

# Santa Cruz: Second part of short play festival reaches higher ground

8 Tens @ 8 Short Play Festival runs through Feb. 19

By [JOANNE ENGELHARDT](#) | Santa Cruz Sentinel  
February 9, 2023

Santa Cruz Actors Theatre has a winner with its annual “8 Tens @ 8 Short Play Festival,” and Part 2 is even better than Part 1, [which was reviewed last week](#). This year 16 short plays were selected for the 2023 festival, with eight performed at a time. The play festival runs through Feb. 19 and features two separate productions dubbed Part 1 and Part 2. All are performed at Center Stage in downtown Santa Cruz.



Lyndsey Marks as the police officer and Evandra Aurelia as the unhappy drinker in “Unreasonable Situations,” one of the short plays in Part 2 of the Actors Theater production of the annual “8 Tens @ 8 Short Play Festival.” (Courtesy Actors Theater)

Part 2 begins with “Everything Happens for a Reason...Right?”, directed by Cathy Warner. As “mom,” Mindy Pedler is the quintessential sweet little mother. When her son (Andrew Yabroff) comes to see her, he asks her why there’s a man’s body on the kitchen floor. Pedler looks distracted and tells him that “It’s not what you think.” And yet the man is still lying on the kitchen floor. The surprise ending is funny and cute. Just keep thinking: Everything happens for a reason.

“Unreasonable Situations” is another short with more than one surprise before it ends. Directed by Kathie Kratochvil, the setting is a small park in an affluent residential area where Lorin (a convincing Evandra Aurelia) sits on a bench with a half-filled bottle of wine. Officer Kent (Lyndsey Marks) shows up to tell her she needs to move on because a nearby sign says “Alcohol-free Zone.”

As the two women talk, it becomes obvious that Lorin is in a difficult situation so the officer decides to help her. Not only does she go with Lorin to confront her cheating husband, she says she might write a few ticket infractions on his car. Another winning script.

But the third short play, “An Awkward Conversation in the Shadow of Mt. Moriah” tries to cover too much ground in a few minutes. Karin Babbitt directs Yabroff (Isaac) and Tom Arns (Abraham) as they return home from Mt. Moriah. Both the men and the storyline trail off and go nowhere by play’s end.

Next up is “Something Holy in Croatia,” directed by Marcus Cato. This is one of those “whatever you can do, I can do better” stories, and it’s done well. There’s some swearing here because these men (David Leach as Bogdan and Scott Kravitz as Anton) are bad guys – or maybe policemen – or old-world Kremlin mercenaries – or FBI – or ... you get it. But it’s fascinating to watch which of these con men can “one up” the other. “Croatia” is both well directed and acted.

After intermission, it’s “Death Brings a Casserole,” directed by Peter Gelblum. Sitting in a church pew, Kostas Guzman-Giesecken as Rudy seems prepared to take on Death himself when Death (Martin Sampad Kachuck) sits down next to him — carrying a large casserole dish. Rudy tells him to move away because he’s trying to worship. But Death tells him that he’s about to have a fatal aneurysm. Naturally, Rudy doesn’t believe him – why, this guy is simply wearing a black hoodie. But Death tells him he no longer wears a long black robe and carries a big scythe. “But I’m too young to die,” cries Rudy, who then tries to run away. The ending won’t be revealed here – suffice to say, this short play will hold your attention.

It takes nearly the entire play to better understand what is happening in “Eddy & Edna,” another well-acted and directed short. Edna (Pedlar) is making breakfast for her husband Eddy (Steven Capasso) who is reading his newspaper at the kitchen table. They seem to be a sweet, long-married couple, although Eddy appears to be very forgetful. As Edna leaves, their son, Danny (August Materazzi) shows up. He reminds his father that Edna passed away several years ago. Then Danny leaves and Edna returns, saying that Danny died years ago. Andrew Davids directed this short.

“Slave Trade,” directed by Gerry Geringer, is another mystery playlet. An “execution” is coming up in just 15 minutes, so everyone’s on edge in the home office. Alexa (a strong Sarah Cruse) tells Bob McNamara (Leach) that executives like him “don’t really do anything.” He starts shaking Alexa and she cries out “I can’t breathe!” When he stops, she admits, “I was just messing with you, Bob!” Another surprise ending here – in what appeared to be the audience’s favorite of the day.

Part 2 ends with “An Adventure in Forms,” well-directed by Wilma Marcus Chandler. The setting, another office, has three desks with three people: Hannah Eckstein as Hayworth, Helene Simkin Jara as Foster and Guzman-Giesecken as Rankin.

Kachuck shows up as Brand, a new employee. While the office workers complete what amounts to a lot of busywork, Brand tries to find out how he fits in and is told to study the other workers. But what crazy work they’re doing! They tell him they’re collecting empirical data ... such as validating three blueberries. Although all the actors are fine, the play itself is a letdown. Too bad because that’s the last short of the day.

Tickets for either Part 1 or Part 2 of the “2023 8 Tens @ 8 Festival” cost \$32 for general admission and \$29 for students and seniors. There are also package deals and discounts for Thursday performances. To check out the remainder of the play schedule and purchase tickets, go to [www.santacruzactorstheatre.org/tickets](http://www.santacruzactorstheatre.org/tickets) or call (831) 431-8666.