

Entertainment

Saturday, May 9, 2009

Berkshire Musical Theater Workshop

\$13K and a passion

Young actress-singer hopes to create haven for new musicals

By Clarence Fanto

Special to the Eagle

LENOX — The way Deborah Grausman sees it, “theater is a living and breathing thing, every day is going to be different, and that’s why I love it so much, why I’m drawn to it.”

It’s why she’s created Berkshire Musical Theater Workshop, a not-for-profit organization devoted to the development of new musicals through staged readings in a low-pressure haven far from the hurly-burly of New York.

Despite the recession — “a great time to start a non-profit!” she said with a laugh, during a recent interview — she raised \$13,000 over the last four months. As a result, BMTW makes its bow today with staged readings of “Sense and Sensibility,” a new musical by Neal Hampton (music) and Jeffrey Haddow (book and lyrics) based on Jane Austen’s novel. Performances are at 2 and 7:30 p.m. in Shakespeare & Company’s Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre, 70 Kemble St. Admission is free but reservations are required.

The 28-year-old Grausman is a

On stage

What: Staged reading — “Sense and Sensibility”

Who: Berkshire Musical Theater Workshop

When: Today 2, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Shakespeare & Company, Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre, 70 Kemble Street, Lenox

Tickets: Free

How: (413) 637-3353; tix@bmtw.org

producer, actor, singer and commercial voiceover performer who divides her time between Lenox and New York, where she grew up opposite the Museum of Natural History. Together with her older sister, Jennifer, she attended the Belvoir Terrace Arts and Sports Camp in Lenox. Deborah spent 10 summers there, starting when she was 10, graduating from camper to counselor.

Her father, Richard Grausman, a chef, cookbook author and culinary educator, founded the non-profit CCAP (Careers Through Culinary Arts Program), which

works with at-risk youth in public schools in seven cities around the country. Her mother, Susan, is a philanthropist whose late mother, Selma Pearl, was a Tanglewood devotee. Both women had become acquainted with “Sense and Sensibility” composer Hampton’s wife, Bernadette Horgan, the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s director of public relations.

Deborah Grausman is a graduate of Duke University’s music program and a ceramics artist whose pottery has been sold through the Hoadley Gallery in Lenox.

She spent the summer of 1998 in the vocal program at the Boston University Tanglewood Institute and worked as an apprentice at the Berkshire Theatre Festival in 2001. She was a super in the Tanglewood Music Center’s production of Mozart’s “Cosi fan tutte” in 2007 — “a priceless experience, to be on stage watching James Levine conduct,” she recalled.

Looking ahead, Grausman is planning workshops in the Berkshires next spring and fall, preferably at Shakespeare & Company’s new 155-seat Elayne Bernstein Theatre.

“I was blown away by the rehearsal spaces there,” she said. “You can’t find this in New York.”