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THEATER: Fringe reviews :: Jeffrey Bruner



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Here's my capsule review of shows as I see 'em at the Iowa Fringe Festival, updated throughout the festival. And if you've seen a show, this is the spot to post your own two cents. What are your favorites?

"Poona the F— Dog and other Plays for Children" Rollingnameless Productions

Perhaps the strangest show in the Iowa Fringe Festival but also the closest thing to a true fringe show, especially performed in a makeshift space at the Rainbow Center. Imagine fairy tales written by the guys from "South Park," George Carlin and Larry Flynt and you have this bizarre confection of a dog with a big pink box, a singing penis, a dancing television set that becomes King, and The Man Who Could Sell Anything. Performed with snarky irreverence by a gang of Des Moines Roosevelt alumni. 2 Sunday at the Rainbow Center, 305 15th St.

"Bad Dates" StageWest

Karla Kash has crisp comedic timing in performing this one-woman show about a 30-something single mom who's trying to get back on the dating scene. Theresa Rebeck's script is flawed and scattershot — it can't seem to make up its mind what it wants to be — but it's hard to tell whether that's due to trims to fit an hour-long fringe slot or whether the original material has the same problems. But women (and husbands) can relate to the shoe-focused humor here as well as the perils of adult dating. 2 Sunday at the Central Library.

"How to Fake Clinical Depression" Steve Marrocco

Actor and bass player Steve Marrocco of Los Angeles tells a remarkably funny trip through Big Pharma Hell as he fakes being depressed into order to become a test subject for anti-depressant drugs in order to make some much needed cash. ("I was on my last pack of Raman noodles," he says at the beginning. "Whole foods is out of the question.") Marrocco whirls through a slew of characters, including his entire family, his pompous doctor and a hot drug company assistant who makes it tough to convince his doctors that he's lost his sex drive. Funny, a pinch profane and a true fringe experience not to be missed. 8 Saturday, 3:30 Sunday at the Central Library.

Iowa Independent Short Films Iowa Motion Picture Alliance & Iowa Scriptwriters Alliance

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An interest assortment of short films by Iowa filmmakers, including several from the Shooting Scripts project where cast, crew and writers come together to put together a short quickly. The production values are better in the 2005 films than the ones done in 2003, although Max Allan Collins' "Three Women" is interesting for its gumshoe femme fatale style. "The Coffee Shop" and especially "Mimes of the Prairie" are worth seeing if you haven't so far and Bill Coleman's script for "Homeland Security" is wonderfully ironic. Shown every time slot at the Poppajohn Building.

"The Bible - The Complete Word of God (Abridged)" Theater ... for a Change

Guaranteed to make you laugh and, quite possibly, send you to hell for eternal damnation. John Cisar, Larry Mahlstedt and Thatcher Williams deliver a funnier and tighter show than last year's production and for good reason — a clock counts down their promise to finish the show in 55 minutes or your money back. (Tonight ended with 11 seconds to spare.) The material is goofy and irreverent — everything from The Top Five Rejected Commandments to The Funniest Scenes from the Book of Job to the big finale called "Revelation: The Musical." Judging from the audience at tonight's show, it's a bona fide crowd-pleaser as well. 2:30 and 6:30 Saturday, 2 Sunday at the Fitch Gallery, 304 15th St.

"The Zoo Story" Frank Burnette Productions

Edward Albee's 1959 masterpiece is a must-see for those who have never seen it. Richard Maynard and Joe Smith reprise their strong work from their Vaudeville Mews production as Jerry and Peter. Maynard perhaps starts a pinch too overheated as Jerry, a remarkably insightful man with keen power of observation who comes to a troubling conclusion about his life. (Beginning the show a few degrees cooler makes the character's boiling point more intriguing.) Smith has few lines as Peter, the mild-mannered editor, but it's just as difficult to maintain focus during Jerry's long rambling monologues and still provide the fire when required. A classic that everyone should see at least once in their life. 2 and 9:30 Saturday and 2 Sunday at the Central Library.

"Feiffer's People" Rabid Dog Theatre

A mixed bag of sketches by 60s humorist Jules Feiffer, this is a finger snappin', sunglass and beret wearin' alternative to standard fringe festival fare. Some skits work better than others and their relevance to today varies, although Feiffer's observations about work and war are timeless — "Letters Home from Indoctrination Camp" is hilarious. 5 and 9:30 Saturday, 3:30 Sunday at the Pappajohn Center.

"The Cubicle" Theater for the Thirsty

The first must-see of the festival, Jeremiah Gamble and Corey Mills have put together a very clever, quite funny and even moving meditation on life in small squares and how that impacts the other parts of our lives. It starts out as a one-joke bit — the cubicles are on wheels and morph into showers, cars, an elevator, and a grocery cart before becoming pieces of office equipment where software designers Jim and Robert work. But then the show slyly becomes something different altogether, mixing subversive comedy bits (the sound design and voice work by Gamble and his wife Vanessa is hilarious) with some nice observations about how people communciate (or don't communicate) with each other. 6:30 Friday and 5



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