

# Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre presents an artistic cornucopia with their '8 Tens @ 8' short play festival

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In Oregon, they have a saying. Don't like the weather? Wait 10 minutes. Something similar could be said about the shift in temperature and pressure inside the small black box theater at the Santa Cruz Art Center this past week.

The Santa Cruz County Actors' Theatre opened its 29th annual short play festival "8 Tens @ 8," with an astounding 16 10-minute plays presented in two parts. Each part contains eight short plays with an intermission at the halfway mark. I attended both parts on Sunday and feasted on the creative bounty on offer. It might seem like a daunting task to watch 16 plays in one day but I was thoroughly entertained the entire time.

After receiving a total of 300 submissions, the committee of readers narrows the selection down to 24 plays. The directors then choose 16 of those plays to produce and the other 8 will be performed as a staged reading later this year in Part 3, "The Best of the Rest." This exhaustive effort undertaken by the festival leads to a truly remarkable and memorable event. Anyone who is interested in theater has a lot to gain from attending this year's first two parts.



*A scene from "Giver of Beauty," written by Randy Warren and directed by Karin Babbitt, featuring Eva Schewe, Ward Willats and Gurjeet Bagri.*

There is an amazing diversity of content in the plays. Some, like "Aileen" and "The Wakers" are futuristic interrogations of dystopias, and others, like "Happy Anniversary" and "Speed Dating" celebrate the sweetness of love in older age. Some comical plays are full of double entendres and insinuation, like "Duels and Detentes" and "Fire Escape," while others are direct and tragic like "The Nearest Far Away Place" and "Balloon Release." I laughed out loud and surreptitiously wiped away tears.

Some of the plays deal with serious subject matter, too. From a terrifying scene of abuse in "The Use of Children" to the explication of unjust labor practices in "The Bargain," these courageous directors and actors pull no

punches. Perhaps because each play is only 10 minutes, it frees up the space to tackle uncomfortable topics. These serious plays give the festival a weight in contrast to some of the lighter whimsical scenes. "Giver of Beauty" is a very funny satire of American spirituality and "Grouchy" is a charming satirical analysis of pretense and authenticity. Together, they kept me engaged and excited to see what was coming next.

There are philosophical questions, legal arguments, culturally relevant explorations and so much more to consider when you see both Part 1 and Part 2. How is AI affecting our legal system? What would people give up in order to conserve resources? Who really has the power in a professional relationship? Is the law or a sense of humanity more important? What would it be like to have to hitchhike to another state for an abortion? How do you recover from grief? Does old age spell the end of romance? As with all art, the most powerful effect of these 16 plays is to ask interesting questions and to offer dramatic answers.

Tickets range from \$32-\$70, and the festival will run until Feb. 16 on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at 8 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. If you plan to attend the short play festival, “8 Tens @ 8,” you can order tickets online by visiting [santacruzactorstheatre.org/tickets](https://santacruzactorstheatre.org/tickets).