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Notes from editor (not for publication):

From Chicago Manual of Style:

8.185: TITLES OF PLAYS

Titles of plays, regardless of the length of the play, are italicized.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 'Dark and unsettling,' but with hope

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Vermont Theatre Company presents 'An Evening of One
3 Acts'

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 As turkeys are getting dressed and with hall-decking
6 around the corner, Vermont Theatre Company (VTC) offers
7 counterpoint.

8 As described by a VTC press release, this weekend's
9 evening of four one-act plays offered at East Dummerston's

10 Evening Star Grange promises audience members a “dark and
11 unsettling night of theater full of psychological thrills and tender
12 moments” in a show that will “crush you and give you hope for
13 humanity, all in one evening.”

14 **‘A dark psychological thriller’**

15 First in the program’s lineup of four roughly half-hour
16 plays is *The Candidate* by Brent Holland, directed by Harral
17 Hamilton.

18 Hamilton, of Brattleboro, is an outreach job advocate for
19 Groundworks who’s been involved in a range of area arts over the
20 years, including local theater. He’s been a set designer, lighting
21 tech, stage manager, and, for the last 15 years, an actor.

22 He describes his first directing venture as “a dark
23 psychological thriller.”

24 “My play is about individuals who wake up in a room
25 with no memory of how they got there or who they are — and no
26 way out,” he says. “And they are put through a series of
27 challenges to determine something that [...] will be revealed in
28 the end.”

29 At the core, he explains, emerge big questions: “What
30 are humans capable of doing when put in certain pressured
31 situations? What’s inside them that they don’t know about? And
32 that can be good or not so good...it can be a little bit of both.”

33 Hamilton had been drawn to the simplicity of Holland’s
34 script.

35 “In the casting,” he explains, “there’s no sense of gender,
36 any gender can play any role. And they’re really stripped down to
37 the abstract colors of the shirt that they’re wearing.”

38 The nameless protagonists “have lost their memories, so
39 they don’t know who they are. But somehow instinct is still
40 within them,” he adds.

41 With a simple and on a bare-bones set, the script allows
42 him and the cast “to focus on the words on the page,” Hamilton
43 says.

44 Hamilton says he's loving all aspects of directing except
45 the scheduling — "trying to get five people all in the same room
46 together to rehearse."

47 Otherwise, though, encouraging meaningful, nuanced
48 delivery from the actors "is very natural to me," he says.

49 "I've worked with dozens of directors, and they all have
50 their own style," notes Hamilton, who hopes to glean from those
51 experiences — and from his studies of literature and history as he
52 holistically shapes the production.

53 'History rhymes, history 54 repeats'

55 *Bar Dykes* by Merril Mushroom is directed by Eli
56 Coughlin-Galbraith, who notes that the VTC lineup is "an even
57 split between dark psychological thrillers and serious pieces with
58 levity and comedic moments. I'm one of the latter."

59 Set in a 1950s gay bar, *Bar Dykes* is about 11 lesbian
60 patrons there one night.

61 "There's fighting, there's flirting, there's dancing; people
62 break up, people get together. There's drama, and a raid" by the
63 New York City vice squad, the director says.

64 Through it all, Coughlin-Galbraith says, "is the grim
65 reality of being gay in the 1950s. It's sort of hanging there,
66 pressing down and down. And under it, and within it all, people
67 laugh, people dance; they fall in love."

68 Grandson of John Kenneth Galbraith and son of James,
69 Coughlin-Galbraith grew up partly in Texas, and partly in
70 Vermont. Having come from New York with an undergraduate
71 degree from Columbia and a master's degree in historical
72 linguistics at New York University, the director became involved
73 in theater nine years ago as both actor and stage crew at VTC,
74 with a directorial debut last April in VTC's 24-hour play event.

75 "So I started as a stage manager because I said, 'Oh, I
76 can organize things. I can keep track of the pieces. I know how to

77 put a whole together out of all of the parts.” Discovering a love
78 for storytelling, Coughlin-Galbraith recalls, “the collaborative
79 nature of theatrical storytelling really appealed to me. So I started
80 acting, too.”

81 For 11 years, Coughlin-Galbraith has run Shapeshifters, a
82 custom tailoring/clothing company offering shapewear and
83 undergarments largely for trans and gender-nonconforming
84 customers — an experience that has influenced an approach to
85 directing: “Running a business means that I like logistics. I like to
86 keep track of moving parts and make sure everything runs
87 smoothly.”

88 Coughlin-Galbraith has been “collecting gay plays that I
89 would like to direct since 2019” and immediately said “Oh, I
90 want this now” when VTC producer Jessica Iris shared it.

91 “This feels like the precise time to do this gay play about
92 living under the pressure of a fascist oppressive state, under the
93 pressure of knowing that you could be arrested at any time for
94 being who you are, [of] knowing that you cannot trust or believe
95 in or be protected by the police,” Coughlin-Galbraith adds,
96 hoping the audience “can glimpse of ways to connect more
97 deeply with people. Especially when you’re feeling pressured by
98 the greater systems.”

99 *Bar Dykes* yields, too, “a sharp awareness of how the
100 1950s, and the 2020s are close in many ways: history rhymes,
101 history repeats.”

102 Questions of family (and no 103 spoilers)

104 Kay Beckett, who holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in
105 acting, has been doing theater in the area nonstop for a year now,
106 a dozen shows, “one after the other.”

107 “It’s good, though. I had to just really stay organized and
108 pace myself,” she says as she plans Beckett’s one-act, *The*

109 *Lemesurier Inheritance*, an adaptation by Miles Ledoux of
110 Springfield, Vermont, of the Agatha Christie story.
111 “For the current production, I’ve written out everything
112 that needs to happen” in great detail, she says, adding that many
113 audiences aren’t aware that directing and producing involves
114 such management and attention.

115 Having been smitten by another of Ledoux’s Christie
116 adaptations (*Thumb Mark of St. Peter*, at Guilford Center Stage),
117 Beckett was happy to hear that the playwright had many more
118 such adaptations. She chose an adaptation that featured well-
119 known Christie character Hercule Poirot.

120 “The way he handles the language is just fantastic,”
121 Beckett says of Ledoux’s ambience and setting.

122 What does a 21st-century jaded and over-teched
123 audience take away from this work?

124 “Well, it’s questions of family,” Beckett says. “I don’t
125 want to give too much away about the play, but it’s family
126 relationships that aren’t working. The audience needs to know
127 there’s a curse going on. But is there really?

128 “At the heart of it, it’s that things are not working
129 between a husband and a wife, but it’s Agatha Christie, right? So
130 we know there’s something else.

131 “And, well...you don’t want to know the ending, right?”
132 Right.

133 “The audience can take a look and see what went wrong
134 and why, and were people justified in how they behaved? Was
135 this a reaction to what happened that triggered this? Or was there
136 always some madness there? So, yeah, well, I mean, old English
137 families, right?” she says.

138 In the original short story, Christie revealed more of the
139 family’s psychological and behavioral issues, but Beckett says
140 she’s “stayed away from that, and tried to keep it just dark and
141 atmospheric.”

((subhed))

The last piece on the program is *Vebrook Hospital for the Reeducation of the Criminally Sane* by Anita Parrott and directed by Saskia Bailey-de Bruijn.

Holding it up to the description of the evening, “I’d say there are tender moments, but it leans heavily into some of the darkness,” they say. “It’s an abstract play, which has been a lot of fun to explore because it gives me as a director and my actors a lot of space to experiment and create.”

Set in “a mental hospital where four artists are faced with four days left to live,” Bailey-de Bruijn explains, the play explores choices made “in the face of an institution that is threatening their life and/or their livelihood.”

Of process, they add, “We’ve been exploring a lot of these very dark themes that sometimes feel all too close to home as we look at the broader context of the world.”

Bailey-de Bruijn has directed in nontraditional settings before, but this is their directorial debut, “with an established script written by someone other than me as a starting point.”

“I’ve done a lot of self-directed, self-produced projects, a lot of devising with friends, but this is my first bona fide attempt at directing a play with a theater company,” they say.

Theater, though, has been part of their life when “I was writing and directing the holiday plays with my family from, you know, 5 years old on. I was involved in the New England Youth Theatre growing up from 2008 to 2015. Heavily involved there.”

While in college studying broadcast journalism, they were involved in the theater department and, since coming back to Vermont in 2019, they have been “primarily a performing artist.”

To bring this story about artists and what’s at stake for them to life, Bailey-de Bruijn “has been doing everything I can with my cast to enhance the artist within all of us: to approach it,

175 not just as theater as artists,” but, as the script requires, as a
176 painter, a poet, a singer, and a mime.

177 “So we’ve been exploring those things within all of us,”
178 they say. “All the paintings on stage are created by my cast, all of
179 the music on stage is sung and recorded by the cast, too.”

180 This world premiere by Brooklyn-based Parrott is
181 presented as an ode to artists and to the consequences of
182 choosing your art in the face of a world that wants everything
183 except your creativity.

184 “So it is dark,” Bailey-de Bruijn says. “It is a bit macabre
185 and twisted and dystopian.”

186 But, they say, it is “also an ode to love, to expression, to
187 creativity.”

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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188 “An Evening of One Acts” at the Evening Star Grange,
189 1008 East-West Rd., Dummerston Center, runs Friday, Nov. 21,
190 through Sunday, Nov. 23. Shows are at 7 p.m. on Friday and
191 Saturday and 2 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are available on a sliding
192 scale of \$10 to \$20, at the door or at
193 vermonttheatrecompany.org.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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