

## THEATER

### Underworld hero

Chances are, you haven't yet heard of Jordan Harrison, but you will. The bright young gay playwright burst upon the theatrical scene with *Kid-Simple*, a playful, imaginative comedy about a young girl who invents a machine for hearing sounds that cannot be heard (playing in Los Angeles at Meadows Basement, beginning October 14). This month, Harrison's *Finn in the Underworld* receives its world premiere in the Bay Area at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Harrison's mentor and champion, Paula Vogel, author of *How I Learned to Drive*, enthuses, "Now we will see the more subtle side of this remarkable theatrical mind."

"The play is about how families deal with something unspoken," explains Harrison, who recently turned 28. *Finn in the Underworld* is set in a haunted house that closes in on the characters as the secrets spill out—but we should expect other surprises. "I like a play to misbehave as it progresses," Harrison adds, grinning mischievously.

—Gerard Raymond

Fictionalizing the story also allowed Kirkman to dramatize the adoptive parents, who have refused to talk to the filmmaker or to their son's biological mother. Not knowing what drove them to reject their child, Kirkman turned the dad into a preacher, played by Chris Sarandon in a mesmerizing low-key performance that's light-years away from his Oscar-nominated scenery shredding as a transsexual in *Dog Day Afternoon*. "This part of the culture seemed to be at a fever pitch: ministers as the [leading] voice of the gay rights opposition," Kirkman says. "I thought, This is not right."

As for the turtles: Kirkman moved the real-life Mark's lover from landlocked Boone, N.C., to the coast in his screenplay in order to make use of the Darwinian metaphor. Then he got the young man's journals, and there on the covers of the notebooks were pictures of turtles. Honest. ■



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