Playwright-in-residence at home with being ‘in-house dramaturg’

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We tend to stereotype the creative process as a sacred affair, where the creative works in isolation from those who would most value their revelations. It’s as if there is a nervous cluelessness to expressing oneself. Perhaps the idea of an artist in residence is a throwback to a simpler time, a period of community and shared values. But Kevin Kerr, the new playwright-in-residence for the Department of Drama, is a man who seems content to sit and chat while being framed by the exuberant chaos of children’s cast playing — there is a playground outside his HUB Mall office — and who appears at home in the brightly lit room.

“I love the fact that I’ve got a place to work,” Kerr says, expressing satisfaction with his environment and with the sense of family in the Drama department. Originally from Vancouver, where he was part of the Electric Company Theatre, he praises Simon Fraser as having a great reputation for its theatre community and arts scene.

Kerr himself is no stranger to recognition, having won the Governor General’s Award for his play Unity (1988). The university awarded him a two-year contract by the university for his playwright-in-residence term — only the second in the history of the pioneering Lee Program. During his residency, Kerr will split his time between his own writing and doing projects within or related to the Department of Drama.

“I am an ‘in-house dramaturg,’” and will be giving feedback to playwriting students and people in the community who are interested in writing, Kerr says. “There is a definite community liaison component to this job.”

Most importantly, Kerr has been commissioned by the University to write a play for the twelve students who are entering their first year of the BFA program.

“It’s exciting for me to tailor-tailor a play for a large cast, and it’s a great opportunity for acting students to watch a project develop from essentially nothing to a full play, and see the steps along the way,” he explains.

Supersession about discussing his ideas for the play, which will be performed in 2010, so early in the game, Kerr is tight-lipped on what it will be about.

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He admits, however, to an interest in the concept archetype, the concept of an individual on the fringe, and his previous plays have explored the impact of science and technology on society, often in a historical context. Kerr says he will begin developing the play after getting to know his newly made student acting company.

“This is a collaboration between the student’s energy and theatre as a collaborative art form, which makes it risky because it relies on the synergy of people coming together, but also creates a wonderful safety net because you’re not alone in the process,” he explains.

Kerr also seems somewhat nonplussed about writer’s block — the scourge of so many writers — considering that the infamous mental freeze has compelled many numbers of authors to spend years on a single work.

“If you’re going to join me,” he laughs about blanking during the writing process, before adopting a more serious tone.

“There are no guarantees really. There’s always a feeling that anything is high-stakes. We have to embrace the mental drought,” he would say in the manner of a writer’s block.

On Singularity, Mae’s third full-length release, the Virginia band tones down a little sea hard.

A few of the tracks show earnestness, but the band needs to learn that every track lyric and chord doesn’t have to be steeped in meaning and metaphor. Words are fun, and making music should be as well.

Singularity’s attempts at deep, soulful songwriting to great tunes quickly, and most tracks feel like they run together along the same musical path. Maybe that was Mae’s intention: to release a coherent, level album — but a bit of contrast between tracks would’ve brought out their different flavours and provided a more well-rounded listen than Singularity’s one-track mind does.

The lyrics, aside from being weighed down with overwrought emotion, are sung like the singer learned his craft from William Shatner. The vocals stem from a terribly dry monotone: any differences in tone are subtle, and any individuality in the songs or inflections present are impossible to pick up. It’s too bad it isn’t Shatner’s Star Trek coda. The album will neither live long in your music stylus, nor will it help Mae prosper.

at least given this album a boost of star power, and given Mae an excuse for such expressionless delivery.

This album is clamped andoggled down by way too many metaphors. Clearly, Mae was feeling too artsy for their own good. Who wants to listen to music that sounds the same from track to track: over-thought, over-produced, and just dull?

“Knots” is supposed to be emotional music at once deep and thoughtful, and genuinely moving. Singularity achieves none of these things, as every single track fails to catch and hold the listener’s attention. Ultimately, Singularity has all the personality of rote without joy, and the overwrought emotional pull causes the album to come off as wildly as here.

In fact, Singularity flips Shatner’s Star Trek coda. The album will neither live long in your music stylus, nor will it help Mae prosper.