

# Play hails Martin Luther King Jr.

BY NATHAN BROWN  
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**SAUGERTIES** — When Michael Monasterial was a kid, he wasn't into books. Yet, he loved movies like "Ben Hur" and "Spartacus."

Now, as the man behind the Passing the Torch Through the Arts theater company, he hopes the plays he writes and performs bring history alive for children in the same way those movies did.

"(History is) not numbers," he said. "It's people, and struggle."

On Monday, which is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monasterial will perform his play about that same civil rights leader at 1 p.m. at the Saugerties Public Library.

"The Man We Never Knew" is designed for kids ages 13 and younger — but Monasterial said adults would appreciate it, too.

It's an interactive play, with the audience taking part.

Monasterial said he hopes it helps younger people, who have grown up in an era without the legally enforced segregation King fought, to understand King's struggles.

"They've grown up in an era of freedom," he said. "There's no connection emotionally to the character or what he's been through."

Monasterial founded his company about five years ago. The first two weekends in February, he will be performing at the



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Michael Monasterial, left, rehearses his play, "The Man We Never Knew," about Martin Luther King Jr., with Eva Barrows, 4, center, and Maya Monasterial. The play will be performed Monday in Saugerties.

Saugerties Performing Arts Factory, in their American History Theater Festival.

His performances there will include plays about singer Sam Cooke; recently deceased South African civil rights leader Nelson Mandela; and Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian independence movement during the French Revolution.

As for Monday's play, Monasterial said he wants the kids to learn about King as a human, rather than an icon.

"Intelligent and committed as he was, he was a person just like everybody else," Monasterial said of King. That, he said, makes what King did even more extraordinary, once you understand that there was an ordinary

man behind the history.

This is what Monasterial said he tries to convey with all of his work.

"It's actual people under certain circumstances doing heroic and amazing things," he said. "They're so much like you, and so much like all of us."

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