



Theater and Dance

Collins: California Actors Theatre to premiere farce by local playwright

By [Mark Collins \(Contact\)](#)

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When Don Fried was a freshman at Haverford College outside Philadelphia, he had a role in a short play written by classmate Ken Ludwig in the college's annual Class Night, which pitted the best wits of each class against one another. Ludwig would later go on to become one of the best American comedy writers of the past 25 years -- Ludwig's "Lend Me a Tenor" and "Moon Over Buffalo" are gems of the farce genre, and Ludwig's book for the 1992 Broadway musical "Crazy For You" earned him a Tony Award nomination.

Ludwig's play was pretty good for a freshman's fare, Fried recalls. Too bad it went up against the senior class writer, a guy named Dave Barry. (Yes, the future syndicated humor columnist.)

Fried, who retired from a 30-year career in IT services in Europe and moved to Niwot in recent years, is now devoting considerable energy to playwriting himself. His play "Present Future" goes into full rehearsals Monday and will be staged by California Actors Theatre in Longmont beginning March 28. Though he likes to avoid the term farce -- "because a lot of Americans have a problem with the word" -- "Present Future" has the earmarks of a classic one. You know, slamming doors, guys disguised as girls, characters scurrying around to cover their tracks.

The 55-year-old took his inspiration for the play from living as an ex-patriot. In their second year in London, Fried and his wife, Rhonda, had 23 sets of guests come for overnight visits. All came bearing gifts.

"People, when they come to visit you, if they don't have the decency to give you something to eat or drink, or that loses its petals, they give you something that should go on the coffee table or the wall, and you always hate it," Fried says.

Then you feel guilty when you shove it into a closet, or, worse, drop it in the waste bin. Which leads to all-out panic when the visitors come around a second time.

In "Present Future," a character starts a business that stores unwanted gifts in a warehouse, then brings them back to you before the gift-giver comes to town again. Add a domineering mother, a

trust fund waiting to be inherited and some hidden identities in jeopardy of being revealed and the comic tension builds.

Fried had not written a play when he started "Present Future" a decade ago, but has honed his craft by auditing playwriting classes at CU. He showed it to Robert Bubon, who runs CAT, and Bubon liked it enough to give it a shot.

"If you really want to dig, 'Present Future' is about ethics in business, and people lying and cheating," Fried says. "It comes from my 30 years in international business. I was getting something off my chest, in addition to just telling a rollicking good story."

Fringe Fest finalizes entrants

Three of Fried's one-acts will also be part of this summer's Boulder International Fringe Festival. He was among BIFF's first-come, first-served pool of entrants, which will make up 25 percent of the artists in the festival.

BIFF held its annual lottery party Feb. 21 and drew the rest of the theater, dance and musical acts that will make up the roughly 70 productions slated for Aug. 14-25. Getting a slot was competitive this time around, according to BIFF Festival Director Alana Eve Burman. Roughly a third of the acts that applied didn't make it in the February drawing.

Also, as in the past two years, the upcoming festival will have a significant presence of artists coming from outside of Colorado. Roughly 30 percent of the productions call somewhere else home.

Some familiar local names that were drawn from the magic hat include Jonathan Bender, The Octopus League, square product theatre, Theatre13 and Gemma Wilcox. Check out www.boulderfringe.com for a list of lucky artists.

New plays at DCTC pay off

The Denver Center Theatre Company's unprecedented decision to stage three world premieres this spring, each of which sprang from DCTC's new-play development program, appears to have paid off.

"Plainsong," based on Kent Haruf's laconic novel about living on Colorado's eastern plains, drew 87 percent of capacity at The Stage Theatre. That's 6 percent more than "King Lear" drew in the same slot in 2007. "Lydia," Octavio Solis' devastating tale of a Mexican American family in El Paso, drew 75 percent capacity at the Ricketson. That was down roughly 20 percent from last year's "Pillowman."

The third offering, "Our House," a scathing satire about the nature of reality TV, played to 63 percent capacity in The Space Theatre. That's an 18 percent smaller audience than last year's "1001," which also sprang from DCTC's Colorado New Play Summit. Despite the lower

numbers in the latter two plays, DCTC is calling the series a "huge success," as new titles typically don't draw well.

However you choose to look at the numbers, there's no question the new-play program has given the longtime regional theater some momentum. In the wake of this year's summit, which coincided with the three world premieres and drew roughly 75 theater luminaries from around the country to Denver last month, DCTC Artistic Director Kent Thompson will announce the company's next season on Tuesday. Word is, more world premieres that DCTC has commissioned will be on the bill.

Brush up your Russian Shakespeare

Colorado Shakespeare Festival Producing Artistic Director Philip Sneed has played the title role in a bilingual production of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" in Vladivostock, Russia. He will hold a public lecture he's calling "Hamlet in Vladivostock, Act I," at 2 p.m. March 9 in the Eaton Humanities Building, Room 150. It's free and open to the public.

Sneed will also present a second lecture during lunch, titled "Hamlet in Vladivostock, Act II," at 11:30 a.m. March 11, at the University Women's Club luncheon in the University Memorial Center on the CU campus. Cost of the lunch is \$15 and reservations must be received by Tuesday. Call 303-786-7013 for more information.

More 'Girls Only'

Congratulations to Colorado comedy team Barbara Gehring and Linda Klein. Their show, inspired by personal diaries they kept in junior high, is on the cusp of going big time. "Girls Only -- The Secret Comedy of Women" was a smash at Denver's Avenue Theater, and now Denver Center Attractions will produce the show about all things girly girl at the Garner Galleria Theatre in the fall. (Specific dates are still being worked out.)

What's more, DCA has optioned the rights to the piece, and plans to produce it in other major markets down the road. As was the policy with the Avenue run, "men are strongly encouraged not to attend" the DCA production of "Girls Only."

Visit www.acecomedy.com/GirlsOnly for more information.

'Copenhagen' extended

Due to popular demand, including some sold-out shows, Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company has extended its production of "Copenhagen" through Saturday. Extra shows are at 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. For more information, visit www.boulderensembletheatre.org or call 303-444-7328.

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