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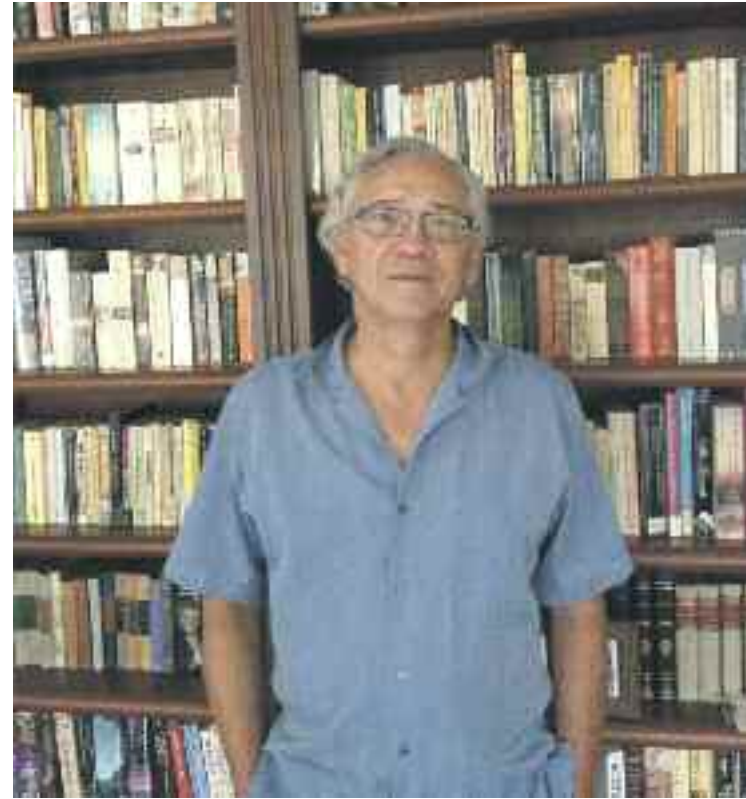
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## Local Author

### Orinda retiree merges his passion for writing with the world of self-publishing

By Ryan McKinley



Author Don Maker at his Orinda home.

Photo Ryan McKinley

Don Maker started trying to write poetry and short stories when he was about 8 years old, but said it wasn't until around 10 years ago that he really got serious about writing, when he retired from a life in advertising and began to follow his passion. "When I retired and started teaching I had more time to work on writing," he said.

Maker's first book, "Zenobia," is a historical fiction novel about a Syrian queen, set during the Roman Empire. The novel took Maker six months of research before he felt he could start writing. "I researched to get a real picture of the society and of the time. Writing historical fiction is a depiction of an era. You're not just talking about a specific event in time; [it's] the people and human reactions you're trying to capture," Maker said.

Not one to repeat himself, the Orinda author chose a young adult novel for his next project. "Miranda's Magic (Volume 1)" focuses on a

young girl's increasing magical powers as she learns more about science. It was inspired by Maker's time as a high school teacher. "I wanted to write a book to get young people interested in science," he said. "I found out what students had to take in the eighth grade and I based the book on the school's science curriculum."

Maker's spent months studying eighth grade science. "The old saying 'you can only write what you know,' it's true. But if you don't know [something] what do you do? You spend a year researching and learning about it."

The strenuous research aspect of Maker's writing process stems from his years working as a marketing writer. "In technical writing you try to focus on every minute detail," he said. "You spend a lot of time making sure you really know what you're writing about, which is how I got into a researching habit."

When it came time to publish,

Maker decided on self-publishing under the name Metacognition Press, instead of using traditional companies. Maker sought the advice of fellow writers when deciding what publishing path to take. "I'm a member of the local chapter of the California Writers Club and their members are very knowledgeable about the industry. The publishing world's changing; many writers are getting out of traditional publishing."

To build the finished product Maker created the cover and interior design, the marketing, purchased the ISBN numbers, and funded it all with his own money. "I enjoy self-publishing," Maker said. "You have total control."

While Maker did the majority of the work, he stresses that self-publishing is not a completely solo venture. "You can't do it all on your own," Maker said. "I've been an editor and writer all my professional life. I have an online writing group and we edit each other's work, and I had the wonderful people from the California Writers Club help me."

As for the future, Maker is hard at work on a number of projects. Later this year his semi-autobiographical historical fiction novel, "The Grindstone," will be released. He is researching a two-volume book called "Shakespeares and the Crown," co-authoring a book with his daughter called "The Handicapped Horse" and has planned three more "Miranda's Magic" novels.

Maker's advice for aspiring writers? "Join a large and reputable writing group, such as California Writer's Club, but there are certainly many others. Writing is like any other profession; you have to keep studying and working at it."

You can learn more about the author on his website at donmaker.yolasite.com. Readers can find his books on Amazon.com.



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## 'Company' The Musical at Town Hall Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Marta (Giana Gambardella), Bobby (Derek Travis Collard), and April (Jade Shojae) Photo Stu Selland

Lafayette's theater scene recently expanded its range masterfully with the opening season musical "Company." Town Hall Theatre's new director Joel Roster took a risk with this fully-choreographed live musical production, but the large cast pulls it together with grace and impeccable professionalism. Some great voices – including one that is of operatic quality – as well as outrageous acting and smashing dancing make "Company" a success that will draw crowds in.

"Company," with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, was nominated for a record 14 Tony awards when it opened on Broadway in the '70s, yet the story has not aged a bit. In fact, everyone in the audience, whether married, previously married, or not yet married, will find it relevant and thought provoking. Five married couples interact with 35-year-old bachelor Bobby, who questions his own choice of the single life and free-

dom, while his friends strip away their own marriages. Sometimes very funny, sometimes bittersweet, the text itself is impeccably crafted and interesting.

The cast for "Company" introduces many newcomers to Town Hall Theatre. First is Derek Travis Collard who plays Bobby. Tall and slender, Collard is a musical actor who has credits in the Bay Area and beyond. The entire play rests on this central character, and Collard develops a range of emotion and a growing presence that pushes the quality of the play to a high level. He looks somewhat older than his 35-year-old character, but his energy, acting performance and vocal mastery more than compensate for this.

Speaking of vocals, a special mention goes to Megan Stetson (Jenny), who must have been classically trained in opera. Listening to her vibrato when she sings a solo piece is enchanting.

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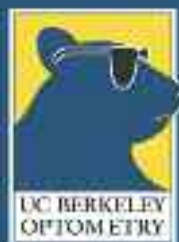
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