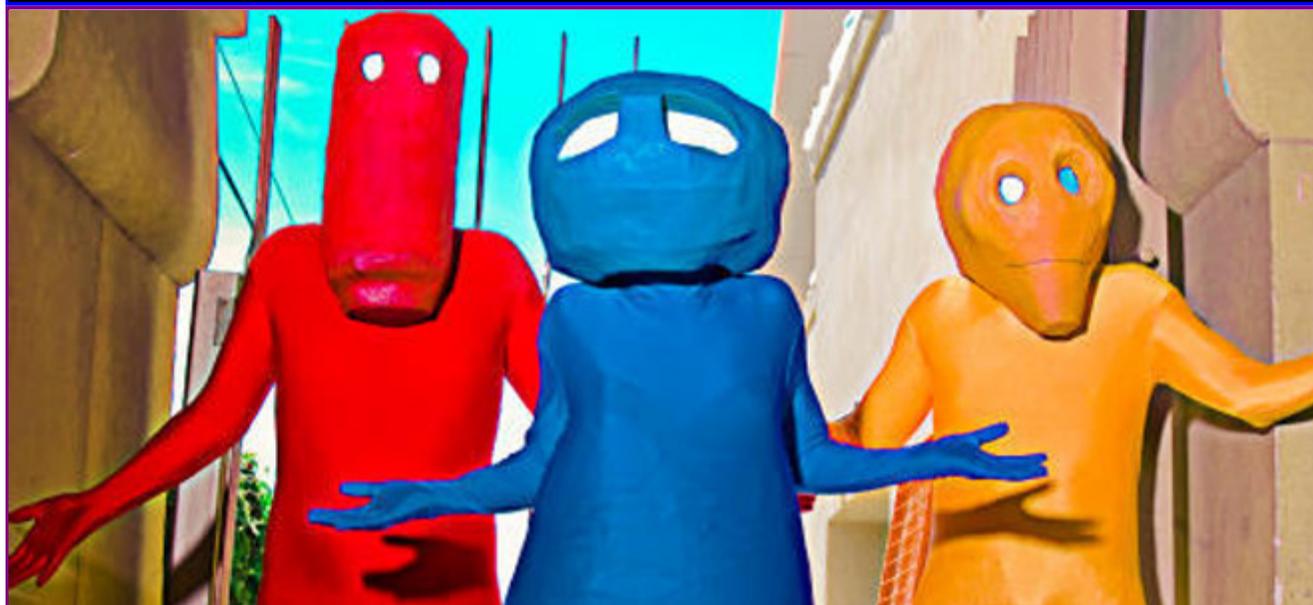


LA STAGE

EMPOWERING ARTISTS AND ENGAGING AUDIENCES SINCE 1975



First Ever Hollywood Fringe Festival

FEATURES by [Steve Julian](#) | June 3, 2010

View the full guide at www.hollywoodfringe.org/guide or pick up a guide at Fringe Central during the festival at the Theater of Arts Arena Stage, 1625 N. Las Palmas Ave., Hollywood. All Fringe venues should have guides available during the festival.

Fringe festivals attract writers, directors, actors and producers from around the country and across the world. The “fringe” idea started in 1947 when people in Edinburgh, Scotland felt the need to heal after World War II, and what better way to heal than through theatre?

“It was unplanned,” says Ben Hill, executive director and one of the founders of the Hollywood Fringe Festival. “The Edinburgh event was a curated and judged festival. But out of the blue, about 10 companies showed up uninvited. They set themselves up along the “fringes” of the festival, demanding their works be seen, too. There was no marketing committee, no central box office. There’s no doubt we took our model from Edinburgh.”

Los Angeles rarely gets mentioned as a top theatre town in the US. Hill wants to change that. “I believe there is a wide audience for theatre in LA. The problem is, these small individual theatres have their own individual audiences. I’d love to see what happens if you put GPS trackers on each audience member to see who goes where: which theatres do they visit? Do they limit themselves to

one or do they overlap into other theatres? I want to know how this migration affects the general eco-system of LA theatre.”

Hill also wonders what sort of theatre town Los Angeles wants to be. “Does it want to be like New York? Chicago? Does it want to be commercial theatre? Experimental theatre? Does LA want to be a professional town or an amateur town? There isn’t consensus.”

Hill envisions a model in which Los Angeles theatre succeeds without having to be a feeding ground for New York. “Why can’t a big musical start in LA and end in LA? Maybe theatre goes entirely underground,” he suggests, “but I don’t see that happening. It’s such an active community and fascinating to watch from a sociological perspective.”



Ben Hill Photo by Star Foreman

Hill, who founded Hollywood Fringe with eight others in 2007, refuses to call it a feeder festival. “Theatre to me is where all the art forms (performance and visual) converge and work together,” he says. “It is musicians working with dancers; dancers working with tech people; tech people working with actors; actors working with producers. It’s defining all these mediums, bringing them all together, combining all forms of expression. I’m interested to see what happens when a dance group develops a relationship with a theatre that develops a relationship with music producers, and on and on.”

Hill and several friends produced The Hatchery Festival for a couple years in Washington, DC. “We work-shopped plays with emerging playwrights,” he says. “It was fun but I always wanted more - a full-on theatrical experience, not just a showcase of new plays.”

He spoke with a few folks “in the know” in LA theatre and asked if they knew of anyone doing a Fringe in LA. “When all the avenues went cold, I discovered there was an opportunity for something special here. We conceived the name of the fest in my Hollywood apartment in September 2007, immediately bought the domain rights and started slowly building up our capabilities step-by-step: incorporation, nonprofit, community contacts, organization memberships, venue relationships, artist marketing, website, sponsors, always wanting to do it the right way rather than the fast and easy way.”

He assembled a team he had worked with in Washington, DC and Iowa, “most notably Dave McKeever, our producing director, and we have been working ever since.”

Hill is reminded of the December, 2008 ARTBASH, a co-production with Need Theatre. “It was a risky but potentially fantastic, open-source event. We set the stage and let the artist fill it with content without our censorship. There was, what I call, great pandemonium.” He smiles. “More than 300 people were there; many of them told me they’d never been to anything like it before. They got carried away like they were on a psychedelic drug! But in a good way!”

This year’s opening ceremony is June 16 at King King, the nightclub on Hollywood Boulevard (\$10 for participants; \$15 for non-participants). The Festival comprises about 200 companies from English speaking countries: the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Scotland, etc.

Hill believes this to be the largest arts festival in California, judging by the number of shows. “I’m also pretty sure we are having the largest first year of any Fringe Festival. We are open to anyone with an idea, a thought. If you have that, you can do it.” He laughs. “Barring, of course, the overthrow of the government or real violence. But we give producers the freedom to fail. Yes, it’s risky. It’s exciting. It’s a little scary. But from the audience perspective, you’re paying \$10 to see a live performance? Hey, that’s living!”

Here’s a snapshot of upcoming shows:

PLAYS:

Friends Like These: Playwright Gregory Craft’s work received a “GO!” from *LA Weekly* and was nominated for Best Ensemble Cast at the Artistic Director Achievement Awards. The play also has been accepted by the New York International Fringe Festival. It debuted last fall and “takes a candid and poignant look at the staggering issue of violence in our high schools.” Co-director Scott Fitzgerald says, “Although Columbine occurred 10 years ago, violence amongst teenagers and young adults is still an ongoing issue. After Columbine, those who dressed similar to the shooters were further ostracized. This production seeks to explore this cycle and to humanize those who are regarded merely as outcasts.” The Ruby Theatre @ The Complex. (More info at www.friendsliketheseplay.com)

Back to You: A Dear John (Mayer) Letter: Written, directed and produced by Brianne Hogan, this original play tracks Mayer as he sets out to find his long-lost Japanese summer school love. It stars Martin Lindquist as John, with Carla Lopez, Rodrigo Fernandez-Stoll and Hogan. At ComedySportz Theatre.



"Booth & Pat: Two Guys, One Guitar, No

Standards"

Booth & Pat: Two Guys, One Guitar, No Standards: Described as the “Smothers Brothers on crystal meth,” this hit from La Comedy Festival & Sarasota Improv Festival was a 2009 Mac Award nominee for Best Music/Comedy Duo. Booth Daniels and Patrick Frankfort (and his guitar) present an hour of song, shtick and sketch. Playing at ComedySportz Theatre.

Pagan Play: The search “for home, the attempt to defeat loneliness and the basic question of ‘What do I do now?’” San Diego Moving Parts Theatre Company member Megan McCauley says the show examines these themes “and the posing of these questions is done through a slightly absurd lens - the play takes place in a forest in present-day. The characters include a Faun, a Centaur, a Coven of Witches, a Family of Tourists, a Waiter, an Apprentice and more. We juxtapose fantasy (predicting the future by moonlight) and reality (setting tables in the forest restaurant) to prompt audiences to focus less on the plot and more on the characters’ own personal journeys.

(movingpartstheatre.blogspot.com/)

The Understudies: TEN WEST is the neo-vaudevillian comedy duo of Stephen Simon and Jon Monastero, under the direction of Bryan Coffee. Four performances at Theatre of NOTE.

Surf Dogs Unite!: Magnum Opus Players presents this work based on the hundreds of unreadable screenplays that get sent to studios. Most never get read - until now. It is “an unbelievably awful screenplay, compressed but otherwise unaltered, word for word. We didn’t change a thing.” The script looks into the “iniquitous lives of a group of young Southern California Christian surfers as they square off against a pack of hell-bent bikers in a tale of revenge, redemption and tasty waves.” Presented by Sacred Fools Theatre Company.



Mikhail Tank in "For the Special Ones"

For the Special Ones: Russian born artist Mikhail Tank’s work is “dedicated to all those who feel like they’re sitting in the corners of life.” Music by Daniel Levin. Performances are at the Stella Adler Theatre.

Valentino: A Play in Verse by David Wisheart is set “in Italy, 1502. Duke Valentino must face the sins of his past in order to protect his family. Brilliant and ambitious, Valentino wages a war to reclaim the Papal States for Rome but he is haunted by the memory of murdering his brother. His beloved sister may be plotting his destruction. His mercenary captains have formed a conspiracy against him. His only hope for survival lies with two Florentine men of genius: Leonard da Vinci and Niccolo Machiavelli.” At Flight Theatre @ The Complex.

SOLO PERFORMANCES:

Shaheed: The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto: Half-Pakistani Anna Khaja revisits the life and

death of the Pakistani leader and seven other characters, at the Open Fist Theatre. It then goes to the New York Fringe Festival in August. Read more [here](#).



Andreas Beckett in
"Unbuttoned"

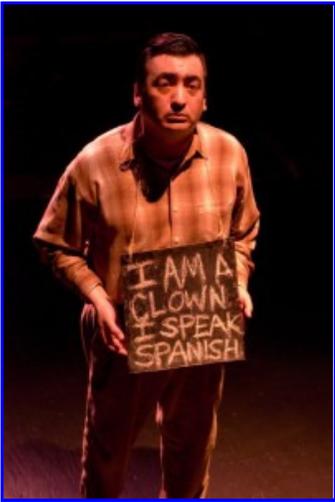
Unbuttoned: Andreas Beckett's turns his true story into a musical dramedy. Its world premiere is at the Lounge Theatre.

Kill Your Television: Jeff Gardner's 45 minute piece that eschews the notion that whoever has the remote control has the power. "Not in this living room. Take a plunge into the other side of the screen and discover why they call it 'programming'." At the Quantum Theatre. (Gardner also can be seen in *King Lear* at Antaeus Theatre Co. in North Hollywood through Aug. 15.)

!Death 40-Foot Tall! Pam Noles' show. Mounted in the ballroom theatre at ComedySportz.

Bye Bye Bombay: Cara Yeates "went to India to write a play. I didn't expect to start working in Bollywood." This is the story of a troubled teen who runs away to India to spite her Indo-Canadian mother. Includes the use of multimedia. Cara plays 12 characters; includes puppets. At Theatre Asylum.

LA Lights Fire: Written by Coeurage Theatre's Eric Czuleger and performed by Joe Calarco. "The Hollywood Sign was burned down, USC was taken over by gangs, Home Depot Center became a refugee camp. The agents, firefighters, deadbeats, whores, writers, stoners, actors, lawyers, drug dealers, and squirrels just watched. This is their story." Coeurage also will mount this year's ensemble piece *Head Over Heels*, also by Czuleger. At ComedySportz Theatre.



Fred Blanco in "The Stories of Cesar Chaves"

The Stories of Cesar Chavez: Fred Blanco's "dramatic bilingual portrayal of the civil rights activist and labor leader blends fact and fiction to offer a compelling look at the California farm workers' struggle of the 1960s as seen through the eyes of their humble leader. As imagined by Blanco, Chavez's 1968 hunger strike leads him to re-examine his past while under the watchful eye of La Virgen de Guadalupe." At Theatre Asylum.

They Call Me Mr. Fry: Written by and starring Jack Fry, it has run for more than two years in LA and had a three month extended off-Broadway run. "*Welcome Back Kotter* meets *Cops*; *No Child Left Behind* versus *King Arthur*" in a 5th grade South LA classroom. At the Lounge Theatre 2.

The Packer: A New Zealand-based theatre company brings its acclaimed play in for its US premiere. It sold out in New Zealand, Australia and Edinburgh Fringes. "Set in West Auckland, it transcends location and showcases the contemporary world where cultures blend, racial intolerance comes to the forefront and insecurities are exploited with humor and heart." At Theatre of NOTE.

Face the City: Jesse Wilson portrays the Painter, the Composer, the Journalist and the Performer. "When one of them decides to take his own life, his pathway to destruction is explored by the Performer who is forced to come to terms with loss, compromise and finally escape from his own false dreams as he discovers himself walking down a similar road." Integrates rock, theatre, audio visual live action and animation. At The Complex Theatre.

Dancing with Crazyies: a wild tale written and performed by Amy Milano, directed by Debra De Liso, about one woman's search for love and a place to call home. Her love of dancing takes her half way around the world where she meets a colorful cast of characters. At The Complex Theatre.



Kahlil Ashanti in "Basic Training" Photo by Peter Prior

Basic Training: Kahlil Ashanti returns to the LA stage after premiering his show at the Second Stage Theatre in October 2004 and subsequently touring to sold-out audiences around the world. Ashanti's "autobiographical show chronicles his time in the US Air Force as a member of the elite entertainment troupe 'Tops in Blue' where he learned to serve his country by using his talent as his weapon. Playing 23 characters, each with a distinctive voice and personality, mayhem ensues as Ashanti's adventures put him in several life-affirming and life-threatening situations." Nominated for a 2009 Drama League Award, Ashanti recently was selected as a Cirque du Soleil performer. At the ComedySportz Theatre.

Mission of Flowers: This true story of love, intrigue, adventure and loneliness, the hit of the Adelaide Fringe, receives its US premiere. Written by Gerry Greenland, directed by Damien Lay, it stars Leof Kingsford-Smith, the grand nephew of legendary aviator Charles Kingsford-Smith, who chronicles his ancestor's 1917 flight from Britain to Australia. At Theatre Asylum.

52 Man Pickup: LA artist Desiree Burch, having done her solo performance at the New York and Edinburgh Fringes, brings her show home before embarking on a summer tour which includes New Orleans and London. "The show is definitely risqué," she says, "and what I like to think of as the real, nitty-gritty version of sex & the city. At Fringe Central Theatre of Arts.

Article by Steve Julian

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