

Despite Shake-Up, Actors' Theatre's '8 Tens' Show Will Go On



BY WALLACE BAINE

Source: Lookout Santa Cruz

APR 11, 2022



There's been a big change in leadership at Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre, but new board members expect that the company's flagship production, the celebrated "8 Tens @ 8" festival, will return in 2023.



Scott Kravitz and Sarah Kauffman Michael star in "Old Aquatics," by Steven Kobar, directed by Gerry Geringer, part of the 2022 "8 Tens @ 8" play festival. (Via Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre)

Most arts organizations have suffered in the wake of an extended pandemic only now beginning to ease after two years. But for Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre, it's been an especially stormy sea.

When news broke last week that the company's top three people had all abruptly resigned, it was all too easy to assume that Actors' Theatre might be a casualty of the COVID era. But, in the best show-must-go-on fashion, the company's board is vowing that Actors' Theatre, and particularly its flagship production, the celebrated "8 Tens @ 8" play festival, will continue in 2023 — and maybe even in 2022.

"8 Tens" is a beloved annual tradition in Santa Cruz theater circles, a program featuring eight fully produced 10-minute plays. For more than a quarter-century, it has offered aspiring playwrights, many of them local, a chance to see their work produced on stage, and has given directors and actors opportunities to pursue a variety of roles. It is considered to be the longest-running 10-minute play festival in the U.S.

On top of the already crippling new reality imposed by the pandemic, Actors' Theatre has been forced to endure two gut-punch setbacks. The first was the 2020 death of Bonnie Ronzio, a cornerstone figure at Actors' Theatre as a director, producer, technician, stage manager, accountant and a kind of you-name-it fixer of all things. Then, in early 2022, the Omicron variant emerged at precisely the moment that the company was ready to present its comeback season of "8 Tens," [forcing the festival's sudden shutdown](#).

Citing exhaustion from keeping the company afloat for the past two years, board president Wilma Marcus Chandler, artistic director Andrew Ceglio and marketing & creative director Jana Marcus have all stepped down from their positions. For her part, Chandler was the

founding artistic director of “8 Tens,” and, as a director, writer and teacher, one of the most fundamental figures in Santa Cruz theater history.

Marcus stepped up to help fill the void left by Ronzio’s death. And Ceglio had planned an ambitious season for 2022 that has now been canceled.

How the three will be replaced specifically is unclear, but new board president Suzanne Schrag and holdover board member Marcus Cato say the board will be going ahead with plans to continue “8 Tens” as Santa Cruz has come to know it for more than 25 years.

“It’s a no-brainer that we would be doing ‘8 Tens,’” said Cato, who for 10 years served as managing director at Shakespeare Santa Cruz. “I can’t imagine a circumstance in which we wouldn’t be doing ‘8 Tens.’”

“We’ve already got about 70 plays submitted for the next year’s festival,” said Schrag, a longtime veteran of Santa Cruz’s theater scene. “They temporarily suspended taking submissions. But as soon as we have the website going again, we’ll repost that and continue to take submissions.”

Schrag said that the three outgoing people have all been working closely with the new board to ensure a smooth-as-possible handover. “The transition is moving ahead,” she said. “I don’t think there’s any animosity at all.”

Though the 2022 festival was canceled due to Omicron, the entire season was filmed and is now available for free on video in [two programs](#). It’s a telling indication of the festival’s robust health that the season has expanded far beyond its original mission, doubling the number of plays offered to audiences — the 2022 festival featured 16 regular plays, plus two more that were to be showcased from young aspiring playwrights. It’s possible that the board might even restage the 2022 season at some point in the coming months.

“They’re rehearsed, they’re ready to go,” said Schrag of the possibility that “8 Tens” would return before the end of the year. “But that’s really up to the bigger board I think and whether we can actually get it together.”

This year’s festival featured about 35 actors. With directors and crew members, that means attempting to schedule about 50 people to bring the festival back.

“Even if we just did a single evening (of selected plays), we could do something sooner with the full complement of 16 plays at another time,” said Cato, who directed one of this year’s plays and acted in another. “But we really need a little time to map out what makes sense for the company.”

It’s also possible that “8 Tens” will be moved from its accustomed spot on the calendar in January. “It’s so traditional to do it at the start of the year,” said Schrag. “Some of our directors, who are also teaching, have that time off over the holidays where they can do a tech week. But yeah, I think that’s the question. Now we’re going to start having COVID season. You know, that might be an argument to move it a little later in the spring, or even in August. I really don’t know. I think that’s something we’re considering. But, at least I think

we can say for sure that ‘8 Tens’ is going to happen in 2023.”



Sienna Thorgusen, Steve Macramalla and Jonny Fontana star in “The Maltese Walter” by John Minigan, directed by Cathy Warner, part of the 2022 “8 Tens @ 8” play festival. (Via Santa Cruz Actors’ Theatre)