

Get bitten by the theatrical bug during Live Theater Week

By Molly Gilmore for The Olympian
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Free samples are a good way to get people to try something new, a marketing principle that you can see in action daily in grocery stores.

And if it works for ginger lemonade and roasted red pepper salsa, why not for Shakespeare and Brecht?

"The struggle is always to get new people in the theater," said Scot Whitney, managing artistic director of Harlequin Productions. "You can't imagine how many people have never gone to the theater at all and have a sense that theater is something for other people."

"Once people come, they see 'Oh, this is not what I thought it was' or 'This is not the bad production of something that I saw at my junior high 30 years ago.'"

That's the idea behind the Night of Free Theater, a national initiative that in Western Washington

has joined with Live Theatre Week to form a festival of free performances, open rehearsals, workshops and peeks behind the scenes.

Monday through Oct. 19 marks the fourth annual Live Theatre Week, a program started by the arts advocacy group Theatre Puget Sound to promote interest in and knowledge of theater.

And "on or about Oct. 16" is the third Night of Free Theater in Puget Sound. Free events at <http://seattleperforms.com/ltw> continue through Nov. 1.



Sweeney Todd - 2007 Live Theatre Week

Harlequin and Capital Playhouse have offered a block of free tickets for current productions as part of the festival.

The week also is a chance to visit a theater in Tacoma, Seattle or elsewhere. In fact, that's part of the reason for participating, said Stephanie Nace, marketing director at Capital Playhouse.

"The purpose of the Night of Free Theater is to attract people who don't normally attend live theater to come to a show," she said. "Or perhaps to attract people who normally see theater in Seattle to come down and give Olympia theater a try."

The event Web site offers details of free events, which include Seattle Repertoire's "Three Musketeers" on Thursday, Seattle Children's Theatre's "The Green Sheep" on Saturday, and the 5th Avenue Theatre's "The Drowsy Chaperone" on Oct. 30.

Free performance tickets must be obtained on the Web site.

Live Theatre Week includes other free events, including open rehearsals, staged readings and improvisation classes. Family Day is Oct. 18, with activities for children, including a free workshop by Whitney and "Antony & Cleopatra" cast members.

"I think it's a really great, really exciting program," Whitney said of Live Theatre Week.