24-Hour Theater Project, an Innovative Arts Tradition in Northampton, Returns to Benefit New Century Theatre

Northampton, MA – Northampton’s critically acclaimed theatrical high-wire act, better known as the 24-Hour Theater Project, takes the stage once again on March 24, at the Mendenhall Center for the Performing Arts at Smith College. This year, the 24-Hour Theater Project will be performing as a benefit for Northampton’s New Century Theatre.

“The 24-Hour Theater Project has become a Valley fixture. I am thrilled that they are doing it here in the Mendenhall Center this year and grateful that they are doing it as a fundraiser for New Century Theatre’s 2012 season,” said Sam Rush, Producing Director for New Century. “The icing on the cake is that I’ve been asked to direct one of the plays this year. It’ll be a not-to-be-missed event -- kind of like the Iron Chef meets NASCAR - cooking up some spectacular plays and staging them at a breakneck pace.”

The premise of the project is simple, the execution anything but: within 24 hours, six plays will be written, rehearsed, directed, produced, and staged. The grueling and adrenaline-filled process begins on Friday night, March 23, when six playwrights meet to draw actors’ names out of a hat. Armed with their casts, the playwrights have 12 hours to come up with a ten-minute play. In the morning, they hand off their scripts to six directors who gather the casts and spend the next 12 hours rehearsing.

At the same time, production teams scramble to find props, scenery and costumes for each play. Dramaturges, or script doctors, roam the rehearsals, pointing out problems and helping with revisions.

By the time the lights go down for the first show at 7 p.m. Saturday, the casts have had a technical rehearsal and a full production rehearsal. The plays have been lit, costumes and props chosen, programs made up, and the show is ready to go on.

Some 22 actors make up the lively and diverse cast. New Century audiences will recognize Jarice Hanson, while 24-Hour stalwarts Bill Dwight, Matt Haas and Pat Mew will welcome newcomers Jaz Tupelo and Northampton High School senior Nora Kaye. Returning playwrights Phil O’Donoghue, Rita Bleiman and 24-Hour Theater Project founder Tanyss Martula will be joined by Paintbox Theatre’s Tom McCabe, local and New York playwright Jessica Litwak, and Northampton High graduate Molly Haas-Hooven. The directors for the project are 24-Hour veterans Tim Cochran, Mark Gaudet, Liz Foley, and newcomers No Theatre Founder Roy Faudree, August Company Co-Founder Liesel de Boor, and of course, Sam Rush.

From its debut performances in 2002, this high-energy event has consistently sold-out the house and garnered rave reviews. Plays from past 24-Hour productions have gone to other venues, such as the Boston Playwright’s Festival, the Five College Word! Theatre Festival, and the F.A.C.T. Theatre Company in New York.

There will be two shows, at 7 and 9. Tickets are $12 for adults, $10 for seniors and students. Tickets may also be reserved by calling (413) 320-3147d.

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