

Gay novelist brings 'Chaos' to the stage

By Larry Nichols
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CHERIL N. CLARKE

New Hope native and award-winner Stephen M. Stahl is directing the play. Both Stahl and Clarke selected the cast, which includes Philadelphia native Nichelle Nichols as well as Maureene Meinert of Newtown, Walter DeShields of Lansdowne and Gabriel Ellis of Princeton, N.J.

Clarke said that at first, it was a challenge to convert her novel into a stage play.

"I'm so used to writing full-length novels at 250 pages," she said. "It was a bit different to try and condense it all and write for the stage. Everything in the play has to happen right now as opposed to a novel, where I have the liberty to have flashbacks."

Clarke said that adapting the play has cut into work on her new book, "Emergency Exit," a political thriller due out next fall featuring a secondary character from one of her other novels, "Tainted Destiny," in the leading role. It's the next novel that she would like to see brought to life.

"I would love to adapt 'Tainted Destiny,' which is the sequel to 'Intimate Chaos,' to a film," Clarke said. "I would try my hand at it in theater, but it has a lot of things going on in it. It has romantic suspense, police involvement, courtroom scenes and all kinds of stuff that makes it more ready for film than the stage."

Clarke's novels often center on stories of less-than-functional lesbian relationships and the emotional uncertainty of dating, but that might change in future works as Clarke married her partner, Monica, in January.

Clarke said married life has "sort of" influenced her writing.

"I view things differently from when I was single," she said. "My wife is really supportive of everything I do. If anything, I'll probably be writing things with families in it or maybe someone adopting a child or going through

Talking to Cheril N. Clarke can make a person feel lazy.

The openly gay writer, 27, balances a full-time position at a consulting firm with a successful writing career and, more recently, producing a stage adaptation of one of her novels.

"I don't watch television," Clarke said. "It's all a matter of time management and trying to balance it all and really prioritize what needs to be done. Normally, I write whenever I can. I'll write when I'm commuting on the train or when I get home from my day job. I'll slip in an hour or two so that I do write every single day. I'm just really picky about how I choose to spend my time."

"Intimate Chaos," the play based on the novel of the same name, is a comedic drama about two women struggling to deal with their pasts, temptation, trust, anger and fear while trying to create a stable relationship.

Clarke, who lived in both Miami and New York City before settling in Mt. Laurel, N.J., two years ago, said her novels reach out to an underserved segment of the literary audience.

"These characters happen to be African American and lesbian, and there aren't many novels that feature these women to my knowledge," she said. "Not that we're so much different from anybody else. It's just that, as far as being able to see portrayals of ourselves in works of fiction, theater or film, it's seriously lacking."