

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA

10x10, 2023 Written by Brent Askari, Michael Brady, Michael Burgan, Allie Costa, Deirdre Girard, Arlene Jaffe, Stephen Kaplan, Diana Metzger, Jim Moss, Robert Weibezahl.

Directed by Alan Paul and Matthew Penn. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“We’re looking for another member of our smutty book club.”



Director Matt Penn (7 years), Skyler Gallun, Matt Neely (10 years), Robert Zukerman (8 years), Camille Upshaw, Peggy Pharr Wilson (12 years), Sky Marie BSC Artistic Director Alan Paul; Photo: Andrew Cromartie

The annual 10x10 play festival is on at Barrington Stage Company in Pittsfield and this year’s offerings range from nearly slapstick comedy to television parody with a final play right out of *The Twilight Zone*. Established authors like Brent Askari (last year’s Berkie winner for new play) and Michael Brady (*To Gillian on Her 37th Birthday*), and locally grown talent like Arlene Jaffe deliver their imaginative work along with seven other playwrights. The one hour and fifty minutes production gives us medieval love, the physics of metaphysics, ghosts, impending death, generational relationships, and so much more. With short plays succeeding each other there is no time to easily digest everything and moments remain magically, indelibly implanted. There is humor, pathos and science fiction in this evening and really something for everybody. And there is a wonderful cast of actors on hand to make it all work beautifully.

Three popular entertainers return for their yearly outing in new theater: Matt Neely,



Robert Zukerman, Sky Marie in Arlene Jaffe's play *"Anything You Want"*
 Photo: David Dashiell

Robert Zukerman and the always astounding Peggy Pharr Wilson. This year's company also includes the very talented Camille Upshaw, Skyler Gallun and Sky Marie.

In Jaffe's local play titled *"Anything You Want"* Sky Marie's student confronts a famous artist in

Stockbridge, MA seeking a photo of him in his studio. A charming look at a piece of local history emerges as a delectable mini-drama. It is directed by Matthew Penn who might well have witnessed the actual incident in his youth. Autobiography provides excellent fodder for a play.



Matt Neely as the jester Tollak with Camille Upshaw as Huberta in *"The Moon is Full o=f It"* by Jim Moss;
 Photo: David Dashiell

Silly, yet serious, Jim Moss's play *"The Moon is Full of It"* takes us into the romance of medieval physics and poetry. Special sound effects provided by designer Eric Shimelonis enhance the personal magic of this nearly impossible affair, brilliantly addressed by Matt Neely and Camille Upshaw, again directed by Penn. This is an intriguing and excellent play by Moss whose earlier work has been produced all over the world.

The wonderfully adult couple, Robert Zukerman and Peggy Pharr Wilson, bring their considerable talents to Michael Brady's *"If I Go First,"* a play about the difficult decisions of the elderly. These two actors understand how the hard is easy and the natural comes hard (thank you, Sondheim) as devoted partners deal with serious consequences of health and aging. I defy you not to be moved to tears during this divine drama.

"Piece of Cake" opens up a different sort of family relationship, based on blood and gutsy employment choices. The physically overwrought

Skyler Gallun is terrific in this second-half play while lovely Camille Upshaw has to deal differently with him, Wilson as a difficult customer and Zukerman as her irrepressible father. It's a sort of three strikes and you're out piece, though very different from Gallun's other baseball play in the first half of the evening, Stephen Kaplan's *"Right Field of Dreams."*

That play lets the actor be a kid again, caught between an indulgent father (Neely) and a ghostly mentor (Upshaw) who each want the boy to succeed and exhibit pride. Directed by new company director Alan Paul, this is a serious play with comic undertones, and Paul handles it all extremely well. He also directed Diana Metzger's *"A Date"* which is one of the funniest plays in the group, especially with Wilson's dating coach on hand to enliven the absurdity.

This series of new plays has a technical team that shines through each and every moment of the presentation. Costumer Peggy Walsh takes the lead with wonderful clothing, both real and fanciful set against the backdrop of lighted forms designed by Marcus Kearns. Lucas Pawelski



Camille Upshaw and Skyler Gallun make Allie Costa's *"Piece of Cake"* reflect a different sort of love. Photo: David Dashiell

has lighted the comic moments and the heart-tug scenes with equal amounts of perfection. The plays profit through these technical/artistic efforts and the evening has a fullness rarely achieved in the one-act/ten minute fom.

"Gimme Shelter" by Robert Weibezahl proves itself a special work. The "Twilight Zone" remembrance *"All Aboard!"* by Michael Burgan, directed by Paul, is an excellent closer for the show.

Once again, in its 12th year, 10x10 at Barrington



Peggy Pharr Wilson and Skyler Gallun in Robert Weibezahl's *"Gimme Shelter"*; Photo: David Dashiell

Stage proves itself a terrific choice for a night out in mid-winter. It is almost sold out for the whole run, so book your tickets quickly. The've already extended the run so it may be possible.

+ 02/24/2023 +

10x10 2023 runs through March 12, 2023 at the St. Germain Stage in the Sydelle and Lee Blatt Center, 30 Linden Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. For information and tickets go to BarringtonStageCo.org or call 413-236-8888.