

SPOTLIGHT

Theater

Seven plays to catch in San Francisco during April

By Jean Schiffmann | Special to The Examiner |

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We Players presents “Adventures with Alice,” an immersive walk through Golden Gate Park.

Lauren Matley

April starts right off with plays from The City’s two venerable LGBTQ theaters — Theatre Rhinoceros and New Conservatory Theatre Center — followed by a world premiere at Cutting Ball Theater, one of San Francisco’s most experimental companies, and the literary troupe Word for Word’s return at last after the pandemic hiatus.

Our flagship company, American Conservatory Theater, presents the follow-up to “Vietgone” at its second stage, The Strand; those zany kids at Killing My Lobster perform in a new location now that the Tenderloin’s PianoFight has, sadly, closed down; and, in We Players’ mile-long, immersive walkathon at Golden Gate Park,

we follow Alice through Wonderland.

'The Rita Hayworth of this Generation'

Local LGBTQ theater queen Tina D'Elia embodies a whole collection of queer Latinas in this solo show that premiered at the Fringe Festival in 2015 and is brought back by Theatre Rhinoceros. It's all about fictional Hayworth fan and aspiring movie star Carmelita Cristina Rivera and her escapades in Las Vegas.

April 6-23. Theatre Rhinoceros, 4229 18th St., San Francisco. Tickets \$12.50-\$25. <https://therhino.audience1st.com/store>

'Locusts Have No King'

Meanwhile, across Market Street, New Conservatory's production of J. Julian Christopher's quasi-comedy is of a different stripe entirely. In it, two closeted gay couples meet for dinner. But that's just for starters. The title is from the Book of Proverbs, so that's a hint that there are layers of stuff going on here, including complicated relationships and a shared secret among the four men. Richard A. Mosqueda directs.

April 7-May 14. New Conservatory, 25 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco. \$25-\$65. (415) 861-8972. nctcsf.org

'Home'

Word for Word does something almost no theaters nationwide do, which is to stage literary works — usually short stories — verbatim and quite elegantly, complete with all the “she saids.” Sometimes the actors even cleverly embody inanimate objects. In George Saunders' short story “Home” (published in the New Yorker in 2011), a young man returns from war in the Middle East to an unhappy homecoming. Directed by Word core company member Sheila Balter, the play is funny and dark; the eight-member cast of terrific actors includes longtime local star Robert Ernst.

April 8-29. Word for Word, Z Below, 470 Florida St., San Francisco. \$5-\$60. zspace.org/wfw-home

'Poor Yella Rednecks'

Qui Nguyen's “Vietgone” was a hit for American Conservatory Theater in 2018. Now the playwright is back with the followup to that tale of a Vietnamese family that emigrates from Saigon to rural Arkansas during the Vietnam War. This one – the second in a trilogy based on the playwright's own family – is set in 1981 and includes hip-hop, martial arts and plenty of comedy. It's directed by Jaime Castañeda; local favorites Jomar Tagatac and Will Dao are among the eight-member cast.

March 30-May 7. American Conservatory Theater, The Strand, 1127 Market St., San Francisco. \$25-\$60. (415) 749-2228. act-sf.org

'Exhaustion Arroyo: Dancin' Trees in the Ravine'

From Vietnamese to Latinx culture: Playwright W. Fran Astorga's trilingual (Spanish, Spanglish, English), queer/trans/BIPOC "psychedelic comedy" follows three friends on an adventure in the Santa Cruz mountains, 'shrooms included. It features commedia dell'arte archetypes, clowning and a telenovela structure. A Cutting Ball/In the Margin coproduction, it's enhanced with original music by Jesse Sanchez. The author co-directs it with R. Réal Vargas Alanis.

April 13-May 21. Cutting Ball Theater, EXIT on Taylor, 277 Taylor St., San Francisco. \$15-\$35. (415) 525-1205. boxoffice@cuttingball.com

'Mythed Opportunity'

From Cutting Ball's psychedelic comedy to Killing My Lobster's sketch comedy (about that nonsensical company name: don't ask): The longtime troupe opens the season at its new Dogpatch venue with a folkloric-themed show. (A good indicator of giggles to come: The title sounds surprisingly funny when you say it out loud.) It's a series of mythical creation stories from various cultures, complete with goofy jokes. Also: mermaids. Head writer is Ela Banerjee; Nikki Meñez directs a five-member cast.

April 20-May 6. KLM, Little Boxes Theatre, 1661 Tennessee St., San Francisco. \$16.50-\$50. killingmylobster.com

'Adventures with Alice'

Ahem, speaking of nonsense and lobsters, the Lobster Quadrille ("Will you walk a little faster? said a whiting to a snail/There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.") may or may not be part of the rhyming gobbledygook on this literary trek West to East through Golden Gate Park, created by the wonderfully imaginative We Players. You'll follow that prim missy Alice as she chases the perennially latenik White Rabbit in company founder/director Ava Roy's new show; she conflated sections of Lewis Carroll's children's classic "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865) and "Through the Looking Glass" for this immersive walkabout. Along the way you and Alice encounter such oddballs and contrarians as the Mad Hatter, Humpty Dumpty, the imperious Queen of Hearts (ever so fond of shrieking "Off with her head!") and more. As Alice says, it's all "curiouser and curiouser."

April 27-May 20. We Players, park stables to Portals of the Past, Golden Gate Park. \$20-\$65. weplayers.org

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