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## F E A T U R E   A R T I C L E

## Humble Boy

Dragon's latest weaves Hamlet, physics, and beekeeping into modern tragedy.

By Michael J. Vaughn

When Meredith Hagedorn set about planning the 2007 season for Palo Alto's Dragon Productions, she opted for a rather democratic angle: ask the *directors* what they want to direct. When she came to Nichole Y. Hamilton, the answer was Charlotte Jones' *Humble Boy*, a modern-day take on the family conflicts of *Hamlet* centered on a 35-year-old physics professor who comes home for his father's funeral.

The Shakespearean parallel "doesn't necessarily scream out at you," says Hagedorn. "There's the Hamlet character, the Ophelia character, the mother, Polonius – but it's not obvious."

What's more important, says Hamilton, is the play's richness. "It is rare to find a script that everyone is so willing to immerse their being into. It not only gives us hints of *Hamlet*, but of the makeup of beehives, superstring theories, and how they all are woven together in a type of poetry. It is also the type of play that can be rehearsed and performed for two months, but you will find discoveries far into the future."

Giving directors the chance to direct their favorites matches nicely with Hagedorn's mission for Dragon, which was founded as a kind of rebuttal to the theatre scene in L.A., where Hagedorn plied her trade as an actor.

"It was difficult to do anything in L.A.," she says. "I'm an Equity actor" – meaning, companies have to pay her at established union rates – "so sometimes it's hard to get cast. Also, there are a lot of theatres that are very cliquey, and it's hard to break in."

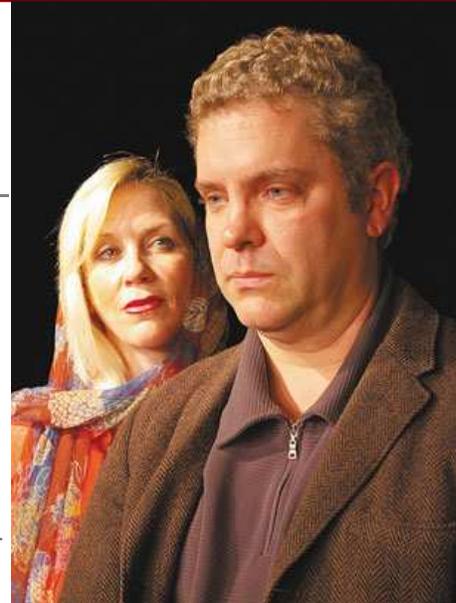
When her techie boyfriend got a job in Silicon Valley, Hagedorn moved to Palo Alto and founded Dragon in 1999, pursuing a semi-professional niche between the full-time pros at TheatreWorks and the community performers at Palo Alto Players. After five years of moving from one performance space to another, the group settled in last year at a storefront black box next to the Art 21 Gallery, on the southern tip of Palo Alto's University Avenue district. Hagedorn hopes to draw a lot of walkup business from her busy neighborhood ("Fifty restaurants in a five-block area!"), and charts her seasons on an unusual calendar-year basis so she can schedule her opening nights around those of other local groups. Her artistic emphasis is on presenting "rarely produced works" and providing opportunities for as many actors, directors, and production staff as she can.

"Many times as artists," says director Hamilton, "we can become frustrated because we don't get the opportunity to work on something that stirs passion within us – we just want to make sure the bills get paid and keep practicing our art. I think Meredith has created something in Dragon that will give local artists a chance to be more enriched and fulfilled. And I truly believe the audiences will benefit from that."

**Ticket Info:** *Dragon Productions' Humble Boy*, Jan. 12-Feb. 3, 535 Alma St., Palo Alto. \$18-\$25. (650) 493-2006 [www.dragonproductions.net](http://www.dragonproductions.net).

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