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Bentley Drama Presents 10 Plays to Honor 10th Anniversary Next Up: Sherman's Lagoon The Musical

By Andrea A. Firth



Members of the Bentley singing ensemble the *Shallow Soles* rehearse for the upcoming production of *Sherman's Lagoon The Musical* Photo Andrea A. Firth

To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Bentley Upper School, drama teacher Winter Mead set the ambitious goal to produce ten plays in a single school year. With the help and support of Ahmed El-Gasseir, Chairman of the Performing Arts Department, and other members of the Drama and Music Departments, Bentley has a theater performance schedule packed with literary classics. Mead and El-Gasseir kicked off the season and treated the students to a faculty performance of Edward Albee's one-act play *The Zoo Story*. The Fall performance also included Tennessee Williams' highly charged *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, another Edward Albee play, *Three Tall Women*, and Stephen Sondheim's Broadway musical sensation (and Johnny Depp's latest movie success) *Sweeney Todd*.

For their next act, in early February, Bentley Drama will present the world premiere of *Sherman's Lagoon The Musical*. Based on the popular comic strip

by Jim Toomey, this dual-campus production will include a cast of over 30 students in 6th through 12th grades from the Oakland and Lafayette school sites. According to director and screenwriter Winter Mead, this 90-minute family-friendly show will be as entertaining to adults as it is to children.

The musical version of *Sherman's Lagoon* is populated with the familiar comic strip characters including the sharks Sherman and Megan, Fillmore the sea turtle, and Hawthorne the hermit crab. They are faced with saving their habitat from an environmental catastrophe set in motion by bad-guy Captain Quigley. The original music and lyrics written by El-Gasseir and Mead have an Afro-Caribbean feel reminiscent of the South Seas with a hint of Latin Jazz. The professionally-designed set features vibrant blues and greens and even bubbles to give the audience the sensation of being "under the sea". And, Toomey will be on hand to add his artistic touch to the sets as his comic strip is brought to life.

Mead came to collaborate on the development of the musical adaptation of *Sherman's Lagoon* after teaching an adult education course in screenwriting in which the comic-strip creator was a student. The two became friends and when the idea to do a musical surfaced, Toomey was on board. Inspired in equal parts by *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* and *Doonesbury The Musical*, Mead worked with Toomey and, in just two months this past summer, developed a story that addressed modern-day concerns regarding global warming and eco-consciousness and everyday themes of human nature as Sherman and Megan meet and fall in love.

Now halfway through this prolific theater season, Mead, his colleagues, and his students have little time to pause and catch their creative breath. The second half of the school year will feature student-directed productions of *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, French playwright Pierre Marivaux's *The Dispute* with guest direction by Ali El-Gasseir (Ahmed's brother), and Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear* directed by Mead.

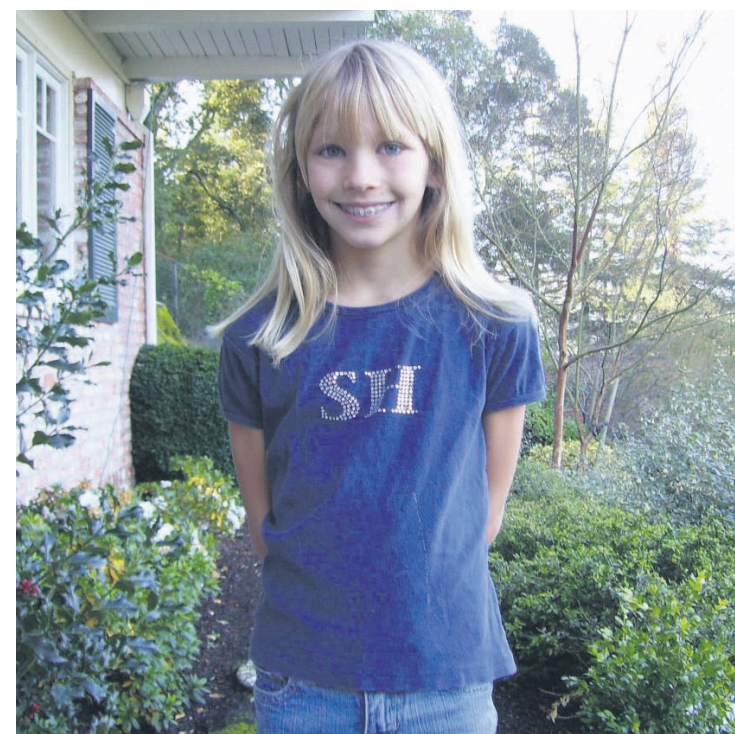
Sherman's Lagoon The Musical will be performed at the Bentley School Lafayette Campus in the Student Performing Art Center on February 1-3 and 8-10. Evening performances will be held at 7 pm on Fridays and Saturdays, and daytime shows will start at 2 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. For tickets go to tickets@bentleystudent.net.

The Poet of Sleepy Hollow

By Jean Follmer

Let it be known to all that Sleepy Hollow Elementary has a published poet in its midst! Third grader Vivian McGowan's poem "I Can Fly" can be found in the January, 2008 issue of *Highlights for Children*. Vivian penned her poem at age six in Mrs. Hilty's first grade class. Mrs. Hilty instructed her students to write a story called "I Can Fly" and Vivian's story came to life as a free verse poem:

Vivian submitted her poem to *Highlights for Children* in 2006 and waited nearly two years for it to be published. Upon learning she was a published author, she



Author Vivian McGowan, Sleepy Hollow Elementary 3rd grader

Photo Jean Follmer

I Can Fly

*Swish, flap,
I soar through the sky
like a hawk drifting along.
A soft breeze
goes through the air.
The sun is setting
in a soft pink and orange.
I can see the ocean.
Beyond that I see
a green forest and meadows.
The stars start to shine.
It is night.
The owl begins to hoot.
The bats begin to squeal.
Suddenly I swish around.
I fly home.
It's been a good flight.*

(Reprinted with permission from *Highlights for Children*)

says "I was proud when I found out." When asked what inspired her to write a poem instead of a story, Vivian said, "I intended for it to be a story and mine turned out to be a poem." Vivian says she likes to write poetry, particularly free verse. Sleepy Hollow Elementary has a strong focus on their writing program, so Vivian has frequent opportunities to work on her poetry in school. Vivian also enjoys sketching and reading. Reading is her favorite subject in school. "I like reading *Goosebumps* and *Nancy Drew*" says Vivian. She wants to be a teacher or a photographer when she grows up.

Sleepy Hollow principal Diane Kanegae says "Vivian has been a lovely addition to our school and has excelled every year.

She's rather remarkable in all areas, she is...unusually articulate for her age. I'm actually thrilled for her." Vivian's parents, Susan Wheatley and Michael McGowan are incredibly proud of their daughter. Ms. Wheatley said "Mrs. Hilty was very enthusiastic about the writing program." She appreciates that Sleepy Hollow is "teaching kids at an early age that they can really be creative and be authors." Mr. McGowan proudly carries a copy of Vivian's poem with him every day in his briefcase.

Correction "Gold Star Award Winners", Jan 9 issue:

Rachel Shapiro, Kimberly Scherr and Caitlin Haley, all Campolindo seniors, are currently working on their Girl Scout Gold Award. When they accumulate the necessary 65 hours of leadership service each, they will receive the award.

They are hard at work helping a new family, a single mom and her 13-year old daughter get settled at the Elizabeth House in Oakland. Shapiro, Scherr and Haley are looking for a number of donated items for the kitchen along with small appliances and bedding to help this family in need. For more information call, (925) 324-2893.

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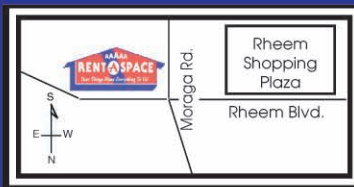
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High School Calendar Debate Open to the Public! Provide Your Input on the Academic Calendar

Do you have an opinion on the future high school calendar? The Acalanes Union High School District is holding five Public Forums to take public input on the academic calendar for 2009-2010 and beyond.

The forums are scheduled for 7:00 to 9:00 pm on the following dates and locations:

- February 5 - Miramonte Theatre
- February 7 - Campolindo, Room A9
- February 12 - Las Lomas Theatre
- February 19 - Del Valle Educational Center, Library