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FRINGE FARE: PORTFRINGE-15 HONES ITS CATEGORIES, DIVERSITY

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Don't despair of all the perky Broadway musicals about to burgeon: Summer is also time to get your Fringe on in Portland. It's the fourth year now that PortFringe has offered new, edgy and experimental work grown here and beyond. Running from June 20-28, PortFringe-15 presents multiple performances of 48 productions, staged variously at Geno's Rock Club, Portland Empire, and Portland Stage's Mainstage, Studio and Store Front theaters.

Fringe-goers should remember that entry to all shows works on a Passholder system (punch passes, rather than tickets to specific shows) and that seating is All-Rush (first come, first served at the door). Passes are for sale at each venue and at Coffee By Design, and can be bought with cash only, either individually (\$10) or in books of 3 (\$28), 7 (\$60), 12 (\$80), or unlimited (\$125); you can also buy a new 3-show "Grab-bag" pass to three pre-selected shows. Go to www.portfringe.com for the full schedule, strategize your Fringe plan of attack and prepare thyself for the strange, brave and barely classifiable. There follows a round-up of PF-15's shows.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

As befits a festival whose mission includes celebrating “the imaginative and the weird,” an abundance of PF shows bridge disciplines. Among those doing the most dizzying genre-straddling: Jimmy Grzelak has sure got Portland’s number in offering a “gastro-liturgical event” called St. Jimmy Celebrates “The Food at Our Feet,” a love child of cabaret, sound work, “edible puppet oratorio” and church service. Machine 5 Theater Works presents a poetic variation of a radio play, plus motion-sensitive sound design, in Sarah Kane’s *Crave*; the Amanrantos Quartet fuses the music of Benjamin Britten and the poetry of George Crabbe in *Ever Shrinking Tradition*; and Tandem Theatre Collective’s *(Be)come Ocean* merges movement and story with sculpture. In *The Road to High Street*, Andrew Potter tells a busker’s story with music, clowning, rubber-chicken-juggling and “digital storytelling,” and in *The Shapeshifter’s Party*, Lynne Cullen and Kurt Kish blend storytelling and live music to tell transgender folk tales.

PHYSICAL THEATER AND MOVEMENT

Little Red Rug, a physical theater ensemble that recreates classic stories, presents a re-imagined *The Jungle Book* that entwines Kipling’s characters with a woman’s real-life coming-of-age story. More physical comedy comes from clown siblings in “Mom?” *A Comedy of Mourners: Box of Clown*”; and in the cabaret-infused *Fruit of the Sea Burlesque*, by Merkins, Daniello & Sons, in which a mermaid contends with something sinister in a kiddie-pool. Modern dance ensemble *Yes Manifesto* researches memory by recreating movement events in *Trouble with Nostalgia*; and danceREK uses movement to explore intimacy in *Mandatory Quest*. Finally, Amanda Erin Miller gives us a “performance/yoga class hybrid” in *One Breath, then Another*.

INSPIRED-BY-REAL-LIFE

Stranger than fiction is the story behind *Dolphinephelia: The True Story of Margaret Howe Lovatt*, about a NASA-funded experiment to teach dolphins English and a woman’s “sensual” relationship with one marine mammal. The Southern Maine Workers’ Center stages the events surrounding the infamous 1911 New York disaster in *The Triangle Fire and the Woman in the Hat*; and the American Civil War is the source of “strange and singular stories” in Tandem Theatre Collective’s *Boy Come Home*. Womanhood, self-discovery, and dual cultural citizenship drive Keila Fontáñez La Salle’s *When I Was a Puerto Rican Girl*; and in *BODY Play*, by Live Oak Collective presents an interview-based exploration of our relationships to our fleshy vessels.

MAGIC

Jackson Ridd calls his *Mindgasm: The Magic Experience*, which investigates the greys of our grey matter’s perception, “an ethereal waltz between mind and body.” And in *The Mysterium Show*, Keith Boudreau and Erica Valen perform a classic show of imaginative legerdemain.

PUPPETS



In Naked Masks' (becoming) Hue Man, a "modern-day Pinocchio" is assigned a gender and must consequently "MANeuver through the stereotypes." A washed-up puppeteer and his sock puppet wait to perform on a late-night talk-show in The Green Room, by Mark Magee. Finally, the Improvised Puppet Project is back, and oh-so-1980s, with Search for the Forbidden [Blank]: An Improvised Choose-Your-Own-Adventure with Puppets.

COMEDIES

There are many, some dark. In The Siren Song of Stephen Jay Gould, a She Smiled Production, a man's decision to kill himself is challenged by a stranger; and Broadside Theatricals' A Play About Nothing claims to be part Pinter, part Seinfeld in relating a disastrous trip to a Chinese restaurant. The Penny Dreadfuls' Once Upon a Twilight Saddle I assume to be a comedy because its private investigator hero is said to follow a lead to a diner, a jazz singer and a "pie-less clown." Billed as part stand-up comedy but sounding rather sobering, Bortle 8, by Chris Davis, tries to find darkness in an era of artificial light. And Ronna Levy's This Gonna be on the Test, Miss? details the vicissitudes of teaching remedial English in community college.

In a musical comedy for the kids, The Dragon's Well, by Janie Downey Maxwell, Orphan Jack must decide whether to kill the beast or throw off the princess. In a comedy probably not for the kids, DragonMaul Productions' Beyond Belief, two mediums drink and cuss to excess. Tim Ferrell, whose show about the trial of William S. Burroughs caused a stir last year, presents his Executive Order 1612, in which U.S. President of 2022 tries to set a Guinness record for executive orders. The Jetpack Superheroes are also back, this time with the comedy love songs of the We're Still Gonna Love You When You're Old. Mad Horse Theatre Company seems to have forgone the Dave and Chrissy Show this year, and instead presents How Dare You Sir: A Gentlemen's Panel of Rock, in which Tim Ferrell will moderate four panelists debating the enduring influence of four rock songs. Ear protection is advised.

DRAMA

A Jewish student's beliefs about the Middle East are called into question when she meets a college activist, in One Time Players' The Conflict; and in 50,000 Things Later, by 3rd Circle Collaborations, a woman wakes up in a strange white room with a mysterious stranger. Images from a Floating World, by Molly Hunt, bills itself ambiguously as "A play between places"; and in one of the few true classics of PF-15, Pie Man Theatre Company presents MacBeth. Finally, the Stone Pinhead Ensemble is back with another JT Nichols' play, this one a scathing dramatic satire called Waiting for God, which follows four dead, un-Baptized children into Limbo.

SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

You knew that this would one day become its own PF category. To start, there's the presumably self-explanatory Quickies, a Reckless Carnage production by Jennifer Reck and Anna Cranage Conathan. In Leonora Rabinowitz, I Love You, presented by Hal Cohen and Amanda Painter, a world-renowned sex therapist seeks to educate a 60-year-old woman and her daughter about female sexuality. This is Awkward, by Connor McGrath, explores the romantic foibles of Millennials, specifically; and the domestic-arts-laden The Fair, by Kevin O'Leary and produced by Ellipsis Productions, brings together a pie-making woman and a drifter who can sew. Teen friendships are the subject of two shows, Life is Like, by Audrey Noelle Trotta and Mira Lamson, in which three high school seniors deal with life while rehearsing Twelfth Night; and Ben Roger's Roses in the Winter, which looks at the tensions of three teens in 1979 Scarsdale. And coming back, inevitably, to sex: If title and precedent are any indication, the end-all and be-all of PF raunch just may be MTWTFSS's A Mixed Bag of Dicks.

META

Two shows will remind us of the craft of literary creation as they explore their themes. In Back-to-Back, by Hal Cohen and Patricia Mew, two plays are performed twice each, by two different directors and to contrasting effect. And Cauldron & Labrys Productions' Louisa May Incest, by Carolyn Gage, the author of Little Woman is accused by her main character of repressed lesbianism and memories of sexual abuse.

FINALLY: BECKETT MASHUPS

There are two: The Meerkats marry the master's work to that of Lewis Carroll, in Waiting for Alice; and the notorious Crowbait Club pits him against extraterrestrial life in Aliens vs. Beckett. I certainly know who my money's on.

PortFringe-15, presented variously at Geno's Rock Club, Portland Empire, and Portland Stage's Mainstage, Studio, and Storefront theaters, June 20-28. Buy Show Passes at Coffee By Design or at the door of any venue prior to curtain. Visit www.portfringe.com.



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