

# 48hills

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## Arts Forecast: Raise your tankards high for Drunk Theatre

*Plus: Bay Area Gallery Weekend, SF Drag King Contest, Wolf Eyes, seaweed foraging, Wata Igarashi, more to do*

By Marke B.



Próst!

“The drinker can get totally out of control. We’ve had a cast member straight-up fall asleep in the middle of the show. We’ve had to force-feed the drinker tacos at intermission because they hadn’t eaten before the show. Another time we had all the cast members drink except for one, and the show was nearly incomprehensible,” laughs Ryan Crowe of uniquely tipsy-based improv show Drunk Theatre (Sat 5 at Z Space, SF, tickets here).

“But when it works, and we tell a fully formed, fun, and exciting story, the audience walks away with their minds blown. How in the heck did they do that? And with a drunk person? The best compliment we can get is when someone asks if we are lying about the show being improvised.”

The concept of the show is simple as a gimlet: Drunk Theatre troupers take the stage to improvise an elaborate play—but one of them must down several shots of whiskey in quick succession first. “We have

a wheel with our faces on it,” explains Crowe. “An audience member who is either chosen at random or who has paid a little extra to be in the ‘Director’s Chair’ comes down and spins the wheel. Whoever it lands on has to take five shots of not good whiskey. The low quality of the whiskey makes for a better show, because it’s funnier when the performer starts to experience their challenge immediately.”

The Drunk Theatre troupe was formed by comedy renegades who wanted to tackle long-form narrative improv, a challenging form which creates entire plays on the spot, and which didn’t previously exist in SF in the way the troupe’s founders envisioned it. “We knew what we wanted to do, but then came how to get butts in the seats,” says Crowe. “Our first few shows we tried a basic theater themes like ‘Merely Players,’ and ‘All The Men and Women,’ and ‘One Night Only.’ Like most improv shows, our audiences were somewhat small.

“So we got together and brainstormed: What concept is immediately recognizable and intriguing? At this time, Drunk History was a YouTube show that had moved to Comedy Central, and was experiencing peak popularity. We simply said, what if we just call ourselves Drunk Theatre? The concept is simple, fun, and already had an easy-to-make association in mainstream comedy. Unfortunately, no spiked tankards were involved (well, at least not at that first meeting).”

Despite its intoxicated premise, Crowe says, “we have spent an incredible amount of time learning about story structure and the philosophy of narrative from coaches and experts. So the plots might be unusual, but they are at the very least cohesive and check all the boxes that a story needs in order to be considered a story. But they do get weird....” I asked him for some sample plots:

A neighborhood couple suspects that their new neighbors are Russian spies, and they mean to expose their secret at a block party. However, the existential and practical threat of a dog that never stops giving birth undermines everyone’s plans.

A combination werewolf-wolverine teenager is going through puberty while trying to navigate high school and ends up succumbing to their natural instincts and ruining prom by eating everyone.

An aristocratic English family that has fallen on hard times is relying on their daughter to marry into a good family, to increase their social standing. They plan a feast for her to make her societal debut. However, she wants to run away and join a band of murderous pirates to sail the seven seas. To make her escape she makes rolls for the feast with gluten which, of course, leads to the death of everyone in attendance.

“You know,” says Crowe, “typical storytime fare.”

Drunk Theatre once made its home at the late, lamented PianoFight, but is now roving (and there’s even a Drunk Theatre LA). Besides this Saturday’s Z Space appearance, you can follow them here.

#### MORE EVENTS OF NOTE

**THU/3-SUN/6: BAY AREA GALLERY WEEKEND** Performances, curatorial tours, lectures, screenings and drinks—free to the public all weekend long at some of the Bay Area’s best art galleries, courtesy of the Art Dealers of America Association. May I recommend the fabulous kickoff performance from dancer-artist-writer Monique Jenkinson (pictured) at 7pm on Thursday at Catharine Clark Gallery? Various locations and times, [complete schedule here](https://48hills.org/2023/08/arts-forecast-raise-your-tankards-high-for-drunk-theatre/).

**THU/3-AUGUST 26: “SWELLS” AT THE AUDIUM** I am loving the incredible new programming at the Audium, opening up the legendary immersive sound space to further experiments, while also resurrecting some of founders Stan Shaff & Doug McEachern’s original compositions. “Swells” by local artist Ben Voisey is a new 176-speaker sound installation in pitch darkness, which “specifically explores the sounds of Audium itself: the hum of the breaker box, the phasing pulse of the equipment cooling fans, door hinges, water pipes, and how the exterior sub-audible sounds of traffic make the building shake at times, creating an almost wave-like sound.” Every Thu/Fri/Sat at 7pm, Audium, SF. More info here.

**FRI/4: SUBATOMIC SOUND SYSTEM** The Brooklyn based touring band for Jamaican dub and reggae inventor Lee “Scratch” Perry (1936-2021) and producers of the acclaimed 2017 album “Super Ape Returns to Conquer,” which reimagined Scratch’s 1973 classic “Super Ape,” swoop into town for a blow out show. And hey, you can win free tickets! 8pm, Sweetwater Music Hall, Mill Valley. More info here.

**FRI/4: WATA IGARASHI** Some DJs mix tracks, others create whole new worlds from building blocks of unique sounds. Japanese techno wizard Wata Igarashi will wear out your feet while leaving you wondering, “How did he do that?” 9pm, F8, SF. More info here.

**FRI/4-AUGUST 26: “WHAT REMAINS”** “What Remains is an exhibit that takes the remnants and discarded debris from SF’s 2023 Pride Parade and challenges local artists to transform them into original works of enduring art—with 100% of the proceeds going to support mental health services for queer people by queer people.” Artists include some of my faves: Jamil Hellu, Marcel Pardo Ariza, Jason Mecier, Leonard Reidelbach, Nat Saia. Opening Fri/4, 5pm-8pm, Schlomer Haus Gallery, SF. More info here.

**FRI/4—AUGUST 19: “QUEERSTORY: FORGOTTEN FIGURES FROM QUEER HISTORY”** Left Coast Theater Company brings lesser-remembered queer figures from the past into full view with these dramatizations of lives like Albert Cashier, Billy Haines, and Annemarie Schwarzenbach, all by local queer playwrights. 7:30pm, Phoenix Theater, SF. More info here.

**SAT/5: TIDAL TREASURES: FORAGING FOR SEAWEED** Naturalist Tanya Stiller guides you through the sensual wonders and ethical harvesting techniques of feather boa kelp, rockweed, and black pine seaweed on a secluded beach near SF’s Fort Point. 7:30am, Fort Point, SF. More info here.

**SUN/6: 27TH ANNUAL SF DRAG KING CONTEST** Dapper Dans, mustachioed machos, ride ‘em cowboys, and lucky Lotharios grace the stage as they attempt to win your heart at this very SF version of “The Bachelor” that turns a spotlight on the drag kings. The inimitable Fudgie Frottage and Sister Roma host, with special guest star Tenderoni. 7pm, Oasis, SF. More info here.

**SUN/6: WOLF EYES** “Bizarre,” “otherworldly,” “disturbing,” “intense”—this Detroit experimental noise/rock outfit ticks a lot of my boxes. They’re here with Bill Orcutt, a legend of avant-garde guitarwork, who lately has been delving into polyrhythmic syncopation with his own Cracked computer music software. 8:30pm, Thee Stork Club, Oakland. More info here.

**MON/7: DARK ALLEYS** Goth vibes and bowling—they’re an unlikely pairing (unlike, say, skinheads), but this party should melt even the darkest hearts with strikes and spares. DJs Tom Axe, Zlaya, Polly Eurethane, and Starr Noir set an eerie mood at Mission Bowling Club with industrial/synth/darkwave tunes every first Monday of the month. 6pm-10pm, Mission Bowling Club, SF. More info here.