

Bucks County Courier Times (Levittown, PA)

October 11, 2009

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Entertainment

stage show

director

actors

Happy in her supporting role

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Ginger Dayle's New City Stage Company is as committed to presenting unusual and challenging works as it is to giving young actors a place to hone their craft.

BY NAILA FRANCIS

STAFF WRITER

Ginger Dayle admits that her initial intentions were less than altruistic.

When the Holland native founded her own theater company three years ago, her decision was prompted by her own disgruntlement.

"I was an actor and I was very frustrated because I wasn't getting cast," says **Dayle**, a 1994 graduate of Council Rock High School. "I was trying to get cast in theater, commercials, film, whatever, in Philadelphia and New York, and I had this idea: 'I'm going to do one production. I'm going to pick a play that showcases my abilities.' "

In the process, **Dayle**, who'd worked on the production aspect of Council Rock's first play during the launch of its theater club her senior year, recalled how much she'd enjoyed those efforts behind the scenes.

Even back then, she says, she realized the value of producing.

"I saw that there are so many pieces that go into making one show. It's like planning a wedding. You don't realize all the little things you have to do," she says.

And so when she founded the New City Stage Company, it was with a benevolent goal in mind.

"I thought I can give other people opportunities. It doesn't always have to be about me," says **Dayle**, who often involves students from the University of the Arts in her productions. "You have all these students graduating from an arts university in a major city and they've had no experience. Places like the Walnut (Street Theatre) and Arden (Theatre Company) aren't going to hire them, but I can give them experience and something to put on their resumes.

"This started out as a selfish thing - but I actually fell in love with giving other people opportunities."

New City Stage Company presented one play during its first season, the Philadelphia premiere of "Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts" by acclaimed playwright Jo Davidsmeyer. Based on the true-life story and trial and execution of Irma Grese, a concentration camp guard known as the "blonde Angel of Auschwitz," the play, with its hefty themes of evil's seductive appeal and guilt versus personal responsibility, introduced New City Stage as a company unafraid to present challenging and provocative works not often seen in the region. Season two offered three plays by Lower Merion playwright and screenwriter William Mastrosimone, including his award-winning "Extremities," which examines the relationship between attacker and victim through the lens of a would-be rape.

"So much theater is very self-congratulatory. People are, like, 'I want to do this show because I want to play Blanche in 'A Streetcar Named Desire.' I can be tough and weak and strong and be raped and angry and vulnerable all in one show.' For a lot of women, that's their dream role - for guys, it's Stanley (from the same play)," says **Dayle**. "There's nothing wrong in that, but I want people to be engaged in a dialogue after they leave a show.

"I do very realistic plays about issues that could be happening to you right now, even though it may not be the most

comfortable thing to watch."

She also tends toward works that showcase minorities.

"For me, as a woman, 80 percent of all roles written for the stage are for men, so I try to come up with things that young women between 25 and 35, my age group, can relate to. Underrepresented groups are really important to me," says **Dayle**, who earlier this year, as part of the company's third season, produced the play "Chicken," about a dysfunctional Latino family and cockfighting in the Bronx.

This season's opener, "Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love," onstage through Oct. 18 at The Adrienne (where her company is in residence), follows the lives of a group of looking-for-love 30-somethings - including several homosexuals - also living in fear of a serial killer. Scripted by "Queer as Folk" producer and writer Brad Fraser, the controversial play was named one of the 10 best of the year by Time magazine when it was first staged in Canada in 1989. For this production, **Dayle** brought in fellow Philadelphia actor and director Ryder Thornton to direct and took on a starring role as Candy, a woman searching for a new definition of love and also confronting an eating disorder.

"When I read the play, I understood the character in a lot of ways but I didn't understand her choices and I wanted to understand why she does what she does," says **Dayle**. "People always say that cliché 'Art mimics life and life mimics art,' but you play these characters and you learn about your own weaknesses and strengths, and the most compelling characters are the ones who are viewed as the weakest. Acting them or portraying them onstage has helped me make better decisions in my life."

A graduate of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, where she majored in economics, **Dayle** knew even before then that she wanted to be an actor but she chose to minor in theater, apprehensive about others' perceptions of such a career choice.

"I had this fear that if I tell people I want to be an actor, it means I don't want to work," she says. Yet she was practically a born performer.

"When I was little, I started to talk really early and I liked to crawl around, so my mother got me into dance classes," says **Dayle**, whose parents, Marge and Robert Dzumaga, still live in Holland. "Everything I ever learned, I wanted to come home and share with my parents. That even crossed over into math class or science class. We'd learn fractions and I'd want to come home and present them to my parents."

She studied dance exhaustively but at the recommendation of one of her dance teachers, also began taking theater lessons at a private school and with a coach.

"I was the kind of dancer in my ballet school - I didn't have the best extension, I couldn't do those turns, I didn't have the highest jumps, but I would regularly get cast in lead roles because the teachers would say, "You can act in that role," " recalls **Dayle**, who danced with companies such as the Pennsylvania Ballet and the Royal Ballet of London.

Eventually, she stopped resisting a career in acting and obtained her master's degree in theater from Villanova University. A certified yoga instructor, she also teaches pilates to "pay the rent" but is confident she can continue to grow her theater company and eventually find it a permanent home.

"Every theater company got started by someone like me with a selfish idea," she says. "If you have a vision or a dream or an idea, it's not out of range to bring it to the stage yourself."

"Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love" runs through Oct. 18 at The Adrienne, 2030 Sansom St., Philadelphia. Tickets: \$16 to \$22. Information: 215-563-7500; www.newcitystage.org.

Caption:

Photo: **Ginger Dayle** (left) produces all of the plays presented by New City Stage Company and starts in many of them as well while also being involved in many of the theater's fundraising efforts and administrative tasks. The theater's latest play also stars (from left) Allen Radway, David Blatt, Armanda Schoonover, Russ Widdall, Kristen Quinn and Kevin Meehan.

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Record Number: levdc5-5rq0q4mmao1bkuzs3xc

