

YAW stages 'The Dream Factory'

STACY TREVENON / Half Moon Bay Review / May 22, 1999

Where do dreams come from? How are they created? What do they tell us - and should we listen?

Those questions can be answered by a visit to "The Dream Factory"- this year's production created and staged by Young Actors Workshop, opening Friday for a two-weekend run.

Like all of the Young Actors' annual productions, this play is developed by the students with help from director Auri Naggar.

This year there is lively action, spine-tingling creatures, special effects and a gentle lesson.

The story is about a boy named Tommy and a place where dreams are made. It's the story of an evil gnome who plots to take over the world by getting into people's dreams. It's a story of Tommy's anguish over his hospitalized brother, whom he's afraid to visit after a tainted dream. But he must find a way to set the dream right and face down his fears to be there for his loved one.

But this year, there's something even more original about "The Dream Factory": It's based on a short story written by one of the actors.

Last year, Cunha Intermediate School language arts teacher Mary Ann Koepf gave her seventh-graders an assignment: Pick a subject and come up with a series of poems, stories and sayings about it - in two pages.

For student Adam Coopersmith, who loves to write, that assignment was a piece of cake.

His topic? Dreams.

"I don't know why I picked dreams, but I thought I'd find out more," said Coopersmith, now 13, a serious, dark-eyed boy with an appealing smile. "It was a broad subject. Dreams are happy, sad - I thought it would be an easy topic."

Enthusiasm guided his pencil.

"After I passed two pages, I was still in the beginning," Adam says of his tale. "I could have gone on longer, but I had to cut it short because of the due date."

He'd always been like that, his mother said.

"When he first started writing, his teachers would say, 'Adam, bring it to an end,' " Lane Coopersmith said, laughing. "He'd go on and on, and start off in different directions."

He went in a different direction after the school year; last summer, he took his story to Naggar.

"I thought it would be good (for YAW) because it's the type of play we've done in the past," Coopersmith said. "It has some evil, it has different creatures, it's fun for kids."

Naggar liked what he read. He met with Coopersmith over the summer and the two discussed crafting the story for the stage.

The play was transformed through a well-established YAW tradition that Naggar coined "guided improvisation." The basic story and subplots are developed by the students and told with dialogue that's improvised anew each performance.

"I thought it'd be fun seeing what the kids would do with it," Coopersmith said.

It takes place in the magical Dream Factory, which is run by Bilby, a "cheerful, old, fat, bumbling gnome," actor Matt Kammerer, 14, said. Bilby lives there with his elves, and they monitor people's thoughts, process them, and send them out as dreams, often with helpful messages.

But something has gone wrong. An evil Demon King (Sam Temko, 14, who will play his role with a growling voice enhanced by a voice-changer operated by his friend Jeffrey Pitts offstage) has broken into the factory. Intent on taking over the world by poisoning people's dreams, the evil king has begun with Tommy (played by Coopersmith).

Tommy's a courageous boy, but he's also guilt-stricken over a mishap that put his younger brother Timothy in the hospital, and which he might have caused. Tommy's bad dream tells him that if he visits his brother, Timothy will die.

Troubled, walking home from school, Tommy stumbles upon a new path with a mysterious gate in the haunting Dorum Woods. He's drawn to the gate, and his friend Donna (Peggy Holsclaw, 14, last seen as Alice in Coastal Theatre Conservatory's "Alice in Wonderland") says she'll go with him.

Beyond the gate, the pair find a wonderful jungle with all kinds of fantastic and scary creatures, brought alive by black and fluorescent lights. Going on, the children find the Dream Factory, a marvelous two-story machine with spinning spirals and light patterns operated by YAW students hidden inside. Now and then a dream slides down the machine's chute, en route to a sleeper somewhere.

Kindly figures and even some karate fighters urge Tommy to see his brother. The doctors even think that would be helpful for Timothy. But Tommy still hesitates.

Before he can try to visit, the Demon King is there, trying to steal the machine. It's up to Tommy and Donna to figure out a clever way to beat him.

"I get to save the day," grinned Holsclaw.

The story will be further enhanced by live music played by local musicians Alex Pasternak (bass), Tom Bates (drums), and Naggar, who will chip in on guitar. Students from the Marengo Karate School will make guest appearances as the karate fighters.

For Coopersmith, the play is a dream come true, complete with a lead role.

"This is what I'd hoped for all the time I was in YAW," said Coopersmith, who along with Holsclaw will attend the School of the Arts for high school students in San Francisco next year.

When he first appeared in a YAW play, he was a little stiff on stage. "I was a rock," he said.

But now he feels comfortable up there, he added.

In the San Francisco high school, Holsclaw will pursue acting and Coopersmith will pursue music.

A drummer since age 8, Coopersmith later took up the trumpet and piano, and now plays in a band along with fellow young Coastside musicians Rene del Fiero and Montara sisters Kelly and Kamille Rudisill. The group played on a flatbed truck at the Devil's Slide block party Sunday.

Coopersmith thinks he might perform, but his secret dream is running a jazz club in San Francisco.

And Holsclaw's dream? Acting professionally would be fun. She has already done a voice-over for Tenth Planet.

Their dreams, and many others', will come true when "The Dream Factory" opens Friday evening. Curtain opens at 7:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, and 2 p.m. on Sundays, through May 16 in the multipurpose room of Cunha Intermediate School.

Tickets at \$6 are available at Eriksen Art and Framing and Bay Book and Video in Half Moon Bay, and at the door.

For information, call YAW at 726-1304.

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