’s production levels soared in creativity and capability due to the new space and how it was outfitted for theatre. What a gift!!

The Fall play was performed in the gym in front of the stage that is already a part of the gym. Performing platforms were built in front of it, portable seating, portable lighting trusses, tarps on the gym floor – it was a mighty transition. And stayed that way for two weeks. Phys. Ed. Classes had to improvise!!!



Xavier Hall opens in spring of ‘86

Linda, during your tenure, where were the plays performed and what obstacles did you have to deal with?



Rehearsing Charley’s Aunt in “The Pit”

Performing from the basement under the gym (known as the Pit) was the student lounge during the day. There was no protection for our set and we had no place to store everything. We battled with the furnace, stalactites and stalagmites forming underneath the second floor showers directly above the crew rooms.

When we moved to the chapel, we had to move the chapel pews down the main hall on Friday afternoon before the shows that night. I also remember needing to set up tables for dinner theater when we performed *Once Upon a Mattress*.

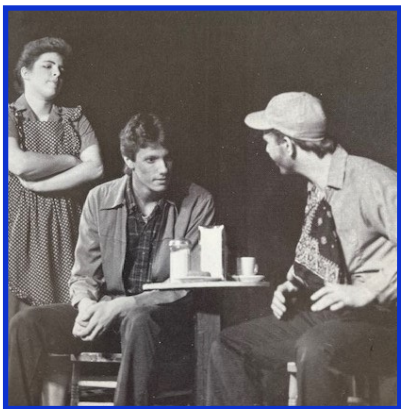
For musicals, finding a place for the orchestra to perform was always difficult. In the chapel, we would have to find a place on the balcony walkway and Rich Fujimoto always did a wonderful job with that.

We really never had much of a budget in those days. Many faculty members and friends would volunteer their time to help. It really created a great theater community. And, we never had any assigned technical support. Students did all of the set building and lighting. Tim Reilly, Renny Austing, Andy Staub, Scott Steins, Scott Stegman, Tom Bockhorst, Mike Garry, Mark and Jim Schabberle, John Boehm, Mike Gilkey and Sean Shafer were a few of the stage crew members that carried the load.

Michele, what performances did you enjoy directing the most? Again, another unfair question.

Too many. So, I must just go with my heart.

The Diviners – a play by Jim Leonard, Jr. I directed it in the fall of 1985 – it was produced in the cafeteria. With portable “everything” so we could clear it after each show. The play itself spoke keenly to me about the nature of unconditional love, forgiveness, strength under emotional avalanche, and – of course, redemption. Due to the needs of this performing space, our Stage Crew numbers skyrocketed! And – they stayed!!! Good thing, too. They became much busier and more involved in building and creating, painting and finishing off sets than in the earlier shows.



Breakfast with *The Diviners* (1985)

More space, more props, larger Running Crews!!!

I directed it again in the fall of 2000 – In Xavier Hall. The set was magnificent – rolling hills – trees – pathways – different levels of acting areas – and entirely covered with water-proof tarp. See, we made it rain on stage. (There was drainage built in. But we did not need it, as the floor was also waterproofed.) Our level of staging was increased so much with more adequate space and materials. I was part of a trio of singers – Nick Korbee and Tim Mulvey included – and they were also in the cast. We all three played guitars, and I added harmonica – we recorded accompanying music in a recording studio, along with some “heavenly” sound effects to bolster the spiritual elements and moments in the play. It was exquisite.

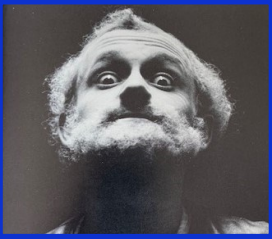


And ... *The Diviners* again (2001)

Stage left...a historical look back at TX...

Peter Pan – the musical. Who wouldn’t love directing or being in this musical??? Large cast, challenging but fun-loving choreography, a great orchestra (Introduced each night as our “Neverland Orchestra”), and we FLEW!! How great was that! Lots of characters flew!! The music is so iconic – the entire show is! And I was like a kid, watching it come alive each night in performance!! Getting to introduce it to every audience, talking with kids in the audience, getting them to Boo! and Hiss! every time Hook took the stage!! Working with the Pirates – what an amazing group of young men! What laughter we shared! They made it so easy!! Peter and Wendy – so memorable! So sweet! Ok – I will stop now. I am just rambling!!

Linda, how do you think TX impacted the students you taught as well as the current students at St. Xavier?



The Crucible (1976)

In 2014, we held a cast and crew reunion at St. X. One of the guys, Joe Mock, told me that I had changed his life. I was skeptical until he told me he had gone on to Xavier University, auditioned for a part in *The Crucible*, one of the plays we had performed at St. X, got the part, met his wife and had three daughters, all of which ended up majoring in theatre in college. He said all because we convinced him to try theater.

Several men from our stage crew meet together and attend each play/show today. Many of them met their wives while in TX.

I think the moment I realized the impact we had on kids was when I ran into Eric Kearney at a restaurant. I remembered back when Eric was a student, sitting on the steps of the school waiting to go home. Not wanting to be an imposition, he told me he didn’t need a ride home, but I gave him one anyway. I wasn’t sure if he remembered me, but when I put my hand on his shoulder and asked him, he jumped out of his seat, gave me a bug hug and proceeded to introduce me to his mother and wife. He said I had made a difference in his life.

Michele, what would you tell a prospective parent about the impact a St. Xavier education, especially in TX can have on their children...

At St. Xavier High School your son will experience classes led by extremely gifted teachers. Teachers who love their work, love the kids, and love the ways they can present their subject matter.

At St. Xavier – your son will experience extra-curriculars that are also led by extremely gifted coaches/teachers. Finding a place to be outside of school hours is especially important. What kind of activity does your son wish? Find it. Talk about it. Get involved. He will become a part of something greater than himself. He will be continually respected in how he grows and learns as an individual.

St. X prepares you for college level work. I know that my Acting classes were based on introductory college level activity. And on advanced content level. And on advanced experiential activity during class. I believe your son will find the curriculum challenging but doable!! I believe – from hearing from numerous grads – that your son will be able to test out of entry level college classes and get to some meatier study.

I believe your son will have so many opportunities at St. X to become a Man for Others...to see the excellence of giving himself to others. I believe that he will be able to take the best of himself and feed it at X.

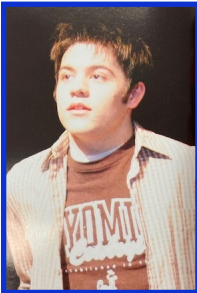
Are there any specific TX performances you directed that really stand out? Again, another unfair question...

Michele:

We did three productions of *Godspell*. We opened Xavier Hall with it in Spring of 1986. We produced it again in the Spring of 1992. We closed Xavier Hall with it in the Spring of 2003. Every production of *Godspell* is different – depending how each section is staged per the director, and how choreography is created differently, and how the major “characters” are personified – as “traveling vagabond performers” – as individual characters existing in our midst today, with particular attention to the solo song they performed as who each could be. (An environmentalist, a social worker, a frat guy, a thug, a runaway girl, etc.) This show always deeply effects audiences...and casts. And directors.



Godspell in 1986



The Laramie Project (1998)

The Laramie Project by Moises Kaufmann affected our cast dramatically. The story is factual, the terrible truth of Matthew Shepard’s murder in Laramie, Wyoming...the fall of 1998. He was beaten severely, tortured, and then tied to a split-rail fence on a knoll overlooking the “lights of Laramie.” It was a freezing night in Laramie. He was 20 years old, a student at University of Wyoming and weighed about 100 pounds. Matthew was gay. That’s why he was murdered.

The play is a series of monologues delivered by the people of Laramie who knew Matthew – and the killers – and each other, including Matthew’s father who spoke at the trial. Our crew built an oversized split-rail fence and placed it on a four foot tall platform on wheels. It was stained and dirties, with grasses growing in front of it and behind it. It was situated behind a scrim – a special curtain. At the end of the play, stage lights overhead illuminated it brightly with mainly amber color. The front of the stage was dark, but you could see the shadows of characters as they moved slowly on stage, some kneeling, some on one knee, some moving closely to the fence. Original piano piece played by its author, one of the students in the cast, was played. It was three minutes in length. We very slowly dimmed the lights during that three minutes, so they were totally out at the end. Usually, dimming lights is five seconds, at most. But people needed to breathe, and pray, and ponder, and stay with the truth of the moment as little while. And then they were still quiet after the lights went out. It was very somber and prayerful. They saved their applause when the actors took the stage for their bows. I will never forget it.

Stage left...a historical look back at TX...

Linda:

As I mentioned earlier, *Diary of Anne Frank* was a very moving moment in my time at St. Xavier. A WWII prisoner of war visited the students and discussed the experience. I believe it really helped prepare the students for the production. It was very powerful. He attended the play and immediately afterwards the kids ran after him to thank him and seek his approval. Tears were shed.

I also enjoyed *Little Mary Sunshine* (1980) and the choreography of *Oklahoma* (1983)

The one play I wish I would have directed is *West Side Story*.

What has life been like in retirement for you guys?

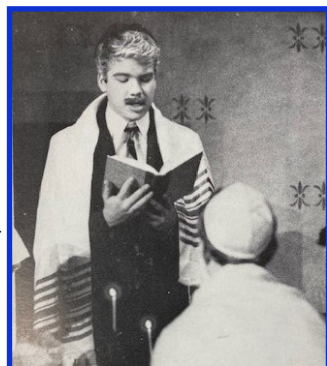
Linda:

I'm trying to remember what it was like before Covid! I'm an active gardener. We have a three acre lot with 20 flower beds. I laid 250 bags of mulch last year! We also refinished our basement, creating two bedrooms, a kitchenette, and large recreation room. My husband's daughter and 5 yr. old grandson from California visited us for three months this winter, and that kept us quite busy! I sew frequently, and I make quilts for the Good Samaritan (NICU) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

Michele:

I have worked in theatre in a couple of community theatres. Met some fine people. But did not continue to seek those directing opportunities. I have worked with an exceptionally talented musician/singer/lyricist on a play with music that he has written and performs. We are just not seeing the filmed version of that piece of theater in final steps of editing. It will be streaming soon.

Beyond that, I have a wonderful pup named Roxee, and enjoy her immensely! Travel, when I can.



Diary of Anne Frank (1985)

Stage left...a historical look back at TX...

So, from “The Pit” of a smoke filled senior lounge, to sharing a chapel, to cafeterias and gymnasiums, to Xavier Hall, and now to the state of the art, theatre in the Walter Deye Performance Center, Theatre Xavier, once known as the St. Xavier Drama Club lives on. Thousands of lives have been positively impacted by the program and many more continue to learn much more than simply “lights, camera and action.” Ms. Donahue (now Mrs. Linda Mace) and Ms. Mascari have left their legacies, indelible impressions on once young people’s lives that have carried those teachings well into their adult years. St. Xavier High School and Theatre Xavier are forever indebted. Simply put, THANK YOU!

