

> Universal Suspends Actors On Three NBC Series

Because the Writers Guild of America strike has caused a halt in production, series regulars on NBC's *Bionic Woman*, *The Office*, and *30 Rock* were suspended Nov. 15 by Universal Media Studios under the force majeure provision in their contracts. The provision, which is standard in Screen Actors Guild deals and covers the effects of a "greater force" beyond a studio's control, means the actors will receive half pay for five weeks; after five weeks, the actors can terminate their agreements. If they choose not to, the studio can keep the actors at full pay or end their deals. (*The Hollywood Reporter*)

> B'Way Talks Break Down; Strike to Continue Indefinitely

Talks between theatre producers and striking Broadway stagehands broke down Nov. 18 after two days of negotiations, and all performances at some 25 affected theatres have been canceled through Nov. 25, the League of American Theatres and Producers has announced. No new talks are scheduled. Losing Thanksgiving week—typically the second most lucrative of the theatre season—is a particularly big blow to producers. The league wants to reduce the minimum number of stagehands required to work at each show, but the union will accept the change only if the stagehands receive benefits of equal value.

> 'SNL,' '30 Rock' Take to Stage

With their programs halted by a writers strike, cast members of NBC's *Saturday Night Live* and *30 Rock* staged a pair of live performances Nov. 17 and 19 at a Manhattan improv theatre. The shows, held at the 150-seat Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre, co-founded by *SNL*'s Amy Poehler, will benefit the behind-the-scenes staffers who have lost work because of the shutdowns caused by the two-week Writers Guild of America strike. (*The Associated Press*)

> CBS News Writers Vote to Strike

In a special election held Nov. 15 and 16 in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., employees of CBS News who are members of the Writers Guild of America voted to authorize a strike against the network at any time. The employees, who include news writers, editors, desk assistants, production assistants, graphic artists, promotion writers, and researchers working in television and radio on the national and local levels, have been working under an expired contract since April 2005 and without pay raises since April 2004. Michael Winship, president of the WGA East, said in a news release that the members are willing to do "whatever it takes" to get what they "have earned and deserve."

> 'Quarterlife' to Get Second Life

NBC has picked up Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick's critically praised Internet series *Quarterlife*. The network will air the 36 eight-minute episodes of the Web series, which premiered on MySpace on Nov. 11, as a six-episode hourlong drama. The show will have a smooth transition to the small screen because it was conceived as six one-hour story arcs that were then broken into six webisodes each. *Quarterlife* will get a second window on NBC in early 2008 after it concludes its run on the Internet. (*The Hollywood Reporter*)

For more details to these stories and updates to daily news, go to www.BackStage.com

STRIKE UPDATE

AMPTP, Writers to Talk Nov. 26

Hollywood film and TV writers who've been on strike against studios will return to contract negotiations Nov. 26, their union and producers said Nov. 16.

In a joint statement, the Writers Guild of America and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers said the sides had agreed to return to formal negotiations. The statement said no other details would be released. Meanwhile, the writers, who went on strike Nov. 5, will continue on the picket line, said Gregg Mitchell, a spokesman for the guild.

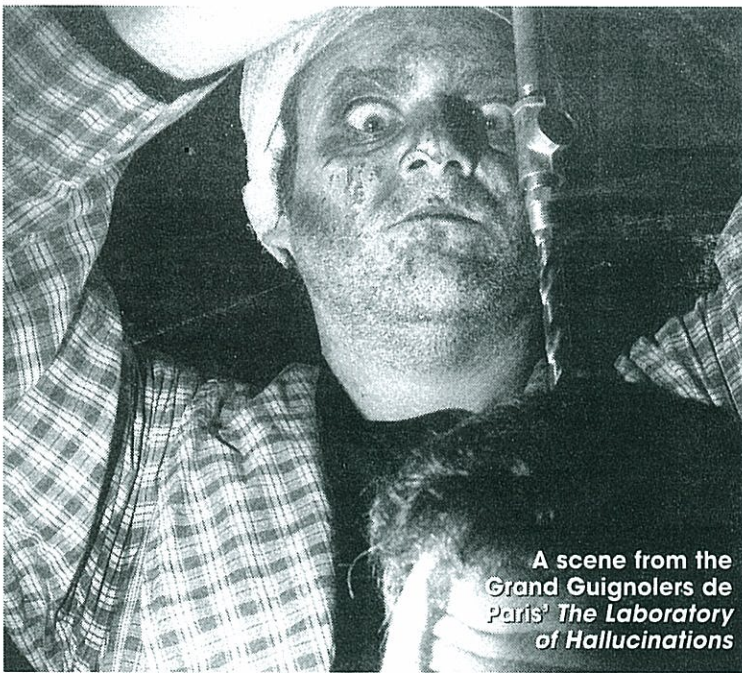
Since the strike began, late-night talk shows and several sitcoms have gone to reruns. Other shows are counting down the number of episodes they have left before running out of scripts.

Industry analysts had thought there would be enough scripts to produce shows well into January. But many shows have gone off the air at a faster pace than expected, as cast members and show runners have refused to cross picket lines.

Some writers applauded the return to talks. "That's fabulous, that's great," said Sean Jablonski, a writer for the FX drama *Nip/Tuck*. "You can't get a deal until two sides sit down and talk about it."

John Aboud, a TV writer and a strike captain, hoped the return to talks would quickly lead to a contract. "I'm delighted to see they're starting to move forward, and I hope we can wrap this thing up soon," Aboud said.

—The Associated Press



A scene from the Grand Guignolers de Paris' *The Laboratory of Hallucinations*

Let's Get Physical

L.A. Physical Theatre Festival launches.

BY NICOLE KRISTAL
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You may be thinking: "Physical theatre" is just a euphemism for "mime." But you'd be wrong. Miming can be a component of physical theatre, but the art form can also embody text-driven melodramas—such as a suspenseful horror play or a comedic farce—with strong physical elements, even clowning. The first Los Angeles Physical Theatre Arts Festival, presented by performance research and development center [via]Corpora, plans to open people's eyes about physical theatre with performances from a wide range of artists Nov. 24–Dec. 23 at the Art/Works Theatre in Los Angeles.

"We're really driven to share this work with the Los Angeles community. I think it's good timing," said festival co-producer Olga Petrakova, noting the strike by the Writers Guild of America and her hopes that it will ignite interest in non-text-driven theatre pieces. Petrakova is part of [via]Corpora, which was started by the theatre company ARTEL—the American Russian Theatre Ensemble Laboratory.

"We are a very physically driven group of artists," she said, noting that she hopes to expose American audiences to a variety of theatre beyond comedy and drama.

A Very Scary Christmas

The Grand Guignolers de Paris' *A Very Grand Guignol Christmas* will play the festival Fridays and Saturdays through Dec. 22. The Grand Guignolers (which translates to "big puppets") will present two pieces: *The Laboratory of Hallucinations*, which features a mad scientist conducting gruesome experiments on people, and *These Cornfields*, a farce about a tempestuously violent couple. Both plays were written in the early 1900s.

"They're horror plays," said *Grand Guignol* director Debbie McMahon, noting that early-20th-century theatre would often feature short horror plays alternating with farces. "They would have a doctor on hand because they would judge the success of an evening based on how many patrons fainted in the audience."

To replicate the original Grand

Guignol experience, McMahon creates the illusion that the Guignolers are an acting troupe from Paris circa 1930, touring the United States. Ushers wear elaborate period costumes; instead of headshots, portraits of the actors in costume are featured on the walls; and an absinthe fairy gives a pre-show absinthe demonstration. (Don't worry, it's all legal.) But the most visceral element of the production happens on stage, when the mad scientist removes parts of his victims' brains. At one point, a drill is driven into a character's skull.

"Then we come out and do a folies dance number, and so it has this kind of goofy quality about it," McMahon said. Of the gore, she said, "It's interesting because you really wouldn't think it would be that effective for today's audiences, but there's nothing like seeing that kind of thing right in front of you."

If seeing tongue-in-cheek blood and gore doesn't appeal, you might want to check out *Limoncello*, by Ten West, featuring clown team Jon Monastero and Stephen Simon. Their comedy routine will combine commedia dell'arte, vaudeville, and slapstick. The Ten West show runs Nov. 29–Dec. 23 on Thursdays and Sundays, followed by the Mitchel Evans Mime Project's *The Big Bang & Other Small Things*. Evans' show begins with the creation of the universe, then slowly focuses in on the minutiae of our everyday life on Earth, from heartbreak to eating caramels—all presented through mime. "I'm making fun of myself and the foibles in my own life," Evans said.

Physical theatre not only captures the magic of live performance, Petrakova said, it "strives to create something exciting and alive right in front of a live audience. It's also something so different. We have so much naturalistic theatre and text-driven theatre, and sometimes it gets a little old. This is something new."

Tickets to the Los Angeles Physical Arts Theatre Festival are \$15–\$25 and can be purchased at www.laptaf.eventbrite.com. For more information about the festival, visit www.laptaf.com, or to learn more about physical theatre arts training at [via]Corpora, visit www.viacorpora.com.

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