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Works of student playwrights take center stage in One Acts

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 April 6th, 2001 by Monya De

A few weeks into last quarter, most students were still easing back into Stanford life, meeting up with friends and generally kicking back. But three sleepless writers were busy perfecting the scripts that, unbeknownst to them, would come to life in the 2000 Ram's Head Original Winter One Acts, which opened yesterday.

By the October deadline for scripts, senior Megan Mickley, the Ram's Head Executive Producer, One Acts Assistant Producer Kateri McRae, a junior, and two Ram's Head board members were "up to their necks" in original work by Stanford students.

Twenty-five scripts were submitted and were judged based on three categories: overall dramatic excellence, technical demands and general reaction to all aspects of the show.

"Between Cleanings" by senior Art Schram, "The Christmas Feast" by Andrew Hinderaker and "Memento Mori" by senior Paul Kerschen were the plays chosen to be performed at One Acts. Mickley said she is "ecstatic" about the shows and emphasized the unique personalities of each play.

The three authors said their plays came about partly by sudden inspiration.

Schram, who has previously acted in One Acts, said, "I wrote 'Between Cleanings' because I suddenly felt compelled to set a play in a bathroom. The story grew out of the location. I used the idea of an executive function for a new hot-shot company because young high rollers with a lot to lose appealed to me. I tried to make the script tight enough to be funny and yet maintain an edge."

Kerschen had never written for the stage before.

"Most of what I write is poetry and short fiction," he said. "'Memento Mori' was written more or less as an experiment. I'd never done anything related to the theater, so when Winter One Acts called for scripts it seemed like a good chance to try writing a play and see if anything came of it."

Although Kerschen said he "churned out" his play in the week before scripts were due, the idea for the play took shape two years ago, when he was inspired to write a piece about a man who is followed around by a personified Death.

Still, he said, he has laced the scripts with plenty of inside jokes.

Hinderaker's participation in the script contest was rooted in his desire to try something new.

"Up until 'The Christmas Feast,' I had only written short stories and a bit of bad poetry," he said. "Winter One Acts gave me a wonderful excuse to try my hand at dramatic work."

Hinderaker also completed most of his play in the week before the looming deadline, and said he was blessed with timely inspiration.

"I was lying in bed one night, and I know it sounds a bit bizarre, but I could see the beginnings of the first scene," he said. "A middle-aged man, the weird uncle that no one in the family really talks about, reasoning out why Superman must have a small penis. And so I just decided to start there and see where it took me."

"The Christmas Feast," a tale of a dysfunctional family, was finished four hours before scripts were due.

Hinderaker said he was "shocked and thrilled" when Mickley called him.

Since then, One Acts production has continued at a rapid pace, the directors said. Directors and all staff

were interviewed and chosen, rehearsal schedules were set, auditions and callbacks took place and rehearsals started within a two-week span.

Senior Geoff von Oeyen, director of "Memento Mori," was drawn to the script for its farcical humor and high quality.

"Thoughtfully constructed and beautifully written, Paul's script excels far beyond what is expected of a student-written play," he said.

Last year's One Acts producer, Avery Willis, took on directing "Between Cleanings" because she enjoyed its fast pace and humor. A playwright herself, she said she strove to create a highly entertaining experience for the audience.

In contrast, director Jessica Donaghy said she liked the challenge of working with the heavily dramatic material in "The Christmas Feast."

Although the writers have different plans for the future, all said they have enjoyed seeing their work produced and giving their directors the experience of working with fresh material.



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