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## From the page to the stage

children's author inspires imagination

By SKY BARNHART, Contributing Writer

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"We all need magic in our lives!" says children's author Gill McBarnet, sipping a cup of tea on a misty Upcountry morning. With her wonderful accent, she might be mistaken for English, but she was actually born and raised in Zimbabwe.

Coming from a country deeply torn by strife, she feels it's especially important to celebrate the beauty and joy of a place like Maui, where she has lived for the past 26 years. And what better way than through the pages of a children's book?

The Kula resident and mother of three has written and illustrated more than 10 children's books on the island. Some of her books have been dramatized and performed as plays, including "Shark Who Learned a Lesson" and "The Brave Little Turtle," which were performed in schools statewide in 2001 as a Maui Academy of Performing Arts educational touring show.

McBarnet's most popular book, "Goodnight Gecko," is brought to life every spring by Quack Moore (former music director for "Saturday Night Live" and Emmy-award winning songwriter for "Sesame Street") at the Palace Theater in Hilo. The ballet/dance production features exquisite costumes, student choreography and dancers ranging from pre-ballet to adult.

"It's thrilling to see how a book can be interpreted," McBarnet says. "A story has drama anyway, so how satisfying to have it acted out and performed! When you're writing and illustrating the book, there's always an element of drama as you visualize it in your mind's eye."

McBarnet says she especially enjoys writing in verse, which "brings in a musical quality." That quality runs throughout her latest book, "Happy as a Dolphin: A Child's Celebration of Hawaii." The vibrant book illustrates a series of Hawaiian-style similes such as: "I'm as happy as a dolphin / Jumping from a wave, / As shy as a spotted eel / Hiding in his cave."

The book's Nov. 14 launch at Barnes & Noble at Ala Moana Center on Oahu will feature a dramatization by the performing arts students of Kaimuki High School.

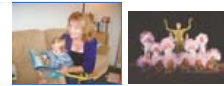
"(Performing arts organizations) put on productions to entertain; I write to entertain-sometimes the two can be intertwined," McBarnet says. "It stretches the imagination more so than simply watching a film: with live productions, you're involving the community."

When McBarnet reads her books to audiences in bookstores and public libraries around the state, she likes to bring her young listeners into the story. "I don't like the thought of the little ones just sitting there, because they're so active at that age!" she says. "I like to get them up and get them involved." For her new book, she might have them sway like palm trees, dance like hula dancers, or tip-toe like ghost crabs.

Maybe it's the accent, but my little daughter was certainly entranced by McBarnet's storytelling. That's a good thing, because in each book there's also what McBarnet calls "a little lesson to be learned." It might be a young whale learning to accept herself for who she is, a little turtle learning to be brave, or a bullying shark learning to respect others' feelings. Or it might be a message that's reassuring, like a little gecko whose mother teaches him about the beauty of nighttime; or simply a means of encouraging imagination, like one of McBarnet's very first books about a pink parrot who flies a little boy to faraway lands.

"So much of the day-to-day is 'guinea pig on a treadmill,'" she says. "A book will take you places. Drama provides the magic!"

### Article Photos



Sky Barnhart photo  
 Kula author Gill McBarnet reads "Happy as a Dolphin" to 14-month-old Day Schual. Below, McBarnet's "Goodnight Gecko" takes the stage in a 2009 Palace Theatre production.

### Fact Box

Gill McBarnet will read her books on Maui at 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 21, at Barnes & Noble in Lahaina; at 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 28, at the Maui Ocean Center; and at 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 28, at Borders Express at Queen Ka'ahumanu Center. For more information, visit [www.hawaiianchildrensbooks.com](http://www.hawaiianchildrensbooks.com).



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A sweet and simple tale of enchantment takes the stage at Baldwin High School Loudon Mini-Theatre. A cast and crew of over 40 students present Disney's "Sleeping Beauty" Kids, the story of the lovely Briar Rose, who is really Princess Aurora. After a curse is set upon her by the evil sorceress Maleficent, it's up to three good fairies and a handsome prince to free the princess from the spell. "Where else on this island can you watch Disney come to life?" says director Linda Carnevale. "It's like going to a show at a Disney theme park!"

n Showtimes are 7:30 p.m. Friday; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, and 5 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$6 for age 17 and younger; available at the door.

Last weekend to catch the ProArts production of "Cabaret" at Steppingstone Playhouse! Jonathan Lehman directs a talented Maui cast in this dark Broadway musical set in 1931 Berlin on the eve of the Nazi rise to power. Tom Althouse plays the Master of Ceremonies of the Kit Kat Klub, a seedy cabaret where "Life is beautiful, the girls are beautiful and even the orchestra is beautiful!" Lynnea Barry is the beautiful, gin-loving cabaret performer Sally Bowles who falls in love with confused American writer Cliff Bradshaw (E. John Messersmith). Rose Roselinsky as German landlady Fraulein Schneider and Dale Button as Jewish fruit vendor Herr Schultz create a courtship that is delightful to watch. But true happiness, it seems, is not attainable in the face of looming madness Due to sexual themes, the show is not appropriate for children.

\* Showtimes are 7:30 p.m. Friday, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$28 for reserved table seating (available only by phone), \$25 for center section, and \$22 for side section; available at the mall's Customer Service Desk or by calling 875-4367. For more information, visit [www.proartspacific.com](http://www.proartspacific.com).

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Opportunities:

Good news for young performers on the west side: Maui Academy of Performing Arts has opened a new studio in Kahana Gateway Shopping Center, offering performing arts classes closer to home. A five-week series of acting classes for students age 8 and up is offered on Fridays or Saturdays, beginning this week. The classes are taught by Ashlie Welte and focus on the fundamentals of acting. MAPA also offers west side drama camps for students in kindergarten through 5th grade on Furlough Fridays. The camps include drama games, character exploration and storytelling. For more information or to register, visit [www.mauiacademy.org](http://www.mauiacademy.org) or call 244-8760.

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A custom-built outdoor theater is the new home for Cirque Polynesia at the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa. Previously set in the Monarchy Ballroom, the 75-minute array of acrobatics is now encircled by a bamboo fence and performed under the stars. Since its June opening, the show's success has led to an extended lease with the Hyatt and "gave us the added confidence to build a dedicated theater to display the magic and awe of cirque," according to producer Cornell "Tuffy" Nicholas. The new venue can seat up to 500 guests.

\* Cirque Polynesia plays at 7 p.m. five nights a week, Monday through Friday, with special rates for kamaaina and keiki (under 12). Dinner and show packages start at \$99. For more information, visit [www.CirquePolynesia.com](http://www.CirquePolynesia.com) or call 667-4540.

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