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Another original served up by YAW

Kevin North directs the Young Actors Workshop rehearsal of their next original musical, "Food Fight," at the Wilkinson School

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Kevin North directs the Young Actors Workshop rehearsal of their next original musical, "Food Fight," at the Wilkinson School.

In a sunny Wilkinson School classroom, Young Actors Workshop students rehearsed scenes and songs for their next annual original production, "Food Fight."

Young actors worked on character development and ran through key scenes. As instructor Kevin North strummed his guitar, they ran through and refined original songs. Laughter and ideas by actors waiting their turns filled the room.

Only one thing was missing from this typical YAW rehearsal: the troupe's late founder Auri Naggar.

Naggar wasn't there, but his presence was felt, if not actively guiding, as students carried on the tradition

he initiated 15 years ago: developing an original musical production through improvisation, spontaneity, humor, unleashed creativity and a story that reflects the real world they live in.

"He's been with me half my life. It's been tough without him," said longtime YAW student Elizabeth Wallace. "I cried a lot when I found out he died."

"It's not Auri-fied," said Gavin Cooke of El Granada.

"He's still helping us even though he can't see it with our eyes," said student Matisse Sremac.

"When I found out he died, I said, let's make this our best play ever on account of Auri," shouted another student.

Typically for YAW, the play presents fantastical situations that have something to say about the state of the world today.

It's about two side-by-side restaurants: the upscale Auri's with healthy fresh food and WackDonald's, with inexpensive fast food. Between the buildings is a trash container inhabited by some rats who take a hungry baby rat to Auri's to find food. Unfortunately, the visiting health inspector sees the rats. He also worries that WackDonald's cost-cutting measures are resulting in unhealthy food and shuts them both down.

It's a blow for the now-jobless employees but horrifies the food about to be thrown away, because to the food the main purpose in life is to be enjoyed. But they find a way out of the dilemma by combining WackDonald's efficiency with Auri's healthy food in a new place, "Cameroon's."

With its collaborative positive outcome, the restaurants' names and the orange-and-black (the colors of Naggar's beloved San Francisco Giants) cake the new restaurant will serve, the students pay tribute to Naggar. His influence is not lost on North, who took the helm of YAW with Naggar's encouragement.

"We always knew this was there but dreading it," North said.

He defused opening-night worries by remembering advice from Naggar.

"I keep telling myself what he would say, that 'it all comes together,'" North said. "I really, really miss him, but, at the same time, I'm happy and really honored that I get to be the one to continue his vision.

"That was very important to him, meant the world to him. I really take it seriously."

"Food Fight" will erupt at 7 p.m. Friday, May 6 and Saturday, May 7, and at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 8, in a set of enclosed tents built by parents, that take up the entire Cameron's Outback yard. Admission is \$10 for the show and food, and \$5 for the show only. Call (650) 576-4754.

This food fight isn't happening at school

Dozens of young people will perform a food fight this week, but it won't be happening at the school cafeteria.

"Food Fight", a musical play produced by the Coastside Young Actors' Workshop will be staged at a local restaurant instead of the Half Moon Bay High School cafeteria, the auditorium where the theater troupe has staged its plays for years.

Organizers with the youth theater troupe say they decided to find a new place to perform after the school district increased its fees last year for outside groups to rent the facilities. As an alternative, the group's organizers and its ranks of devoted parent volunteers are constructing three wooden stages for their production.

"We're a not-for-profit organization," said workshop creative director Kevin North. "We figured if we're going to spend a lot of money, we might as well spend it building our own stages."

Before his death earlier this year, Auri Naggar, the longtime leader of young actors' workshop, had reportedly been preparing to move the group's future theater productions to a new location.

The latest play, "Food Fight", is being staged in the outdoor patio area at Cameron's Restaurant & Inn, the same place where the theater troupe hosted a celebration of life for Naggar in January.

Young actors' workshop leaders say the wooden stages they are constructing can be reused each year for the group's annual production.

- Mark Noack