

Announcing the 2018 Next Stage Theatre Festival

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Toronto, ON (September 12, 2017) – The Next Stage Theatre Festival returns this January with a lineup of ten companies **showcasing a cross-section of our exciting indie performance community**. With many familiar faces from past Fringe Festivals, the 2018 programming is a true representation of the ‘best of the fest’. The festival will take over **Factory Theatre** from **January 3 to 14, 2018**.

The 2018 lineup gives new life to many hit shows and the artists behind them from the 2017 Toronto Fringe. Internationally-renowned comedy troupe and Fringe favourite **Sex T-Rex** presents their swashbuckling fantasy ***SwordPlay: A Play of Swords***, fresh off their sold out run of their site-specific show, *Bendy Sign Tavern*. Fringe veterans **Martin Dockery** and **Vanessa Quesnelle** perform their NNNNN-reviewed romantic two-hander ***Moonlight After Midnight***. **Samel Tanz**, the hot, new Toronto dance collective, brings back ***that F word*** (previously ***The “F” Word***), a movement-based exploration of what it means to be female. And stand-up comedian **Franco Nguyen** gives us a second chance to see ***Good Morning, Viet Mom*** (previously ***soaring in liquid skies***) after selling out his performances during our summer festival.

The festival also welcomes back talent of past Next Stage hits, including **Paul Van Dyck** (*Blood Wild*, 2016), director of ***Jonno***, a dark comedy about a famous radio personality; **Matt Murray** (*Myth of the Ostrich*, 2015), bookwriter of the new Canadian musical ***Rumspringa Break!***; and **Stephen Gallagher** (*Myth of the Ostrich*, 2015), director of the emotional drama ***Birthday Balloon***, set in modern-day Newfoundland.

Audiences can laugh away the January blues with ***The Harold Experience***, a rarely performed long-form improv showcase by **The Assembly**, featuring a rotating roster of Toronto’s best improvisers. **Izad Etemadi** will bring his alter-ego Leila, the sassy, bearded, hijab-wearing superstar to life in ***Leila Live!***, a new cabaret. And finally, **Christel Bartelse’s *The Surprise*** will ask patrons to help plan a surprise party for a mystery guest in her solo clown show.

Toronto Fringe Interim Executive Director Lucy Eveleigh says, “After celebrating the 10th anniversary of Next Stage in 2017, we look forward to ushering in the next decade of the festival in 2018. We are very excited to provide the platform for these ten works to develop and engage new audiences this winter. We are particularly proud of the range of styles in this year’s lineup – there truly is something for everyone to enjoy. With so much talent on and off stage, this year’s Next Stage will certainly be a great one.”

General Information:

The 2018 Next Stage Theatre Festival runs from **January 3-14, 2018** at **Factory Theatre**, 125 Bathurst Street. Shows will play in the Mainspace, Studio, and Antechamber. For all media inquires, contact Toronto Fringe Communications Manager Tessa Cernik at communications@fringetoronto.com and 416-966-1062 ext. 225.

Tickets:

Advance tickets and passes available as of November 27, 2017. Next Stage Early Bird savings of 15% can be accessed until December 5, 2017. Tickets can be purchased online at www.fringetoronto.com or by phone at 416-966-1062. Tickets are \$15 for Mainspace and Studio shows (60-90 minutes), and \$10 for Antechamber shows (30 minutes).

Schedule:

The 2018 Next Stage Festival Schedule will be available by the end of November. For more information visit www.fringetoronto.com

Factory Theatre Mainspace

Jonno

Presented by: Rabbit in a Hat Productions

Playwright: Alix Sobler

Director: Paul Van Dyck

Genre: Drama

About the show:

An angry new comedy about a famous radio personality, the women he assaults, and Mr. Donkey Long-Ears, his only friend. Inspired by true events, *Jonno* is a harrowing piece from New York-based playwright Alix Sobler, brought to Toronto after a very successful run at the 2016 Winnipeg Fringe. Engaging with the current conversations of victim-blaming, consent, and how to do feminism 'right', *Jonno* finds the humour and hope in the challenging and the controversial.

From Paul Van Dyck:

"As I watched this riveting, disturbing, and crucially relevant piece of theatre [at the 2016 Winnipeg Fringe], I knew this play needed to be produced in Toronto where the original scandal began and where so many of us are far from overcoming the confusion, betrayal, and fear that came with it. In these current times there is now, more than ever, a need to present plays that explore modern misogyny, feminism, powerful men, brave women, and alternative forms of justice."

Why you should see it:

There is incredible talent behind this project. Alix Sobler's play *The Secret Annex* was workshopped at the Stratford Festival in 2015, and *Jonno's* premier garnered rave reviews, including a five stars from the Winnipeg Free Press. Director Paul Van Dyck wrote, directed, and starred in *Blood Wild*, part of the 2016 Next Stage Theatre Festival.

More about Rabbit in a Hat Productions:

<http://www.rabbitinahatproductions.com/>

Rumspringa Break!

Presented by: Marigon Productions

Book: Matt Murray

Music: Colleen Dauncey

Lyrics: Akiva Romer-Segal

Genre: Musical Theatre

About the show:

Moments before their baptism into the Amish faith, eighteen-year-old twins Hannah and Ruth leave the comfort of

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their strict, sheltered community to explore the outside world for the first time. Unfortunately, things don't go as planned and the twins find themselves desperate, penniless, and stranded in the big city's roughest neighbourhood. In order to survive, the naïve sisters must rely on their faith, the outlandish locals, and each other.

From the writing team:

"*Rumspringa Break!* is fresh, subversive, fun, and the perfect escape from Toronto's winter blues. This musical delivers big laughs, an infectious score, zany characters and a surprising amount of heart. With Canadian musical theatre making big waves around the world, we invite audiences to witness the creation of a brand new homegrown musical comedy."

Why you should see it:

Come see the most recent work from critically-acclaimed writers of Toronto Fringe hits *Bremen Rock City* (songwriting team Colleen & Akiva) and *Myth of the Ostrich* (book writer Matt Murray). The Toronto Star's Richard Ouzounian said of *Bremen Rock City*, "The last time a new Fringe musical rang so many bells, it went on to be a Tony Award-winning Broadway triumph."

More about Colleen and Akiva:

<http://colleenandakiva.com/>

SwordPlay: A Play of Swords

Presented by: Sex T-Rex

Playwright: Seann Murray

Producers: Kaitlin Morrow and Seann Murray

Genre: Action/Comedy

About the Play:

In *SwordPlay*, a grandfather bonds with his granddaughter through a 1980s sword-fighting video game. It is a big, bright, bold comedy show full of witty humour, elaborate physical comedy, and delightful plot twists. Through the haze of foam swords, puffy shirts and 16-bit dragons, you will find nods to Dumas and Errol Flynn alongside references to Skyrim, Zelda, and Game of Thrones. With an astonishing number of laughs per minute, this show surprises with moments of sincerity and heart.

More about Sex T-Rex:

Sex T-Rex are Fringe veterans, and have won many top awards for comedy at Fringe festivals across the globe. Since winning Second City's Most Outstanding Comedy award in 2016, they have produced three shows at Second City, in addition to the shows they regularly produce at Bad Dog Comedy Theatre. Though some have mislabeled their scripted work as sketch or improv, *SwordPlay* is most definitely a swashbuckling play.

Why should you see it?

SwordPlay won the 2015 Just For Laughs Best Comedy award, and, most recently, received a five star review from CBC Manitoba. Sex T-Rex's most recent production in Toronto, *Bendy Sign Tavern*, was one of the hits of the 2017 Toronto Fringe. Come for the action-packed comedy, and stay for the nostalgia!

More about Sex T-Rex:

<https://sextrexcomedy.com/>

that F word

Presented by: SaMel Tanz

Choreographers: Samantha Schleese and Melissa Hart

Genre: Dance

About the show:

A powerful contemporary dance performance that fearlessly explores the struggles and complexity of feminism. With a diverse female cast featuring the Rasasvada Dance Company, the dancers show the physical strength and mental capability women possess through solos, duets, and group phrases. Through excerpts from an interview from rap queen Nicki Minaj, legendary poetry by Maya Angelou, and the cast's personal experiences, *that F word* drives home that the fight for "fair, equal, and just" is far from over.

More about SaMel Tanz:

Rising stars of the Toronto dance scene, SaMel Tanz was founded in 2014 by Samantha Schleese and Melissa Hart. Together they fuse Urban and Latin styles into their choreography, and explore vibrant stories of the human experience. SaMel Tanz have been featured in CBC's "Interpretive Facts" segment, and have performed together for major corporations, such as Samsung and Bud Light Sensations. They are also part of an all-female hip-hop crew, DEUCEnDIP.

Why you should see it:

The debut of *that F word* (formerly titled *The "F" Word*) at the 2017 Toronto Fringe Festival established this company as one to watch. Mooney on Theatre said of the performance, "If you want to see some real dancing, and I mean REAL dancing, check out [this show]." Come see this invigorating and comedic dance show at Next Stage.

More about the company:

www.sameltanz.com

Factory Theatre Studio

Birthday Balloon

Presented by: Mauzy May Productions

Playwright: Steve Cochrane

Director: Steven Gallagher

Assistant Director: Dana Puddicombe

Producer: Renée Hackett

Actors: Renée Hackett and Craig Pike

Genre: Drama

About the show:

Birthday Balloon finds David and Millie on the brink of divorce after a horrible tragedy. Millie has stayed in Newfoundland while her husband, David, works as a pipe fitter in Fort McMurray. Millie wants to go back in time but David wants out and away from the stench of death. It is an emotionally evocative exploration of a relationship at its lowest point, and makes one question what keeps us loyal to the province known by one perfect word: 'home'.

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More from Renée Hackett:

“Through the lens of a dying marriage *Birthday Balloon* examines a ‘new’ Newfoundland identity during the worst economic downturn since the 1930s, which has threatened the very existence of rural Newfoundland. This black comedy/drama tells the story of David and Millie as they struggle to make sense of their new found identity in this modern age.”

Why you should see it:

Come From Away isn't the only Canadian show about Newfoundland! *Birthday Balloon* (commissioned by Rising Tide Theatre Company, 2016) is a poignant tale that uses a love relationship to examine the possible extinction of the rural way of life in Newfoundland. You may also remember Steven Gallagher as the director of the Next Stage 2015 hit *Myth of the Ostrich*.

Good Morning, Viet Mom

Presented by: Soaring Skies Collective, in association with Cahoots Theatre

Playwright: Franco Nguyen

Director: Byron Abalos

Genre: Storytelling/Comedy

About the show:

A hilarious, gut-wrenching, autobiographical one-person show that wakes you up from your millennial hangover and reminds you to be nice to mom! Award-winning comedian-filmmaker-writer-multi-hyphenate, Franco Nguyen, dives into his not-so-funny past and takes you on an overdue family trip to rural Vietnam that changes his life forever. Part stand up, part theatre, and part cinéma vérité, Nguyen's debut theatre piece, formerly titled *soaring in liquid skies*, is not to be missed.

From Byron Abalos:

“We rarely see the daily life of displaced refugees attempting to assimilate in a foreign land represented in mainstream media. Most popular media about the Vietnam war focuses on the perspective of the US soldiers and never on the Vietnamese people. Franco's show re-centres Vietnamese people through his experience visiting Vietnam for the first time and his discoveries about his mother's youth and her courageous journey to Canada.”

Why you should see it:

Developed in comedy bars and storytelling circles, Franco's unique perspective and original film footage creates a story of family, sacrifice, and mistranslation. Come see why its run at the 2017 Toronto Fringe was completely sold out. This production is supported by Cahoots Theatre, where the collective is a 2017-18 Artist-In-Residence.

More about Franco Nguyen:

<https://www.secondcity.com/people/other/franco-nguyen/>

The Harold Experience

Presented by: The Assembly

Producers: Rob Norman, Martha Stortz

Genre: Improv/Comedy

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About the show:

Experience a night of true stories, interesting characters, and lots of laughter, all made up on the spot! *The Harold Experience* is an improvised comedy show brought to you by Toronto's only game-based longform company, The Assembly. Featuring Toronto's best improvisers, the show is inspired by improv's most elusive format, the Harold. The Harold is a method of improvised comedy where the audience meets different, unrelated stories, informed by the lives of audience members. It is the performers' job to connect the seemingly unrelated stories together by the end of the show. Can they do it?

From the company:

"*The Harold Experience* weaves together fictional elements with a real life narrative using the Harold, a format made famous by Amy Poehler and The Upright Citizen Brigade. The Harold isn't seen often in Toronto, despite its popularity in other cities (like New York and Chicago) and other forms of media (think television and movies) but we've assembled the best and brightest improvisers in Toronto to breathe new life into this classic form for the best nine shows you'll ever see and never see again."

Why you should see it:

You love comedy, you love theatre, you want to see some of your favourite Canadian performers on stage, and/or you love Amy Poehler but no longer subscribe to cable to catch reruns of *Parks & Rec*. It's January, and you need a little belly laughter to jumpstart your 2018.

More about The Assembly:

<http://theassemblyimprov.com/>

Moonlight After Midnight

Presented by: Concrete Drops Theatre

Playwright: Martin Dockery

Dramaturg: Vanessa Quesnelle

Genre: Drama

About the show:

In this internationally acclaimed romantic mystery about love and loss, a man and a woman meet under puzzling circumstances in a hotel room at midnight. A cerebral love story that engages the heart, *Moonlight After Midnight* plays with the concept of time and challenges its audience to deduce who these two people are and who they are to each other. "This brilliant two-hander burns slow and steady, building to a crescendo that left [the audience] dabbing at their eyes. I'll likely not shake its echo anytime soon." – David Silverberg, *Now Magazine*

From the creators:

"In creating *Moonlight After Midnight*, our aim has been to produce an experience that would immerse the audience in the world of the play, to have them feeling somewhat voyeuristic. The goal of the show is to maintain a connection with the audience while constantly twisting their perspective, and forcing them to re-evaluate where they believe the line between fiction and reality is drawn."

Why you should see it:

This show was a run-away hit at the 2017 Toronto Fringe Festival, acclaimed by critics and audience alike. Winning

top awards and garnering many five-star reviews at Fringe festivals across the world, this remount is not to be missed.

More about Concrete Drops Theatre:

<https://www.concretedrops.com/>

Factory Theatre Antechamber

Leila Live!: an intimate Persian cabaret

Presented by: Laugh with Leila Productions

Playwright/Performer: Izad Etemadi

Director: Shawn Hitchins

Genre: Cabaret/Musical/Drag

About the show:

She's fierce, she's bearded and she's living with her parents in a one-bedroom apartment. *Leila Live!* is a new cabaret starring the sassy, charming, hijab-wearing Leila as she navigates her way through her (and her parents') new life in Canada. Become mesmerized by this fun, flashy, Middle Eastern superstar's original music and Persian versions of your favourite pop songs. Leila's edgy take on current political issues, complete with costume changes, dance moves, and vocal runs, speaks to the oppression in the world today from the point of view of a newcomer.

From Izad Etemadi:

"For the past three years I have toured my drag-meets-theatre one (wo)man show to sold out houses and rave reviews across the country. Beginning at the Hamilton Fringe in 2014, Leila continues to do good in the world, working with the Street Haven women's shelter in Toronto to raise money during the holidays, and the Immigrant Women's Centre in Hamilton to develop a storytelling program for women newcomers."

Why you should see this show:

This project is being developed with the support of Sky Gilbert and the Cabaret Company, and Izad was recently announced as a new member of Cahoots Theatre's HOT HOUSE creation unit. Leila's original solo show *Love With Leila* has won several awards including Best Independent Production in 2016 by Broadway World.

More about Leila:

<https://www.laughwithleila.com/>

The Surprise

Presented by: Christel Bartelse/Dutch Girl Productions

Playwright/Performer: Christel Bartelse

Director: Andy Massingham

Genre: Comedy/Clown

About the show:

Ginger is throwing a surprise party, and she needs your help! An immersive audience experience, *The Surprise* is a high energy party for a mystery guest, and everyone is invited. A Fringe-favourite who has travelled to 16 different

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Fringe Festivals, including a recent return from the 2017 Edinburgh Festival, Bartelse challenges and delights through physical work and the art of 'play', delivering powerful messages through the power of laughter. Don't forget to RSVP to the party – there will be cake!

About Christel Bartelse:

Dutch Girl Productions sprung out of Christel's need to produce her own solo work - you may recognize her from the comedy duo The Burnt Marshmallows – and now she creates, writes, produces, and performs all of her own material (*Chaotica*, *ONEymoon*, *All KIDding Aside*). She thrives on creating works through movement and improvisation, using her background in theatre, sketch, dance, comedy, and clowning. Her pieces are always very physical and very fun.

Why you should see it:

Who doesn't love to clown around? Ginger is sure to make you smile despite the January chill.

More about Christel:

<http://christelbartelse.com/>

Please contact Fringe Communications Manager Tessa Cernik with all media inquiries
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