

**New York****A Weekend Tribute to the 60th Anniversary of the "Fame" School – New York's High School of Performing Arts***(Photos: David Kaen/Kaen Photography)***Nicole Flender.****By Nicole Flender,  
Principal Councillor**

I feel as though I have spent my life on 46th Street. I got my Equity card in 1983 and subsequently have walked East on 46th Street to the Equity building to attend auditions and committee and Council meetings. In the '70s I was on the block daily since I attended New York's High School of Performing Arts, located at 120 West 46th Street. Performing Arts, or PA as it was fondly called, existed at this site from 1948 until 1984. Though it is now the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School for International Careers, I found myself trudging towards it yet once again on the weekend of June 13 and 14, 2008. I was not alone; approximately 500 alumni and PA teachers gathered at this former haven for actors, dancers and musicians to reunite and celebrate the 60th year anniversary of the founding of Performing Arts.

The High School of Performing Arts existed as a vocational school in the 46th Street building. Students took an equal number of classes in academic and studio subjects. The setting was intimate, the teachers knew all the students, all of the students knew each

other, there was support and camaraderie and, most telling, many people describe it as the best years of their lives. In 1980 the movie *Fame* hit theatres coast-to-coast and New York's scholastic secret became a national wannabe. In reality the

"Hot Lunch" musical number featured in *Fame* closely resembled reality since "lunch" took place in a big empty space with a sound system and people created their own version of disco fever while wolfing down sandwiches. *Love's Theme* from The Love Unlimited Orchestra was a huge favorite at the time.

In 1984, Performing Arts merged with its "sister school" Music and Art and moved to Lincoln Center to become the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and the Arts.

**Ivy Austin belts out a tune accompanied by Joe Joubert.**

What had been an intimate school of 600 became a very large school of 2400. But... for two days the PA people, those who had been in the building at a unique time, were glad to be together again, on their old turf. On Friday night, there was

an all-class reunion with drinks and snacks. Five hundred people crowded into an open space without air-conditioning. My friend and classmate, Ned Eisenberg (who recently appeared in Broadway's *Awake and Sing!*), and I tried to figure out where we were! A fire gutted the building after the move and the new Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis structure looks nothing like our school. Yet though it was hot, and the internal structure was no longer the same, people were throwing their arms around each other and screaming as in former times, happy to be reunited.

On Saturday, we were escorted into the auditorium. Teachers were presented with honorary diplomas. Bel Kaufman, author of *Up the Down Staircase* and beloved English teacher at PA, said she based her stories on experiences with her students from the '50s. Dr. Marjorie Dycke, first chair of the drama

department, congratulated Dr. Franklin Keller, the first principal, for having the vision to create a serious arts school. She stated that prior to PA, in the school system, music was thought of as a hobby and dance and drama were thought of as after school activities. Over 20 faculty members showed up to get their "honorary PA diplomas." Music teacher, Gerald Trevor, emphatically stated, "I just loved teaching here. I

couldn't wait to get to school. I could never get here too early." Former biology teacher, Haron Shuman, clarified misconceptions by stating he had taught "philosophical biology!" And then there's Bill Britten, drama teacher, aka

Bozo the clown! My ballet teacher, Bella Malinka, is in her 80s. She lives in a walk-