



Cohen Morano and Heather Rayann in "The REM Zone" at the Blue Room Theatre.
PHOTO BY AMBER MILLER

'Mildly deranged entertainment'

Blue Room celebrates creative process with annual *Fresh Ink* one-act fest

Imagine this: You're one of three writers who've been given a week to write a 15-minute play. Each must include references to a character named Karen

by
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who is not in the play. Each also must contain a product placement of some kind, as well as the

theme song from the 1959 movie *A Summer Place*. Oh, and this: Each play will be part of a fictional serial program, *The Hand of Fate*, that requires the one-acts to have two different endings. The audience will decide which ending to use.

These were the writer prompts for the 19th annual edition of *Fresh Ink*, "the Blue Room Theatre's own celebration of theatrical creativity," as the playbill stated. I'd say "mildly deranged entertainment" would be more like it.

Take, for example, "The Collectors," written by Ken Smith (a friend and former CN&R co-worker of mine) and directed by Cohen Morano (who, along with the rest of one-act crew members, had only two weeks to bring the play to life). The "collectors" in this play are two women whose job is picking up dead bodies for transfer to a mortuary. The older of the two (played

by JJ Hunt) is a death-run rookie named Betty who is being trained by their van's driver, a younger woman played by Sam Lucas.

This set-up generates all kinds of morgue humor, with Lucas' character (she isn't named at first) having loads of fun at Betty's expense. "Don't you go all Cujo and crap," she says at one point.

The most realistic play this year was "Breakaway Chair," written by Morano and Lucas and directed by Erin Tarabini. It's centered around Rory (Mia Corrina), who has come home from attending college in England. She and her younger sister Heather (Lola Parks) have a charged relationship, and Rory's return gives rise to emotional outpourings that draw in their parents (both played by Corrina).

It turns out that Rory has dropped out of school to become a slapstick comedian, leaving her girlfriend, Karen, behind. This gives Corrina the opportunity to do some slick slapstick moves, including a pratfall caused by a banana peel.

The third play, "The REM Zone," was written by Pamela Lloyd and directed by Lucas. It features Morano as Daniel, who is plagued by nightmares and seeing a therapist (Heather Rayann, who also played Daniel's boss, his wife, Sonia, and his daughter, Jessica).

This multiplicity of characters exists because the play—or, rather, Daniel himself—moves freely between a frightening dream state and what he calls "wake fears." It seems to ask which is real and which is delusion.

One of Daniel's "wake fears" involves his daughter, who died after driving drunk and slamming into a tree and who berates him in dream time for being a bad father. Similarly, his wife wants a divorce, chiding him for being a bad husband.

For his part, Daniel wants only to return to his "summer place," where his daughter is alive, his wife loves him and he no longer is delusional. Will he get there? That, of course, is up to the audience.

Hosting *The Hand of Fate* were Lilia Chavira and CC Maher, who called themselves Cheech and Chong. With help from Martin Chavira, they developed several funny memes that popped up in the plays, including a commercial for Miso Corny breakfast cereal and another for the Savage Days of Summer camp, in which kids learn how to shoot guns, throw axes and play Russian roulette.

This annual program runs for only one weekend, but readers can assume the ink will be just as fresh for next season's 20th anniversary edition. □

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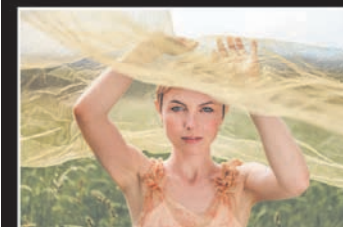
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