

FronteraFest Short Fringe: Week 3

Hyde Park Theatre, Feb. 3

No one would ever plan a night of theatre such as the night of theatre that was Short Fringe Best of Week 3, but it set a high-water mark for entertainment. The audience was laughing for the better part of 2½ hours. A great part of the enjoyment was derived from the wonderful variety of ways in which the entertainment occurred.

Big Poppa E got the night rolling with his contagious energy. He screamed, "I am the biggest asshole in all the mosh pit." But in truth, he went on to explain, he is a "wussy boy" and proud of it. He thanks those who have made wussy-boy-ness mainstream, particularly Elijah Wood as Frodo Baggins. Big Poppa E delivered a series of mostly autobiographical spoken-word poems. Highlights were his defense of Pluto ("A rose by any other name is still a freakin' planet") and his Bitter Ex-Girlfriend Haiku series. A boisterous beginning.

Next came the Available Cupholders. First and foremost, I was impressed with the balls of this troupe. Improv can become victim to poor suggestions from the audience. These guys bravely rejected "The Life and Times of the Crocodile Hunter" and accepted the more versatile platform "The Ant in the Mushroom Forest." Thank God. Otherwise, we might never have met Bob-Ka and Headcomb, two young worker ants. The world would never have been blessed with Bill Stern's ditties on "Temporary Ant Peace." We were treated to bizarre characters such as the Blind Speaking Non-Mushroom and Mant, a man ant. My favorite line was, "Headcomb, you have possibly injured my floor." Or was it: "You think one mushroom-laden scepter will evoke some sort of peace agreement?" These guys are hilarious and inventive. Their ant-mushroom play was 20 minutes of epic debauchery, complete with grasshopper gore.

When Luna Tart walked on stage in low blue light, she changed the room. This piece was a bright theatrical island rising from the expanse of less formal performance. Laura Freeman's "Luna Tart Died of a Broken Heart" is a simultaneous composition of magnificence and desperation. This character was so thoroughly complete that she felt familiar. With every brilliant song she plucked on her tiny ukulele, she evoked entire worlds. Luna Tart drags a vast and curious history behind herself, like the train of a stained, sequined dress. Laura Freeman's work was gorgeous.

After intermission came Genevieve Van Cleve, a spoken-word artist of a totally different breed from Big Poppa E. "Chick on the Team" was a series of political poems. Her ideas are fierce, insightful, and packaged in anecdotes that make them accessible. In an interesting collision of circumstances, she performed a satirical piece about being a wicked stepmother, and her stepson was in the audience. She was clearly aware of his presence as she stormed into lines such as, "I force plateful after plateful of liver down their throats



Left to right: Bob McNichol, Erika May, Rachel Madorsky, Dave Buckman

before sending them outside to farm in the dark." Her sarcasm is thick, which keeps her sincerity surprising. In a powerful piece condemning the manipulation of Christ, she said, "I want Jesus back. They can't have him ... anymore." The most heartfelt moment came when she paid tribute to her mentor, the recently deceased Molly Ivins, an irreplaceable voice in American journalism.

Finally and excellently, the Frank Mills climbed on stage. This was the evening's second long-form improv troupe, but the two were worlds apart in style and tempo. The Frank Mills graced the stage with fine-tuned intelligence. Working with the suggestion of "Passover," they developed what could be a scripted scene about culture clash. It began as an awkward dinner party between a Jewish couple that has just moved to the neighborhood and a Catholic couple that is ineptly trying to host a Passover celebration. By the end, it was a joyful melding of faiths. They were toasting "L'chaim" over Communion wafers, and the Catholics were furiously searching for the hidden *chametz*. The troupe calls its work character-driven, and it's an accurate description of their calm, confident, and impressive improvisation. In particular, Erika May's Laura Ingalls Wilder-loving character buoyed the scene with her charm.

I am sold on this structure for a fringe fest, and I am sold on the 20-minute format for theatre. A breeding ground, a testing ground. In this day and short-attention-span age, 20 minutes might just be the perfect length of time. The perfect theatre unit. — Hannah Kenah

5:30-7pm: It's the festival's wrap party, baybee. Help all the performers, participants, and your fellow theatregoers celebrate another successful year of Fronterafesting. 1118 Gillespie. www.hydeparktheatre.org.

ONGOING

AN IDEAL HUSBAND is Oscar Wilde's *other* witty social comedy, overflowing old-school society's soup tureen of manners with bon mots and sharp insights into blue-blooded human nature. Austin Playhouse's Don Toner directs a top-notch cast (David Stahl and Bernadette Nason, anyone?) in this period piece of high-stakes blackmail and financial chicanery. *Through Feb. 18. Thu.-Sat., 8pm; Sun., 5pm.* Special Valentine's Day show: *Wed., Feb. 14, 8pm.* Austin Playhouse, 3601 S. Congress, Bldg. C, 476-0084. \$22-25 (half price for students); \$35, Valentine's Day show. www.austinplayhouse.com.

DEARLY BELOVED The Paradox Players present this comedy (by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope, and Jamie Wooten), in which the Futrelle sisters of Fayro, Texas, are "throwing a wedding, come hell or high water." Directed by Karen Jambon. *Through Feb. 18. Fri.-Sat., 8pm; Sun., 3pm.* Valentine's Day show: *Wed., Feb. 14, 8pm.* First Unitarian Universalist Church, 4700 Grover, 744-1495. \$15 (\$20, opening night or Valentine's Day show). www.paradoxplayers.org.

365 DAYS/365 PLAYS The acclaimed playwright Suzan-Lori Parks wrote a play a day for an entire year back in 2002. Now every single one of those plays is going to be staged at various venues all across the U.S.: New York, Seattle, Los Angeles,

and so on. But *Austin* is where the yearlong cycle begins, so get set for 10 weeks of theatre — with short plays of only 10 minutes, perhaps, and longer ones of 20 or more — as only Suzan-Lori Parks can write it. Up next: **M.E.M.E.**, the company that brought their multimedia *Synecdoche* to FronteraFest from Vermont, provides the next batch of short theatrical wonders. *Fri., Feb. 9, 8pm. 1717 E. 32nd. Güero's, 1412 S. Congress. www.zachscott.com.*

PRESENT LAUGHTER This madcap (and partially autobiographical) farce is one of playwright Noel Coward's funniest works, in which a narcissistic and "self-dramatizing" middle-age actor does vigorous social battle with a young playwright, his secretary, his ex-wife, his business partners, and possibly a potted palm or two. This show is, like, the ground zero of snark and features TV soap star Jamie Goodwin as the self-obsessed Essendine. Directed by Dave Steakley. *Through March 11. Thu.-Sat., 7:30pm; Sun., 2:30pm.* Zachary Scott Theatre, 1510 Toomey, 476-0541 x1. \$28-38 (\$12, student rush tickets). www.zachscott.com.

DINNER THEATRE

A CRUISE SHIP CRIME Gary Payne and his Capital City Mystery Players present this hilarious, interactive sleuthing caper where you help to solve the mystery of thefts and murder aboard "the luxury cruise ship *Titanium*." With, of course, full-course Italian fare sating your appetite as you go. And there's a special, wine-filled, gift-enhanced, Valentine's show, too! *Feb. 10-15. Sat., 7pm; Wed.,*

7pm; Thu., 7pm. Spaghetti Warehouse, 117 W. Fourth, 404-9123. \$29.95 (\$119 per couple for Valentine's show). www.meatballs.com

AUDITIONS

GIVE THEM A CHANCE is a musical drama in which "children of various ethnic backgrounds witness, process, and respond to tyrannical behavior and unite in solidarity to make the world a better place." To be staged in Round Rock in June. They're seeking 50 performers from 9 years old to adult. See their Web site for details and application forms. www.give-them-a-chance.com.

A THOUGHT IN THREE PARTS Rubber Repertory and the Vortex seek performers (male and female, ages 18-35) for the U.S. premiere of this legendarily "impossible to stage" Wallace Shawn play. NB: One of the female roles involves nudity and explicit sexual content. Call for appt. *Feb. 10-11.* The Vortex, 2307 Manor Rd., 825-3071. www.rubberrep.blogspot.com.

THEATRE CALL BOARD

CITY THEATRE: OPEN HOUSE Have a drink, tour the theatre, hear some live music, catch a few scenes from Mother of Invention's *Romeo & Juliet*, and see what this up-and-coming company of thespians is all about. *Mon.-Tue., Feb. 12-13, 7:30pm.* City Theatre, 3823 Airport Ste. D, 524-2870. Free. www.citytheatreAustin.org.

Comedy

IN THE CLUBS

CAP CITY COMEDY CLUB 8120 Research Blvd. #100, 467-2333. www.capcitycomedy.com.

John Evans Well, of course he's gonna make you laugh! Why else would Evans be the featured comic at the Valentine's Day show, there among your glasses of champagne and fried Snickers? Oh, and **Lisa DeLarios** opens. *Feb. 13-17. Tue.-Thu., 8pm; Fri.-Sat., 8 & 10:30pm.*

Open Mic Comedy Seasoned pros and up-and-comers knock themselves out to benefit the Austin Children's Shelter. *Sundays, 8pm. \$2 (free, college students).*

Doug Benson The acclaimed co-creator of *The Marijuana-Logues* brings his 4:20-friendly comedy to the Cap City stage to complement all your preshow bong hits, with opener **Dan Gabriel**. *Feb. 9-10. Thu., 8pm. Fri.-Sat., 8 & 10:30pm.*

COLDTOWNE THEATER 4803 Airport Blvd. www.coldtowne.com.

What a lineup! features some of Austin's best stand-up and (especially) improv: **Parallelogramophonograph**, the cutest improvisers in town, weave stories that are equal parts poignant and absurd; **Shannon McCormick** presents the improv'd adventures of 18th century spice merchant Cornelius Corneliszoon De Vries; and **Improv for Evil** evokes the imminent Apocalypse. *Thursdays, 8pm.* **One-Woman Showdown** is sketch comedy in which **Kaci Beeler** and **Jill Morris** offer their personal interpretations of *Harry Potter* and *It's a Wonderful Life* — as one-woman shows — and attempt to show how they're really, pretty much, the same movie; **Hoover's Blanket** gets all territorial in their "Rivals" show; and ColdTowners **Tami Nelson** and **Michael Jastroch** polish off a bottle of scotch onstage during their sketch called **Lovey & Lovey**. *Fridays, 8pm.* **That Other Paper presents ... Standup Comedy Showcase**. *Fridays, 10pm.* **Whirled News Tonight** is where the news is real, but everything else is improvised by a crack team of performers. Emphasis, perhaps on "crack." *Saturdays, 8pm.* **ColdTowne** The mighty house troupe rocks your night with fierce improv until you're handed off to **Girls, Girls, Girls**, a kickass phalanx of females who create longform musical improv. *Saturdays, 10pm.* **You, Me, and Greg** are sometimes improv, sometimes sketch, always unpredictable. *Sundays, 7pm.*

ESTHER'S POOL 525 E. Sixth, 320-0553. www.esthersfolies.com.

Esther's Follies The most popular comedy troupe in town returns with their riotous musical send-ups of local and national politics and cultural phenomena, with the incredible and — *ai! ai! ai!* — spicy illusions of master magician **Ray Anderson** an audience-galvanizing feature. *Reservations highly recommended. Thu., 8pm; Fri.-Sat., 8 & 10pm.* \$20 (discounts available Thursdays & Fridays for seniors, students, military.) Additional \$5 for special reserved seats.

THE HIDEOUT THEATER 617 Congress, 443-3688. www.heroescomedy.com.

AUSTIN IMPROV Let the Austin Improv Collective and friends take away some of the season's chill with a little extemporaneous comedifyin'.

Thursday Night Awesome: ColdTowne's Chris Trew and **Dave Buckman** of the **Frank Mills** host an Ed Sullivan-style show of stand-up, improv, and sketch comedy to start your preweekend off on the right rockin' foot. This week: Team-based improv from **Leading Brands**, music from **Beth Miner**, stand-up comedy from **Mary Helen McCarthy**, and the duotone hijinks of Jeremy Lamb and Madeline Malka, aka **Kazillionaire**.

Friday: Improv Threerfer features **A Sip of Chantico**, the **Knuckleball Now**, and **Troy's Bucket**. *8pm. \$7-10.* The **Double Barrel** features **Baby Back Rib Soup for the Soul** and the **Frank Mills**. *10pm. \$7-10.* And late night's **Cage Match** brings as challengers, **Conspiracy Butter**. *11:30pm. \$7-10.*

Saturday: The Heroes of Comedy present an improv format called **Six Degrees**, so Bring Your Own Bacon. *8pm. \$7-10.* **Maestro** is a fierce, multipartite battle for supremacy among improvisers, scored by you, the audience. Highly recommended. *10pm. \$7-10.* This week's Blank Show features the **Lieography**. *11:30pm. \$7-10.*