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A CurtainUp Report

2013 New York International Fringe Festival

by [Les Gutman](#), [David Lipfert](#), [Kathryn Osenlund](#), [Deirdre Donovan](#), [Gregory Wilson](#), [Jordan G. Teicher](#), [Jacob Horn](#)

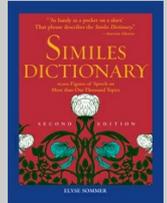
Final Update - August 26, 2013

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Now in its seventeenth year, FringeNYC runs August 9-25, 2013. This year's festival has scheduled 185 or so shows at 18 or so venues over its 16 day duration. We will report on a healthy dose of this year's offerings in the reviews below.

Many people do their show-picking on the fly, but readers are advised to consider making reservations for popular shows they don't want to miss. What shows are those? We don't like to predict. Further information, schedules and tickets at least 24 hours prior to the show time are available by phoning 866.468.7619 (9 AM-7PM, credit cards only, convenience charge applies); on the web at: www.fringenyc.org (24 hours a day, credit cards only, convenience charge applies) or in person at Fringe Central at 27 Second Av (1/2 Sts) (Noon-8PM, cash or credit card). Day-of-performance tickets are available (cash only) at the door at each venue, 15 minutes prior to the show. Prices: \$15 for advance purchase, \$18 at the door, reduced (only at Fringe Central or at the door) to \$10 for kids under 12 to FringeJR events and for seniors. There are also passes: 5 shows for \$70, 10 shows for \$120 and the "Lunatic Pass," which entitles you to attend as many shows as possible, for \$500.

A complete list of venues (with addresses) can be found at the end of this page or by clicking [here](#).

The last name of the author of each capsule review is indicated at the end of the review in brackets.

Reviews

The Nightmare 'Dream'

Hermia, Helena, Lysander, Demetrius, and ... Renfield? The Bard meets Bram, as selected scenarios of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* congeal into bits of *Dracula*. George Romero also wafts uninvited through the plot, as wary and unwary alike join the ranks of the undead (except in Romero's movie, they're zombies). Writer Neal J. Freeman directs his spoof-mix with admirable precision and humor. The character of Oberon/Dracula/Puck looms. Dracula "consorts with black brow'd night" and reigns over Titania and her fairies, who are snarling vampires. Theseus and Egeus, a terrific comedy duo, weave through this fun concoction. Mad Renfield quotes Shakespeare and Stoker with equal blazing delirium. I'd love to see more dovetailing of the two stories' details, but with the bright acting, outsize histrionic posturing, and inspired costumes, *The Nightmare 'Dream'* is a solid fringe offering, sure to please – oh, I mean scare. At 14th St Y. 55 minutes. [Osenlund]

They Call Me Q!

When it comes to theatrical passion on stage, *They Call Me Q* has plenty. This one woman play, penned and performed by Qurrat Ann Kadwani, is a veritable house on fire. It clocks in at 60 minutes, has a furious pace, features 13 characters, all played by the luminous Kadwani. No doubt the show's exclamatory title is Kadwani's nod to the fact that New Yorkers are very keen on the K.I.S.S. principle: Keep it short and sweet! Indeed her Indian name (Qurrat Ann Kadwani), a tongue-twister of tongue-twisters, didn't fly in the Bronx, where Kadwani settled in with her upwardly-mobile Indian family as a youngster. This show succeeds because you sense truth hovers behind every joke, anecdote, painful memory, old family recipe (get ready to salivate for some curry and lentil dishes) and her own American dream. You might find a larger cast, a longer running time, and splashier effects at the Fringe. But moment by dramatic moment, this solo turn is splendid. At Sgouros. 65 minutes. [Donovan]

Perceval

Ambitious productions with quality individual performances (even if the whole often isn't greater than the sum of its parts) are a common occurrence at the Fringe, and *Perceval* fits nicely into this tradition, attempting to retell the Arthurian legend of Welshman Perceval's quest for the Holy Grail with a cast of four, guided in the endeavor by the Troubador (Elizabeth King-Hall), whose character has conceptualized the entire retelling from the beginning. King-Hall is exceptional in this role, moving seamlessly from Troubador to nun to French maiden in distress to down and out peasant woman without a single blip, and her acting is almost enough to carry the show by itself. The rest of the cast is solid too, if not up to King-Hall's standard. But even an excellent individual performance can't entirely make up for a show's other deficiencies, and unfortunately the production isn't pristine; it starts to drag about halfway through, with heavy reliance on overwrought *Macbeth*-style witch scenes and dream sequences, and the tone is inconsistent. Had the show followed the lead of King-Hall's Troubador—a kind of charmingly eccentric university professor whose passion for her subject is both engaging and funny—instead of veering into strange moments of tragedy and grinding despair, it would have been better off, as it is, it feels both erratic and overlong. Still, the story has some funny and moving moments, and King-Hall is good enough that I'm inclined to forgive *Perceval's* unevenness. If you have any interest in the stories of King Arthur or quality acting, this show may well be worth your time. At Kraine. 90 minutes. [Wilson]

Double Heart

One of the great things about the Fringe is its unpredictability; shows can and do fail (sometimes spectacularly), but rarely is the viewing not worth the effort. And occasionally a show surprises in a good way—as is the case, I'm happy to say, with *Double Heart*. Billed as a kind of prequel to Shakespeare's classic comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Double Heart* looks at the early relationship between Beatrice and Benedick, one of the most delightfully witty couples Shakespeare ever penned. Telling the tale in verse and without modern updates to either language or setting is ambitious, but much to my pleased surprise playwright David Hansen pulls it off and then some, presenting an entirely credible introduction to Beatrice and Benedick's complicated and uneasy relationship without doing violence to either the language or the setting. It helps that the show is universally well acted by the four person cast, and director Lisa Ortenzi strikes just the right tone in guiding the actors without stifling them. And despite a playing time under an hour, the plot takes several intriguing turns which, if not quite as hairpin as Shakespeare's, are still engaging and thoughtful. If anything, the show could have been longer; it feels a bit cramped at its current playing length. But on the whole *Double Heart* is an excellent production, and one of the better overall shows I've seen at the Fringe in a while. At Connelly. 55 minutes. [Wilson]

The Skype Show

When a show doesn't work at the Fringe, it's usually because the rough edges are *too* rough for the show's good elements to shine through, and *The Skype Show* is a textbook example of this problem. The concept is great: two modern day "star-crossed lovers" are separated due to an expired visa, and both can only stay in contact via the ubiquitous Skype; the vast majority of the show consists of conversations conducted between writer and actress Jody Christopherson and Michael De Roos over Skype, and something about the timelessness of the predicament set against the timeliness of the communicative medium is compelling. And the chemistry between the two actors (the Skype conversations of which were the actual basis for the show) is undeniable. The problem lies in the execution: the show is easily a third longer than it should be, and starts to drag considerably about halfway through despite the welcome relief of the guitar teacher Unka Dave (David Anzuelo), whose DVD lessons spice up a rather pedestrian narrative. I found myself wishing director Aaron Simms had seen or worked to correct the obviousness of the plot; as it is the show becomes very predictable very quickly, and without dramatic variety has to fall back on its other conceit—the show's music, which is unfortunately its weakest part. With considerable cutting and polish *The Skype Show* could realize the potential of its concept; as it is, it's another example of a Fringe show whose reach exceeds its grasp. At 440 White Box. 1 hour, 15 minutes. [Wilson]

Breaking Kayfabe

Are you ready to rumble? In the ring a ripped young wrestler looks mighty fine. Off to the side the wrestler, older now, participates in a podcast interview. Sometimes elements of the podcast appear on a screen. Meanwhile a dynamic announcer goes ballistic calling the moves and holds of a match, "That was bowling shoe ugly!" "The Suicide Bomber" reflects on his career as he progresses from a nobody to a Heel (villain) to a Babyface (young fave) to a Face (star). This isn't a real podcast, just as pro wrestling isn't real. The podcast we see is breaking kayfabe, i.e., outs the illusion that pro wrestling is real, even as it exposes the reality behind the setup. The small cast handles a variety of roles well, including the doubling of various very different wrestlers. This show's got it all: It's funny, sad, heartwarming, and action-packed. 1 hour, 40 minutes. At Redgrave. [Osenlund]

Gertrude Stein SAINTS!

Stein was an in-tel-ec-tu-al. What can be done with lines like this? "Many many saint can be left to many many saints scene five left to many many saints. Scene five left to many saints." You'd be surprised what can be done. Who could have imagined a production of such transcendent joy? Theatre Plastique ensemble could imagine it. These young actors not only have adapted Stein's libretto for *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *Saints and Singing*, but have unleashed an explosion of creativity—devising their production's varied music and vibrant choreography. Michelle Sutherland, director, and the ensemble of thirteen pretty unbelievable artists, all students at Carnegie Mellon, have discovered that Gertrude Stein's modernist, non-narrative writing with its seemingly endless variations on repetition is permeable and performable—with a vengeance. In this work where the syntax, not the words, carries whatever meaning is created, the ensemble doesn't try to understand it. They experience it in a physicalized American opera without pretensions. And they vividly transmute their high-spirited experience to the audience. "Saint Therese unsurrounded by reason of it being so cold that they stayed away. Saint Therese using a cart with oxen to go about and as well as if she were." Don't you wonder what they did with this? "Irrational exuberance" has found a new meaning. Standing O, baby, standing O. 1 hour, 15 minutes. At LaMaMa. [Osenlund]

Bellini and the Sultan

A famous Venetian painter, a splendid sultan, simpatico eunuch, concubine in peril, wily vizier, handsome soldier, and a secret mission... *Bellini and the Sultan* by TARTE (Turkish American Repertory Theater & Entertainment) has a whole lot of ingredients and a lot of heart. But the actors' enthusiasm for the project isn't quite enough to earn audience appreciation beyond loving family and friends. Billed as a comedy, the long and earnest script actually misses multiple opportunities for humor, and the comedy is essentially provided by actors' individual inspirations and flourishes. Even in the Fringe these days, a production needs at a minimum a solid, tight script, inspired and disciplined direction and the tangible support of coherent and reliable set pieces and props. *Bellini and the Sultan*, a sweet, picaresque and meandering play, would be better suited to a local stage where the audience craves good old fashioned Little Theater. At the Fringe the larger audience is mad for the cutting edge, bright ideas and ever-new approaches... that's why it's called the fringe. At 440 Moss. 90 minutes. [Osenlund]

The Human Fruit Bowl

A model in a life class was told that in Paris in the 20s Pierre Bonnard's model killed herself in a bathtub. The chatty nude model is fascinated by the story. She thinks about this as she poses, makes mental lists, jots things down between poses, and sometimes comments on how totally weird it is to be naked in a room full of people. Harmony Stempel, the humorous, practiced actress, delivers her monologue well with direct engagement of her audience. Is this show about audience voyeurism? It begins to look like the theme is getting at objectification, when you take into account the title of the play. But not so fast. Isn't it more about the historical relationship between artists and models? Except that there's no investigation of these relationships beyond the model's interest in the conflicting accounts of the suicide of Bonnard's model. And then there are the endless paintings of Bonnard's wife in the bathtub. The model's main interest seems to be in collecting and continually reciting long lists of names of famous artists and their models. Except the models are mostly not famous. Maybe that could be the point. A current-undercurrent story begins to emerge. And then the show ends with an absolutely stunning closing image. What is this show about? Hesitant indicators don't support any one particular direction, and any philosophical stance is inconclusive. With all the discrepancies in the factoids brought up, is inconclusiveness the point? Why is she naked to tell this story? The experience of the show adds up to the thought that the long monologue is a lot like nothing dressed up as something, except it's not dressed. At C.O.W. 55 minutes. [Osenlund]

Little Piece of You

Mariah Freda's *Little Piece of You* has a charming premise: We leave a little piece of ourselves in the people we love. This romantic notion will be put to the test in the world of this play. And though I don't think this work delivers on all theatrical levels, it makes one ponder the fragility of human relationships. Before the play proper begins, we watch a short video projected on a giant screen on stage, presenting two young lovers, Jessica (Megan Branch) and Sam (Tyler Caffal), who are struggling to define their relationship. They have made love the night before, and now are teasing each other over who seduced who. Both offer ambiguous responses, and we sense that their "finger-pointing" is no new game but part of the "masks" they wear to avoid deeper commitment. The video blacks out. And, presto, we see Branch and Caffal enter as live performers on stage, advancing the film's storyline, abetted by two other actors, Patrick Williams and Simon Winheld, who will play Jessica and Sam's loyal friends. This screen-to stage transition hits the bulls' eye, and if you have never witnessed this fusion of art forms on stage, here's your chance to see it first-hand. Having said that, I wish that the subsequent live performance was as solid as the film portion. Rather than gaining theatrical traction, the scenes played out in real-time become less focused, largely because the play's subplots (involving betrayal, casual sex, and real commitment) pull in too many directions. Freda's play is promising, however. It paints a realistic portrait of two young adults who aren't capable of making a full commitment to each other. While its dramatic structure gets wobbly in places, and the narrative needs a stronger through-line, its message is clear: If you fool with love, you will inevitably find yourself

the fool. At LATEA. 65 minutes. [Donovan]

BARCODE

It's futuristic corporate culture, with guys who look straight out of the 50s – vs. – anti-establishment hackers, who seem like throwbacks to the 60s or 80s. BARCODE takes place in a dystopic world, reminiscent of Orwell's *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, or *Star Wars*, where rebels bravely undermine the dominant Fascist forces. Good live musical accompaniment is provided by a keyboard, 3 guitars, and drums. The ensemble does a nice job with songs that, while pleasant enough, aren't particularly memorable at first hearing. Although, memorably, the rebel sweetheart sings, "There's always an angel beside you to carry your heart." Huh? To carry your heart? The stiff culture doesn't seem to be a great vehicle for a rock musical, at least not in this case, maybe because the constraints of the squared off and totally controlled culture work against the pumped but easy feel of rock (although the counterculture seemed to thrive well enough in the 60s, so maybe it's some other issue here.) The Earth Corp implants barcodes in the citizens' wrists and demands that they buy things in order to keep everything "corporate, safe, and secure." Person-love is forbidden, so of course, a case of person-love quickly develops across political lines. You get the picture. Because you've seen it before, more than once. At La MaMa. 2 hours with intermission. [Osenlund]

WREX

These days, New Yorkers need not look far for a good political sex scandal, but all the carnal misadventures of today's candidates for public office combined can't hold a candle to the plight of poor old Oedipus Rex. Hurling the world of ancient Greek tragedy headfirst into the strange new setting of a conservative talk radio show, playwright Christopher Lord Compton's *WREX* reimagines the tragic hero as Eddy the Gimp, a Rush Limbaugh-esque figure who takes to the airways each day to rally his loyal following against the political and social evils facing Thebes. The play takes on the question of how Eddy might fare if the events of Sophocles fifth-century BCE drama played out in an ancient Greece imbued with today's sensationalist journalism and social media (instead of tweeting, radio listeners send herms via HermesNet). The transposition works well enough, even if a bit forced at times, to hold the audience's interest even while the play moves towards the revelation we all know is coming. Clever classical references abound—most commonly recognizable enough not to require a mythology dictionary—but the sendup of the blowhard mainstays of the modern-day media still offers plenty to enjoy for those less familiar with ancient history. Meanwhile, as well known as the Oedipus story is, *WREX* still has some surprises, some comic, others much more serious. For all its joking around, Compton's script packs a damning punch in asking what power these sorts of media and political figures hold over us, and what secrets they might be hiding. At Connelly. 1 hour, 40 minutes. [Horn]

Lollapacocharoozastock Music Festival

A duo in various get-ups fronts a *rockin'* band and performs different types of music. A rock concert, not a play, *Lollapacocharoozastock* features great live music and intermittent video footage of their tour bus, interviews, and backgrounds on the bands. All faked. This is *Positive Feedback*. It's a spoof band—extremely silly and lots of fun. They send up the music and style of, for example, country ("I think that I love you/ or I might be wasted"), 80s hair bands, and arena bands. For each band impression, as the singers change costumes and assume totally different personas, the musicians change their accessories: scarves, hats, glasses, wigs. Their group *Simon Never Said* has a touch of Seattle. "She wears a wedding dress to sleep... she goes hunting every weekend... The girl is so ironic." Their late 70s band *Plymouth Voyager*: "And when there's no one left to screw/ I come back home to you." The show is too short by half an hour. You get all wound up and then it's time to go. On the happy side, though, the bar at Subculture is open during and after the performance. It's a good time. At Subculture. 45 minutes. [Osenlund]

Why Not Me: Love, Cancer, & Jack White

Playwright-actress Jen Bosworth is the newest prophet of live-your-dream. With some storytelling assistance from her director Alyson Lyon and musician Briar Rabbit, Bosworth dares you to be her soul-mate for seventy minutes, and listen to her surreal life story. And surreal it is! Starting out as a struggling actress, she gained visibility with stints on *ER*, *Early Edition*, and a lead role in a production with the notable Steppenwolf Theater Company. When agents told her, time and again, that she was "too fat" to advance her career as an actress, she shrugged and headed to L. A. in 2000. Once there, she was gainfully employed in a metaphysical bookstore, and in a strange turn of fate, ended up as office manager for Nicholas Cage (Yes, the movie star!) Bosworth reveals that the job wasn't always as glam as it sounds, with picking up dry-cleaning and dog poop being part of her daily rigmarole on Sunset Boulevard. Weary with Hollywood culture and endless work hours, she decided to return home to Illinois to recharge her battery. Bosworth, ironically, would arrive just in time to find that her father, who had been on painkillers for his broken back, was in the ICU for a drug overdose. Bosworth poignantly recounts her hand-holding with her father through his last days, and how she helped him to reach out to the "Ancestors." Bosworth embraces the thorns on the rose at every turn and always looks life-and-death-in the face. Bosworth's next thorn was even longer and sharper. She shares with the audience what it was like to see her mother fight terminal cancer, and ultimately succumb to the disease. Yes, bring your tissues! You alternately cry, and laugh yourself to tears at this show. What makes this show winning is not its celebrity appeal (one Chicago critic wrote that the playwright-actress needs a tad more material on "her encounter with the Hollywood Machine") or its pie-in-the-sky promises. It is Bosworth herself—and her love, honesty, and courage is contagious. At Subculture. 70 minutes. [Donovan]

Lula del Ray

Chicago-based Manual Cinema group brings an appealing retro tale of a proto-band groupie fittingly told with retro techniques and technology. In this wordless animated production, Lula proves to be obsessed with getting close to her favorite ensemble, Bader Brothers, and will stop at nothing to track them down, knocking on doors and stealing into off-limits places. Finally she discovers they are appearing at her city's main venue, and she scurries down the ventilation system as the only way to view their sold-out show. Without spoiling the plot, the after-show encounter makes her older and wiser. She returns to the rural abode where the story began, fully primed to revel in the natural beauty she set aside during her quest. Four puppeteer-players perform an intricate choreography with transparencies, stencils, paper shadow puppets and short films using of all things overhead projectors. At times Sarah Fornace in silver and blue wig plus a mask element mimes some of Lula's scenes, appearing on the large screen above as a highly animated profile against backgrounds like a 1950's office or forest glade at the very end. Sparing use of color contrasts with the rich sound design which appropriately includes some traditional acoustic instruments, all blended using quadraphonic technology. In this appealing if enigmatic show Fornace shares creative direction with Julia Miller and Drew Dir. At 14th Street Y. 75 minutes. [Lipfert]

Track Twelve

When the four characters of Emily Comisar's *Track Twelve* discover that their train from Penn Station to Washington, DC has been delayed several hours due to a blizzard, they are understandably despondent, but we soon realize that they may not be exactly eager to get on their way, either. Sister and brother Jenny (Keelie A. Sheridan) and Simon (Leo Goodman) are headed to their mother's second wedding, where they'll have to confront some of the troubled relationships within their family. Meanwhile, business partners - and former romantic couple - Mike (Charlie Gorilla) and Lindsay (Sarah Sanders) struggle with their own personal and professional challenges while preparing themselves for a sales meeting that

could make or break their company. When the four meet in Penn's waiting area, their lives become rapidly entwined as they help one another work through these problems, in addition to causing each other new ones. Comisar's script is, overall, nicely polished, especially when it comes to family issues: the interactions between Jenny and Simon are particularly edifying to watch, at both their lightest and heaviest moments. Sheridan's performance, characterized by strong stage presence and consistently spot-on timing, is the standout of the show. The business people come off a bit flatter as characters, however. The central conflict for Mike and Lindsay vacillates - sometimes erratically - between the need for the two to overcome their romantic past and that to save their business from failure; further, Lindsay's character was always precariously perched between wittily sarcastic and just plain mean-spirited. Nonetheless, Comisar does indeed compel us to feel invested in these characters as we watch them grapple with the demons of their pasts and turn towards the even more daunting uncertainties of the future. In fact, by the time the train comes (which, it is worth noting, is not the end of the play), so much has developed that the weather delay that began *Track Twelve* seems rather insignificant in comparison, and we've even enjoyed the opportunity to wait for the train along with the characters. Anyone who has ever endured a significant delay in Penn Station before can understand just what a tremendous feat that is. At Circulo. 90 minutes. [Horn]

In My Own Defense

Fringe exists for a whole host of reasons, but chief among them is to offer a stage to those who may not have the same backgrounds or professional training as many of the performers who occupy the stages of New York for the remainder of the year. In this sense, writer and performer L.H. Mursy's *In My Own Defense* almost attempts to serve as a mission statement of the festival, proclaiming that meaningful artistic expression can come from anyone, regardless of who they are and what experience they have had (though Mursy and co-star David Woodard have, in fact, trained at Second City in Chicago). On paper, the play is about a disgruntled comedian, Victor (Mursy), and his evil sidekick, Owen (Woodard), trying to conquer the world via bad poetry, yet this summary misleads more than it clarifies. Rather, this is a performance offering a conscious meta-commentary on what it means to express oneself and to go against accepted norms in society. The show labels itself as an "Intellectual Dramatic Comedy," but while *In My Own Defense* has some amusing moments, the show prioritizes the intellectual and the dramatic over the comedic; it is a cerebral take on notions of (in)sanity and performativity. As part of this, both characters wear masks during the play in order to obscure their faces, but these have the unfortunate effect of also obscuring many of their words, and as a result, their message. For those festivalgoers interested in more experimental fare, however, Mursy and Woodard have an impassioned message to offer, and in a half-hour-long show, they don't waste any time in cutting to the chase. At SubCulture. 30 minutes. [Horn]

Landscape with Missing Person

Strangers, a man and a girl, set off on a cross-country odyssey. The girl is a with-it, self-centered, delinquent drop out. He's distant and seems naive. Watching them negotiate their relationship (not "a relationship") is intriguing and funny. That Conradian thing nags in the back of your mind, that a journey is not so much about where you're headed but about who you are. The play takes its time and doesn't give up its secrets, but eventually possible meanings emerge. It's hard to get what this play wants to be, though, when the travelers encounter outrageous cartoon caricatures to move the plot along. "Real" humorous people would be quite funny enough. The resulting dissonance casts a slight shadow on an otherwise compelling show. *Landscape With Missing Person* has something special, and it sticks in your mind. At LATEA. 2 hours with intermission. [Osenlund]

Cowboys Don't Sing

A double send up-of Westerns and Musicals-is packing them in at Theatre 80. It's a good thing that this clever show grows on you, because there are lots of songs and the singers aren't exactly Patti LuPone. When a handsome stranger arrives in the singing town and insists "I'm not much of a singer," the Sheriff retorts, "That's all right, we aren't either." Creators Dennis Flynn and Johnny Kelley work in pretty much the whole narrative territory of The Western: Goodies, baddies, train robbery, Indians, Saloon with Mexican girl, new girl arrives on a train, a doctor from the East, Deputy, shooting and stand-offs, the telegraph. There are cute tricks in the very rough set design, among them a mirage. The cowboys look good and archetypal. The singing horse complains, "There's nothing worse than being the horse in a one-horse town." His owner tells him, "You know I don't speak horse, Shadow." Unrelenting meta-theatrical punches keep the laughs coming, ie, "I thought this was going to be a bigger role," a dead cowboy complains. A stereotyped Indian brings up the years of institutionalized racism. Unseen musicians play a score written by the show's cowboy hero, T.J. Alcalá. It's an understatement to say *Cowboys Don't Sing* is a crowd pleaser. At Theatre 80. 1 hour, 40 minutes with (fake) intermission. [Osenlund]

Listen . . . Can You Hear Me Now?

Those who enjoyed Nina Raine's *Tribes* should check out Gloria Rosen's autobiographical show *Listen . . . Can You Hear Me Now?* Rosen, who was born to deaf parents, recounts her unique experience of living with them, day in and day out, year after year. This show scratches beneath the surface of the deaf culture, revealing its multiple issues (lip-reading vs. sign, deaf speech, social stigma, isolation, and so forth) confronting deaf persons and their family members. What you get here, besides authenticity, is a double portrait of a deaf couple as viewed through the sensitive eyes of a daughter. Rosen isn't just telling it like it is here. She creates the verisimilitude of her family home life, including its flashing lights that allowed her deaf parents to visually "hear" the door bell or phone ringing. Indeed, this is an instance of full-immersion theater, not for titillating the senses, but for creating Rosen's lived reality. Funny, serious, frustrating, bewildering, wise- You can pick your own adjective to describe her show, but I would go with *wise*. Far from a vanity show, Rosen points out how she gained wisdom by living with her deaf parents and being their "ears" and more. Rosen's show ultimately ends on a triumphant note. Much more than entertainment, *Listen . . . Can You Hear Me Now?* reverberates with a bittersweet truth. Go to listen--and learn. At Sgouras. 1 hour. [Donovan]

En Avant! An Evening with Tennessee Williams

Thomas Lanier Williams, better known by his moniker "Tennessee Williams," is brought to life in *En Avant! An Evening with Tennessee Williams*. This solo show, written and performed by William Shuman, is an homage to the master who gave us the indelible characters of Blanche Dubois, Maggie the Cat, and the fragile-as-glass Laura Wingfield-to mention a few. Even if you typically run in the opposite direction from one-person shows, you should really make the exception for this one. Shuman's easy-going manner is altogether winning. Dressed in a dapper white suit and Panama hat, he may not be the spittin' image of Williams but bears enough of a resemblance to pull you in. According to his "Author's Note" in the program, Shuman's love affair with Williams sparked at Northeastern University where he "was cast as the Gentleman Caller in *The Glass Menagerie*." Not only was he immediately stage struck, he would soon be devouring Williams' short stories and journals. Little wonder that his current monologue is chock-full of insights, anecdotes, and vital facts on Williams. What makes this 85-minute yam different than most biodramas, however, is that Shuman isn't attempting to inhabit the great writer but to create a convincing "impression" of who Williams was. And, as he floridly riffs on the various aspects of this literary titan, he paces across the stage to pour himself a drink, settles into a patio chair, taps away at an old-fashioned typewriter, or waltzes around the performing space. It is evident that this is a labor of love for Shuman, and that he is utterly fascinated by his famous subject. Far from a hagiography, Shuman explores Williams' rollercoaster career, his troubled family life, his alcohol and drug addictions, and his homosexuality. Some Williams' aficionados may

fault Shuman for "impressionizing", and *not* impersonating, the writer in the piece. This reviewer just took the show on its own terms and relished every morsel parceled out on Williams. After all, how can you outdo this quote that sails in with gravitas at the finale: "He [Williams] was a monster among angels, and an angel among monsters." At Kabayitos. 85 minutes. [Donovan]

Occupy Olympus

Occupy Olympus traces back to ancient Greece the futility of wanting to redistribute wealth. Didn't work then, doesn't work now. This Occupy Movement tribute show is both an undifferentiated complaint and a call to do something, to "make a noise." With Aristophanes's play, *Plutus*, god of Wealth as the model, the Magis Theatre Company and director George Drance have put together a protest of just about everything in an amazing litany of economic woes, but the principal target is rich people, the 1%, whether they're just rich or robber CEOs, and whether they're just successful investment bankers or greedy white collar criminals. They name names too, like "the richest guy in the world in Mexico . . . Carlos something." The lively company keeps everything moving with clever lyrics, cute choreography, and oodles of energy. Live musicians supply fine music, although drumming often overpowers the spoken or sung word. Poverty, a heroine, argues that poor people provide services and help the community. Problem is, poor people aspire to be what they despise. Plutus can make them rich if they're virtuous, but they'll start out following virtue and end up pursuing wealth for themselves. Plutus comments on banks too big to fail: "Lie down a prince, wake up a schmuck." Like its model, the well-intentioned Occupy Movement, the show offers no real answer as to what can be done, no plan, just an effort to shake things up with relentless scattershot non-specific protest and a realization that not a whole lot can be done when fighting both an entrenched system and human nature. *Occupy Olympus* is a feel-good experience with people of like mind, and an upbeat cry for help. At Flamboyant. 1 hour, 30 minutes. [Osenlund]

I (Honestly) Love You

A young woman and a young man meet in a coffee shop when both order the same amusingly complicated drink. They quickly discover that they suffer from the same truth-telling malady, a comedy setup if ever there was one. Their best friends meet and start dating, employing the usual white lies and subterfuges that smooth a relationship, providing a handy contrast to the increasingly beleaguered compulsively honest couple. In this engaging and well put together show, the encounters take place in front of a calendar. The couples wear sweet if slightly naff matching costumes. Devices like compressing time help to tell the story, and there's a bit of audience participation when someone is selected to read a short and comically awkward part. The guy who was tagged at this performance was either really good or a shill. I'm betting he was just really good. New York is like that. This appealing play with its self-deprecating attitude was written and directed by actor Damon Lockwood from Perth, Western Australia. At Kraine. 50 minutes. [Osenlund]

Sheeple

Primarily, *Sheeple* is about five kids sitting on a porch. There's nothing inherently wrong with that, but coupled with low stakes and largely static action, problems arise in this play by "recovering former child actor" Mara Wilson and directed by a former college classmate, Max Reuben. Set in 2005, it follows teenaged Nick, his friend Alberto, his not quite girlfriend Soo-Min and his not quite friend Russ as they argue about politics and try to procure drugs. The dynamic is upset with the appearance of Nick's older brother Seth, who seems to have few other objectives besides doing his laundry and making everyone else feel either stupid or horny, gender depending. Wilson captures the voices of ostensibly self-assured but inwardly confused high schoolers, but doesn't do enough to make us understand their lives from a more informed, removed perspective. It's capably acted, with an especially spirited performance by William Vaughn as the obnoxious conspiracy theorist Russ. At Kraine. 170 minutes with intermission. [Teicher]

Shyama - The Legend of Krishna

Bharatanatyam is a classical Indian dance form going back over 2000 years. Its performance requires complex timing and movement and an extreme attention to detail, all of which are on display in this presentation. The program plays out in seven movements, each with a narrative exploring the boyhood of the Hindu deity Krishna. Ramya Ramnarayan is not just a skilled choreographer, but also a magnetic performer. In previous works, she has commanded the stage completely on her own, and *Shyama* only further supports the fact that she's capable of captivating an audience single-handedly. But *Shyama* also introduces us to Ramnarayan's troupe from the Nrithyanjali Institute of Dance, and they've earned their share of the spotlight. These young dancers are proof that a new generation are poised to take up the mantle of this tradition, and, along with Ramnarayan, they make the case that more people should see this beautiful form. At 14th Street Y. 75 minutes. [Teicher]

Nicholas Maeve Marriane

It doesn't take long for things to fall apart once Marriane shows up. Inseparable a decade ago, the three eponymous 30-somethings of the play reunite over drinks. In the course of two days in Brooklyn, all the old feelings, and some new ones, emerge, upending their lives along the way. While much of the drama concerns the implications of an incident well in the past, the present is made engaging by Matthew Stephen Smith's fast and lively dialogue, and Rachael Lee, Christopher McInden and Shannon Sullivan's strong performances. Though there is an intellectual argument at the core of this play, one considered aloud by its characters, the work is best when it deals with the characters' more palpable emotions. These characters are sharply drawn and utterly human, each uniquely endearing and flawed. They're crafted by a writer of considerable talent, whose work merits larger audiences. At Circulo. 95 minutes. [Teicher]

Kemble's Riot

London's (partially Crown subsidized) Covent Garden Theatre, owned by John Kemble, burned down uninsured in 1809. When it was rebuilt the celebrated actor raised ticket prices. Therein lies a tale. Adrian Bunting's rather magnificent and ambitious play, *Kemble's Riot* has essentially three parts: Covent Garden Theatre burns down during a performance of *Macbeth* by the great actor John Kemble and his sister, the great tragedienne Sarah Siddons; Protests ensue when the rebuilt theater reopens with raised prices; Kemble and Sarah are shown behind the scenes. *Kemble's Riot* was altered for its trip to FringeNYC: The theater riots, which were set in the past in the Edinburgh production, have been updated, perhaps in a knee jerk reaction to playing in contemporary New York. The change is a stretch, seeking resonance in parallels with 9/11, and relating firemen going in to the WTC to the Covent Garden fire in 1809. And the riots are connected to Occupy Wall Street with a reference to bailouts, and sentiments such as: "I'm not the man who has courtside seats at the Knicks." Although Kemble and Sarah exist in the past and the revolt has been updated to the present, the audience is nevertheless fully engaged, caught right in the middle of the action, with conflicting feelings about John Kemble's situation and his price gouging. His sister reminds Kemble: "They are the reason you are here." If you're ready to be pulled in to this spirited and complicated production, do see it immediately, for there are few performances left. At Players. 1 hour. [Osenlund]

Who's Afraid of Me, Myself, and Edward Albee?

If Edward Albee's plays set you thinking in fresh directions, then take a new detour with Matt Thompson's dark comedy *Who's Afraid of Me, Myself, and Edward Albee?* Thompson's new work has clear echoes of Albee's absurdist themes and mysterious characters. Thompson's two-hander centers on a neurotic businessman and eccentric stranger, sitting on a

bench at a bus stop, and waiting, waiting, and waiting. The stranger soon begins to bully the businessman, and later on, tries to seduce him. The businessman attempts to keep the stranger at bay but to little avail. Frustrated, the businessman eventually pulls a magazine out of his satchel and begins reading. The stranger, who is a virtuoso at asking questions, asks the businessman if any "famous people" are in the magazine. This, of course, sparks a discussion on fame, famous American writers, and how their characters can permeate our psyches and be absorbed into the culture at large. Though the businessman doesn't quite gain the upper-hand here, the scene acts as a turning point in the play. Both characters finally look beyond themselves, and their petty lives, to something with more scope and meaning. This play, at its best, is not just about fame but about our relationship with language itself. This noirish comedy needs a lot more polishing. But it perceptively looks at the American phenomenon of fame, famous people, and, more importantly, their lasting works. At Kabayitos. 85 minutes. [Donovan]

The Storytellers

Unseasonably cool temperatures aside, Halloween is still a few months away, but Abigail Strange's *The Storytellers* offers compelling evidence that scary stories need not be relegated to October. The show's promise is simple - storytelling - and it delivers with adaptations of four stories by Saki ("The Storyteller"), W.W. Jacobs ("The Tollhouse"), Robert W. Service ("The Cremation of Sam McGee"), and Edgar Allan Poe ("The Tell-Tale Heart"). Saki's tale sets the tone for the performance, as a bachelor traveling with three young children and their aunt tells an "improper" story of a good girl who, despite her extremely well-behaved manner, is eaten by a wolf. This story, standing in stark contrast to a morality tale told by the aunt moments before, delights the young audience, much to their aunt's dismay. This is, in some ways, the manifesto of the performance: these stories are not always 'proper,' and their worlds do not always operate according to a clear system of morality and reason, but they will entertain. And indeed, they do, owing in large part to the strength of the performers. The show's ensemble cast (Louis Aquiler, Tyler Gattoni, Patrick Harman, Bethany McNamara, Kristin Nemecek, and Christopher Wentworth) worked well together, enlivening each individual story while agilely transitioning from one segment to the next. The script could have taken better advantage of this, as there were relatively few times that the entire group operated as an ensemble. The adaptation of Poe's story, staged as a monologue and placed at the close of the show, embodies the central challenge. Nemecek delivers the story with great force and energy - it's thrilling to watch - while the remainder of the cast is reduced to lying in the shadows around the stage tapping out the beat of the eponymous tell-tale heart. Perhaps "reduced" isn't the right word, since this staging does work for Poe's story, but I couldn't escape feeling shortchanged at the end of the show. It is a testament to Strange's concept, the performers, and the atmosphere created by the creative stagework and Aquiler's original music that I left wanting more, and I mean it as a compliment to say that the show could have been more ambitious. Maybe *The Storytellers* is a victim of its own success in its central task; the show attempts to find the joy in sharing stories, and it offers several that are a good deal of fun. That the concept can be taken farther certainly means that it is worthwhile in the first place, and given the modular composition of the show (there is no frame that explicitly connects all the stories), Strange has a great deal of flexibility to build on the concept in the future. At Flamboyan. 1 hour. [Horn]

Snakes I Have Known

"All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go . . ." That pop song from the 60s gets new mileage in the solo show, *Snakes I Have Known*. Written and performed by Molly Montgomery, this is the parable of a prodigal daughter whose ticket is stamped: DFW to JFK. A native-born Texan, Montgomery gives you a real slice of the Lone Star State here, including its people, pecan orchards, spacious ranches, shotguns, and snakes. When the lights go up, Montgomery, dressed in jean shorts and a red tank top, is straddling a chair turned backwards, glowing with Texan pride. She chronicles her life story, more or less, by the variety of snakes she has met in life. Indeed her earliest encounter with a "snake" was at the tender age of 6 months. During a family boating trip, her mother glimpsed a snake in the water and, paralyzed by fear, dropped Molly from her arms. This "snake," on closer scrutiny, was discovered to be just a stick drifting in the current. No matter. Molly winkingly confides this misadventure to the audience, perhaps to underscore how obsessed and vulnerable Texans are to snakes of all stripes. Montgomery is a charming raconteur who clearly knows how to spin a good yarn with Texan patois and local color. Many of her anecdotes grab hold with their humor; others sparkle for their whimsical air. But if I were to pick the most vivid one, I would go with Montgomery's vignette about getting snake-bit, "buck-ass naked," and very nearly dying from it as a teenager. Naturally, her move to New York City after high school gets chronicled too. But the better part of the piece is when Montgomery is riffing on what Texas is *really* like, and evoking its rugged Davy Crockett-like flavor. Montgomery's title sounds snarky, but truth be told, her show is anything but. This pretty-as-a-model actress hits the bull's-eye with her show. Montgomery illuminates two worlds here: Nowhere, Texas and New York City. And what begins as a tall tale, ends up as a master class on snakes, survival, and beyond. At Jimmy's No. 43. 70 minutes. [Donovan]

The Dead Hooker Play

As Miles (Scott Decker) prepares for his wedding day, there's anything but joy in the air. His best man Marco (Jim Conroy), recently come down from a cocaine high and trying to recover with several hits of ecstasy, is banging on his door. Soon to follow is his other friend, Lee (Sean Modica), who is in the midst of an identity crisis, having become "90% sure" he is "50% gay" after an erotic encounter with Miles' fiancé's uncle the previous evening. Miles' fiancé, Kelly (Madeleine James), is crazed and obsessive, and he isn't particularly fond of her. And then, of course, there's also the matter of the dead prostitute in his hotel room (Maria Pastel). Decker - who pulls triple duty here as playwright, co-director (with Lindsay M. Stringfellow), and performer - has set the stage beautifully for a farce, and *The Dead Hooker Play* does not disappoint. The show's first half is a fast-paced barrage of jokes while the second act (which takes place the evening before the first act) changes the dynamic of the play, tempering the ongoing humor with more somber notes mixed in as we learn how the events of the first act came to transpire. As with many dark comedies, the balance between the flippant and the serious can be a tough balance to strike, but Decker is up to the task. So are all of his co-stars, particularly Pastel, whose performance offered some of the show's funniest moments as well as some of the most tragic. The humor itself is not for the easily offended. Most races, religions, and sexual orientations become the butt of a joke at one point or another, while other jokes cover nearly every bodily function imaginable. The show also relies heavily on lines about Hollywood and celebrities, which are more hit-and-miss; some work well, while others are just gratuitous cheap shots, and few of them will still pack any punch five or ten years down the line. *The Dead Hooker Play* is certainly not for everyone, but for those who can handle the in-your-face comedy, there's a lot to like. You might feel guilty laughing at times, but the chances that you'll be laughing are good. It's OK, these characters don't seem like the types to judge. At Players. 2 hours with intermission. [Horn]

Aisle Six

Welcome to the Super Duper Store, where Customer Service is staffed by Night and her Furies and the cursed *Aisle Six* is your one stop shop for paper goods and pure evil. Into this grim environment enters trainee Melody Elbow (Nicola McEldowney), a "girl of destiny" who is enchanted by everything about the store, from the majestic voice that comes on the loudspeaker to announce completed deli orders to the shy Non-Perishables Manager, Sidney (Jake Lenmenes). When a plague strikes the store, Melody is its only hope, but as she learns more about the lost souls who haunt it after receiving terrible service, can she make the employees change their ways, or will they decide a bit of plague isn't nearly as bad as behaving decently towards others? It's a ridiculous sounding premise, and it is. This show is a descendent of

musicals like *Urinetown* (which debuted at Fringe in 2001) and *Avenue Q*, which both predicate themselves on absurd or trivial scenarios and which feature similar ingénue characters - Melody is like the hybrid of *Urinetown's* Hope Cladwell, *Avenue Q's* Kate Monster, and Kristin Wiig's recurring *SNL* "Target Lady" character. Another debt to *Q* is the use of puppets, executed most elaborately here by Anthony Michael Stokes, who manages to sustain a fight with his puppet for an entire scene. For those who have enjoyed these other shows, you'll want *Aisle Six* to work, but you may find that there's not ever quite enough at stake to draw you in. The play is nothing if not self-aware, though. One character explicitly labels himself a *deus ex machina*, and Melody's exuberance for all things grocery store-related seems to overwhelm the other characters as much as the audience. One of the show's best moments was an unscripted one: as Melody and the Supermarket Fairy (Teresa Hui) were forced to stop a set piece from falling over at the start of a scene, they joked smartly about the obvious plot twist that would be coming in the following moments. *Aisle Six*, which McEldowney wrote in college and based on her experiences working at a supermarket, certainly has heart and a meaningful connection to the playwright's life, but it's never quite able to overcome its mundane setting to tell a story that's truly grabbing onstage. At Redgrave. 1 hour, 40 minutes. [Horn]

Bully

From cyber-bullying to harassment on the playground, from intimidating to discriminating, bullying has come out of the closet and is being taken seriously across the country. Little wonder that Lee J. Kaplan's *Bully* has been a sure-fire hit ever since it first appeared on the boards. Kaplan gives us his personal story of being bullied in school as a youngster, and relies on his 6th-grade journal entries to give him lots of unvarnished details on the subject in question. With its subtitle of "It's the Fight of His Life," Kaplan points out that his battle against bullying wasn't a tidy little problem but something that loomed monstrously in his everyday life. Kaplan, an A-student and academically at the top of his class, was an easy target for his peers. While at the time, he simply toughed it out and took refuge as he could, his show neatly imparts a trio of guidelines to best a bully: 1) Stop caring for him. 2) Tell somebody. 3) Stop blaming yourself. This is no pedantic journey, however. Kaplan is constantly in motion during his hour-long show: skipping rope to train for boxing (his chief metaphor in the show), doing push-ups on the floor, or re-enacting an episode of bullying from his grade-school days. Kaplan is a dynamo on stage with his one-two punches aimed squarely at the aggressor, and a voice of compassion for the underdog. That his play speaks to today's society is a given. There's even an insert in the program that cites that "only days ago, I learned of the tragic death of Evan Rosenstock in Potomac, MD. Evan took his own life in May after enduring bullying in school." And, quite fittingly, Kaplan has been invited by the Rosenstock family to perform *Bullying* at an upcoming Memorial Service for this 16-year-old victim. This is theater with a social conscience. And, coinciding with the New York City Public School's new initiative called "Respect for All," which requires staff to report any instance of bullying and harassment of students, this show is spot-on. Clocking in at one hour, it is more than entertainment. What one takes away from this show could save a young person's life. At Sgouras. 1 hour. [Donovan]

Antony & Cleopatra: Infinite Lives

Tragedy? History? Or Roman Play? No doubt Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra* is tough to categorize. Philadelphia's Porch Company is now inviting you to take a fresh look at this warhorse through the lens of contemporary politics. Its new play, *Antony & Cleopatra: Infinite Lives*, centers on an Egyptian expatriate Nassima El-Kahir (Nazli Sarpkaya) and her fiancé Kitt Marsh (Davin Plantamura), an activist museum director, who has recently received a commission to mount a Shakespeare play (that would be *Antony & Cleopatra*). As the action opens, Kitt is in the throes of blocking the sprawling play and helping his amateur ensemble inhabit their historic figures. Things get complicated when Nassima, who also is Kitt's assistant at the museum, finds herself between a rock and a hard place: Nassima's revolutionary brother Gamal (Dustin Karrat) has just arrived on the scene from Egypt and is trying to persuade Nassima to return to Egypt with him. Nassima struggles with her conscience, as her fiancé Kitt continues to deal with the inevitable headaches of staging *Antony & Cleopatra* (His lead Cleopatra has just broken her leg, his female Enobarbus is unhappy with her male casting, and so forth). Set in the Egyptian wing of a university's museum of archaeology in November 2011, this play is extremely ambitious as it appropriates Shakespeare's language, themes, and characters into a fresh context. Co-authors Michael De Angelis and Pete Barry, in a program note, offer comments on the production, and you would do well to read it. It offers reflections on the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the morass of Egyptian politics today, and the dilemma of being artists in a political world. While I don't think this theater piece, in its present version, is fully realized yet, I do applaud their intent to rework a Shakespeare play so that it resonates with contemporary issues. At Redgrave. 2 hours with intermission. [Donovan]

The Famous Play

Anthony Natoli's *The Famous Play* is an unneringly honest and funny exploration of artistic creation that establishes a direct line of dialogue with the audience, opening a window into the enormity and fragility of the artist's ego. Five actors, wearing plain white tee shirts emblazoned with the playwright's contact information, are used essentially as prop pieces in the playwright's narrative, narrated by another actor playing the playwright himself. As the playwright, Brian Cross nails the unblinking, stilted plasticity required of the role, only later to drop all pretenses and stun with a unexpectedly moving monologue. The rest of the cast delivers equally well in their multifaceted roles, switching, as required, between being audience members, teachers, parents, and "smart quirky white people." For audiences in on the joke, *The Famous Play* may prove to be one of the Fringe Festival's hidden gems. At Kraine. 55 minutes. [Teicher]

Two Gentlemen of Verona: A Swashbuckling Comedy!

The Classical Avant-Garde Experimental (C.A.G.E.) Theatre Company takes Shakespeare's apprentice play, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and lends it a steely edge. Reimagined as *Two Gentlemen of Verona: A Swashbuckling Comedy*, it lives up to its dashing subtitle. Michael Hagins, who adapted and directs the play, retools the early comedy with a swash-and-buckle attitude. No dew is going to rust the blades of this troupe. You get bright blades put up from the get-go. There's even a Prologue, where a couple of cross-dressed swashbucklers (Ambar Aranaga, Laura Mae Baker) roil up the audience with jokes, banter, come-hither winking, and three rollicking refrains out of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*: You know that intoxicating sea-chant: "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest/ Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum . . ." The performers invite the audience to sing along, and they collectively do. Hagins has added other novel touches: The Duke of Milan (Sean Ward), Silvia's father, looks and acts a lot like Captain Hook, that villain out of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* who has a steel hook as a surrogate hand. Yes, this adds a sinister aura to the Duke. And though not supported by Shakespeare's text, it underscores the company's credo that rattling the original a tad won't destroy it. Less successful is Hagin's morphing of Crab to a stuffed animal. Crab is that hard-hearted mutt, traditionally played by a real dog. And if you have ever seen *Two Gents* in a live stage performance, you will know that Crab *always* upstages his owner Launce (Mark Levy) during his famous comic monologue in Act 1, Scene 3, that compares his parents to his well-worn shoes. Hagin regains his theatrical footing, however, when the Dangerous Outlaws of the Woods (suitably performed with reckless abandon by Aranaga, Baker, and Mark Levy) arrive in Act 2 for some waggingly good sword-fights. While the acting is uneven, the zest of the young cast is consistently infectious. A shout out to Michael Rehse for his derring-dos as the swain Valentine, and Reynaldo Piniella for his up-to-speed rendering of Speed, Valentines' servant. And huzzah to the entire cast for casting a fresh light on the Bard's seldom-staged and often-dismissed play. Purists might complain that Hagin has watered-down the Bard's text, omitted some characters (like Proteus' father Antonio), and taken too much poetic license here. And, in the strictest sense, he has. But what Hagin adds is a good deal of fizzy fun. If you insist on

perfectly articulated Shakespearean verse, immaculate performances and name actors, you won't find it in this show. But if you want to see *Two Gents* done in a wild and wooly fashion, this staging nails it. At Flamboyant. 2 hours intermission. [Donovan]

The Accidental Hamlet

Some people might say that William Shakespeare's greatest contribution to the world was a magnificent corpus of poetry and drama that probed the human condition and addressed head-on some of the major challenges facing his society. Others might find it equally important that he gave subsequent generations of artists a rich store of material to mock mercilessly (with love, of course). Perhaps the best example of the latter school of thought is the work of the Reduced Shakespeare Company, and it is precisely in this vein that *The Accidental Hamlet* follows, enlisting the same sort of humor but focusing exclusively on the one play as opposed to jumping around between works. The script is credited to "Sebastian Seidel shamelessly riffing off William Shakespeare," but it feels as if very little of the show is actually devoted to retelling Shakespeare's tragedy; instead, most of the time, we're watching the relationship develop between the two performers, John (Danny Ashkenasi) and Frederick (Bob Homeyer). It's not hard to guess the dynamic between the two before the show even begins: one is the bossy, overly-confident type who takes the Bard so seriously as to refer to him as the Bard (that's Frederick); the other is a well-intentioned buffoon who can be relied upon to play all the female characters so long as he isn't too distracted by his fake breasts and the vast entertaining potential thereof. They fight and make up at regular intervals, and we're supposed to know that underneath all the petty conflicts, they really care for each other. The play isn't quite convincing there, however, and that makes it a lot less funny than it aspires to be, since a potential source of warmth turns into a source of distaste for the characters. Faster timing could have helped accentuate the play's farcical elements and overshadow the character issues, but this 105-minute show takes its time and advances slowly. That Ashkenasi and Homeyer can maintain their energy throughout the entire duration is impressive, but it can only go so far. Ultimately, there's nothing so problematic about *The Accidental Hamlet* in and of itself, but in the crowded genre of Shakespeare-spoofs, it doesn't feel like this particular show brings anything new to the table. At Connelly. 1 hour, 45 minutes with intermission. [Horn]

William

Can we read Shakespeare's sonnets and view them as x-rays of his intimate love life and literary career? No matter whether you respond with "aye" or "nay," you must go see *William*, a one-man musical, performed by Swedish actor-singer Jonas Nerbe. Nerbe assumes many personas here: There's Christopher Marlowe, Henry Wriothesley (third Earl of Southampton), the Dark Lady, Richard Burbage, Richard II and III, the Bard himself, and Narrator. Accompanied by a String Quartet (Stefani Collins/violin, Sarah Koenig-Plonskier/violin, Caterina Longhi/viola, Bridget Pasker/cello) on stage, Nerbe takes you on a whirlwind ride through literary London in 1592. Nerbe, a notable European actor who has established his reputation in musical theatre with lead roles in *My Fair Lady*, *Les Misérables*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Beauty and the Beast* and diverse operas, has a set of titanium pipes, and as he insinuates himself into his various roles, exudes presence. Though it might seem an insurmountable obstacle to many performers who speak English with a strong accent to do Shakespeare, Nerbe deftly incorporates his Swedish-ness into the musical. In fact, when he enters the performing space and first addresses the audience, it is in Swedish: "Vart liv ar en strid. Vi slass a betvingar . . ." Feigning surprise that the audience isn't pulled in by the sheer beauty of the Swedish language, Nerbe tells everybody that he will "compromise" his artistic talent and do the show in its English version for them. It is a charming moment, as he acknowledges his audience not merely as random ticketholders, but as an integral part of the incipient theatrical performance. While the show lasts but 90 minutes, Nerbe brings to life the up-and-comer Shakespeare, his struggle to make a name for himself in the London theatre world, his fierce rivalry with Christopher Marlowe and the other university "fops," and his decision to write a sonnet sequence under the patronage of the young Earl of Southampton. Nerbe sings several of the Bard's beloved sonnets (or portions), including Sonnet 76 ("Why is my verse so barren of new pride"), Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day") and Sonnet 129 ("Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame"). The script (book, music, and lyrics by Jan-Erik Saaf and translated into English by Owen Robertson) could use some streamlining, and one correction (Robert Greene accused Shakespeare of being an "upstart Crow," not Marlowe). Still, Nerbe is a real stage-taker and carries the show in spite of its flaws. What you take away is no museum portrait of Shakespeare but the Man-of-Avon as a sharp sonneteer and a writer on the cusp of his success with *Romeo and Juliet*. At SubCulture. 90 minutes. [Donovan]

Slaughterhouse-Five

Time-warping is back! Daria Tavana's new play *Slaughterhouse-Five*, based on Kurt Vonnegut's sci-fi classic of the same name, is resurrecting Billy Pilgrim, his bizarre WWII story, and the planet and aliens of Tralfamadore. Perhaps it was inevitable that Vonnegut's anti-war novel would be reworked for our grim-visaged times. Presented by the True False Theatre, this piece has been created with the goal of revealing "the struggles of soldiers coping with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." No doubt its ideal audience is veterans from Vietnam, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, or Iraq. And, oh yeah. Add on Vonnegut fans of all ages (including this reviewer). The good news is that Tavana's reimagining of the classic, in many aspects, works. It retains much of Vonnegut's language and anti-war sentiments. And though she's reorganized, and transposed many of the novel's episodes, the sweep of the narrative is intact. The current production has many strengths: The ensemble acting is competent, with David Kubicka being well-cast as Billy Pilgrim. Zachary Sitrin's set design (with assistance from Liz Nelson) proves the adage: less is more. Sitrin evokes war zones with realistic images of "steel spaghetti" (Vonnegut's term for barbed wire) on a large screen. And the planet Tralfamadore is conjured by ragged-edged mini-sculptures strewn here and there on stage. The bad news is that there's too much prop-shifting, and set changing, during this 90-minute (intermissionless) performance. And it becomes unnecessary "static" in the show. But this is nit-picking at a skeletal production. With more resources, the creative team could likely resolve the clunky set changes. No doubt this stage adaptation of *Slaughterhouse-Five* has blemishes but attention must be paid. At C.O.W. 90 minutes. [Donovan]

Rubble

Funniest show at the Fringe? *Rubble* may well take the brass ring! This 95-minute comedy by Mike Reiss (he of *The Simpsons* fame) has a laugh a minute, and never stops going til the last gag detonates. The plot? Blink, and you'll miss it. No matter. Laughter is the aim here, and nobody's funny bone will be spared. All right, there are some serious themes anchoring the piece: mid-life crisis, divorce, natural catastrophe, and parent-offspring relationships. The opening scene has Diane (Amy Wilson), a sophisticated network exec in her early 30's, sitting at her desk in a chic LA office. Enter 53-year-old Alvin (*Hollywood Squares* celeb Bruce Vilanch), a veteran TV comedy writer who's recently divorced his wife, is broke, and is in dire need of work. As he presses Diane to let him have a go at writing a new sitcom called "My Brother, the Pope," Diane, who assumes Alvin is Jewish, questions whether he is the best writer to "poke fun at the Vatican." Alvin, convinced he is, immediately informs her that he's "from a small Irish Catholic family" with six kids. Done deal? Hardly. An earthquake hits, and Diane is supposed dead and Alvin is trapped in a ton of rubble. The rest of the play is rather surreal: Alvin, who may or may not be dead, has a series of out-of-body experiences and engages in conversations with his father(s) (Jeffrey Arnold Wolf, Jason Jacoby), his mother (Wilson again), his ex-wife Brie (Wilson again), his aging agent Lee (the excellent Jerry Adler), the Virgin Mary (Wilson again), Jesus (Bryan McElroy), and a vaudevillian Freud. *Rubble* is more than meets the eye. Not only is it well-written, sharply-acted, and well-staged by director James Valletti,

it is a parable illustrating the dilemma of an aging TV writer who realizes that "his age and experience are considered a liability" and that younger writers have the edge in the marketplace. Reiss never hits you over the head with his points, however. He simply guarantees that you will go home from his show laughing. At Players. 95 minutes. [Donovan]

The TomKat Project

Brandon Ogborn's *The TomKat Project* is a send-up of celebrities, Tom Cruise (Walt Delaney) and Katie Holmes (Julie Dahlinger), tracing their roller coaster romance, marriage, family lives, and involvement with the Church of Scientology. The young performers who portray Cruise and Holmes are quite convincing as the celebs. And though neither Delaney or Dahlinger bear a striking physical resemblance to their real-life counterpart, it's a credit to their respective acting skills that they can temporarily persuade you that they are, and pull you into the dramatic moment. Playwright Ogborn serves as Narrator, and the rest of the ensemble inhabit Cruise and Holmes' family, friends, church members, television personalities, mega-stars, and those in showbiz. And with approximately 50 personalities represented here, you get a real slice of tinseltown and more. The problem with the show is that most of the play's material mirrors what has already appeared in the tabloid headlines. And an entire play chronicling their tumultuous life together, and apart, dramatically thins out after the first 30 minutes. That said, the cast looks like their having a terrific time impersonating the likes of Tom Hanks (Micah Stenberg), Oprah Winfrey (Brianna Baker), Nicole Kidman (Baker again), Scarlett Johansson (Allison Yolo)-to mention a few. This show is light fare. But if you are a showbiz junkie, *The Tomkat Project* dishes the dirt on Cruise, Holmes, and their entire retinue. At Players. 1 hour, 45 minutes. [Donovan]

Peninsula

Even though the ending is never in doubt, Nathan Wright's fast moving tale grabs the attention from the opening scene with handsome Brazilian teenager Tiago (Josué Gutiérrez Guerra) floating underwater and never lets go. Desired by all, only a few of the people he encounters can enjoy him. Action flashes from northern Michigan back to Tiago's Rio favela with increasing speed until the scenes unfold simultaneously, Tiago center stage mediating under Drew Florida's highly articulated lighting scheme. Tiago's life explodes in Brazil to catapult him to the US where another tug of wills around a summer job picking cherries make him excess. His encounter with rich kid Tommy (Kellan Peavy) and mom brings the immigrant's precarious emotional and financial situation to a second breaking point, this time fatal. Angela Atwood is masterful in portraying the inner violence of Mrs. Vaughn's conflicted if pampered life to the point of making her sympathetic. Nadia Foskolou's razor-sharp direction highlights contrasting personalities while not shortchanging comic moments peppered throughout the script. At 440 Moss. 1 hour, 40 minutes. [Lipfert]

Horsehead

It's *Godfather* time again, but Damon Lockwood goes behind the onscreen action to ask whose job it was to make the horse's head end up in the movie mogul's bed. None other than two brothers out to make a can-do impression on their mafia bosses. It's not a smooth ride for the chain smoking big talkers. Each phone call (with *Godfather* theme background) can lead to bring success in *The Family* or a quick end to their lives. Filippo's (mafia) war stories won't solve the problem, but younger brother Ed brings up how he dealt with a moose in Canada. Armed with an ax they do the deed, but in the process Filippo's privates are KO'd. It's novice Ed's turn now to enjoy their success. Sebastiano Gavasso and Diego Migeni do the honors as the brothers. Leonardo Buttaroni's direction amplifies Lockwood's Pinteresque atmosphere building to ever funnier moments. *Horsehead* won Best Play award at the 2012 Rome Fringe Festival. At Connelly. 1 hour. [Lipfert]

Why You Beasting?

"Looking at the darker side of the human experience" is included in NewYorkRep's mission statement. Little wonder that it is presenting David Don Miller's new play, *Why You Beasting?*, which brings to life a young English teacher and his first year teaching at a Bronx high school. Puzzled over the title? Well, it is essentially a slang expression used by street-smart teens to describe anybody who's "blowing his stack." And, yes, you will see "beasting" in this play! The lights go up on a "modest" high school classroom. The principal, Dr. Rogelio Rubio (Andre Montgomery), who is in his mid 50s, is interviewing Donovan for a position as an English teacher. As Rubio tries to size-up this young candidate in his late 20s, he gives the skinny on what it takes to deal with minority students and educate them in accordance with the rigorous "New Standards," on which the ink has just dried. Fortunately, Donovan is able to articulate, cogently enough to please Rubio, why he's particularly qualified for the available job. And, Rubio, figuring that Donovan would be "putty" in his administrative hands, decides to take a chance on this green teacher, giving him one bit of advice: "Take attendance and keep a grade book. If a kid fails, it's always good to have attendance records and a grade book." Sound advice indeed. But as the action unfolds, and Donovan gets his first taste of teaching students from the "hood," he realizes that keeping attendance records and a grade book are no easy task. His students routinely saunter in late, derailing his literature lesson, with gangsta attitude to boot. Donovan, who at first politely corrects his students, ultimately lets loose his anger in a steamy tirade (a.k.a. "beasting"). The rest of the narrative illustrates how this fledgling teacher has his "armor cracked," not only by his students, but his colleagues as well. This play is in the same vein as *Stand and Deliver* and *Dead Poets Society*. Though Miller's script could benefit by incorporating a few more nods to J. D. Salinger's classic novel, *Catch-22*—that Donovan is teaching for all too obvious reasons—this piece has stage legs. There's some solid acting by several cast members: Zeigler, who plays Donovan, has just the right blending of naiveté and hipness. Montgomery is well-cast as Dr. Rogelio Rubio, a high school principal who runs a tight ship. In other supporting roles, Fletcher Shepley-McTaggart, as the seasoned science teacher, Mr. Tom Wallace, is an excellent foil to the tyro Donovan. And Corwin Tuggles is perfect as bad-boy Tyrone Marshall Jones III, wearing a t-shirt with a fitting legend for his wild personality: "Warrior." *Why You Beasting?* gets a high-five as a credible portrait of a high school teacher and the existing educational system. Already tapped to be a part of the Fringe Encore Series 2013, this show is a must-see. It speaks, if not eloquently about the current educational scene, with authentic street poetry and raw power. At Flamboyant. 2 hours, 15 minutes, with intermission. [Donovan]

Old Familiar Faces

Nat Cassidy's *Old Familiar Faces* surrealistically interweaves two couple's love affair with William Shakespeare: Charles (Sam Tsoutsouvas) and Mary Lamb (Tandy Cronyn) in tandem with Oliver, a.k.a. "Laurence Olivier" (James Patrick Nelson) and Lee, a.k.a. "Vivian Leigh" (Marianne Miller). Sound rather confusing? Very. By far, the easier narrative to follow is the Lambs'. They are those English-born siblings who lived in the late-18th Century and into the early 19th Century. They became famous as co-authors of *Tales of Shakespeare*, a prosaic interpretation of Shakespeare's plays for children. (Charles tackled the tragedies; Mary the comedies.) Ostensibly set in London during "one week in 1834," Cassidy impressionistically stitches together a series of key events in their lives: the blossoming of their literary partnership, their uncanny brother-sister bond, their bouts with mental illness, and Mary's bizarre murder of their mother with a table knife. Enough Hitchcock-like horror for one play? Indeed. Cassidy balances the Lambs' strange-but-true story by shifting historical eras, and taking oodles of poetic license. Cassidy alternates their bio-drama with that of Olivier and Lee's tempestuous relationship. Don't ask me how, but these historical thespians from the 20th Century morph into the present tense as Oliver and Lee. While I admire Cassidy's inventiveness and dramatic reach, I don't think her two narratives gel. All the same, *Old Familiar Faces* has one saving grace that makes the show very worthwhile: Both couples intensely loved the Bard through their good and bad times. And Cassidy has a talent for highlighting this. At Players. 2 hours, 30

minutes with intermission. [Donovan]

Waiting for Waiting for Godot

Patience is a virtue, as they say. And you must hand it to the pair of understudies in Dave Hanson's *Waiting For Waiting For Godot*. This new comedy is unpretentious, and ultimately endearing. It presents three theater types: an understudy named Ester (Chris Sullivan), another understudy named Val (Hanson), and an assistant stage manager Laura (Amy Weaver). And though this trio doesn't get to see their names sparkling on the neon marquee outside the theater, they do get "mentioned" in the play's program. Hanson's comedy is funny, and sometimes poignant, to watch, largely because it reflects the real-life situation of many an actor and theater professional. Truth be told, few actors, or actresses, have careers like Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Ian McKellen, or Judi Dench. Rather than regularly going on stage, many actors have their "shining day" and then must wait in those proverbial wings, hoping for their next "break." Sometimes Lady Luck smiles; sometimes she doesn't. And the wisdom, according to this piece, is simply in the vigilant *waiting*—and wondering: Will one of the actors on stage get sick? Fall victim to an accident? Or perhaps get fired? One never knows what might happen. And that's just what an understudy worth his salt feeds upon: the unknown. Set in a theater dressing room, you watch and listen to Ester and Val unpack their dreams and heartaches. And you would have to be a stone not to feel their angst, hope, and enduring belief in the magic of theater. One of the better scenes is when they do a vaudeville skit, spoofing Irving Berlin's song "There's No Business Like Show Business." This show not only thinks "outside the box," it thinks outside the "old rules." In fact, Val gets his "break" here by unwittingly breaking the rules, much to Ester's chagrin. Weaver may only have a minor part as the no-nonsense assistant stage manager (she dubs herself the "A.S.M."), but she holds her own here. All of the acting here is done tongue-in-cheek, and all the stage business is actually *backstage* business. No matter. You take away something very special from this show: Theater is not really about the "big names" but the authentic artists in our midst. At Kraine. 80 minutes. [Donovan]

Venue Addresses

14th St Y -- Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street (1/2 Avs)
440 Moss -- 440 Studios - Moss Theater, 440 Lafayette, 3rd Fl (Astor Pl/E. 4th St)
440 White Box -- 440 Studios - White Box, 440 Lafayette, 3rd Fl (Astor Pl/E. 4th St)
80 -- Theatre 80, 80 St. Marks Pl (1/2 Avs)
Circulo -- Teatro Circulo, 64 East 4th St (Bowery/2nd Av)
Connelly -- Connelly Theater, 220 E. 4th St (Avs A/B)
C.O.W -- The Celebration Of Whimsy, 21 Clinton (Houston/Stanton)
Flamboyan -- CSV Flamboyan, 107 Suffolk St (Rivington/Delancey)
Jimmy's -- Jimmy's No. 43, 43 E. 7th St (2/3 Avs)
Kabayitos -- CSV Kabayitos, 107 Suffolk St (Rivington/Delancey)
Kraine -- The Kraine Theater, 85 East 4th St (2nd Av/Bowery)
La MaMa -- Ellen Stewart Theatre at La MaMa, 66-68 East 4th St (2nd Av/Bowery)
LATEA -- Teatro LATEA, 107 Suffolk St (Rivington/Delancey)
Players -- Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal (W. 3rd/Bleecker)
Redgrave -- The Lynn Redgrave Theater, 45 Bleecker St (@Lafayette)
SEA -- Teatro SEA, 107 Suffolk St (Rivington/Delancey)
Sgouros -- Sgouros Theatre, 115 MacDougal, 3rd Fl (W. 3rd/Bleecker)
SubCulture -- SubCulture, 45 Bleecker St, Downstairs (@Lafayette)

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Ndebele Funeral
Waiting For Waiting For Godot

Overall Musical:

Gertrude Stein Saints!
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Carol and Cotton - James Vculek
Down the Mountain and Across the Stream - Jake Shore
Kumrads Wort - Christina Michelle Watkins
The Rufus Equation - Ted Cubbin
Strange Rain - Lynda Crawford

Solo Performance:

En Avant: An Evening with Tennessee Williams
Human Fruit Bowl
Naked in Alaska
Talk to Me About Shame
What's an Anjan?

Ensemble:

Count Down My Life
Peninsula

What Every Girl Should Know
The Young Olympians & The Most Amazingly Awesome Adventure Ever

Book, Music and Lyrics:

Cowboys Don't Sing: A Western Musical - Dennis Flynn, Johnny Kelley and T.J. Alcalá

Costume Design:

Joey Haws - The Nightmare "Dream"

Directing:

Padraic Lillis - Bully
Lisa Oretenzi - Double Heart (The Courtship of Beatrice and Benedick)
Michelle Sutherland - Gertrude Stein Saints!

Choreography:

Allison Plamondon - Someone To Belong To

Puppetry:

Lula del Ray

Performance:

Remy Germinario - Bradley Cole: A Musical
Jonas Nerbe - William
Melissa Rosenberger - Carroll Gardens Aborning
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