



Byron's random comments on  
the 2022 Montreal Fringe

## Description

# Three winners, one promising duo and hopefully some remounts

By **Byron Toben**

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In covering the **St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival** since its inception, I had averaged seeing about twenty individual shows per year, in addition to my preview 'picks' and final 'wraps.' Alas, circumstances limited me to only four in-person shows in 2022. Westmount Magazine colleague **Faith Langston** posted [six reviews](#) herself.

Below are my four reviews and random comments about some of the other shows:

## Josephine, a burlesque cabaret dream play

This solo spectacularly depicts highlights in the life of **Josephine Baker**, the first internationally famous Afro-American entertainer who had to move to Paris in the 1920s to receive recognition due to the American prejudices of the times. And who better to impersonate her than **Tymisha Harris**, a dancer, actor, puppeteer, acrobat, stunt performer, choreographer, costume designer and "badass burlesque diva"? Florida-based Ms. Harris wrote and choreographed this show, directed by her real-life partner, **Michael Marinaccio**. It has won **20 awards** off-Broadway and elsewhere in the USA and Europe.



Josephine

Ms. Harris combines spins, a cartwheel and many quick gown changes while relating Ms. Baker's success in France, enough to generate bookings back in the USA, where her other activities in the civil rights movement led to her being dubbed a communist by right-wing politicians of the day, leading her to exclaim that "the only thing worse than being a black person in America is being a communist black person".

Songs in the show included the romantic *La Vie en Rose*, the cheerful *Blue Skies*, the audience-responsive *Minnie the Moocher* and the haunting *Strange Fruit*.

Not mentioned in the show were Josephine's late-life friendships with princess **Grace Kelly** and first lady **Eleanor Roosevelt**. Ms. Baker also received a **French Croix de Guerre** for her WW II activities as a spy against the Nazi occupiers.

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This 75-minute show definitely calls for a post fringe remounting in Montreal. Hint, hint to the Segal or the Centaur.

## Midsummer Bushwa

A new group called **Mossy Fae** co-created this 75-minute extravaganza 'loosely' based on **Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream***. The word 'bushwa', new to me, is defined as rubbish or nonsense. Anyway, this show was co-created by the nine actors/dancers involved and directed by one of them, **Adalia Pemberton Smith**. She also portrays Titania.



Midsummer Bushwa

The key role of Bottom is **Jean Bernard**, while Puck is **Cindy Bastien** and Oberon is **Jeremy Lewis**. Others are **Sari Hoke**, **Chloe Gilbert-Savary**, **Maddison Dana**, **George Longshadow**, and **Nguyen Dinh**.

The rollicking event adds burlesque, gibberish, romance and “more than one bottom.” Lots of fast-moving blistering dancing includes 16 musical strains, including Ella Fitzgerald’s *Solid as a Rock* and in the style of Peggy Lee’s *Why Don’t you Do Right*.

Not sure what it all meant, but I liked it.

Looking forward to more from this company – perhaps exploring Shakespeare’s *As You Like it*?

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## The Awkward Ballerina



The Awkward Ballerina

I was attracted to this 75-minute solo show as it was directed (and dramaturged) by all-time fringe great **T.J. Dawe**. Written and performed by first-timer **Kristin Govers**, it describes her problems being born with cerebral palsy and being bullied as a young child. Now 37, married and living in Pincourt, she seems to have overcome these early handicaps and is turning to theatre to enhance her lifestyle.

The bare stage included six numbered cards at the footlights, each representing her year of age being described – 6, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 13. I spotted this as a T.J. Dawe suggestion which Ms. Govers confirmed to me in an after-show chat. Clad in a white ballet tutu, she remembered difficulties trying to replicate ballet steps or being picked last for soccer teams.

This gutsy lady has promise in her next show, where and whenever.

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## Adam&Eve

I was amazed how many worldwide fringe shows have had entries based on the story of the first couple and the serpent and the apple. I admit to being spoiled by great versions of that story in the past – the original story in Genesis 1:26 to 5:5. This was followed by **Milton's** serious epic poem **Paradise Lost** in 1667.



Adam&Eve

In 1904-1906, **Mark Twain** essayed the humorous *Diaries of Adam and Eve*. In 1918-20, **G. Bernard Shaw** wrote his lengthy 5-play epic *Back To Methuselah*, wherein play one, *In the Beginning*, retold the story with emphasis on his “life force” thesis. In 2009, Canada’s **Paul van Dyck** created his memorable one-man show of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

In 2018, Canada’s **Erin Shields** wrote the multi-person epic theatrical version of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, performed at the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, and again at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal. Thanks to **Gabriel Safdie**, it also became the first play to add a theatre category to the annual Quebec Writer’s Federation awards.

This 2022 Fringe version by **Mad Paradox (Marissa Blair and Jeroen Lindeman)** pales in comparison to the above listings. Then again, they are landmarks, and this is the Fringe. What it does have are two engaging performers as they amble through their sixty-minute, often completely nude save for some on-again, off-again green plastic fig leaves.

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The dialogue, sometimes thought-provoking, sometimes pretentious, is punctuated by lots of yelling and groaning, and vomiting of the endless red apples eaten. Missing in action in this version – the serpent/Satan – which places more blame on Eve’s curiosity alone.

Verdict – glad to have seen it, but does not warrant a repeat.  
Would be interested in seeing a different show by this energetic couple.

## Shows that I missed and hope for a remounting



Cornichon

### **Cornichon: un parcours perplexe vers la francophonie**

Whether in French or English, **Nisha Coleman** solos are worthwhile.

### **Salzman's Antiques**

Reviewed favourably by colleague Faith Langston, this duet features **Carolyn Guillet**, a drama professor at Dawson, in a return to the stage after her glory years acting at **Infini theatre**.

Both of the above are local small casts, so should be doable.

A larger cast based in Toronto that I would like to see back here is **Niggas in Pontréal**. I was attracted to its supposed timely serious theme. However, I was surprised that it was nominated for the comedy award. What gives? Also, why Montreal with a P? Viewer feedback is encouraged.

'Whether in French or English, Nisha Coleman solos are worthwhile.'

## Fringe changes overall



Helping the environment:  
The ending of leaflet flyers by performing groups  
The ending of paper tickets

The adding of new venues:  
Monument National and Théâtre la Comédie de Montreal  
The unavailability of one great venue – the MAI

Feature image: Josephine

Images: courtesy of St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival

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**Byron Toben**, a past president of The Montreal Press Club, has been WestmountMag.ca's theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites Rover Arts and Charlebois Post, print weekly The Downtowner and print monthly The Senior Times. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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### Category

1. Review
2. Theatre

### Tags

1. Adam & Eve
2. Byron Toben
3. Josephine Baker
4. Midsummer Bushwa
5. St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe 2022
6. The Awkward Ballerina

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