Limited runs to look out for

SCOTTISH PLAY SCOTT
by Scott C. Morgan, Windy City Times
2012-01-11

Militant Hulley portrays the transgender character Candice in Erasing the Distance’s Finding Peace in This House. Photo courtesy of the company.

Before she became founder and artistic director of the theater company Erasing the Distance, Brighid O’Shaughnessy honed her craft volunteering and working with Thresholds, largest and oldest provider of community behavioral healthcare and mental health services in Illinois.

With Thresholds, O’Shaughnessy worked in its theater arts program which helped individuals with mental illness to share and perform their own stories.

“The more comfortable I got about talking about mental health in my own community, the more I realized that friends, family members, people I met on the train were just pouring their hearts out to me regarding things that they were struggling with—whether it was depression or maybe the anxieties of a roommate or maybe a parent’s bipolar disorder.” O’Shaughnessy said. “Then I started to sense that were all of these stories hungering to be told and that there needed to be a forum outside of our little program in Thresholds so people could have a voice.”

So in 2005, O’Shaughnessy created a not-for-profit arts organization that would eventually become Erasing the Distance to shed light on mental health issues through theater. The idea is to sharing stories through theater helps to combat stigma and educate people.

“I decided to use professional actors for a variety of reasons. One was that I knew actors could really embody the stories to the point so that audience could get swept up and be able to see themselves in the characters,” O’Shaughnessy said. “And then I was really interested to see if we could create that distance between audience members and storytellers so we could see that were more similar than we are different.”

Erasing the Distance’s upcoming show Finding Peace in This House at the Hoover-Leppen Theatre in the Center on Halsted is a revival. It originally debuted in a one-night-only performance in June 2011 at the Chicago Cultural Center and grew as a collaboration with students from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology who collected stories from people struggling to find peace in their “house”—be it someone growing up in a terror-filled home, a person feeling abandoned by his disabled body or how someone copes while locked up in a prison cell. Some of those stories were then selected to be transformed into theatrical monologues for the show.

One of the collected stories was from a transgender woman called Candice, but those creating the show were reluctant to include it. Not because it wasn’t a great story, but they were nervous about including it in a show exploring mental illness.

“We really did not in any way shape or form want to send a message that being transgender was a mental illness, so we went through some stalling to get it in there,” O’Shaughnessy said.

Photo: Erasing the Distance
However, once the title was settled upon and the focus of the show was shifted so that it explored the processes that people go through to find serenity in self, the show's creators decided to put Candice's story back into the mix of six monologues.

"Candice's story is really about a woman who at a very young age, even at age 3 or 4, didn't have peace," O'Shaughnessy said. "She felt like she was at constant war with herself because she knew who she wanted to be, but that didn't seem possible for many years in her life."

In creating the show, O'Shaughnessy said some of the original people interviewed actually got involved with the actors portraying them (like a slam-poet with cerebral palsy), while others chose to step away from the process and see how things turned out later. Either way, each original person interviewed got a copy of their script so they could see what was included.

At the previous performance of Finding Peace in This House, Candice was in attendance and participated in the talkback session.

"She actually talked to the audience about how it impacted her and how moved she was to see her own self reflected back to her," O'Shaughnessy said. "She was like, 'Wow, I've gone through this huge journey and I know it's not what I lived it but sometimes I forget about the depth of my own experience and then when I saw it reflected back it was like seeing it in a whole new light.'"

Erasing the Distance's production of Finding Peace in This House plays 7:30 p.m. Jan. 23-24 and Jan. 30-31 at The Center on Halsted's Hoover-Leppen Theatre, 3656 N. Halsted. Tickets are $15 in advance and $20 at the door. Visit http://www.brownpapertickets.com and type in the search term "Finding Peace" for tickets. For more information on the organization, visit http://www.ErasingTheDistance.org.

Diverse new series

The Raven Theater is introducing its new "Raven's Evenmore Series" to highlight emerging and diverse artists in theater, music and dance. On the bill through spring are modern-dance works by the Joel Hall Dance Company (March 10 and April 14), jazz music from George Goetschel & Friends (March 18) and the return of James Anthony Zoccitti's popular musical piece "Vagabonder" [white boys/Black dads/gay actors] about growing up in an interracial family in 1979 (April 6-7 and April 13-14).

However, to launch Raven's Evenmore Series is a one-woman show from out performer Kelli Strickland called 'We've Got a Badge For That.' Originally premiered at the Festival of Solo Festivals, the piece is a coming-of-age story of one girl in the Scouts dealing with puppy love, pyromania and peach schnapps.

Strickland's past work include starring in the feature film Hannah Free (playing young Hannah with Sharon Glass) and holding the former position of Executive Director of Ballywick's Lesbian Theatre Initiative.

We've Got a Badge For That runs at 8 p.m. Jan. 13 and 14 at the Raven Theatre's East Stage, 6157 N. Clark. Tickets are $20 and $15 for students and seniors. For more information on the Raven Theatre's call 773-330-2177 or visit http://www.raventheatre.com.

Send theater news and other related insights to scottishplayscott@yahoo.com or Androw@windycitymediagroup.com.
La Cage aux Folies 2011-12-28
Spotlight the Adams Family 2011-12-29
Curtain times: Highlights of 2011-12-30
CRITIC'S PICKS 2011-12-30
Gililland's Dawn Walks on her Chicago show 2011-12-28
Task Force names Stacey Long and Sarah Reece to key positions 2011-12-23
Holidays at the Chicago History Museum 2011-12-21
Penelope important part of Lakeview LGBT community 2011-12-21
LGBT Nanette Alon, meetups at Haymarket 2011-12-21
Full plans: Talking with "La Cage" star Christopher Sieber 2011-12-21
Opus 2011-12-21
Penelope 2011-12-21
A Christmas Story, The Musical 2011-12-21
The Christmas Schooner 2011-12-21
Spotlight The Secret Garden 2011-12-21
Chicago Advisory Council thanks President, Secretary of State for ongoing support of LGBT human rights 2011-12-19
Youth Pride Services holding food drive 2011-12-14
El hosts strategy summit for leading Midwest LGBT groups 2011-12-14
Center on Halsted has new website 2011-12-14
Don we now our drap 2011-12-14
Elizabeth new 2011-12-14
Forchlights "A" Feb 15-April 1 2011-12-14
SAM Dec. 15 2011-12-14
Haunting & Noice at the Apartment 2011-12-14
Tracy Letts in Steppenwolf's "Penelope" 2011-12-14
Hannukah: The Musical 2011-12-14
Spring Awakening 2011-12-14
Spotlight 2011-12-14
LGBT doctors, lawyers hold mixer at Scarlet 2011-12-14
George Donney joins cast of "Py" west coast premiere 2011-12-14
Rodgers & Hammerstein's Pilgrim winning musical South Pacific coming to Cadillac Palace Theatre 2011-12-14
El hosts strategy summit for leading Midwest LGBT groups 2011-12-13
NCLR Federal Policy Director Myles Rupert one of Ebony Magazine's "Power 100" 2011-12-08
Legend Phyllis Diller: On Joan Rivers, gin and retirement 2011-12-07
Far Away, LIT 2011-12-07
Suzanne Palmer at Stage 773 Dec. 10 2011-12-07
Crosby 2011-12-07
Pump Boys and Dinettes 2011-12-07
Changes of Heart 2011-12-07
Spotlight Rodgers the Red-Haired Reindeer 2011-12-07
CRITIC'S PICKS 2011-12-07
cortes Alexander: Out entertainer on his new show and Lisa 2011-12-07
BOOKS Judy, Judy, Judy, Judy! John Froide knows all about legendary actress 2011-12-07
COMEDY's Taillefer thru Dec. 11 2011-12-07
LGBT Nanoties Aeon, meetups at Haymarket 2011-11-20
Howard Brown development director resigns 2011-11-10
Matthew Shepard Foundation vying for Giving Award 2011-11-20
A Prince among Broadway dances 2011-11-30
Peter Gstin 2011-11-20
SPOTLIGHT 2011-11-30
Season's Greetings, Burning Bluebird 2011-11-30
An Illiad 2011-11-30
A Christmas Carol at the Goodman 34 years and counting 2011-11-30
CRITIC'S PICKS 2011-11-30
Funny business 2011-11-30
Whole Foods donates percent of sales on World AIDS Day to Right Ministry 2011-11-29
Chicago Theaters to honor Maggie Daley by dimming lights at noon Sunday 2011-11-28
Creative Movement Awards to honor Van Jones, Yvonne Wheaton, Kevin Coval, among others 2011-11-28
Leppen hosts Pride Films & Plays benefit 2011-11-23
OPALOA honors its own, civil union advocates at gala 2011-11-23
Holland Taylor's Arrived at attitude 2011-11-23
Meredith Baxter at Personal PIC luncheon 2011-11-23
COMEDY's Lipstick raises $8k 2011-11-23
Spotlight Fiddler on the Roof 2011-11-23
SAM Dec. 15 2011-11-23
GayGo's holiday revue 2011-11-23
CRITIC'S PICKS 2011-11-23
A Bright New Boise 2011-11-23
Five Flights, Let My People Come 2011-11-23
AJ's Birthdays Things 2011-11-23
The Caretaker 2011-11-23
Forchlights running "A" Feb 15-April 1 2011-11-23
Black Ensemble Theater finds new groove with new space 2011-11-23
Tracy Lets Joins the cast of Steppenwolf's Penelope 2011-11-23
Ensemble member John Markey to leave Steppenwolf's Penelope 2011-11-22
HRC Foundation launches Jewish Organization Equality Index Survey 2011-11-22
Fiddler on the Roof ticket deal, click below 2011-11-21
Theatre announces send off for Angels in America 2011-11-21
Tony award-winning Spring Awakening opens at Griffin Theatre Dec. 6, 2011 2011-11-14
COMEDY's Holly Follies 2011-11-19
GayGo Productions presents LIT! Sketch Comedy Revue for December's landmark holiday 2011-11-19
LifeLine Theatre's 20th anniversary season offers "Hungry" 2011-11-19
Victory Gardens receives $20,000 NBA grant 2011-11-18
The League of Chicago Theaters launches ChicagoSpaces.org 2011-11-17
Juliana Margulies to be honored at "Steppenwolf Salutes Women" 2011-11-17
Chicago Givers" exhibit on philanthropy Nov. 16-Jan. 8 2011-11-17
OPALOA gala Nov. 1 2011-11-16
Office and Penis at HRC gala 2011-11-16
Vital signs benefit at Atmosphere Nov. 15 2011-11-16
Chicagoawl to award $7,500 in scholarships 2011-11-16
Nilo Cruz's "Father" through Nov. 18 2011-11-16
An Offbeat housing unit 2011-11-16
Matthew Shepard Foundation vying for Giving Award 2011-11-16
Mastro: The Art of Leonard Bernstein 2011-11-16
Our Leading Lady 2011-11-16
CRITIC'S PICKS 2011-11-16
First Look at Steppenwolf 2011-11-16
Dreamcast at Paramount through Nov 20 2011-11-16
SPOTLIGHT Sweet Cornfection 2011-11-16
Godspeed Moon, The Musical, Walk Two Moons 2011-11-16
Assisted Living 2011-11-16
Reservoir Dogs 2011-11-16
Area men take part in "Movember" 2011-11-16
Vital Bridges fundraiser held at the Bridge 2011-11-16
All Concert Art & Soul celebrates life 2011-11-16
Holland Taylor stars as Ann Richards 2011-11-15
Federal report shows HBCBs earn $2.5 million from grant problems 2011-11-09
Ymca's raises funds for Chicago House 2011-11-09
HRC Chicago gala Nov. 12 2011-11-08
Catalinf HIV/AIDS. Lessons for nonprofit