

Playwrights premiere short works

Julie Harris will star

By Sue Harrison
BANNER STAFF

The Provincetown Theatre Company is holding a Playwrights Festival from Feb. 24 to 27 featuring staged readings of new works by local playwrights, a Playwrights Chat for works in progress and a special performance of Lynda Sturmer's "Almost Sisters." Actress Julie Harris will star in one of the new works. The events will take place at the Schoolhouse Center, 494 Commercial Street.

The seven plays written by participants of this winter's PTC Playwrights Lab will be performed three times during the festival. Included are "Never Trust a Stranger," by Noel Tipton, "Hole in the Heart" by Ding Watson, "Worshipping Toothless in the Listerine Chapel" by Wendi D. Wilkerson, "The Brave" by Jim Dalglish, "Eddy and Benny" by Jerry Thompson, "The Good Load" by Candyce Rusk and "Meryl Streep, Meryl Streep" by Candace Perry.

The seven playwrights met weekly for the past three months, and the actors from the PTC worked with them. Lab director Margaret Van Sant points out that playwrights working with actors is key to the collaborative process that is theater. "You always see a lot of applications for residencies," she says. "All playwrights want that, to spend six weeks with the actors."

lar actress, she says, emphasizing the give and take between the playwright's outline of creation and the actor's ability to turn it into flesh and blood.

The contribution of PTC actors to the process, and the fact that the writers were all working to help each other and not compete, has led to a solid body of work and the promise of some good theater.

Although the works are new, most of the playwrights have a history with the theater, either with past playwriting, acting, or other related work. Perry first worked with the PTC Playwrights Workshop ten years ago and had one of her plays produced then. Since that time the Wellfleet resident has taken a hiatus from playwriting in favor of fiction. She rejoined the play fray this winter and it was during one of the weekly lab sessions that Tipton mentioned that Julie Harris would be great in the part of the mother in Perry's play. In a meant-to-be kind of way, Tipton, who knew Harris, asked her to look at the part and she signed on.

Rusk appeared in last winter's PTC winter reading series and has also directed for the company. Currently she is working at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center.

Watson is better known for her children's books, most recently "Tommy's Mommy's Fish," and has recently completed a musical for young girls now being performed in London and soon to be staged in New York.

Wilkerson, an Oklahoma native with a degree in theater came East

stayed on in the area. She has one previously produced play under her belt and is also doing some acting.

Thompson, a local contractor, performed with PTC over a decade ago and got involved from the writing end last winter when his "Hello, I'm William Shakespeare," was performed as part of the winter series.

Tipton, who's from Eastham, is artistic director for the Eventide Arts Festival in Dennis and is a composer with musical theater productions to his credit. He also has worked on a series of 10-minute musicals with Joseph Papp in New York.

Dalglish splits his time between Provincetown and Boston. He works in education and has worked in theater previously.

Sturmer, who was most recently seen in PTC's "Melville Slept Here," is bringing her comedy, "Almost Sisters," to the stage. The play was featured reading last year as part of the Women's Project in New York. Sturmer will be bringing in Boston actors to augment the local cast. She is an adjunct professor at Boston University and teaches an acting class for writers at Truro Center for Arts at Castle Hill.

The festival's Playwrights Chat will take place on Sunday, Feb. 27, and offers writers the chance to go over five minutes worth of a play in progress. PTC actors will read the work and script analysts James Luse from Yale University and Priscilla Sample from the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center will dis-



Photo by Elwood

Playwrights (front, L-R) Candyce Rusk, Candace Perry, (rear L-R) Jerry Thompson, Ding Watson, Noel Tipton and Wendi D. Wilkerson at last week's preview readings of their plays, which will be featured at the Playwrights Festival, Feb. 24-27.

feedback. Anyone wishing to take part in the Chat is asked to call PTC at 487-8673 to ensure a spot in the workshop. Call the same number for more information about the festival or to make reservations for the performances.

PTC will also offer a benefit performance of Joyce Carol

Oates' "The Key" at Napi's Restaurant with a Caribbean buffet and island music by Magic.

The festival is funded by grants from the Cape Cod Economic Development Council, the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod, The Mass. Foundation for the Humanities and the Mass. Cultural Council.

Playwright's Festival Schedule

All events at the Schoolhouse Center, 494 Commercial St., except "The Key."

Thursday, Feb. 24, "Almost Sisters," 7:30 pm, \$5.

Friday, Feb. 25, "The Key," 7:30 pm, at Napi's Restaurant, dinner and play, \$25 to benefit PTC.

Saturday, Feb. 26, Plays from the Lab: "Never Trust a Stranger," "Hole in the Heart," "Worshipping Toothless in the Listerine Chapel,"

pm, \$10; "The Key," 7:30 pm, at Napi's Restaurant, dinner and play, \$25 to benefit PTC.

Sunday, Feb. 27, Playwright's Chat, 10 am, donation; repeat of Plays from the Lab, 1 pm, \$10; "Almost Sisters," 7:30 pm, \$5.

Met broadcasts
"Mefistofele"

New plays by new writers

Julie Harris to attend Playwrights Festival

Raffle includes Key West vacation

Legendary, five-time Tony Award-winning actress Julie Harris will appear this weekend at the Schoolhouse Center to read from Candace Perry's "Meryl Streep, Meryl Streep" as part of the four-day Provincetown Playwrights Festival.

thrilled Harris was able to fit this weekend into her busy schedule.

"Julie has always been supportive of theater in Provincetown and all over the Cape," said Van Sant.

Harris will read the role of the dominating mother in "Meryl Streep, Meryl Streep." Her character is obsessed by the actress of the same name. When her daughter, also named Meryl, coincidentally marries a man named Streep, her obsession and disappointment come full circle during the evening of the Academy Awards.

Like "Meryl Streep, Meryl Streep," the other plays that will be read Saturday and Sunday were developed this winter at the PTC's playwrights by local residents. They are: "The Good Load," by Candyce Rusk; "Eddy and Benny" by Jerry Thompson; "Hole in the Heart" by Ding Watson; "Worshipping Toothless in the Listerine Chapel" by Wendi Wilkerson; "The

the PTC Playwrights Workshop for over 10 years. Although she is an award-winning short story author, she is, in reality, clinical director at the Provincetown AIDS Support Group.

Jerry Thompson of Truro is a local building contractor, who performed in several PTC productions 15 years ago. His first play "Hello, I'm William Shakespeare" debuted last year at the PTC Winter Series. As part of the festival, his play "Eddy and Benny," will be read. Similar to "Of Mice and Men," it is the tale of two men in a bar, who have entered into a bogus business arrangement. One is bright and the other controlling.

Another writer is Jim Daghish, who works in the field of education. He has written "The Brave", the story of a male couple, one of whom is dying of AIDS.

Candyce Rusk, who also worked at PASG, is now working part time at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center. Her play, "The Good Load," is an Irish, ethnic power struggle which takes place on a stoop in South Boston. The story is between a married couple who collect and sell junk metal and their boss.

Ding Watson, a well-known local children's book author (most recently "Tommy's Mommy's Fish"), has written a musical for young girls which has been produced in London and will be in New York. Her

Continued to page 22





Brave by Sam Daghlian, and "Never Trust a Stranger" by Noel Tipton. Van Sant said the Playwrights Lab would never have been possible without a \$9,800 grant from the Cape Cod Commission to focus



Margaret Van Sant, who has directed many of PTC's productions, said not only is the weekend exciting because of Julie Harris's continued support of local theater in Provincetown and all over Cape Cod, but because of the work developed by the Playwrights Lab over the past three months.

Live Caribbean music by Magic of Steel, a Caribbean buffet and a raffle of gift certificates to local restaurants and businesses, including a one-week vacation at the Brass Key Guesthouse in Key West, round-trip airfare included, are also part of the fundraiser at Napi's.

Tickets are \$25.

In addition to providing opportunities for new playwrights, like Perry, to have their work read in public for the first time, the festival will also include staged readings Thursday and Sunday at 7:30 a.m. at the Schoolhouse of Lynda Sturner's comedy "Almost Sisters."

And, it will hold two fund-raising performances of "The Key" by Joyce Carol Oates Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at Napi's.

"The Key" will star the husband and wife team of Judith Partelow and Jeff Spencer and newcomer Peter Murray in his debut role for PTC.

Sturner's "Almost Sisters" will be directed by Van Sant. It is a comedy about separation, connection and adoption. The play concerns an adopted daughter who, when her adoptive mother dies, meets her birth mother and another adoptive sister. The comedy, which Van Sant calls funny and joyous, arises out of the women being from very different cultures.

Sturner is no stranger to Cape Cod or Cape Cod theater lovers. She and her husband live in Truro during the summer. An adjunct professor at Boston University, Sturner teaches an acting class for writers at the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill.

Harris will read Saturday at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. and again on Sunday at 1 p.m. Van Sant said she was

Provincetown as a center for the theater, developing programs that may attract visitors to Provincetown.

Interestingly, the seven local people who have participated in this Playwright's Lab are not all theatrical professionals, Van Sant said, but they all share an interest in live theater.

Candace Perry, for example, has been a member of

Festival highlights act of play writing

One of the exciting parts of the Provincetown Playwrights Festival will be the readings from the seven plays written by local writers this winter at PTC's Playwrights Lab.

Although only portions of each play will be read, the lab and the live workshops, with real actors, provide each playwright with the opportunity to hear their written words, off the page, for the first time.

Margaret Van Sant, a long-term director with PTC, said this is one of the best ways for playwrights to work. It's also one of the reasons a playwright will often associate himself through a residency with a single company. The labs and workshops the company provides offer the playwright the opportunity for refining and fine tuning a play prior to an actual production.

Provincetown playwright Sinan Ünél, whose play "Pera Palas" will open in London in May, is a prime example, Van Sant said. He has written several plays over the years that PTC produced and performed. In the case of "Pera Palas," it was the staged readings in New York City at the Lark Theater that led to the play being optioned for production in London.

Companies like the Lark, she said, are dedicated to this kind of development process. The readings and workshops are a way to have plays read with actors

without having to make the investment in costumes, lighting and all the other expenses associated with full-fledged productions.

PTC decided to reinstitute the Playwrights Lab this year after Provincetown's Fall Arts Festival. The seven playwrights whose plays will be read Saturday and Sunday have been meeting weekly since November.

They have been joined from time to time by PTC actors who have read their scripts aloud. Following the readings, the actors give the playwrights their input prior to the rewriting and additional readings.

An additional benefit also accrues to actors, said Van Sant, because the readings provide actors with the opportunity to be in on the development of a character at the ground-floor level. Often, Van Sant said, an actor may actually help create the finished character before actually performing the role in a real production.

PTC will also offer on Sunday at 10 a.m. at the Schoolhouse and opportunity for new playwrights to bring in their work for spontaneous readings. A dramaturg from Yale and someone affiliated with the Eugene O'Neill Theater will be on hand to provide input and on-the-spot critical analysis. Van Sant is hopeful new writers will use this as an opportunity to join the lab.

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THE BRASSKEY, CAPE AIR, MR. PERRY'S TUX,
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THANK YOU ALL,
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