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## Montgomery County residents participate in the Capital Fringe Festival by Topher Forhecz

Staff Writer

The silent movie may be dead, but its theater counterpart is far from it. In "A Day at the Museum," which runs Sunday through July 23 at the Capital Fringe Festival, director Perry Schwartz uses no words to tell the story of a mother and daughter's visit to an art museum.

Within 35 minutes and without dialogue, the Silver Spring director establishes multiple plotlines along with a variety of characters.

There are eight actors altogether and they probably play 30 different characters, so there's lots of doubling," Schwartz says. Artistic director of Montgomery College's Arts Alive Theatre series, this is Schwartz's first time as a Fringe Fest participant. After responding to the festival's call for directors, Schwartz was hooked up with the show's composer, Brian Wilbur Grundstrom. The play was performed at the 2008 New York Fringe Festival and Grundstrom decided to remount the production for Washington, D.C., audiences.

Schwartz says the contemporary classical music matches the play's quirkiness.

It's a comedy ... that hopefully will make people laugh. It's pretty broad and it has a little love story," Schwartz says. It has a little touching story between a mother and daughter."

Aside from the lack of talking, another feature that sets the play apart is its setup. When the actors visit the museum, three empty frames line the stage's foreground.

What's in the frames is represented by a nude model who's upstage behind the scrim, and at certain time she assumes the pose that each of the paintings is supposed to be," Schwartz says. And we light her at certain times and the audience can understand that the pose is the painting that the characters in the play are looking at."

This willingness to explore artistic boundaries is something founder and executive director Julianne Brienza says is in line with the Capital Fringe Fest's mission.

Just to provide a place for an artist to do what they want to do without the barriers that are put in front of them," she says.

Whether it be monetary, not being able to rent a space, not being able to afford that or not being able to get chosen because a lot of things in D.C. are curated."

Beginning tomorrow and running through July 24, The Capital Fringe Fest has been presenting new and interesting works since its premiere in 2006. This year's festival will present more than 100 pieces. One of its co-founders, Brienza says the plays were accepted on a "first come, first served" basis. Most of the 11 official Fringe venues are located near the Fringe's Mount Vernon headquarters.

We're going to have seven venues on one block," she says.

Brienza has lived in Washington, D.C., since her 2003 move from Philadelphia.

While Philadelphia produces a lot of physical theater, such as clowning and miming, Brienza says one reason she created the festival was, after working in the Philly event, to discover what type of material the capital region produces.

Even after five Fringes, the verdict is still out.

Maybe it was the end of last year's festival," she recalls. I was like, 'Maybe I still don't really know.' I feel sort of odd saying that, but maybe what I've learned is that there isn't a specific thing."

Still, Brienza notes that many older texts, including Shakespeare's works, are re-imagined in the festival.

Given the region, allusions to the metropolitan area are inevitable, as is the case in Rockville playwright Jason Ford's "GS-14."

The play tells the story of Hank, a technical supervisor for the federal government. When Hank's life spins out of control, he engrosses himself in his work.

It's a drunken diving accident where he nearly loses his life, and his wife leaves him," Ford says. It's suggested in my mind [that] he has a drinking problem," Ford says.

Desperate to find meaning in his life, Hank begins neglecting certain bureaucratic stipulations in order to better engage his work. An employee of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for almost 22 years working in economics and computer programming, Ford wrote the comedy after he heard about some of these odd rules.

It was partly inspired by a supervisor telling me he just got back from supervisory training and he couldn't even tell an employee that they should clean up their desk because that's not officially part of their job, to have a clean desk," Ford says.

Ford first had the idea for "GS-14" in 2008 and refined it with the help of The Playwright's Forum, which he joined in 1997. Ford says some of the Fringe plays come out of the Forum.

This the third year "GS-14" has been part of the Fringe, but while it does poke fun at the government, Ford is quick to point out it also doesn't discredit it.

The play also shows that what the government does is important because the project they're working on in the play is a software system that would help out to aid people in case of terrorist attacks," he points out.

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With silent shows and plays poking fun at the federal government, it should come as no surprise that puppet shows are also a part of Fringe Fest.

Along with director Colin Grube and writer Danny Pushkin, Eric Brooks of Glen Echo Park's The Puppet Co. will present "Pascal's Aquarium." The show's seven puppeteers will operate nine puppets who tell the story of a socially awkward lobster as he is placed into a tank with creatures including a piranha, shrimp herd and sea horse in a high-end restaurant.

Brooks, a Rockville resident, says the show centers on the lobster learning to appreciate life, given how short it may be. "Like meeting a love interest or sort of that awkwardness that would ensue or finally realizing that you need to come out of your shell no pun intended," Brooks says.

Brooks helped Pushkin compose the music. During the show, the music will be played from a recording while the puppeteers sing. For most of these seven puppeteers, this is their first time participating in the art form. Brooks says they were chosen because of their musical theater backgrounds. Using computer software, Brooks says they created music that references funk bands from Sly and the Family Stone to the Bloodhound Gang.

"We've been delving into so many different styles and genres of funk music though the '70s, through the early [two] thousands and tipping our hat at the sounds by hinting at their style," Brooks says.

Brooks' expectations for the wacky, tongue-in-cheek show work well into the unique range of performances on the Capital Fringe Fest schedule.

"We take you on a ride," he says.

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The Capital Fringe Fest runs today through June 24. "Pascal's Aquarium" runs Friday through July 24 at The Mountain Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church, 900 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. "A Day at the Museum" runs Sunday through July 23 at the Warehouse Theater, 645 New York Ave. NW Washington, D.C. "GS-14" runs from Saturday through July 24 at Spooky Universe the Universalist National Memorial Church, 1810 16th Street NW Washington, D.C. Entry for shows requires a one-time purchase of a \$9 button. Each show is \$17. For information visit 866-811-4111 or visit [www.capfringe.org](http://www.capfringe.org).

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