

Found on the fringe

Theatre

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Picking and choosing from the annual SF Fringe Festival offerings is a crapshoot. After all, it's a lottery system that awards the available slots from entries received, without regard to any adjudged quality or proscribed content. How could the 42 productions in the upcoming festival be anything but a theatrical stew indiscriminately seasoned by dozens of chefs? The 21st edition of SF Fringe takes place Sept. 5-16, mainly at the Exit Theatre's venues on Eddy and Taylor Streets, and what appears below is a sampling of these productions. It's a sampling filtered through one writer's arbitrary and deservedly suspect sensibilities. A complete listing of the shows and schedules is available at www.sffringe.org.

The deed was done upon me decades ago, and I have no dog in this fight, but the voices rising against circumcision do bring up the tricky matter of non-consensual elective surgery on infants. Glen Callender, who stakes claim to possessing the most famous foreskin in Canada, will present *The Revolution Will Not be Circumcised* as part of his fight to keep penises in their natural hoodies. This sex-ed comedy is a project of the Canadian Foreskin Awareness Project, which Callender founded in 2010.

Titles of entries play an important role in what shows audiences will sample when confronted with a long list of unfamiliar names. *Cheesecake and Demerol*, both of which have often given pleasure in different circumstances, turns out to be a memoir monologue performed by an 80-year-old nurse. SF resident Gene Gore recounts her journey from dutiful Southern homemaker to a caregiver on the front lines as the AIDS crisis explodes. Subjects addressed include the meaning of life and how to save a marriage with oral sex and dance lessons.

While looking to titles to intrigue, *Confessions of the World's Worst Missionary* evokes the Broadway hit *Book of Mormon*. Southern Californian Lina Alfinito based her one-woman show on actual missionary experiences in South Africa, where poverty, HIV, and racism collide with idealism. Sounds dark, but Alfinito reports that this is "a quick-witted, snarky and heartfelt comedy performed with a Tina Fey-style dry sarcasm."

It's a hard-knock life being 5-foot-4 and presenting yourself as a top. And if your attributes don't easily include such quickie descriptions as bear or twink, what's a fellow to do?

In *VGL 5'4" Top*, New Yorker Lucas Brooks shares the stage with a laptop to look at snobbery in a gay-dating scene where differences often outweigh commonalities.

Paychecks can create strange bedfellows, as R. SKY Palkowitz reveals in *America Calling: Don't Hang Up!!* The pot-smoking Jewish lesbian from Los Angeles goes to work for a conservative think tank, and her solo show includes numerous characterizations from her double-life adventures. Palkowitz, who also includes clown, punk rocker, and educator among her credits, is professionally known as "The Delusional Diva."

The shows highlighted above, as many others in the Fringe Fest, are experience-inspired solo turns. But the festival also includes examples of fictional drama. *Tyrone "Shortleg" Johnson and Some White Boys* takes place in 1967 as a boozy blues legend finds himself on a second-rate TV dance show. Wayne Harris wrote and plays the singer, who manages to command the television camera as a soapbox for his views on everything from whorehouses to the co-opting of black music by white record executives.

San Diego's Animal Cracker Conspiracy takes puppetry to dark places in *The Collector*. Using toy theaters, tabletop puppets, stop-motion animation and film, the play follows a debt collector, working for a tyrannical overseer in an alternate universe, who undergoes a radical change of heart. Animal Cracker Conspiracy is partly funded by the Jim Henson Foundation.



Gabriel Gilli and Catherine Tandy head the cast of *Stalking Christopher Walken*, which imagines the working of the actor's mind and the night Natalie Wood drowned in a boating accident. (Photo: Molly Kate Taylor)

Suggesting echoes of the movie *Being John Malkovich*, Oakland's Gabriel Gilli of Oakland's Brickabrack Theatre offers a dance-comedy titled *Stalking Christopher Walken*. The piece suggests the inner workings of actor Walken's mind – and especially the boating accident that led to Natalie Wood's death.

Religion shows up in several of the Fringe offerings, usually with a good dose of irreverence. David Caggiano brings about a collision of creationism and Hollywood commercialism in *Jurassic Ark*. It's the story of a fire-and-brimstone preacher hell-bent on making a movie that shows men and dinosaurs living together, and Noah's Ark as the actual cause of what we call evolution. The studios aren't as keen as Brother Dallas to take the plunge.

To finish up this look at the 2012 Fringe Festival, we need to hop on a bus to take us to an off-site venue. Actually, the bus *is* the off-site venue. *Sugar High: A Brechtian B!tchslap* is an immersive theater experience that finds its roots in SF's Popcorn Anti-Theatre of the 1990s and Europe's Pollinator movement, and the drama that ensues from the collision of the two. As the bus travels through diverse neighborhoods, Patricia Miller's script takes aim at primal desires, Brecht, Sartre, crack whores, and Mexican wrestling. A final caveat: "Possibly cold, windy, rainy walking involved."

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