

Fringe Festival offers experience of experimental theater

SIMON KELLY | STAFF WRITER

For all you theater junkies out there who cannot get enough plays, dance and multimedia into your system, the 5th Annual Greensboro Fringe Festival might provide just the fix. It has been running since Jan. 25 and will continue until Feb. 11. The festival also includes up to 19 new, independently produced works.

If you hurry, you might be able to catch these upcoming short plays Feb. 8 - 11 at the City Arts Studio Theatre: "Bear in Mind," "Charms," "An Evening with John and Marcia," "Fall of Al Kfjar," "Girls' Night," "The Kissing Bandit," "Memorial," "The New Toy" and "Ray's Request."

According to most Fringe Fest veterans and enthusiasts, though, the Greek-myth-influenced "Opening the Eye of Light" is expected to be the centerpiece for this year's event. If you were to see a performance of it, you might understand why.

The show begins with the chiming of a solitary bell struck by none other than the playwright himself, Aubrey Simpson. With a metaphysical twinkle in his eye, he glides about the foreground of the stage, dispensing little flakes of cosmic wisdom for



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the audience to bear in mind throughout the production. He sums up his play as a piece of "ritual theater ... about the dream of our earth mother, Gaia."

Then, as the capstone to his prologue, he says, "In the eyes of the divine, we are all divine!" "Eyes," of course, is the operative word as soon as a giant Egyptian eye (theretofore an inanimate prop towards the back of the stage) begins to strobe with a flurry of images of planets, stars and nebulae. Two omniscient astral narrators appear at both sides of the stage, brush up the audience on their creation myths, and then usher in the dawn of time saying "and all creation danced into existence!"

And dance it does.

What follows on stage next can be best described as a neo-pagan rave complete with a troop of wild dancers in vibrant body paint, and a score that goes from tribal to Elvish (or some strange combination of the two — think The Talking Heads' "I Zimbra" segueing into an entire Yes album).

Despite its fantastical context, however, "The Opening of the Eye of Light" seems to be addressing themes other than fairy debauchery and tribal dancing, as it is laden with a very strong environmental message. The earth mother Gaia, for instance, is found bedridden with global warming.

This awareness of culturally and globally relevant issues is common to many of the works found in Fringe Fest this year.

"I think that especially because these plays are new, the topics are a lot more popular, and in that sense not only popular topics (are addressed), but also popular art in general,"

said Todd Fisher, one of the co-founders of the Fringe Festival who was present at the premier of "Opening the Eye of Light" at the Broach Theater. "For example, you're taking things right off the pages of the newspaper and putting them on stage. 'The Opening of the Eye of Light' certainly has an elemental, environmental theme."

The Greensboro Fringe Fest also functions as a wonderful springboard for budding playwrights and other performance artists in the Triad area. It is by no means a form of amateur theater, however, as it includes a jury (to which Fisher belongs) that puts applicants through a discerning selection process. One applicant, Kim Moore, was talented enough to have her play, "Your Place," go on to an even larger audience at the New York International Fringe Fest last year.

"That's the stage that you want your work (to reach), especially when you're doing something new and experimental," Fisher said of Moore's success. With that said, the Greensboro Fringe Fest is meant to provide a nurturing environment for both artists and theater enthusiasts alike.

After the show, the air was charged with the hum of a happy audience. The painted dancers walked freely amongst the crowd with beaming smiles, shaking hands while being pelted with every form of praise. It was not until then that I genuinely was able to gauge how vital this scene is to the artistic community — so many ideas, so much energy. Then, Fisher turned to me while gesturing toward the stage and said, "We like to foster people into believing they can do this kind of work."



Valentine's Personals

SCORPION
PRINCESS
I want you love me!

Easy with
You can drive my
18-wheeler anytime
Stinky Pete

925 year old
Time Lord seeking companion
Must be able to operate
Type 40 TARDIS.
Helpless human female preferable.
Noth (I) or (II) humans as T. Gallrey.

Call me
I'm a
I'll be there
I'll be there

Grumpy
I'll be there
I'll be there

Even,
Your rippling muscles and blowing hair,
Mimic Apollo's; I have to stare
I get lost in your eyes with just one glance,
And I'd show you real love with just one chance.
So just give in, please please, take me.
'Cause I'm here waiting if you can just find me.
Your secret admirer.

You're FIRE and ICE
I'll be there
I'll be there

All I want
I love the meadows
I have red hair
I weigh around
LOVE to eat

"Toward a Cartography of Love," an evening of love poems and dedications, will be held on Monday, February 12, 2007, at 7:00 in the Gallery of Founders Hall. Refreshments (homemade and otherwise) will be provided. Please invite students and friends to attend.