

## Creative coupling



Mark E. Lang and Alison J. Murphy met performing in Cape May in 2001 sharing a stage kiss.

## Performing artists find love, relationships that last long after the stage curtains close

By VINCENT JACKSON  
Staff Writer

Samantha Morrone and Ted Wioncek III each accepted acting roles in a production of the musical "Ragtime" in 2007.

Morrone, 26, of Philadelphia, played Evelyn Nesbit, an artists' model, vaudeville personality and a chorus girl. Wioncek, 29, of Gloucester Township, portrayed the character of Younger Brother, who professes his love to Nesbit during the musical's first act. At the same time, Wioncek grew as impressed with Morrone as his character did with Nesbit.

"I remember watching Samatha onstage and marveling at her self-confidence. She has always possessed the innate ability to immerse herself into a role," Wioncek said.

Ten months after meeting, they turned into a couple. They are still a couple today. Morrone is a Philadelphia-based actress and choreographer and Wioncek is the co-artistic director of the Eagle Theatre in Hammonton. Wioncek has directed Morrone, and Morrone has served as a choreographer for several productions that Wioncek directed.

"Ted and I maintain a professional relationship at the theatre. Most people do not know that we are together throughout the rehearsal process. We are too hyper focused on the work," Morrone said.

Most people who work in offices or factories can't imagine what it is like to make a living in the performing arts. One of the fringe benefits of a life of self expression is spending



Roy Steinberg, the producing artistic director for Cape May Stage and his wife Marlena Lustik, an actress and playwright, met while working together in theater in New Haven Conn. Roy and Marlena have been married for 30 years.

Staff photo by Dale Gerhard

hours on end with people who are creative, passionate and generally good looking:

When performing artists decide to start a relationship when they are working together, things end up one of two ways.

They can find someone to share their creative and personal lives with just like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner, Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, and Tom Hanks

and Rita Wilson.

Or there is the risk they will break up and be stuck working together like Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony, or Katie Holmes and Joshua Jackson.

Mark E. Lang has been an actor for more than 20 years. Lang has traveled across the country and internationally for work, but

□ See Couples, B6



# Couples

(Continued from B1)

arrived in the summer of 2001 in Cape May to act in the lead role in the comedy "The Dictator" for the East Lynne Theater Company. Alison J. Murphy was cast in the same show as Julia Bowie. In the comedy of mistaken identities, Lang had to kiss Murphy during the show.

Murphy was living in Cape May Court House and didn't live in the cast house in West Cape May, but she would bring her fellow actors groceries and hang out.

"By the end of the show, in September, we were dating," Lang said. "We kept it to ourselves at first, for the sake of professionalism; but then the show ended, and we had to decide if we had a future together, and if so, where we would live. My feeling from past observation was that a 'show romance' between two actors was often a fleeting thing, and neither of us was interested in that. I suggested that Alison spend some time with me in New York, to see if she liked it... and the rest is history. We were engaged, at the Cafe des Artistes on Central Park West, in the summer of 2002 and married soon after."

They are still together 12 years later.

In 1978, Roy Steinberg and Marlana Lustik were each acting in Connecticut. Steinberg was acting in "The Ghost Sonata" by August Strindberg with the Yale Repertory Company. Lustik was hired to act in "The Sea Plays" by Eugene O'Neill.

They met for the first time at 10 a.m. on a street corner in New Haven, Conn.

"I thought Roy was very attractive... I had been out late the night before, and my first impression was why is this hot guy hitting on me when I must look like something the cat dragged in. Then, I found out not only was he my type physically, but he was funny and smart too," Lustik said.

They later acted together in a Yale Repertory show titled "Expo 99" by Robert Auletta. Steinberg thought

Lustik was the most interesting person he ever met. After two weeks, they were living together.

"Well, we thought we were very good at keeping our relationship a secret, but we soon realized that everyone knew. When my friends came to see it and said, 'Are you involved with him?' We knew our secret was out," Lustik said.

They were married in 1982 and are still together. They have one child together, who is a psychologist.

Murphy said it is a joy and privilege when she and Lang act opposite each other. Murphy said something the other couples also mentioned. When you are a couple who works together artistically, it can create a shorthand to communication because you know each other on so many levels.

"It's always enigmatic because you're playing someone new every night and working on your characters' development together. You learn so much from one another in the process of acting together. It creates an intimacy between you both that can open doors of creativity in your work period," said Murphy, who added her husband wrote a play for them about Lunt and Fontanne, who the musical "Kiss Me Kate" was written about. "When working together, I think it's healthy and necessary to have some alone time. You need to give one another some breathing space."

Wioncek and Morrone have been able to make the relationship work even

though he is in the more powerful position as the co-artistic director of the Eagle Theatre.

"As an actress, Samantha appreciates constructive criticism from the director. It is only natural that she is adamant about giving constructive criticism as a choreographer. Samantha has worked for the Eagle as an actress and choreographer. As an actress, Samantha spends rehearsal exploring where her character is rooted vocally, physically, mentally. As a choreographer, Samantha's approach is similar to my directorial approach. We both spend an exuberant amount of time in pre-production mode, filled with dissecting and editing our own work," Wioncek said.

Since Steinberg will direct his wife annually, they have set up rules for time in the theater and outside the theater.

"We separate the rehearsal from our home life. For example, once I leave rehearsal, I don't continually give her notes on her performance as a director. Once we leave the rehearsal hall that part of it is done, and then, we are just husband and wife because there is a different relationship between a director and an actor. There is also a power dynamic. We very much strive to be equals as a couple, and there is a different relationship in a rehearsal hall where somebody is in charge," Steinberg said.

Lustik can't believe they have been married for 32

years.

"It doesn't feel like that at all. Anyway, I think that Roy and I are both people who are easily bored, and for some reason, we have never bored each other. Someone once read our cards and said we were soul mates. We look at life in the same way and consequently have had many adventures together so life is always interesting and never predictable. And of course, great sex helps," Lustik said.

Contact Vincent Jackson:

609-272-7202

VJackson@pressofac.com