Goldfish in Alaska

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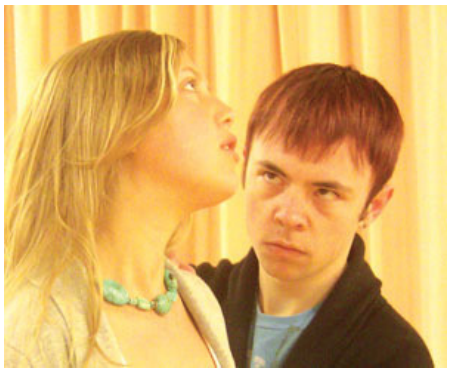

New theater director Gina Hayes stages work of famous poet

Starting up a new theater company in a small town like Santa Cruz can equate to making it as an actor in Hollywood. Meaning that it's tough—not only to get it off the ground, but to keep it rolling. And that is exactly what 24-year-old UC Santa Cruz alumni Gina Hayes has set about to passionately do with her creation of Red Egg Theater. The one-woman company, spearheaded by Hayes, hopes to provide college students across the Bay Area, and particularly in Santa Cruz, with an option to act off-campus, and plug into community theater.

It's quite an undertaking, but Hayes seems up to the task. Late last year she launched the company's first show, and now from March 27-29, at the Actors' Theatre, she'll be directing its second play, "Goldfish in Alaska: Adapted from the Poetry of Richard Brautigan." Brautigan was a writer who passed away in 1984. Hayes, a long-time fan of his work, took his poetry and adapted it into this multi-media experimental type of play. Showtimes are at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, and 3 p.m. on Sunday. Earlier this week, Hayes and company members had a special event at the Capitola Book Café where she discussed the play and scenes were reenacted from it.

"The play deals with [Brautigan's] inner life," Hayes says. Brautigan, while praised for his poetry, was also known to have had a troubled life—childhood abuse, he grew up poor, was checked into a mental hospital and eventually committed suicide.

The hour-long play takes a look at his life and some of the characters (either real or imagined) that he knew. It also includes elements of dance.

Admittedly, Red Egg Theater puts up low-budget productions, but Hayes explains that the artistic quality is quite strong. "We try to do things that present the material without a lot of excess fluff," she says.

Her cast includes students from both local colleges—Cabrillo College and UCSC. Advertising is grassroots and features one of the actresses handing out fliers at the farmers' market. But even with limitations, Hayes says her company offers high-quality productions and that everyone involved in one of Red Egg's shows learns something and teaches something.

This democratic outlook is something that sets Red Egg Theater apart from other local theater companies. "I'm not God," says Hayes, the director, noting that she looks for actors who give and take in their theatrical experience.

In addition, Red Egg Theater has found an original niche with its multi-media focus, incorporating music, movement, dance and poetry into its productions.

For Hayes, taking on the challenge of being a young person while running a small theater company, directing all the shows, and writing original content doesn't appear daunting to her. It's simply what she knows and loves. Acting for most of her life, and enamored with poetry, the twentysomething has found her niche with directing. "When I was an actor, I wish I had a director work with me instead of talking at me," she says.

As for the original name of Hayes' theater company, Red Egg Theater, it was hatched from the idea of the "Orphic Egg," an ancient creation story. "I wanted to [incorporate] creation with music and movement," Hayes says of her company's roots.

Red Egg Theater presents "Goldfish in Alaska: Adapted from the Poetry of Richard Brautigan," March 27-29 at the Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz. Showtimes are at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday. Admission is $12/general; $10/students. All proceeds from the play will go to benefit Actors' Theatre. For more information, visit santacruzactorstheatre.org or call 425-PLAY.