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Notes from editor (not for publication):

This sounds awesome!

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

Secrets and motives, tensions and suspicions

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Rock River Players premiere 'Midnight in Vermont,' a
classic whodunnit by Guilford mystery writer Michael Nethercott

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TEXT BODY:

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The Rock River Players (RRP) seem to be making a name
as producers of new works at their Williamsville Hall home.
Following May's evening of original one-acts was the
August premiere of Patrick Keppel's *The Freeing of Mollie Steimer*.
And starting Friday, Nov. 7, the RRP premieres Michael
Nethercott's *Midnight in Vermont*, a classic whodunnit à la
murder-mystery greats such as Agatha Christie.

The first full-length drama by the Guilford-based mystery writer, *Midnight in Vermont* centers on the untimely death of a rock star — one Virgil Eastman, the former leader of a popular 1970s band, The Midnight Rides.

According to a RRP news release, “The story begins with a present-day séance interrupted by an unexpected spirit, which incites a narrative shift back to 1983. The aunt of the recently deceased has gathered his former bandmates and associates in her Vermont manor, determined to address her suspicions that her nephew’s recent death was no accident.

“The suspects — a varied and unconventional lot — all harbor secrets and motives. As tensions and suspicions mount, they find themselves stuck in the isolated home, their desired departure blocked by an impending [and historically accurate] tornado. Now, with no escape and a killer potentially among them, they must face their past and uncover the truth behind Virgil’s death.”

The rest is mystery.

Relishing the mystery tropes

Nethercott is no stranger to the supernatural. “I come from a large, extensive Irish family, and I heard lots of ghost stories growing up,” he recently told *The Commons*. “You know, assumedly true ghost stories. So I think that’s always been an interest.”

He has authored two suspense novels, [*The Séance*](#), [*Society: A Mystery*](#) (2014) and *The Haunting Ballad: A Mystery* (2014), and many stories published in numerous magazines and anthologies over the years, including *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine*.

Concurrently, he’s honed theater skills, directing and performing locally with various groups — Guilford Center Stage and Vermont Theatre Company, among them — and he founded Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center’s Forest of Mystery some 35 years ago.

46 Having written two one-acts presented by the RRP —
47 *The Bacchus* and *The Required Man* — and with so many
48 published mystery narratives to his name, he felt compelled to
49 merge the two: to write a murder mystery for the stage.

50 “I’ve written plays before and directed them, and I’ve
51 written mysteries and had them published, but I hadn’t brought
52 those two together,” said Nethercott, not unlike Christie (1890-
53 1976), a writer of mystery in various genres: “I’ve read all of
54 Agatha Christie. She’s definitely been like a spiritual guide,” says
55 Nethercott.

56 He said he relishes and employs the mystery tropes that
57 the renowned British author developed so well: “numerous
58 suspects, an isolated location, misdirection, red herrings, dark
59 motives, secrets linked to the past, and lots of twists and turns.”

60 Having already worked with the RRP, Nethercott finds
61 the 10-year old theater group’s culture a familiar one. The
62 company includes some new faces, some RRP regulars, and
63 some of Nethercott’s actor colleagues.

64 The cast includes Emmadora Boutcher, Peter Broussard,
65 Susan Boyd Joyce, Amy Donahue, James Duffy, Denise Evans,
66 Jess Guerrero, Alex Lacey, Bree Lacey, Helena Leschuk, Ann
67 Linge, Laura Lockie, Aaron Morse, Shey Nessralla, Hunter
68 Savage, Dawn Slade, Addison Rice, Isabella Watkins, and Chris
69 Wehrman.

70 **Twists, turns, and musicality**

71 “What’s really fun about this play is that almost all the
72 characters have some sort of secret, and that allows each of us
73 actors to play with what we’re presenting and then what we know
74 will come forward later,” said Donahue, RRP’s artistic director,
75 producer of *Midnight in Vermont*, and a member of its acting
76 ensemble. “It’s given us a lot of meat to chew on in terms of the
77 way we deliver our lines, our physicality.”

78 Donahue has also “had the opportunity to tap back into
79 my dancing roots” to stage a dream sequence as a choreographer.

80 She welcomes the chance to work with RRP actors in this vein
81 and, she added, with the movement and with musical interludes
82 woven in, the audience's attention will be grabbed and diverted
83 repeatedly throughout to conclusion.

84 Helena Leschuk, operations manager at Brattleboro
85 Community Television, is assistant director for the production. A
86 Marlboro College graduate with a concentration in theater, she
87 said she's "always loved theater" and finally recognized that she'd
88 "love to be involved in a play again."

89 Of theater in the area today, she said, "I think people
90 really have missed coming together, especially in a creative way,
91 to make something new and exciting and get people out of their
92 homes, get them together, because we really don't want to be
93 cooped up anymore."

94 Leschuk added that "the importance of theater in our
95 communities, I think, has become even more accented post-
96 pandemic, post-Covid."

97 As she saw this production on the horizon, Leschuk said,
98 she was drawn to it being an original work.

99 "I was familiar with Michael and [daughter] Genna Rose
100 Nethercott," Leschuk added. "I know that they have talent, they're
101 a family of writers, and I loved the musical aspect, too, knowing
102 that it was about a rock star and there was going to be music."

103 The inclusion of contemporary music, she added, seems
104 to be a means of bringing the "murder mystery play into the
105 modern world." And the bond of the band is an added bonus in
106 the narrative for her.

107 "It's a unique script. Definitely some twists.... And it's
108 very literary, which I really like, too. It's gotten me into a lot of
109 books."

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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110 Performances of *Midnight in Vermont* are Friday and
111 Saturday, Nov. 7 and 8 and Nov. 14 and 15, at 7 p.m.; and
112 Sunday, Nov. 16, at 2 p.m. at Williamsville Hall, 35 Dover Rd.,
113 Williamsville (ADA compliant). Admission is \$15 (\$12 for
114 students and seniors). For information and tickets, visit
115 rockriverplayers.org.

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