

CALENDAR



Photo by Stacey Bock

Downtown's Padua Connection

Kali Quinn, Bill Celentano and Daniel A. Stein rehearse *Clown Show for Bruno*, one of two new plays by Murray Mednick that will debut at Art Share L.A. this week. The Mednick festival continues through April 19.

Art Share Presents Three Works by Influential Playwright Murray Mednick

BY ANNA SCOTT
STAFF WRITER

The organization Art Share L.A. made a splash in the Downtown Los Angeles theater scene last summer with *A Thousand Words*. The production of nine short plays was based on works by nine visual artists, ranging from paintings to sculpture to even an urn.

This week, the Arts District-based organization is set to draw theatergoers to an unlikely venue again, as it partners with an acclaimed playwright for a trio of works. Audiences may end up as surprised as the writer, who last week had not seen at least one of the pieces in its entirety.

The lineup, which continues through April 19, is called *New Works* by Murray Mednick. It includes two new stage plays, *The Destruction of the Fourth World* and *Clown Show for Bruno*, and a film version of one of Mednick's previously produced plays, *Girl on a Bed*.

Padua Playwrights, Art Share's resident theater company, plans for the Mednick fest to be the first in a series of annual tributes to playwrights associated with Padua.

Mednick founded Padua in 1978 and served as its artistic director for years. For a time, the organization was a major force in the local theater scene and produced playwrights including Sam Shepard, David Henry Hwang and John Stepping.

Mednick's work has garnered two Rockefeller Foundation grants, a Guggenheim fellowship and countless accolades. Though he no longer runs day-to-day operations for the company, Padua still produces his work.

"Mednick and Padua are both major forces in L.A. theater because they're a major part of its history," said former *L.A. Weekly* theater editor Steven Leigh Morris. "Mednick's Padua Hills Playwrights Festival, held every summer in the foothills above Claremont, drew critics and audiences from across the region from 1978 to 1995. The festival was a model of new play development that featured a kind of poeticism, creativity and linguistic rigor that offered a direct challenge to traditional sensibilities and the plays they engendered."

Padua came Downtown more than a year ago to partner with another nonprofit entity, the Los Angeles Downtown Arts District Space. The organizations planned to set up a community arts center as part of the One Santa Fe development, a proposed mixed-income project.

With no recent movement on One Santa Fe due to the current recession, however, Padua reached out last year to Art Share. The organization, which operates out of a converted two-story warehouse on Fourth Place, offers art classes for children and teens in various mediums and houses a 99-seat theater, a gallery, a computer lab, an art studio, classrooms

and 30 residential lofts for low-income artists.

"We wanted an interim place to begin to establish the kind of work we want to do," said Padua Artistic Director Guy Zimmerman. "So we talked to Art Share and they were a natural partner for us, and we formed a partnership where we would be the resident theater company."

Destruction and Invention

Destruction of the Fourth World, the first of the new works to take the Art Share stage, debuts this Thursday. It is the most challenging of the pieces to mount.

The play is written in a style close to verse, with no stage directions or costume specifications. The surreal story revolves around a Native American mythological trickster known as Coyote and his accomplice, a 13-year-old boy from a dysfunctional Jewish family, as they prepare for the end of the world.

"That play began as an exercise, really," said Mednick.

The production, Schultz noted, is a homecoming of sorts for Zoo District. The company was born 12 years ago in a nearby loft and then moved to Art Share, where it produced a handful of shows before shifting to Hollywood about nine years ago.

Early last week, Mednick had not yet seen Zoo District's version of *Destruction* in its entirety, but he caught a snippet when he accidentally walked in on a rehearsal.

"It's not what I would do," he said of the company's take, "but it's interesting."

Stage and Screen

Clown Show for Bruno, directed by Zimmerman, begins at Art Share this Friday. The play premiered last year in workshop form at an Atlanta theater, and the same actors who performed there will also appear at Art Share.

The play is Mednick's tribute to Polish writer and artist Bruno Schulz, who was murdered in 1941 in an act of revenge against a

Nazi officer who had protected, or "owned," Schulz.

"He died a very unusual death," said Mednick. "When I wrote it, I was having a tremendous amount of empathy toward him. I felt like I was writing with his voice, in a way. There are several levels to it, but it's basically a biography, an homage to Bruno Schulz."

Clown Show and *Destruction*, Mednick said, deal with similar themes of Jewish life and loss of memory.

The final piece of the festival is a film version of Mednick's play *Girl on a Bed*, about a high school girl involved with pornography and drugs. The film, also directed by Zimmerman, will open at Art Share at 10 p.m. on Saturday.

"It was an experiment," said Mednick. "If you're going to see a movie, it's not quite a movie, and if you're going to see a play it's not quite a play either."

The playwright is looking forward to seeing his works come alive as much as anyone else who will be in the audience. He said Art Share provides the ideal venue for the plays.

"I like the space," he said. "It's just the right size and has the right perspective; the actors are not too far away or too close. The space is perfect for those plays."

New Works by Murray Mednick runs March 26-April 19. The Destruction of the Fourth World opens Thursday, March 26, with performances Thursdays at 8 p.m.; Fridays at 8 p.m. except March 27; Saturdays at 5 p.m.; and one Sunday performance at 8 p.m. on March 29. Clown Show for Bruno opens Friday, March 27, at 8 p.m. with remaining performances Saturdays and Sundays at 8 p.m., except Sunday, March 29. Girl on a Bed and Other Films opens Saturday, March 28, and screens every Saturday night at 10 p.m. Art Share L.A., 801 E. Fourth Pl., (213) 625-1766 or paduaplaywrights.net. Contact Anna Scott at anna@downtownnews.com.



Mike Lion, Kelly Van Kirk, Michael Shanus Wiles and Laura James in *Destruction of the Fourth World*, Mednick's play dealing with a Native American trickster and a 13-year-old boy readying for the end of the world.

"There were no characters. I was just writing voices and trying to keep it one line at a time, like metrical poetry, and it just blossomed and bloomed into this whole play."

The nonprofit theater ensemble Zoo District, known for blending theater with music and dance, is producing *Destruction* and seems to be taking free reign with the material.

"It's a difficult play because the way he wrote it was more poetic than linear," said Zoo District's Kristi Schultz, co-director of *Destruction*. "Certain themes Murray has put in the play, we take and say, 'What can we do with that?' We've put a lot of fun elements to counterbalance the heavy-duty message of the text."

Those elements include a farcical physical comedy sequence, an additional actor to take on the mute role of a dead character and a lot of dance-like choreography.