The eight directors of the Cabrillo Theatre Festival.

CABRILLO THEATRE FESTIVAL
Santa Cruz County's best independent theater troupes come together at Cabrillo

{ THROUGH MAY 12 Fridays at 7:30 and 9:20 p.m. Saturdays at 2, 3:20, 7:30 and 9:20 p.m. Sundays at 2 and 3:20 p.m. Cabrillo College Black Box Theater, VAPA Complex, Cabrillo College. $10 general; $7 Cabrillo SAC holders for single performance. $18/$21 for two performances. Group rates, $80 for 10 tickets to the same show. Membership Pass, $50 for nine shows. www.cabrillovapa.com }

By WALLACE BAINES
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Technically, the various independent theater groups that call Santa Cruz County home are competitors — for audiences, for cast and crew and even for material.

But sometimes they behave like sibling organizations, each recognizing that they’re all part of the same effort — to nurture the larger theater community.

That’s the spirit behind the upcoming Cabrillo Festival of Local Theatre Groups, that opens this weekend on the campus of Cabrillo College.

The idea, said Cabrillo College theaters arts faculty member Sarah Albertson, is invite as many of the small theater companies as possible to take advantage of the beautiful new theater facilities at Cabrillo's Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) complex.

“The Crocker Theatre and the VAPA complex exist because of bond measures put before the voters in the community,” Albertson said. “And they voted yes on those bond measures, twice. So, with that in mind, we’ve always wanted to bring in the theater companies that are working in the area on campus here to work with these facilities, these set designers, this staff and faculty.”

The result is a cascade of theater productions available on the Cabrillo College campus over the next four weekends, including seven local theater companies, plus representatives of the dramatic arts of storytelling (Erica Lunn-Clark) and improv (Um...Gee...Um).

Among the highlights of the festival are the return of the long-dormant theater group Friends of Gus, which will present the comedy “Eleanor Duse Dies in Pittsburgh,” Joan Van Antwerp’s company presenting “Blackbird” by David Harrower, and Lampshade Productions’ version of William Gibson’s “Handy Dandy.”

Also part of the festival will be Woody Allen’s “Death,” directed by Cabrillo student Adam Stanton, SEETheatre’s “Turn of the Screw,” based on the Henry James novel of the same name, the Rainbow Theatre Company’s “Breath, Boom” and SideReal Theatre Company’s satire “A Contemporary American’s Guide to a Successful Marriage, circa 1989,” by Robert Bastron.

Half of the productions will be presented during the first weekends of the Festival, and half come during the second and final two weeks. All productions take place in the Black Box Theater, in the round, on the campus of Cabrillo College.