

COMPASS

Your Guide to Tri-State Events

September 15 - 21, 2016

BOOKS: DARRYL GANGLOFF
'A Murder of Crows'

A World Full of Stories

Wassaic, N.Y., resident Terrence McCauley has an entire fictional universe swimming through his head "in a big soup." As ideas rise to the top, he grabs the nearest device — his phone, his iPad, his computer — and starts to write.

That's how he completed his latest novel, "A Murder of Crows," which was recently published by Polis Books.

It's a spy thriller that follows James Hicks, who is part of a clandestine intelligence agency known as The University, as he hunts the most wanted terrorist in the world.

The book is a sequel to McCauley's "Sympathy for the Devil," which introduced readers to Hicks and his group.

"The first book made people want to learn more about The University, who Hicks

is, and what happens next. That's the reason I wrote 'A Murder of Crows,'" McCauley said in a recent interview. "I explain more about what The University is, its origins, and talk about a lot of the bad choices Hicks made in 'Sympathy for the Devil.'"

McCauley works in the government relations industry, but writing is both his hobby and his passion. He won TruTV's national "Search for the Next Great Crime Writer" contest in 2008 for his first novel, "Prohibition," which is set in 1930 New York City and tells the tale of an ex-boxer as he searches for who is trying to undermine a gangster's criminal empire. "Slow Burn," his other novel set in 1930s Manhattan, follows a corrupt NYPD detective as he investigates a murder/kidnapping case that could tear the city

apart. Everything McCauley has written — including these four novels and numerous short stories — is set in the same fictional universe. "It helps keep me grounded," McCauley said.

This doesn't mean that all of his work is required reading — the ties between the books are loose, such as characters in one novel being mentioned in another.

"This is not like 'Games of Thrones,'" he said with a laugh. "I want to write something that's for everybody. If you're in the mood for a 1930s book, you can read 'Prohibition' or 'Slow Burn.' If you want a modern-day spy thriller, read 'Sympathy for the Devil.' And in 'A Murder of Crows,' I summarize everything so you're immediately caught up."

McCauley is constantly writing. He has ideas for a sequel to "Slow Burn" that will set up The University in pre-World War II America; a sequel to "A Murder of Crows," which he could see extending into a series of eight or nine books; and a standalone Western that features the patriarch of a wealthy family from "Slow Burn."

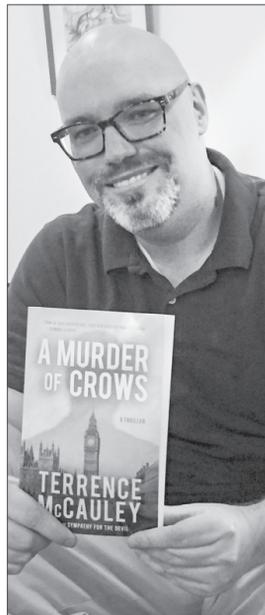


PHOTO BY DARRYL GANGLOFF

Terrence McCauley

How does he find the time to write?

"I write at night after work and on the weekends," he said. "You've always got time to do it. On your lunch break, or when you're waiting for your kids after soccer practice, on your way to school or work, after work, get up early. Where there's a will there's a way."

"A Murder of Crows," published by Polis Books, is available widely. For more information on Terrence McCauley and his novels, go to www.terrencepmccauley.com.

THEATER: DANA GAVIN

'Heathers: The Musical'

Darkly Dreamy

Admittedly, "Heathers" is one of the last films I would ever dream of being made into a swinging musical. As a child of the '80s, I adored the flick — it was stylish, mean, murderous and full of the best quotable lines. Perhaps a dark comedy of suicide, homicide, homophobia, bullying and a mass attack on a school didn't seem that controversial in 1988.

The Castaway Players Theater Company has assembled an outstanding cast at the Center for Performing Arts in Rhinebeck. These actors have excellent voices and looked confident as they moved around the sparsely outfitted stage. Credit must be given to the efforts of director/musical director/choreographer Sean Matthew Whiteford.

The scenery took me aback, at first — the stage was outfitted only with a movable three-part platform with stairs. However, the film had many locations that are used to create the odd, hyper-stylized aesthetic. By stripping it down, and allowing the costumes to replicate the bright color palate, the effect seemed closer to that idea of over-the-top imagery. Kudos to costume designer Juda Leah.

I am not certain, however, that the musical itself works for me as a whole, partially because of the film's subject matter and the musical's efforts to try to sanitize and reimagine the satirical nature in our post-Columbine/Orlando nightclub shooting world (the stage show premiered in 2014).

"Heathers: The Musical" tells the story of Veronica Sawyer, a quirky, clever high school student who is a fringe member of the

most popular and vicious clique, comprised of three beautiful girls all named Heather. The chance arrival at school of a mysterious and murderous young man, J.D. Dean, spells trouble for the Heathers and for two hyper-masculine, misogynistic football players, Kurt and Ram.

Olivia Rose Michaels stars as Veronica, the lead role played on screen by Winona Ryder. She is our heroine, and we're certainly rooting for her, but I expected Veronica to still have a bite to her. While Michaels' voice is clear as a bell, she offered too much winsome earnestness for me.

Wendell Scherer had a similar challenge as J.D., the sly, scheming sociopath (played by Christian Slater in the film) with whom Veronica becomes tragically infatuated. As a character, J.D. needs to balance charm with utter cold menace, and while Scherer did well with the sinister charisma, having the character break out into dance took me out of the moment.

Perhaps my favorite character was Martha, played by Kristen Schaeffer. As a kid, I don't recall having much affection for the character — more like sincere sympathy, as she is the most bullied student at the high school where the Heathers reign supreme. Schaeffer brought a wonderful sense of humanity and sweetness to the role — in the musical, Martha seems to have more to do than she did in the movie. I found myself looking forward to her scenes and musical numbers.

I would recommend this show purely on the truly excellent vocal and acting talents. Perhaps if I were not such a fan of the original film, I wouldn't have found the alterations distracting. Certainly, it does retain some of the sharp social commentary and ends on a somewhat more uplifting note.

"Heathers: The Musical" runs through Sept. 18 at the Center for the Performing Arts at Rhinebeck. Call 845-876-3080 or go to www.centerforperformingarts.org.

MCINERNEY AT WHITE HART

Jay McInerney, author of "Bright, Precious Days," will speak at The White Hart inn in Salisbury on Tuesday, Sept. 20, at 6 p.m.

In his first novel in 10 years, McInerney returns to the Manhattan couple from his previous two novels, "Brightness Falls" and "The Good Life."

The White Hart Speaker Series is presented in collaboration with The White Hart inn, Oblong Books & Music and the Scoville Memorial Library.

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