

Boulder International Fringe Festival brings in the quirky

By MARK COLLINS, For the Colorado Daily

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Jonathan Caster / For the Daily Lizi Watt and Joan Bruemmer in a scene from "Striptease," part of this year's Boulder International Fringe Festival.

August is a busy month for Joan Bruemmer. It has been since 2005. That's when the Boulder International Fringe Festival was launched, and that's when Bruemmer first performed in the Fringe.

Next week, the local actress will mark her fifth production in the festival's four years -- she appeared in two shows last year -- when she performs in "Striptease," a politically charged play by Polish playwright Slavomir Mrozek.

The play, produced by Wreckingball Theatre Lab, will take place in the stairwell on the west side of the Dairy Center for the Arts during the 12-day festival.

Bruemmer's Fringe habit isn't all work and no play, though. It's become a time for her and hundreds of other artists to network, see each other perform and interact with audiences.

"The environment is great," Bruemmer said. "It's great to have two weeks of complete dedication to performance and art."

Bruemmer and Wreckingball are among 70 artists or artist groups who will present their work in theater, dance, music, film and visual arts during the festival, which runs Thursday through Aug. 25 at 14 venues throughout Boulder. The fun begins Thursday evening at the Boulder Theater with an opening night party, which will feature short preview performances by dozens of the Fringe artists.

This year, half of the groups at the Fringe hail from outside of Colorado, according to Festival Director Alana Eve Burman. Eight are heading here from international destinations.

Most Fringe performances are an hour in length, though some are longer. The Fringe allows the artist groups to set their own ticket prices, ranging from free to \$15. Artists keep all of the ticket proceeds, though they must pay for space rental and for their own publicity.

As it has for each festival, the Fringe is offering several workshops open to anyone.

"The teachers that are coming to teach them are renowned in their field," Burman said. "That's something that we've been constantly trying to improve each year, and I think that we're really hitting it this year."

Workshops in bhuto-style dance, "action theater," developing a solo performance, clowning and - for the kids -- superheroes are on tap.

Also, Mark Whitney, whose show "Bad Dad," a personal story about how his own house of cards came crumbling down, had audiences in hysterics at last year's Fringe, will give a one-day workshop on stand-up comedy.

"The comedy workshop will end with the people having a chance to try out their material in a late-night show," Burman said.

Whitney runs the San Diego Comedy Co-Op in southern California, and performs regularly from coast to coast. Whitney will also bring his one-man show "Fool For A Client" to the Fringe.

The original fringe festival took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1947, when several theater troupes showed up in the city during a European theater festival to celebrate the end of World War II. After being turned away, they set up shop and performed "on the fringe" of the main festival. Today, there are dozens of fringe festivals that take place in North America and abroad each year.

Boulder's festival has steadily grown during the past three years. According to Fringe President David Ortolano, the festival accounted for 7,000 ticketed patrons in its inaugural year in 2005, and 10,000 in 2006. Last year, the audience number jumped to 25,000.

Ortolano attributes that in large part to the fringe artists finally figuring out that, as producers of their own shows, they are responsible for their own marketing.

"We're expecting over 30,000 (in audience numbers) this year," Ortolano said.

Charlotte LaSasso, communications director for the Boulder County Arts Alliance, has noticed a growing awareness of the Boulder Fringe, too.

"They seem to be an anticipated presence in the community," LaSasso said. "Arts programming is on my radar, and so I'm shocked when I'm in another (non-arts) group of people and they say, 'What is the Fringe?' But that's happening less and less."

Many of the performers at this summer's Boulder Fringe are regulars on the fringe-festival circuit. They make their living traveling to and performing at festivals around North America and elsewhere.

For Bruemmer and others, the Boulder Fringe offers a chance to catch up with the fringe community.

"I meet a lot of amazing people, people who come into town who maybe I only see once a year," Bruemmer said. "It's kind of become like an extended family."

ALL YOU CAN ARTIST

Join the Fringe kick-off celebration featuring Denver's singer/cellist Ian Cooke jazz singer Heather Marie Philipp at the Boulder Theater at 6 p.m. tonight. The "All You Can Artist Buffet" featuring Boulder Fringe's very own late-night talk show host, Eddy the Eskimo, who will take the audience on a tour of this year's artists. Watch as each 2008 Fringe artist uses one minute to preview their show. It's weird, it's quirky, it's 12 days of art, madness and beauty! Visit www.bouldertheater.com for tickets and www.boulderfringe.com for more information. Tickets are \$10.

SEE THEM HERE

2008 Boulder International Fringe Festival Venues

B-Side Lounge 2017 13th St.

Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art 1750 13th St.

Boulder Outdoor Cinema 1750 13th St. (Behind BMoCA)

Boulder Shambhala Mediation Center 1345 Spruce St.

Boulder Theater 2032 14th St.

Café Babu 1335A 14th St.

Central Park

Broadway and Canyon Boulevard

The Dairy Center for the Arts 2590 Walnut St.

The Laughing Goat Coffee House 1709 Pearl St.

Naropa University 2130 Arapahoe Ave.

Nomad Theater 1410 Quince Ave.

Trident Café and Booksellers 940 Pearl St.

Urban Pearl Salon 1537 Pearl St.

Wesley Chapel 1290 Folsom St.

Visit www.boulderfringe.com for a complete list of shows taking place at each venue.