

## PEOPLE WORTH KNOWING

# Jane Childs

*After 40 years in the business, Jane Childs is helping to train the next, as well as the current, generation of staging professionals through the Stagecraft Institute of Las Vegas. Founded by Jane and her husband, Don, in consultation with a variety of top educators and live entertainment professionals, as a way to provide designers and technicians with a working vocabulary and skills for current and emerging methods and technologies, SILV turned out its first graduating class this past August. LSA recently spoke to Childs about her career and the future of technical training.*



**Lighting&Sound America:** What is the overall concept of the SILV?

**Jane Childs:** It's a way to instruct and train technicians that's totally up to date, thorough, and expedient. The idea actually began to evolve about 40 years ago, when Don was teaching at UC Santa Barbara.

**LSA:** How are the various programs structured?

**JC:** The Entertainment Technology Program is ten weeks of intensive, eight-hour training days and performances at night. We try, and usually succeed, to gear the performance attended to reflect what we're working on in class. Our students work nonstop, so they get a lot done!

**LSA:** Who is the typical SILV student?

**JC:** The ten-week program and the Professional Development Workshops are geared toward various levels of expertise, from people who are new to the industry to professionals who need training on newer technologies. We also have the Backstage Bootcamp, for 14-18-year-olds; there are many acting and performance summer programs for kids, but none that focus on kids who are into performance technology.

**LSA:** How much interaction do you have with the professional world in Vegas?

**JC:** Our classes are taught by working professionals. There are so many companies with offices here, or are headquartered out here, and we have worked with many of them in planning and conducting our classes. The manufacturers have been fantastically helpful. Vari-Lite shipped in [regional sales manager] Leonard Miller, and two control boards plus instruments for the students to work with for a week. Meyer Sound supplied us with Gavin Canaan and Steve Bush and a full complement of gear to handle training on the sound side. Rosco supplied us with Jenny Knott who, with Kurt Sharp, handled scenic painting, and Rosco, together with Rose Brand, supplied hard goods for scenic

painting classes. We also had exciting light sessions with GAM president Joe Tawil and independent lighting designer Brian Gale of Nyx Designs.

**LSA:** What does your job at SILV entail day-to-day?

**JC:** Current and long-range planning. I'm the conduit between Don and the outside world and his students. During the summer, I focused on instructional scheduling and getting out a weekly newsletter to friends of the institute; I'm continuing with a monthly version. As SILV grows, new tasks will come—my job is always evolving.

**LSA:** How did you get involved in the industry?

**JC:** In high school, I got interested in costuming. When I got to college, based on placement exams, I was one credit away from a French major, so I took it, and that allowed me to do my own thing with costuming. In 1963, no one had heard of an individualized major, but that's what I did. I spent a year in Paris, where my research project was visiting theatres, operas, fashion houses, and shops, learning about costuming and design in "the real world."

**LSA:** How did you and Don meet?

**JC:** When I got back to the U.S., I worked in the costume shop of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival. I was on the third floor; the first floor was the technical area; about halfway through the summer, I looked out the window, and there was a guy with a lightbulb in his mouth: Don. He and some other tech guys were building a special effect. I thought, hey, any guy who can make a lightbulb light up in his mouth, I want to know better. Two days later, we stayed up all night talking, and, although it didn't happen for a few months, we had already decided to get married. We've been working together ever since. We're lucky to have been in the business for a long time and have made friends with some fantastic people who have been willing to lend us a hand in this new project. ☺