

## A 24-hour play production from start to finish

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By Floyd Brandt



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Grant Olson of Montana Actors' Theatre greets the crowd at Triple Dog Brewing Co. and begins the process of dividing people up into random teams to write, rehearse and put on a play in 24 hours.

The Little Theater at Montana State University-Northern filled with laughter then quickly fell silent as plays progressed, setting a pattern of realism from a headline taken from a national newspaper during the Montana Actors' Theatre 24-Hour Play Festival.

MAT escaped from the tradition of buying well-known productions to an innovative new concept of selecting a topic or news headline giving it to a team. Team's author writes a script through the night then hands it to a director with a group of actors who put it together as a well-thought out and acted production, accomplishing this in a 24-hour period of time.

The idea came when Montana Actors' Theatre met to discuss the events and shows that they would do for the season, MAT Artistic Director Jay Pyette said.

Pyette, who has written plays put on in the past by the troupe, said, "this is the first time we have ever tried this. When we were planning our season we were talking as the artistic council, we talk about things we would like to do events and shows. Grant Olson had been involved with a 24-hour festival before, he threw the idea out there and we decided it was a great idea."

The event began Friday in Triple Dog Brewing Co. with dividing up the writers, directors and actors.

The teams were picked by a random drawing, then each drew for a topic that had to be incorporated into the script.

"It's a headline from a world newspaper. There were five different headlines," Pyette said. "We had an audience member pick it randomly then the teams and writers need to incorporate the headline into their script."

The headline picked came from the Guardian, such as, "My dad's first few months in jail were OK, then the beatings started."

As one of the writers, Pyette was up all night writing his script and was not sure how the other writers would fare on their scripts.

"When I walked into the theater and there were five writers, including myself, who are dead-tired but are excited ... with the full cast waiting for these scripts, that was truly an inspirational moment," Pyette said. "It is going to be such an interesting and enjoyable night for the audience."

Five different writers all found a source of energy inside them to write a play in a short period of time.

"It was so difficult," writer Oriah Williams said. "I was up from 8 p.m. Friday night until 7:30 a.m. this morning writing. I was up here in the sound booth. It was very tough, trying to write these personal experiences for somebody in a situation that I had never actually experienced before so I drew from research that I knew trying to make it as real as possible. I was trying to encompass all these intense things that we feel and spreading them into three people."

Writer Morgaine Olson Evans-Lomayeva said she had written creatively but never a script.



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Michelene Edwards, from left, Haley Lippy and Angela Murri act Saturday in Montana State University-Northern's Little Theatre in "Me, Myself & I," written by Oriah Williams and directed by Patrick Ulano, during the 24-Hour Play Festival put on by Montana Actors' Theatre.

"I finished at 7:35 a.m. and not all that was very productive," she said. "I spent a lot of time staring at the computer screen. I was worried that I would let them down, that I would leave the team with only three pages.

"It was a very fun process," she added. "It was very cool. I was really, really nervous. I would not want to write a hour-long play this way."

The directors and actors had from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. to learn their lines, put together a set and costumes, and make the scripts come to life.

"I have been here for eight hours, our group has been through a lot of emotion," actor Barry Brownlee said. "People are so exhausted that they can't think any more but it has been fun and we have had some laughs."

The doors opened at 7:30 p.m. and the curtain opened at 8 p.m., the first play made a mark in the Montana Actors' Theatre history book, audience members said, adding that the writing was great, the directors did a incredible job, but the actors made it come alive.

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