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MuCCC stands for Multi-use Community Cultural Center, which accurately describes our mission. At The MuCCC, a 90-seat theater at 142 Atlantic Avenue, we present the performing arts in the greater Rochester community in all its diversity and richness.

We are proud to acknowledge Mr. Christiano who has been an artist-in-residence at The MuCCC since our first year of the program. During that time, he workshops “The Rochester Plays” which were then titled “The Sidewalk That Couldn’t Be Plowed.” He is our New Play Facilitator and will oversee our first new play festival early in 2014.

As an all-volunteer theater, our artist-in-residence program is the artistic and operational backbone of our mission. In addition to Mr. Christiano, our artists-in-residence include: Michael Arve, Karen C. Craft, Annette Dragon, Philip R. Fray, Cassandra Kelly, Roger Gans, Reenah Golden, Kevin J. Indovino, Mary Lewandowski, Yashodhara Deshpande Maitra, Jacqueline Moe, Kimberly Niles, Louie Podlaski, Meredith Powell, Justin Rielly, Curtis Rivers, Darryll Rudy, Mario Savastano, Reuben Josephe Tapp, Karen A. Tuccio, and Dave Woodworth.

We are also proud and fortunate to host such wonderful Rochester theater groups as The Rochester Community Players, The Irish Players, Limelite Productions, John W. Borek Presents, Sankofa Festival of Theater and Jazz, Screen Plays, ShakeCo, and TLF. We welcome our newest theater companies to the MuCCC: Out of Pocket Productions and the Rochester Latino Theatre Company. Please visit us to discover a world of Rochester theater in one special space. MuCCC.org and facebook group MuCCC.
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

the ur international theatre program

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A NOTE ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Program content is compiled by the production’s Assistant Director, Devin Goodman, and edited by Nigel Maister. For a complete list of sources and works cited, please contact the Theatre Program.

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**Spencer Christiano** (Playwright) is a Playwright-in-Residence and the New Play Facilitator at The MuCCC Theater in Rochester. A graduate of the SUNY College at Brockport Theater Program, he is the author of such works as *To My Friends: The Life and Death of George Eastman* (a supernatural play taking place on the afternoon of the Rochester icon’s suicide), *War Terrier* (a jingoistic fantasy about a grizzled war veteran—a talking dog—who teams up with Uncle Sam to take out the Nazis), *Midnight on the Front Lawn of Good and Evil: a hypothesis* (a meditation on citizens and the police inspired by Rochester’s Emily Good/police recording incident), *A Window on the Carragee* (a tale of Nazi soldiers stationed in neutral Ireland during World War II), and *Mystery of the Golden Buddha* (a children’s play for adults). A proud disciple of the Post-Capitalist Art Movement, and frequent collaborator with John W. Borek Presents, Christiano has directed or facilitated the production of over seventy new plays and performance art events in Rochester. His upcoming works include *Theater, Inc.* (an iconoclastic farce exploring economic hardship and artistic compromise in commercial theater) and *Rails* (a collection of Rochester one-acts concerning the abandoned subway, the Underground Railroad, and the Midtown Plaza monorail).
Where did the concept of The Rochester Plays first come from?

I have a particular interest in the way we interpret controversy. A lot of my plays are about how we are conditioned to take in information. We have a reaction first, form an opinion, and only then take in information, which usually only reinforces our initial, knee-jerk reaction. Many things contribute to this, but I’m more interested in addressing the problem than in pointing the finger.

This play challenges the way you think more than what you think. You could see it as an “issue play,” but that’s not how it is. The “issue” is you—your mind, and how it works. If we’re presented with a common problem that seems like it has very simple, clear-cut sides, it’s easy to look at the knee-jerk reaction and examine the way we think and why we think it. Sex offenders—pedophiles—and what to do with them is one of the great quandaries of our society. We know what they do (or want to do) is wrong—evidently wrong. The word pedophile itself creates a deep, visceral reaction in so many people—each person knows exactly what they think should be done with them, even if they’ve never once thought about it. But when you start to question people about it and really listen to what they have to say, you get the most amazing answers.

When I was first workshopping Part One: Attraction in 2010, I talked to a lot of people and was amazed at the range of feedback I got. I heard all sorts of ideas for solving this problem: special housing regulations, mandatory rehabilitation, chemical castration. Then there’s the aftermath of being falsely accused and never being erased—once you’re registered as a sex offender on the internet, it’s out there forever. One woman said all sex offenses should be executed. Even if they’ve never committed a crime: executed...

I’ve heard you describe these plays as “a low income love story.” What methods did you employ to make that relationship the central focus of the work as opposed to some of the darker elements?

This is a play about relationships: relationships that grow, crumble, and redefine themselves. The pedophilic subplot is just a catalyst—it’s something to knock these characters out of their tedium, get them thinking, feeling, and doing. With all that going on, they change. Their relationships change, and that catalyst reveals the basic humanity in these apparently normal people that is otherwise... pretty dull.

Margaret and Matthew have an initial connection through the fear surrounding the pedophile, and while their relationship becomes much more than alternating panic and comfort, I don’t know if they would have ever met if it weren’t for that first shock. The mechanics of fast love and building one thing while destroying another—that interests me.

I focused on the relationships because those are most interesting to me. I write plays I would like to see, and I write characters that I think would be fun to play.

The plays were originally titled The Sidewalk That Couldn’t Be Plowed. What is this title in reference to? Why the change? Why set the plays in Rochester?

In previous drafts, the plow strike was a larger focus in the plot, so The Sidewalk That Couldn’t Be Plowed made sense. But when I started to tone it down in reviews, it made even more sense to change the title so we settled on The Rochester Plays. There’s really nothing specifically “Rochesterian” about the plays. It’s only The Rochester Plays because we’re in Rochester—if we were doing this production in Brooklyn, it’d be called The Brooklyn Plays. All you’re told about the setting is that it’s a low-income American neighborhood that experiences blizzards, and there are plenty of those to go around. But I want the plays to feel both universal and local, so having the name of the town in the title goes a long way towards...
Zima is a clear, malt alcoholic beverage originally created and distributed by the Coors Brewing Company. Introduced in 1993, the lemon-lime beverage gained widespread fame and popularity around the mid 90's, ultimately being discontinued in 2008 after being outsold by the more popular, Smirnoff Ice.

At the time, Zima was predominately known for its low alcohol content and aimed at the female market segment, almost akin to Mike's Hard Lemonade today. As such, before each run of a production, any necessary blood packs are hidden in various nooks and crannies of the set. Good luck finding them, though, these spots are chosen so that no audience member can guess when they’re about to see red!

IT'S A GAME.
The game system featured in The Rochester Plays, Part 2: Escape is a Nintendo Game Boy Advance, released to the American public in 2001. That makes the system over 10 years old! Today, unopened Game Boy Advances are considered “antiques” by the video game industry, going for as much as $250 on Amazon. Refurbished systems, on the other hand, cost a little under $20. The Game Boy Advance on stage is an actual working system, complete with a copy of “Pokemon Sapphire.”

STAGE BLOOD
It's impractical to store blood packs—tiny baggies filled with stage blood that can be popped at just the right moment—on an actor’s person during a fight, lest their pocket leak red halfway through the first punch-up! As such, before each run of a production, any necessary blood packs are hidden in various nooks and crannies of the set. Good luck finding them, though, these spots are chosen so that no audience member can guess when they’re about to see red!

Where's Bloody Waldo?
Playing Hide-and-Seek with the red stuff

CAST
Part 1: Attraction

Walter ........ W. Spencer Klubben III
Matthew .......... Shaquill McCullers
Wendy ............ Susannah Scheffler
Margaret .......... Halle Burns
A Neighbor .......... Nathan Damon

Zima

Walter got a Zima back in the stockroom—
(Gavin) The Rochester Plays, Part 2: Escape, Scene 3

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At the time, Zima was predominately known for its low alcohol content and aimed at the female market segment, almost akin to Mike’s Hard Lemonade today. As a result of several rumors that the drink would not cause the imbiber to register on a BAC breath test, Zima’s popularity with the teenage demographic soared.
establishing that connection.

The character of Matthew has been altered significantly since rehearsals began last October. Why was this and how do you feel this new character contributes to the central ideas of the work?

This play is very much about stereotypes and preconceptions. Matthew’s character serves as a sort of device to entice the audience to examine their own positions a bit further. We’ve seen before—the ex-con trying to “do right”—and we’re conditioned to identify with that character and root for his success. But when you toss in another character who is a pedophile and registered sex offender—who we are equally conditioned to despise—then what is our reaction? Why does one criminal get a second chance, while another is shunned?

Matthew was originally much more abrasive, hardened, and unapologetic, and it made it difficult to identify with him. As this is, in part, a play about the hardships and pitfalls of rehabilitations in all their forms, it seemed more appropriate for Matthew to want to try to better himself.

Can you talk a bit about some of the other changes that you have made to the script throughout the rehearsal process?

Before this production, the last time I touched this play was back in late 2011. After that, I shelved the play and wrote and worked on a huge amount of other stuff. Nigel didn’t even approach me about producing The Rochester Plays until last April. When I picked up The Rochester Plays again for this production, I was ready for it. I had a different outlook on myself as a writer and the kind of plays I want to create.

There was a lot of updating and tweaking—moving words around and switching tenses... Cuts and additions and changes are all inevitable when you rework a script and try to put it on the stage. Suddenly there’s this symbiotic relationship, where the production changes to support the play, and the play changes to support the production. Sometimes there would be this collective jolt of inspiration, and a whole page would be rewritten on the spot, right there in the theater. That kind of collaboration only works if the environment is right, the director really knows the play and everyone in the room trusts one another. And there were lots of times when the actors and designers and stage managers had really great suggestions, too. We all just wanted to make a good play.

Who is Walter thematically, and what does he represent with respect to the other characters?

Walter represents the stasis that is unfortunately present in so many communities like the one we see in this play. He’s trapped. There’s no way out, for whatever reason, and even though he’s been this way for a very long time, he’s still trying to find a balance that makes him feel okay with himself—his status, his failures. He’s probably the poorest character in the play, and while it may seem like the others are better off, they’re not. Walter is where you end up right before you totally fail—when there’s just that single glimmer of hope left, and all you’ve got is one more grab at change before you have to make a really difficult choice.

How do Part 1: Attraction and Part 2: Escape work in tandem with one another? Do you believe that they serve more as compliments or contrasts?

Part 1 stands on its own as a complete play, enclosed in its own universe. Part 2 is a sort of reward for the dedicated audience. It says, “Let’s get serious.” All of a sudden, you’re looking at an aftermath you hadn’t considered, characters that aren’t who you thought they were. Questions you had from part 1 are answered, and more spring up. It changes your perspective on everything you saw in the last play. I can’t imagine why anyone would want to have just half of that experience.
By nature, crimes involving sexual contact or exposure are difficult to categorize and punish accordingly. In fact, the idea of a "sexual offender" has evolved over time to cover a broad swath of transgressions from misdemeanors such as public urination to significantly more serious offenses including rape, sexual assault, and child sexual abuse. As such, anyone convicted of a comparatively minor "sexual offense" could be lumped together with criminals guilty of crimes and transgressions that are far worse.

To combat this issue, most states have instituted levels of sexual offense. The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services ranks Level 1 sexual offenders as posing the lowest risk to the public, and Level 3 sexual offenders as being the highest risk, with both Level 2 and 3 offenders available in a statewide search engine on the Criminal Justice website. These levels are based on a wide range of factors, including but not limited to the offender’s relationship to the victim, the victim’s age, any use of force, weapons, alcohol, or drugs, and the number of victims. This risk level, also referred to as the "Level of Notification," dictates how likely it is the offender will commit another sexual crime.

Child sexual abuse and/or molestation, one of the more serious sexual offenses, is a different entity to pedophilia. Child molestation is the physical manifestation of pedophilia, a sexual attraction to prepubescent (generally age 11 or younger) children. The two are not equivalent by any means, though they are often used interchangeably. Sexual abuse is an action; pedophilia is a sexual orientation.

SEXUAL OFFENDERS & PEDOPHILIA

IN THE ARTS...

The depiction of pedophilia, child abuse and, indeed, the sexualization of children have a long history in all of the arts. In literature, there are many examples, most notably Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita and Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice (both made into movies). The Rochester Plays are certainly not the first example of this subject in the theatre. Paula Vogel’s How I Learned to Drive, John Patrick Shanley’s Doubt (also made into a movie) are two recent examples of plays that touch on, or center around this theme. In the movies, Todd Solondz’s Happiness, Nicole Kassell’s The Woodsman (starring Kevin Bacon), Michael Cuesta’s L.I.E., Thomas Vinterberg’s The Celebration (also made into an acclaimed stage production), and Justin Kurzel’s The Snowtown Murders all deal obliquely or directly with this material. The 2004-2007 hidden camera reality program To Catch a Predator lured potential sexual predators into compromising situations using decoy children online, only to be confronted by host Chris Hansen about their intentions. In the art world, the photographic portfolios of both Sally Mann and Jock Sturges have faced controversy due to their use of undressed, often nude adolescent or pre-pubescent children as subjects (in Mann’s case, her own children). Sturges, in particular, has faced significant backlash. After publishing one photoshoot in 1990, his studio was raided by FBI officials and all of his equipment was seized. He was, however, not indicted by a Grand Jury.
Scientists believe that pedophilia results from a combination of genetic and environmental factors. In what is referred to as a “victim-to-perpetrator” cycle, pedophiles are statistically more likely to have been subjected to violence or sexual abuse as children themselves. Brain trauma at a young age (prior to six years old) has also been linked to the development of abnormal sexual orientations such as pedophilia.

Like other illnesses that are psychological in nature, pedophiles generally maintain a façade of normality to the world, while nursing feelings of extreme inferiority or isolation. Pedophiles also have difficulty forming close relationships with the people around them, resulting from either poor communication skills or a general lack of empathy.

Treatment for pedophilia is based mostly around education and self-control; if the pedophile can learn to suppress his or her behavior, thought patterns, and feelings, they may be able to function in society with additional therapy and medication. Unfortunately, convicted child molesters have a tendency towards high rates of recidivism, also known as repeat offense. Judges are not often inclined towards leniency on matters of child sexual abuse, and convicted offenders are often the target of harassment and violence in both federal and state penitentiaries.

Somewhere around 400,000 sex offenders are registered in the United States. Up to 100,000 more are “missing,” meaning that they should be registered but cannot be found. An estimated 1%-5% of the population of the United States molests children.

96% of all reported sexual assaults are perpetrated by men. 89% of all sexual offences are committed by someone with whom the victim is familiar. These are known as acquaintance perpetrators, and they are the most common sexual abusers. 75% of violent child victimizations took place either in the victim’s home or the offender’s home.

Though not officially considered abuse, the highest incidence of incest is the victimization of younger siblings by their older counterparts. Child molestation is one of the most underreported crimes: only about 1%-10% is ever disclosed to the proper authorities.

The most serious and chronic offenders often show signs of antisocial behavior as early as the preschool years.

Some facts

- In 1999, 17% of all incarcerated sex offenders were convicted of child molestation.
- An estimated 25% of incarcerated sex offenders were convicted of committing crimes against children.
- In 1999, 10% of incarcerated sex offenders were convicted of committing crimes against economically disadvantaged children.
- In 1999, 20% of incarcerated sex offenders were convicted of committing crimes against children of color.
- In 1999, 15% of incarcerated sex offenders were convicted of committing crimes against children with special needs.
In terms of both conception and rehearsal, what makes a fight different from the rest of a production?

Well a lot of the same elements apply. We have lighting, sound, props, costumes, sets; those elements all play into how we construct the fight, and have to be taken into account. To use the example of Bethany (a show I just finished) we had to build a blood rig into a counter, so the set designer had to be in on that. We had to have lighting come in and out in order to hide some of the effects we were trying to do. We were getting blood on things, so we had to collaborate with the costumer to make sure that the blood could come out of the costumes. Again with costumes, I needed to have one of the characters well padded, so we had to get him a motocross jacket. So some of the elements are the same, but then there are things that need to be specifically tailored to facilitate the actors in accomplishing the illusion that they're fighting. Because of course they're not. That's where the design elements have to yield to the exigencies of the fight moment.

How much is the success of a fight scene dependent on an actor's technical ability to perform different moves (fights, naps, slaps, etc.)?

Of course, you have to go with the needs of the performers, because they're doing it eight times a week. It's not about the choreography or the moves, it's about telling a story. That is where the major collaboration comes in. I've read the play, so I have my ideas. However, because of the nature of my job, I'm not in the room everyday, so I have to rely on the director and the actors to tell me: "No, this isn't what the character would do." It's an organic, living process. As someone only in rehearsals for fight choreography, how did you approach translating each character's humanity into violence?

That's Stella Adler [a famous acting teacher]. I was fortunate enough to be able to work with her back when I was a foolish young actor in New York. Amazing acting teacher. There's a technical way of breaking down action: first, we're discussing: "I think you're wrong, I think we need to limit spending. I don't think we need to raise taxes." The nature of that is that I give a salient point, and then you rebut that: "Yes, that's true. However, part of the way of alleviating that is making the rich pay their fair share." So I'm listening to your points and commenting on that. When we get into arguing, I'm no longer listening to reveal that without the audience wondering how it was done, then you can keep their focus on the reality of the moment.

During the rehearsal process, you described the three stages by which a fight escalates: discussion, argument, and physical engagement. Can you speak about what those are and how you use them to help actors understand a fight?

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The human element. And that is what's often left out. People think: "Let's just work the choreography. Give me some fancy choreography." It's not about the choreography at all; it's not about the moves. It's about the connection between characters, it's about decisions. And then, of course, there is the moment when you reveal the blood. If you can find a shocking way to reveal that without the audience wondering how it was done, then you can keep their focus on the reality of the moment.

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