

Cape Cod Performing Arts

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players" - WS

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Stagestruck wins best documentary at WHAT Film Festival

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Director Liz Argo of Orleans wins with personal film

If you ever saw a play at the Orleans Arena Theatre (or the Academy Playhouse as it is known today), you're part of history. Liz Argo's documentary film, *Stagestruck: Confessions of a Theater Family*, about the Orleans Arena Theatre, won best documentary at the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater's (WHAT) third annual Filmmaker Takeover on March 6.

Argo, the head of [Argo Video Productions](#), has produced and directed more than 100 award-winning videos. But this one is different. It's personal. It's about her family's life and livelihood as producers of America's first summer stock theater-in-the-round from 1950 - 1976. As a "resident" summer stock theater, the Argo family shared their home, living, breathing, and eating theater with the 30 or so young actors and actresses who came to the Orleans Arena Theatre every summer to refine their craft.



As the oldest child of the founder-producers of the Orleans Arena Theatre, Liz Argo adds her emotional intimacy to bring the well-crafted story to life. Liz' sister, Allison Argo, also appears in the film to add to the telling. She too is an award-winning filmmaker whose work focuses primarily on animals' rights.

Argo uses fascinating reenactments, historical theater photos, and lively interviews to tell the story behind the glamorous grind of 1950's summer stock theater. Author Kurt Vonnegut is an engaging addition to the interviewees, providing the famous Vonnegut humor and insight to the telling of the family's experiences running the Orleans Arena Theatre. The staged historical re-enactments are particularly well executed, with more than 50 Cape Cod actors and actresses employed to act out the scenes in the famous theater that now houses the Academy of Performing Arts.

Stagestruck gives audiences a top bunk in an American art colony. The docudrama is an intimate look at a bygone era in American history when people were willing to camp out and create great theater from nothing but string and sweat. Not just a tale of wild parties and steamy relationships, the story of the Orleans Arena Theatre is also one of hard work and sacrifices, of pain and of joy. Part expose, part homage, the interviews, old stills, and re-enactments tell the tale of this creative, industrious, and humble theater business venture carried on by producers Betsy and Gordon Argo and their children from 1950 until 1976.

Stagestruck has many friends. Private donations accompanied donations from The Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank and The Arts Foundation of Cape Cod so the film could be made and history documented. More than 150 people attended the Filmmaker Takeover screening at WHAT, with a standing ovation at the end.

When asked what's next for *Stagestruck*, Argo said, "I'm excited that public television has shown interest. I'll be sending it off to them next and hope to be able to tell everyone who helped make *Stagestruck* to look for it on PBS soon!"

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