

Shakespeare Un-Scripted

By Paul Sinasohn

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Your show will be different.

The Un-Scripted Theater Company specializes in creating spontaneous new works for each performance using suggestions from the audience. The current production, *Shakespeare Un-Scripted*, leads the audience through what might be an early play by the Bard (or perhaps a masterpiece by his insane cousin). While not strictly Shakespearean, the play that results from the performance was set in the past. That's something when you have to juggle "tyrants," "sluts with a heart of gold," "traveling through the mountains while blind," and the ever-popular "finding your destiny."

This leads to some very interesting situations on stage, such as mountain goats (who double as spies for the duchess) that lead a blindfolded hero through the mountains to his destiny.



Alan Goy, Christian Utzman, Mandy Khoshnevisan

The performers change every night; the cast I saw was Alan Goy, Amy Keyishian, Ann Feehan, Tara McDonough, and Trish Tillman. All excel at improvising scenes, dialogue and characters. Each scene was hilarious and well put-together; the characters retained their sense of self throughout the show, even though each performer played up to four different people (or animals). Tara's depiction of a pompous old advisor to Amy's Duke was sparkling. Trish was stellar as the shrewish duchess, and Ann was spot-on with her portrayal of a drunken town floozie. Alan brought a sweet-natured goofiness to the hero's role.

The show began with an explanation of the mechanism for collecting audience suggestions (fill out your form while you wait for the house to open). Then, the players passed around the forms and read some suggestions aloud. Many were extremely funny, giving the cast much to work with. Improvisation as a genre is inherently chaotic, since there is no set path the action will take. Thus, the players must keep in mind what has happened to each character and how they relate to each other — not an easy task. A scene might begin and go as far as it can — then suddenly, it will end. The following scene may or may not be directly related to what has just transpired. That can be fun for the audience too, as you try to figure out where the players are going.

Of course, there are risks: a player may crack and begin laughing in the middle of a scene because it is too hilarious, or the audience may take on a role itself and begin playing with the cast members (our crowd was very adept at braying like goats). Or the show may lose its focus and wander off into the sunset, leaving no way to end the story that is consistent with the scenes played. Fortunately, with the players of the Un-Scripted Theater Company, that is not going to happen to you.

I encourage you to go see one of their final shows this weekend, if only so you can write in and tell us what you saw, because as with all good improv, what I saw is not what you'll get.

Shakespeare Un-Scripted plays through Saturday, Sept. 1 at the SF Playhouse, 533 Sutter Street. Tickets (\$10 to \$15) are available in advance at www.Un-Scripted.com or at the door.