



Nicole Trobaugh, center in chair, played Annelle, a recent beauty school graduate, in the summer production of "Steel Magnolias" at Cottage Theatre.

The new actor factor

Young actress expands on lessons learned about character development into her next venture — a one-woman show.

By Chris Cunningham
FOR SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

In her day job, budding actress Nicole Trobaugh sells tickets and popcorn at Regal Movie Theater.

During most evenings last summer, Nicole rehearsed her role as Annelle at Cottage Theatre's production of "Steel Magnolias," written by Robert Harling.

It was the biggest role yet for Nicole, 24, and a walk to remember for bringing a stage character to life. It also served as excellent experience for her upcoming — and much larger — role in the one-woman show, "My Name is Rachel Corrie," to be performed at the Lord Leebrick Theatre Feb. 18 through Mar. 12.

Since early fall, Nicole has been working hard to master the script, which is based on Corrie's writings from her diaries and e-mails. Corrie was killed by a bulldozer in 2003 in Gaza, where she was protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes.

"There are always parts of characters that are easier to connect with than others, but you have to find some way to relate to them in every way," Nicole

says. As Annelle, Nicole played a recent beauty school graduate and newcomer to the small town of Chinquapin, La., where she lands a job at Truvy's beauty salon.

Nicole was the youngest of six actresses in the August stage show. Her age, and her brown curly hair, expressive eyes and delicate features, made her believable as the sweet, innocent Annelle.

When director Alan Beck auditioned more than a couple dozen actors for the all-female cast, he says he quickly saw a match between Annelle and Nicole.

"She had an immediate charming, vulnerable quality ... an innocence that I thought would play well off" the five other female roles, Alan says. "She was the first person I cast."

While studying for the audition, Nicole says she sensed a kinship with Annelle, in that both have their quirky sides. But the fictional character is "more of a ramped up" version of herself, she adds.

How did the young actress, then,



Collin Andrew/Special Publications

Nicole studies for the February production of "My Name is Rachel Corrie" at Lord Leebrick.

land the starring role in a one-woman show? Carol Horne Dennis, the director of "My Name is Rachel Corrie," saw Nicole in a spring production of "The Vagina Monologues" at Lane Community College and asked her to audition for the role of Corrie, Nicole recalls.

Nicole says she relates to how Corrie felt for the underdog. "I have to be able to feel connected to so many different people and to feel sympathetic toward them and feel their emotions," Nicole explains. "She was like that."

On a role

Nicole's first major role required her to morph Annelle from shy newcomer to partying extrovert to ardent religious fundamentalist. Through it all, Nicole showed that Annelle found genuine friendship with Truvy and four other women who frequent the salon.

Preparing for the summer production began with rehearsals at the theater in early July: five days a week, two and a half hours per session.

Starting at 6:30 p.m. on the dot at one rehearsal evening, the actors began where they had left off the previous night, reading their scripts and repeating when Alan suggested a different tempo or expression. Nicole sat on the stairs, studying her script, staying alert for Annelle's cue.

A third of the way through the rehearsal, Nicole practiced her entrance as Truvy's salon assistant, wide-eyed and girlish, speaking to her salon friends in a honey-soft Southern accent that wasn't too sweet to swallow.

Later, Alan would give Nicole a director's high praise: "She's very directable. We've both had a great deal of fun exploring the character."

Nicole took her director's advice to heart. "I like what he has to say about acting," she says.

She especially likes a concept Alan refers to as "transformational acting," which requires actors to find themselves in the characters they are playing.

Nicole says genuine emotions surface after you "go over your lines and analyze them, (asking yourself) what is really being said? What is the character struggling with?"

These words of wisdom have guided Nicole well in tackling the role of Rachel Corrie. Up until the turn of the new year, she had been rehearsing with Carol about twice a week, but began hitting it hard in January.

"Carol is really helping me with the pacing of the dialogue and the big picture stuff. I tend to focus on the details and the emotion, and she's been helping me a lot with the arc of the story," Nicole says.

Walking the walk

With her script under control two weeks before the "Steel Magnolias" performance, Nicole's remaining challenge was perfecting the timing of her responses while realistically performing the tasks of a hairdresser.

A professional hairdresser taught Nicole how to tease and style, and use a curling iron and rollers. Nicole doggedly rehearsed the nuances of a dexterous stylist, even learning to remain calm when a salon "customer" went into a tizzy while Annette was teasing her hair.

Following the final curtain call for "Steel Magnolias," Nicole smiled easily through enthusiastic ovations and applause. But in the end, the greatest reward of all was the chance to hone her craft.

"I was given an environment where I could bloom and grow," Nicole says. "I couldn't have asked for a better experience."

Nicole continues to learn her craft, and her one-woman show presents a plum opportunity. At first she was nervous about forgetting her lines or whether she would be entertaining enough as the sole performer, but "a lot of that fades away," she says. "I look forward to telling Rachel's story."

Writer **Chris Cunningham** can be contacted at dash@registerguard.com.

Get in on the act

Anyone interested in auditioning for a role in a community theater performance, such as at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove or Very Little Theatre in Eugene, can borrow a script and set up an appointment for an audition. See the "get involved" link at www.cottagetheatre.org or "Auditions" at www.thevlr.com. Visit www.lordleebriek.com for information on performances of "My Name is Rachel Corrie."



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