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## Here We Go

### **The 365 Days/365 Plays Festival takes up shop in Brooklyn**

By Jerry Portwood

Stand amongst the Le Creuset or cop a squat near the rolling pins and KitchenAid appliances and get read to take in a bit of theater. No really. Polybe Seats, the 5-year-old experimental theater company, is starting out the year by staging seven short plays in unconventional settings—like the Brooklyn Kitchen, a new kitchenware shop in Williamsburg.

It's all part of the 365 Days/365 Plays National Play Festival that's been taking place across the country since November. Oh, don't know about that? Well, turns out Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks (of *Topdog/Underdog* fame) got the notion back in November of 2002 to write a play a day for a year. And that little firebrand, she did it (the plays have since been published by Theatre Communications Group). Later, the Public Theater began taking proposals from theater companies to stage the plays around the country for an entire year. According to director Stacey McMath, Polybe Seats originally proposed doing a week of plays in the spring and hoped to stage them outdoors. When they were asked to take on the plays from the first week of the year, they had to adapt quickly. "We came up with a list of categories," says McMath. "What would it be like to perform in a store, in a church, in a bar?"

Because the group has attracted a growing audience in the Williamsburg and Greenpoint areas of Brooklyn, they stuck closer to their home base and will be performing in UnionDocs (a documentary arts collective), The Greenpoint Reformed Church, Pete's Candy Store (a bar where bands usually play) and Brooklyn Kitchen beginning January 3 and ending at the Public Theater on Jan. 7. At each location, all seven plays from Jan. 1-7 are to be performed in succession with the same actors playing everything from children to adults.

The plays themselves are a mixed bag: "Here We Go," the Jan. 1 play, has four people wearing historical hats (think Napoleon and Jackie O typical chapeux) and a fifth wearing a wig. Music is played and then there's a mad scramble as they exchange hats. There's all of six lines uttered and the entire thing is expected to take approximately three and a half minutes. "Star of India" has a master of ceremonies introducing what he thinks is a male contortionist but turns out to be the Star of Indiana, the top salesman of his group in the state. The plays do a remarkable job of

combining humor and drama with politics, race relations and gender in such short compact frameworks.

“I think of them like a short stories: a snapshot of a moment,” explains McMath. “There’s always this ending moment, a zinger at the ending. But it’s left open concerning what happens before and after ... We cast our acting company so there’s a tie made between the characters in the plays. A woman plays a child, later a full-grown woman and a midwife.”

The entirety of the seven plays, with transitions, will most likely be over in under an hour and the productions will adapt to each place in which they’re performing. While performing at Brooklyn Kitchen, the company plans on preparing cakes to coincide with the play “The Birth of Tragedy” (the Jan. 6 play), which will then be eaten at the end of the production. It’s a creative way of bringing theater to the people and interacting with them in quirky ways. Just watch out for the Henckel knives.

Jan. 3-7. For directions and information: [www.polybeandseats.org](http://www.polybeandseats.org), 212-967-7555; Thurs.-Sat. 8, Sun. (at Public Theater) 3 & 7, \$5 suggested donation. 718-782-0437; 3-6, \$15.