

In Focus

# 'Making Books Sing' Outgrows Vineyard

By Leonard Jacobs

After six years at the forefront of the Vineyard Theatre's arts-in-education programming, *Making Books Sing*, which develops and produces sung-through musicals based on contemporary children's literature, has become an autonomous nonprofit, effective July 1. Vineyard founder Barbara Zinn Kreiger will serve as the group's artistic director, and will move from being the Vineyard's long-time executive director into the newly created position of board president.

"My career began as a speech and theatre teacher—specifically, how to use drama in the classroom—so, as much as I adore administration, I really needed to get the art back into my life," Kreiger says. She adds that *Making Books Sing*, operating on a Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) Equity contract, will now develop two works annually.

The shows will continue being presented at Queens Theatre in the Park and Kingsborough Community College, although Kreiger says she's now seeking a Manhattan berth as well. She also expects the program's in-school component, which uses teacher-artists in the classroom to work with students on devising their own musical segments based on books, to grow. At its 1996 inception, *Making Books Sing* used one teaching artist and 150 students; it now uses 20 teaching artists, who reach over 5,000 students.

"Because New York City schools are filled with ethnically diverse children," Kreiger says, "we look to develop culturally specific books that will speak to them." She cites "Beautiful Warrior," a book by Caldecott medalist Emily Arnold McCully, as an example. Composed by Jin Xiang, the

piece uses Chinese music, shadow puppets, Peking Opera, and even martial arts to convey its story.

Not only does *Making Books Sing* introduce students to theatre and the uses of music in it, but Kreiger believes the program also emphasizes the importance of literature in learning. "Before children ever see our shows, their teachers talk about why somebody sings—they explain the idea that when emotions are so strong, you *have* to sing. They're primed to understand how music is used and why, making this a great marriage of literature, music, and theatre."

## Producer Schwartz Honored

Theatre, film, and TV producer Bonnie Nelson Schwartz has been named a Fellow by the College of Fellows of the American Theatre.

Schwartz has produced more than 100 plays, films, TV programs, specials, and concerts in New York, Washington, D.C., and London. Among her Broadway producing credits: "Pack of Lies"; "Acting: Shakespeare"; "Jerome Kern Goes to Hollywood"; and "State Fair."

Off-Broadway, she presented "Dylan Thomas Return Journey" and "Babalooey." She is currently producing a two-hour PBS special, "Who Killed the Federal Theatre?," which will be telecast later this year.

Schwartz joins previously named Fellows Edward Albee, Ming Cho Lee, and Mark Medoff, among other notables. The formal presentation will take place at a ceremony at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in the spring of 2003.