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Night of storytelling aids Latchis

By JON POTTER / Reformer Staff

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Saturday April 13, 2013

BRATTLEBORO -- The road to stardom in the storytelling world began for Adam Wade nearly 20 years ago at Keene State College, thanks to his lousy social life.

"I was trying to find true love at frat parties, and it wasn't going to happen," said Wade, who began trying to spin the sow's ears of his social life into on-air silk purses during his Monday show on Keene State College's radio station. People liked the stories, and Wade summoned the courage to tell these stories in between his songs and guitar-playing at open mikes in downtown Keene. It was a pretty humble beginning. "I was terrible," he said.

After graduating from Keene State in 1998, Wade found his way to New York City, where he managed, once again, to go from loser to lucky.

Wade was working as for comedian and former Saturday Night Live star Colin Quinn as a production assistant, which is a fancy title for go-fer. One day, Wade was sent to pick up Quinn's dry cleaning, missing the one time the great Jerry Seinfeld came to have lunch with the cast and crew. Realizing Wade had missed the fun, Quinn took pity on him and agreed to watch a videotape of Wade's open mike act.

Quinn didn't think much of Wade's songs, but he liked the stories Wade told in between them. "The stories in between the songs, that's your gold," Wade recalls Quinn telling him. "My biggest break was missing Seinfeld."

Taking Quinn's advice, Wade focused on storytelling and spoken word, and in 10

years he's become one of the best. He's an 18-time StorySLAM winner and a two-time GrandSLAM champion at The Moth, a non-profit organization, radio show and pod cast dedicated to stories.

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Now Wade is headed our way, as one of the performers in "Take a Seat: Five Storytellers on a Mission," a benefit event on Saturday, April 20, at 7 p.m., at the Latchis Theatre. Wade will be joined by P.J. O'Rourke, Jim O'Grady, Ed Gavagan, Peter Aguiro and host Brooke Van Poppelen in an evening of stories in a humorous vein to raise funds for Latchis Arts' Campaign for The Heavens and The Earth.

The event is the first to bring so many high-caliber story smiths to the Latchis and also marks the debut of The Hatch, a new group in the area whose mission is to produce events and donate the proceeds to worthy causes.

"We want to raise money for our community and have fun doing it," said Tom Bodett, one of the founders of The Hatch, along with Rita Ramirez, Elizabeth Catlin and Rich Korson. "We're all involved up to our necks in all kinds of things, and you're fundraising constantly, and you keep going back to the same well constantly. It's a grind. You don't want to be that person who walks into the room and everybody grabs their wallets."

The folks at The Hatch hope to present two or three events a year in the area as benefits for different local causes. For this first one, they chose the Latchis to be the beneficiary and tapped on their personal connections to assemble this panel of storytellers.

"This is going to be a great event. These are five of the top storytellers in the country," said Bodett, who has appeared with some of these folks on The Moth and is known to many for his work on the NPR show "Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me!"

For the "Take a Seat" event, Vermont Public Radio has signed on a media sponsor and will broadcast an edited version of the program at a later date with Bodett providing introductions and commentary.



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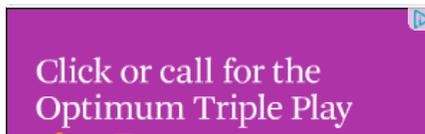
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The April 20 event not only represents a night of great fun for a worthy cause, it also gives Brattleboro audiences live exposure to one of the hippest, hottest art forms out there.

Which may come as a surprise considering the high-tech, gadget-filled times we live in. But maybe that's why storytelling is so hot. At a time when we can fit whole home entertainment systems in the palms of our hands, communicate with anyone as long as we have unlimited texting and a good pair of opposable thumbs, and access anything, anywhere at anytime as long as there's an app for it, we've lost something call it our inner campfire, maybe.

"It's a reaction to the atomization of our lives. We're connected, but we're not. It's the personal connection, the face-to-face we need. It's in our DNA," said Bodett. "When you sit down to hear a great story, there's nothing else like that. There's this craving that we have that's gone unsatisfied."

"Put down the phone and let someone tell you a story," said host Brooke Van Poppelen, bluntly. "I think before all is lost, more than ever, it's time to reclaim your humanity."

Storytelling might just be that important. It certainly is for Wade, who is grateful Quinn was candid enough to tell him his songs were bad, but his stories had potential. From there, it's been a 10-year journey to tap into his humanity.

"When you're telling a story, you're not afraid to be yourself. You don't have to be a character. You don't have to be someone you're not. You just have to be you," said Wade. "In today's society, everything can be so plastic and sometimes it lacks heart. People want to be emotionally touched in some way. I want people to laugh, but I also want people to think a bit."

The April 20 show has a focus on comedy, and some of it will be for mature audiences.

All five storytellers have impressive credentials. O'Rourke was a writer and editor for the National Lampoon, best-selling author of 14 books and America's premier political satirist. He is a regular with Bodett on "Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me."

Aguero is another Moth GrandSLAM champion and lead singer of The BTK Band, New York City's hardest-partying improvised storytelling rock band.

O'Grady is a WNYC transportation reporter and has told his stories on "This American Life" and The Moth.

Gavagan is owner of a design/build firm by day and a storyteller who has appeared on The Moth by night.

Host Van Poppelen is a New York-based comedian and actress who was named one of the "Best New Comedians in 2012" by Esquire. She is a cast member of the History Channel's show "I Love the 1880s" and a writer for MTV's "Failosophy."

In addition to Bodett, The Hatch's founders include Elizabeth Catlin, a Latchis board member, Rita Ramirez, who has worked for local causes such as Girls on the Run and Hilltop Montessori and is a guardian ad litem with Brattleboro Family Court and Rich Korsen, a new resident of the area who has producing credentials at Comedy Central (The Daily Show, The Colbert Report) and Busboy, Inc.

Upcoming events presented by The Hatch may include more storytellers or something else, depending on what moves the founders. To contact The Hatch, e-mail tbodett@gmail.com or korsonr@gmail.com. "This is the beginning of something really good," Bodett said.

Tickets to Take a Seat: Five Storytellers on a Mission are \$50 for front orchestra, \$40 for rear orchestra, \$25 for balcony. A limited number of Premium Guest Tickets will be available for \$1,000, which includes two front orchestra tickets, sponsorship of one front orchestra chair (your name on the armrest plaque) and entrée to the exclusive after-party. Tickets are available at brattleborotix.com and at the reception desk of the Latchis Hotel.

For more information, call Gail Nunziata at 802-254-1109, ext. 3 or e-mail gail@latchisarts.org.

You can contact Jon Potter at jpotter@reformer.com or 802-254-2311 ext. 149.

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