The Highland County Arts Council will present the theatrical performance of “Exchange of Gifts” on Saturday, December 14th at The Highland Center at 7:00 pm, and I recently spoke with playwright, Dwayne Yancey.

“I have a day job - I'm a journalist in Roanoke, a newspaper journalist with the Roanoke Times. On the side, I write plays. “

“I have two ways to describe myself, in terms of play writing. One is that I have had plays produced all over the world - 47 states, six Canadian provinces. 15 countries - won awards, various places. The other way is to say nobody's ever heard of me. Both are true. I tell people, that I make so much money from play writing that get to have a day job.”

Mr. Yancey has ties to Highland County.

“My daughter lives here in Highland County, Rain Hupman. She married a son of Highland County, they moved here, and she now teaches Spanish at the high school and loves Highland County.”

I asked about the origin of his becoming a playwright, as well as the creation process.

“I'D done some acting in high school, just to have something to do – I was never very good at it. And in college, my senior year, there was a playwriting class offered - seemed an easy three credits to me. So I took the playwriting class, got a good, grade, got the credits, moved on. And then when my daughter was about nine, and of an age you could take her out and do things, we went to see a show, near Roanoke, and it was written by someone local. And I thought, ‘Well, you know, that's pretty good, but I could do that.’ “

He continued, “So I started remembering everything I learned in that playwriting class and I sat down and wrote a play, and I thought, ‘Man, this thing is brilliant.’ It wasn’t - I don't even claim it anymore., but at the time, I thought, you know, every word was written in gold. So I wrote another, and another, and soon I have a bunch and I start sending them out, and lo, a few get produced. And so here I am.”

“I tried to write every day. I always have a list of ideas - they may not be good ideas, but I've got a list good ideas. And it’s like running - I'm not a runner, but I have friends who are, and they run every day. Whether the weather's good or bad, they just go out and run, that's part of their routine. So this is just part of my routine. If you wait until you're inspired, you may never write anything.”

He talked about the upcoming performance, and his role in the production.

“The show is a Christmas show, and it's called “Exchange of Gifts.” We will be performing this at nine locations in December, up and down Western Virginia. We’ll be in Monterrey at The Highland Center on Saturday, December 14th at 7:00 pm, and then the next day, Sunday, December 15th, in Clifton Forge, at the Masonic Theater in the afternoon. Monterey is the northernmost point, Galax is the southernmost point.”

“It is about three college students, all women, all from other countries - one from Australia, one from Canada, one from Russia, who are studying in the United States, they're trying to get home for Christmas. And they find themselves snowbound in an airport. They're stuck there, and as the line goes, drama ensues. I won't try to give too much away.”

“ It's a show for all ages, although little kids will not understand it, you know, there's nothing inappropriate, but there are no sugar plum fairies or anything like that - it's three college students stuck in an airport, trying to figure out what they do next.”

“I will be at each location. I'm not directing, I have a director, that is not my skill set. My role was to write it, and find a director to produce it and then I booked all the shows, so I guess I'm sort of the front man in that regard.”

More about Mr. Yancey can be found on his website, [www.dwayneyancey.com](http://www.dwayneyancey.com).

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