

April 27, 2007

Section: LIFESTYLE

Edition: GWPR

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Community theater: A Blueberry sampler

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Pieces of this weekend's spring sampler fill the **Blueberry** Pond Theatre Ensemble's home in Ossining's Cedar Lake Park.

At a final rehearsal, they're blocking Michael Small's "Got You" on the main stage - where to sit, when to sit, when to stand, how to stand, what to lean on.

In a narrow library, Nick Raio's "Sheila and Angelo" gets a reading. Accents are checked, timing tightened, emotions confirmed.

Actors, writers and directors spill into a lounge area and outside in the cool, night air.

That wise-looking 11-year-old kid hanging out? She'll step on stage in Lloyd Pace's "New Orleans" in a few minutes and command the action.

Later, Gabrielle Fox's "Real Estate," and Kathy H. Kafer's "The Lincoln Continental" will take one more run to make sure the exits and entrances are just so and actors know the choreography of each scene.

Never heard of "Got You" or "The Lincoln Continental"?

Good. That discovery is the exciting part of BPTE's sampler. You walk into the small theater in the park - the one with the comfy leather chairs - and find yourself adopting one or more of the plays.

And your involvement is part of the ensemble's laboratory approach to creating new theater. Your feedback will help shape each of the eight plays in development, with 16 actors playing 30 characters each night.

Discovery. That's the **Blueberry** method. The audience is part of the workshop. By the end of the evening, you'll find yourself drawn into the process of making something. Each of the scenes and acts in the spring sampler tonight and tomorrow grew out of weekly **Blueberry** sessions. Some - Alan Lutwin's historical drama "Yussel Takes the Wheel" and Jean-Paul DeVellard's intense Southern work "The Conversation at Choctaw Junction" - are new scenes for plays that have been part of earlier samplers. Others mark the start of a new work.

Members play any and all of three roles: Writers get to see and hear their words rise from the page. Actors get new work to try on. Directors get to adapt pieces from scratch.

"It's an open discussion," artistic director Cynthia Granville says. "Are people shifting around because they're bored? Are the jokes funny? Writers can ask for something specific about character or dialogue, and members can respond as actors or directors or as an audience member."

From his first days with the ensemble, says Granville, Michael Small started bringing in scenes that have grown into "Got You." The sampler audience will see a New York couple crumbling under the pressure of 9/11, illness and real estate lust. He's scared to live in Manhattan anymore. She's scared not to.

The asking price is not the only deadly sin in "Real Estate," a scene set in Westchester. That's where nosy neighbors can watch a couple come apart. Gabrielle Fox, a teacher, thought she'd like to observe the **Blueberry** sessions, Granville says. Now she's working on the play's second act.

Nick Raio joined the group as an actor - he was in the fall production of "Through November Moonlight" - and his "Sheila and Angelo" has been part of previous samplers. This time, in a prequel of sorts, Raio's elderly couple find ways to value their relationship.

"If we get through this," 70-year-old Sheila says at one point, "we're never having sex again."

Kafer settled on her scene's title, "The Lincoln Continental," at Tuesday's rehearsal. A grown daughter, who wants her elderly father to stop driving, has taken his beloved car for a drive and wrecked it in an accident. Now she has to call him and explain.

"A Lexus and a Mercedes and you're driving my car," the father shouts. "What kind of person talks an old man out of cheesecake?" he asks.

In "New Orleans," Pace asks Molly Callahan to be a little girl who recalls having to hold her family together, and the woman she becomes.

"Some of us move on," she says, introducing the act. "Some of us don't ... when I was 10 or 11, something happened."

After the sampler, a reading committee selects plays ready for a fully staged reading. Another audience takes a fresh look before a work becomes a mainstage production.

"With new plays," she says, "the audience needs to take the journey with us and to find the journey fun - to have that moment of discovery.

"When you see 'Wicked,' you know that 'Wicked' is not going to change. Here, you may reshape a play."

Blueberry Pond Theatre Ensemble's Spring Sampler:

"Got You," by Michael Small, directed by Suzanne DuCharme.

"Real Estate," by Gabrielle Fox, directed by Michael J. Muldoon.

"Yussel Takes the Wheel" by Alan Lutwin, directed by Forest Hamilton.

"The Rest of the World" by Jill Maynard, directed by Cynthia Granville.

"Sheila and Angelo" by Nick Raio, directed by Michael J. Muldoon.

"The Conversation at Choctaw Junction" by Jean-Paul DeVellard, directed by Hal Hahn.

"The Lincoln Continental" by Kathy H. Kafer, directed by Cynthia Granville.

"New Orleans" by Lloyd Pace, directed by Lily Burd.

Where: Shine House, 235 Cedar Lane, in Cedar Lane Park, Ossining.

When: 8 p.m. today and tomorrow.

Tickets: \$30.

Information: 877-FOR-4TIX, www.blueberrypond.org

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