

# Support grows for safe site to inject drugs

Backers include D.A. Gascon, former TL police captain, health care alliance

BY TOM CARTER

**I**F the city creates safe injection sites, most health experts agree, it could save lives from overdosing and reduce the risk of HIV and hep C infections, two diseases that kill numbers of San Franciscans every year.

A room where addicts can inject their dope without fear of arrest and under medical supervision, using clean needles and maintaining hygiene is supported by District Attorney George Gascon, former Tenderloin police Capt. Gary Jimenez, and a coalition of major groups. The Department of Public Health has been supportive in the past, but isn't interested now because it can't fund current services let alone a new endeavor.

This compassionate, lifesaving concept, which offends some people

but excites many health and law enforcement professionals, is being shopped around City Hall. Staff of the Alliance to Save Lives — representatives from the many groups in support — say they have talked to four supervisors since January about the controversial service that no U.S. city has yet to adopt.

"We haven't found any opposition," says Laura Thomas, deputy state director of the Drug Policy Alliance, who heads the group. "And last year when George Gascon was police chief, he came out for it at a Young Democrats meeting." The Drug Alliance, with offices in five states, says it is the nation's leading organization offering alternatives to the drug war.

"Drug use is a public health problem and safe, clean sites for injection are preferable to unsafe

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**"A lot of people don't understand that we can't solve this problem through law enforcement."**

Capt. Gary Jimenez

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# CENTRAL CITY

# EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

## FRINGE 20 FESTIVAL



PHOTO BY MOLLY PECK

From New York, Tanya O'Debra's "Radio Star," a 1940s-style radio detective spoof, "only dirtier," has her voicing 10 different characters plus sound effects.

# The New York City 7

Big Apple groups see EXIT Theatre's fete as major gig on Fringe circuit

BY MARK HEDIN

**J**UST Like New York City's legendarily seedy Times Square, San Francisco's Eddy Street has its share of hustlers, hookers and have-nots. But this month, Eddy is our Great White Way for some of the Big Apple's most ambitious showbiz types. Seven stage productions from that city populate the schedule of 44 shows coming to six Tenderloin venues in the 20th San Francisco Fringe Festival.

Fringe festivals are staged worldwide, from Edinburgh, Scotland, where they started, to South Africa, in Europe and all across Canada and the United States, offering cutting-edge theater at affordable prices. The most expensive shows at this milestone year's S.F. Fringe cost \$10; several are free. The performers keep the gate.

The festivals attract itinerant showmen, young, aspiring dramaturges and everything in between. The productions are chosen by a nonjuried — indeed, random — selection process, in San Francisco's case this year, from a Tupperware container with slips of paper bearing each of more than 130 applicants' names. The resultant lineup includes something for everybody.

Of the seven shows coming from New

York, however, not one is deemed appropriate for preteens. Other shows draw the line at ages 7, 8, 10, 11½, 12, 14, 15 and 16 or simply say "not for children."

There are other guidelines for viewer interest and some shows will satisfy several categories at once. New Yorker Una Aya Osato, for instance, is bringing her solo performance, "JapJAP," which the program says involves "tearing down borders and tearing off clothes."

"JapJAP" won Best of Festival at the Winnipeg Fringe earlier this year, and was a newspaper's top pick at the Montreal Fringe. It got the Audience Choice Award at New York's version of the Fringe Festival, dubbed Frigid.

"Hopefully, the audiences will come out and take a chance on something that isn't on Broadway, but us coming together and sharing our stories," Osato said by phone from New York. "It's an awesome festival, continually some of the best theater I've seen."

She and other Fringe veterans cite the camaraderie between the artists and producers and the networking opportunities the festivals provide. Osato, who's been performing since she was 2 and doing solo shows for seven years — at venues off Broadway, off-off Broadway, at schools, universities and "anywhere people gather" — said she is inspired by seeing what others are up to at the Fringe.

In San Francisco in particular, she said, the diversity of experiences the audiences bring to the theater, plus the sheer joy of being in San Francisco and the hospitality of EXIT Theatre, all make this a choice gig.

"It's exciting to do theater outside of New York, because New York is so saturat-

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PHOTO INSITE, VANCOUVER B.C.

A user in Vancouver, B.C.'s medically supervised injection site prepares to shoot up with a free rig.



# D.A., ex-TL police captain support safe-injection site

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behavior that impacts the community and the user," Gascon wrote in an email to The Extra. "I support the identification of appropriate sites for the safety of the user and the community in which they reside."

Safe, or supervised, injection sites are rooms where users inject their illegal drugs under medical supervision with counseling and rehabilitation services available. Results have been good, but the approach remains controversial with most critics against having the site, and user traffic, in their backyard.

Establishing injection sites was recommended in February by the San Francisco Hepatitis C Task Force in a report citing studies that show the sites help curtail the spread of hep C, HIV and death from overdosing. Also in support are the groups in the Alliance to Save Lives: Drug Policy Alliance, Harm Reduction Coalition, Hospitality House, AIDS Foundation, Mission Neighborhood Resource, San Francisco Drug Users Union and the Harvey Milk Club.

The idea got a boost when District 6 supervisorial candidate Glendon Hyde made the cause a major point of his campaign.

"The sites were extremely well received by the District 6 community," Hyde, who represents the Harvey Milk Club with the alliance, said in an interview. "It was a solution offering dignity, not a punishing solution."

The sites opened in Europe in the 1970s. The alliance notes there are 27 cities in other countries with facilities, including in Sydney, Australia, and Oslo, Norway. But prime data come

from North America's only facility, Insite, established September 2003 in Vancouver, B.C., which has 12,000 registered users. During 2010, users injected their own illegal drugs nearly 600 times a day under nurses' supervision.

There were 221 overdose interventions with no fatalities. Counselors made 458 admissions into Onsite, the adjacent detox treatment facility, and 43% completed the program. Overdose deaths within a third of a mile radius were reduced more than a third after Insite was established; the rest of Vancouver saw a 9% drop.

The supervision reduced HIV infections, increased the use of services and reduced "public disorder caused by injection use in public spaces." Moreover, Insite, with a \$3 million budget for 2010, has been "cost effective," according to a study by a panel of experts in the field.

In a similar vein, state Sen. Leland Yee's SB41 would allow adults to buy syringes in pharmacies without a prescription. Research in support of Yee's legislation brought out that the World Health Organization concluded in 2008: "Overwhelming scientific consensus showed improved syringe access reduced rates of HIV and hepatitis without contributing to drug use, crime or unsafe discard of syringes." Research also showed the average cost of treating hepatitis C is about \$100,000, or \$300,000 if a liver transplant is required. The estimated lifetime cost of treating an HIV/AIDS patient is \$600,000.

"Based on a robust body of research, it is clear that Sen. Yee's bill will save thousands of lives and hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars by

preventing HIV and hepatitis," Thomas said of the bill that has passed both houses but needs a second Senate vote before going to the governor.

A public conversation about safe-injection sites arose in San Francisco in 2007. The Department of Public Health sponsored a symposium at the Women's Building, featuring speakers from Insite. That October, at a Friends of Boeddeker Park meeting, Tenderloin police Capt. Jimenez stunned everyone by suggesting the northeast corner of the park might be converted into a supervised, safe-injection site. But it didn't resonate, so he dropped it.

The next year, a team pushing safe injection sites made the rounds of community organizations to air the topic, hoping for support. Conard House Supportive Housing Director Seth Katzman and a Dope Project spokeswoman touted the need for a site, suggesting locating it in the

Tenderloin or the Mission, because that's where most IV addicts are. Katzman told the Tenderloin Futures Collaborative that it would reduce needles and pass-outs on the street and cut the spread of disease and overdose deaths while offering addicts services. He got no support. The prevailing sentiment was: Not in my backyard.

One man said it would be like a billboard advertising addicts to come to the Tenderloin. Another suggested a safe haven would be like "World War III." But Katzman said the war was already raging and that a measure of safety could be introduced to benefit the community.

The city wasn't responding then, either. Mayor Newsom, after first supporting the idea, backed off from leading the charge.

"There was no action by the city,"

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**CENTRAL CITY**  
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SAN FRANCISCO  
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Rank choice endorsements

Mayor Candidate	District Attorney	Sheriff
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<b>Leland Yee</b> <small>2nd choice</small>	<b>David Onek</b> <small>2nd choice</small>	<b>Ross Mirkarimi</b> <small>2nd choice</small>
<b>Cesar Ascarrunz</b> <small>3rd choice</small>	<b>Sharmin Bock</b> <small>3rd choice</small>	<b>Paul Miyamoto</b> <small>3rd choice</small>

This endorsement slate is by Tenant / Civic Leaders who have resided in District 6 neighborhoods for over fifteen years and engaged in preserving affordable housing. Each of us won many victories on behalf of our community. When hearing about other endorsements ask yourself if these people even support the most basic need we all share, which is decent housing for everyone.

Your vote counts on Nov. 8, 2011

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Tuesday 9:00am – 10:00am & 6:15pm – 6:45pm

Thursday 9:00am – 10:00am

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For other weekly and monthly events such as Street Retreats, Bible Study, Creative Writing and Movie Nights check out our website!

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PHOTO INSITE, VANCOUVER B.C.

Vancouver's clean, well-lit Insite injection facility services 12,000 registered users and last year had 221 overdose interventions with no fatalities.

## 'Treat addicts like alcoholics'

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Eileen Shields, DPH spokeswoman, said. "And (Health Director) Barbara Garcia has said it's not an issue to take up at this time because there are too many budget issues. It's not being talked about. A number of people want this to happen, but we're not one of them."

Police Capt. Jimenez is one. Now a night supervisor in the Field Operations Bureau after his 32-month stint at Tenderloin station, he retires in October after 41 years on the force.

He said in 2009, when he drove then-Police Chief Gascon around the neighborhood, the chief was appalled at the rampant dealing and immediately wanted to do something about it. He did crack down in the TL for a while. It was a "typical" reaction, Jimenez said, as he sat in his car at Leavenworth and Golden Gate Avenue one July evening before work. But there's more to slowing the drug problem than making arrests, he said.

"There's still drugs — as long as there's a demand, we'll have them," Jimenez said. "That problem won't go away. And you can't arrest them all — there's no room for them, anyway, the system is so taxed. And the system can no longer address the petty stuff."

When he first heard about safe injections in community meetings, he thought

it was a "terrific" idea, he said, but not for the Tenderloin, already swamped with drug services. Later, he said, he couldn't imagine any other neighborhood going for it. "So maybe this is the only place — it makes sense."

He said many citizens want a tough cop, one who won't look the other way.

"A lot of people don't understand that we can't solve this problem through law enforcement — it's medical."

Jimenez also believes drugs should be legal, available in pharmacies to card-carrying addicts and sold for a fraction of the street cost. The quality, too, would be pure, not harmful like "dirty" heroin.

"And if people can't afford it, it should be free. We give away methadone. And we don't want bad stuff that can eat away a shoulder, either. We should treat addicts like alcoholics — it's a medical problem."

Thomas said the alliance will continue meeting with supervisors and community groups to inch the topic forward.

"The supervisors asked good questions and so we have some research to do on costs and results," she said. "More people need to be educated about it, and we need a couple of public servants in support. We're in the process of finding them. The next election may help."

Hyde says a safe injection site is "three or four years from getting passed." ■



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If you have a disability that prevents you from fully participating in this process please call (415) 957-0227.



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## Would a safe-injection site encourage drug use?

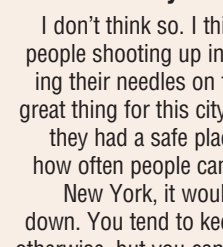
Asked at various Tenderloin locations

### John Atchan, Tenderloin



It would encourage needle use, and we don't need any more needles. Using needles is against my good judgment. I have a phobia against them. When I was 14, I used to have to tie my niece up when she'd come out of her nod because she would point her needles at me. Once you get started on heroin, at the very least you're going to end up needing methadone for another 20 years. It's a down-down dirty drug.

### Larry Browder, Tenderloin



I don't think so. I think it would cut down on people shooting up in front of kids and throwing their needles on the streets. It would be a great thing for this city — especially this area. If they had a safe place where they monitored how often people can come in, like they do in

New York, it would actually slow drug use down. You tend to keep doing more and more otherwise, but you can only get so high. You're not going to get any higher. You're just going to end up ODing. That's what happened to me.

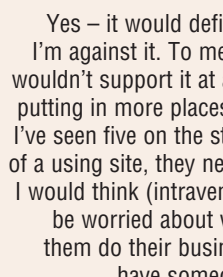
I'm finally getting off the whole intravenous thing. I'm on methadone now.

### Pedro Angel Rivera, Tenderloin



It would give people who already have a problem a means to do it safely. I advocate it, and needle exchange, too. I've remained HIV negative all these years because I have access to clean needles. A safe-injection site would discourage you being stuck on the street doing it. It would keep it away from young eyes and young minds. It would keep people from trying to emulate needle use, which is not healthy.

### Brenda Washington, Tenderloin



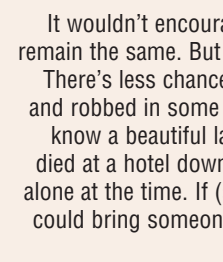
Yes — it would definitely encourage it, and I'm against it. To me, it glorifies drug use. I wouldn't support it at all. But I would support putting in more places to dispose of needles. I've seen five on the street just today. Instead of a using site, they need more disposal sites. I would think (intravenous drug users) would be worried about who would be watching them do their business. I'd be ashamed to have someone see me if I did that.

### James Word, Tenderloin



It would facilitate drug use, but I don't think it would promote it. It would just be a service where people could go for a better way of doing what they're going to do anyway. It's a no-brainer, really, in my humble but correct opinion.

### Roman Carrasco, Tenderloin



It wouldn't encourage drug use — it would remain the same. But I think it's a great idea. There's less chance of you getting beat up and robbed in some hotel or on the street. I know a beautiful lady who overdosed and died at a hotel down the street. She was all alone at the time. If (safe-injection site staff) could bring someone back from ODing, I'm right behind that.

### Penny Cunha, Tenderloin



It would encourage people to use drugs and needles. It wouldn't help the problem. It would just be a glorified shooting gallery. They could hook up there, hustle there, then go out and rob more and shoot up more. I hate needles.



# 20-year milestone S.F. Fringe featu

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**P.J. Walsh** performs at a forward operations base in Afghanistan. He brings his personal story, "Over There," to EXIT on Taylor, Sept. 8, 10, 11, 13, 17 and 18.

ed. Audiences outside of the city are so enthusiastic," said "Sousepaw: A Baseball Story" writer Jonathan Goldberg, who's doing a "minitour" of Fringes — San Francisco, Minneapolis and Indianapolis. "In New York, you wind up playing to the same 10 people who come to everything you do." Being on the road, Goldberg said, provides "a way to test the show, get different reactions, see what works with audiences."

"Being with the Fringe," he said, "it becomes a community event, a band of brothers, a sense of community that travels with you."

"Sousepaw" features the hard-drinking, fire truck-chasing, alligator wrestling, early pro football-playing, baseball Hall of Fame lefty (southpaw) pitcher Rube Waddell, who also has a Mission District rock 'n' roll band named in his honor, though Waddell's been dead for 97 years. "Sousepaw" finds him in a seedy hotel, employing a circus Reptile Girl to help him stay sober on the comeback trail.

"He probably had some sort of undiagnosed mental problems we would probably give him pills for and he'd be real boring today," Goldberg said. But as a misfit, Waddell's story, Goldberg said, is "very typically American: What do you do when the one thing you want to do in life is taken away from

you?"

Bob Brader, of New York's John Montgomery Theatre Company, has a very different story to tell. His "Spitting in the Face of the Devil," deemed Best Show of the London Fringe by Beat Magazine, is an autobiographical story of his coming to terms with finding out about his father's pedophilia.

"The most powerful thing we've experienced while touring," he said in a phone interview, "is a lot of survivors have come up and talked about their experiences." For that reason, Brader said, a portion of the proceeds from the five stagings of his play will be donated to Prevent Child Abuse California.

Brader is concluding a five-festival swing that wound through Regina, Winnipeg, Calgary and Victoria, B.C., on his way here. "You always want to find out or go to the best festivals you possibly can. That's probably why San Francisco is getting a lot of New Yorkers. It's a pretty major Fringe," Brader said.

P.J. Walsh also has a personal story to tell. "Over There" looks back on his career since the first Gulf War, when he was a Marine field medic, followed by a job in the White House as Bill Clinton's dental technician, and then a standup comic in the Blue Collar Comedy Tour alongside Ron White and Larry the Cable Guy, to the present, which finds him engaged in more serious theater.

"It's my story," he said, "from when I'm a kid to the present day ... the choices I made, a lot of coming of age, a bit of an education."

"It's not a comedy club show," he warns. "I'm telling my life story. Events made me change my direction." He still tours as a comedian to make ends meet, but put in two years



PHOTO COURTESY P.J. WALSH

**T**he 20th San Francisco Fringe Festival runs from Wednesday, Sept. 7 through Sunday, Sept. 18. Shows begin at 7 p.m. on weeknights and at 1 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. (415) 673-3847. [www.sffringe.org](http://www.sffringe.org).



**TENDERLOIN**

## Pam Benjamin: Magic poetess pulls p

BY ED BOWERS

**S**TROLLING through U.N. Plaza, I happened to see Pam Benjamin, a poet friend for years, sitting at a small table upon which was a classic Olivetti-Underwood typewriter. A sign in front of her read, "Poems: Starting At \$1.00."

"What do you think you're doing?" I asked. "I'm selling poems."

"Is this legal?" I asked. I'd often thought of selling my poems on the street, but I am all too aware of the police presence. Not everyone loves poetry.

"Yes, it's legal," she said. "All you have to do to work here is register on the Internet at [www.artsmarketsf.org](http://www.artsmarketsf.org). You can get a spot to sell your art here." It's the Arts Market, Thursday's answer to the Wednesday farmers' market.

"How much does it cost?" I asked.

"Nothing," she said. "It's free. I rent a chair from the library for \$2 and that's it. I sell poems every Thursday from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. I love my job! It's good for my writing and people love to get a poem. One day I made \$82."

She used to be a housewife in suburbia. Her husband made \$175,000 a year, and she was a high school teacher. But she gave it all up to be a writer in San Francisco when she fell in love with fiction and got her M.A. in lit-

erature from S.F. State. Then, rather promiscuously, she fell in love with poetry, and will get another master's in that subject in December. There are lots of starving unemployed poets in this city, not all with more degrees than a thermometer, so her dedication to the cause is both brave and admirable. She still has, however, the cheerful, harmless, wholesome demeanor of a suburban housewife, despite the tattoos on her neck.

"I try to look scary sometimes, but in spite of all my tattoos, it doesn't work. Besides, by my smiling a lot, I attract people who might ordinarily be wary of a street poet," Benjamin explained.

I guess people buy the package as much as the product.

"What's the most unusual thing that has ever happened to you out here while selling poems?" I asked.

"I've received a couple of marriage proposals. Back in the day (this project started Aug. 8, 2010) there were a lot of drug dealers around me getting into fights. One of them came up to me once and said, 'Girl, I respect your hustle,' and I took that as a high compliment."

A curious young man approaches Benjamin and says, "I think I have exactly one dollar." He asks her to write him a poem and she does, and he gives her his last dollar, then walks away smiling.

"You were totally concentrated while writ-

ing that poem," I said. "Is this job good practice for you?"

"Oh yes," she said. "I get to hone my communication skills through my writing. That's why I write poems. In San Francisco at poetry readings, people don't have the attention span to listen to stories, so I learned to write poetry. My writing is meant to communicate with people."

A nice-looking, middle-aged couple stop at her table. The man asks her to compose a poem about the negative and positive aspects of lawyers. Quite a challenge, especially the positive part, but she runs off a poem in five minutes, hands it to the couple, who then take her picture and have something to return home with when their vacation is done. They give her \$5.

"Monkey see, monkey do" is like a marketing mantra for a poet on the make.

"I've observed," she said, "that when people notice that I'm writing a poem for someone, they too become interested in buying a poem."

"Do you feel like you're commercializing yourself by selling poems?"

"As much of a socialist as I'd like to be, I'm really a capitalist. We cannot live in this society without cash. I can also use this venue to sell the two books I've written. I sell about one a week. Why sell them in stores when you can sell them yourself and keep all the money?"

### TENDERLOIN STARS

**T**HERE are 30,000 of us in the Tenderloin, each unique in special ways. Tenderloin Stars captures the personality, humanity and, often, strangeness of our remarkably diverse populace. These are the people who make our neighborhood great.





# ures 7 shows from New York City

at theatrical school on his way to creating this show. It's been well received, he says, by audiences across the political spectrum, from ultra-liberal to conservative, and won a Best of L.A. Fringe this year.

"A lot of my work goes toward helping veterans," Walsh said, citing upcoming veterans benefit shows he has scheduled. "It's my mission to show what their service is and how we can't forget about them, whether we think we should be there or not. I can't control that, but we're a country at war right now and don't act like it. It's very sad."

He's played to San Francisco audiences before, at the Punch Line nightclub, for instance, and says, "Any excuse to come to San Francisco is never a bad one."

But if it's laughter you need, Tanya O'Debra may be just the ticket. Her show, "Radio Star," which she describes as a "pretty standard mystery plot" delivered as a spoof of '40s radio detective shows, is perhaps particularly apt for Tenderloin audiences, given that Dashiell Hammett once walked these streets. She voices 10 different characters and does sound effects as well, though she's taken pains to update the foul language.

She made her Fringe debut in Edinburgh, and this year has performed in Orlando and Montreal as well, where "Radio Star" garnered "best of" nominations in two categories.

In an email, she wrote that she'd put a lot of thought into which festivals to apply to. "When we talked about San Francisco, I mentioned that I won a pageant called Miss Fag Hag. Having heard a crazy rumor about a strong homosexual community, it just seemed like a no-brainer that we would bring the show here. And I know San Franciscans are fairly liberal folks, which is a bonus when you have a show as filthy as mine. Plus I haven't spent much time in S.F., so I'm pretty excited to get more acquainted with the city."

"Radio Star," she promises, is "just like the golden age of radio, only dirtier."

Columbia University student Simone Marie Martelle, earning her master's degree in playwriting, is bringing her "The Three Bears" production on the advice of a visiting lecturer at Columbia, Craig Lucas, who spoke highly of how the San Francisco Fringe Festival is particularly helpful to young dramaturges' efforts to self-promote and get their work out there.

Then there's Rupert Wates, phoning from his Hyundai Santa Fe in a parking lot somewhere west of Indianapolis, where he'd been appearing at the Fringe Festival there. "I was quite lucky to get in," said Wates, an Englishman now based in New York, who unashamedly admits he's "hijacking the theater audience" for his music review, "Joe's Café" — 15 story songs he wrote based on true-life experiences people have shared with him in his travels.

"A listening audience is rare," he said of the lot of a musician playing mostly in bars. But, by turning a concert playlist into a play, voila, he gets an attentive audience. A former journalist in Europe, Wates explains that "most of the stories people remember or want to tell are painful. Those are the ones we remember." Being an outsider in America and a journalist, he said, "seems to give me the necessary perspective." Some themes include homicide, child abuse and incest, although the show includes lighter material, too.

Wates has 25 songwriting awards and four CDs on his resume since coming to the States in '06. On his way here from Indianapolis, he's got gigs at house concerts, coffee houses, wine bars, in Reno, at Salinas' National Steinbeck Center on Sept. 3 and at the Alternative Café in Seaside (Monterey County).

His troupe varies in number depending on the venue, but in San Francisco it'll be four. Besides himself, Wates will present three other singers, with a minimal guitar and keyboard backing, performing a total of six times. If it was simply a quality-of-life matter, he said, he'd live in San Francisco, but for him, showbiz requires a Big Apple home base.

Osato of "JapJAP" says the S.F. Fringe is a great place to accumulate press clippings, as most shows are reviewed. Exit's publicist for the past eight years, Gary Carr, elaborated, cit-



PHOTO BY SCOTT WYNN

ing the many bloggers and online reviewers, besides the "usual suspects" of the region's newspapers who follow the goings-on.

Carr, formerly on the board of Theater Bay Area, says that, among the shows he's intrigued by this year, besides the New Yorkers' offerings, is "The Madogs of Diego." That's a freebie, and the group putting it on, Trup Sapsiway, is coming to the Exit Stage Left all the way from Mauritius, an island east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean.

Who needs Broadway? ■

**Bob Brader's** solo show, "Spitting in the Face of the Devil," is an autobiographical story of coming to terms with his father's pedophilia.

**Pam Benjamin** knocks out poems for anyone anytime about any topic at \$1 a crack. Sometimes a pleased patron pays her more.

## IN STARS

# oems out of her hat for a buck apiece

"How do you write poems for people you don't know?"

"I get them to talk to me, and from what they say, I know what to write."

A smiling man approaches and asks her to write him a poem about his client, a "technical liaison" who is giving him a hard time and who he apparently doesn't like very much.

So, with the sound of a live jazz band playing in the background, and people lining up for the food trucks, in five minutes Benjamin knocks out a poem about a technical liaison (whatever that is), and gives it to the man who walks away happy. He pays her \$2.

"Write me a poem about writing poems for people," I request.

In three minutes she hands me the following:

### To Warm Up

*The sun bathes my face in light beat  
as another tourist snaps a shot.*

*"Look Mommy, a poet!"  
And my bile rises a little.*

*But The Audience likes smiles,  
a different kind of beat.*

*And bricks warm not enough to bake  
bread or sleeping bodies.*

*Night time the warmth of strangers  
dissipated to cold.*

Then she signed and dated it. Good job. ■



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO



**DARWIN DIAS**  
Fought for his peers

Darwin Dean Dias, a Latino who became an activist in many causes but was noted for fighting for the rights of the mentally ill, died July 24 of lung cancer at age 77.

He died at Coming Home Hospice a week after relocating there from the Alexander Residence, where he had lived for two decades.

Sister Andrea Turbak of St. Anthony's Foundation welcomed four dozen people to the Alexander on Eddy Street Aug. 12 for a memorial service.

Among those in attendance were Robby Cruz-DeCastro, Mr. Dias' partner of 36 years, and many friends and colleagues from their battles on behalf of the mentally disabled and other righteous causes.

The service opened with "Amazing Grace," sung by a 12-member group from St. Boniface that also played clarinet and guitar. Speaker after speaker reminisced about Mr. Dias' efforts on their behalf.

"He was just one of those wonderful spirits," Fancher Bennett Larson recalled. "Darwin had a true vision of what self-help was about. He was imbued with something that was righteous and right and beautiful. He was able to project this, giving hope and dignity. He was a light to this community, striving for what is good."

Betty Duran, a social worker at the Alexander, and Yolanda Recania of the Salvation Army, said that, in his power wheelchair, Mr. Dias earned the nickname "Speedy." "He was always going so fast, with his hair flying," Duran said. "I used to tell him, 'Be careful, you might get a ticket for speeding!' His dream was being in a city with no homeless people."

Mr. Dias had lived in San Francisco, the city of his birth, since the mid-1950s, after growing up in Fresno. He was out as a gay man and living in the Castro "long before it became the gay Mecca," Cruz-DeCastro quoted him as saying. Mr. Dias worked for Bank of America and then at Cliff's Variety Store on Castro Street, and during the Summer of Love lived in the Haight-Ashbury and worked light shows at rock concerts and for the Angels of Light.

He continued to wear his hair long and prided himself on being an original long-haired hippie, Cruz-DeCastro wrote in a biography he submitted to District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim, who asked for something to read at the board's Aug. 2 meeting, which was adjourned in Mr. Dias' memory.

Mr. Dias advocated against the Vietnam War and for the civil rights of people of color, gays and the mentally ill. Cruz-DeCastro said that in a '70s



PHOTO BY JUSTIN DECASTRO

demonstration outside the Examiner newspaper offices police kicked out Mr. Dias' front teeth, but never charged him with any crimes. The protest was against police entrapment of gay men at Macy's and the newspaper's publication of their names and addresses.

Cruz-DeCastro wrote that he and Mr. Dias were in the crowd outside the International Hotel in the early hours of Aug. 4, 1977, when police and ax-wielding Sheriff Richard Hongisto evicted its elderly, mostly Filipino and Chinese tenants, after almost a decade of controversy.

Otto Duffy, another speaker, recalled how Mr. Dias, who in the early '80s had taken to living on the sidewalk behind the Aarti Hotel on Leavenworth Street, was eventually invited in by the friars and then participated in its transformation into the first Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp. building in 1981. Mr. Dias went on to serve on TNDC's Board of Directors in the 1980s and '90s.

Larson, first to speak, also prepared a printed testimonial that was distributed to the gathering along with a program and two hymns, "Rock of Ages" and "The Old Rugged Cross," which were stacked by the photo, three floral arrangements and candles at the front of the Alexander's community room. In it, she described Mr. Dias' work with the San Francisco Network of Mental Health Clients and its Spiritmenders Community Center, a no-meds, no-shrinks, self-help drop-in center for people who felt abused by the mental health system. Spiritmenders, with Mr. Dias on its staff and board, served the disaffected mentally ill from the early '80s until it sputtered out in 2008.

"The primary goals that Darwin championed were the development of self-reliance and a community that, by example, would counteract stigma, prejudice and discrimination," Larson wrote.

Michael Nulty, longtime TL organizer and a resident of the Alexander, recalled knowing Mr. Dias for 15 or 16 years. "He had a lifetime of contributing," Nulty said. "He was very much into disability rights as an advocate." Nulty cited Mr. Dias' work for the Alexander Tenants Association as treasurer, utilizing his skills from his days of working at a bank and as a charter member of the Central City Democrats and the North of Market Planning Coalition.

Nulty called him a "poster child for hoarding and cluttering — he got into the paper, started advocating, and finally services (for hoarding) were created."

Susan Owsley stood up to say that she had known Mr. Dias "longer than anyone except my kids" — for 41 years. "We were horror addicts." She said; she used to rent movies two at a

time for them to watch. She said, though, that "King of Hearts" most made her think of Mr. Dias.

"He taught us how to be a community/mental health activist," Alexander neighbor Marvis Phillips said, citing work on strengthening ordinances for rent control and on hotel conversion. "We always knew we could talk to each other any time we wanted to."

Last to reminisce was Cruz-DeCastro, Mr. Dias' longtime partner.

"We went through many hard times in our lives," he said, and spoke of their resentments toward the Catholic Church, in which they were both raised, over its positions on gay rights and women's reproductive rights.

Cruz-DeCastro recalled the day Mr. Dias entered the hospice.

"He didn't want to go, I didn't want him to go. It was hard for me to see him leave the Alexander," Cruz-DeCastro said. But "on that day he was in so much pain. The pain was enormous, I wanted to tell him, 'Let go, let go, it's time to move on, there's only so much we can do!'"

"Of all the people I've met, he was the one I was closest to. It was like watching my own life pass before me watching him die. I made him promise me to come back and give me a signal. Whether he ever will, I don't know."

After the attendees sang the final verse of "Amazing Grace," Sister Turbak ended the service "to celebrate a great man among us" with a few comments on how Mr. Dias had been "a huge blessing to us. We fight for justice, inclusion, dignity and respect. In the end, what do we have? Our relationships." ■

— MARK HEDIN

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San Francisco Public Library Smithsonian Ford Motor Company Fund EMP Experience Music Project

Created by Experience Music Project and organized for travel by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. The exhibition, its national tour, and related programs are made possible by Ford Motor Company Fund.

Dancers photograph courtesy Johann Kugelberg.

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## SPECIAL EVENTS

**Tenderloin Children's Mid-Autumn Moon Festival: Tet Trung Thu**, Sept. 9, 6-8 p.m., 570 Ellis St. Vietnamese Youth Development Center's 33rd annual event with lantern parade, 7-8 p.m. Arts & crafts, games & prizes, goodie bag giveaway for the first 150 children. Info: [www.vydc.org](http://www.vydc.org) or 771-2600.

**First Harvest Festival**, Sept. 10, Tenderloin Children's Playground, 570 Ellis St., noon-6 p.m. Food, art and entertainment celebrating the TL's Burmese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai and Vietnamese communities.

**Heart of the City Farmers' Market**, 30th anniversary, Sept. 14, U.N. Plaza, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Special discounts, live music, face painting, balloon animals, hula-hooping, market history exhibit, scavenger hunt with prizes, farm family biographies, awards for the "Thank You Farmers" kids art contest. Info: [hocfarmersmarket.org](http://hocfarmersmarket.org)

**Hunter's Point**, Sept. 16, St. Boniface Church theater, 175 Golden Gate Ave., 7 p.m. World premiere of a play with music about love, responsibility and homelessness. Performances through Oct. 1, some followed by panel discussions. Suggested donation \$15-\$25; no one turned away for lack of funds. Proceeds benefit the Gubbio Project, St. Boniface's day shelter for the homeless. Info: [strangeangelstheater.org/hunterspoint](http://strangeangelstheater.org/hunterspoint) or 422-6733.

**Free Concert in Boeddeker Park**, Sept. 20, Eddy and Jones streets, noon-1 p.m., jazz from M.B. Hanif & The Sound Voyagers.

**St. Anthony's 60th anniversary celebration**, Sept. 24, Hope Rally on the steps of City Hall, 10 a.m., and free BBQ lunch and block party, 150 Golden Gate Ave., 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Jones to Leavenworth will be closed with seating for 3,000. Info: 592-2736.

**ARTery Project's "Photographs of Central Market,"** opening reception Sept. 23, 5-7 p.m., City Hall, Room 282. Supervisor Jane Kim hosts the exhibit of images by seven S.F. Arts Commission interns, through Nov. 15. Info: [sfartscommission.org/artery](http://sfartscommission.org/artery).

**16th Annual Tenderloin Health Fair**, Sept. 24th, 11 a.m.- 3 p.m., Tenderloin Children's Playground, 570 Ellis St. Free flu shots, dental exams, blood pressure and blood sugar exam, entertainment, raffle, games and activities, free lunch for the first 500 to show up. Info: [tenderloinfair.org](http://tenderloinfair.org).

**Streaming Circus**, Sept. 29, U.N. Plaza, 2-5 p.m. Clown Snots Bombs Secret Circus performance and after-school workshop for kids. Part of 24 Days of Central Market Arts Festival. Info: [musicevents4causes.com](http://musicevents4causes.com).

## COMMUNITY: REGULAR SCHEDULE

### HOUSING

**Supportive Housing Network**, 3rd Thursday of the month, 3-5 p.m., Dorothy Day Community, 54 McAllister. Call: 421-2926 x304.

**Tenant Associations Coalition of San Francisco**, 1st Wednesday of the month, noon, 201 Turk St., Community Room. Contact Michael Nulty, 339-8327. Resident unity, leadership training.

### HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

**CBHS Consumer Council**, 3rd Monday of the month, 5-7 p.m., 1380 Howard St., room 537, 255-3695. Consumer advisers from self-help groups and mental health consumer advocates. Public welcome.

**Health & Wellness Action Advocates**, 1st Tuesday of the month, 5-7 p.m., Mental Health Association, 870 Market St., Suite 928. 421-2926 x306.

**Healthcare Action Team**, 2nd Wednesday of the month, 1010 Mission St., Bayanihan Community Center, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Focus on increasing supportive home services, expanded eligibility for home care, improved discharge planning. Light lunch. Call James Chionsini, 703-0188 x304.

**Mental Health Board**, 2nd Wednesday of the month, 6:30-8:30 p.m., City Hall, room 278. CBHS advisory committee, open to the public. Call: 255-3474.

**National Alliance for the Mentally III-S.F.**, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Family Service Agency, 1010 Gough St., 5th Fl. Call: 905-6264. Family member group, open to the public.

### SAFETY

**Neighborhood Emergency Response Team Training (NERT)**. Central city residents can take the S.F. Fire Department's free disaster preparedness and response training at neighborhood locations. [www.sfgov.org/sffdnert](http://www.sfgov.org/sffdnert), or Lt. Arteseros, 970-2022.

**SoMa Police Community Relations Forum**, 4th Monday of the month, 6-7:30 p.m. Location varies. To receive monthly email info: 538-8100 x202.

**Tenderloin Police Station Community Meeting**, last Tuesday of the month, 6 p.m., police station Community Room, 301 Eddy St. Call Susa Black, 345-7300. Neighborhood safety.

### NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

**Alliance for a Better District 6**, 1st Wednesday of the month, 6 p.m., 230 Eddy St. Contact Michael Nulty, 820-1560 or [sf\\_district6@yahoo.com](mailto:sf_district6@yahoo.com), a districtwide improvement association.

**Central Market Community Benefit District**, board meets 2nd Tuesday of the month, Hotel Whitcomb, 1231 Market St., 3 p.m. Information: 882-3088, <http://central-market.org>.

**Friends of Boeddeker Park**, 2nd Thursday of the month, 3:30 p.m., Boeddeker Rec Center, 240 Eddy St. Plan park events, activities and improvements. Contact Betty Traynor, 931-1126.

**Gene Friend Recreation Center Advisory Board**, 3rd Thursday of the month, 5 p.m. Works to protect SoMa resources for all residents. Gene Friend Rec Center, 270 Sixth St. Info: Tim Figueras, 554-9532.

**North of Market/Tenderloin Community Benefit District**. Full board meets 3rd Monday at noon. Call 292-4812 for location or check [nom-tlcbd.org](http://nom-tlcbd.org).

**SoMa Community Stabilization Fund Advisory Committee**, 3rd Thursday of the month, 5:30 p.m., 1 South Van Ness, 2nd floor. Info: Claudine del Rosario 749-2519.

**South of Market Project Area Committee Housing Subcommittee**, 1st Wednesday of the month, bimonthly 6 p.m., 1035 Folsom St. Health, Safety and Human Services Committee 1st Wednesday after the 1st Monday bimonthly, 1035 Folsom, 6 p.m. 487-2166 or [www.sompac.com](http://www.sompac.com).

**Tenderloin Futures Collaborative**, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 11 a.m.-noon, Tenderloin Police Community Room, 301 Eddy. Presentations on issues of interest to neighborhood residents, nonprofits and businesses. Information: 928-6209.

**Tenderloin Neighborhood Association**, 2nd Friday of the month, 842 Geary St., 5 p.m. Nonprofit focuses on health and wellness activities to promote neighborly interactions. Info: [tenderloinneighborhood@yahoo.com](mailto:tenderloinneighborhood@yahoo.com).

### SENIORS AND DISABLED

**Mayor's Disability Council**, 3rd Friday of the month, 1-3 p.m., City Hall, room 400. Call: 554-6789. Open to the public.

**Senior Action Network**, general meeting, 2nd Thursday of the month, 9 a.m.-noon, Universal Unitarian Church, 1187 Franklin St. Monthly programs, 965 Mission St. #700: Senior Housing Action Committee, 3rd Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. Call for health program and Senior University: 546-1333 and [www.sfsan.org](http://www.sfsan.org).

### DISTRICT 6 SUPERVISOR

**Jane Kim**

Chair of Rules Committee, member of Budget & Finance Committee and Transportation Authority. Legislative Aides: Matthias Mormino and Viva Mogi. [Jane.Kim@sfgov.org](mailto:Jane.Kim@sfgov.org), 554-7970

## City and County of San Francisco For Papers September, 2011

### Public Art for the New North Beach Library

Come see the three proposals for the new public artwork! Three artists - Bill Fontana, Paul Hayes, and Mark Malmberg - were selected by the North Beach Community Artist Selection Panel to create proposals for the new artwork to be placed at the new library. Come see the proposals and provide us with feedback on the comment forms located onsite. On view from September 1-15, 2011 at the North Beach Branch Library, 2000 Mason Street. Visit [www.sfartscommission.org/pubartcollection](http://www.sfartscommission.org/pubartcollection) for more details.

### Port of San Francisco

Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Public Relations and Media Services (As-Needed)

In preparation for the Port of San Francisco's 150th Anniversary in 2013 and the proposed 34th America's Cup Event on San Francisco's waterfront in 2013, the Port seeks a pool of qualified consultants for as-needed contract services to support the Port's Public Relations Manager in developing strategic media relations and marketing initiatives. Pre-proposal meeting Thursday, September 8, 2011; 2:00 p.m. The RFQ is due Monday, September 19, 2011; noon. For more information please visit <http://mission.sfgov.org/OCABidPublication/>, [www.sfport.com](http://www.sfport.com), or email Linda Battaglia at [linda.battaglia@sfport.com](mailto:linda.battaglia@sfport.com).

### The Department of Building Inspection (DBI)

DBI is now offering a **Voice Inspection Scheduling System** - where customers may telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to: schedule an inspection, reschedule or cancel an inspection, obtain inspection results, or obtain an inspection history.

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### San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) SFAC Gallery presents Passport 2011 in the Castro!

SFAC Gallery hosts Passport 2011 in the Castro on Sunday, October 23, 2011. Passport invites the public to create an artist's book by collecting stamps designed by 12 emerging and established Bay Area artists in a customized notebook.

From Noon to 4 pm, you can take to the streets, following a three-square-block route to collect stamps from the artists themselves. Buy Passports online for \$25. Proceeds from Passport 2011 benefit SFAC Gallery's exhibition and public programming, dedicated to supporting San Francisco artists and bringing challenging contemporary art to the City.

For more information: [www.sfartscommission.org/gallery/](http://www.sfartscommission.org/gallery/) or call 415-554-6080.

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## CENTRAL MARKET

COMMUNITY BENEFIT DISTRICT

### All CMCBD Meetings are open to the public.

Help us create a clean, safe and inviting Central Market.  
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All CMCBD meeting notices and agendas available at the  
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Learn more about the CMCBD's Board of Directors Meetings and Committees,  
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### CMCBD Board of Directors Meetings

Second Tuesday of Every Month, 3-5 p.m.,  
Hotel Whitcomb, 1231 Market Street, Second Floor

The Central Market Community Benefit Corporation (CMCBC) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) community-based organization formed in 2006 to provide programs and services to improve the quality of life experienced in the public realm of San Francisco's Central Market Community Benefit District (CMCBD)