

Three for Three

The Berkshire Fringe Festival is on its way to becoming a fixture of the summer arts scene. This year, energetic co-directors Sara Katzoff, Timothy Ryan Olson and Peter Wise unveil their third annual festival, which runs from July 17 through August 5 at Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington, Mass. On offer? Three weeks of six shows, plus special events including a staging of Suzan-Lori Parks's *365 Days, 365 Plays*—by Katzoff, Olson and Wise's own production company, Bazaar Productions—and readings of new works by local young writers from a brand-new playwriting mentorship program called EarlyStages.

Though there's no strict "through-line" in this year's program, says Katzoff, all of the shows selected represent different kinds of journeys—which result from, and result *in*, looking at things in a different way. This is certainly true of *Recitatif*, a poetry, song, movement and spoken word piece that is slated to run from July 31 to August 3. The title is taken from Toni Morrison's only published short story, and it uses that story as a jumping-off point, says director Adrienne Mackey. The play *Recitatif* stars two young actresses, Audrey Pernell and Felicia Leicht, and evolved from a set of stories inspired from their own experiences. The play premiered in Philadelphia at the Community Education Center earlier this spring.

Issues of race are threaded throughout—Pernell is African American and Leicht is of Italian and Lebanese heritage—but the identities and experiences of the two characters overlap and are deliberately left in flux. *Recitatif* imagines that the two women are childhood friends who meet in an African-American art museum in Philadelphia and flash back to their younger years. The play unfolds as a series of non-linear, expressive vignettes. Nothing is resolved or "fixed," says Mackey, noting that a recitatif in opera is the portion of the work that comes before an aria. "The recitatif sets the stage for the emotional catharsis moment," she says. "In the play, that moment is withheld—you don't get the release." What you do get is a searching look at friendship, race and identity, and the delicate intertwinings of all three. [413-320-4175] —A.M.



Audrey Pernell (l) and Felicia Leicht in *Recitatif* • Photo by Jacques-Ivan Tizieu