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## Summer Arts Preview: Theater

More than "Mermaid": 10 summer picks on state's stages

By John Moore Denver Post Theater Critic  
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While the summer of 2007 in Colorado theater surely will be remembered for the birth of Disney's Broadway-bound "The Little Mermaid" here in landlocked Denver, an incredible array of other exciting shows also are heading our way.

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival is about to kick off its 50th anniversary season under a new artistic director who is shaking things up; theater returns to the historic Elitch Theatre, or at least to the grounds surrounding it. And we end the summer with an unlikely invasion of twentysomething Hollywood heartthrobs like Chris Klein who are coming to Boulder to play - and put on a play.

Summer is best known around here for the Colorado Shakes, and professional-quality entertainment from by seasonal companies in Creede, Grand Lake and Aspen.

Among the big upcoming special events this summer are the Playwrights Showcase of the Western Region, which returns after a year hiatus to the Arvada Center from July 18-21, and Perry-Mansfield's 10th annual New Works Festival from June 15-17 in Steamboat Springs. It'll be a big year for Perry-Mansfield, for Denver Center Theatre Company artistic director Kent Thompson will be tweaking and sneak-peaking his two upcoming big-time world premieres, "Plainsong" and "Lydia."

Also, the rising Boulder International Fringe Festival freakout runs Aug. 16-27, and a downsized Colorado Festival of World Theatre moves to early fall (Sept. 20-30) in Colorado Springs.

For complete upcoming schedules for all of the state's theater troupes, searchable by opening date or by company, visit [denverpost.com/theater](http://denverpost.com/theater).

Without further ado, here are 10 plays not to miss this summer, listed by opening date:

1. Center for American Theatre's **"The Pavilion"** (Thursday-July 1 at West 38th Avenue and Tennyson Street): The Elitch Theatre is under reconstruction and will not reopen until early 2009. In the meantime, what better place to bring theater back to the grounds than the nearby carousel bandshell pavilion, with a play called, no kidding, "The Pavilion"? Craig Wright's tale, performed by members of Boulder's Theatre 13, is about a man who returns for his 20th high

school reunion to win back the girl he left behind. The cast includes Kevin Causey, who is spearheading the theater's rebirth.

2. Germinal Stage Denver's **"What the Butler Saw"** (June 8-July 8 at 2450 W. 44th Ave.): Joe Orton's final play was hailed in 1969 as "destined to live to be accepted as a comedy classic of English literature" by London's Sunday Telegraph. The breakneck comedy begins with a psychoanalyst instructing a prospective secretary he's interviewing to undress. Twists, turns, mishaps and changes of fortune, coincidences and lunatic logic ensue. Perfect lighthearted summer fare, a 1960s comedy of manners akin to "The Importance of Being Earnest." And with a cast that includes the great Tupper Cullum, Erica Sarzin-Borrillo, Ed Baierlein and Tom Borrillo (303-455-7108).

3-4. Little Foxes' **"The Sound Collector and the City of the Blue Moon"** (June 12-28 at the Aurora Fox, 9900 E. Colfax Ave.), and the Creede Repertory Theatre's **"Lullaby Bay"** (June 23-Aug. 11, 124 N. Main St.): These are two major local commissions of new works for children.

The Aurora Fox hired the esteemed Hugo Jon Sayles to create an African musical folk tale that will likely most appeal to 10-to-16-year-olds. The Sound Collector travels the world collecting the sounds and songs of animals and humans. When he discovers a remote city where inspiration and art have been banished, he shares his gift of sound (303-739-1970).

Creede Rep, nestled 250 miles southwest of Denver, commissioned Jeff Carey ("Pan and Boone") to write "Lullaby Bay," about a girl whose dreams are stolen by pirates, but not her spirit (719-658-2540).

5. Arvada Center's **"The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas"** (June 26-July 29 at 6901 Wadsworth Blvd.): Summertime is when the Arvada Center pulls out its big musical guns - and everything is bigger in the Lone Star State. The area's best hoofers will stage this rollicking tale of small-town vice. No Ann-Margret (star of the national tour that came through Denver), but I'll take Beth Flynn any day (720-898-7200).

6. Colorado Shakespeare Festival's **"Around the World in Eighty Days"** (June 30-Aug. 18, University of Colorado-Boulder's indoor theater): The nation's second-oldest Bard fest is celebrating its 50th anniversary with its first two non-Bard titles (along with "The Servant of Two Masters") since 1997. This adaptation, performed indoors, features Denver Center veteran Randy Moore playing 17 roles opposite the great Elgin Kelley, the 2005 Denver Post Ovation winner for best year by an actress, who plays nine parts. It should be a thrilling season of change in Boulder, with more offerings and earlier start times under an exciting new artistic director who has wasted no time shaking things up (303-492-0554).

7. Paragon's **"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"** (July 14-Aug. 11 at 1121 Santa Fe Drive): Edward Albee's night of drinking dangerously, starring Martha Harmon Pardee opposite Sam Gregory, a stalwart of the Denver Center Theatre Company. I'm not afraid -- let's get this party started (303-300-2210).

8. Denver Center Attractions' **"The Little Mermaid"** (July 26-Sept. 9 at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House, Denver Performing Arts Complex): Talk about storybook: First, Disney chooses to launch its next Broadway spectacular in Denver's world-class Ellie in advance of its high-

stakes New York debut. A nationwide casting search leads to the coronation of Denver's Sierra Boggess as Disney's newest princess. A gaggle of Broadway stars will call our city home this summer, and "Mermaid" fans are breathlessly waiting to discover whatever novel stage innovations the creative team has come up with to convey an underwater musical. Reports put the budget at close to \$15 million (303-893-4100).

9. PHAMALy's "**Urinetown**" (July 27-Aug. 19 at the Space Theatre, Denver Performing Arts Complex): That's the Physically Handicapped Actors & Musical Artists League, if you don't know - and if you don't, you should. These actors put on a show like you've never seen before, with self-deprecating humor and high artistic standards. It can be life-changing. "Urinetown," a clever satire of corporate greed - and the musical theater - is a natural for PHAMALy. I can't wait for the scene where hero Bobby Strong rips the brace off a crippled girl in a revival-style fever. You half expect her to walk, but instead she crumples to the ground. These are the moments PHAMALy was born to play with (303-893-4100).

10. Triptych Theatre's "**The Mistakes Madeline Made**" (Aug. 3-11 at the Dairy Center, 2590 Walnut St., Boulder): OK, so big-time actors blow through town all the time, but this is no typical tour stop. It's a posse of top-ticket young Hollywood heartthrobs who have decided to put on their own play in Boulder. Go figure.

We're talking Chris Klein ("American Pie"), Justin Chatwin (Tom Cruise's son in "War of the Worlds") and Chris Marquette ("The Invisible"). And the as-yet unnamed female lead just might turn out to be a bigger name than all of them. Flipper Dalton of the band Prodigy is writing original music for the play.

This is all the doing of Jamie Wollrab, a Boulder High grad who went to L.A. a decade ago and apparently has made some friends there. And the play? It's described as "a frenetic story about the horrors of low-level bureaucracy, pretentious writers and, more seriously, the death of a family member" (303-440-7826).

*Theater critic John Moore can be reached at 303-954-1056 or [jmoore@denverpost.com](mailto:jmoore@denverpost.com).*

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