

# Lenny & George, meet Martin & Jack

GALA AT POUGHKEEPSIE'S  
CUNNEEN-HACKETT THIS FRIDAY  
BENEFITS PASSING THE TORCH  
THROUGH THE ARTS

**F**rom generation to generation, stories have been told from old to young: stories that transmit the values of a culture, stories that “pass the torch” of wisdom and give continuity to the human experience. Michael Monasterial, an actor whose life was changed by the stories that he encountered as a young adult through theater and the arts, aims to continue this tradition with his theater company, Passing the Torch through the Arts, which will stage a gala performance on the evening of Friday, February 20 in Poughkeepsie.

Passing the Torch is devoted to empowering young people through in-class and out-of-class performances of new and classic literature. Its productions are tailored to the young adult audience, bringing to the fore the issues of ethics and hard choices that are at the center of their own lives. According to Monasterial, he founded the company to combine his two loves: “a love of the arts and a love of social activism.” He says, “There was a lack of accessible material that could get kids into the work – the kids who needed to be reached.”

He credits his own experience as a teenager – one who “always sat in the back of the room” – with turning his life around: “An arts teacher took me under his wing and said I was a natural. Acting gave me

self-esteem. It showed me I didn’t want to be on the wrong path anymore.”

Since founding Passing the Torch, Monasterial has brought performances to rehabs, group homes and juvenile detention facilities. His current “Classroom Classics” program focuses on building literacy and acquainting young people with the valuable contributions of our literary history that they often find too challenging to read.

Passing the Torch will bring two such performances to the stage during its February 20 event. The night begins with a gala featuring catering and live jazz music. During this period, Passing the Torch will present Luminary Awards to several people who have made a difference in the lives of Hudson Valley youth. Among this year’s recipients are congressman Maurice Hinchey, Jesse V. Bottoms of the

Beulah Baptist Church, Shirley Adams of the Catherine Street Center and Carmen McGill of Dutchess Community College. Five deserving young adults from local youth organizations will be awarded free tickets to a Broadway show – donated by the Arts Society of Kingston – which Monasterial views as a life-changing, mind-expanding experience to which the young people would otherwise not have access.

Following the awards ceremony, a band of Passing the Torch actors will perform two theatrical pieces. The first is a work titled *King and Kennedy*, written by Monasterial himself. Set just before the 1963 March on Washington, the work brings to life a one-time meeting between Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy, Jr. The second piece is an adaptation of the classic Steinbeck novel *Of Mice and Men*. The timely piece depicts the sorrows and longings of Depression Era farmhands Lenny and George. *King and Kennedy* is directed by Elizabeth Fraser Barrows; Dorothy Penz directs *Of Mice and Men*. Monasterial acts in both plays; fellow actors Brett Owen, Rose Thomas and Soyal Smalls make up the rest of the cast.

It all takes place on Friday, February 20 at 7 p.m. at the Cunneen-Hackett Arts Center at 12 Vassar Street in downtown Poughkeepsie. There is a suggested donation of \$20 per person, which is waived for students. For more information on Passing the Torch through the Arts, see its website at [www.passingthetorchthroughthearts.com](http://www.passingthetorchthroughthearts.com).

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