



'Love at the Louvre' by Dianne Sposito. Directed by Peter Gelblum. Featuring Sarah Marsh and Sophia Alexander-Sidhoun. (Jana Marcus — Contributed)

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As happens every year, some of the 16 plays seem to zing along at a fast clip and are over too soon. A few, of course, might be better had they been tightened up a bit because they sag and have audience members looking at their programs to see what's up next.

But 8 Tens @ 8 founding artistic director Wilma Chandler, her right-hand woman Bonnie Ronzio (listed as producer, stage manager, light board operator and director of one of the skits) work tirelessly all year to make their January production an amazing cross-section of genres and emotions.

More than 200 entries were submitted from all over the United States – as well as some from other countries – for this year's show. They then invite local writers and directors to read the entries and help select the short plays that are in the 2019 production.



1 of 6

'Jornada Del Muerto' by Gwen Flager. Directed by Marcus Cato. Featuring Tara McMillin, and Austin Bruce. (Jana Marcus -- Contributed)



Sharp, incisive dialogue runs through many of this year's plays, especially several of the comedies which got loud guffaws and broad laughter from the opening weekend crowd.

Several from "Night B" that stand out:

- Scott Kravitz, Steve Capasso and Gail Borkowski in the Daria E. Troxell-directed "The Greyback Payback," written by Mark Saunders. Not only are all the actors fine in their roles, but Troxell keeps the action moving in this well-written short with a surprise ending.
- "Where's This Train Going?" directed by Anita Natale, intelligently written by Bruce Guelden (and also with a surprise ending). All three actors – Sara Marsh, Nic Terbeek and Capasso – seem authentic in this comedic story.
- Thought "Frameworks" attempts to deal with the not-too-fascinating topic of physics, somehow Mike McGeever's 10-minutes of fame – with the help of veteran director Bill Peters and two believable actors (Kravitz and Camille Russell) make it not only mostly understandable but also witty.

Example: As the two stand at the El subway station platform in Chicago, Kravitz, as Gabe, says to Marie (Roberts), "You're the reason I'm here today." She looks at him with alarm and replies, "You're the reason I carry pepper spray." Now that's funny.

In fact, it's probably humorous skits that usually work best in the 10-minute format. That was the case with another winner: Dianne Sposito's "Love at the Louvre," which got some loving direction from Peter Gelblum.

The premise here is that two of the world's most treasured artworks, "Mona Lisa" and "Venus de Milo," take a break from their usual spots at Paris' world-renowned Louvre museum. As they sit together in a hallway in what the program describes as "after hours in the Eternal Now," Venus, a demur, sweet take on the role by Sophia Alexander-Sidhoun, and a hilarious approach to the exhausted Mona Lisa role by Marsh, bemoan the fact that they never get a moment alone.

It's nice to see so many young people in this year's festival. Besides the aforementioned Russell and Alexander-Sidhoun, there's also Elias McMillin, Solange Larenas Marcotte and Tristan Ahn. And, in Brian Spencer's "The Rug," McMillin gets to act with his mother, Tara McMillin who, appropriately plays his mom.

One thing that somewhat marred the Saturday night performance: A group of other "8 Tens" actors and directors, seated together, all whooped and hollered for their fellow actors. While this might be a fine way to honor their compatriots at the dress rehearsal, it's really not appropriate at a regular performance. Best to let the paying audience members show their appreciation of the plays and actors they enjoyed.

There are four more weekends to see Santa Cruz's annual short-play festival with shows running twice every Saturday through the end of the run. "A" skits will show on Jan. 19 and Feb. 2, and "B" skits will repeat on Jan. 12 and 26. All Saturday shows are at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

If You Go

8 TENS @ 8 SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL

Produced by: Santa Cruz County Actors' Theatre

Where: Center Stage, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz

When: Through Feb. 3

Tickets: Adults: \$32; seniors/students: \$29; \$58/\$54 two-night package

Details: www.sccat.org