

THEATER

KIDS AND THEIR HEROES

BY J. SCOTT BURGESSON

GARY AYLESWORTH is telling me about an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Clouds* he did in Madison, Wis., back in '78. Among the local Wisconsin figures he substituted for the play's original Greek characters was a crusading homophobic preacher who'd been accused of paddle-spanking the children at his school. Aylesworth played the part with a paddle and a sign around his neck identifying the preacher, who was far from amused.

"This preacher had young hit-squad goons he sent to rough us up," he says. "One night we were getting ready for a performance and these guys took the stage and started reading from the Bible, talking about the horrible things we were doing. The preacher showed up for the last performance. When I got to the heavy speech where he appears, I parted the waves of the crowd and just nailed him. Then we had to flee."

A few years later, he and partner Peter Newton quit Madison for the greener pastures of SF. Most of his heady, biting, and always high-octane plays have just one or two actors playing numerous parts — usually himself and Newton, who also writes the plays' musical scores.

Among the 10 plays Aylesworth has written since he arrived here are dramas about the Beats, novelist Barnaby Conrad, the Bohemian Club, and the Haight-Ashbury hippie scene in the '60s.

"We usually get this weird or interesting dialogue going in the community," he muses. *The Bohemian Grove* poked fun at the likes of George Shultz, Caspar Weinberger, and other members of the exclusive Bohemian Club, a number of whom turned up for the show.

Although Aylesworth has compiled a thick stack of critical raves over the years, noncommercial theater hasn't always paid the rent. His latest play, *The Dick and the Devil*, is a searing 90-minute monologue mining his recent experiences as a private investigator working on one of California's biggest serial-killer cases and as a teacher-counselor for emotionally disturbed children.

With Newton accompanying him on guitar, Aylesworth leaps, spins, and about-faces among 15 different characters as he explores the links between serial killers and young children who identify too strongly with real and cinematic murderers. Let's just hope he doesn't get any surprise visitors this time. ●

The Dick and the Devil opens June 4 at the Noh Space. Through June 26.