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Lawyers Shine in MCCA's Broadway-Style Revue plus

- Rainmakers Reflect on Mentoring
- 2010 or Bust: MCCA's New Capital Campaign
- Scholarship Program Enters Third Year



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MINORITY CORPORATE COUNSEL ASSOCIATION

By Patrick Folliard

vo-ca-tion /vo-ke-shun/
[voh-kay-shuhn] noun—
a particular occupation,
business, or profession;
calling.

The goal of this column is to enlighten our readers about the private endeavors of attorneys with whom we come in contact in the profession.

By examining lawyers and their work practices by day in contrast to the personal interests that they pursue outside of the office, it is our hope that this series of articles allows our readers to see the other side of lawyers who manage to pursue unique interests despite their demanding careers.

MCCA on Broadway

It's no secret that many attorneys are frustrated performers. Still, encouraging gainfully employed legal professionals to unleash their inner hams and strut and belt out musical standards onstage in front of hundreds of people seems a shaky proposition at best. Nonetheless, that's exactly what MCCA did. The results, we are relieved to say, were pleasantly surprising.

When MCCA executive director Veta Richardson first began to think about the association's 10th Anniversary Dinner Series (which took place throughout 2007), she knew she wanted to do something different to make the evenings memorable. Asking around, she got a tip from MCCA Board Chair Cathy Lambolely about a Houston-based production team that specialized in putting lawyers on the boards. Richardson's meeting with them



Photo by John Abbott Photography

eventually resulted in "MCCA on Broadway," an all-attorney mini-musical with a poignant message that charmed audiences at anniversary dinners in San Francisco in October and in New York in November.

The day before the New York performance, the cast gathered in a rehearsal studio in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood to go over the show. Despite being well-rehearsed and having met with a warm reception when they performed the show in California, the 10-member cast of musically inclined attorneys had reservations about providing the evening's entertainment at the final anniversary dinner at the Marriott Marquis Times Square.

Traveling mostly from Texas and Arkansas, the attorneys had been warned that New York audiences could be pretty tough and that it's never easy to hold the attention of a roomful of schmoozing Big Apple attorneys. But when the cast took the stage just moments after dessert had been served and faced a sea of more than 1,100 revelers in the cavernous Broadway Ballroom, nary a nerve was on display. The audience of their peers responded positively to their tuneful efforts and rewarded them with appreciative applause throughout the show. It was evident not only that the cast had triumphed individually and as a group, but that they reflected the camaraderie and supportive spirit of the evening and of MCCA in general.

Performed by attorneys from corporations and firms as well as three solo practitioners, "MCCA on Broadway" is a persuasive musical journey that succinctly and entertainingly outlines the progress of diversity in the legal profession over the past 15 years. The 20-minute show was produced and co-written by Judy Frow (rhymes with "show") and her husband Gene Smith, who own and operate FrowBiz, a theater company in the special events industry. It featured monologues adapted from MCCA member testimonials and pop and R&B classics with lyrics tailored to the production.

The show began with Marty Thompson (Haynes and Boone LLP), Patricia Lin (Chevron), Heather Kubiak (Fulbright & Jaworski LLP) and Trina Perkins-Moutin (solo practitioner aka "The Queen of Justice") bounding onstage as four young law school graduates eager to make their way in the profession. Soon they are joined by their equally enthusiastic male counterparts, played by Mark Robertson (Fulbright & Jaworski LLP), Antonio Ocasio (Wal-Mart Stores Inc.) and Howard Speight (Law Office of Howard Speight). The idealistic lawyers sing of their aspirations and legal ambitions in "MCCA on Broadway," a legal take on "On Broadway," a tune made popular by singer George



From left to right: Patricia Lin, Mark Robertson, and Marty Thompson perform the "Diversity Drag."

◀ **Top row** (from L to R): Mark Robertson, Marty Thompson, Howard Speight, Jim Benton, music director and accompanist.

Middle row: Mary Allen, backup vocalist and production assistant, Trina "The Queen of Justice" Perkins, Paul Shanklin, Debra Baker, Patricia Lin, Heather Kubiak, Gene Smith, co-writer and stage manager.

Front row: Tony Ocasio, Judy Frow, co-writer and director, Mary Kendall, Camilla Smith, production assistant, and Gene and Judy's daughter.

Benson. Debra Tsuchiyama Baker (Connelly-Baker-Wotring-Jackson LLP), Mary Kendall (Wal-Mart Stores Inc.) and Paul Shanklin (Shanklin Law Firm) join the cast to sing the final verses of the show's optimistic title song. In San Francisco, the cameo players were Cornell Boggs (Coor's), Mary Snapp (Microsoft), Lauri Shanahan (Gap Inc.), and Rhonda Bethea (Del Monte Foods). Marie Lona (Winton & Strawn LLP) was a part of the San Francisco production, but a heavy work schedule prevented her from reprising her role in New York.

Reality hits when Robertson, as the smug voice of years of discrimination, flanked by Thompson and Lin as a pair of bouncy flappers, breaks into the "Diversity Drag" (to the tune of the Jazz Age anthem "Varsity Drag"), advising the newly minted women and minority lawyers, "Our clients want someone who looks just like me. You'd never succeed here, I'm sure you'd agree...That's the way we do the Diversity Drag!"

Down but not out, the attorneys press on, bonding with the growing diversity movement in the legal community. Then the trio of Kendall, Kubiak, and Baker sing the show's version of "Waiting on the World to Change," followed by four cameo players—Robbie Narcisse (Pitney Bowes), Don Liu (Xerox), Cindy Faatz (Intel Corporation), and Hinton Lucas (DuPont)—reading excerpts from the seminal 2004 document penned by Palmore of Sara Lee, "A Call to Action on Diversity."

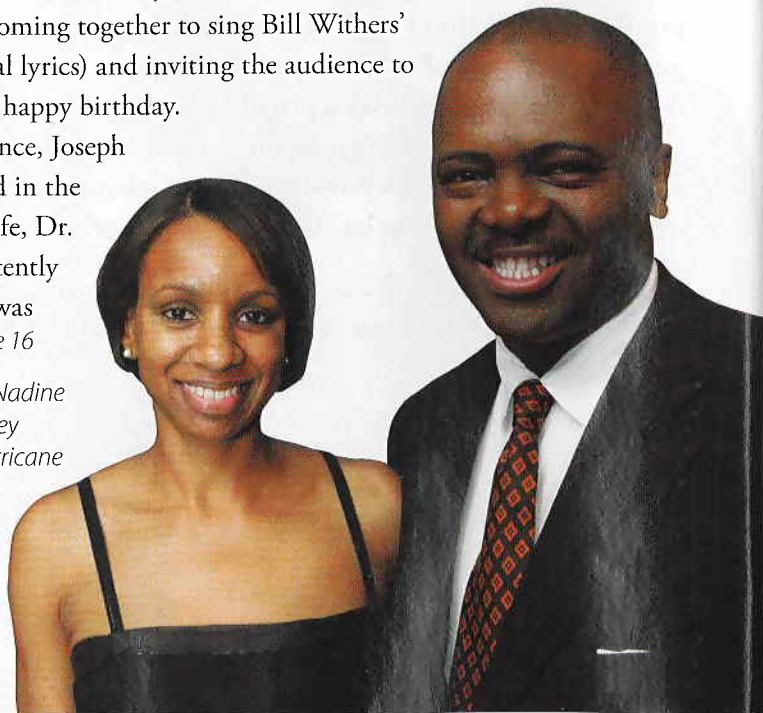
Next, Baker interprets an MCCA member's recollection of how, after a long absence from the profession, the association helped her reenter the workplace. In perhaps the show's most compelling moment, Paul Shanklin delivers a monologue gleaned from the recollections of an African American MCCA member whose life was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. After sending two of his children to safety, the attorney remained behind with his physician wife and their nursing infant at the New Orleans hospital where his wife was employed. There he assisted with patients for six long days, enduring the floods and numerous tragedies wreaked by the storm. For months after the hurricane, his life was seriously upended, until an MCCA connection led to an in-house position with Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. Today, he is rebuilding his and his family's lives in Bentonville, Ark.

The show closes with the cast coming together to sing Bill Withers' "Lean on Me" (with the original lyrics) and inviting the audience to join them in wishing MCCA a happy birthday.

At the New York performance, Joseph K. West (the attorney portrayed in the Katrina monologue) and his wife, Dr. Nadine Ford West, watched intently from the audience as his story was

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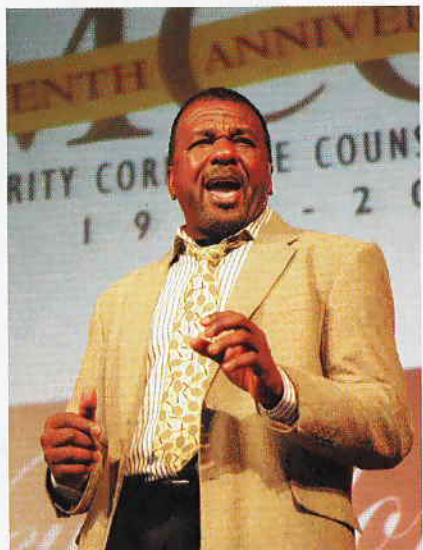
The harrowing experience that Dr. Nadine Ford West and her husband, Attorney Joseph K. West, endured during Hurricane Katrina, were recounted during the performance by Paul Shanklin.



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told on stage. After the performance, West said, "The good news is that they captured it very well; the bad news is that they captured it very well." He added, "It's still very difficult. So much happened in New Orleans that we still don't speak about—not even to each other—so to see and hear our experience portrayed so movingly in a public fashion is a little jarring at first, but also very cathartic."

"Above all," West said, "the show makes me realize how grateful I am to MCCA and Wal-Mart. They've both really been there for me and my family. Sharing my story with Judy, and with MCCA's members, has been a wonderful thing."



Paul Shanklin delivering his Hurricane Katrina monologue.

Judy Frow, who directed the production, says, "I knew that for an attorney in the audience to see his story performed by a peer or colleague would have a very strong impact. That's why, when other directors tell me I'm crazy to work with lawyers and not professional actors, I never listen." For 12 years, Frow has co-written and directed the annual all-lawyer musical comedy for the Houston Bar Association's Night Court theater company. This full-blown production typically features a cast of 60 lawyers and judges, and regularly sells out its limited run at a 500-seat theater. The most recent offering was titled "Draculaw."

"Whether it's a Night Court show or a FrowBiz corporate event, we use our skills, concepts, and techniques to create a theater experience," says Frow. "In MCCA's case, it was to acknowledge an anniversary." Whatever the production, she and her husband co-write the librettos and parody lyrics, typically collaborating from inception to execution.

The cast for "MCCA on Broadway" was mostly Houston-based Night Court regulars, so they were able to get a jump on rehearsals. Cast members in other states learned their parts from scripts and CDs of the score sung by Frow. A day before both the San Francisco and New York performances, Frow arrived with her very able musical director and accompanist Jim Benton and FrowBiz stalwart and featured player Mary Allen Keating, and joined the attorney-performers for a final rehearsal. Frow is fast, and she keeps the blocking and choreography very simple—it's more about the words. According to Frow, this approach works fine, because lawyers are notoriously last-minute folks who never fail to pull it off in the end.

"A lot of our business includes writing shows to introduce and sell widgets," Frow says, "so when we get an opportunity to use our craft to make people feel good about a great organization like MCCA, it's very validating for my husband and me. And for me, it's great fun to help attorneys and other professionals express their artistic side and, in some cases, even introduce them to their performing side. That's my joy!"

Cast member and assistant general counsel for Wal-Mart Mary Kendall says, "I'm not a professional singer by any means, but I'd love to do it if I didn't have to make a living." Kendall, who studied voice in college before earning her law degree from Texas Wesleyan School of Law, adds, "When attorneys get together, we have a lot in common, but there's nothing quite like actors and singers getting together—we have a blast!"

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Kendall recruited her Wal-Mart colleague Antonio Ocasio to be in the show at the last minute. Ocasio says, "I warned her that I can't sing or dance to save my life and that the last time I was up on stage was in a play in junior high school. I think it was Gilbert and Sullivan's 'H.M.S. Pinafore,' but I'm not sure. I told her that if she was willing to take me with the understanding that she'd be better off grabbing anyone off the street, I'd do it." He did it, and says that being part of the show turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences he's had in a long time.

Although he is very involved in diversity initiatives at Wal-Mart and with the Hispanic National Bar Association, Ocasio says the show was his introduction to MCCA. "It's a great organization that has provided opportunities to many attorneys and their families. I plan to remain involved with MCCA."

As Mr. Status Quo in the "Diversity Drag" number, Mark Robertson, a partner in Fulbright & Jaworski's New York office, displays considerable presence and a very respectable voice. Robertson is a theater buff who has invested in a number of Broadway shows, including "The History Boys" and "The Wedding Singer." Because of his tight schedule, he was unable to participate in the San Francisco show, and although he had the script for weeks, he first looked at it on a flight from Europe just days before the New York performance. "There was a lot going on," he says. "I was a little worried that I wouldn't get my lines down. But [he adds, too humbly] everything seemed to work out okay."

Robertson's interest in theater dates back to his formative years in Snyder, Texas, where his immediate family was very interested in theater. His local public high school (where he played the stage manager in "Our Town" and Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream")

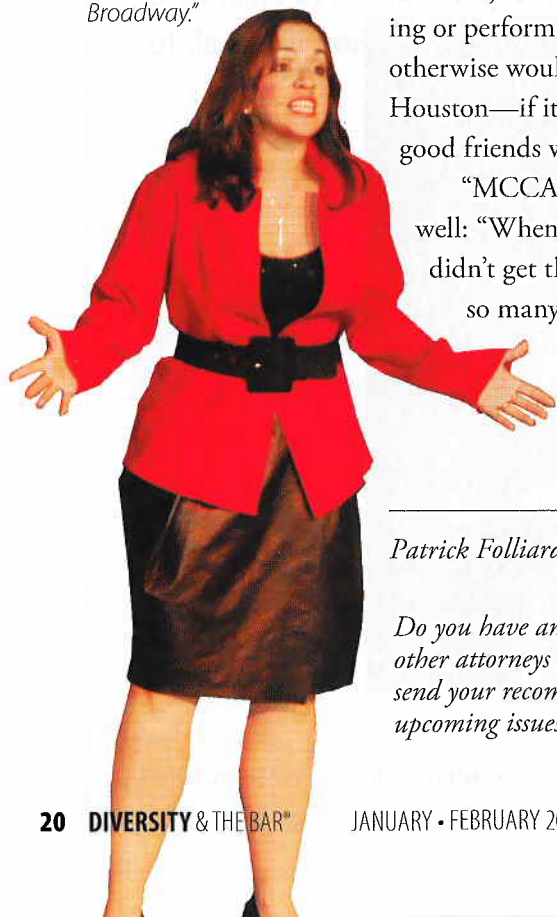
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The cast performing the final number for "MCCA On Broadway."

av-o-ca-tion /ævo-ke-shun/
[av-uh-kay-shuhn] noun—
something a person does in
addition to a principal occupa-
tion, esp. for pleasure; hobby.

Marie Lona of
Winston & Strawn
performs in the San
Francisco "MCCA on
Broadway."



was ranked by the Rockefeller Foundation as having one of the best high school fine arts departments in the country. "The director was a tremendously talented guy, and we all learned a lot from him," recalls Robertson. "He was with the school for 30 years; in fact, he was actually paid more than the football coach, a nearly blasphemous thing in west Texas."

As a student at Columbia University School of Law, Robertson sang and danced in the Cabaret and Law Revue; before transferring to New York in 2001, he was based at Fulbright's headquarters in Houston, where he was a Night Court regular. "For me, doing 'MCCA on Broadway' has been an opportunity to connect with old friends and a chance to perform—a great time overall."

For Debra Tsuchiyama Baker, founding partner with the Houston litigation and environmental law firm of Connolly-Baker-Wotring-Jackson LLP, theater is something she does just for herself. "At home and at work, it's about others, but when I'm rehearsing or performing, it's time for me," she says. "It's also an opportunity to meet people I otherwise wouldn't. For example, Paul Shanklin does a small solo criminal practice in Houston—if it weren't for theater, we would never have crossed paths and become the good friends we are."

"MCCA on Broadway" contains a message that Baker says she understands all too well: "When I was starting out in law, I didn't get invited to be on the pitch teams. I didn't get the opportunities that the young men got. But it's different now—because so many corporations demand a team that's diverse, I'm regularly sought out."

Baker says, "What most attorneys want is a chance to show what we can do and to have an opportunity to shine." Every day, MCCA works to make that wish a reality in the office; for two enjoyable evenings last fall, MCCA also made it happen on stage. **DB**

Patrick Folliard is a freelance writer based in Silver Spring, Md.

Do you have an interesting pastime that you want to share in this space, or do you know other attorneys whose away-from-work activities might be showcased in this column? Please send your recommendations to robtruhn@mcca.com, and we'll consider your submissions for upcoming issues. Thanks!