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Developmentally disabled performers take center stage

5:45 PM, March 19, 2009



John Paizis once acted in summer theater in Connecticut, performed in rock 'n' roll bands and trained with Jim Henson and Frank Oz, as Susan Brink wrote last year in a pair of stories ([here](#) and [here](#)) for The Times' Health section. He also relied on day jobs to pay the rent, often working with people with disabilities.

So in 1998, he combined two passions in opening Performing Arts Studio West, an Inglewood acting, music, dance and production studio for people with developmental disabilities. Since then, the studio has seen its students land various gigs, including Luke Zimmerman's role as Tom Bowman on ABC's "The Secret Life of the American Teenager," which has its season finale Monday night on ABC. (For more about the studio and Zimmerman, see the video below from our brethren at KTLA.)

And on April 30, [Performing Arts Studio West](#) will hold its first awards gala at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, with tickets going for \$100 apiece.

— Scott Sandell

Photo: Students perform in a dance class at Performing Arts Studio West. Credit: Gina Ferazzi/Los Angeles Times

