



Currents

THE SIDEBAR

Born on this day

- Actress Mitzi Gaynor is 78.
- Singer Merald "Bubba" Knight of Gladys Knight and the Pips is 67.
- Actress Jennifer Salt ("Soap") is 65.
- Bassist Ronald LaPread (The Commodores) is 59.
- Actress Judith Ivey is 58.
- Drummer Martin Chambers of The Pretenders is 58.
- Actress Khandi Alexander ("ER," "NewsRadio") is 52.
- Actor-comedian Damon Wayans is 49.
- Guitarist Kim Thayil (Soundgarden) is 49.
- Actress Ione Skye is 39.
- Singer Richard Wingo of Jagged Edge is 34.
- Actor Wes Bentley ("American Beauty") is 31.
- Singer Dan Miller of O-Town is 29.
- Singer Beyonce Knowles (Destiny's Child) is 28.
- Actor Trevor Gagnon ("The New Adventures of Old Christine") is 14.



Beyonce Knowles

Don't forget ...

The "Project Runway" blog continues today following the designers' third challenge. Ooooh, a team challenge. They hate those. Read all the drama by going to www.mankatofreepress.com and clicking on the Katotainment blog at the top-left of the main page.

Book news

Kennedy memoir calls Chappaquiddick 'inexcusable'

NEW YORK — Sen. Edward M. Kennedy wrote in a memoir being published this month that he made terrible decisions after the 1969 car crash that killed Mary Jo Kopechne, but said he was never romantically involved with her and was haunted by that night for his entire life. He also wrote in "True Compass" that he accepted the conclusion that a lone gunman assassinated his brother President John F. Kennedy. The memoir is to be published Sept. 14 by Twelve, a division of the Hachette book group. The 532-page book was obtained early by The New York Times and the New York Daily News. In it, Kennedy, who died last week at age 77, said his actions on Chappaquiddick Island on July 18, 1969, were "inexcusable." He said he was afraid and "made terrible decisions" and had to live with the guilt for more than four decades. Kennedy drove off a bridge into a pond. He swam to safety, leaving Kopechne in the car.

— Free Press Staff and news services

Short & sweet

First Minnesota Shorts Play Festival to premiere at Lincoln Community Center

By Regan Carstensen
Free Press Staff Writer



Minnesota State University theater student Alex Goe (left) wrote and stars in his short play "The Proper Steps to Crying."

Submitted Photos



Jacob Kempfert (right) plays a frustrated teacher in Paul Gansen's "Professor Confessions."

If You Go

What Minnesota Shorts Play Festival
When 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 11, and 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 12
Where Theater of the Lincoln Community Center, 110 Fulton St., Mankato
Admission \$8 for adults and \$5 for children ages 12 and under
Information For more information, call 345-1361 or 507-420-1881.

What started as an everyday conversation turned into the basis of a short play for Alex Coe. Instead of racking his brain for ideas, that single conversation sparked the concept for Coe's short play, which was one of 16 winners chosen to be performed in the premiere Minnesota Shorts Play Festival Sept. 11 and Sept. 12 at the Lincoln Community Center.

"(Writing a play) takes up time and emotion," said Coe, a theater student at Minnesota State University. "But the idea of someone reading it makes you want to write even more."

Coe, who's been acting since elementary school, will star in his short play, "The Proper Steps to Crying," alongside MSU dance student Katie Drietz. But it wasn't his acting abilities that won him a spot in the festival.

To be selected as a winning piece, plays could last no longer than 15 minutes — and that's about where the restrictions ended. Some short play festivals specify where they want the stories to take place, or require the plays to have certain themes. Greg Abbott, founder of the Minnesota Shorts Play Festival, said he wanted to leave the competition wide open because he wanted the very best plays.

After the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis narrowed down the entries from about 50 to 16, Abbott was left with an assortment ranging from comedies to dramas to family-friendly children's plays. The adult selections are slated for Sept. 11, while plays for all ages are reserved to be shown on Sept. 12.

"A lot of times when you have a festival, maybe (one specific) play wouldn't be appropriate for kids 12 and under," Abbott said.

Kids with shorter attention spans may have trouble sitting through full-length plays, but the festival offers six 10- to 15-minute plays set aside on their own day to help children get some exposure to theater without viewing adult content or losing interest in a long production.

Abbott came up with his own play for the children's portion of the festival, titled "PC Street." The play was inspired by how the popular television series "Sesame Street" decided to convert the Cookie Monster into a sudden fan of health food.

Long before "PC Street" had ever come to mind, Abbott penned "The Greatest Story Ever Edited" after getting hooked on playwriting through a class. He was surprised that Northfield holds the only short play festival in Minnesota and said a venue for short plays in Mankato is important for the local playwrights. With a grant from the Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council, Abbott was able to pay the winners for their work, something he said isn't typical of festivals.

"With a lot of these short play festivals, you enter and you're kind of excited if your play gets in, but you don't get anything out of it," he said. "I wanted to appreciate their good work, and that's what Prairie Lakes has helped me do."

The ability to pay winners, along with the specific all-ages day of plays, is what sets the Minnesota Shorts Play Festival apart from others. One of the family-friendly plays going to be performed will take the audience into a classroom where they're shown the difficulties of teaching.

"I wanted to take some humorous aspects of the frustrations of teachers and put them on stage," MSU student Paul Gansen said.

Gansen originally wrote "Professor Confessions" as more of a 30-minute one-act play, but was able to take away bits and pieces until the length would qualify for submission to the festival.

"Ultimately, in a short play, you need to find what is truly important in your script and trim out the excess," he said.

Whether cutting down time from a longer play or starting from scratch and working up to 15 minutes, the process is no quick task. For Abbott, the initial writing comes easy. An idea hits him, he writes everything down in a hurry, and within a couple of hours the first draft of his play has come together. The next several months of revisions are what turn such a short play into a long work in progress before a final product is ready to enter a festival.



Greg Abbott founded the Minnesota Shorts Play Festival so area playwrights would have a local venue for short plays. Two of Abbott's own plays will be performed at the upcoming festival.

LGBT places great importance on annual Pridefest

Jessica Flatequal remembers well the day she tried to reach out to an Alternative Lifestyle Office, still unsure of who she was. She was alone in her parents' kitchen, cooking macaroni and browsing the phone book, just sort of looking for an unknown something that might make her feel better. That's when she came across the listing for Alternative Lifestyle.

"Was that me? Am I that?" she wrote in a recent essay. "I wasn't really sure what 'that' was, but I knew 'that' wasn't a good thing."

She dialed the number but hung up right away. At the time, she just wasn't ready. Eighteen years later, through what she calls a miracle of faith, she is the one answering those calls from scared and isolated gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who don't know where to turn.



AMANDA DYSLIN
Free Press
Features Editor



"The stories, the fear, the isolation, the anger, the terror and anxiety — it all sounds eerily familiar," she said. "My tummy hurts every time (the phone) rings."

Flatequal receives calls from people of all ages: a 40-year-old caring for her elderly mother who feels like a sinner and a deviant; a friendless 15-year-old called fag-got every day at school; a 65-year-old who doesn't even know the real meaning of the words "lesbian" or "gay," but on that day, she decided to tell someone how she feels, who she is.

If You Go

What South Central Minnesota Pride festival
When Next Friday, Sept. 11 through Sept. 13
Where Various places in Mankato (see accompanying column) For more information, call 351-7004 or e-mail festival@scmnpride.org.

Flatequal put it best. It's very difficult to be different. The LGBT community feels that way every day, which is why the annual Pridefest, in its eighth year, is so important. The festival kicks off next Friday, Sept. 11, and ends Sunday, Sept. 13.

"Pridefest is a special moment in a very long, very heterosexual

year," she wrote. "No matter how 'out' you fashion yourself to be, not a day goes by where you aren't reminded that you are a little bit different, a little bit less than, a little bit queer."

"Finally, on this special weekend, in this special moment, we find a place where we get to feel completely special, practically equal, and awesomely queer."

And, of course, they get to celebrate. Allies, as always, are welcome to help do so.

Here are a few highlight events:

- Queeraoke party, next Friday night, Pub 500, 500 S. Front St.
- Run with Pride, a 5K run or 1-mile walk, 9 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, Sibley Park, \$20, registration required.
- Parade on Riverfront Drive, 11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 12.
- Pride Festival, noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, Sibley Park.



File photo

Jessica Flatequal tapes a Pride parade several years ago.

- Dance, 8 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, Morson Ario VFW, \$5.
 - Pride Breakfast, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 13, Pub 500.
- For more information, visit www.scmnpride.org.