



Kathryn Zdan is Victorian Countess Ada Lovelace in Central Works' *Ada and the Memory Engine* by Lauren Gunderson.

Central Works Explores a Female Perspective on Math and More

Premiere celebrates a computer genius from the 1840s with a woman's point of view. By Sam Hurwitt.

If the phrase "first computer programmer" doesn't make you think of an early 19th-century countess and estranged daughter of the Romantic poet Lord Byron, then you don't know Ada Lovelace. But playwright Lauren Gunderson is out to change that with *Ada and the Memory Engine*, her new play premiering with Berkeley's Central Works.

Plays about often-overlooked female scientists of bygone eras are one of Gunderson's specialties. In 2012, Symmetry Theatre Company produced *Emilie: La Marquise du Châtelet Defends Her Life Tonight* in this same room at the Berkeley City Club, dramatizing the life of a 17th-century French physicist and

mathematician. *Silent Sky*, her play about early 20th-century astronomer Henrietta Leavitt, played TheatreWorks in Mountain View last year.

In her new play, Gunderson explores how Lovelace was inspired by her friend Charles Babbage's invention of the mechanical computer, the Analytical Engine, to concoct an algorithm for the engine to compute Bernoulli numbers in the 1840s, the first program ever designed for a computer to execute. The play is about much more than mathematics, dealing with Ada's feelings about the father she never knew and her bold vision of a future she would never know. Directed by Central Works co-director (and

resident playwright) Gary Graves, the cast features Kathryn Zdan (who also starred in Gunderson's political farce *The Taming* with Crowded Fire Theater), Kevin Clarke, Josh Schell, and company co-director Jan Zvaifler. This is the 49th world premiere for Central Works, a company that does nothing but original plays, most of them created in collaboration with the cast and creative team.

What's in store for big number 50? We'll have to stay tuned for next season to find out.

Ada and the Memory Engine, Oct. 17-Nov. 22, 8 p.m. Thu., Fri., Sat. and 5 p.m. Sun.; Berkeley City Club, 2315 Durant Ave., Berkeley; \$15-\$28; 510-558-1381, CentralWorks.org.

BOOKS

Caught in a Web of Addiction, Prejudice

Two new books from Oakland authors that might at first glance seem completely unrelated each introduce haunting, unforgettable central characters and thought-challenging subjects.

Bucky Sinister's jolting and eerily funny *Black Hole* (\$15.95, Soft Skull Press, 181 pp.) traces the disturbing, downward spiral of 43-year-old Chuck, a drug addict who rails in expletives against San Francisco gentrification, yoga practitioners, coffee houses, Silicon Valley, and more. *George* (\$16.99 Scholastic, 195 pp.) is a young-adult debut novel by Alex Gino about a teenage girl trapped in a boy's body who seeks release through a school production of



Bucky Sinister, pictured, is the author of *Black Hole* about down-and-out Chuck.

Charlotte's Web and other measures. The lingering effects of reading the two books is similar: Increased compassion for people caught in the webs of addiction or prejudice and tender concern for

anyone living with the belief that their body's biology is enemy territory.

Putting the two books into one column should in no way be taken as an effort to equate ► 22

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