

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA
10x10 New Play Festival 2025, written by Brent Askari, Alex Dremann,
Melinda Gros, Mark Harvey Levine, Rachel Lynett, James McLindon, Ken Preuss,
Jessica Provenz, Scott C. Sickles, Robert Weibezahl.
Directed by Alan Paul and Matthew Penn.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“The Friendship Dynamic”

The object of a ten minute play is to present a concept, characters and a situation that can be explored and responded to in a short amount of time and still satisfy an audience’s need for completion, answers, response. This year’s new play collection on Barrington Stage’s St. Germain Stage basically gives us all of that in ten different ways. For me, nine of the ten do what they should and that’s a very gratifying percentage. Among the six players are three very welcome old friends, Peggy Pharr Wilson, who is still the most brilliant player in the company, Matt Nealy who has grown into a superb actor able to create bizarre characters and



Wilson, Vega, Nealy, Malcolm, Reyes; Photo: Roman Iwasiwka

make them so very real, and Robert Zukerman who gives a new level of perfection to the gruff and irascible, but amiable, characters he creates. They are joined by

newcomers Raya Malcolm, Lori Vega and returning artist Xavier Reyes. This is, perhaps, the finest cast to take on this assortment of plays and characters in the productions 14 year history.



Vega, Nealy. Zukerman, Wilson; Photo: Roman Iwasiwka

The very different plays all seem to deal with the idea of real friendship, relations with those we like, used to like or might like if we had to. They all work very well, but the second play in the series, “Wheel of Fortune, Reversed,” by Scott C. Sickles, left me cold. Death confronts a young man ready,

though not willing, to face his demise. Zukerman as death is excellent but the odd plot is only that - odd. He is even better in “Poetry, Prose and...Pirates,” by Ken Preuss which closes the first half of the performance. Here he plays one of five writers who have all glommed onto a single idea which they don’t intend to share. Preuss has written a delicious piece which is funny and still rings true. Both of these plays have been beautifully directed by Matthew Penn.

The most moving piece in the first half is “A Happy Child” by Melinda Gros, another Matthew Penn directed play. Featuring Wilson and Raya Malcolm as a mother and her estranged daughter; the nature of true friendship is explored with a soft tenderness that was extremely touching. Both actresses gave their emotional all to the play leaving the impression that we had just witnessed a moment of unexpected reality.



Wilson, Malcolm; Photo Roman Iwasiwka:

Company director Alan Paul was the star of the second half of the program with three plays in a row that touched,

and amused the audience with their differences and their truths. “Altared” by Brent Askari was the program’s seemingly requisite wedding difficulties play. The bride’s mother, high on “mushrooms” invades the bride’s chamber and is confronted by her other, unmarried daughter. A three character play that is both funny and moving, it is dominated appropriately by Wilson once again who is as funny as a woman left high by circumstances and a drug could ever be. Vega counters her high with a psychological low that makes Wilson’s work even funnier.

This is followed by Robert Weiberzahl’s “Senior Prom” in which two very old friends meet for the first time in many years and reminisce about the romance they never had, and it turns out never could have had. Wilson scores once again with her vis-a-vis Zukerman who is as tenderhearted as a man can be in his lovely looking back sensibility.

The show ends with the quirkiest examination of the nature of relationships, this time in “Forever is a Long Time” by Jessica Provenz, the story of two



Vega, Nealy; Photo: Roman Iwasiwka

penguins on exhibit in a zoo during mating season narrated by a zookeeper played by Zukerman whose commentary is almost as funny as the comments and dialogue between the two birds played by Nealy and Vega. This is one of the best plays in the group and a perfect way to end the experience of the day. All three actors are at their best in this odd piece.

The rest of the fine plays in the group are “Ordained” by Mark Harvey Levine in which two total strangers find themselves married by a rogue internet priest, “The Friendship Dynamic” by Alex Dremann about four people on a trip who are confronted by a tornado, “Safe Haven” by James McLindon which gives us a fireman’s answer to family dilemmas, and Rachel Lynett’s “Choosing You” with a woman torn between two relationships that may actually not be very different.

The production’s designers are BSC’s Peggy Walsh (costumes), Erika Johnson (Lighting), Amy Altadonna (Sound) with Renee Lutz as Stage Manager.

Paul and Penn have put together a nice two hour event that amuses and warms us in this cold, difficult winter. Performances are selling out so if you want to see this collection of new works, don't hesitate. Make a reservation today.

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10x10 New Play Festival 2025 plays through March 16 on the St. Germain Stage at Barrington Stage Company's The Sydelle and Lee Blatt Center for the Performing Arts, 36 Linden Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. For tickets and information call the box office at 413-236-8888.