

THEATER GOES TO THE DOGS WHEN BILL BERLONI IS IN THE WINGS!

Check out this Famous Trainer's Prize Pupils in **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL**

At just 19 years old, Bill Berloni had never trained a dog. He was trying to become an actor and was offered a part in a summer stock production if he would take on one simple task—train a dog for a part in the play. So Berloni went to the local animal shelter and picked a dog that fit the part. The summer stock performance was ANNIE, and when it went on to enthrall audiences on Broadway, Berloni and Sandy went with it. Little did he know that his rescued “Sandy,” adopted for less than \$10, would become “the longest running dog on Broadway,” not missing a single show in more than seven years!

Bill Berloni's method of training dogs for entertainment purposes is unique to say the least. When first confronted with Sandy, Berloni had only owned one dog, a collie, when he was growing up. “I was young and naïve,” he remembers, “but I remembered that that dog loved me.” So he thought that if he could make the dog love the theater as his home and convince him that each performance was the equivalent to dinner time, he could get Sandy to do whatever was asked of him every night. And it worked. The performance became a routine that the dog enjoyed doing each time it went on stage, and Berloni and Sandy became partners. “It's more about the relationship than about establishing control over the animal,” he states. Which, of course, flies in the face of contemporary dog training methods. But it has been working for Berloni for more than 30 years, making fur fly on the set of such Broadway shows as CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG, GYPSY and THE WIZ.

Four of Berloni's four-legged companions will be taking the stage in **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL**, at Ovens Auditorium April 21 – 26. Frankie and understudy Roxie are the Chihuahuas who play Bruiser, main character Elle Woods' companion, while English Bulldogs, China and

understudy Nelly, play Elle's friend Paulette's pooch, Rufus. The dogs, and their handlers, travel in style with a specially customized van, private hotel suite and their own dressing room (pretty impressive when you consider that the actors have to share and the dogs get one all to themselves!).

The most difficult part of training a dog or animal for the theater, unlike for film, is that Berloni can't give commands from the wings. “They can't be looking offstage at me for their cues all the time,” he says. “So we train all the cast members to be handlers.” Each cast member of every production Berloni works on is trained to give the correct cues to the animals at the right times—making them all part of the dogs' “family.” The dog respects the cast and the cast respects the dog; it's a win-win situation for all involved.

In addition to his work training animals for theater, television, film and print, Bill Berloni is a tireless advocate for animal adoption. All of his animal performers are rescue animals and Berloni is currently the Behavior Consultant for the Humane Society of New York, a shelter that supports rescued animals in New York City. He believes that when you adopt an animal, you make a lifelong commitment to that animal. As such, the Berloni residence in New York is home to 13 rescued dogs, with another eight touring the country in shows. When their run is over, they, too, will retire in style.

Recently, Berloni released his book “Broadway Tails: Heartfelt Stories of Rescue Dogs Who Became Showbiz Superstars,” chronicling the 21 Broadway shows he has worked on and the 21 amazing animals he has had the privilege of welcoming into his life.

For more information on Bill Berloni and his outstanding career, log onto TheatricalAnimals.com.



Nathalie Joy Johnson in LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL. © Joan Marcus.

LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL

April 21-26, 2009 • Ovens Auditorium
 Tuesday - Thursday 7:30PM • Friday 8PM
 Saturday 2PM & 8PM • Sunday 2PM & 7:30PM

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Becky Gulsvig in LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL. © Joan Marcus.