

THE FRINGE



I can't grasp the meaning of a FRINGE FESTIVAL. In the dictionary, most definitions of FRINGE

involve fabric and its tassled edges, imply adornment as opposed to a peripheral or "edgy" relationship to the primary fabric.

In America, it is no secret that the artists formerly known as the avant-garde (the ones who were making violent, offensive, messy, inaccessible, anti-American, anti-humane, crazy or non-utilitarian art in the 70's and 80's) have been gradually embraced by a relatively mainstream audience (i.e. a largely white, educated, urban audience).

These artists are our favorite professors in grad school or, if we're lucky, in college. As they speak to us about art, under the low but cozy roof of some academic institution, we can't forget that some years back this man shot himself in the leg and called it art, or that this other man put the Duchess of Malfi on stage being sodomized with her twin brother's gun.

And you? What the hell are you going to make that beats someone setting themselves on fire?

If the artists of the 70's avant-garde are now the standard for "experimental" art, do the fringe kids attempt to emulate them, or react against them? Unfortunately, based on the handful of plays I saw at the New York International Fringe Festival, they seem to be doing neither, but are instead happily gliding along some surface tradition of theater as a harmless expenditure of energy, a frenetic orgy of adrenaline and camaraderie. If we understand the word FRINGE to mean "on the edge of," then wherein lies the edginess of the plays at the festival?

Certainly all 120-plus plays at the festival cannot, and should not be alike, but the lack of unity in mission among the group is disappointing; I can't locate a commonly held core belief in something other than the standard agenda of mainstream theater. What these plays and players have in common seems to be the lack of funding/recognition and enough motivation to spend most of their time and energy (heroically, it may even be said) to make it happen.

Meanwhile, at Fringe Festival Headquarters, the staff is barely sleeping, certainly not going

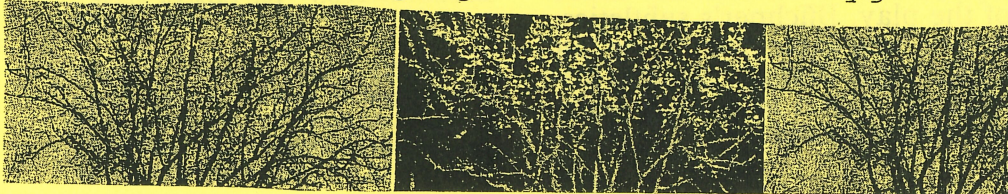
home nights, often staying sober and wired on too much coffee in order to fuel this annual madness. Seeing them, I am infected by the energy of it, the community of it, and the quixotic delight of DOING IT AGAINST ALL ODDS. But it disturbs me that so many lower East Side theaters choose to have nothing to do with the Fringe Festival (including the Todo Con Nada theaters, whose founder Aaron Beall was one of the original co-founders of the Fringe). It is disturbing that this year, the Midtown International Theater Festival was launched and scheduled to run at roughly the same time as the New York International Fringe Festival. I don't know why this dissent among groups, but no matter if it stems from personal, professional or artistic disagreements, it is disturbing and discouraging that even this small sub-population of New York City cannot agree or unite on a lousy festival of theater.

On cloudy days, I see no connection whatever between the performers presenting themselves in the context of fringe and the artists of the avant-garde they were weaned on. More obvious is the connection between the fringe (especially an organized fringe event like the festival) and the larger consumer culture of the entertainment industry. Any capitalist system has competition at its root, and so the possessive competitive qualities of these various fringe factions should be no surprise.

Still, what is implied by the FRINGE in Fringe Festival? Perhaps it is not the "outsider" position of the fringe that is important, but its role as adornment for some primary material, in this case, for a rather threadbare piece of cloth that is the contemporary theater.

In the Oxford English Dictionary (where most of the definitions of FRINGE have to do with fabric), there is an example of the word's usage from George Eliot, in 1863: "Such fringing away of precious life... is an affliction..." Elliot wasn't talking about theater, but the relevance is striking. It follows that to fringe means to expend energy on a diversion in a fruitless and exhausting manner. Is the word choice correct after all? The New York International Fringe Festival's contradictory desires (to be entertaining and profitable AND to advance radical new work) are frittering away the precious energy of a generation.

Luna Zeygman



EMERGENCY is a FREE and BI-WEEKLY gazette, providing an immediate response to what's really happening in theater, film, and performance. EMERGENCY is not a consumer guide. The idea: To liberate the form of critical response from the limitations of conventional review etiquette. EMERGENCY seeks: essays, run-on reviews, manifestos, dialogues with colleagues, and proposals for impossible theater. Please send us word of open rehearsals, guerilla acts, collaborations, shows, and screenings.

the emergency gazette

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Gratis!

THEATER REVIEW

- I. Name of Play, Playwright, Venue, Director, Actors, Theater Company (Check spelling!)
- II. Evidence That I Am Smart
 - A. Big words ("liminal"?)
 - B. Factoids (Ezra Pound called theater "a form of third-rate intensity")
- III. Brief Account of My Thoughts During the Play (MUST BE INTERESTING!)
 - A. Why was the box office built like a pulpit?
 - B. I always feel so bad for actors when I see them having to recite clunky lines. But then I think it's their fault for having said yes to the production.
 - C. Frank wore his new Liberace sandals to the play. They are powder-blue and-silver, really whacked out. So when we sat in the front row, and he crossed one leg over another, his foot stuck out over the edge of the stage, and it was so great, like his sandal was a very small and glamorous extra.
- IV. Small Jab at Someone Famous, But Not Too Famous, So That By Jabbing, I Look Bigger, Not Smaller (Foreman?)
- V. Analysis
 - A. My favorite part of the play was the part between scenes, where it was totally dark except for the light from the video, and you could see the actors in silhouette, running around and rearranging the furniture to accordion music.
 - B. One-and-a-half stars
- VI. Things I Should Write, But Don't
 - A. How this play relates to all other plays ever performed.
 - B. How it is sometimes so weirdly thrilling to sit in the theater trying to unwrap a piece of gum as quietly as possible.
- VII. Brief Account of My Thoughts During the Play, Continued
 - A. I would like to be in a theatre company dedicated totally to fight choreography. We would just go out and stage really terrible, scary fights in public. Until the cops came. Then we would run.
 - B. Love the sound of that ceiling fan.

Amy Fusselman

MICRO REVIEWS

THE FRINGE FESTIVAL

WITH THE CLEARNESS COMES THE COLD

CY. ANCAL; A DANCE-THEATRE PIECE
BASED ON THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS
BERNHARD.

I am overly sensitive these days to all kinds of manipulation. Incidental music, swelling, is enough to make my heart race as if I'm dying.

What is this, this Theater? It is fundamentally fucked up. It is HUBRIS: to want to move people.

[Meanwhile, a man from the audience power-walks through the exit door. This is not what he wanted.]

NO TABLEAUX!
NO SYNCHRONIZED HAND
GESTURES!
NO LIGHTS!
NO INTENTIONS!

What makes this dance performance (ostensibly based on the texts of Thomas Bernhard) SUCK is that, unlike Bernhard, these performers do not acknowledge nor, seemingly, understand that their efforts are inevitably WORTHLESS and USELESS.

Look, I am no critic. I am not the enemy. Or maybe I am even a more dangerous and insidious enemy than your garden-variety critic, who at least is a KNOWN QUANTITY. But me, I don't even know why I got into this theater thing, why I'm sitting in this theater right now. What I crave most is theater with NOTHING, as little movement as possible.

The whole thing should have been this nice blonde dancer, running in a circle and smiling at us from time to time, endless tiny variations, until she collapses from real and utter exhaustion. Then she stands and keeps going.

CRUCES

ME XIHC CO TEATRO;
PERFORMED OUTSIDE, IN SPANISH.

Embarrassing.

HUNGER IN A LAND OF PLENTY

JOHN BETTENBENDER PERFORMANCE
COMPANY, THE INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND
HUMANITIES EDUCATION. CREATED AND
PERFORMED BY THE STUDENTS

Some New Jersey kids, ages 15 to 18, have collaboratively whipped together an unflinching multimedia show with a natural feeling of measure and grace.

The show confronts its topic, the hunger of the mind, soul and

body, with a natural dignity, and not a thread of hypocrisy. The skits (on consumer culture, inner city education, body image, and "fashionable faith") are sharply ironic; there's even a very chilling word-less sequence that addresses the problem of TV and its numbing effect on children's minds.

Perhaps not knowing any better, these teenagers created a smartly felt show that exposes the eternal wounds of our society. It is a pity that it has only been scheduled once during the Fringe Festival. We can only hope that they will be back to perform again before they grow up.

DAYS & NIGHTS WITHIN

BY ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN; WORDPLAY.

Some people believe that plays about torture, interrogation or other cruel repetitive acts should evoke that same cruelty in the theater. I don't think this is necessary, nor particularly interesting, but it is hard to tell, because I've never seen a play that has really achieved this, this play being no exception.

DANTON'S DEATH

BY GEORG BÜCHNER; LAST COMPANY
(LOS ANGELES).

These college students are under the impression that lofty speech and fluid gestures are enough to make theater exciting. And the faster, they believe, they speak the words of French revolutionaries, the less bored (or more impressed) the audience. In truth, their speedy production cut out or breezed through some of the most moving, complex and scary moments in playwriting history.

Ok, ok, you say, don't be so hard on them. The problem: if no one is hard on them early on, their standards will forever fall under their feet until they've stomped them out completely.

Danton is not easy. You can't take it to the streets by providing a melodramatic soundtrack and cutting the difficult sections. This only succeeds in making the play banal enough to applaud. If one's mission is to make a work (classic or contemporary) accessible, one must first genuinely attempt comprehension. These so-called students of theater with stereotypical bravado voices convinced me that this was not the case here. Their aesthetic development, having achieved only a superficial understanding of symmetry, cannot handle the chaos of the play. Büchner's subtleties, humor, and game playing are lost amid vulgar (though spirited) histrionics, which nowadays seem to pass for theater.

ARTAUD LE MOMO

BY ALEXANDER PANAS; NO UNDERWEAR
UNLIMITED.

A despicable attempt to shove a grubby little finger up Artaud's asshole. Instead, these degenerates confuse Artaud with themselves.

THE COMPLETE LOST WORKS OF SAMUEL BECKETT...AS FOUND IN AN

ENVELOPE (PARTIALLY BURNED) IN A
DUSTBIN IN PARIS LABELED "NEVER TO
BE PERFORMED. NEVER, EVER, EVER!
OR I'LL SUE! I'LL SUE FROM THE
GRAVE!"; GREG ALLEN, BEN SCHNEIDER,
AND DANNY THOMPSON;

The Theatre Oobleck/Neo-Futurist group give us a great parody of Beckett at the Fringe Festival. The show is well-rounded from start to finish. You get your programs from the same trash can in which an actor ends the show. The group recounts the discovery of the lost works with great relish, and presents them with a ceremonious air. TABLE TALK pushes the theme of the self-interrupting narrator and his captive audience to the absurdly ridiculous. NOT ME presents a despairing voice unexpectedly bursting into a happy sing-along, and a puppet show reveals the mind of a seven-year-old Sam foreseeing his future literary landscape. IF and FRAGMENT are side-splitting send-ups, canning the repetition, minimalism, and poetic sentimentality found in Beckett's shorter plays. The closing piece...I can't give it away.

Altogether the show was tongue-in-cheek yet reverential, played with levity yet studied mischief, full of specific references yet accessible to non-Beckettians. The audience experienced hysterical laughter—what more could you want? A tragic tribute to Beckett? A biographical play? A real Beckett play, poorly interpreted? Please!!! No!!! Sam, this time the laugh's on you.

Classification of a Spit Stain
by
ellie ga

the summation of a 2 year
investigation of the
underfoot rot
of the city

-spiral bound, silicone
intaglio prints-

city secrets revealed!!!!

\$35.00 edition of 25
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HORACE THE MAN Chapter 1: Horace Starts The Theater

No more basketball, said Horace. He was already too old for basketball. But there was still time before the end.

There is still time, said Horace. There was still time for theater, thought Boris. And that's how it all got started.

They chose teams and took to the stage. The whole gang was there. They stored their flabby basketballs in the lockers. They put on their sweats and their shorts. Their team uniforms were sent to the dry cleaners.

Horace blew his whistle. Okay, everybody, the game is theater. You know the rules. Let the games begin.

Horace sat in a folding chair marked COACH. Later he would change the word on the chair to DIRECTOR. They got on stage and began their stretches. Then dribbling practice—no balls, remember. Some of the players paced the perimeter where they thought the boundaries to be. There were diverging views on this issue. So Horace intervened. To intervene he strapped on a black and white striped vest.

Horace was pointing.

What are you pointing at, asked one of the fellows.

At the basketball, said old Horace, old and confused Horace.

We're not playing basketball, said another, we're playing theater.

No one noticed the basketball that had appeared in the corner.

At the basketball, said old and confused Horace.

What are you pointing at?

At the basketball.

What are you pointing at?

At the basketball.

What are you pointing at?

At the word basketball.

What are you pointing at?

What are you pointing at?

What are you pointing at, Horace?

Horace was pointing at the space where his finger ended. But where was the perimeter of the playing space? The fellows were already tired. Some of them thought of the Isla de la Mujeres and the ferry that would take them there.

tag-team directed by
Auguste and Louis
Lumiere

LISTINGS

DANCE LIBERATION FRONT
THE MILLION MAMBO
MARCH—a dance action. Sunday,
Aug 27 at 5pm.
From Tompkins Sq. - Washington Sq.,
featuring DJ Liquid Todd of K-ROCK.
The goal of the Dance Liberation Front
is to eradicate New York City cabaret
laws, which prevent dancing in unli-
censed venues. For more info:
www.dlfnyc.com

**AMERICAN LIVING ROOM
FESTIVAL**
Through August 27th.
Puppet Parlor — August 24
MYSELF WHEN I AM REAL, based
on Francis Bacon and Charles Mingus,
created, designed, dir'ed by Eric Novak;
THE TRANSFORMATION OF
THINGS by Erin Eager;
ASSEMBLAGE OF SOULS
by Jonathan Cross; An excerpt from
BED OF LIGHT by Cathy Shaw;
STEEL DITTIES by Julian McFaul

Performance Series—August 25
COURTESY WORKS, performed by
Jessma Evans & Nora Wooley; BIG
TIMES, perf'ed by Mia Barron, Maggie
Lacey, & Danielle Skraastad
Directing Cabaret—August 26-27
GOD IS A POTATO, directed by
Michele Minnick; TWINS OF DE-
SIRE, dir'd by Mei-Chiao Chiu; GOLD
INTO MUD, dir'ed by Bruce DuBose
& Katherine Owens
HERE, 145 6th Ave, 647-0202. \$12.

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL

In its fourth year and going strong, the
Fringe Fest presents a hundred-plus
shows in 11 days. From the stupid to
the sublime, anything is possible in this
most festive of festivals. This year,
many shows from Austria, Germany,
Australia, Mexico, Canada, and other
exotic ports. Texts by Artaud, Bern-
hard, De Ghelderode, Ellen
McLaughlin, among others. New York
regulars include Trav S.D., The Drama
League, 63rd Dimension, Charlie Vic-
tor Romeo, and The Infinity Six.
420-8877; All shows \$12.

PURE POP 2000

This year's NATURAL BORN POP
Festival holes up at the good old Nada
theater, and includes such sweets as:
SAD CLOWNS ON VELVET
three vaudevilles by Anton Chekhov
directed by Ian W. Hill.
Wednesdays at 8pm, Aug 23--Sept 20
AMAZONS IN CHAINS!
written and directed by Frank Cwiklik
Thursdays thru Sundays, at 7:30pm,
August 24--September 3.
EVEN THE JUNGLE
by Ian W. Hill and
David LM McIntyre
Sat. August 26 at 10.00 pm
Sun. August 27 at 3.00 pm
Two Shows Only. Tickets \$12
Nada Classic, 167 Ludlow St, 420-1466.

ROBERT BECK MEMORIAL CINEMA

SCIENCE PROJECTS:
short films, all exploring the calculatory
nature of cine-mathematics.
August 22 at 9pm, at the Anthology
Film Archives, 2nd Ave and 2nd Street.
For more info: 254-5277. \$5.