February 6, 2012: Mlive speaks with Dr. Feffer.

Department of English

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KALAMAZOO — Kalamazoo is a theater town, but is it a playwright's town?

"I really think it is," Steve Feffer, Western Michigan University professor of playwriting, said. "I've seen how the playwrights have been able to thrive here."

Created to give playwrights a boost, Theatre Kalamazoo's New Play Festival is expanding in its second year to ten participating theatres, and has added the work of community writers to that of students of Kalamazoo College and WMU. Ten new plays will be given staged readings at the Epic Theatre Feb. 11.

Event producers Feffer and Ed Menta (professor and director of theatre at Kalamazoo College) said the fest is a help for writers who need to see their works on the stage.

It usually takes money and a lot of talented people -- not to mention a supportive audience -- to get a script on the stage. New works by fresh writers don't often get a chance at a full production.

If you go

New Play Festival

Saturday Feb. 11:

11 a.m.: full length, "Take-Off" by Conor McShane, directed by Katy Copeland, presented by University Theatre.

1 p.m.: One-acts, "Tree House for Tom-Tom" by Bonnie Grooters, directed by Ada McCartney, presented by Festival Playhouse of Kalamazoo College. "Coming Attractions" by Fran Hoepfner, directed by Allison Alexander, presented by Portage Summer Entertainment Series. "Kindness of Strangers" by David Landskroener, directed by Kevin Dodd, presented by Kalamazoo Civic Theatre.

4 p.m.: 10-minute plays, "Natalie" by David Landskroener, directed by Kimberly Dunham, presented by The New Vic. "And the Name of the Killer Is..." by John Thierwechter, directed by Janai Travis, presented by Black Arts and Cultural Center. "Desserted Island" by Jason Lenz, directed by Kyle Waterman, presented by the Center Stage. "A Matter of Taste" by Bill Zorn, directed by Dann Sytsma, presented by Farmers Alley.

8 p.m.: Full length, "Revisionaries" by Jason Lenz, directed by Robert Smith, presented by Kalamazoo Civic Theatre.

Where: Epic Theatre, Epic Center, Kalamazoo Mall.

Cost: Free.
On the Web: theatrekalamazoo.org.

"That's one of the reasons for the festival, to provide the opportunity for the playwrights to see their work done and to have it worked on by different people," Menta said.

The festival won't stage full productions of the plays. Actors will do "script in hand" readings.

"They're not just sit-down readings," Feffer said. Actors will be "moving through space, you're getting a sense of how the play works in the space of the stage, and that's so vital."

A script might have a good story and dialog on paper, but a playwright needs to see how a piece works on stage, worked on by, and in front of, people who had nothing to do with the initial creation.

"It's a solitary experience, you in the room with the computer screen or blank page," Menta said. "But sooner or later it has to be in rehearsal with a director and actors, a stage manager calling the cues. And all these people are contributing to your work. Sometimes the writer may not always agree with what's happening.... But that's part of the process of theatre, it's impossible to do it by yourself."

After the plays Feffer holds a talk-back session, leading the audience, director and actors in a discussion of the work. "He's very good at that in terms of getting everybody involved," Menta said.

Feedback is a needed help for the playwright in fine-tuning the script. "The audience becomes a very important part of the process with these talk-backs," Feffer said.

The festival is part of a theatre community that is more open than most to new work, Feffer said. "This is really extraordinary and unique," Feffer said, "to see a community come together with this many theatres, to support and do work, new work, over a weekend like this, I'm not sure where else that's happening."

Posted by bethlynn at 9:38 AM