

A finished play in one day

Yellow Taxi brings '24 Hour Plays' to Nashua

By Patty Caya

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Yellow Taxi Productions is giving the local theater community the opportunity to do something really scary this Halloween—write, direct and act in a play developed from scratch and performed within 24 hours.

The Halloween-themed program, called "24 Hour Plays," is the latest theatrical event produced by the Nashua-based group that has changed the face of local theater in recent years.

Their innovative offerings have included site-specific performance pieces, staged readings, world premieres and original plays.

"Nashua audiences are really receptive to everything," said Suzanne Delle, Yellow Taxi's founder and Artistic Director. "They are willing to take chances with new ideas about theater.

"We want [to do] work that hasn't been seen before. In the case of the play-in-a-day event, they are going to get work that hasn't been written yet, never mind seen before."

Here's how it works. On Saturday, Oct. 23 at 7 p.m., the clock starts counting down 24 hours as event participants meet for the first time at the Hunt Memorial building in Nashua.

They'll be split up into groups of actors, directors and playwrights. Each group of actors will be paired with a playwright and director. Keeping with the Halloween theme, each actor will be asked to discuss a fear (or something scary) as a way of introducing himself.

After the initial meet and greet, the playwrights will use the fear stories as a jumping-off point to write a play tailored to group of actors they've been matched with.

The playwrights have until 8 a.m. the next morning to write something that will be funny, scary, clever or poignant. Really, they have 12 hours to write *something*.

When the group re-assembles on Sunday morning, the scripts must be finished. With the ink still wet on the newly-minted plays, the rehearsals will begin.

"Sometimes under stressful deadlines great work can happen," says Delle of the overnight playwriting process she has witnessed in prior play-in-a-day productions.

On Sunday morning, when the entire group reassembles and rehearsals begin, the directors take over. As the playwrights look on (or nap), the directors will begin turning the scripts into stage-worthy productions by nightfall.

Trying to pull a great performance out of an actor who has to learn his lines, blocking and character in a very short time may be a daunting task, but it's the actors who have the biggest challenge.

"Have fun and let go," is the advice Delle will give the brave actors who come to perform. "No one is expecting a polished production. It's about making big choices quickly and sticking with it."

The 'letting go' means letting go of fears, but also translates into dispensing with such luxuries as extended rehearsals, intricate blocking, line readings, character development and the kind of text analysis that usually goes into a play's development process.

The actors are out in front and are performing without a net. But according to those who have seen or performed in similar 24 Hour Plays events, that's the real high. The audience understands how challenging the situation is and really supports the cast.

While the play-in-a-day concept is new to southern New Hampshire audiences, it's a format that has developed a strong following with productions in New York, London, Los Angeles and Chicago.

Only recently has the format been licensed to community theater groups for local productions. In New York, where the concept originated, 24 Hour Plays attract A-list celebrities and award-winning

directors and playwrights, all vying to participate in these unique events.

For Delle and Yellow Taxi Productions, the play-in-a-day format serves two purposes. It allows her to introduce Nashua audiences to a new theatrical form and also serves the company's core mission to support new playwrights.

Though the production process is compressed, it allows several playwrights to develop a concept, write a play and see it performed. Delle sees it as a way to get a community of theater people together in a room to work on something fun.

In Nashua, 24 Hour Plays promises to be a great experience for the local theater community as well as for audience members willing to take a chance on something new.

Sunday at 7 p.m., as the curtain goes up before a paying audience, a mere 24 hours will have passed since the actors on stage first met. The results, according to Delle, are always unpredictable, often hilarious, and most importantly, "so much fun."

Yellow Taxi Productions' 24 Hours Plays event begins Saturday, Oct. 23 at 7 p.m. Pre-registration is encouraged for actors, directors and playwrights who would like to take part in the event. There's a \$5 registration fee. For more information or to register, e-mail Suzanne Delle: sdelle@yellowtaxiproductions.com.

The performance of 24 Hour Plays is open to the public and will take place on Sunday, Oct. 24 at 7 p.m. at The Hunt Memorial Building, 6 Main St., Nashua. General admission is \$5.00. For more information, visit www.yellowtaxiproductions.com.

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