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Short play festival celebrates 20 years

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County Actors' Theatre will present the 20th annual 8 Tens @ Eight Short Play Festival, running Friday through Feb. 8, at the Center Street Theater, 1001 Center St. in Santa Cruz.

To celebrate their 20th anniversary of the 10-minute play festival, Actors' Theatre is offering 16 award-winning plays from their national playwriting contest, showing in repertoire over the five-week festival. Every summer Actors' Theatre holds a national playwriting contest, judged by a select group of local writers and directors. The winning plays are then produced into full productions for the January festival. The contest has become nationally renowned, with over 200 entrees this year from across the country and internationally, some from as far way as South Korea and England.

"Over the years we have received plays from writers all over the world," said Artistic Director and Festival Founder Wilma Marcus Chandler. "The 8 Tens @ Eight has become known as the premiere 10-minute play festival on the West Coast. We have proudly kept in touch with many of our winning playwrights and seen them go



Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo

"Change of Heart" is one of 16 plays showing at the 8 Tens @ Eight Short Play Festival.

on to have plays produced in larger venues, knowing it all started for them here in Santa Cruz."

In past seasons Actors' Theatre produced staged readings of the contests' runners-up, titled Best of the Rest, which followed the festival. Due to popular demand, this season audiences will see the Best of The Rest transformed into an additional evening of fully produced short plays,

with the area's top directors, actors, designers and stage crew recruited to produce the new festival format. This year's 16 award-winning plays will be presented as an "A" and "B" night, eight 10-minute plays on each night, in rotation. A special \$40 ticket package is available to see any "A" and "B" showing throughout the run of the Festival.

Over its 20 years the festival has seen some difficult

times. In 2011, when the festival was in its 16th year, it almost closed its doors permanently. But it was the fortitude and commitment of Actors' Theatre president Bonnie Ronzio that kept the festival going.

"Due to financial reasons, Actors' Theatre left the Art Center as its resident home," Ronzio said. "It seemed a shame to discontinue the festival as it had become a community favorite and was very dear to my heart, and to so many others. Four years later, here we are — celebrating our 20th anniversary. It gives all of us at Actors' Theatre such joy and satisfaction that we have endured, and that the community supports the festival with soldout performances every year."

"The 20th anniversary will be our biggest season ever," said Chandler, "as we present an extravaganza of both comedy and drama, both traditional and avant garde, in a wide variety of short plays designed to give audiences two distinct and diverse evenings of fine performances."

Tickets are \$25 general and \$22 senior/student, and can be purchased by visiting www.brownpapertickets.com. For information and a schedule, visit www.sccat.org.