

RANDOM ACTS

FROM AUGUST 14TH-30TH, hundreds of new and new-takes-on-old works will enjoy their stint in the spotlight, with as many genres as can fit into 16 days and 20-something spaces. As intriguing as the shows are, even more so are the people and processes behind them.

Librettist Mark Leydorf's and composer Michael Brennan's offering to the Fringe gods is "Citizen Ruth," the story of an aerosol huffing, unwed, soon-to-be mother and the pro-life and pro-choice groups that descend upon her in the name is What Is Right—set to music. Based on the star-studded 1996 movie of the same name, "Citizen Ruth's" road to The Minetta Lane Theatre began in Las Vegas six years ago.

"Michael and I were talking about all the movies that were being turned into musicals," Leydorf explains, "and wondered why people seemed stuck on the easiest, most commercial choices rather than the most interesting stories. I jokingly said to him that we ought to be looking for something really odd, something

by Margo Lemberger

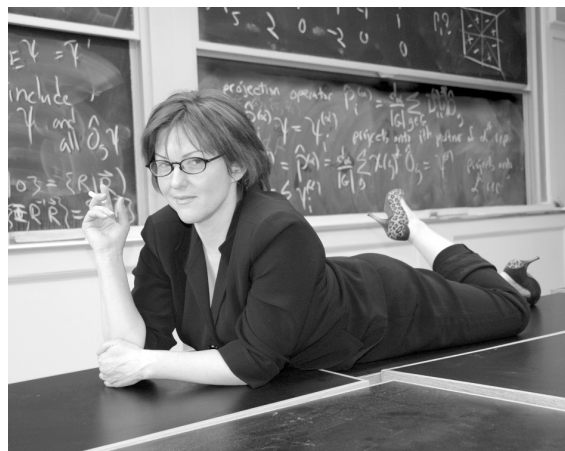
really sick, something really out there — I asked if he knew "Citizen Ruth," he hadn't seen it. Then a couple nights later he happened to stumble onto it on TV. We're both big musical theater queens, so the show is a Musical, capital M, with an overture and an entr'acte, etcetera."

The work may be farce, but it touches on deeper issues.

"It isn't really about gender politics, or even abortion," Leydorf says.

"The real story is about a person completely on the outside figuring out her role in the culture. Good satire makes us question our own role. We might dismiss the radical feminists or the far right babysavers, but we can't dismiss Ruth."

From a show that revolves around one woman to a one-woman show, "Truth Values: One Girl's Romp through M.I.T.'s Male Math Maze" is the brainchild of actress, singer and math-whiz-in-mufti Gioia De Cari. "Truth Values" recounts her experiences as a



Photographer: John Olson

Math whiz Gioia De Cari of "Truth Values"

woman in the male-dominated world of science, the associated indignities and amusing encounters with her pocket-protected peers.

De Cari says the piece was an unexpected outgrowth.

"I actually left the field of mathematics completely many years ago and never worked in it since," she says.

"I swore I would never talk about it again, but it was inescapable — every time I met someone, the subject of my education would come up, and I would be forced to mention math and that would captivate whoever I was talking to. I figured I had better just get on with it and write a show all about math so I would never have to explain my background again! There came a point, though, when it seemed to me that the whole women in science issue was so passé that I felt embarrassed to talk about my experiences."

The burning debate about women in math and science was stoked in 2005 when the current director of the White House National Economic Council stated that a woman's aptitude was likely less than that of her male counterparts.

"When Lawrence Summers made [his] outrageous remark, I figured it was my duty as an artist, a woman and a 'recovering mathematician' to speak up," De Cari says. "I kept my goal very simple — to create theatrical art out

of a personal history. But the show has also turned out to be something that speaks to the issue of the continuing under-representation of women in science and math, a topic usually reserved for scholarly conferences."

After the run at The Lafayette Theatre, "Truth Values" will continue to bridge that gap by heading back to the scene of the crime.

"I've been invited to take the show to Cambridge, MA just five minutes from MIT," De Cari says. "The performances will be paired with panel discussions and talk-backs with notable scholars on the topic of women in science."

So—beyond erudite dissection—how do these disparate disciplines co-exist onstage?

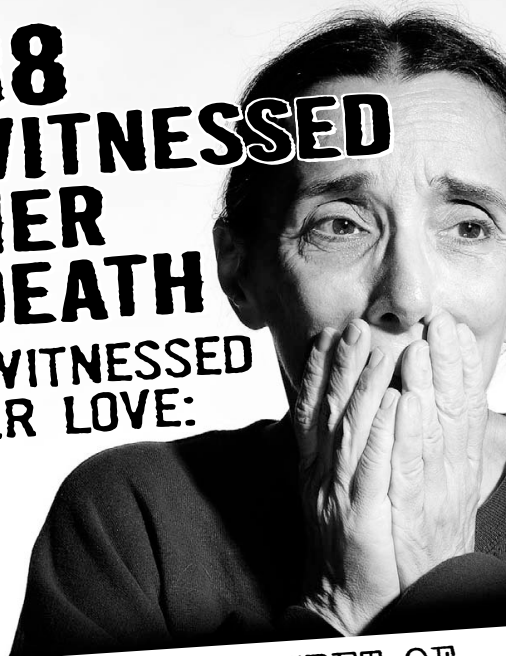
"I think performance and math are very contradictory. I make the most of that in my show, actually, these bizarre clashing sides of myself."

Sounds like perfect Fringe fodder.

"CITIZEN RUTH;" VENUE #10: Minetta Lane Theatre; Mon 17 @ 7:45, Thu 20 @ 2:45, Fri 21 @ 1:30, Sun 23 @ 10:30, Mon 24 @ 7:30

"TRUTH VALUES: ONE GIRL'S ROMP THROUGH M.I.T.'S MALE MATH MAZE;" VENUE #5: Theatres at 45 Bleecker Street — The Lafayette Street Theatre; Fri 14 @ 5, Tue 18 @ 10, Fri 21 @ 9:15, Wed 26 @ 7, Sat 29 @ 2 ■

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