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Hudson County One-Act Festival at DeBaun

Second annual festival by area theater groups

By: Diana Schwaeble
Managing Editor

The Hudson County One-Act Festival is back for the second time at DeBaun in Hoboken.

The festival features exciting work by six well-known local theater companies, who are also part of the newly formed Hudson County Theatre Alliance. The plays are short, original works that should enthrall audiences with the mix of compelling drama, lighthearted comedy, and multi-media dimensions.

According to David Zimmerman, executive director for the Center for Performing Arts, the festival is considerably shorter than last year's production, with a running time of about 95 minutes including intermission.

"One-acts have always worked well in Hoboken," said Zimmerman. "We got a lot of positive responses last year."

The festival opens on Sept. 14 and runs until Sept. 22 with all shows beginning at 8 p.m.

Original work

Advertisement "Watermelon," a new play by Jersey City resident Ed Schroeder, will be performed by members of Art House Productions. Art House Productions is the Jersey City-based company that provides opportunities for visual and performing artists. Christine Goodman, director of Art House Productions, will make her directorial debut with "Watermelon." As director of Art House Productions, Goodman has been a long time advocate of the arts. She spearheaded the seasonal event "JC Fridays," which attracts thousands to the downtown art scene.

"Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" by Jerry McGee will be presented by the Attic Ensemble, Jersey City's longest running theater group. The Attic has year-round performances at the historic Barrow Mansion in Jersey City.

"Clowning Around" by Jami Brandli will be portrayed by company members of gaia studio in Hoboken. Gaia is a woman's group dedicated to supporting the local arts.

"Off the Beaten Path" by Ken A. Collins (a Stevens alumnus) will be performed by The Theater Company, which is DeBaun's own company. The company has year-round theatrical events that are performed by members, professionals and students.

"Floating Home" is an excerpt written by Adrian Rodriguez and performed by the Hudson Exploited Theater Company (HEXTC), which is based in Union City. This original two-character play is directed by Arian Blanco, who is also this season's festival coordinator. HEXTC is committed to presenting work that reflects a variety of experiences and diverse cultural backgrounds.

J City Theater will present "Compression of a Casualty," by Kevin Doyle. This new company based in Jersey City is dedicated the progress of the Jersey City artistic scene.

That's funny

The first half of the festival features shorts that are comedic in nature.

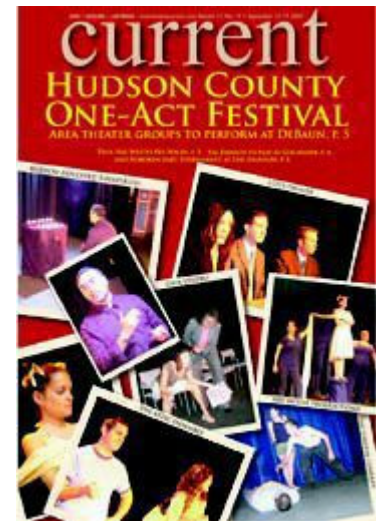
It opens with "Off the Beaten Path," which follows two teens who have stumbled into the wrong part of town. According to director Mitchell, the script calls for spotlights on the two actors who are lost in the dark.

"I thought it would be fun to bring them closer to the foot of the stage," said Mitchell. "So [the audience] can really see where they are."

Mitchell is a seasoned director with a knack for creating absurd and stimulating visual comedic scenes, who has directed several productions for the Center and the Attic Ensemble. He directed "Noon" in last year's One-Act festival.

"Watermelon" will have the "Art House" stamp with its multi-media production, which is a device they used for the acclaimed "Camino Real" last year.

According to director Goodman, after reading the piece by the Jersey City artist, she felt that this was a production she wanted to direct. She said that because the production is only 10 minutes long, she was able to take her time with each aspect it.



THRILLING THEATER – The Hudson County One-Act Festival features exciting work by six well-known local theater companies, who are also part of the newly formed Hudson County Theatre Alliance. The plays are short, original works that should enthrall audiences with the mix of compelling drama, lighthearted comedy and multi-media dimensions. For tickets or more information, visit: www.debaun.org.

Although this is her directorial debut, Goodman has years of experience behind-the-scenes as director of Art House Productions.

"When I read the piece I had a real vision for it," said Goodman. "I really wanted to take the reins and try it out."

Mercedes Ilarraza is directing "Clowning Around" for gaia studios. Ilarraza is an actress, playwright, and director. She recently directed "Delivery Boy," which won "best play" at the One Festival.

According to Ilarraza, the play is a situational comedy which follows two candidates as they wait in the lobby to interview for the same job. The one woman is a twentysomething who recently graduated college. The other, a thirtysomething, is looking for an entry level job because of life circumstances. They both desperately need this job.

"It goes with the premise that 30 is now considered old," said Ilarraza. "The job states that the candidate should be able to clown around."

That means different things to both women, who are determined to break the competition.

A real world view

The second half of the show features realistic stories.

"Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" is the story of two former lovers who by chance see each other on a crowded subway. Or do they?

According to Mitchell, he had an easy time directing the seasoned actors in this production - both of which he had worked with before.

"It's a light, touching drama about two people who were in love," said Mitchell. "[Both actors] knew me, but they hadn't met each other. Yet it gets very intimate. I think you feel it."

"Floating Home," which is directed by Blanco, features a man entering a church looking for answers and a priest who is struggling with his own problems.

Blanco said that the story is set in Hudson County and is actually part of a larger work. The completed play is actually a trilogy, which will be presented in full as part of HexTC's regular season. The excerpt that will be presented takes place in a church.

"I chose to create the world of the church," said Blanco, who has the most elaborate set out of the shorts. Blanco made sure to include the holy water basin and the prayer candles. The water represents the idea of washing away sins and making amends.

Blanco said that the essential conflict involves Father Al and a stranger to the parish. The stranger, who is called Able, hasn't been to church in a long time.

To the viewer, "Compression of a Casualty," might seem perhaps the most familiar to this media soaked decade. The short is a play that is based on an actual news broadcast. The attractive, yet removed news anchors make their way through another day of seemingly far away tragedy.

J City Theater was created last fall by the founding members of the group - Clay Cockrell, Sandy Harper Cockrell, and Kellis Carroll. The group opened with "J.B." followed by "A Tuna Christmas."

According to Sandy Harper Cockrell, the director and actress, she initially saw "Compression of a Casualty" at a one-act festival in Brooklyn.

She said that she responded to the writer's style and story telling ability.

"It was something [the writer] wrote in response to a newscast about the casualties in war," said Cockrell. "We prefer straightforward pieces that just tell a story."

And ...

The Hudson County One-Acts Festival opens on Friday, Sept. 14 at 8 p.m. at DeBaun Auditorium, Fifth and Hudson streets in Hoboken. Other dates are: Sept. 15, 21, 22 at 8 p.m.

Tickets are: \$15/adults, \$10/students, \$10/seniors, and \$5/children under 12. There is also a dinner/show package for \$35 per person.

For tickets or more information, visit: www.debaun.org.

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