

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA

10x10 2024, by Glenn Alterman, Brent Askari, Mark Evan Chimsky, Jordan Ealey, John Mabey, Jennifer Maisel, James McLindon, Diana Metzger, Christopher Oscar Peña, Jessica Provenz Directed by Matthew Penn and Alan Paul.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Sometimes a different perspective is all that you need.”

Ten new one-act, ten minute, plays comprise the 13th edition of this festival of new plays. Some are laugh-riots, some are more serious, many of them confront you and some of them complete you in ways you never expect. All of them, this season, will comfort you.



The Company; (front) Peggy Pharr Wilson, Matt Nealy (with Berkie), Robert Zukerman;
Photo: David Dashiell

Matt Nealy has written the half-play that opens the show, one which celebrates Alan Paul and his completed first season, including the 10x10 win of the 2023 Berkshire Theatre Critics Award (*the Berkie*). You can see in the photo above that its “Grease” parody is a crowd-pleaser.



Matt Nealy, Gisela Chípe; Photo: David Dashiell

Nealy has some fine moments in the show, especially in Jessica Provenz's play "The Open Door" in which he portrays a man looking forward to a first date with a woman he met on line. She is not so sure it will work out. In her finest moments Gisela Chípe as Debbie hems and haws and hesitates with all the finesse of a seasoned comedienne. She also plays an overtly interested sex therapist in Brent Askari's hilarious "The Consultant" during which she engages Peggy Pharr Wilson and Robert Zukerman in a variety of semi-romantic efforts. The play warns us all off of taking a chance... on love.

Newcomers to the company Naire Poole and Ross Griffin take the second play, "I Don't" by Jordan Ealey, to tragically comic heights. Ealey's basic plot is an old one,

runaway bride and former boyfriend caught up in a sensual rescue that only self-predicts disasters to come. It is a good play but a bit of a downer after the opener's sexual shenanigans.

A much more serious play, "Meeting Fingerman" by Mark Evan Chimsky puts an elderly author into the clutches of a younger writer who has created a piece that hits too close to home for Fingerman's comfort. Zukerman is superb as the older immigrant and Griffin is perfect in his roles. It takes his second role, Mendel, to bring home the less than kosher bacon in this play.

John Mabey's "The Mount Greylock Fish Hawk Squawk" involved the entire company as three couples lost on the mountain disclose their own special anniversaries as they find themselves lost and abandoned. This situation reflects their personal lives and gives us, in the audience, the realization that this and all the other plays in the series are set in and reflect our own lives in, The Berkshires.

The first half ends with a confusing play by Jennifer Maisel, "The Welcome" in which an older woman, Wilson, greets a visitor, Poole, and shows her her room. A fascinating play that stops rather than ends, it is well performed, amusing and fascinating, but never explains itself.

James McLindon's "Snow Falling Faintly" with Wilson and Griffin, explores the special relationship between a recently widowed mother and her adult son. This is a charming play with so much heart that it moves slowly into drama and returns, almost reluctantly, to the gently comic style that opens it.

“Can I Tell You a Story” by Christopher Oscar Peña is a solo confessional performed by Griffin. It is a comic tragedy that could be slightly shorter and be a whole lot better for it.

Diana Metzger’s “High Time” is a comedy triumph for the author, the four actors and the show as a whole. Zukerman is brilliant and Wilson is perfection. Nealy is hilarious and Poole is wonderful. The play seems to fly by in a minute and the laughs are genuine.



Ross Griffin, Naire Poole; Photo: David Dashiell

The show closes with play that as former President of The Berkshire Writers Room struck very close home for me. It is “A Doubt My Play” by Glenn Alterman in which a playwright is exposing his new work to a “jury” of his peers, Their reactions are faced in three ways in the course of the short length and his four listeners are marvelously played by everyone except Wilson. For Nealy as the playwright there seemed to be an almost personal depiction of his character. I loved the piece very much.

Directors Alan Paul and Matthew Penn were spot-on with each piece. Paul’s work, at the start of his second year as Artistic Director, is especially fine in “High Time,” “Meeting Fingerman,” and “Snow Falling Faintly.” Penn’s best work is seen in “The Open Door,” “The Welcome,” and “The Mount Greylock Fish Hawk Squawk.”

Their design team delivers the usual style of production with a single , by now familiar, backdrop and additional set pieces by Marcus Kearns, costumes by Peggy Walsh, lighting by Lucas Pawelski and sound design by Nathan Leigh. The backstage crew delivers a well-timed and flawless evening of theater with production stage manager Reneé Lutz keeping it all moving perfectly.

It is mid-winter but Barrington Stage Company has prepared us once again for the season to come. As my fourth play of the month I am glad to see new work coming back to The Berkshires in a timely fashion and I am delighted that it is this collection of new and original plays helmed by a company that delivers such things so well.

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10 x10 New Play Festival plays on the St. Germain Stage in the Barrington Stage Company’s Sydelle and Lee Blatt Performing Arts Center. 36 Linden Street, Pittsfield, MA through March 10, For information and tickets go to their website at barringtonstageco.org.