



What's it like to start a new thing at 70?

BlueStone Neighbors

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Verna Gillis headed back to NYC stage

Anne Pyburn Craig
BSP Reporter

Music producer and former professor Verna Gillis found her comedic voice in a TMI workshop several years ago and has never looked back; her "Tales From Geriassic Park" won Best Comedic Script at the 2014 United Solo Festival. The experienced citizen and Kerhonkson resident is bringing a polished and updated rendition to the

United Solo stage later this month and plotting an 80th birthday bash for her co-conspirator in all things, trombonist Roswell Rudd. BSP caught up with Verna to find out more.

BSP: Were you surprised to be awarded Best Comedic Script 2014?

VG: I was surprised. I didn't really understand there was a prize, but I was delighted. And I'm doing it again in New York on Sept. 27, with updates. I have new stuff. For example, I've found the true cause for any hypochondriac: just live long enough, it all becomes real. And "The certitude of the great uncertainty is more certain." I'm still working that one out a bit.

BSP: Any chance of a local performance with the new material included?

VG: I'm going to do something around here in the spring, have it filmed, and then move on to new material after that. It's been a great journey. Geriassic Park is where I now live, in the infancy of older, watching myself and others around me move into it, through it, out of it. And part of the effect is, it makes the present more present than it's ever been, and more compelling.

BSP: You guys suffered a major barn fire last year,



Verna Gillis in a performance at Theatre Row in NYC, Oct. 2014. Photo by Eve Tenuto

and lost a lot of works on paper and ephemera of yours, Roswell's, and of your late husband, Bradford Graves. How's the ongoing recovery faring? Any plans to reopen the Bradford Graves Sculpture Park?

VG: It was a process. I have some very funny fire-related material. I have a great idea for a service, called Ragers for Hire, where people with anger can make good money dealing with banks and insurance companies. My insurance company dropped me after 27 years. Everything just takes more out of you when you're older.

BSP: Did you wish you could hire a rager?

VG: Well, perfect manners have never been my problem. In fact, I think that's one possible title for my memoirs, "I'll Never Know if I'd Have Gotten Different Results if I'd Been Nice."

The main thing is, now it's behind us. We're still so

grateful it was not the house. The sculpture's back up, and the sculpture park is reopening in spring 2016. Roswell will be 80 in November, and his cancer is being controlled, so we have all this good news.

Keeping a balanced view is never what I've been known for, but it's survival at this point. My mother used to say she hoped she lived long enough to see me go through this or that. I'm grateful to have lived long enough to make a few changes.

BSP: So how are you and Roswell doing, each of you? And what are your plans, at least those we have any business knowing about?

VG: Roswell's getting hard of hearing and it has its benefits for him -- he doesn't have to hear as much of my crap. Although I have also noticed that if you have to say something three times it becomes pointless; you start to realize it was never that big of a deal.

I'm producing Roswell's 80th birthday concert on November; we've written a new song. He has a new CD coming out with Heather Masse called "Wizard of Ros."

Me, my fault lines are still active, but I don't spend as much time hanging out on them as I used to. The goal is to move on from ourselves every day, after all. And today is just a perfect fall day. A reminder to all of us: Spend as much time as possible outside, while we still can. Today is a good day and it's so beautiful. **BSP**

Tickets to the Sunday Sept. 27 8 p.m. performance of "Tales From Geriassic Park: On the Verge of Extinction" can be purchased through the United Solo Theatre box office or Telecharge. The "Wizard of Ros" birthday celebration, featuring Rudd, Masse, and a veritable who's who of legends, will happen on Nov. 15 at the Poison Rouge on Bleecker Street, Manhattan.



On stage