

Women Playwrights Series in Hackettstown spotlights top talent, diversity

Written by Bill Nutt Correspondent
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'In the Car with Blossom and Len' by Joni Fritz, above, is described by Rust as a 'hilarious' tale of families and misunderstandings. / FILE PHOTO

WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS SERIES

WHEN: April 16-30 **WHERE:** Edith Bolte Kutz Theatre at the David and Carol Lackland Center, Centenary College, 715 Grand Ave., Hackettstown **TICKETS:** Donation for staged readings; free for writing workshop, but reservations are strongly recommended **INFORMATION:** 908-979-0900 or www.centenarystageco.org **7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 16:** "Fata Morgana" by Mary Humphrey Baldrige **7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 23:** "In the Car with Blossom and Len" by Joni Fritz **10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 26:** Writing workshop, led by John Pietrowski, founder of Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, **2 p.m. Sunday, April 27:** "How Water Behaves" by

Sherry Kramer **7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 30:** "Cygnus" by Susan Soon-He Stanton **10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 26:** Writing workshop, led by John Pietrowski, founder of Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey,

In 1993, the organizers of Centenary Stage Co. in Hackettstown decided to institute a series of staged readings of plays written solely by female authors. That first year, the audience averaged about six people per show.

What a difference 22 years make. The Women Playwrights Series (WPS) has developed an impassioned following among men and women. Each reading draws as many as 100 people.

"To get that many people out on a cold, rainy Wednesday evening is remarkable," says Catherine Rust, general manager of Centenary Stage Co. and program director for WPS.

Rust says that the quality of attendees is even more impressive than their numbers. She relates that the visiting authors have come to value the feedback, the insightful questions, and the constructive criticism of Hackettstown audiences.

What is more, some of the plays that premiered at WPS have taken on their own life. Two works that debuted in Hackettstown in recent years — "The Unfortunates" and "The English Bride" — were staged as full productions in New York City in the past year.

Rust believes the respect that these plays have received underscores the fact that WPS is not for women only.

"A lot of women playwrights want to be known simply as playwrights," she says.

Centenary Stage Co. is now gearing up for the 2014 series, which Rust describes as a typically diverse line-up of works. They consist of four readings:

- **“Fata Morgana”** by Mary Humphrey Baldrige focuses on a feisty 60-year-old who foils an armed robbery. In the ensuing publicity, the woman and her adult daughter find themselves confronting a long-buried family mystery, resulting in a surprise ending.
- **“In the Car with Blossom and Len”** by Joni Fritz is described by Rust as a “hilarious” tale of families and misunderstandings. “I was laughing as I was reading it,” Rust says.
- **“How Water Behaves”** by Sherry Kramer is a farcical but poignant comedy that touches on a number of timely issues, not the least of which is raising a family on a limited budget. “It’s about how a white lie can spin out of control,” Rust says.