



After 18 years, Santa Cruz's 10-minute play festival '8 Tens @ Eight' still has lots to draw from

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POSTED: 01/02/2013 05:14:16 PM PST

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Of all the events that festoon the Santa Cruz County cultural calendar, the annual "8 Tens @ Eight" Festival is inarguably the first and probably the most varied and diverse.

For 18 years, the Festival has welcomed 10-minute play submissions from all over the country and produced them in a month-long smorgasbord of comedy, drama and whatever happens to fall between.

This year, the Festival, sponsored by Actors' Theatre, is back with eight new plays, followed by a quick "Best of the Rest" final weekend that will carry the stage madness into February.

"This year, we have lots of comedies," said the Festival's founder and artistic director Wilma Marcus Chandler. "Almost all of our playwrights this time are from California, entirely by accident. One is from Arizona, another is from Indiana. And the rest are from the Los Angeles area, San Francisco or here in Santa Cruz."

The selection includes everything from clowns to old guys surfing to agoraphobics.

"I think if there's any one theme to this year's festival is that things are not what they seem," said Chandler. "Characters who appear to be one thing turn out to not live up to those expectations."

The eight plays this year are:

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"The Match" by Seth Freeman; "Morons" by William Baer; "Dudes Like Us" by Ian McRae; "Clown Camp" by Dan Borengasser; "For Art's Sake" by Elyce Melmon; "Be It Ever So Humble" by Susan Forrest and Karen Schamberg; "Just Say It" by Marlene Miller; and, "Prison Coach" by Zazu Lein. McRae, Forrest and Schamberg are local writers.

Each year, Chandler and her volunteers take on submissions for the Festival and choose the best on a blind basis — the author's name is not on the judged scripts. Many 10-minute play festivals, said Chandler, are circumscribed by certain rules such limits on the numbers of characters or set changes. The Santa Cruz festival has none of those limits.

"All we want is that the writing is good," said Chandler. "You can have two characters or 50 characters. You can have a flying elephant, if you want."

The only rule is right there in the Festival's title — the play has to be 10 minutes long. The Festival enforces this single rule not with a stop watch but with the tried-and-true guideline of script writing, that one page is roughly equal one minute.

"Ours is more of a literary contest," said Chandler. "We're really just interested in good pieces of writing."

Chandler, while serving as the chair of the theater department at Cabrillo College, began "8 Tens" in the mid 1990s, inspired by the only other such festival at the time, from a theater group in Louisville, Ky. "I really liked the idea of 10-minute plays and felt that there was enough interest on the West Coast to do it here."

Today, there are many 10-minute play festivals taking place from coast to coast and Santa Cruz's remains the oldest such festival, second only to Louisville's, which is still going strong. Chandler and her Actors' Theatre volunteer s have maintained a large stable of directors to step in and take on the plays each January. This year's directors include Adrian Torres, Brian Spencer, Bill Peters, Marcus Cato, Helene Jara, Gail Borowski, Sarah Albertson and Chandler herself.

The Festival runs through Jan. 27, with a "Best of the Rest" staged readings taking place Jan. 31 through Feb. 3. The Jan. 12 event is a benefit for the participating actors in the Festival.

{ opening Friday Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3 p.m., through Jan. 27. Center Street Theater, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz. \$20 general; \$18 students and seniors. Thursdays and matinees, two for \$30. www.brownpapertickets.com (<http://www.brownpapertickets.com>). }