

3 weeks ago The Toronto Fringe Festival 2019: more choices than chorus boys
in a Broadway musical



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Let's not even pretend that this is an exhaustive, or thorough, or even a likely "best of," round-up of the Toronto Fringe Festival. With over 150 productions spread over more than 30 venues, it is virtually impossible to sort through, let alone see, every show. So in a very unscientific manner, I began with the shows that had sent press releases, followed by the shows that have good word of mouth (yes, the hype begins months before the Fringe begins only to accelerate once the curtains rise. And it is still the best way to find out what show is hot and what is not. Talk to your fellow theatre-goers while in line), and then was compelled to at least skim through the entire website . . .



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The following are shows that intrigue me or trigger my own idiosyncratic tastes, but it might be a good jumping off point for an exploration of all that the Fringe has to offer. The best thing about the Fringe is that it is utterly unpredictable, so it's always worth taking a chance. So here, in no particular order, are the shows that are on my list of potentials. My current, sure to have changed by the time you read this, list . . .



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Molly Bloom: Last summer, I had the good fortune to see a production of the ever-evolving *Molly Bloom* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/06/molly-bloom-evening-in-idyllic-garden.html>] set in a garden. The cast Jenna-Lee Hyde, Lena Maripuu, Reanne Spitzer and Annie Tuma, and director Jocelyn Adema are not only dedicated to their erotic interpretation of the Ulysses text but have also shown, in works as diverse as *Peter Pan* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/12/peter-pan-bad-hats-theatre-can-fly-and.html>] , *Turtleneck* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/09/turtleneck-sex-violence-porn-and-red.html>] and *Pippi: The Strongest Girl in the World* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/08/pippi-strongest-girl-in-world-and.html>] , that they can seduce any audience. For the Fringe *Molly Bloom* has been dressed in finery and placed on a full stage: the results will be theatrical magic.



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Ghosted: a musical where desperate people join a dating app that is "run by demonic beings from a parallel universe whose intentions are nefarious at best." Will the demons take over the world or will the plucky posse of song and

dancers save the day? *Ghosted* has a cast and crew who are Fringe and musical theatre veterans, which bodes well for earth's survival. And who could resist Claire Rice (*Jesus Christ Superstar* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2015/01/selfies-with-jesus-jesus-christ.html>]) as The Mother of All Revenge and Ted Powers as Ravi, The Demon Fairy?



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Personal Demon Hunter: Velvet Duke's "demons are getting their exercise. He will use every tool in his arsenal to vanquish them for good, including turning to you, his fans." Duke is an "internationally acclaimed" motivational speaker who intends to confront and explore anxiety nightly through storytelling, music, stand-up, improvised comedy and audience interaction. A queer man with a baritone voice, Duke is charming and funny as hell so those demons don't stand a chance.



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Fuckboys the Musical: A hit at Fringes from Orlando to Melbourne, our feisty and foul-mouthed heroines sing and

ance instructions on dealing with Fuckboys who are "literal garbage and must be stopped." Do you need to learn "the skills you need to take down the post dangerous predators in today's modern dating scene?" We all do. And it doesn't hurt to have a little karaoke, a lot of comedy and enough obscenities to earn a content warning in the mix.



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Clitoria: A Sex-Positive Superhero! (The Musical): As if the title, the anti-Dog Fraud stance and the synopsis - "A sexually repressed high school science teacher accidentally turns herself into a sex-positive Vixen of Kink through a science experiment gone wrong" - weren't enough, *Clitoria* also boasts the talents of the scene-stealing Jada Rifkin (*Anne of Green Gables* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2016/04/anne-of-green-gables-ginger-pride-meets.html>]). Writer and star Laura Bailey also has the enviable assistance of director Christopher Wilson [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2016/09/two-kittens-kid-gay-man-raising-his.html>] who, as the impresario/director of Toronto Musical Concerts (*Parade in Concert* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2019/03/chris-tsujiuchi-leads-parade-in-concert.html>], *Merrily We Roll Along in Concert* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/09/michael-de-rose-is-merrily-rolling-along.html>], *Company in Concert* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/03/david-lopez-is-in-very-good-company.html>], *Assassins in Concert* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/10/assassins-ryan-kelly-joins-killer-cast.html>], *Into the Woods in Concert* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2015/01/into-woods-with-ryan-kelly-and-stellar.html>]) and a star of *Andy Warhol Musical: In Rehearsal* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/07/andy-warhol-musical-in-rehearsal.html>], knows how to make a musical zing.



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Boys Don't Cry: Christopher Wilson is busy this Fringe as he also directs "award-winning young songwriter Mateo Lewis exploring his complicated relationship with gender in this semi-autobiographical musical coming-of-age story." Lewis is a musical prodigy with a particular interest in gender fluidity, queerness and "the construct of masculinity." And he gets an able foil in the hunky and strong-voiced Carson Betz (*The 29th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/11/the-29th-annual-putnam-county-spelling.html>]).



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Outside Ethel: Inside: "Tragedy! Loneliness! Ballet!" Clowns are always best when they're "dark-tinged." Christine Moynihan is a housebound "advanced in years" clown in this one-clown show. "One-clown" as long as you don't count her friends, "the real ones, the stuffed ones, the imaginary ones." Best of all, "While this is a clown show, it is not intended for audiences under 15 years of age." The best clowns, like the best women of a certain age, are also racy.



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Night Cows: Queer Indigenous artist Jovette Marchessault "transforms herself into a sensual, grotesque, night cow. She opens herself in two, she splits herself in four, expanding into the milky way; her daughter riding her back as they go to wake the crows." Blurring the lines between human and animal (and the photos are fantastic) Marchessault says she wants to "invite audiences into the milky ecstasy of liberation."



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Spend Your Kids' Inheritance: A musical where "four seniors plot to regain control of their finances and escape their Ontario retirement home. A newcomer upsets the status quo at Alpine Home, unleashing repressed desires, igniting conflict between staff and residents and their adult children" is already appealing, but when it stars Charlotte Moore in an intimate setting (can that voice be contained?), all the better. Also in the cast are favourites Kyle Ozrech who made a big splash in *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding*, and the hilarious (I'm biased, he's a colleague. A very talented colleague) Bil Antoniou (*We Say Such Terrible Things* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2015/03/brain-food-masculinity-bottled-or.html>]).



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Unravelled: Musical director Chris Tsujiuchi [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2019/03/chris-tsujiuchi-leads-parade-in-concert.html>] (*Box 4901* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/08/box-4901-queer-talent-answers.html>] , *Onegin* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/05/onegin-oh-how-we-love-to-dream-of-love.html>]) is in charge of a score full of "soaring songs in the style of Les Misérables. His dramatic flair will make them stratospheric. The plot intertwines *Romeo & Juliet*, *Orpheus & Eurydice* and *The Gift Of The Magi*, so romance and regrets are afoot. The cast includes Jeff Lillico, who held his own in the panto *Cinderella* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2014/11/cinderella-drag-queens-save-christmas.html>] opposite the drag monster sacre Plumbum, and demonstrated quirky dramatic flair in *Bang Bang* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/02/bang-bang-darkly-comic-attack-on.html>] and *Tom at the Farm* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2015/04/tom-at-farm-sex-death-comedy-and.html>] . Who wouldn't want to hear him belt something as excessive as "But the tigers come at night/With their voices soft as thunder"?



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News Play: Before the era of fake news accusations and disintegrating advertising revenues, comedies set at newspapers were as frequent a source of laughter as the Sunday colour comics. A troupe of Fringe familiars - including Andrew Cromwell (*KOMUNKA*) and Greg Solomon (*Bitch Island The Musical*) - tackle an "exuberant" and "absurdist" plot ripped from the headlines: "after botching a major publishing deal, two estranged children's book writers return to their hometown to revitalize the local newspaper and save their pyromaniac cousin."



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Boy Falls From the Sky: Jake Epstein Live At Supermarket: Most of Canada saw Jake Epstein on *Degrassi* where he proved that he is a very effective teen idol. A lucky few hundred of us saw him in *Dog Sees God* where he proved he has dramatic theatrical chops. And then he earned his bona fide triple threat status on Broadway in *Beautiful* and *Spider-man: Turn Off the Dark*. Now he channels his Stritchian depths, with a one-man song and dance journey through the highs and lows, promising to lay bare the "rejection, stage fright and heartbreak behind a seemingly successful career in this showbiz tell-all."



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Mayhem at Miskatonic: subtitled "A Burlesque Mystery Game" - the audience will "choose the direction of the plot to save our souls or plunge the world into demonic darkness . . . No pressure" - the hijinks fuse burlesque with HP Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu*, two great teasers. And the cast includes sexy superstars Bianca B Boom (who was a musical theatre powerhouse before blossoming into a burlesque goddess), Brad Puddin [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2019/05/brad-puddin-takes-it-off-and-takes.html>] (*Portrait of a Scandal* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/08/brad-puddin-seduces-in-high-society.html>] , *Circus Shop of Horrors* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/07/circus-shop-of-horrors-at-late-night.html>]) and Sebastian Marziali (*Blood Weddings* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/03/blood-weddings-seething-with-repressed.html>] , *BoylesqueTO* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2013/07/theatre-review-class-dismissed.html>]) making the combination of tentacles and tantalizing flesh irresistible.



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Beneath the Bed: Branded as "age-accessible" (the Fringe does have a large selection geared to young audiences), *Beneath the Bed* has at least three stellar attractions to lure a discerning adult audience to this tale where, "in the aftermath of a trauma, a young child meets a monster living under their bed and together they discover through searching the stars that this too will pass" 1) Puppets! 2) Lucas Penner who braved the seas, and the children, in *Pippi: The Strongest Girl in the World* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/08/pippi-strongest-girl-in-world-and.html>] and 3) Graham Conway who charmed all ages in *Peter Pan* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2017/12/peter-pan-bad-hats-theatre-can-fly-and.html>] and then concentrated successfully on charming the pants off a more adult audience in *The Ding Dong Girls* [<https://drewrowsome.blogspot.com/2018/07/the-ding-dong-girls-everything-is.html>] .



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Box: Ray has been guarding The Box for 13 years. His orders are simply "do not allow the box to be stolen, tampered with, and most of all, never let it be opened!" Then he gets a new partner Dabney who is easy-going and wants to be friends. The duo face off with some "cultists" who have nefarious designs on The Box and/or its contents. There is a battle of wits, a battle of violence, tortured monologues and, of course, a dramatic twist. The playwright and director are both Fringe darlings, so it might be worth braving the opening of the **Box**.

And I can't help but be curious about:



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Closet Confessions: The Secrets of a Hot Mess: "With sass and dramatics, the show hilariously explores coming out of the closet, living with mental illness, and life as a hot mess." We can all relate.



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Searching for Marceau: "a budding young Mime trying to make sense of his two fathers: the real one raising him and the far away Marcel Marceau." Mimes are only one step away from the glory of clowning.



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Squeeze My Cans: Surviving Scientology: "Lets you experience for yourself how Scientology devours money and lives."

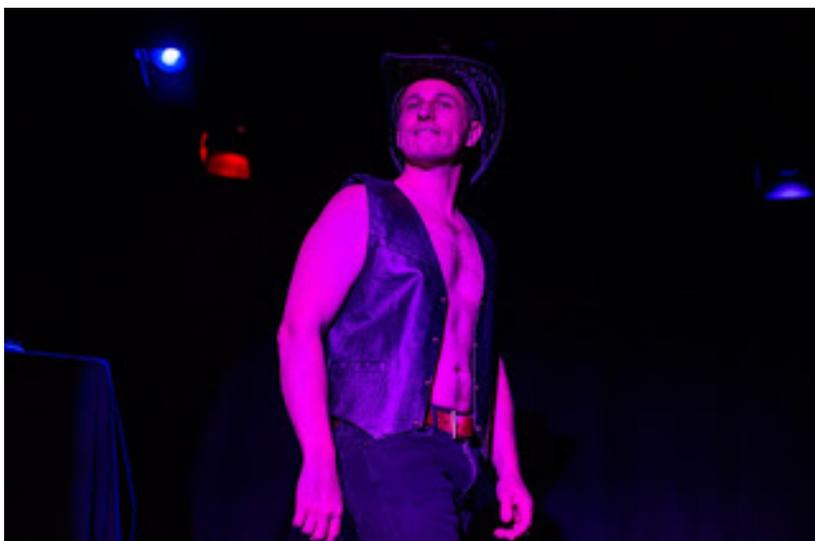
A Plague Upon the Doctor's House: A comedy where "the darkest things lie on the second floor of the doctor's house. There is a devil in this home. A putrid stench of strawberries and rotting corpses."



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Pack Animals: The queer Scantly Glad Theatre send a cub scout and a girl guide on "an adventure through the untamed forest of sex, puppets, bushcraft . . . and campfire songs." Puppets!

Omen: The Musical: even though it's about a quartet of witches and not Damien



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Becoming Magic Mike: "A smokin' hot, action adventure comedy about a detective thrust deep undercover in the unfamiliar world of male stripping . He's undercover, underdressed, and over the top. Can he pull it off?" Because that movie was begging to be satirized. And a little flesh never hurts.



[<https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-ZFisijDAKjo/XRjHBtUjW5I/AAAAAAAAAv48/JKW7V4aM94MtvPsiZdb4zvzZOquq9vdUgCLcBGAs/s1600/The%2BAshes%2Bof%2BForgotten%2BRain%2B01.jpg>]

The Ashes of Forgotten Rain: "It's opening night and the dressing room isn't big enough to contain all the egos." A heightened comic microcosm of: It's the Fringe festival and the city isn't big enough to contain all the egos. Or all the entertainment.

The Toronto Fringe Festival *runs Wed, July 3 to Sun, July 14 at venues across the city.* fringetoronto.com

Posted 3 weeks ago by Drew Rowsome

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