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Mt. Vesuvius Erupts at SMC

By Lou Fancher



Andrew Galindo and Renee Beauchamp

voices for the statues, it all fell together," she says. Not afraid to show horror along with hope, Santillo points to a gladiator scene as the climax. "This was the down surge, when ash fell like molten glass on the people."

Santillo's experience during the 1994 Northridge earthquake, ("I wasn't prepared at all," she says,) and her observations during Hurricane Katrina reverberate in the new play. Clear parallels between then and now add to its relevance: the denial of danger by powerful figures, the confusion of the general population, and the horrible moments when victims realized their lives were considered less worthy than others. "If there's a message," Santillo says, "it's 'learn from history.' You can't stop disasters, but you can prepare yourself."

Sera will be performed in the LeFevre Theatre on the Saint Mary's campus, April 22nd, 23rd and 24th at 8 p.m.; and April 24th and 25th at 2 p.m. Tickets are: \$15 general, \$12 Seniors (65+), \ \$12 non-SMC students; \$12 SMC faculty and staff; \$8 SMC students. For reservations: 925-631-4670. An audience talk-back, with the cast and director, will follow the opening night performance on Thursday, April 22nd.

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The Big One is coming. No, not that Big One, but rather, the ancient city of Pompeii's Mount Vesuvius: exploding in the center of Sera, a new play and world premiere at Saint Mary's College (SMC), April 22-25.

Written by SMC alumna Angela Santillo, Sera explores the power of nature: both earthly and human. Four years ago, on a visit to the Met in New York, Santillo was struck by an image: "I saw a marvelous statue of a woman terrified," she remembers, "and it struck me-the idea of being blind in a natural disaster." Haunted and entranced by the memory, she began to research historical events. The lost city of Pompeii, with its gods, gladiators, affluence and ignorance, intrigued the young playwright. One year of research, one day to write the first draft, and three years of work-shopping and development later, SMC is bringing Santillo's vision to the stage.

Alex Kirschner, a SMC (06) graduate and fellow classmate, is returning to appear as Jupiter, ruler of the universe. Drawn initially by the opportunity to perform in a work by Santillo, he appreciates the collegiate atmosphere, which he describes in an email as, "a learning collaboration that truly utilizes and challenges all of the artist's senses."

Santillo's play introduces 35 characters and consists of 22 snapshot scenes, weaving together the before, during and after of the cataclysmic eruption. "I like to destroy my characters' environments, then see how they cope," she admits. Her previous work has followed a cerebral, traditional approach, with narrative and plot driving the words. But Sera nearly wrote itself: "Once I had the