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By Helen Shaw Wed Dec 10 2008

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These days, everywhere you look is another article on the nasty life of the modern-day playwright. (Even a seasoned pro such as John Guare watches helplessly as his latest work [is shelved](#) due to an ailing economy.) Surely, dramatists must be the most dejected of creatures. Not so! Self-empowering playwrights' collectives are springing up like toadstools, especially in the outer boroughs. Add to the list (which includes [13P](#) and [Joyce Cho](#)) the [Brooklyn Playwrights Collective](#), a five-year-old, loosely knit group that opens its 4th Annual Festival of New Plays this week. After the jump, [TONY](#) speaks with Les Hunter, cofounder of the group and author of participating

playlet *Biggest Break*.

So with a title like Brooklyn Playwrights Collective, do you accept only writers from the King's borough?

Actually, neither Will Cordiero [Hunter's cofounder] nor I live in Brooklyn anymore. Will teaches at Cornell, and I just got priced out—I live in Queens. We take all comers, from all boroughs. But meetings are still at Zillo's, on Fifth Avenue in Park Slope. We meet every other Sunday, and they are very sweet about looking the other way while we're screaming and acting out our plays. The secret to having a playwrights' collective is: Tip well.



Surely you perform in Brooklyn?

Some, but we're also wandering into Manhattan. We always do. We have a budget of \$1,000, so we go wherever people will let us perform. We've been in bars; for a while we were at Siberia in midtown, the sort of place where they were warning you not to touch the couch. But this year we're at the Brecht Forum, Under Minerva and the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center.

Your current series is *Confronting Chekhov*. What did he ever do to you?

Well, for one, really like Chekhov. We're on this alphabetical trip—our first two series revolved around Artaud and Brecht. We're sort of socialist, so we make our decisions collectively. This one was

easy: Chekhov is pretty much the biggest guy in the Cs. About a year ago, we sent out a call for scripts to our membership [about 150 names], and selected 11 scripts. Each play is 10 to 15 minutes long and responds somehow to Chekhov. Writers have to read his works and some criticism, then react creatively. We've got comedies, a metafarce and dramatic pieces that tackle his theatrical innovations.

What are your hopes for these pieces? Or are they just learning tools?

Let's just say: We each wear a button that says, "Willing to Sell Out." We're prepared to be discovered.

The Brooklyn Playwrights Collective 4th Annual Festival of New Plays is running at various venues through Dec 21.

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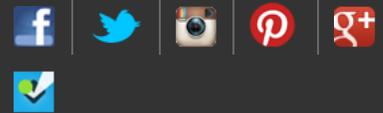
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