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Intense finale for Montreal Fringe Festival Winds up this weekend with a slew of shows, concerts

BY PAT DONNELLY, GAZETTE THEATRE CRITIC JUNE 21, 2013

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Leslie Baker gives a feral performance in F--- You! You F---ing Perv!, which, not surprisingly, contains strong language.

Photograph by: Torso

MONTREAL - Following a Fringe festival can be exhausting as well as exhilarating. And it all becomes more intense on the final weekend, which, for the 23rd edition of the Montreal Fringe Festival, is now. The Fringe ends Sunday.

Tickets for some shows are becoming scarce. Through a mixture of reviews and rumours, the collective sorting process has singled out certain shows, which are consequently already playing to sold-out houses. Fortunately, the festival holds back 25 per cent of the tickets for each show, for sale exclusively at the venue starting one hour before show time.

The good news is that you can still get in, as long as you get there an hour ahead of time. Once you have your ticket, you can go shopping or

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pick up something to eat. (The gastronomic possibilities located in proximity to Montreal Fringe venues are rich and varied.)

Another complication is that the Fringe's outdoor activities at Fringe Park, the hub of the festival in Parc des Amériques at the corner of Rachel St. and St-Laurent Blvd., intensify.

Because of a unique deal with the Pop Montreal festival, the Fringe is co-presenting an impressive lineup of free outdoor concerts on Saturday (7-9 p.m.) and Sunday (4-8 p.m.). If you want to hear a particular music group, it may mean skipping an indoor show. (Groups playing are Sea Oleena, Carpet and Maica Mia on Saturday, and the Sin of the Swoon, Rakam, Ramzi, Paula, and the Moment on Sunday.)

Also, the Fringe's annual Drag Queen Race, hosted by Mado Lamotte, which involves high heels, an obstacle course and martinis, takes place Saturday from 4 to 6 p.m. On Sunday, from noon to 4 p.m., multiple children's events will be presented outdoors as part of the first-ever Kid's Fringe.

Child-friendly entertainment at the Fringe doesn't end there. Several of the top indoor shows at this year's festival are family fare, starting with Belzébrute's delightful puppet-show musical *Mr. P*, which tells the heart-wrenching life story of a potatohead song-and-dance man within an antique nickelodeon framework. The company is francophone, but there's little dialogue, most of the songs are in English and there are surtitles. *Mr. P* is adorable.

Little Orange Man, a touching tribute to a Danish grandfather performed by Ingrid Hansen of Victoria, features edible puppets and is marvellously inventive, as well as suitable for all.

Pierrot and the Moon, which leans heavily on mime, isn't as innovative as *Mr. P*, but it's still a polished, charming piece involving an Italian-speaking Pierrot, a sobbing bride and a puppet rat who steals the show as well as the heroine's necklace.

Just about everyone should get a kick out of Aussie comedian Birdmann, too. His two specialties are deadpan one-liners and zany physical comedy tricks — like pouring water from a teapot through his nose.

Unfortunately, one of the most imaginative for-all-ages shows at the Fringe, *Urge for Going*, inspired by the music of Joni Mitchell, is playing in a bar (Cabaret Mile End), which means no kids allowed. Mitchell fans won't want to miss this poignant mix of music, visual art, puppetry (a friendly fox) and storytelling.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are plenty of Fringe shows aiming to be X-rated, or for adults only. One of them is the blandly titled *Circle*, an Off-Broadway-style collection of tales about hooking up in the big city featuring eight characters (played by Christel Bartelse and Bob Brader) and various sexual persuasions. It's sizzling and thoroughly professional.

Not surprisingly, *F--- You! You F---ing Perv!* contains strong language. And Leslie Baker's performance is positively feral. An earlier version of this disturbing work was presented at the Edgy Women Festival in March.

At press time, I hadn't yet seen the entirety of Holy Trinity! The glimpse of this sex-in-the-1980s show I caught at the Fringe-for-All suggested that it could be the most X-rated of them all.

Some shows, like Angel's Share, a new Scottish-themed play by Alexis Diamond, are adult in the sense that they're text-oriented, character-based, talky and propelled by nuanced acting (Chip Chuipka and Stefanie Buxton here).

Others, of similar local and theatrical ilk, aren't as professional as Angel's Share. Sins of the Mother being one (earnest but lame), and Good Housekeeping (a zany scenario with flashes of wit), which suffered a collapsing set on the night I attended, being another.

Local shows, good or not, are often the ones with the largest and most enthusiastic audiences, as friends and family fill the pews.

Some comedies, like the Aussie-talk solo Zack Adams: Zack to the Future, which has a sci-fi angle, are adult (and hilarious), but also of special appeal to older adolescents.

My colleague Bill Brownstein highly recommends two local comedy shows: Now That I Have Your Attention, by Dan Bingham, and The Balding, by Jeff Gandell. I very much enjoyed comedian Rena Hundert's monologue The Sky Is Exploding.

At the Fringe there's a certain gender equality. Of the 31 one-person shows at the 111-show festival, 16 are by men, 15 by women.

Among the female solos, They Call Me Q!, by an American performer of South Asian descent (Qurrat Ann Kadwani), stands out. It's witty, polished and inspiring to young women in search of freedom and identity.

The Montreal Fringe Festival ends Sunday, June 23. Visit montrealfringe.ca for more details.

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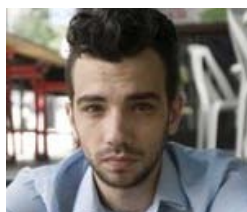
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