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Theater company to select unique locations to enhance audience experience

By [Peter Crimmins](#) · September 7, 2017



 Performers from Die Cast rehearse for "Pericles," a Fringe Festival offering at The Rotunda. (Emma Lee/WHYY)

A new theater company is debuting in Philadelphia, during the annual Fringe Festival.

This weekend, Die-Cast performed an experimental version of Shakespeare's "Pericles," in the Rotunda in West Philadelphia. The former church with a high, domed ceiling has notoriously difficult acoustics.

“The space is an instrument, itself,” said co-founder Brenna Geffers. “We are finding ways the sound and text can be used in the space in a new way.”

During a recent rehearsal, Geffers led her six performers through a series of vocal tests to sound out the space. They barked and sang and breathed and beat on furniture, while Geffers cocked her ear to the dome.

“Volume doesn’t mean better. Louder doesn’t mean clearer,” she said. “There are some very basic actor-as-athlete things: what does your body need to do to create the right sound in this space?”

Both Geffers and her co-founder, Thom Weaver, are veterans of the Philadelphia stage, Geffers as a director, Weaver as an award-winning lighting designer. They formed Die-Cast in order to work out ideas they both have about total theater — a play as a fully integrated experience of sound, light, space, and design.

“We started working together a couple years back, and found we were in agreement,” said Weaver. “We want to try to make the audience experience deeper — to get the audience into the design rather than watch it.”

“We wanted to keep doing that kind of work, but didn’t want to wait for other companies to match us together,” added Geffers.

Die-Cast was named such to be a site-specific company: actors are to be poured into a selected space like molten metal, to be shaped and hardened by that space.

One of the first things Geffers and Weaver did was write a seven-point manifesto, stating the values and goals of the new company. The performers will be collaborators. The performance spaces will be chosen to heighten the audience engagement. They will take cues from “open world” exploratory landscapes common in realistic video games.

“Our goal is in resistance to American theater,” said Weaver. “It’s passive. The experience is handed to them. We’re attempting to give the audience agency, give them challenges. Making it not so easy, more participatory.”

The founders aspire to create only original work, created inside the space where it will be performed. For their first outing, however, they are leaning on *The Bard*. “*Pericles*” is a seldom-performed work by Shakespeare, much of it taking place on a ship. After the Fringe run this

weekend, Die-Cast will take the production to Cape Cod, to the Tennessee Williams Festival, where they will perform Pericles on an actual schooner.

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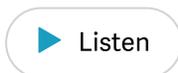
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