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Monday, February 11, 2013



Wanderlust produces second play in trilogy from playwright Tom Block

Silver Spring artist spreads his wings with latest work
by Cara Hedgepeth

Staff Writer

Silver Spring resident Tom Block is a bit of a renaissance man.

After establishing himself as a well-respected painter in the local art community, Block has published two books, "Shalom/Salaam: A Story of a Mystical Fraternity" in 2010 and "A Fatal Addiction: War in the Name of God" in 2012.

Butterfly

When: 8 p.m. Fridays; 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturdays, Feb. 15-23

Where: Takoma Park Community Center Theater, 7500 Maple Ave., Takoma Park

Tickets: \$20

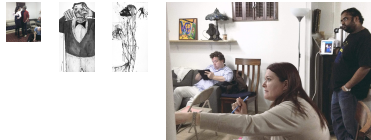
For Information: brownpapertickets.com/event/295235

Five years ago, looking to expand his artistic repertoire even further, Block began writing plays.

In his short time as a playwright, Block has written six pieces, including a trilogy. The second play in the series, "Butterfly," makes its world debut Thursday at the Wanderlust Theater



Photo by Kiva Fecteau
Roselie Vasquez-Yetter works with actor Josh Canary and assistant director Sam Basa.



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Lab in Silver Spring.

"I should call it a pile of plays or a lump of plays," Block said. "It's [only] a trilogy in an organic sense. They're thematically linked."

Though Block said the trilogy doesn't necessarily follow a

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linear progression from one play to the next, the shows are built around a local actor and friend of Block's, Michael Mack.

"I have a friend ... and I wanted to write plays for him as the lead, basically," Block said. "I developed the idea of writing a trilogy that he would star in."

The first play in the trilogy, "White Noise," was produced by Wanderlust and premiered at The Fridge, an art gallery in Washington, D.C., last June. "White Noise" is the story of an African American artist, Tim, who travels to Detroit for an exhibition sponsored by an older, wealthy couple. Though the show doesn't mention much about his art, it does explore Tim's struggle with spirituality and self-realization. "White Noise" will run this June through July at the Theater for the New City in New York.

The production of "White Noise" was the beginning of an artistic partnership between Block and Wanderlust founder and "White Noise" director, Roselie Vasquez-Yetter.

"We had about four readings for 'White Noise,' and that whole process really brought Roselie and me together in terms of artistic vision," Block said. "To have someone who could kind of translate these words of mine ... was very exciting."

Like "White Noise," "Butterfly" explores many complex themes including spirituality, humanity, religion and race, often using references to philosophy and mythology. It follows the last few days in the life of self-proclaimed prophet, Todd (Mack), and those in his life who are helping him to fulfill his quest. While Block's intricate approach may seem overwhelming and even confusing, Vasquez-Yetter said she felt compelled to bring his work to general audiences.

"We both felt like as creative people living in this part of the county, it was challenging to build up some buzz around art," Vasquez-Yetter said. "Especially around art that pushes the envelope."

Both Vasquez-Yetter and Block said the artistic partnership between the two of them worked so well because while Block had the concepts, Vasquez-Yetter had the theater background necessary for execution.

"We worked on revising 'White Noise' because [Block] didn't come from a theater background," Vasquez-Yetter said.

She said Block was incredibly open to suggestions on how to translate his work from the page to the stage.

"What's beautiful with Tom is he is not wedded to the verbatim representation of what he's written," Vasquez-Yetter said. "He's very open to the creative process."

As with "White Noise," "Butterfly" gives Block an opportunity to showcase not only his playwriting, but his painting as well. The play will feature work from his "In the Garden of the Mystical Redoubt" series, a collection of black and white art, on stage. The pieces are not merely for decoration; they serve to set the tone of the show and even act as another part in the play, according to Block.

"The art ... on stage ... is a character in the play," Block said. "It's static, yet it represents some aspect of the character, and it offers a very strong visual background."

"The artwork is a fundamental piece," Vasquez-Yetter said. "Those pieces ... are part of the production."

Though he's only been writing plays for a few years, Block said the theater might be his favorite artistic release.

"I have a lot of interests and I'm able to bring them all to bear in playwriting in a way I can't in another medium," Block said. "Somehow, it just offers me a way to bring all of these interests into the same time and place."

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