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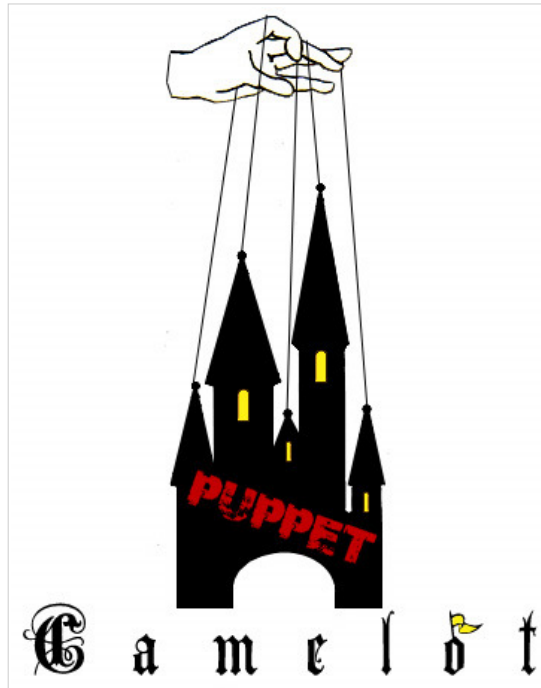
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Pulling the strings of (puppet)Camelot

11 DECEMBER 2009

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Gina Marie Hayes was five years old when she first saw *Camelot*. It was the first stage musical the native Santa Cruzian, now the founder and producing artistic director of [Red Egg Theater](#), ever saw.

"It looked like an Arthur Rackham painting," Hayes remembered. King "Arthur was very blustery and Guinevere had hair down to her ankles."

The show, with its magic and mystery, was a turning point in her life. "From then on, it was complete and utter dedication to theater."

Now Hayes — a graduate of UC Santa Barbara and the fifth year theater arts program at UC Santa Cruz — is putting her own spin on the knights of the

Round Table with *(puppet)Camelot*, December 23 through 27 at Actors' Theatre. A preview of the family-friendly Red Egg Theater production will be held 7: 30 p.m. December 15 at Capitola Book Cafe.

"We do a lot of things based on legends or fairytales and this is the biggest fairytale you can possibly think of," Hayes said.

Four actors puppeteer a multitude of roles in *(puppet)Camelot*, which follows the rise and fall of the kingdom of King Arthur. The Alan Jay Lerner/Frederick Loewe musical revolves around the love triangle formed by Arthur, Guenevere and Lancelot with classic songs such as "If Ever I Would Leave You" and "The Lusty Month of May."

"Puppet theater allows us to find more comedy in the melodrama because it emphasizes the theatrical quality," said Paul Baird, who plays Lancelot and five other characters. "Otherwise, it's kind of a sad play."

Designed by Kacey Kvamme, the puppets are sculpted on top of foam bases from paper clay — a modeling media that mixes cellulose with clay. The puppet's appendages are joined with leather joints. Hayes said the puppets are based on larger-than-life icons, such as Brigitte Bardot and Truman Capote.

"Lancelot's a little bit like Fabio," said Hayes, who has worked with puppets before, but never on a large-scale musical.

The puppets don't have moving mouths, or very many moving facial features, which means that a lot of the characterization will come from the performers. Audiences will be able to see the performers as they puppeteer, a la *Avenue Q* and *The Lion King*. Part of the joy comes from watching the actors trying to tell the story.



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"It's like doing voiceover for a cartoon, except we're animating the cartoon at the same time," said Baird, who played Pellinor (a role he reprises here) in his high school's production of the musical. "We use our voices to create all of that movement."

Christopher J. Carr — who juggles accents as well as puppets to play both King Arthur and his nemesis, Mordred — said *(puppet)Camelot* is the essence of theater. "It reminds me of those theater troupes where all of the players put on a show out of a wagon."

The title song, which bookends the libretto, has special resonance for Carr. As a teen, he loved to raid thrift stores and bought a record with 100 showtunes.

"'Camelot' was the first song on the vinyl," said the actor, who taught theater at a creative arts center in his hometown, Placerville.

Though the center put on puppet productions of fairytales and Mother Goose during weekends, this is the first time the Cabrillo College student has developed a character off of a puppet.

Rehearsals began without the puppets, with Hayes asking the actors to block the scenes as if they were onstage without their doll-like avatars.

"Rehearsing without puppets is freeing because we get to inspire the puppet maker, and our imagination can take us anywhere," said Baird, who took a class in puppetry as part of his bachelor's degree from UC Santa Barbara.

However, no matter how far the imagination goes, this is a production grounded in emotions, a tale of sweeping romance and epic betrayal.

"The more real the drama, the funnier the comedy is. It has to be honest. always," said Baird, who was also cast in the first show Hayes ever directed, at UC Santa Barbara. "In puppetry, you have to be more careful to capture the emotional truth of it."

A free preview of (puppet)Camelot will be held 7: 30 p.m. December 15 at Capitola Book Cafe, 1475 41st Avenue, Capitola. Call (831) 462-4415 for more information on the preview.

Red Egg's (puppet)Camelot will be performed 8 p.m. December 23, 2 p.m. December 24, 3 & 8 p.m. December 26 and 2 p.m. December 27 at Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center Street, Santa Cruz. Tickets are \$10 general admission, \$5 for students and seniors. Call (831) 425-7529.



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