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## Theater BY ANNA GRACE



Paul Calandrino

## Theatrical Haiku

Local playwright Paul Calandrino illuminates life, ten minutes at a time

It was an article on suicide tourism that pushed him over the edge.

Paul Calandrino was your typical theatergoer until he happened upon a *New York Times* report on a peculiar growth industry — businesses that fly terminally ill people halfway around the world so they can die with dignity. Inspired, a play pushed its way out of Calandrino's imagination and onto the stage, where it swept a couple of competitions. He was hooked.

If Calandrino's work around town as a playwriting instructor and the wizard behind the Northwest Ten Festival of Ten-minute Plays is any indicator, he wants to get the rest of us hooked on playwriting, too.

But this weekend, it's all about Paul.

Trial By Fire Theatreworks is showcasing *An Evening With Paul Calandrino*, an octet of Calandrino's short plays with themes ranging from the philosophical musing of a man trapped in the mundane cubicle work world (*Cubism*) to the kidnapping of a fishmonger (*Bring Me the Head of Dufresne Fish*).

Calandrino describes ten-minute plays as haiku — broad brushstrokes illuminating a moment in time. But haiku are under no obligation to have a plot, build tension or come to a resolution. So how does Calandrino conceive and craft these quick, quirky theatrical experiences? By obsessing on concepts that collide with real events in his life, sparking the idea for a play.

Take, for instance, *Buzz Bohannon's World Famous Weed Whacker String Museum and Hall of Fame as Seen on That's Incredible!* Some years ago, Calandrino's daily walk to work took him along a path

that was frequently and liberally littered with weed-whacker strings. This niggled at him. Where did the strings come from? Were they just going to keep piling up?

The strings struck Calandrino as weird, but they didn't inspire a play until he stumbled upon Graceland Too, a low-budget tourist attraction where an odd little man with clattering dentures has stuffed his pink Mississippi house from floor to ceiling with Elvis memorabilia. At last, the weed-whacker strings had found a character worthy of their care, and a play was born.

The eight plays selected for the performance have been rehearsing separately. Directors include Alan Beck, Bailey Ellis-Wiard, Emily Hart, Richard Leebrick, Adam Leonard and TBF veteran Benjamin Newman. Calandrino says it "feels great" to see his plays in the hands of others. "Sometimes they open up a whole new interpretation of my work," he says, smiling.

I finish our interview by asking why he would pursue playwriting, a field that yields neither money nor fame. Calandrino's eyebrows draw together quizzically, and he responds with a silence punctuated by aborted answers.

It's as though I'd asked why he decided to pursue breathing. I realized that I had the equation the wrong way around. Playwriting has been pursuing Calandrino, for a long time now. This weekend we get to enjoy the results. **EW**

*An Evening With Paul Calandrino runs Thursday-Friday, Oct. 20-28, and Saturday, Oct. 29, Trial By Fire TheatreWorks at Reality Kitchen, 245 Van Buren; \$10, info at 683-1429.*

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