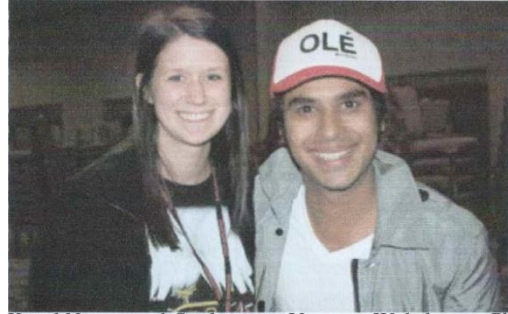


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Stars of Today and Tomorrow

Kennedy Center Festival hosted by University is an inspiration to a visiting television star, and to audience of would-be stars who attended the event.



Kunal Nayyar and Sophomore Vanessa Wehrkamp. Photo by

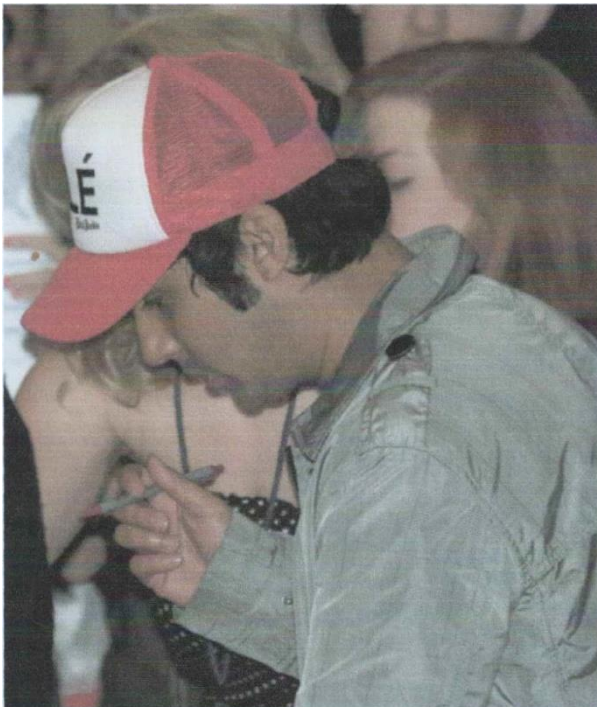
College theatre festival draws large audience to Reno and to campus

March 2, 2010

By Kathie Taylor

Television actor Kunal Nayyar, who plays Raj on the CBS hit comedy "The Big Bang Theory," addressed aspiring actors, directors and technicians on the last day of the Region 7 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival hosted by the University of Nevada, Reno, on Feb. 15-19.

Nayyar participated in the Region 7 Festival as a student of the University of Portland in 2003, where he was nominated for his role in the play, "The Rose Tattoo," and invited to compete at the national festival in Washington, D.C., the same year. He won the Mark Twain Award for comic brilliance and a fellowship to the Sundance Theater Lab. He then earned his master's degree in fine arts at Temple University in Philadelphia, and in 2007, he joined the cast of "The Big Bang Theory."



Kunal Nayyar, a.k.a. "Raj" from television's hit comedy "The Big Bang Theory" signs autographs for students attending the Region 7 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival hosted by the University Feb. 15-19. Nayyar delivered the keynote address. Photo by Kathie Taylor.

"I owe so much of what has happened to me to the Kennedy Center Festival," Nayyar said. "It propelled me to the position I'm in."

Nayyar said his address was meant to add to the fun of spending five full days at a theatre festival in Reno.

"It was so much fun just being myself," he said. "I just answered (students) questions honestly. The room was raucous and alive with the spirit and energy that is needed to be an actor."

Nayyar urged students not to be afraid of their dreams, and told them with hard work and a positive attitude, anything can happen. He is living proof, he said.

"If you want to work in New York or Los Angeles, you have to be there," he said. "What's the worst that can happen? You always have home."

In the future, Nayyar said he would like to produce or direct, and eventually open an acting school. But for now, he hopes to continue with "The Big Bang Theory," one of the biggest comedies on television today.

"People say television comedy isn't serious acting," he said. "I sometimes wonder, 'How the hell did I end up in this company of talent?' These are real actors doing incredible work, and I am blessed to be in their presence."

Patrick Laffoon, University of Nevada fine arts major and competitor in the regional Irene Ryan Scholarship auditions, said that Nayyar's address really hit home for him.

"He's got this experience where you can say, 'Hey, this is possible,'" he said. "What I learned from him is never stop working hard. There is no point where you hit easy street. Network and be nice to people, because you never know who you'll meet."

Laffoon said participating at the festival brought him the feeling of comfort knowing he was on the right track.

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"Getting to watch the other actors, perform alongside them and see other shows, is an elevation of everything we're doing," he said. "In our department, we've been concerned because we have a small budget. But, what we saw is that we're ahead of the curve on a lot of things."

Rob Gander, faculty chair of the University's Department of Speech Communication and Theatre, said the festival provided opportunities for networking, along with developing and honing skills.

"Students from our University are connecting to students from other schools, faculty got to know and understand each other," he said. "It is so rare to have such an intersection between student, academia and professionals."

Gander said the festival also elevated the University beyond local visibility to regional and national attention.

"We had national representatives from the highly prestigious John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts," he said. "We had students from a 10- to 12-state region coming to us, many from community Colleges who now have the University of Nevada, Reno on their map."

Another payoff to hosting the festival, Gander said, was the economic impact.

"We had more than 1,000 people for five and six days staying in hotels, eating meals and spending time and money here," he said. "The festival was a financial reward for the City of Reno."

University students and faculty from the School of the Arts provided technical expertise for lighting audio and visual equipment for all festival performances and workshops. The festival included four full-stageplay productions; a full day of 10-minute plays that were cast, rehearsed and performed during the Festival; and nearly 60 workshops in design, lighting, acting, directing and many other aspects of theatre.

"We had nearly 100 percent participation from theatre students and faculty," Gander said. "We were really pleased with the way our students took to everything – performances, workshops and events."

Mike Fernbach, technical theatre design specialist in the School of the Arts, participated as a student in 1980, the last year the University hosted the festival. Fernbach said participating in the festival as a student gave him direction towards graduate school and a career in theatre. Back then, the festival was much smaller, he said.

"We have more to offer," he said. "The campus has grown; we have more faculty and better facilities."

Fernbach said that Reno's destination status drew a large festival crowd, and that the ease of transportation from the airport to the host hotel and from there to campus, in addition to Reno's many attractions such as skiing and gambling, made this year's festival memorable to attendees.

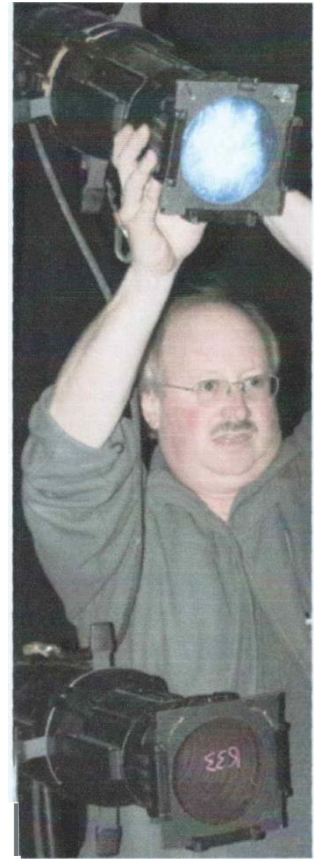
"Kunal Nayyar said it best in his address," Fernbach said. He said, "You guys are lucky you get to come to Reno."

Kathie Taylor is an intern for university media relations.

University of Nevada, Reno - 1664 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV 89557-0208

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Mike Fernbach, University of Nevada, Reno theatre technology and design specialist, participated in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival when the University last hosted the event as student in 1980. This year, Fernbach contributed his expertise in audio and visual effects at the University-hosted festival Feb. 15-19. Photo by Kathie Taylor.

Katherine Taylor

From: Robert Gander

Sent: Wednesday, March 03, 2010 10:50AM

To: Katherine Taylor

Cc: Larry A Walters; Susan E Klemp; Michael R Fernbach; Matthew C McKinney; Carla J Geib; James L Owen; Ronna S Liggett; Gwen A Hullman; Aaron R Hess; Samuel A C r o s t i c

Subject: indebted

Kathie,

GREAT article on the front of the website, thank you for putting it together. It's hard for me to express how important that kind of exposure is for us right now. Many, many thanks,

Rob

Katherine Taylor

From: Jane F Tors
Sent: Wednesday, March 03, 2010 1:55 PM
To: Larry A Walters; Katherine Taylor
Cc: Natalie Savage
Subject: RE: Nice article

Thanks, Larry, for taking the time to commend Kathie's outstanding work.
Thanks, Kathie, for that outstanding work!

Jane

From: Larry A Walters
Sent: Wednesday, March 03, 2010 1:50 PM
To: Katherine Taylor
Cc: Jane F Tors; Natalie Savage
Subject: Nice article

Kathie, not is your article well written and well placed, it is well timed. As you know, programs are being sacrificed so that those with a strong track record may continue. Thank you for helping us to establish that record. I'm seeing a pattern, too. **It** seems that since you have been working with our department we've been getting more press coverage than any time I can remember in my nearly 30 years.

Thank you for everything (both semesters),

Larry A Walters
Managing Director of Theatre
Associate Professor of Theatre
University of Nevada, Reno

Katherine Taylor

From: James L Owen
Sent: Wednesday, March 03, 2010 12:34 PM
To: Robert Gander; Katherine Taylor
Cc: Larry A Walters; Susan E Kemp; Michael R Fernbach; Matthew C McKinney; Carla J Gelb; Rona S Liggett; Gwen A Hillman; Aaron R Hess; Samuel A Acrostic
Subject: RE: indebted

Great job Kathie, and congratulations to our theater faculty and staff ...Jim O.

From: Robert Gander
Sent: Wednesday, March 03, 2010 10:49 AM
To: Katherine Taylor
Cc: Larry A Walters; Susan E Kemp; Michael R Fernbach; Matthew C McKinney; Carla J Gelb; James L Owen; Rona S Liggett; Gwen A Hillman; Aaron R Hess; Samuel A Acrostic
Subject: indebted

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