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## Smaller venues dare to be adventurous



SNAP's "Speech & Debate" looks at teens and cybersex.

Not everyone is sticking to the tried and true.

Amid a stubborn recession and flagging revenues, some arts outlets are still displaying adventurous spirits in programming for the new season.

In the theater community, smaller stages with smaller bills to pay are leading the way in taking creative risks and choosing titles new to Omaha.

The Blue Barn Theatre scheduled "Hot 'n' Throbbing" by Pulitzer winner Paula Vogel for its March slot and "Rabbit Hole" by Pulitzer winner David Lindsay-Abaire for June. Vogel's play centers on a suburban mother who writes erotic screenplays while shepherding her dysfunctional family. "Rabbit Hole" explores guilt, grief and forgiveness.

SNAP Productions and the Shelterbelt Theatre share a performance space, easing the budget pinch. SNAP's season opener, "Speech & Debate," involves three teens caught up in a cyberspace sex scandal. In March, "Execution of Justice" looks at why Dan White killed San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected city official.

The Shelterbelt, which regularly premieres new plays by area authors, offers "Warpaint" by Benjamin Graber in April and "Mountain Birds" by Maddie Radcliff in July.

SkullDuggery Productions, one of Omaha's newest troupes, has scheduled eight plays new to Omaha, featuring challenging themes. In "Dog Sees God," writer Bert Royal imagines the characters of the comic strip "Peanuts" as delinquent teens. "Almost an Evening," by Oscar-winning writer Ethan Cohen, looks at the concept of hell. Sarah Kane's "Blasted" is described as "sheer, unadulterated brutality."

The Brigit St. Brigit Theatre Co., which specializes in classics and Irish plays, opens Brian Friel's "Faith Healer" in late January, then follows it with George Bernard Shaw's 1893 play about a prostitute, "Mrs. Warren's Profession."

While the Rose Theater's anchor shows are decidedly mainstream, Artistic Director James Larson said they are often lead-ins to more adventurous or substantive scripts written for children and families. Recent examples include "The Giver" and "The Forgiving Harvest." This year, "The House on Mango Street" follows "The Velveteen Rabbit" in October.

Other titles, while not cutting-edge subject matter, are risky simply because they're not as familiar. "Escanaba in da Moonlight," by actor Jeff Daniels, opens in February at the Circle Theatre. It's a comedic look at opening day of deer-hunting season on Michigan's upper peninsula. "Almost, Maine," at the Omaha Community Playhouse, is another comedy new to Omaha, featuring romantic complications in midwinter.

University theaters might feel less box-office pressure, since their budgets are aided by tuition and taxes.

Creighton's "Hotel Paradiso," by French playwrights Feydeau and Desvallieres; Iowa Western's "Venus," the story of a South African woman by Suzan-Lori Parks; Tracy Letts' Pulitzer winner "August: Osage County" at Nebraska Wesleyan; and "Hippie Doctor," by local playwright Benjamin Graber, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The Omaha Symphony's Itzhak Perlman concert on Nov. 7 may be a safe bet, but you can't say that about the orchestra's spring concerts. On March 26 and 27, the orchestra will present the world premiere of American composer Michael Daugherty's Flute Concerto with flutist Amy Porter. The orchestra follows that on April 23 and 24 with Aaron Copland's modern masterpiece, the often-dissonant Symphony No. 3.

Visual dissonance could be the theme of the Joslyn Art Museum's first show of the season, "The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States," Sept. 26 through Dec. 13. The exhibit is devoted exclusively to the works of such contemporary artists as Will Barnet, Lynda Benglis and Richard Tuttle.

Risk, of course, is always the name of the game at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

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