

Vogel plays with

# 'The Oldest Profession'

By Sue Harrison

BANNER STAFF

This year the Provincetown Repertory Theatre has started a play reading series, the first ever for the Equity company, and is holding one reading each month through May. This Thursday, the reading series continues with Paula Vogel's "The Oldest Profession," directed by Patrick Falco. The reading takes place at 8 p.m. in Manso Hall at The Schoolhouse Center for Art & Design, 494 Commercial St., Provincetown.

Imagine the Golden Girls as aging beauties with a more provocative retirement, arranging their clientele of men from the nearby senior center. Falco directs a strong group of women: Judith Partelow, Lynda Sturner, Phoebe Otis, Ruth Greenblatt and Betsy Hulik. (The Rep's artistic director, Norris Mailer, was originally to have read one role but Hulik took over for Mailer due to illness.) The women are using their acting ability to play roles older than their actual years, but each has a strong character acting background and spark off each other very well.

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Rep artistic director Norris Mailer (lower left) talks with cast members (clockwise) Lynda Sturner, Judith Partelow, Phoebe Otis and Ruth Greenblatt.



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The play puts them on a park bench in New York where they talk about old times, new times, good food, politics and the recently elected Ronald Reagan. Vogel, the playwright who penned the Pulitzer Prize-winning play "How I Learned to Drive," has a good time with these feisty women and their take on life. Currently, the play is being converted into a screenplay that Fred Berner will direct. In the movie version, Olympia Dukakis and Cloris Leachman have already signed on as two of the women in question, or should we say questionable women.

Falco directed Vogel's "How I Learned to Drive" when the Provincetown Theatre Company produced it, and he also directed a reading of Vogel's latest work, "The Long Christmas Ride Home," at the Fine Arts Work Center last summer.

In this performance, Falco says, the Rep is choosing to do very little in the way of staging or costuming. "I told them to just wear something with indications of the character," he says of his instructions to his actresses. "It's just women sitting on a park bench talking with occasional blackouts as each dies until finally only one is left."

The idea of a reading, he says, is not to see the play but to hear the playwright's words. In a purist world, the audience might actually close their eyes and just listen but Falco says the Rep is offering more than that while sticking close to the premise of a reading.

"It's not about seeing," he



*Playwright Paula Vogel will be on hand when her play is read on Thursday.*

says. "It's about picking good actors and just putting it out there. It can be tricky, doing a reading or a staged reading [a hybrid between a reading and a full production]. I'm learning to keep it as simple as possible. I don't want the actors to do so much rehearsal that they get off book. We do two rehearsals and we're up."

Vogel is coming from Brown University, where she teaches, to attend the reading. She's has been very approachable and helpful in the various productions of her plays by the local companies, Falco says.

It all adds up to more theater, more things to do in the off-season and to keeping the Rep's name in front of the public while the construction of a new home for theater in Provincetown continues. Plus, he says, it expands the range of possibilities.

"It gives us the opportunity to do plays we might not do in a full production. Sometimes we don't have the budget or the acting pool. It's a case of less is more." □