

THE STYLE of actor/playwright Gary Aylesworth's work, which he sometimes refers to as "passionately serious comedy," might be described as *opera compressed*. Though his dramas, such as "The Matador Club," "Kerouac-ie!," "The Bohemian Club" or "The Doom Folk," are crowded with characters, portrayals are accomplished by one or two actors — usually Aylesworth and his partner, Peter Newton, who also provides music scores.

Aylesworth's latest, "I Was a Go-Go Dancer for Gurdjieff," opening Friday at the New Performance Gallery, is lavishly staffed, by comparison. In addition to Aylesworth and Newton, it stars Harriet Schiffer in the title role of a spiritual seeker in the Summer of Love who uses her body to pay for nurturing her soul.

Although playing multiple characters in his own works has become one of Aylesworth's signatures since he moved to the Bay Area in late 1982, it is an invention that evolved out of necessity, he said recently in the cool whitewashed interior of the New Performance Gallery. Given his druthers, he would enjoy seeing more actors onstage fleshing out the parts he has

Gary Aylesworth's "I Was a Go-Go Dancer for Gurdjieff" opens Friday at New Performance Gallery, 3153 17th Street.

ADULT

MITCHELL BROTHERS'

OUR INCREDIBLY DELECTABLE

FANTASY GIRLS!

WILL FULFILL YOUR WILDEST DREAMS!
LIVE AN INCREDIBLE FANTASY
AROUSAL FEELINGS BURIED DEEP WITHIN.

4 COMPLETELY

DIFFERENT

LIVE SHOWS!

INCLUDING THE FAMOUS O'FARRELL "SHOWER SHOW"!

GET IT ON!

PLUS ON SCREEN IN 35MM — ANITA — THE SWEDISH NYMPHET

BOX OFFICE OPENS 11:45 AM DAILY, SUN. 5 PM 775-5686
CRL. POLK/O'FARRELL MUST BE 18 YRS. 10 REQUIRED

O'FARRELL THEATRE



so prolifically created (seven works in 4½ years), and would like to stage them in venues larger than his usual.

"I covet the Greek Theater over in Berkeley," he said. "I've always thought of my works as a strange cross between Aristophanes, Euripides and Charles Ludlam."

The classical Greek playwrights figured in Aylesworth's literature studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and also in his long apprenticeship with the much-respected Broom Street Theater in Madison. Ten years ago, he was part of a pared-down Broom Street Theater version of Aristophanes' "Clouds" that substituted for the play's ancient Greek subjects modern-day Wisconsin figures — specifically, a fundamentalist preacher who, Aylesworth said, was anti-equal rights and anti-civil rights. The production created a local controversy, he said.

It also has been a hallmark of Aylesworth's particular mode to address issues of the community in which he locates. Thus, works such as "Matador Club," "Kerouac-ie!" (pronounced "ker-oo-wacky") and "The Bohemian Club" have centered on various Bay Area connections, though reaching for more universal aims.

Acknowledging their "nonrealist" stance, he added, "My plays always have three points: autobiography, biography and historical elements." Thus, "Bohemian Club" deals with the century-old Sonoma County retreat where power figures of the national government sequester themselves annually for a romp in the redwoods; "Matador Club" deals with activities in a mythical San Francisco haunt from a novel by Barnaby Conrad; and "Kerouac-ie!" takes up the legend of the late beat generation figure and his San Francisco followers.

"Doom Folk," Aylesworth's last production, was more autobiographical than most, having to do with the adopted playwright's search for his natural mother, but Aylesworth, 38, transformed his personal journey into a vastly extended metaphor for the human condition.

"Go-Go Dancer" came about, he said, from a chance remark by a woman with whom he had had a relatively new relationship. Having mentioned that she once was involv-

ed in a spiritual quest via the teachings of the Russian writer/mystic G.I. Gurdjieff, the woman said a group she had joined allegedly to study his method had given her an experience that amounted to "a one-night stand of the soul."

AFTER the physical excesses of the early '60s, the woman said, she had been looking for a means to cleanse her body of drugs and attend to the spiritual life. The Gurdjieff group seemed a likely vehicle, but its demands for monthly dues were beyond her means. One member pointed her toward work as a topless go-go dancer — high pay for relatively brief work — and that involvement led to other work as an actress in X-rated films. The Gurdjieff group, however, turned out to be abusive both physically and psychologically, the story goes, and at length the woman left it.

Having heard the tale, Aylesworth said, he told his newfound innamorata, "I could do a play about that. I don't know how seriously she, or I, took it" at the time, he said, but the story engaged his imagination and later, after the relationship ended, the play-took shape.

He saw it not only as a point of history — "It was part of the Summer of Love; there was a cultural revolution here that has more of a tie to Jonestown and Jim Jones than it does to patchouli oil and tie-dyed T-shirts" — but also a part of larger cultural issues. "Go-Go" is also the story of an adult child of alcoholics," he said, "the issue of how adult children get into cults — especially in that Summer of Love."

When Aylesworth came to the Bay Area from Wisconsin, he said, he had served an arduous apprenticeship in the theater, completed a half-dozen full-length scripts and considered himself unusually well-versed in his profession. His reception in San Francisco was not what he had imagined. "Nobody cared," he remembered. "In a way, it was like starting over, and I resented it very much."

The realization forced him back on his own resources, he said, and he began the work that was to result gradually in a certain recognition. He began winning local awards for his work. "Just the fact of doing seven plays in four or five years here is a crucible in which the

other [negative] stuff burns away," he said. "Otherwise, you couldn't concentrate on the work that needs doing. And I might not have developed had I been slurped up by a major repertory company here, which is what I kinda expected."

Aylesworth in performance is a remarkable combination of energy and control, switching all at once from characterization to characterization, by voice, physical stance and suggestion of costume. About five years ago, he took up the study of tai ch'i chuan, the ancient Chinese "moving meditation" whose mental and physical enhancement have made it a favorite among performing artists. His last, and perhaps most demanding play to date, "Doom Folk," was attended by his tai ch'i teacher, Aylesworth said — a man not long removed from China, whose command of English was not yet in the range of Aylesworth's rapid, variously accented and pitched dialogue. "But he said to me, 'I like this one; your energy is very low,'" meaning centered and grounded.

"That was greater to me than praise from critics," he said. ■