

'Stories With Purpose': Five new American plays to be premiered at Contemporary American Theater Festival in July

CATF board member Lisa Younis reads a portion of "Did My Grandfather Kill My Grandfather?" in The Church on March 26. Tabitha Johnston

SHEPHERDSTOWN — The Contemporary American Theater Festival (CATF) shared a sneak peek into its upcoming season, in The Church (304 East German Street in Shepherdstown) on Wednesday night.

According to Artistic Director Peggy McKowen, the plays being featured at the Shepherdstown-based festival will center around the theme, *"Stories With Purpose."* Five new American plays will be premiered, this coming July: *"Did My Grandfather Kill My Grandfather?"* by Cody LeRoy Wilson, *"Happy Fall: A Queer Stunt Spectacular"* by Lisa Sanaye Dring, *"Kevin Kling: Unraveled"* by Kevin Kling, *"Magdalene"* by Mark St. Germain and *"Side Effects May Include . . ."* by Lisa Loomer.

Selections from each of the plays were performed for the audience by local actors and CATF board members.

CATF board member and retired opera singer David Rampy and Roving Peregrine Theatre Company member Chris Leatherman kicked off the evening, with a selection from *"Happy Fall: A Queer Stunt Spectacular."*

"Our stunt specialist is a fire, wire high-fall specialist. He is coming to work on this show with us, along with a stunt coordinator and an intimacy director — that makes up our fight team. We're actually doing rehearsals for three days, before we start rehearsals on the play, to just have stunt

bootcamps," McKowen said, noting this will make the play unique from any CATF has previously featured. "So, you've got to come and see the show! It's got stunts, it's got video, it's got puppets and it's a great love story between these two men, who are stunt performers in Hollywood."

CATF board member and retired opera singer David Rampy performs a scene from "Happy Fall: A Queer Stunt Spectacular," during the Shepherdstown Sneak Peek in The Church on March 26. Tabitha Johnston

CATF board member Lisa Younis then took to the microphone, to read a monologue from *"Did My Grandfather*

Kill My Grandfather?: An Unlikely Vietnam War Story." The play, about a blended Vietnamese family moving to West Virginia, was particularly appropriate for her to perform, McKowen noted, as it tells a similar story to Younis' own.

"I'm really excited that we're able to produce this show! The play is very autobiographical, which is one of the reasons that we didn't ask an actor to come in and read it," McKowen said, mentioning she is pleased to be able to highlight a work by a West Virginia native and WVU alumnus who has found success in the Washington, D.C. and New York City theater worlds. *"I'm so glad that we could showcase the talent that is part of West Virginia!"*

For the third play featured at the Shepherdstown Sneak Peek, *"Magdalene,"* an audience member was invited to volunteer to read one of the parts. The selected audience member, Roving Peregrine Theatre Company member Ryan Perry, joined actress Rona Mensah to perform a scene between Peter and Mary Magdalene.

"I do want to say, he was not a ringer!" McKowen said of Perry. *"We did have one planted, but we didn't need to use him when Ryan volunteered!"*

The fourth play, *"Side Effects May Include . . .,"* featured a scene performed by two former and current CATF board members. Several things combined together make this play

a delightful addition to the coming season's play lineup.

Roving Peregrine Theatre Company member Ryan Perry, left, performs a scene from "Magdalene" with actress Rona Mensah, during the Shepherdstown Sneak Peek in The Church on March 26. Tabitha Johnston

"This is by a playwright who was with CATF, in our very first season," McKowen said, mentioning that this play is unique, in that it is somewhat autobiographical about the playwright's son's scary experience with medication side effects. *"She's back, and we're very excited about that!"*

The final play featured in CATF's coming season, *"Kevin Kling: Unraveled,"* will be performed by its playwright, who has a longstanding friendship with fellow storyteller Adam Booth, of Shepherdstown. Because of this connection, Booth was asked to interview Kling via a video call, about the play. The two talked about the challenges Kling has experienced, due to some birth defects and the loss of the use of one arm, after a motorcycle accident.

"Every artist comes at their world with a perspective. I think that's why we're artists — we bring a unique perspective to this world," Kling said, mentioning his need to feel a sense of belonging in a world not made for people with disabilities, has driven much of his work. *"With some of the things that I have lived through and gone through, in my travels, I think I have something important that I can share with people."*

Individual tickets to the CATF 2025 season range from \$40-\$70. Packages of three or five mainstage performances range from \$174-\$300. Tickets can be purchased online at catf.org or by calling the box office at 681-240-2283.

Shepherdstown resident Adam Booth, bottom, interviews fellow storyteller Kevin Kling about his play, which will premiere at CATF this July, during the Shepherdstown Sneak Peek on May 26. Tabitha Johnston