

# HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

## Rutgers to present works for national theater festival

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Anything can happen on the highways and byways of Central New Jersey. A motorist might languish for hours in Apocalyptic traffic. He might complete a degree in political science as he waits. He might, dare we say it, find a cure for the common cold.

Or he could see a play.

Hey, it could happen to you — especially this week in New Brunswick, as Rutgers University participates in the nationwide theater collaboration 365 Days/365 Plays. As part of the festival, Rutgers senior Dan Swern will mount a play by the roadside on Douglass campus, right around the newly designed traffic circle.

365 Plays/365 Days began in November 2002, when Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks ("Topdog/Underdog") decided to write a play a day for the next 365 days. And on Nov. 13, 2006, as part of the 365 Days/365 Plays National Festival, more than 600 theaters across the country began staging her works. The project, which will conclude on Nov. 12, is billed as "the largest collaboration in the history of American theater."

Beginning tomorrow, Rutgers, the sole New Jersey 365 Days festival participant, will present the dozen works that Parks wrote from Jan. 29 through Feb. 4. (Yes, there were days when she turned out more than one play.)

Here's how it works: Each day, one or two brief plays will be performed during daylight hours all around Rutgers University, mostly in various student centers. Then, each evening at 8, members of the Lab Theater ensemble will perform all 12 plays at the CabaretTheatre on Douglass campus. The cast — and the plays themselves — will change nightly as Swern takes a fresh approach to each work.

"A lot of them are art for art's sake," he says, explaining that some of the plays are wordless. "Some you can get a lot of meaning out of." In one play, a person talks about whom he would murder if he were forced to do so; in another, three scenes unfold simultaneously: a woman with knife and child, a digging race and a man quitting his job to watch the World Series.

Swern says the entire week's worth of plays runs just over an hour, so — never fear — this is not a nine-hour evening of Tom Stoppard's "The Coast of Utopia" trilogy or anything like that. Admission is free.

Swern, 22 and an intern at the Public Theater in New York City, says the Public's involvement in the yearlong festival inspired him to apply. The Public is organizing the New York City portion of the collaboration. More information about the festival's New York City venues and performance dates is available online at [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org).

"Because I could really see the fervor with which people approached it at the Public, I wanted to be a part of it," says Swern, who co-founded the Lab Theater group last year.

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And at Rutgers, it really is an artistic jam: Swern plans to bring together university theater students and vocalists with visual artists from the city-based art collective Albus Cavus.

"I wanted to get as much collaboration as possible," Swern explains.

Swern says he's not worried about people "getting" it.

"This is the age where we're supposed to be doing this," he says. Besides, Swern adds: "I knew I could do really cool things because the plays are so free-form."

Chances are, Parks would approve of Swern's attitude.

"I don't care what anybody says," she has said to *The New Yorker* about the festival. "Stick to the spirit of the play and you're doing it right. It's about embracing the spirit of the text instead of noodling some idea about things."