

## Boxing Lessons, Beverly Hills Financial Planner's Latest Play, Now Running In L.A.

By Steve Simmons

Can one be a successful financial advisor and playwright? Yes, says John Bunzel, a certified financial planner practitioner at a leading Beverly Hills wealth-management company who is seeing his latest play, *Boxing Lessons*, have its world premiere at The New American Theatre, 1312 N. Wilton Place, Hollywood, now through June 2.

Bunzel, who graduated from the Juilliard School studying acting, had always been interested in finance. In the '90s, he had the opportunity to work as a production executive learning the ins and outs of film funding, sales and delivery.

"In many ways I was an artist who was a frustrated businessman," says Bunzel.

After overseeing the production of several multi-million dollar films around the world, he was recruited into the financial services field and now uses all he learned helping clients in the entertainment field. "I've worked all sides of the business.

"And I've always wanted to stay connected to the theater," says Bunzel. "This production gives me the chance to follow my passion. I'm the luckiest guy in the world because I have my career, and playwrighting, because I love it."

This latest play studies what happens when a famous writer dies under mysterious circumstances and family and friends gather in his cabin on a remote island in the Puget Sound to box up his belongings. As they go through the clutter dad left behind, hidden family secrets come to light — and they all come to realize just how much they both despise and love one another.

"They are packing and unpacking and duking it out literally and figuratively," says Bunzel.

Bunzel has wanted to write the play since the death of both of his parents within the last six years. "It's pretty profound when your parents pass away and I wanted to find a way to deal with the emotions it stirred up, create a fictional world and process my feelings."

Bunzel designed the play as a dark comedy, his favorite genre. "I love the ability to tell a dramatic story and also make people laugh," says Bunzel. "The



John Bunzel

audience experiences a wide range of emotions and it's a tightrope for the actors as it has to stay funny. It's hard to pull off and you have to strike the right tone. I find it endlessly fascinating."

"Each of the characters in *Boxing Lessons*

possesses a zany pride, a desire to always come out on top and to control the situation, which is what drives the humor. But, in the end it's about forgiveness, and that's the serious substance underneath that makes the comedy so authentic," says director Jack Stehlin.

Artistic director of the New American Theatre and Bunzel's Juilliard classmate, Stehlin has directed six of Bunzel's plays. (*Delirious*, *Death of a Buick*, *Gravity Shoes*, *63 Trillion*, *Expecting Bobby* and *Complexity*) "We have the same training and we look at theatre the same way," says Bunzel. "We have a longstanding partnership. He has a lot of faith in my work and he's instrumental in keeping me writing."

"*Boxing Lessons* deals with secrets," Bunzel says, "and how transformative a death can be in bringing a family together for a shared experience."

In the play, two sons, one with special needs, a daughter and their mother/ex-wife learn things they never knew about the father/husband as "things that we kept hidden are revealed," said Bunzel.

"They learn about themselves through the mourning process and it reflects what I went through in my own experience in dealing with that critical moment where our parents are gone and our lives are forever different after that."

Performances are 8 p.m., Friday-Saturday and 3 p.m., Sundays.

Tickets are \$35. To purchase and for more information, call 310-424-2980 or visit [www.newamericantheatre.com/](http://www.newamericantheatre.com/).