

Most Personal and Political Next Stage Theatre Festival Line-Up Ever Offers a Vision for the Future of Theatre

Featuring well-known Fringe veterans and introducing a diverse set of voices never before seen at Next Stage, with a renewed focus on work in development.

September 5, 2019 (Toronto, ON). The Next Stage Theatre Festival, run by the Toronto Fringe, is pleased to announce the line-up for the 2020 festival. Programmed by a jury of industry leaders and Fringe staff, the festival features 11 visionary shows, ranging from staged readings to fully realized productions. The 2020 Next Stage Theatre Festival runs **January 8 – 19, 2020 at Factory Theatre** and, new this year, some shows will be presented “in development.” This means different things to different companies: some will seek feedback from the audience via talkbacks and post-show conversations, while some will experiment with form. More details about the developmental status of each show will be available in the Next Stage 2020 brochure, out this fall.

The 2020 Next Stage Theatre Festival features internationally famous Iranian playwright Mohammed Yaghoubi (*Winter of '88*); a musical romp through queer/disabled artist Ophira Calof's mind/body divide (*Literally Titanium*); sociopolitical drag (*Pearle Harbour's Agit Pop!*); Fringe faves Morro & Jasp (*Save the Date*); a queer/trans South Asian response to those in our society taken away unjustly, from Bilal Baig (*Kitne Saare Laloo Yahan Pey Hain*); feminist burlesque from touring Fringe veteran Lindsay Mullan (*Tease*); the return of 2019 Fringe Fest hits *Tita Jokes* and *Every Silver Lining*; a poetic investigation of intergenerational trauma from athena kaitlin trinh (*49th Day*); the return to Next Stage of acclaimed playwright Kevin Shea (*Consumption Patterns*); and Toronto-fave Julia Lederer with a staged reading of her new work (*U-R-U*).

Shows in the 2020 festival represent the vanguard of indie theatre makers in Toronto. These artists are not afraid to ask big questions and to confidently subvert theatrical forms and genres. **2020 is the perfect year to talk about 20/20 vision** – and these artists have it: they represent a vision for the future of theatre, both in the innovative styles and formats of their shows, but also in their own diverse identities. They do not shy away from deep diving into discussions around their politics, bodies, genders, abilities, fears and desires. This may be the most personal and political Next Stage ever. **This is Next Stage's vision for the future.**

From Executive Director, Lucy Eveleigh:

“There is so much incredible talent in this city right now, and in our 13th year we are really bringing that to the forefront. We know this festival will excite and entertain many different audiences and we look forward to more conversations happening between them and the artists. Some artists will be seeking specific feedback on their work, and some will want to simply have deeper discussions. We are so proud of the work being presented this year, some political, some comedic, and all unique - we know it will be the perfect way to launch your year of theatre in 2020.”

Shows in the 2020 Next Stage Theatre Festival

In alphabetical order

49th Day

From Theatre Artaud

Written and Performed by athena kaitlin trinh

Directed by Rouvan Silogix

Produced by Theatre Artaud and Angela Sun

Sound Design by Gloria Mok

Scenography by Waleed Ansari

In the Studio

“there is a kind of storm

in losing the words

in losing your name”

This poetic and lyrical show is a love-letter to the playwright’s elders. The piece investigates themes of intergenerational trauma and migration/displacement through the lens of a young woman’s journey to a cemetery in Hanoi, Viet Nam, to enact death rituals and offerings for her recently deceased and estranged grandmother. This play was written by athena kaitlin trinh out of a profound need to tell her family’s story and the realization that these stories could have died with their original storytellers. Developed with support from Factory Theatre, Nightwood Theatre, Nightswimming Theatre, and after many dinner table conversations with her own elders, athena says “I want the audience to leave feeling like they need to go home and call their grandparents.”

Consumption Patterns

From Luxury Goods

Written by Kevin Shea

Directed by Jill Harper

Choreography by Patricia Allison

In the Studio

“I am your master. And I am your God. And I make the world turn.”

In this darkly funny monologue play, evoking a taste of Caryl Churchill, Kevin Shea returns to Next Stage for the first time since co-creating *A Misfortune* (Next Stage 2014). Over the course of this piece we meet various characters who are grappling with the complexities and disappointments of late-capitalism. From these micro-perspectives, we are asked to reckon with our own complicity and hypocrisy when it comes to consumption, climate change and inequality. Directed by Jill Harper and with choreography by Patricia Allison, *Consumption Patterns* subverts the style of a traditional monologue play and creates something raw and unexpected.

Every Silver Lining

From Silver Lining Productions

Composition and Lyrics by Allison Wither

Book by Laura Piccinin

Directed by Jennifer Stewart

Music Direction by Aaron Eyre

Dramaturgy by Adriane VanSeggelen

In the Mainspace

“Everything can change in a single moment.”

With a *Degrassi*-style setting and *Dear Evan Hansen*-esque lyrics, this tender musical about teens experiencing death for the first time was a hit of the 2019 Toronto Fringe Festival. Co-creators Laura Piccinin and Allison Wither both experienced tragic loss of friends when they were teens, and they hope this musical will help “alleviate some of the mystery and stigma of death.” The clever lyrics and peppy dialogue make it a perfect show for families, teens and anyone looking to move beyond grief. Expect to get a bit misty, but audiences will leave with a smile on their faces, humming the catchy tunes of these impressive emerging artists. Suitable for a general audience but please note mature themes about death and grieving are handled in a tasteful way.

Kitne Saare Laloo Yahan Pey Hain

From The KSLYPH Collective

Written and Performed by Bilal Baig

Directed by Tawiah M'Carthy

Produced by Daniel Carter

In the Studio

“Do you think it won't really matter if you take me away?”

Escaping to the West, a young trans woman runs away from Bangladesh with only one suitcase and a secret. As she fears for her life in her new surroundings, can she trust you to keep her safe? In this new piece from queer and trans South Asian theatre-maker, Bilal Baig, you are taken on a journey to investigate what it takes to remember and honour those most vulnerable in our society who have been taken away from us unjustly. After their boundary-bending work on *Wah Wah Wah* (SummerWorks 2019) and *Acha Bacha* (TPM/Buddies 2018), Baig offers another truthful drama that “authentically and unapologetically puts queer and trans bodies at the centre of the story-telling.” This will be an opportunity for Next Stage audiences to see vital work from this visionary artist in a crucial time where the stories of the most vulnerable must be heard.

Literally Titanium

From Canadian Comedians

Written and Performed by Ophira Calof

Dramaturgy by Jess Watkin

In the Studio

“It feels so good to be front and centre, airing out my feelings and reclaiming my goddamn time.”

In this incredibly personal and joyous piece, queer/disabled improv and comedy veteran Ophira Calof investigates “the marks this world can leave on bodies that are other.” We get to meet Diane, her mobility device, which is the “wind beneath [her] wings” and are treated to Ophira’s opera-trained singing voice throughout the show. Developed through the Buddies in Bad Times Emerging Creator’s Unit, this piece will introduce a wider audience to Ophira’s unique style and perspective. Patrons can expect a range of access features at this show – details to be announced soon. The Factory Studio is accessible for patrons and artists who use mobility devices.

Morro & Jasp: Save the Date

From U.N.I.T. Productions

Created by Heather Marie Annis, Amy Lee, and Byron Laviolette

Performed by Heather Marie Annis and Amy Lee

Directed by Byron Laviolette

In the Mainspace

“You’re the only forever I’ve ever known.”

Morro & Jasp make their first official Mainstage appearance at Next Stage 2020 – returning to the festival for the first time since 2012 when their show *Go Bake Yourself* inspired the long-running Antechamber series. In this hilarious and heartwarming piece, which premiered at the 2018 Fringe Festival, Jasp is about to get married and Morro is worried that she’s going to lose her best friend. Hijinks inevitably ensue and the clowns’ relationship is tested. Full of surprising (and consensual) audience participation, the show will brighten your January and get you off the couch. Say the clowns: “Netflix can’t spray you with Margarita mix!”

Pearle Harbour’s Agit-Pop!

From Pearle Harbour

Written, Co-Directed, and Performed by Justin Miller

Co-Directed by Rebecca Ballarin

Musical Direction by Steven Conway

In the Mainspace

“I’m stressed, and busy, and mad as hell and I’m not going to take this anymore!”

An all-American gal who’s sweet-as-pie and sharp-as-nails, Pearle Harbour presents an evening of drag, song, storytelling, and sociopolitical tirades. This show walks a razor’s edge between light and dark, with a pendulum that swings from existential panic and ecological anxieties to sweet ditties and intimate audience interaction. This January, it may be cold outside but the world is on fire – so come spend your evening with Pearle (Audience Choice Winner, SummerWorks) while she takes you for a tour through surprising historical factoids and the classic songs of David Bowie, Judy Garland, Tom Waits, Nancy Sinatra, and more.

Tease

From Theatre Lab & Big City Kitties

Written and Directed by Lindsay Mullan

Produced by Michael Orlando

In the Studio

“Women don’t get to be neutral...”

After a smash-hit run at the 2018 Edmonton Fringe Festival, *Tease* appears in Toronto for the first time. Full of high-energy dance numbers, satirical clown sketches, consensual audience interaction, and lots of surprises, this feminist burlesque show is pure fun on one level, and a deeply honest investigation of the artists’ own bodies on another level. No spoilers: but you’re going to want to stay to the end of this show.

Tita Jokes

From the Tita Collective

Written and Performed by the company

In the Mainspace

“Welcome to the concert you’ve all been waiting for!”

Tita Power! One of the sell-out hits of the 2019 Toronto Fringe, *Tita Jokes* is back and better than ever. Featuring new sketches, new songs, expanded design elements and a sixth Tita, this all-Filipinx, all-female, all-fun sketch comedy show will “bring so much heat from the Philippines that you’ll forget that it’s winter” this January at Next Stage. In this show, the collective thoughtfully represents the narratives of the Philippine diaspora through the power of music, joy and laughter. Bring your kids, your parents, your grandparents and definitely your tita (Tagalog for aunt) to this empowering show. Suitable for general audiences.

U-R-U

From QuestionMark-Exclamation Theatre

Written by Julia Lederer

Directed by Heather Marie Annis

In the Mainspace

“You are an empty screen in a world where all the keyboards have been destroyed.”

The company will present a polished staged reading of this new feminist comedy inspired by Czech writer Karel Čapek's 1921 play, *R.U.R.*, which coined the term "robot." Long before computers, or Siri, or even the first Roomba, Čapek imagined how powerful and human-like A.I. could become. In Lederer's piece, genders have been changed, technology updated, and current political issues are central, while retaining Čapek's prescient themes. Workshopped extensively in LA, this is the first time Toronto audiences will get a chance to see a professional reading of this piece, written by Next Stage veteran Julia Lederer (*With Love and a Major Organ*, 2013).

Winter of '88

From Nowadays Theatre Company

Written and Directed by Mohammad Yaghoubi

Produced by Aida Keykhaii

Translated by Mohammad Yaghoubi and Nazanin Malekan

In the Mainspace

“Where were you the Winter of '88?”

Winter of '88 is a meta-theatrical, autobiographical piece based on the traumatic experiences of the Iran-Iraq war. Next Stage is very pleased to announce that this internationally renowned play will be presented in Canada, and in English, for the very first time. Recently translated from Farsi, this play creates a window into the not-so-distant past; a window to the days when death was just around the corner, and even though many survived death, no one survived the trauma. The core artists, who have recently relocated to Toronto, have a loyal following among the Persian-Canadian community. We are very excited to introduce the work of this ground-breaking company to Next Stage audiences in 2020.

More info about the Next Stage Theatre Festival

Dates: January 8 – 19, 2020

Location: Factory Theatre Mainspace and Studio

Tickets: On sale Monday, November 25, 2019

More info: <https://fringetoronto.com/next-stage/about>

History: The Next Stage Theatre Festival was founded in 2008. It was created to encourage indie artists and artists who had previously been in a Fringe Festival to move beyond the summer festival model and showcase their work to a wider audience, including discerning artistic decision makers who could be interested in programming their shows on main stages across the country.

Finding its home in January at Factory Theatre, it quickly became the premiere winter theatre event in the city, filling in a void that the after-holiday season had created. Over the last 13 years there have been many shows that appeared at previous Fringe Festivals as well as many new works by established indie theatre artists who have demonstrated the passion and tenacity to take their work to the next stage.

In 2018 we removed the caveat that participants had to be a previous Fringe Festival artist and allowed anyone to apply. We recognized that as the Fringe is a lottery not everyone will have had a chance to perform in one and therefore would also not have the opportunity to apply to Next Stage.

The Antechamber Series, which was launched almost by accident by Morro and Jasp, ran from 2012 to 2019. The Antechamber Series is no longer offered, as the festival's focus has shifted to make more space for post-show conversations and works in development.

A jury of industry experts evaluate the submissions.

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