

# Stages of Creation

by AMY MARIE JONES

## The Accidental Salon

*Once a month, in the back of a sports bar, a crowd of encouraging onlookers gives scripts a chance.*

In the front room of a downtown Seattle sports bar, soccer fans are obsessing over the performance of their favorite players, oblivious to the drama unfolding behind a curtain in the business's back room. It is there that an enclave of theatre folk is celebrating the art of the work-in-progress. These are the Seattle Cold Readers, a group that meets here every third Thursday of the month to read each other's work in an atmosphere teeming with an energy that rivals that of the televised events on the other side of the bar's curtain.

At SCR, playwrights, screenwriters and actors network and hone their craft in a fun and curious way that offers a peek at the beginning stages of a show. Each month four writers see an excerpt from their works read by professional actors who are reading the scripts cold, with no advance rehearsals of the material. For actors it's the best way to practice for an audition; and for writers it's a valuable tool for making final edits. SCR also hopes to foster community and promote a more vital interest in theatre in Seattle.

Founded in 2008 by writers Keith Rivers and Adam Zang, SCR is now in the curatorial hands of actress and Reiki healer Eileen Dey. In August, having outgrown its home in the basement of the Alibi Room, SCR moved to the larger back room of Spitfire Bar and Grill. By the look of recent events, it might not be long before the group needs a venue that is larger still. Since the early part of this year, Dey has been expanding the audience by marketing SCR as a unique and "out-of-the-box" theatre experience for industry folk and audiences alike. With the addition of intermission acts spanning disciplines the event now has a variety-show atmosphere. This evening, freestyle tap dancer Josh



**Too Cool for School:** (from left) actors Lisa Skvarla, Kevin Cook, Tom Brophy, Scott Hamlin and Don R. Crawley perform without rehearsal at Seattle Cold Readers.



Scribner is keeping the energy of the audience up during scene changes.

Before the show gets underway, seven actors begin picking up scripts, clustering with scene partners for quick reads and a chance to highlight lines. Audience members scout seats at small cocktail tables or on one of the many red sofas. Waitresses take orders for happy-hour taquitos while the singer warming up the room competes with the noise of lime muddling and excited greetings. It seems that everyone here knows each other and has been waiting eagerly since the last show to meet with friends again. SCR is far from being an insider's club; attendees also notice anyone they have not seen there before. As a newcomer, I was greeted more than once with the question: "Are you a writer or actor, or just here for the show?"

A few actors look familiar and I try to recall where I may have seen them before. I speak with one actress who tells me that her name is Monica but tonight she is going by Jessica — the illusion of anonymity helps her deal with stage fright. There is as wide a variety in the material as in the background of the actors. Covered in the work being presented is a college relationship in turmoil over an unplanned

pregnancy, a dramatic dissection of race and racism in the military, a screenplay whose content seems quite similar to that of the *Saw* movie franchise, and a love story set amid the violence of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh religious cult. An enthusiastic host, Dey sets a tone of familiarity by kicking off her heels halfway through the show and by taking a seat on the floor between acts. While she says this format is a valuable tool for the participants, she is very anxious that the experience just be fun. Even though every script isn't a masterpiece and every actor is not up for an Oscar, there is no way to tell by the audience's reaction. People here are free with applause for a job well done, or just a job done.

Dey says the value in SCR comes from the production being as much play as it is work, but that doesn't mean it isn't accomplishing its more serious purpose. A few scripts have been noticed by producers, plays have been picked up, and a screenplay or two have been optioned. While SCR is notching up the professionalism as it goes along, acquiring proper theatre lighting and better mics, there seems to be no plan for losing the "just wing it" attitude from which it sprang. ◀

**Seattle Cold Readers Write-up in the November 2009 edition of Seattle City Arts Magazine**