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FEATURES

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Quirky Fall Festivals

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By Anna Bengel

Autumn rushes in with a blast of fresh air, ushering in not only cool temperatures but cool festivals, from theatre and dance to science fiction and puppets.

Many are already underway in New York, including one celebrating women artists and another honoring the Japanese dance form butoh. The H.G. Wells Science Fiction Festival will feature stage adaptations of four of the author's works, while the Shortened Attention Span Horror Festival speeds things up with a barrage of one-acts. And November brings a festival focused on American identity and another celebrating the small-scale art of puppetry.

Here's a rundown of some of the city's most peculiar and profound fall festivals.

EstroGenius Festival

The EstroGenius Festival, which wraps up Oct. 13, celebrates female voices in ensemble theatre, solo shows, music, visual art, and dance.

Now in its eighth year, the festival welcomes submissions from around the world in a variety of disciplines. Its mission is to provide opportunities to female artists, both emerging and professional. The final shows, which run in the afternoon and evening, include short plays and teenage performers.

For a detailed schedule, visit www.theatresource.org/estro.htm.

New York Butoh Festival

The conventional and the avant-garde collide at the New York Butoh Festival, a three-week collection of performances, workshops, films, and lectures focused on the origins and evolution of butoh.



In the late 1950s, butoh emerged in Japan as a dance form that's difficult to define and limit. Its theme is "paradox," which is presented onstage through complex choreography and wild improvisation and physicality combined with meditative stillness. Now practiced worldwide, butoh will be honored at the festival as an art form that impacts and challenges culture, society, and spiritualism.

The festival, which runs until Nov. 21, is sponsored by the CAVE Organization, a long-running experimental art space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Performances take place at Theater for the New City, 155 First Ave. (between Ninth and 10th streets), Manhattan. For a schedule, visit www.nybf.caveartspace.org/.

BlakTino Performance Series

A special performance of a new spoken-word theatre piece headlines the BlakTino Performance Series, a festival of film, dance, and literature by African-American and Latino artists.

The festival "presents challenging works that are empowering to women, Latinos, and people of color and the LGBT community," says Charles Rice-Gonzalez, executive director of the series. "[The] series not only celebrates the work of black and Latino artists but also those of us who are both and more. It interweaves all of the communities."



A.B. Lugo (*Banjee, Ramble*) wrote and stars in *Manchild Machismo*, a work that plays with various styles and tones of language, stereotypes, and ideas of gender and sexuality. It's laced with hip-hop poetry, dramatic monologues, and storytelling and tells the story of a boy growing up in modern urban culture.

Other events include a concert by Cuban composer and saxophonist Yosvany Terry, a literary reading by Thomas Glave, and a screening of a documentary on the life of Audre Lorde, a New York writer and activist of West Indian descent.

The series is presented by the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance and runs through Nov. 3 at BAAD, 841 Barretto St., Hunts Point, South Bronx. Tickets cost \$15; a festival pass is \$45. Students and seniors receive discounts. For tickets and a detailed schedule, call (718) 842-5223 or visit www.BronxAcademyofArtsandDance.org.

H.G. Wells Science Fiction Festival

The urban legend goes that when *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells was read on the air on Halloween in 1938, there was panic in the streets. [Radio Theatre](http://RadioTheatre.com) seeks to honor that legend, and the legendary author, with the H.G. Wells Science Fiction Festival.

The company will present four of Wells' most famous science fiction works -- *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* -- in repertory, adapted and directed for the stage with original orchestral music and sound effects.

The culmination of the festival will be a Halloween weekend marathon, in which all four plays will be performed both Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 27 and 28.



The festival runs until Nov. 4 at 59E59 Theaters, 59 E. 59th St. (between Park and Madison avenues), Manhattan. Tickets are available by calling (212) 279-4200, by going to www.ticketcentral.com, or at the box office. For more information, visit

www.59e59.org/shows_2007/hgwells.htm.

Shortened Attention Span Horror Festival

Quick or you'll miss it! The Shortened Attention Span Horror Festival wants to grab your attention with 18 plays, each less than 30 minutes long, about everything from vampires to one nasty pedicure.

Six different short works of horror will be presented each weekend for three weeks. Each week's most popular play, as selected by the audience, will receive a special performance on Halloween at the 199-seat Players Theatre.

The festival will take place Oct. 11-28 at the Players Theatre and Loft, 115 MacDougal St., in Greenwich Village. For a detailed schedule, visit www.broadwayworld.com/viewcolumn.cfm. Tickets cost \$17 and are available at www.theatermania.com.

New York Clown Theatre Festival

Master clown teachers, clown movies, clown theatre (including experimental clowning), clown Shakespeare, clown sports, and clown panel discussions are all part of the New York Clown Theatre Festival -- not to mention clown pie-throwing wars.

The three-week event celebrates a unique and ancient discipline. Clowns in various forms, from court jesters to mimes and minstrels to Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp, have been performing for thousands of years in many cultures: ancient Egypt, the native civilizations of America, early-20th-century vaudeville, and many others.



A highlight will be the latest clown show by the Brooklyn-based company the Glass Contraption, *Ridiculousity*, which features music, tap dancing, breath-holding, attempted acrobatics, the juggling of chain saws, and clowns on fire.

The clowning around continues until Oct. 28 at the Brick Theater, 575 Metropolitan Ave. (between Union Avenue and Lorimer Street), in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. For tickets and information, visit www.bricktheater.com/clown/.

ID America Festival

What is our "American" identity? There are cell phones and cowboys. There's *American Idol*. Diners, terrorism, hamburgers, and hurricanes. The ID America Festival will tackle this indefinable issue by showcasing works that examine cultural differences and search for commonality.



Thirty plays from 15 states were divided into three themes: American psyche, American cultures, and American dreams. Each group of plays will be performed throughout the festival.



Photo by: *BlakTino Performance Series*

"This is a bold new festival, with playwrights from all over the United States meeting here to premiere their work, each covering the American psyche, culture, and dream," says Dan Demello, the event's press agent.

The [Quo Vadimus Arts company](#) is sponsoring the festival. Its mission is to create an open forum for playwrights to explore what it means to be living in America today.

The festival will take place Nov. 9-20 at the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St. (between Rivington and Delancey streets), on the Lower East Side, Manhattan. For details, visit

www.idafestival.org or www.qvarts.org. Tickets cost \$15 and can be purchased through TheaterMania at (212) 352-3110 or through the event's website.

Voice 4 Vision Puppet Festival

It's small-scale art in a big way at the Voice 4 Vision Puppet Festival, featuring works by four New York artists who have been creating dynamic puppet theatre for many years.



Masterfully crafted puppets will star in a psychological mystery with a tormented hero, the life of Andy Warhol, and a trilogy of ghost stories, among many visually rich performances. *Handmade Puppet Dreams* headlines a collection of shorts exploring the art of handmade puppets crafted for cinema. The film has been seen at the Cannes Marche du Film, the Atlanta Film Festival, and the Rhode Island Film Festival.



The festival will culminate in a "puppet slam," mini-works by a variety of puppet artists.

Voice 4 Vision runs Nov. 29-Dec. 9 at Theater for the New City, 155 First Ave. (between Ninth and 10th streets), Manhattan. For more information, visit www.voice4vision.org/.