

fringe festival

IT'S BEEN ONE OF THE HOT SCORCHING DRAMAS, MUS NOWTORONTO.COM/FRINGE

THE FRINGE: TORONTO'S THEATRE FESTIVAL featuring 143 local, national and international companies at 27 venues. Runs to Sunday (July 17). \$10 or less, surcharge on advance sales, discount passes. Advance tickets sold up to three hours prior to showtime online, by phone or at the festival box office at the Fringe Club (581 Bloor West). At least half of all tickets go on sale at the venue one hour before showtime. No latecomers. See complete Fringe listings at nowtoronto.com/fringe. 416-966-1062, fringetoronto.com.

ANNEX THEATRE

730 Bathurst

CANUCK CABARET by Paul Hutcheson and Sharon Nowlan. Jul 14 at 2:15 pm, Jul 15 at 11 pm, Jul 16 at 4 pm. Rating: **NNN**
Hosted by Paul Hutcheson and Sharon Nowlan, this show originally premiered as a collaboration celebrating Canadians at the New York Frigid Festival. Wanting to showcase other Fringe talent, on Sunday night they invited Christel Bartelise, Jason Morrow and Allan Girard to perform. But the hosts are the standout acts in a hodgepodge of styles, especially Hutcheson's monologue about substitute teaching in high schools and Nowlan's romantic dance number with a Lothario puppet. **DF-G**

ELLAMENTARY: A ONE PERSON MUSICAL ABOUT FILLING OUT AND FITTING IN by Christine Aziz and Steve Raiman. Jul 14 at noon, Jul 16 at 7:30 pm. Rating: **NNN**

In this cute solo about the challenges of hitting puberty, Christine Aziz plays Ella Salmon, a young girl trying to gain popularity at school while struggling with her inner geek.

Shaista Latif's staging keeps Aziz moving gracefully between scenes set at summer camp, school and home. Aziz excels at voices, and her impressions of Tallulah Bankhead giving Ella advice provide some of the strongest moments. The show mostly references music and pop culture from the early 1990s, but Aziz's energetic performance and the funny original songs by Ben Pelchat, Liam Pelchat and Steve Raiman make the material work for all ages. **DF-G**

GAMETES AND GONADS by Jeff Leard. Jul 15 at 5:45 pm, Jul 16 at 11:30 pm. Rating: **NNN**

Jeff Leard's solo comic sketch is Woody Allen's sex-as-space-launch scene from Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex mixed with imagery from Star Wars and Star Trek.

Where Allen's view remained male-centred, Leard takes us inside Ovaria, where a high priestess is preparing one of her sister eggs for monthly sacrifice. Leard is adept at keeping his 20 or more characters distinct, often using acrobatic moves to change from one to another. It's too bad Leard's frenzied scene-shifting between male and female genitalia doesn't result in a stronger climax. Leard is certainly talented enough to take on the challenge of depicting fertilization and cell division. **CH**

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KIM'S CONVENIENCE by Ins Choi. Jul 15 at 5:15 pm, Jul 17 at 7 pm. Bathurst Street Theatre. Rating: **NNNNN**
A street-savvy Korean immigrant (Paul Sun-Hyung Lee) runs his convenience store in Regent Park with his wife (Jean Yoon) while coping with neighbourhood gentrification, his unmarried daughter (Esther Jun) and the estrangement of his son (Ins Choi).

Choi also directs and wrote the script, which is rich with historical facts and even dares to poke fun at cultural stereotypes. Set entirely in the store, Ken Mackenzie's design serves as a functional backdrop – the play begins cleverly with the flip of an open/closed sign and ends poignantly with the clicking sounds of a pricing gun. The strong cast, rounded out by Andre Sills in three supporting roles, has great range, ensuring the intergenerational dialogue is sometimes intense, often humorous and very authentic. **DF-G**

INFINITUM by Melissa Major. Jul 14 at 5:45 pm, Jul 15 at 2:15 pm, Jul 17 at 5:15 pm. Rating: **NNN**

Infinitem consists of excerpts of a larger dance work to be presented this fall. Even in its unfinished state, it's fantastic. The show blends modern dance, spoken word, clown, song and circus skills like contortion, acrobatics and aerial silks to create a fascinating exploration of the idea of infinity.

The action proceeds from the statement "According to the laws of infinity, anything you can imagine is there." Five of the six performers enact the evolution of single cells to human beings in a rapid Escheresque pattern. A sixth sphinx-like performer leads the other five to find separate identities. The performers' depiction of the universe's progress from uniformity to unlimited differentiation dazzles. **CH**

PADRE X by Marc A. Moir. Jul 15 at noon, Jul 17 at 7 pm. Rating: **NNNN**

This solo show is based on the life John Weir Foote (1904-88), a Canadian chaplain awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery at Dieppe. Marc A. Moir creates a sensitive portrait of an unwaveringly good man and devout Christian who viewed his heroic actions simply as part of his duty.

Moir displays real linguistic skill in imitating the wide range of accents both of the British officers and the wary German

soldiers who speak little or no English. As Foote, Moir shines with a quiet inner strength, tried but not broken by the horrors he's witnessed. It's a powerful performance of a fascinating story. **CH**

SONNETS FOR AN OLD CENTURY by Jose Rivera. Jul 14 at 11 pm, Jul 15 at 4 pm, Jul 16 at 5:45 pm. Rating: **NNNN**

Written in the year 2000, this unusual play is not a conventional drama but a series of monologues for 17 actors. A group waits in an antechamber to the afterlife; they need only sum up their life in words in order to depart.

The play has no plot, but rather surveys this microcosm of humanity both as a reminder of the injustices of the previous century and as a tonic to brace us for the shocks of the present. Gradually, recurring themes of anger, loss and regret build to a moving conclusion in which we realize that we must accept life's manifold contradictions – including death. **CH**

TOTAL VERRÜCKT! by Joanna Caplan. Jul 14 at 7:30 pm, Jul 16 at 9:45 pm. Rating: **NNN**

In this 30-minute solo, Joanna Caplan blends movement and text in a striking tribute to Jews in the Westerbork concentration camp during WWII, where numerous cabaret performers were interned before their deaths.

Caplan has carefully chosen the props, and her use of two small wooden tracks to

symbolize transport trains have a very powerful effect, echoing as they bang on the floor. After the performance, Caplan re-emerges for a discussion and requests audience feedback. The work already creates a strong emotional impact; future incarnations hold much promise. **DF-G**

BATHURST STREET THEATRE

736 Bathurst

BLOOM adapted from the book by Michael Lista. Jul 14 at noon, Jul 15 at 9:15 pm, Jul 17 at 3:30 pm. Rating: **NN**

See review at nowtoronto.com/fringe

CELLAR HOTEL by Tony Rein, Terence Vince and Alan J. Nash. Jul 14 at 5:15 pm, Jul 16 at 11 pm. Rating: **NN**

See review at nowtoronto.com/fringe

THE 5TH ELEMENT Jul 14 at 1:45 pm, Jul 15 at noon, Jul 16 at 7:30 pm. Rating: **NNNN**

This breathtaking show blends urban, classical and cultural dance forms with live drummers and a diverse soundtrack ranging from k-os to the Vitamin String Quartet. Based on the elements of earth, water, fire and air, each component begins with a powerful spoken word segment delivered by the very poised Conely de Leon.

The focused dancers revel in the synchronized, super-energized choreography created by Janet L. Castillo, Natasha Powell and Tiff Mak. The costumes help set the mood and move gracefully with the dancers' bodies. **DF-G**

THE LAST ROCK N' ROLL SHOW by Jeff Jones. Jul 15 at 1:45 pm, Jul 16 at 9:15 pm. Rating: **NN**

See review at nowtoronto.com/fringe

MONARITA by Shannon Bramer. Jul 14 at 11 pm, Jul 16 at 5:45 pm, Jul 17 at 1:45 pm. Rating: **NNN**

Shannon Bramer's play about the interdependent friendship of Mona (Sara Tilley) and Rita (Ruth Lawrence) takes a fresh look at the challenge of retaining identity in the face of motherhood and relationships.

The quirky dialogue includes some honest observations on the topic of beauty and aging. Both actors create nuanced characters, and Tilley earns huge applause with her delivery of a monologue describing Mona's annoyance at hanging out at drop-in centres with other new moms. Amy Anthony's set and prop design is colourful and functional but leaves the play's location a mystery. The show also reveals many truths about nurturing female bonds – and, in a humorous highlight, the importance of finding a great hair stylist (Mark White). **DF-G**

SHE SAID WHAT HAPPENED by

Carly Heffernan, Emma Hunter, Marni Van Dyk and Megan MacKeigan. Jul 14 at 3:30 pm, Jul 15 at 11 pm, Jul 16 at 12:30 pm. Rating: **NNNN**

Sketch troupe She Said What goes beyond funny, offering thoughtful takes on the issues affecting women today, like their approach to birth control (Plans C through E), which falls just shy of Casey Anthony territory.

Performers Emma Hunter, Marni Van Dyk and Meg Mack have a hilarious aggressive/gentle dynamic, best demonstrated in their sketch about a ballet class that culminates in a surprising request from one of the tutu-clad girls. Perfectly timed delivery, smart costumes and smooth transitions lend real polish, although a Dolly Parton sketch feels like an SNL leftover.

Hunter is particularly sharp as a petulant Napoleon, but it's the intense, catchy chemistry between the three performers and co-writer Carly Heffernan that bumps up the sketches to fully drawn, hilarious studies of the dark side of being a lady. **NS**

THE SOAPS – THE LIVE IMPROVISED SOAP OPERA Jul 15 at 7:30 pm, Jul 16 at 4 pm, Jul 17 at noon. Rating: **NNNN**

This improvised soap opera, a fictional behind-the-scenes look at a play in rehearsals, showcases the skills of some of Toronto's wittiest talent. Narrator Matt Baram introduces the characters, sets up the story and throws challenges at the cast.

Highlights from Saturday night's instalment included an "act-off" dual between Ron Pederson and Sandy Jobin-Bevans, and Baram commanding Albert Howell to play out a scene with Aurora Browne all in double-entendres. In less capable hands, improvisers onstage would be disastrous, but this group is as good at putting one another on the spot as at helping one another out of one. **DF-G**

DF-G = Critics' Pick **NNNNN** = Standing ovation **NNNN** = Sustained applause **NNN** = Recommended, memorable scenes **NN** = Seriously flawed **N** = Get out the hook

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