

theater • preview

By George, they've got it

By LAURIE GRANIERI
On the Go Writer

Ted Sod likes to tell stories. For Sod, storytelling isn't about stringing together anecdotes; it's a vital form of communication.

Sod is the associate artistic director at George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick. He is curating a 10-day Solo Performance Festival at George Street in which eight performers share stories in comedic, dramatic and musical form.

The festival, in its third year, runs through May 19 on the theater's Next Stage.

"It's more immediate than

SOLO PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL

8 p.m.

Through May 19

George Street Playhouse

9 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick

\$10

(732) 246-7717

www.georgestplayhouse.org



On the Go/1999

Ron Taylor stars in a 1999 performance of "It Ain't Nothin' but the Blues," which originated at New Brunswick's Crossroads Theatre. Taylor is back in New Brunswick, participating in a Solo Performance event at George Street Playhouse.

nity-based educational initiative, began in 1993, Sod says, while the Gentle Men Project debuted this year.

Roughly 98 students in junior

high and high school collaborate with professional theater artists to create songs, monologues, essays, and the like. The students will give free performances of their work 6:30 p.m. May 23 at the theater.

Sod says he's an advocate of same-gender workshops because of the "silencing that goes on because girls are afraid to voice their opinions because they're afraid they won't be seen as attractive. They lose their voice."

Sod says they have consulted with area psychologists to create tailor the program to kids' needs.

For Sod, the workshops aren't just about promoting creative self-expression, but, for the boys in particular "trying to encourage emotional literacy."

Taylor, who starred in the 1999 Tony Award-nominated musical revue "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues" at the neighboring Crossroads Theatre Company and on Broadway, serves as a positive example for the students, Sod says.

"Ron talks to them with a sense of, 'Look, I was given up on as a kid, and I made something of myself,'" Sod says.

Ingrasciotta is a first-generation Sicilian-American from Brooklyn. He wrestles with ethnic identity and morphs into 30 characters in "Blood Type: Ragu," which he will perform this evening.

The piece is strongly autobiographical, he says, drawing on comedic and poignant elements of his childhood in a traditional, highly emotional Sicilian-American family.

Because the "emotion of the (Sicilian) culture is so great,"

Ingrasciotta says, "Blood Type: Ragu" "takes you on a ride where things are really funny one minute and intense the next."

Ingrasciotta says he was inspired to create "Blood Type: Ragu" when he returned to his parents' hometown in Sicily.

Meeting long-lost relatives allowed Ingrasciotta to reevaluate his thorny relationship with his late father. "It opened forgiveness," Ingrasciotta says. "I said to my wife, 'I had my peace.' Then I was able to take it and make it a piece of art."

The schedule for the Solo Performance Festival is as follows:

■ Tonight: Baby Jane Dexter, cabaret chanteuse; Ron Taylor, Tony nominee from Broadway's (and Crossroads Theatre Company's) "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues"

■ Tomorrow and Sunday: Actress/performance artist Liza

Colon-Zayas; Frank Ingrasciotta, New York actor-comedian who examines his Italian-American heritage

■ Wednesday and May 18: Kirsten Childs, award-winning playwright; Dan Domingues, comic actor who create multi-cultural characters

■ May 17 and 19: Tonya Pinkins, Tony Award-winning actress; Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, who explores his multi-cultural heritage

■ May 23: Free bonus event 6:30 p.m. on the theater's mainstage. Solo performers from New Brunswick schools who have been working with the aforementioned artists as part of George Street's Diva and Gentle Men Project.

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theater," Sod says of solo performance. "It is like inviting people into your living room and telling a wonderful story, having a wonderful party. . . . You feel as if you know the person. You are right there with them."

Featured performers include Tony Award-winning actress Tonya Pinkins ("Jelly's Last Jam"), Tony nominee Ron Taylor ("It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues"), cabaret favorite Baby Jane Dexter and New York City actor-comedian Frank Ingrasciotta.

The Solo Performance Festival is presented in connection with George Street's Diva and Gentle Men Project, eight-day writing and performance workshops that began this week at New Brunswick High School and the Paul Robeson Community Themed School for the Arts. In the project, female students work with women artists and boys work with male artists.

The Diva Project, a commu-