

E18 • VARIETY • STAR TRIBUNE • FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 2009 •

# onstage

## The best of what's left of the Fringe

• Check your fluids, grab a theater-loving pal and head out into the festival's final weekend.

If you've been able to catch your breath and crunch down a granola bar for energy, the second weekend of the Minnesota Fringe Festival is out there in all its sprawling, uneven glory. Organizers said attendance over the first four days of the festival (July 30-Aug. 2) was up 19 percent from a year ago. More venues and more shows fueled some of that spike, but the energy definitely seems up. If you have your eye on a hot show in a small theater (fewer than 100 seats), be aware that there have been several sellouts.

Star Tribune critics reviewed 48 shows this week. Among their favorites: "Tales of the Expected," "The William Williams Effect," "Livelihood," "The Morning After the Summer of Love," "Concord Virginia," "Alice Unwrapped," "Secrets Revealed," "Squawk" and "Oops!"

Browsing the Fringe website this week, the best-reviewed shows of the festival were "Jurassic Dork" and "Sideways Stories From Wayside School." Both rated five kitties (kitties rather than stars) with more than 40 citizen reviews. "Bard Fiction" and "The Harty Boys in the Case of the Limping Platypus" had the most reviews, both with ratings of 4.5 kitties. Other five-kitty shows with at least 15 reviews were "2 Sugars, Room for Cream," "An Intimate Evening With Fotis III," "Where Egos Dare: The Musical" and "Buyer's Remorse."

The festival ends Sunday. All Star Tribune reviews are at [www.startribune.com/onstage](http://www.startribune.com/onstage).



ALICE UNWRAPPED

### Alice Unwrapped

Wow. An outbreak of real art at the Fringe. Jill Anna Ponasik sings this slight but affecting opera by Laura Harrington and Jenny Giering, with Michael Pearce Donley at the piano. Ponasik plays a teenager whose father has gone off to the Iraq War and given her one request: Don't fight with your sister. The music, the heartbreak, the sense of honor in young Alice make this 35-minute piece a poignant ode to family relationships. Nautilus Music-Theater has brought this kind of small, beautiful jewel to the Fringe many times. This year is no exception. (8:30 p.m. today, 4 p.m. Sat.; Rarig Thrust, 330 21st Av. S., Mpls.)

GRAYDON ROYCE

### Oops!

This uproarious farce by Colin Wait triumphs, not only for laughs, but for its uncanny insights into the ambivalent feelings many parents experience during pregnancy — not to mention its premise: a straight black woman whose best gay friend gets her pregnant accidentally. Wait and Jasmine Rush infuse vaudevillean-style zest throughout as Benji and Janet. They also delight in hilariously inspired sequences where each plays the baby making demands in the womb. Tom Lloyd directs the action with rollicking vitality.

### Moby Dick Tonight!

Loren Niemi's solo performance fluctuates between college lecture, dramatic interpretation, confessional and crude jokes. Though he clearly feels a deep connection to Melville's classic novel, Niemi is overwhelmed by too many of its ideas — the "science" of whaling, fate, homoeroticism, among others. The pacing gets set in cadences at times. Some pauses last too long. However, when Niemi draws parallels between the source and his own work history and turbulent heterosexual relationships, things get interesting and Melville is finally well-served. (1 p.m. Sat. 4 p.m. Sun., U of M Rarig Center Experimental, 330 21st Av. S., Mpls.)

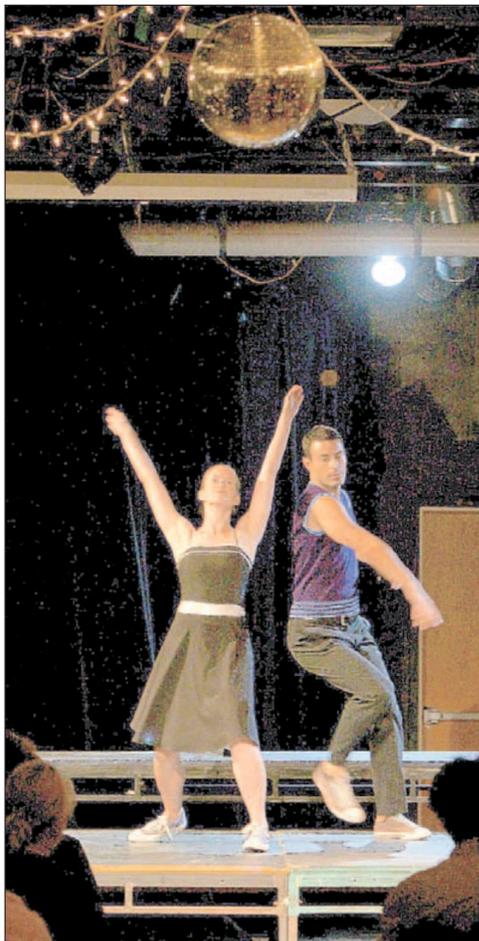
JOHN TOWNSEND



HOGG AND THE HUMORS

### Hogg and the Humors

British smart guy Jimmy Hogg teams up with his Minneapolis chums, the Four Humors, for a raggedy talk show that's largely improvised from a few set pieces. Hogg is a spirited bloke who loves to mix things up with his guests (other Fringe performers who have arranged to stop by the show). His Humor mates are a bit too amused with themselves. After picking a title (again, of a real show in this year's festival), the three boys spin off their version — which results in lots of shouting and not much imagination. Maybe better luck next time? (4 p.m. today, 5:30 p.m. Sat., Intermedia Arts.



CASEBOLT AND SMITH: SPEAKING OUT!

STEVE RICE • [srice@startribune.com](mailto:srice@startribune.com)

### Habitat

There's raw beauty in this touching staged reading that takes the words, observations and experiences of homeless people in Duluth for the bulk of its content. Playwright Rachel Anne Johnson has woven it all into a kaleidoscopic tapestry that skillfully bypasses didacticism. The cast members, who hail from Duluth and the Twin Cities, are citizens concerned about homelessness. Cheryl Skafte directs them with a profound simplicity that cuts straight to the heart. Guitarist Ryan Jordan imbues "Habitat" with his wistful original music. (5:30 p.m. Fri., 4 p.m. Sat., U of M Rarig Center Arena, 330 21st Av. S., Mpls.)

JOHN TOWNSEND

### Casebolt and Smith: Speaking Out!

Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith hail from Southern California, where they're known as the "Nichols and May of dance." It's an accurate description — these performers have a way with language and movement, cleverly combining comic timing with intelligent choreographic choices. "After Words," in particular, is a witty commentary on the dance-making process, audience perception and sexual tension, while "In Other Words" offers a well-crafted study of conflict and collaboration based on gestures played out on a simple tabletop. (8:30 p.m. today, Southern Theater, 1420 Washington Av. S., Mpls.)

CAROLINE PALMER



SECRETS REVEALED

### Secrets Revealed

Hey, can youse Fringies stand a little high cultcha? Opera Bob brings to life four scenes from Mozart, Verdi, Donizetti and Puccini. Baritone Chandler Molbert is the standout among a group of very accomplished singers. With dashes of humor and explanatory interludes, the performers set up sparsely staged 10-minute vignettes accompanied by pianist Eric McEnaney. This is a perfect introduction to opera for those unfamiliar (it's all sung in English) and a delightful hour for those who appreciate the work. Bravo. (1 p.m. Sat., Rarig Thrust, 330 21st Av. S., Mpls.)

GRAYDON ROYCE

### Squawk

A top graduate of the military's intelligence program gets to advanced training and finds his roommate is a penguin. Thus begins a smart, absurd little buddy story that charms the pants off us. Is it a whimsical look at stereotyping, or a story of one man's frustration with the system, or just a funny romp that is superbly acted (the penguin puppet is perfect) and archly directed (by Amy Rummennie)? Yes, yes and yes. This was sold out Tuesday night, so get there early. Well

### MINNESOTA FRINGE FESTIVAL

What: 160 productions, more than 800 shows. • When: Ends Sunday. Where: 22 venues in Minneapolis and St. Paul. • Tickets: \$5-\$12, plus a \$4 Fringe button is required for admission. Multi-show passes also available. 866-811-4111 or [www.fringefestival.org](http://www.fringefestival.org). • Web: Search shows, read reviews, add comments and see daily videos at [www.startribune.com/onstage](http://www.startribune.com/onstage).

### FRINGE FESTIVAL VENUES

