

'New Voice' fills stage at Actors

Jeff teen based her play on younger brother's games

By Jenna Esarey | Special to The Courier-Journal

Anabelle Horton does not fit the stereotype of the struggling playwright, laboring for years to get a play noticed by a producer. After all, she's only 18 and a senior at Jeffersonville High School.

But she saw her first play, "Imagination," staged last weekend at Actors Theatre of Louisville as part of the fourth annual New Voices Play Festival.

The festival features eight 10-minute plays written by Louisville area students, and Anabelle was the only student from Southern Indiana selected.

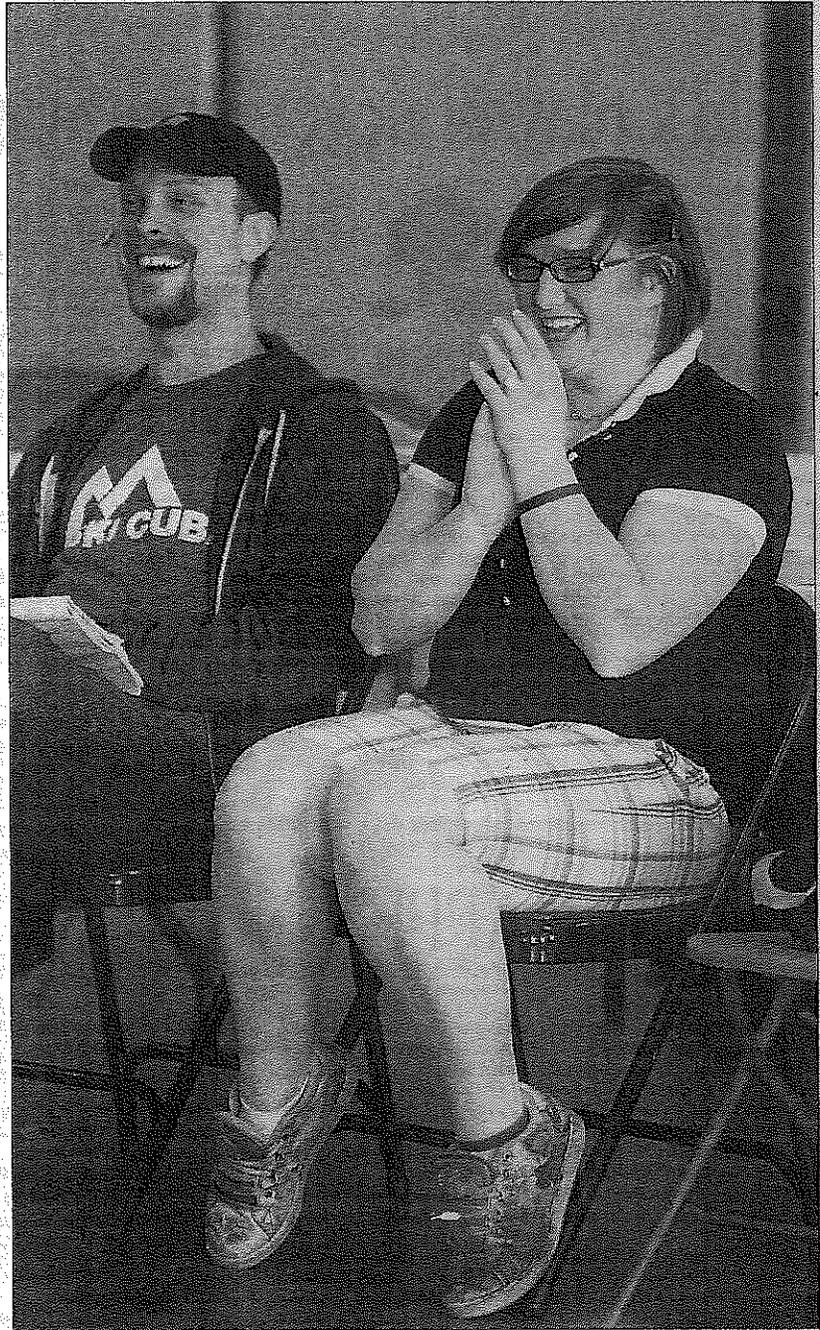
Anabelle said her inspiration came from watching her young brother, Chase Alexander, playing games he created. "I thought that would be a good play," she said.

"Imagination" tells the story of Alex, a young boy who entertains himself at home while his mother has gone shopping.

"We all did that stuff when we were kids," Anabelle said. "You know, the lava game and you can't touch the floor."

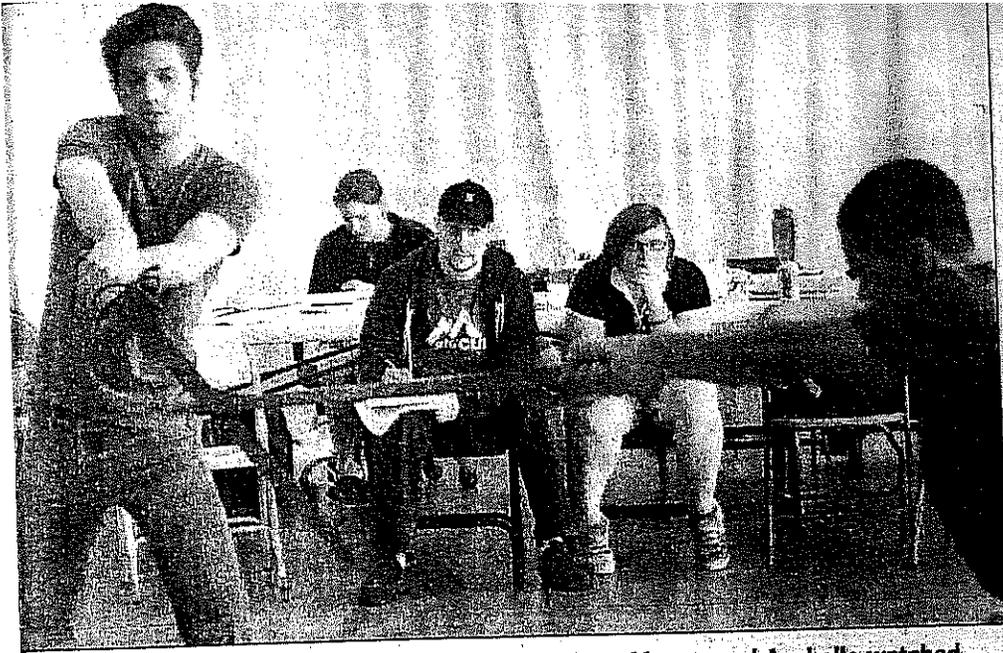
Entering its fifth year, the New Voices Play Festival uses the 22-member Acting Apprentice Company to stage the youths' works.

"Each year the productions have become more realized," said Lee Look, New Voices coordinator. "We started with stage readings. This year we had fully realized productions."



Photos by Michael Hayman, The Courier-Journal

Director Jeffrey Mosser and Jeffersonville High School senior Anabelle Horton laughed during a rehearsal of Anabelle's comedy. Actors Theatre apprentices staged the play, to be published in an anthology.



Eric Eteuati, left, and Steven Rausch wielded swords as Mosser and Anabelle watched. The play is about a young boy who entertains himself at home while his mother is out.

With approximately 250 plays submitted, narrowing the field to only eight was a daunting task, Look said. "I'm looking for compelling characters that want something very specific," he said. "I'm looking for something that I believe."

Anabelle said she always wanted to be a writer and seeing her creation brought to life on stage was a thrill. "I'm just excited to be a part of the whole thing," she said. "I got to be part of the whole backstage thing. They're serious about it, but they still joke around."

"I have it set in my head and I get to see it come out on stage," she said. "Those are my words, and (the production) is so much more than I wanted and more than I imagined."

She said she wrote the play last school year in her third-year theater class, Advanced Acting. It was part of the Playwriting in the Schools Program through Actors Theatre.

Patti Miller, Jeff High's theater teacher, wrote a grant in conjunction with Fund for the Arts specifically for the New Voices program. Two of her theater classes, about 35 students, took part in the pro-

gram last spring, and wrote scripts. All of their completed scripts were submitted to the New Voices program.

"I was sure I wasn't going to win," Anabelle said. "I had no expectation at all. I had seriously forgotten about it."

Miller received word from Actors Theatre in March that Anabelle's play had been selected. "I was seriously excited when I got the word," Miller said. "They were going to notify her by mail but Lee gave me the OK to tell her."

Accompanied by principal Steve Morris, Miller tracked Anabelle down in her English class and delivered the news along with roses and balloons from the theater department.

"This was my first play," Anabelle said. "I never imagined I could actually write a play that would be performed."

The eight plays in this year's New Voices festival offered a lot of variety. Coming first in the running order, "Imagination" would be considered a comedy.

"Mine's the shortest play reading-wise because mine is basically all physical comedy and action,"

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Anabelle said. "Mine's the most physical."

Her play, along with the other seven winning plays and four honorable mentions, will be published in a small anthology.

Look said the New Voices experience can be life-changing for the young playwrights. "I think many of them may not really appreciate it until later in life," he said. "Many authors go for years without having their work performed by a regional theater."

Anabelle said her experience with Actors Theatre was beyond her expectations.

"I'm not sure if I want to pursue (writing plays), but it's definitely on my list," she said. "I mean, I'm a senior in high school and one of my plays has been published."

► **COVER PHOTO:** Eric Eteuati, left, and Steven Rausch practiced a duel as director Jeffrey Mosser and playwright Anabelle Horton watched.

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