

The Little Dog Laughed  
by Douglas Carter Beane  
Directed by Scott Ellis  
Kirk Douglas Theatre  
November 16 – December 21, 2008

# Between the Lines



Center  
Theatre  
Group  
L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre  
Mark Taper Forum  
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

# The Little Dog Laughed

Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle,  
The cow jumped over the moon,  
The little dog laughed to see such sport,  
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

Playwright Douglas Carter Beane reveals the true nature of Hollywood in *The Little Dog Laughed*. No one is exactly who they say they are. No one reveals exactly what they want, except in private and under duress. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, each has a price but none are sure of their own value. *The Little Dog Laughed* is the latest from Beane, author of *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar* and *As Bees in Honey Drown*. This time, he turns his sharp, observant gaze on who's doing whom in Hollywood and why.

## Between the Lines

Ann Anderson  
Writer

Rachel Fain  
Editorial Manager

Jean Kling  
Proofreader

Haruka Hayakawa  
Graphic Designer

[Between the Lines  
Feedback](#)

[The Little Dog Laughed  
Tickets  
Information](#)

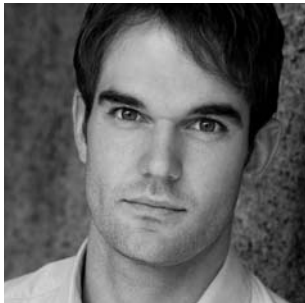




1. **JULIE WHITE**

**Diane**

A Hollywood agent who aspires to be a producer



2. **BRIAN HENDERSON**

**Mitchell**

An actor who might have a shot at the “A-list” if he behaves himself



3. **JOHNNY GALECKI**

**Alex**

A prostitute or “rent boy”



4. **ZOE LISTER-JONES**

**Ellen**

Alex’s sort-of girlfriend

“It is often wise to reveal that which cannot be concealed for long.”

– Johann Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), German dramatist, poet and historian

Film actor Mitchell Green's star is on the rise. He's just won an award, and his agent, Diane, wants to push him to the next level. Diane is angling for the rights to a play, which in its film adaptation, will be a career-making vehicle for Mitchell and a big step up the ladder for her. There are only two problems: The play is about a gay man and the gay playwright doesn't want to turn his character straight. Problem two is that Mitchell has a "slight recurring case of homosexuality" himself and is toying with coming out of the closet. One would think that the material and the actor are perfectly matched, but in Hollywood, an [openly gay leading man](#) is an oxymoron. Diane is determined to change the playwright's mind

and prevent Mitchell from coming out, which in her opinion, would be professional suicide.

Much to Diane's horror, Mitchell has taken up with Alex, a sexually ambivalent "rent boy," who has a girlfriend, Ellen. Mitchell thinks he could be serious about Alex, but Ellen has her own agenda.

What to do about the balky playwright, the up-and-coming but weak-willed client and his boyfriend? Diane, a professional problem-solver and deal-maker extraordinaire, invents the solution that makes everybody happy, or as close to happy as these characters get. ●

“[Douglas Carter Beane] had a totally different type of person in mind. He had said he couldn’t believe it would work to turn over this character to a nice Southern lady. And I was like, ‘Honey! Nice Southern ladies are the most evil people ever!’ We know how to be pleasant while we’re screwing you to the wall.”

– Actress Julie White on being cast as Diane in *The Little Dog Laughed*

## Desert Island

.....

If you were stuck on a desert island, which character from *Little Dog* would you want with you: Diane, Mitchell, Alex or Ellen?

Talk About...

# Sue Mengers

As actress Julie White says, “If you’re an agent, you’re just a ten-percenter, you’re a servant to the star.” True enough, but not all servants are cut from the same cloth. Diane, the Hollywood agent portrayed by White in *The Little Dog Laughed* may seem like an exaggeration, but she’s not far removed from the storied Sue Mengers, the most powerful agent in Hollywood in the 1970s.

Mengers started as a receptionist at William Morris Agency and went on to be the first female “super agent,” repping such clients as Jack Nicholson, Barbra Streisand, Gene Hackman and Gore Vidal, to name just a few. Part Jewish mother, part deal-making genius, she paved the way for every high-level female in the entertainment industry. In her way, she was every bit as talented as her clients, and by all accounts, much more influential.

Mengers, a short, zaftig woman given to wearing caftans and muu-muus, worked the phone the way Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello. An extraordinary hostess, her A-list parties were as much about business as fun. She knew it was hard to cheat someone who’s had you to their house for dinner.

Many of her clients defected along the way, and her tenure as top agent gave way to Michael Ovitz. Mengers’ personal style of doing business was out of step with the cold-blooded corporate ethos of the 1980s.

When Mengers’ husband, screenwriter Jean-Claude Tramont, died of cancer in 1996, she withdrew from the business. She keeps in touch with old friends by (what else?) telephone and rarely leaves her Beverly Hills home. ●

# A Very Brief History of Gay Hollywood



David Furnish and Elton John at their wedding.

When [William “Billy” Haines](#) was summoned to the inner sanctum of his boss, Louis B. Mayer, he had a feeling that something dire was afoot. Haines, the most successful actor you probably never heard of, was the number one box office draw in the late 1920s, turning in high-quality work in both silent films and “talkies.” He was also a known homosexual, which is why Mayer personally ordered Haines to enter into a fake marriage. “I’m already married,” Haines replied, referring to his mate, Jimmie Shields. Mayer, according to Hollywood lore, tore up the actor’s contract on the spot.

Haines’ forced exit from show business was a cautionary tale for decades. Everyone in the movie business knew the rule: It’s fine to be gay as long as the public doesn’t find out. The trick then and now is managing the press, quashing rumors and putting up a good (read “heterosexual”) front. The code was fairly transparent, though. Reporters who called an actor “pretty boy,” “bachelor” or “afraid of commitment” might as well have written: “This actor is queer and that goes double for his boyfriend.”

Gays and lesbians have worked in Hollywood from the first day someone hand-cranked a camera. The workplace atmosphere is far more open than it used to be, but neither has acceptance of gays traveled a (pardon the expression) straight trajectory. Those who work

behind the scenes enjoy more leeway than actors. Lesbian actresses are given more slack than homosexual actors (no one minded seeing [Marlene Dietrich](#) in a tuxedo), while the notion of an openly gay leading man is a non-starter. In an industry where sex appeal is in direct proportion to ticket sales, the knowledge that a leading man is completely faking his attraction to the leading lady is assumed to be bad for business.

The 1920s and ’30s were relatively easy on gays because “homosexual” was a concept unknown to mainstream America. Nevertheless, it wasn’t enough for performers to keep their personal lives private. Actors had to feed the publicity machine, and that meant consorting publicly with the opposite sex.

Cary Grant (yes, that Cary Grant) hid his homosexuality in plain sight. He had an on-again, off-again romance with Randolph Scott from 1932-1942. The two men lived together in between marriages and frequently went on double dates with beautiful actresses for the sake of the tabloid press. As David Ehrenstein notes in his excellent history of gay Hollywood, [Open Secret](#), the graceful nonchalance that made Grant an enduring star was his gayness itself. The same might be said of Montgomery Clift’s soulfulness or Clifton Webb’s crisp precision.

The 1940s brought padded shoulders, the jitterbug and rampant homophobia. America was out to save the world from fascism, after all, and that required he-men. Gays in the U.S. armed services were routinely sought out and dishonorably discharged. In Hollywood, as in the war effort, sissies need not apply. Post-war films such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* sentimentalized heterosexual marriage and the traditional nuclear family. Homosexual actors were vulnerable to discrimination and went to great lengths to appear straight, which in some cases was their most convincing performance.

The only decade worse for gays than the 40s was the '50s. The House Un-American Activities Committee tried to peer into everyone's closet. "Commie" was interchangeable with "Pinko," which was another way of saying "Faggot." Definitely not a good time to come out, not that many did.

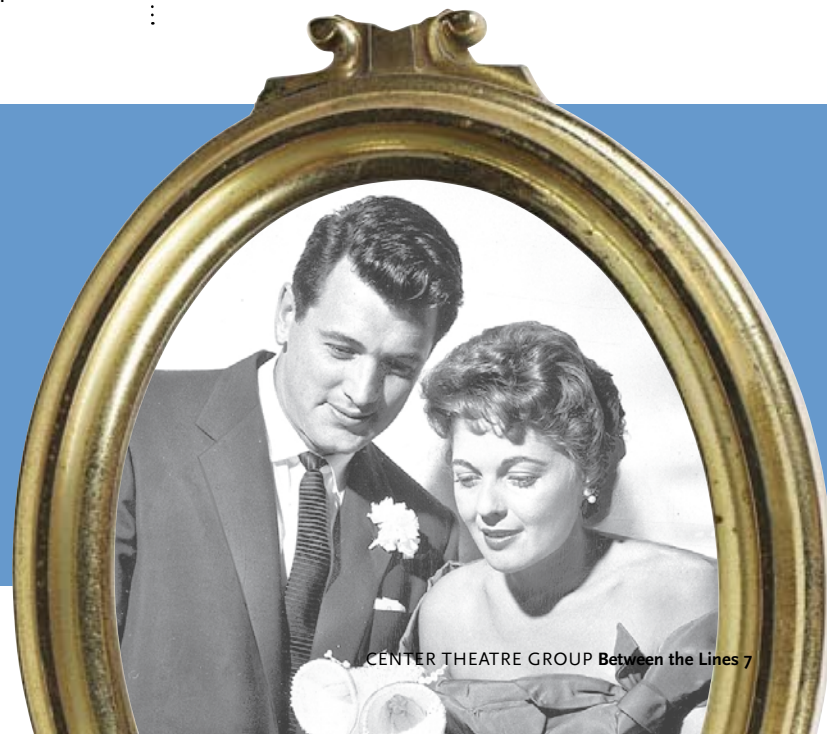
The 1960s and '70s ushered in an era of sexual freedom – if you happened to be heterosexual. The years bracketed by the advent of the pill and the onset of the AIDS epidemic were a period of sexual liberation that horrifies social conservatives to this day. Gays, however, were not included in that freewheeling "If it feels good, do it" era. In Hollywood, as elsewhere, gays and lesbians were careful to keep their sexual preference a secret in order to safeguard their jobs and personal safety. Gay bars were more in evidence, but they and their patrons conducted their business on the d.l.

Rock Hudson was the quintessential mid-century closeted gay actor. Onscreen, he was the most virile guy to come along since Errol Flynn butched up a pair of tights. Rock Hudson stories were a staple of fan magazines, which ran countless photos of the actor in the company of pulchritudinous starlets. The problem was, the editors weren't buying it. They demanded that Hudson marry or explain why he wouldn't. Enter Mrs. Rock Hudson, the former Miss Phyllis Gates, secretary to Hudson's agent. The quickie marriage lasted from 1955 to 1958. Gates claimed ignorance of Hudson's sexuality, which, if true, made her the only person in the business who didn't know he was gay. Hudson's homosexuality was an open secret in Hollywood, but his on-screen persona was so conventional that he got away with playing a straight man pretending to be gay in *Pillow Talk*.

Hudson never came out publicly (his promiscuity and rumored "marriage" to Jim Nabors notwithstanding), but his tragic death from AIDS in 1985 prompted many gays in the industry to come out. The '90s and '00s have brought more disclosure (Ellen, Portia and Rosie, for example) but don't hold your breath waiting for Rupert Everett to be cast as a romantic lead. Stars such as Tom Cruise, Richard Gere and John Travolta continue to deny rumors of gayness. The question of who is and who isn't won't go away any time soon, but shouldn't the real question be: "Who cares?" ●

"If they're romantic leading men, it's probably best to be quiet about it because it kinda interferes with the fantasy."

— Richard Chamberlain (1935-), American film, television and stage actor on staying in the closet



"Film actor Rock Hudson, 29, and Phyllis Gates, 25, cut wedding cake after their surprise marriage Wednesday night in Santa Barbara."  
TIMES FILE PHOTO, NOV. 9, 1955.

# Henry Willson

Rock Hudson was the creation of agent [Henry Willson](#). The sine qua non of talent scouts, Willson took an unpolished truck driver with the un-movie star name of Roy Fitzgerald and groomed him for the screen.

Willson had a penchant for beautiful young men he could mold into show biz commodities. Hopefuls flocked to Willson for representation and a make-over. With the flick of a pen, he christened Tab, Rory, Troy, Guy and countless other male stars, some gay and many willing to be gay-for-pay.

His client list ran heavily to chiseled young men, but Willson also represented women. In a business where bone structure often trumps ability, Willson had an unerring eye for a camera-ready face. He turned a Hollywood High School girl named Judy Turner into Lana and promoted her until she was a bona fide star. Over objections that his latest protégé couldn't act, Willson exclaimed, "I didn't say she could act. I said she could be a movie star!" Willson worked his magic on dozens of young wannabes, many with no more experience than posing for headshots.

Hudson was his biggest star, and he controlled every aspect of the actor's career. He protected his star's reputation by any means necessary. It's been reported, though never actually proven, that Willson hired a notorious Hollywood goon to intimidate a man who threatened to "out" his most lucrative client.

Willson, a well-known homosexual, was determined to create an image of hetero manliness for all his gay clients. He set them up on dates with starlets, and if that didn't seal the deal with the fanzines, he made them engage in sports, the more violent the better. Willson had no use for effeminate actors because there was no way to exploit such a person commercially. His clients would hook up with each other occasionally, but that's as much as Willson would permit. As he said to one of his young clients, "No two men can live together and have a career in Hollywood. It is not allowed."

Willson made a lot of stars but not a lot of friends. He died in 1978 alone and mostly forgotten at the [Motion Picture House](#) in Woodland Hills, California. ●

(For more on Henry Willson, see [The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson](#) by Robert Hofler.)

## Talk About...

### If I Could...

.....

Would you rather have a long, platonic relationship with your favorite movie star or a brief fling?

Would you rather run a movie studio or be a movie star?

Would you rather be rich or famous?





# A Conversation with Damon Romine

Damon Romine has worked in Hollywood for the past 20 years as a television development executive, entertainment journalist and currently as the Director of Entertainment Media at the [Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation](#) (GLAAD). *Between the Lines* caught up with him for a conversation about the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Hollywood today.

**In general, how would you describe the workplace environment for gays and lesbians in the entertainment industry?**

The entertainment industry has always been one that attracts creative people, and, whether it's a stereotype or not, many gay people seem to be creative as well. In the past two decades the industry really has become a place where people are more comfortable being out in the

workplace. When people are able to be open and honest about their own lives, they are ultimately happier with themselves and at work.

**Describe the differences, if any, in attitude shifts or workplace policies between now and say, 10 years ago.**

What we're seeing is more recognition and acknowledgment of gay and lesbian employees by companies and studios through officially-sanctioned employee resource groups. Certainly many companies are putting in place non-discrimination policies to provide equal employment protections to LGBT employees, and are providing partner benefits as well. And the entertainment industry has at least two guilds, the [Writers Guild](#) and the [Screen Actors Guild](#), which have created committees specifically to support their LGBT members.



1979 sculpture by George Segal commemorating New York City's Stonewall Rebellion, the first piece of public art honoring the struggle of LGBT people for equality.

**What are the differences, if any, between television and film production?**

I would say there is still a certain degree of the old boys club running the movie studios, which is reflected in some movie content that can be perceived as anti-gay or projects that get passed over. But when you look at the television networks, many of the executives, writers and show runners are out, very successful and responsible for most of the images of diversity we see on TV.

**It's much more common for theatre actors to be out than those in electronic media. Why do you think that is? Or if you disagree with that premise, why?**

TV and film performers have always lived under a microscope fueled by the gossip machine. It is even more intense now because of blogs and the ability for anyone to write anything and have it be perceived as 'journalism.' Theatre actors have historically enjoyed a certain degree of anonymity, which may be why we see more out theatre actors. Because their lives are often not played out in the media, many more stage performers are comfortable being out and are able to play leading man straight roles without anyone blinking an eye.

**Do you see a trend in attitudes toward gay people in the industry? If so, in what direction?**

What we're seeing is an overall trend of acceptance and understanding across the board, and this really is because of the media's increasing willingness to tell our stories, and to do so in ways that are fair, accurate and inclusive. And when celebrities live openly and honestly, not only does this have a positive impact on their own lives, it also creates tremendous awareness, understanding and acceptance by others. We know that when people see our lives portrayed or see an interview with an out celebrity, they get to know us as something more than an abstract issue.

**It's been said that it's impossible for a gay leading man to come out because it would ruin the romantic fantasy for the female audience. In other words, stardom is predicated on heterosexual attraction and the illusion of availability. What do you think?**

We won't really know if that's true until it happens. ●

# Louella, Hedda and Bad Behavior in the Age of TMZ

## The Examined Life

“What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself.”

– Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th U.S. president

“There is no such thing as bad publicity except your own obituary.”

– Brendan F. Behan (1923-1964), Irish Writer

“A career is born in public, talent in private.”

– Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962), American actress

In old Hollywood, an actor's star did not ascend until his or her name appeared regularly in the newspaper columns of [Louella Parsons](#) and [Hedda Hopper](#), the two most powerful gossip reporters in town. They had legions of stringers – or more accurately, spies – who found out who was sleeping with whom and why, where and when. Parsons was supreme among the doyennes of dirt. Her fiat, “You tell it to Louella first,” was not a casual suggestion. Hopper, her protégé and rival, was somewhat less influential, but if these two ladies were displeased with you, your career was as dead as a fox fur stole. Parsons' prim disapproval of William Haines, for example, didn't help the actor plead his case. On the other hand, Louella and Hedda could and did protect many stars from potential disaster. When Loretta Young had an out-of-wedlock child fathered by Clark Gable, the Hollywood publicity machine went into overdrive to

save the star's valuable public image. A good relationship with the gossip columnists was as essential as wardrobe and makeup.

Hollywood actors had less to fear from the reporters at *Confidential*, a local rag known for pandering to the most prurient of tastes. *Confidential* had no compunctions about publishing career-damaging secrets, but it wasn't as widely circulated as Parsons' news outlet, the Hearst papers.

By today's standards, the old gossip columns are quaint. When Britney's crotch is more accessible to photographers than Mount Rushmore, it's safe to say the publicity landscape has changed. Anyone with a cell phone can catch celebrities in flagrante and post the images on the Web. That's what sites such as [TMZ](#) and [Gawker](#) count on. The foibles of the rich and famous, which once upon a time were protected like state secrets, are now captured and consumed like fast-food fries. Antics that would have ended a career a few decades ago raise nary an eyebrow today. Not only is the public unshockable, a lively YouTube sex tape for the aspirant is practically de rigueur. Where would Ms. Hilton be today without “A Night in Paris”? A performer's image may be harder to control now than it was in the days of the studio system, but the range of acceptable behavior has expanded like the waistline of [your favorite overweight celebrity's name here]. ●



PHOTO BY TAÍS MELILLO.

# Playlist

To put you in the right frame of mind  
for *The Little Dog Laughed*:

***I'm Coming Out*** by Diana Ross  
(written by Bernard Edwards, Nile Rodgers)

***It's Raining Men*** by The Weather Girls  
(Paul Jabara, Paul Shaffer)

***YMCA*** by The Village People  
(Henri Belolo, Jacques Morali, Victor Willis)

***If You Don't Know Me By Now*** by Harold Melvin and  
the Blue Notes (Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff)

***Tell the Truth*** by Eric Clapton (Eric Clapton)

***Honesty*** by Billy Joel (Billy Joel)

***Policy of Truth*** by Depeche Mode (Martin Gore)

***Little Lies*** by Fleetwood Mac (Christine McVie)

***It's Only Make Believe*** by Conway Twitty  
(Jack Nance, Conway Twitty)

***The Real Me*** by Natalie Grant (Natalie Grant)

***There's No Business Like Show Business*** by Ethel Merman  
(Irving Berlin)

***Cracked Actor*** by David Bowie (David Bowie)

***Fame*** by David Bowie  
(David Bowie, John Lennon and Carlos Alomar)

***Hollywood*** by Madonna (Madonna, Mirwais Ahmadzaï)

***It's a Sin to Tell a Lie*** by Fats Waller (Billy Mayhew)

***Let's Get Drunk and Screw*** by Jimmy Buffett (Jimmy Buffett)

***My Attorney Bernie*** by Dave Frishberg (Dave Frishberg)

“Oh, Mary, please!”  
.....

Ask yourself:

- What do you lie about? Is your public persona at odds with your personal life?
- To what extent have you become your public persona?
- What things, people or activities define you? Who would you be without them?
- What have you concealed to get ahead? What have you exaggerated?

Discuss with the one who brung ya:

A poll taken by Pew Research in 2007 revealed that 81% of people between the ages of 18 and 25 chose fame as one of their two top goals in life. (The other was getting rich.)

Talk About...

## Websites

[www.power-up.net/pages/powerlunch.html](http://www.power-up.net/pages/powerlunch.html)

Power Up, the organization for lesbians in the entertainment industry, lists the most powerful gay women in the business.

[www.glbtc.com/arts/film\\_actors\\_gay.html](http://www.glbtc.com/arts/film_actors_gay.html)

A short history of gay actors in film

[www.out.com/detail.asp?id=22392](http://www.out.com/detail.asp?id=22392)

An article about contemporary gay Hollywood

.....

## Books

***Hollywood Babylon*** by Kenneth Anger (Straight Arrow Books, 1975)

A collection of gossipy anecdotes about the secret lives of Hollywood players

***The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons*** by Samantha Barbas (University of California Press, 2005)

The life of the most influential publicist in old Hollywood

***Celebrity Culture in the United States*** edited by Terence J. Fitzgerald (The Reference Shelf, 2008)

A collection of essays about the nature of fame in the age of electronic media

.....

## Film & Video

***The Celluloid Closet*** directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman (HBO, 1996)

A documentary about historical images of gays in film

***In and Out*** directed by Frank Oz (Paramount Pictures, 1997)

A drama teacher questions his sexual orientation

***Tea and Sympathy*** directed by Vincente Minnelli (MGM, 1956)

A “sensitive” teenage boy is befriended by an older woman

***Pillow Talk*** directed by Michael Gordon (Universal Pictures, 1959)

Classic rom-com pairing of Doris Day and Rock Hudson

Gay-themed films are too numerous to mention here.

For more comprehensive lists, see

[www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/andrew.cmu.edu/usr/out/public/Filmlist](http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/andrew.cmu.edu/usr/out/public/Filmlist)

[www.queerlounge.org/films/alphabetical.php](http://www.queerlounge.org/films/alphabetical.php)

[www.geocities.com/genxcelt/films.html](http://www.geocities.com/genxcelt/films.html)

### For 38 years, Center Theatre Group's P.L.A.Y. (Performing for Los Angeles Youth)

has served 25,000 – 35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to artistic excellence and innovation in its development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.

#### Performing for Los Angeles Youth

Leslie K. Johnson, Director of Education and Outreach  
 Debra Piver, Associate Director of Education  
 Kimiko Broder, Educational Programs Manager  
 Rachel Fain, Editorial Manager  
 Patricia Garza, Department Manager  
 Dan Harper, Educational Programs Associate  
 Christine Mantilla, Educational Programs Coordinator

Special thanks to Damon Romine.

#### Funder Credits

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH RECEIVES GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM the Center Theatre Group Affiliates, a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing innovative theatre and creative education to the young people of Los Angeles.

MAJOR SUPPORT IS ALSO PROVIDED BY The Annenberg Foundation.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR P.L.A.Y. IS PROVIDED BY the the Bloomingdale's Fund of the Macy's Foundation, Employees Community Fund of Boeing California, The Sascha Brastoff Foundation, the Brotman Foundation of California, The Dana Foundation, the Darden Restaurants Foundation, the James A. Doolittle Foundation, the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, the Lawrence P. Frank Foundation, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Education Endowment, the Walter Lantz Foundation, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the B.C. McCabe Foundation, the MetLife Foundation, the Music Center Fund for the Performing Arts, the Kenneth T. & Eileen L. Norris Foundation, Laura & James Rosenwald & Orinocco Trust, The SKETCH Foundation, the Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation and the Weingart Foundation.

