

TORONTO  
**FRINGE**  

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**NEXT STAGE**

**At the 2020 Next Stage Theatre Festival, audiences came out en masse to show support for the inclusive and diverse programming that represents the city we live in**

*The festival saw its highest audience capacities of all time, with many shows at 85-100% full*

**January 20, 2020. (Toronto, ON).** The Toronto Fringe staff and board of directors congratulate the artists of the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Next Stage Theatre Festival for making the 2020 festival, which wrapped up yesterday evening, a resounding success. Toronto Fringe's goal with this edition of the festival was to make sure that the independent artists who power the festival could perform to the most packed houses possible. **The performances at the festival were sold at an average of an incredible 93% capacity (Studio shows) and 65% (Mainspace shows).** This is a huge leap from the capacities we have seen at previous festivals. *TEASE* was the first show in Next Stage history to sell every seat and reach 100% capacity with *Consumption Patterns* close behind at 99%. Many of the other shows in the festival sold out multiple performances. The Toronto Fringe, the charitable organization that runs the Next Stage Theatre Festival, will **return over \$66,000 in box office revenues** to the artists in the festival.

It's clear that the demand for independent theatre is alive and well in this city. **6940 tickets were issued** for only 12 days of performance – that is 6940 votes for the sort of city people want to live in, 6940 votes for inclusivity and acceptance. The artists at Next Stage demonstrated live theatre's ability to pull people out of their houses on chilly winter nights, to come together in community and conversation, and to celebrate our common humanity. This is the best way to launch a new decade in this city – one that affirms the artist's vital role, at a time when many are being priced out. Even with a huge snowstorm on the final Saturday of the festival, many people showed their commitment to live art by braving the weather and supporting the artists.

The shows in this festival offered us many points of view and taught us to experience the world through many bodies, genders, classes, abilities, ages. We were gifted with these myriad perspectives and will launch this new decade with their voices in our ear.

From Executive Director, Lucy Eveleigh: "We consciously decided to make the festival smaller this year, allowing for more companies but fewer performances each to ensure full houses and good word of mouth. This, along with a small ticket increase, proved positive as we saw an increase in revenue despite having fewer shows overall. This means we were able to showcase more work, especially work in development that we might otherwise not have been able to present."

## The 2020 Next Stage Theatre Festival featured:

**Powerhouse performances**, ranging from the empowered silence of a Bangladeshi trans woman caught in moments of reflection and joy (*Kitne Saare Laloo Yahan Pey Hain*), to raucous clown sisters who taught us to laugh and love with all our hearts (*Morro and Jasp: Save the Date*).

**Genre benders**, such as a monologue play that opened up into an uncanny and hypnotizing movement sequence (*Consumption Patterns*), and a burlesque dance show that opened up into one of the most honest, personal, solo stage moments Next Stage has ever seen (*TEASE*).

**Boundary pushers**, such as a young woman's poetic love letter to her ancestors (*49<sup>th</sup> Day*), and a company of Iranian-Canadian artists who overcame the tragic events of recent weeks to deliver an unforgettable story about war, grief, and family (*Winter of '88*).

**Musical virtuosos**, such as a classically trained opera singer belting out goosebump-inducing arias from her power wheelchair (*Literally Titanium*), the hilarious Filipina divas who showcased their dynamite voices and comedic chops over a dish of *kare kare* (*Tita Jokes*), and a team of stars-in-the-making who delivered a new Canadian musical about teen grief (*Every Silver Lining*).

**Visionaries of the future**, such as the unforgettable drag queen/performance artist who wove a tale of the coming apocalypse with humour, history, and a lot of heart (*Pearle Harbour's Agit-Pop!*), and an acclaimed playwright who offered us a smart satire of the coming robot revolution (*U-R-U*).

## Other Highlights:

**An evening with TallBoyz** (Guled Abdi, Vance Banzo, Tim Blair, and Franco Nguyen) in support of Toronto Fringe. This sold-out performance welcomed donors and superfans alike to see the performers from the hit CBC comedy series tackle long-form improv. Their hilarious performance left the crowd in stitches and raised funds that will directly support artists in the summer festival.

**Steam Whistle samples paired with Filipinx snacks!** Our beer partner Steam Whistle joined us at the tent on opening weekend and offered Next Stage audiences complimentary drinks while our Fringe Patio food partner, Tita Flips, warmed up the tent with spicy and flavourful Filipinx snacks.

**Random Acts of Car Sharing** from our car share partner, Communauto. Patrons attending Next Stage were offered rides up the subway on a chilly wintry night.

**The 24 Hour Playwriting Contest winner**, Michael Lee, got a chance to stage a reading of their winning play, *The Smell of Earth*. This brand-new show will now move towards a full run at the summer Fringe Festival.

**Up Next for Toronto Fringe:**

The 2020 Toronto Fringe Festival will welcome 150 productions from around Canada and the world. The 32<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Toronto Fringe Festival will run July 1 – 12, 2020 at venues across Toronto.

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