

# **Review: Cinderella pushed to the fringe**

**Screwball comedy has right dose of irreverence**

**Stephen Hunt, Calgary Herald**

Published: Friday, August 10, 2007

There's wicked stepsisters and then there's stepsisters willing to stage a cage match over the merits of Lindsay Lohan and Hillary Duff.

Never mind that one of those stepsisters is a guy enlisted by the narrator (hilariously played by Cody Michie) who looks pretty good in his slinky dress and red wig - better, in any event, than Lohan's mugshot after a night on the town.

These are just some of the twists on the original fairy tale in Cinderella the Wizard, an enjoyable, irreverent all-ages screwball comedy that opened the Calgary Fringe on a breezy, brittle Friday afternoon that felt more like late October than early August.

Seeing as we've all had a first-rate tutorial in fairy-tale revisionism with Shrek, reinventing Cinderella as Edmonton author Ellen Chorley does here - it's retold as a dead-broke community theatre production, with a dash of Harry Potter's wizardry thrown in alongside the original Cinderella - is a perfectly fun idea, which they pretty much pull off.

There's a narrator who tries to deliver the fairy tale straight, but, being a low-budget affair, things go wrong left and right. There isn't enough money in the budget to pay two evil stepsisters, forcing the campy stage manager to step in. They are forced to stop the play halfway through in order to cast one of the actors to play the mayor.

And for the big ball scene, the production enlists the support of the audience to play the party guests. You could almost say it's what would happen if you took Cinderella to the Fringe. Which, of course, is exactly what it was.

It was pretty much one-to-one ratio between cast members and audience members at the Big Secret Theatre on Friday, the first day of the Fringe, but that didn't dismay the game cast, which included author Chorley, Andrea Gilborn, Nicole Moeller, April Killins, Michie and Kevin Ritchie. The good-natured cast more than fulfilled the comic possibilities presented by Chorley's screwball script. Fans of The Princess Bride, or Shrek will enjoy Cinderella the Wizard, and underneath it all, there's a valuable pitch for literacy.

Best of all, it's easy to follow for kids, all of whom were under five at Friday's performance and stuck with it right through to the moment where Cinderella meets her Prince Charming. Or is Prince Charming from another fairy tale?

shunt@theherald.canwest.com

## **Deep Fried undercooked**

**Performance more compelling**

**Stephen Hunt, Calgary Herald**

Published: Sunday, August 12, 2007

Than storyline Calgary fringe festival

Deep Fried

## Curried Perogies

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Written & Performed by Michelle Todd

The Motel at EPCOR Centre

Calgary Fringe Festival

Rating 3 1/2 out of five

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Just when we thought there was nothing else to learn about Edmonton, along comes Michelle Todd to set us straight.

This engaging actress-playwright's one-woman show *Deep Fried Curried Perogies* explores the experience of growing up a mixed-race young woman -- half Filipino, half Jamaican -- in, of all places, Edmonton. Further complicating her life is that fact that she's pregnant, and the dad is a Ukrainian white guy named Bob.

Todd is a charismatic performer, who uses movement and voice to recreate all the various characters from her childhood. She nails the details of being a minority in Canada so well, from the way her dad automatically smiles and says hi to every other black person he comes across, to him listening to BBC broadcasts of cricket, to the casual racism practised by the teens she goes to high school with, that you almost feel like you're home in the kitchen in Edmonton with her and her family.

Along the way, Todd takes us on hilarious dance tour of her past, everything from voguing to line dancing the way the girl from Newfoundland does it. She can convey more information and cultural nuance in a 10-second dance sequence than many performers can in a 10-minute monologue. When she blows out her hair for a school photo at the urging of a classmate, it breaks your heart even as you laugh your head off.

Todd's strengths as a performer struggle when they run into her limitations as a storyteller. *Deep Fried Curried Perogies* doesn't so much tell a story as it does capture a time. The problem is, as you go deeper into the show, your attention begins to trail off a little rather than building. The truth is that being pregnant with a Ukrainian guy's kid isn't

really that big of a problem for her multi-ethnic family -- or at least that's the way it's presented to us.

Despite the narrative shortcomings, not to mention anti-Edmonton feelings around here, Deep Fried Curried Perogies still manages to effortlessly draw us into its world.

Todd almost makes you want to visit there some time. (Just kidding, Edmonton!)

## Late Night more awkward than bizarre

**Jeff Kubik, For the Calgary Herald**

Published: Sunday, August 12, 2007

Late Night

Circus Bizarre by Tabloid Origami

Legion #1, 116 7th Ave SE

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Rating 2 out of five

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A late night talk show collapsing in front of the audience's eyes, Late Night Circus Bizarre goes through a series of mishaps and hijinks: scheduled guests fail to show up, the Red Green nerd-styled host openly mocks the show, and the producer hawks his personal possessions in lieu of advertising sponsors.

Ironically, the muddled production itself is an unfortunate mirror of the fictional premise.

Seemingly improvised by the earnest but underwhelming Tabloid Origami troupe, the talk show structure proves downright claustrophobic.

Instead of the zany antics the show seems desperate for, a series of obligatory, stumbling steps forward take place and the result feels forced.

Thankfully, in between second-rate (if still funny) pseudo-Borat impersonations and a tasteless appearance by the producer's mentally challenged nephew, the show manages to demonstrate a glimmer of Fringe innovation with its "guest" spot.

For its first show, Late Night Circus Bizarre featured an appearance by June Morrow of Miss April Day's School for Burgeoning Young Strippers, another Fringe production.

And while Morrow did more to illustrate her own struggles with tempo and tone than endorse her show, the idea of offering a taste of other Fringe productions is an inspired combination of performance and promotion.

Call it theatre of the awkward, the kind of cringe-inducing comedy that's made The Office one of the most popular shows on network TV.

Unfortunately, performance as intimate as theatre doesn't require much to bring on moments that leave their audience wearing holes through the floor or grooves into their arm rests -- all it needs are awkward performances that leave their own gaping holes in an unfortunate premise.

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## Fringe highway

**Life on fringe circuit proves, an Obscene tour across Prairies**

**Stephen Hunt, Calgary Herald**

Published: Thursday, August 09, 2007

Spotlight

The Calgary Fringe Festival starts Friday and runs until Aug. 19 at various venues downtown. Check [CalgaryFringe.ca](http://CalgaryFringe.ca) to buy tickets.

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West End Winnipeg. Saturday. 9 a.m. Late July.

There are four cots lined side by side in the bare, concrete basement of a bungalow on Lipton Street in Winnipeg. This is where *Obscene But Not Heard*, the longtime Calgary-based sketch comedy troupe, has called home -- courtesy of local billets -- for the past 10 days, where they performed their show *Jihad Me at Hello* to Winnipeg Fringe Festival audiences of varying degrees of enthusiasm. If it resembles anything down here, it's that basement in *Silence of the Lambs*.

Nicole Zylstra drags a duffle bag out of the basement, ahead of fellow cast members Peter Strand Rumpel and Trevor Campbell, as well as their tour technician, Gina Marin. It's the end of the most recent leg of a road trip that started in June, when the group took *Jihad Me at Hello* to Montreal's Fringe and started a long, slow trek across the country that included Fringe festivals in Montreal (good parties, bad attendance), Toronto (lots of buzz, not such a hot sense of humour), Winnipeg (good money, steaming hot weather), and continues through the Calgary Fringe (starting tomorrow) and on to Vancouver.

"We're not used to being up at this hour," Zylstra says, a little solemnly. "There wasn't a night in Winnipeg that we got to bed before three in the morning."

Last night, the group performed not only their final show of the Fringe to a solid full house, but also performed some new material at a late night show in the living room of an apartment on Arthur Street -- a show that included complimentary shots of tequila and peppermint schnapps.

Today, we are driving from Winnipeg to Calgary in an air-conditioning-free minivan with 192,000 kilometres on the odometer. That's the bad news. The good news is, it's a much easier drive than the one the group made from Toronto to Winnipeg, which is about 22 hours of northern Ontario bleakness.

Welcome to the fringe festival circuit. It starts out in June, in Montreal (or mid-May, if you choose to travel to the Orlando, Florida Fringe Festival.)

For many theatre artists, the fringe circuit that has sprouted across Canada has become a kind of 21st century vaudeville circuit, the gen X equivalent to the carnival lifestyle.

From Montreal, they go on to Ottawa, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria and finally Vancouver, which ends late in September.

Some of the most popular fringe acts, such as British spoken word performer Jem Rolls, or TJ Dawe (star and author of *Maxim* and *Cosmo* and director of *Local Celebrity*, which is playing Calgary), can earn upwards of \$35,000 over the summer fringe circuit, affording them a winter off to create a new show.

For others, who struggle to differentiate their shows from more than 100 that play many of these festivals, it's strictly a break-even proposition.

"Stars are everything at fringe festivals," says Zylstra, referring to the reviews every local paper runs. "A lot of people just photocopy the four and five star shows, and see them." (One Winnipeg paper gives Jihad Me at Hello four stars. Another gives them an A-plus, declaring them one of the Best of the Fest, both of which compensate for the Winnipeg Free Press's critic, who is less enthusiastic about the show).

## Fringe highway

### Life on fringe circuit proves, an Obscene tour across Prairies

**Stephen Hunt, Calgary Herald**

Published: Thursday, August 09, 2007

10 A.M. Breakfast.

Peter Strand Rumpel used to come to this Perkins in west Winnipeg at four in the morning in the early '90s, when he worked a dinner theatre by the Winnipeg Airport called Celebrations, so it's a nostalgia trip in addition to the most important meal of the day.

Jihad Me at Hello is a collection of sketches and monologues created by the group, written mainly by founding member Tony Binns, and performed on this tour by Zylstra, Campbell and Rumpel. (Members Tammy Roberts and Tom Sarsons didn't do the 2007 fringe tour).

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They push the envelope in their sketches. The show opens with Campbell playing Hitler, stuck in a waiting room in Hell, waiting for a meeting with Satan. There's another sketch featuring an inappropriate weatherman. There's Campbell doing Christopher Walken, reading from a book of sausage recipes, and Campbell again, as Leonard Cohen. The finale is something called the Circus of Pain, featuring Rumpel as the host, dressed in black leather who verbally abuses the audience as he introduces characters such as the Armless Juggler, a mentally challenged Elvis and a consumptive Clown, who coughs herself to death onstage.

They're a bit like that dinner party guest in the corner who always says the most outrageous thing he can think of to get a little attention -- although Obscene But Not Heard are the easygoing, western Canadian version of that dinner party guest. They're

amiable even as they offend. During last year's Calgary Fringe, the show played at the Big Secret Theatre in Epcor Centre, which is near a Muslim prayer centre. Despite the walls being lined with posters advertising the show, the group didn't receive a single complaint.

When Rumpel tells the story, he almost sounds bummed out that no one was upset by the title.

According to Binns, playing the fringe circuit is a way to introduce the group to audiences out east in a way that's affordable: between being billeted in each city, collecting 100 per cent of the box-office receipts for all of their shows, and driving between cities, the group can almost manage to pay its way across the country.

"We're hoping to get our name out there, and as far as that goes, mission accomplished," Binns says, over the phone from Calgary, where he's getting married Aug. 25. "There's been a lot of reviews where people loved us, and a lot where people hated us. But people were talking and that's the important thing, so now when we go up to people and say, 'Obscene But Not Heard,' people go, 'Oh, coughing-up-blood-clown, retarded-Elvis. I know you guys.' "

Noon. Somewhere West of Brandon, Man.

It's 29 degrees outside and mid-summer clear. Campbell is driving and telling stories about life on the circuit.

## **Fringe highway**

### **Life on fringe circuit proves, an Obscene tour across Prairies**

**Stephen Hunt, Calgary Herald**

Published: Thursday, August 09, 2007

The last Thursday of the Winnipeg Fringe, he found himself in the King's Head Pub at two in the morning, talking to an actor who plays a character called Dishpig in a one-man show called Dishpig.

Dishpig is about 25-years-old, brown-haired, a likeable, Matt Damon type of guy. Earlier in the night, upstairs at the pub, which had been transformed into a fringe festival venue holding about 130, Dishpig killed: another sellout house that loved Dishpig's tale of 20-something woe, about being a smart, funny guy trying to find meaning in a life dominated by a meaningless, brainless job. It was a big-bucks night for Dishpig, even after 10 or 11 earlier performances in Winnipeg.

Then, at 2:15 a.m. in a pub filled with wired fringe performers and fans, Dishpig was plastered.

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"You know what I like about you?" he asked Campbell.

"What?" responded Campbell, who performs standup when not performing sketch comedy that pushes the boundaries of popular taste.

"You're so average-looking," Dishpig said. "Bald guys. Just average-looking people. I love that about you guys," Dishpig slurred. "You can do anything, and get away with it."

Campbell laughs at the story while, on the dashboard, an iPod plays an animated show called Strongbad. Road trip entertainment has come a long way.

It's easier to laugh at such moments when you're not flat broke. That doesn't always happen, but things are looking good for Obscene But Not Heard on this year's circuit.

"I don't think we expected big numbers at all out this way. They've (eastern audiences) never heard of Obscene But Not Heard. . . . For an absolutely unknown commodity, an unknown show to get labelled offensive that early, I think we did OK, actually. Hopefully we're returning to friendly stomping grounds, back home to Calgary.

"(The final show in Winnipeg) was actually pretty full. There seemed to be less hate in the room than usual. I think we only had a couple of arms folded, in disgust."

4 P.M. Boston Pizza. Regina.

It's 34 C outside. It's gorgeously chilly inside, where we sit at a banquette and gaze over at the Roughriders' paraphernalia hanging on the walls. After six hours in a hot minivan driving across the flat, barren prairies, Roughrider paraphernalia is practically erotic art.

"I've never been in a Boston Pizza," Zylstra says, gazing around at the generically decorated walls. "It's so popular. Why?"

6 P.M. Tim Hortons.

The old motel signs rising into the prairie sky look cool, like lost Vegas nightspots that got blown across the desert onto the prairies. You drive past each one of them and feel the tired eyes of everyone who ever drove across this stretch of blacktop, doing their best not to doze off at 110 kilometers per hour. We drive and listen to a podcast of Ricky Gervais of The Office.

For all the members of the troupe, the fringe circuit is far from a financial windfall. It's a crazy, unpredictable, economically dubious life.

Zylstra, who also toured a one-woman show on the fringe circuit in 2006, works on a casual basis at the Glenbow Museum when she's back in town, where she lives with her boyfriend Ben Rose, a popular busker on Stephen Avenue.

## Fringe highway

### Life on fringe circuit proves, an Obscene tour across Prairies

Stephen Hunt, Calgary Herald

Published: Thursday, August 09, 2007

Rumpel has worked the festival crews for eight years now. He owns a home and has tenants who cover his mortgage.

"I remember being told, when I was in college, doing a summer fun tour, (I met) some children's festival performers," Rumpel says. "We got along really well, and we got chatting, and they told me, 'Ahh, you're a lifer.' I said 'What?' There are certain people who will do this their whole lives.

"You hate to be the cliché, but when you talk to students, one of the first things you say is, 'Is there anything you can do that will make you happy?' If there is, you should, because your chances of having what most people consider a fulfilling life doing this are pretty minimal. But if you're happy without all the material possessions, without the security, and are willing to put up with the roller coaster ride that it is, then it's fun. I'm not saying it's bad. It's just not for everybody."

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10 P.M. Gas Station. Medicine Hat.

The neon lights of the gas station cast a weirdly surreal light across the parking lot and beyond, where cars zoom down the highway. We've been grinding it since 9 a.m. It's time to crack open a six pack and a bag of Old Dutch chips and watch some DVDs of old Monty Python and the Flying Circus (OBNH's comedy heroes) on the TV set in one of those sketchy Trans-Canada Highway motels -- at least it would be, except we still have 3 1/2 hours of driving to do.

All of which leads one to ask: why keep doing it?

For Binns, (who stayed behind in Calgary), there's a big difference between standup and sketch.

"In sketch comedy, the audience is more willing to go with you," he adds. "They're more patient. They're more willing to take flights of fancy and they don't need that laugh every 30 seconds, which is a big deal.

"They don't need that structure. They can actually follow a piece even as it gets weirder and weirder and weirder, even just for a payoff at the end."

1:30 A.M. Northwest Calgary

For Zylstra, it's something else. "It doesn't really pay off financially, when you're splitting it four ways," she says. "Even though we draw more than I did when I did the one-person show last summer, I made more then. But I also remember that there wasn't a day, last summer, when I was out on tour, that I didn't burst into tears.

"You do meet other performers and make friends, but it's nice just to have a gang," she adds as the van pulls up in front of tour technician Marin's house in the northwest part of town.

It's still hot out as the group says so long to Marin, who leaves the tour here. She's got another trip ahead of her, this time to Halifax, where she has a new gig as that theatre's assistant technical director. It's nice to see that fringing has paid off in a legitimate theatre job for someone.

For the others, this is just the end of another leg on their long trip. They'll be back on the road soon, collecting more anecdotes from their life on the fringe.

## **Fringe highway**

### **Life on fringe circuit proves, an Obscene tour across Prairies**

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One More From the Road . . .

There's a bandstand in a Winnipeg park that musicians play during the fringe. Atop it, a dozen performers stand in a semicircle, guitars poised. They're mostly theatre people in their 20s, circuit people. They might have started out in Montreal with some notion that this was a training ground, which it may or may not prove to be. But, it turns out, the fringe circuit is just as much a way of life.

One through 12, the dozen deadly six-string guitar players and their bits and pieces of beards face off. It's not easy trying to think up a song that 12 guitar players can play.

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Then, as if on cue, they break into a 12-part guitar symphony of Johnny Cash's Folsom Prison Blues.

Not everyone knows all the words, but everyone knows the line about shooting a man in Reno, just to watch him die.

"It's nice," Zylstra says, remembering why she asked her sketch guys to go on tour, "to have someone to have breakfast with."

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- [The Story Behind Third Songs](#)

Review

Miss April Day's Burgeoning School for Strippers

Written and Performed by June Morrow

Directed by Dave McKay

Four stars

This morning on the radio, Fan 960's Mike Richards played callers' favorite 'third songs', which only means something if you're a stripclub goer. Third songs are the ballads, the ones where the stripper lays onstage on a blanket, for the benefit

of her viewing audience.

After seeing Miss April Day's Burgeoning School for Strippers, June Morrow's engaging one-person show about what goes on after you've spent seven years in the V.I.P. room of the local peeler palace, third songs will never hold quite the same meaning.

Morrow, who spent a long time stripping for a living, is an entertaining, insightful guide to the back-rooms of the strip club world. She has a loopy, self-depreceating sense of humour that balances out the seaminess of the story she tells here, and gives the people who populate strip clubs--the strippers, at least--a recognizable humanity. As for the guys who go to strip clubs--they're about what you'd expect them to be.

This show is also part-musical, with Morrow showcasing wobbly vocals by singing her own lyrics, which are surprisingly good (the lyrics, that is). The song about Promise, her stripping mentor who turns into Poison halfway through the show, only to turn up at the local courthouse with a child, is poignant, and revealing, even if a little off-key.

Somehow, being a little off-key works just fine for the world depicted in Miss April Day's Burgeoning School for Strippers and the men and women who study there.

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Every show at the fringe carries with it six degrees of separation--sometimes less--from a bunch of other fringe shows.

In other words, performers use their shows to recommend other shows, to spread the word of mouth about shows, to generate buzz and basically get audiences excited to check out different stuff.

Last night at the Big Secret was a perfect example. Onstage was Ryan Gladstone doing his excellent, hilarious one-man show Napoleon's Last Word. In the audience was Michelle Todd, the writer and performer of Deep Fried Curried Perogies, not to mention fringe director Michelle Gallant and performers from other shows I haven't seen yet, so I can't tell you their names--but they were there, trust me. I saw them.

At the end of every show, the performer asks audience members to spread the word of mouth if they liked the show they just saw (Gladstone got a semi-standing ovation last night), then recommends a few others worth checking out. Some of Gladstone's recommendations were Deep Fried Curried Perogies, Bye Bye Bombay, Local Celebrity and Urban Reality.

In a way, it's the old-fashioned network that has always existed among performers, long before Facebook and those other social networking websites existed. The fringe, in its own way, is Facebook! Live.

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- [Geek Life](#)

**The Inner Life of Geeks** ★★★★★

Review: Chainmail Bikini

Written and Directed by Peter Boychuk

There's something right about the collection of misfits and geeks who gather at the Chainmail Bikini, a gaming store that's the setting of Peter Boychuk's witty, thoughtful one-act comedy of the same name.

This store is a haven for geeks, and in fact is co-owned by a couple of them, Tim, an aging geek and the other a young, skinny 19-year-old named Derek.

It's the day before the story is set to open, when Tim gets a phone call: thanks to an inflammatory letters-to-the-editor denouncing gaming as basically the road to ruin for young people, there might be no opening day at all, until Tim devises a contest between himself and Lucas, an old friend who found religion after a mutual gamer friend of the two kills himself.

Boychuk, who also directed, has a nice way of weaving his deadpan wit into a pot that's brimming with social issues.

Chainmail Bikini is a kind of old school exploration of spiritual values set in a new media landscape, but the questions Boychuk raises here are well worth having a conversation about. We live in a violence-drenched popular culture, in cities full of guns, often wielded by hormonally-raging young men. It's worth talking about the social consequences of that. If anything, Boychuk could probably take the story further than he does, by expanding Chainmail Bikini to full-length format.

And while Chainmail is well-written, it doesn't hurt to have a solid cast, including Luigi Riscaldino, David Bronson, Marissa Chastain and John Knight, all of whom reprise roles they originally played at the Calgary One-Act Festival, where Chainmail Bikini had its debut. The cast have terrific chemistry together, and are utterly believable in their roles. (Walking out of the theatre opening night, one woman said, "That was the best acting I've seen so far in the Fringe.")

I still don't get the title, but I sort of like that I don't get it.

Four stars out of five.

Stephen Hunt

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- **[The Buzz](#)**

Saturday night, 7:30 pm, Olympic Plaza is buzzing. There's a stage set up and dozens of young people are milling around. There's a crowd gathered too, lawn chairs set up, and maybe 300 people, armed with digital cameras and beverages and cushions.

At last, I'm thinking, there's finally a bit of Fringe buzz happening down here. The weather is warmer than Friday's autumn blast. So I wander over to check out the outdoor show.

Turns out it's not the Fringe at all; it's closing night of Footloose, the Musical.

Oh well--it made for a nicer scene than a lot of nights in Olympic Plaza.

And as far fringe shows go, I've seen three good ones in a row--Bikini Chainmail by Peter Boychuk, Local Celebrity by Alice Nelson and Miss April Day's School for Burgeoning Strippers, which actually drew a pretty good crowd for a Sunday matinee show.

The only thing missing at these shows was about two-thirds of the house.

Oh, and one other thing: a beer tent.

It's difficult to understate the importance of a good beer tent. The beer tent is every fringe festival's ground zero. It's where information gets exchanged, gossip gets passed down the pipeline, and performers mingle with audience members, although my mingle might be your hard sell.

It's nobody's fault there's no beer tent; it's a transitional year for the Fringe (next year they're moving to Inglewood), and there's just less room to maneuver downtown. Having the Calgary Fringe downtown is sort of the fringe equivalent of playing baseball in a stadium that's not quite perfectly suited for baseball. Although the venues themselves are good. The Theatre Calgary Lobby Theatre is actually a comfortable, fun place to watch a play, ditto for The Motel and the Big Secret. If that Theatre Calgary Lobby proves anything, it's that you can turn just about anyplace into a theatre.

The tricky part is turning a neighborhood that's more of a corporate lunch than a cozy meal into a festival.

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- [\*\*The Best Special Effect of Them All\*\*](#)

Review: Local Celebrity by Alice Nelson

Directed by TJ Dawe

Will Scheffer, a New York playwright who's the co-creator of the HBO series Big Love, a polygamy drama, once gave me an interesting piece of advice.

"The audience always responds to the truth," he said. "In fact, it's the only thing they find interesting."

What does the truth look like? What does it sound like? Is there a sound cue before it makes its way on stage? How about slides? Dry ice billowing out into the crowd?

In Local Celebrity, a one-woman show by Alice Nelson, the truth comes with a chair and a black backdrop--and Alice, telling a story about a young woman in Grande Prairie, Alberta, from a stable, two-parent family who grows up to become an escort who has sex with men for money.

Nelson, who is also a part of the group Clowns Without Borders, weaves quite a tale over the course of her 50 minute show. A lot of it ain't pretty. It's loser guys paying her to have sex with them. What elevates Local Celebrity beyond the sordid is Alice, who, despite the seaminess of her job, still manages to regard it as a job.

"A lot of it is customer service," she explains, as if she were talking about selling shoes, or working at the local Tim Horton's (her previous job), where they make you pay for the bad Tim Horton's uniform and don't give you an hour off for

lunch.

Nelson is not the most polished performer in the world. She isn't quite comfortable up there, inhabiting the skin of all those johns in her show. And, in the true fringe tradition, there's not much to look at except for her. There's no set, apart from the lonely chair.

But she's honest. Her writing has the unmistakable ring of the truth to it. It's funny one minute, and breaks your heart the next. We walk in to the Theatre Calgary Lobby, which has been pretty impressively transformed into a 100 seat theatre, but fifteen minutes later, we've all hitched a ride to the seamy side of Grande Prairie. Nelson has a way of cutting through the bull and getting right to the gist of it. Her show starts out a little awkward and nervous -- probably sort of the way one of those escort dates does -- and an hour later, everyone is glued to her story.

That's why, in theatre, the truth is the best special effect of them all.

Four stars out of five

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- [\*\*Saturday at the Fringe\*\*](#)

Here are a few shows we've got our eyes on for today at the Fringe.

1. The Tomb by Seattle's Joseph Luckhurst. Two guys in a bomb shelter trying to survive dystopia. It's on at 8pm at the Big Secret.
2. Chainmail Bikini by Peter Boychuk. An affectionate look at the world of gamers, which is another way of saying a peek into the emotional lives of geeks. 8pm at Theatre Calgary Lobby.
3. Late Night Circus Bizarre, by Tabloid Origami. Obscene But Not Heard co-founder and head Tony Binns recommendation.
4. Urban Reality by David Trimble. Based on a true story, a drama about a young girl from a broken home who runs away and gets addicted to crack. 5pm at the Motel.

REVIEW:

Here's a sneak peak at a review that's running in the Sunday Herald:

## Deep Fried Curried Perogies

Written & Performed by Michelle Todd

The Motel at EPCOR Centre

Calgary Fringe Festival

Just when we thought there was nothing else to learn about Edmonton, along comes Michelle Todd to set us straight.

This engaging actress-playwright's one-woman show Deep Fried Curried Perogies explores the experience of growing up a mixed-race young woman—half Fillipino, half Jamaican—in, of all places, Edmonton. Further complicating her life is that fact that she's pregnant, and the dad is a Ukranian white guy named Bob.

Todd is a charismatic performer, who uses movement and voice to recreate all the various characters from her childhood. She nails the details of being a minority in Canada so well, from the way her dad automatically smiles and says hi to every other black person he comes across, to him listening to BBC broadcasts of cricket, to the casual racism practiced by the teens she goes to high school with, that you almost feel like you're home in the kitchen in Edmonton with her and her family.

Along the way, Todd takes us on hilarious dance tour of her past, everything from voguing to line dancing the way the girl from Newfoundland does it. She can convey a much information and cultural nuance in a 10 second dance sequence as many performers can in a 10 minute monologue. When she blows out her hair for a school photo at the urging of a classmate, it breaks your heart even as you laugh your head off.

Todd's strengths as a performer struggle when they run into her limitations as a storyteller. Deep Fried Curried Perogies doesn't so much tell a story as it does capture a time. The problem is, as you go deeper into the show, your attention begins to trail off a little rather than building. The truth is that being pregnant with a Ukranian guy's kid isn't really that big of a problem for her multi-ethnic family—or at least that's the way it's presented to us. \n\u003cp\u003eDespite the narrative shortcomings, not to mention anti-Edmonton feelings around here, Deep Fried Curried Perogies still manages to effortlessly draw us into its world. Todd almost makes you want to visit there some time. (Just kidding, Edmonton!)\u003c/p\u003e\u003cp\u003eThree and a half stars out of five\u003c/p\u003e\u003cp\u003e\u003ca href\u003d\"mailto:shunt@theherald.canwest.com\" target\u003d\"\_blank\" onclick\u003d\"return top.js.OpenExtLink(window,event,this)\" \u003cu\u003e\u003cfont color\u003d\"#0000ff\" \u003e shunt@theherald.canwest.com \u003c/font\u003e \u003c/u\u003e\u003c/p\u003e

u003c/a>\u003c/p>\u003c/div>\u003c/div>\n\n",0] ); D(["ce"]); //-->

Despite the narrative shortcomings, not to mention anti-Edmonton feelings around here, Deep Fried Curried Perogies still manages to effortlessly draw us into its world. Todd almost makes you want to visit there some time. (Just kidding, Edmonton!)

Three and a half stars out of five

[shunt@theherald.canwest.com](mailto:shunt@theherald.canwest.com)

Stephen Hunt @ 3pm

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- **[The Joy of Plans Falling Apart](#)**

One of the best things about a fringe festival is making a plan after the first plan you made falls apart before you even make it out the door Saturday morning.

Take me, for example.

There's an 11am performance of Charles' Netto's Chance Moments on at the Big Secret Theatre that I wanted to see. It's a comic drama about a relationship, starting with the end of the relationship and going back in time to the moment the two lovers meet. It sounds good.

Alas, it's not happening this morning. Life got in the way. There's still another chance to see Chance Moments--every Fringe show is on five or six times.

And there are all sorts of shows happening at four different venues throughout the day, all the way up to the Late Night Circus Bizarre starting tonight at 10:30 pm at the Legion across from the Hyatt Hotel, that it's tough to get too bummed out about missing any single show.

Last night, the plan fell apart too. After enjoying Cinderella the Wizard at the Big Secret, I had to file this review.

<http://www.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/entertainment/story.html?id=3102915f-7f09-4b96-8c0a-cd10b1f7101a>

Then I wanted to make it back for an 8pm performance of Napoleon's Secret Diary, but one thing led to another and I made it back to the Big Secret with two minutes to spare before the curtain went up on Deep Fried Curried Perogies,

Michelle Todd's funny, touching one woman show about growing up half-black and half-Fillipino in Edmonton, which performed to a full house at The Motel.

It rocked.

So things went off the rails a little, but with a Fringe festival, that's all part of the charm. I spoke to David Trimble, the author and one of the stars of Urban Reality, Thursday. He had been out Wednesday, having a few pops, so instead of driving drunk, he caught a cab home. Thursday morning, he goes back to get his van--and it's been towed away from a lot he'd been parking in on weekends for years (OK, illegally parking but still).

So instead of loading in the props and running the show Thursday morning at his venue, Trimble spent it trying to get his van back (it cost \$175 to get it back--oops, there goes the box office from the first show).

"Know what the lesson is from that?" Trimble asks me on the phone.

"What?"

"Drive drunk!"

Well, either that or pay the \$5 and park it legit somewhere. But that wouldn't have made for a very good punchline, would it?

--Stephen Hunt at 11:08am.

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