

Things look 'Star Bright' for local playwright Eiland

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Harvard -

While some people like to carry on the family tradition, Harvard resident Bob Eiland seems to have gone above and beyond that. Although Eiland is relatively new to Harvard, he is no stranger to the stage, having performed in his first play at the age of 5, with parents who were actively involved in theater. Now, with two published plays under his belt and his most recent one, "Star Bright," just signed for publication, Eiland seems to be doing much more than continuing the legacy.

When he was a freshman at Tufts University in the 1970s, Eiland took a stab at writing his first play, which, he is quick to admit, is a work that now makes him cringe to remember. But it is clear that he has come a long way since then, having written many works for the stage, sat in the director's chair for more than 20 years, and founded his own theater group, The Gazebo Players, in Medfield.

Eiland classifies many of his stage plays as "dramadies," a term that lies somewhere between drama and comedy, but he does not feel as though his works fall under any strict category.

"I like the idea of not being confined to a genre," he explained. "I'm a very contemporary writer. The feel of my plays is a lot like Woody Allen."

And although he adds that this wasn't intentional, it certainly does not seem to be hurting him.

In fact, JAC Publishing and Promotions has taken a keen interest in Eiland's writings. JAC is a local company, with headquarters in Burlington, that began as a desktop publishing and design firm, but has only recently taken on the playwriting industry. JAC has published "Philosophical Differences" and "Super Cooper," Eiland's first two published plays. Like his newest work, "Star Bright," these plays have "threads of the family theme."

According to Eiland, “Philosophical Differences” is essentially about the desire to have children, which, in this particular plot, exists between two friends — a straight man and a gay woman. In “Super Cooper,” Eiland creates his own unique account of a well-known superhero.

“I wrote the story of Superman as an adoption story,” he said, choosing to focus more on the intriguing aspects of family and identity than on saving the world.

Eiland’s exploration of the adoption theme did not come out of nowhere. It happens to be a personal topic for him, since he and his wife Charlotte have two adopted children of their own. His experience with the adoption of his daughter Thea inspired ideas for “Star Bright,” which has just been signed for publication by JAC.

This two-act play takes place in the pediatric ward of a modern-day medical clinic, with a star-filled sky set overhead. A lot is going on in the clinic, to say the least. The lives of several different people are interwoven, as the stories of two very pregnant women, Dehlia and Holly, unfurl side by side. Teenage Holly has intended to give her baby to a married couple, Jamie and Elliott, with whom she has been matched for adoption, but these plans get complicated when some unexpected individuals arrive on the scene. Meanwhile, the 20-something Dehlia is found in a different, although similarly interesting, situation, with a medical condition that puts her baby at risk and a wholly unreliable man who nevertheless has a big part in her life. With humor that has serious undertones, “Star Bright” weaves a world of surprises, confusion, suspense and comedy among a cast of characters that captivates us, including a mysterious little girl who seems to be waiting for something and a certain woman posing as a cafeteria aid.

“It’s an ensemble piece,” Eiland said of the play, explaining that there is no main character, but rather a collective cast of characters that all carry equal weight in the meaning of the play.

Back in November of last year, before it was signed, Eiland held a public reading of “Star Bright” at the Harvard Public Library. Like the readings for his last two plays, this one was also a success, but Eiland does not fail to give a good deal of the credit to his cast of Harvard-based actors. He recollects that the company played a big part in the revision process of “Star Bright,” offering him valuable feedback during rehearsals.

“We’d rip old pages out and put new pages in,” he said.

Janet Dauray, who played the character of Myrna, said that “Star Bright” was “a great experience.”

She went on enthusiastically: “Bob listened to everyone’s opinion. I love how he was equally respectful of children and teens’ opinions as he was of older, more experienced professionals’ thoughts.”

Dauray first met Eiland a number of years ago, when he cast her as Hannah in Arlington Friends of the Drama’s production of “Night of the Iguana,” and now, under his direction once again, she maintains that he is “an exceptional director and a talented playwright...He has this wonderful way of asking you questions about your character that make you take the role deeper.”

So what’s next for Bob Eiland? Starting next month, he will be directing a stage adaptation of Harper Lee’s classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, at Arlington Friends of the Drama, with auditions to be held on Aug. 16 and 18. For any potential Scouts or Atticuses, more information can be found at www.afdtheatre.org.

Although he stays busy running a full-time executive search business (EGS Elite), this father, husband, director, playwright, actor, writer and search consultant always has ideas brewing for the future. He mentioned work on a novel version of “Super Cooper,” as well as some possible ideas for another play that ventures away from the adoption theme and into another topic that intrigues and perplexes him — violence in U.S. schools.

“I keep an idea file,” he said. “I don’t think I’ll ever be without something to write about when I have the time.”

Bob Eiland’s stage plays can be enjoyed by ordering online at <http://www.jacneed.com> /JAC/JAC.htm or going to the Harvard Public Library.