

Boulder International Fringe Festival is like no other

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Fully one-third of the third Boulder International Fringe Festival will be one- woman shows. Yet all eyes will be on a trio of teenage boys.

No doubt the 2007 Fringe will be remembered for its eclectic amalgam of solo women sure to be equal parts angry, radical, angst-ridden, comic and sexually charged. And that's not by design: The lineup is determined each year by lottery.

But an enduring audience favorite from 2006 was "Power to Pleasing: The Sex Lives of Teenage Girls." Audiences were jammed into a tiny women's bathroom, where a trio of women from Boulder's Giving Voice Productions used portable lights, toilet stalls and the bathroom mirror as mesmerizing theatrical tools to dramatize interviews and found text addressing universal issues facing contemporary girls. It won "Pick of the Fringe" audience awards two straight years.

None of the women in that cast were teens. But this year, Giving Voice is back with its tantalizing sequel, "Power to Prove: The Sex Lives of Teenage Boys." This one won't be staged in a bathroom, but age-appropriate actors will perform it: Robert Paul Ryan, J Brommel and Ian Colson. Similar to its predecessor, "Power to Prove" promises to be an edgy exploration of teenage boys' often unspoken experiences as they come of age in today's hyper-sexualized culture. The material is again taken from research and interviews.

"Power to Prove" heads our list of 10 intriguing titles on tap for the Boulder International Fringe Festival, which opens today with a slate promising more than 300 performances by 70 artists in 14 venues all around the Boulder area over the next 11 days. In addition to more than 30 plays, the fest offers dance, music, workshops and special events.

All stage offerings will get six performances. "Power to Prove" opens at 9:30 tonight and closes at 8:30 p.m. Aug. 22; Dairy Center; 60 minutes; \$12-\$15 (givingvoiceproductions.org).

2. "Calculus, the Musical" By Matheatre, Minneapolis

The pitch: "This comic review of the concepts and history of mathematics was born as a teaching tool. Marc Gutman found setting formulas and rules to music helped his students retain tricky information. 'Maxima' and 'minima' is only an abstract concept until sung to a rousing 'Can-Can' chorus. This fun piece is meant to show that although calculus is used in rocket science, well it isn't exactly rocket science."

Fringe facts: Opens 7:30 tonight, closes 6:30 p.m. Aug. 26; Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art; 50 minutes; all ages; \$8-\$10 (calculusthemusical.com).

3. We've got clowns! One-man shows by John Leo of Juneau, Alaska; and Chris Harder of Portland, Ore.

The pitches: Leo, of the Li'l Buoy Physical Theatre, offers "Number's Up!" "It's a one-man 'clown catastrophe' written as an ode to the glorious awkwardness of being human. When the superstar clown wanders off, his delicate and overwrought sidekick is cast dreadfully alone." Harder counters with "The Centering: One Man's War on Terror." It's "an intense, Kafkaesque tale of a political prisoner's terrifying doom, his twisted past and a circus clown offering escape."

Fringe facts: Leo opens 7 tonight and closes 7 p.m. Aug. 24; Boulder Cooperative Market; 55 minutes; ages 13 and up; \$5-\$9 (johnleo.net). Harder opens 7 tonight and closes 1 p.m. Aug. 25; Dairy Center; 60 minutes; no one under 17 without guardian. \$10-\$15 (chrisharder.com).

4. "Element"By the Umbrella Story, Oakland, Calif.

The pitch: "Journey with fools and spirits to the lands of the mundane, profane and sacred. This is story, music, cartoon, film and puppetry all rolled into one four-man show."

Fringe facts Opens 10 p.m. Saturday, closes 5 p.m. Aug. 26; Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art; 40 minutes; all ages; \$5 (myspace.com/theumbrellastory)

5. "The Neon Man and Me"By Slash Coleman, Richmond, Va.

The pitch: "Three years ago, my best friend died. He was a glassblower and Pentecostal musician who was electrocuted after he was blown into a power line while hanging a neon sign. He was only 35. A month after he died, his girlfriend discovered she was pregnant. This is a spiritual rock 'n' roll comedy about best friends."

Fringe facts: Opens 8:30 tonight, closes 7:30 p.m. Aug. 25; Dairy Center; 60 minutes; all ages; \$12-\$15 (slashcoleman.com).

6. "The Feminazi" By Will It Productions, Tampa, Fla.

The pitch: "A feminist comedy by Suzanne Willett that addresses issues like the invisibility of older women. Search for sexist pigs. Hear the Virgin Mary's story as a mother with angst over how she's raised her child. Unite with your older sisters. Or simply share the pain of suburbia."

Fringe facts: Opens 1:30 p.m. Saturday, closes 5 p.m. Aug. 26; Dairy Center; 80 minutes; no one under 17 without guardian; \$10-\$15 (thefeminazi.com).

7. "True Theatre Critic" By Omar Sangare, Warszawa, Poland

The pitch: We begin with a defeated man, a critic lost in the world of theater. Through his sorrow and anger, he finds sweet revenge in criticizing those who have rejected him. It asks what art has to offer, and, perhaps, to take. A bittersweet journey toward acceptance.

Fringe facts Opens 7 p.m. Saturday, closes 3:30 p.m. Aug. 26; Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art; 45 minutes; all ages; \$6-\$15 (omarsangare.com)

8. "Testosterone Monologues" By The Image Maker, Denver

The pitch: "One man sayin' one man's thing." That man is venerable, solo spoken-word performer Ed Ward. Trickster tales of male identity.

Fringe facts: Opens 8:30 p.m. Saturday, closes at 6 p.m. Aug. 26; Boulder Cooperative Market; 58 minutes; adult content; \$10-\$13 (theimagemaker.qwestoffice.net).

9. "Shadows and Journeys" By Betsy Tobin and the Now or Never Theatre, Boulder

The pitch: "At dusk, nomadic characters perform interlocking stories of survival using masks and shadows to embody cliff dwellers, fortune seekers, hunters and outlaws while conjuring the mythology of the Southwest and integrating drumming, dance, puppetry, masks, shadows and video sequences."

Fringe facts: Opens 8:15 tonight, closes 8:30 p.m. Aug. 25; outdoors on the Naropa University courtyard; 55 minutes; bring blankets or chairs; \$10-\$12 (nowornevertheatre.com).

10. "The Mask Messenger" By Faustwork Mask Theatre, Toronto

The pitch: "A mix of monologue, physical comedy and theater, this solo performance by Michael Gunst explores the artistic, cultural and psychological use of masks throughout history."

Fringe facts: Opens 5:30 p.m. today, closes 4 p.m. Aug. 25; Dairy Center; 60 minutes; \$8-\$13 (faustwork.com).