



Byron's Fringe picks sight unseen 2019

Description

A look at some promising St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival shows

By **Byron Toben**

Hard to believe that the Montreal Fringe is entering its 29th year!

Harder still for me to realize I have covered it for each of those years!

Each year blends into another and I was nonplussed at its press conference when asked which was my favourite show over all those years. With the benefit of some sober second thought, probably **Rick Miller's** *MacHomer*, but I will try to find time to compile my cumulative "sweet sixteen" list so as not to be caught speechless at next year's big 30th anniversary.

In the meantime, here is my annual list of my **Fringe Picks Sight Unseen for 2019**. As usual, I am limiting it to English language shows as, although I enjoy many of the fine French language shows, I do not feel competent to review them. There are some 800 performances in all, involving about 500 performers.

My top three

Magnificence

By and featuring **Keir Cutler**

Directed by **Paul Van Dyck**



Magnificence

Mr Cutler has performed ten original monologues over the years and toured them across Canada. This one is based on his relationship with his late mother, **May Ebbitt Cutler**, who had founded Tundra Books and also became a mayor of Westmount. Although Cutler has directed shows himself, he has enlisted fellow actor/playwright/director Van Dyck, himself a popular Fringer, to add another dimension to this show.

Although most of the Fringe entrants perform six times each at one of the ten venues **between June 6 and 16**, this one is at off-venue B (Free Standing Room) and runs from **May 29 to June 15** for 12 times in that small space.

I Can Only Give You Everything

By and featuring **Alain Goulem**

I thought *One Man Alone*, Mr. Goulem's one-man show last year, the best of the lot even though it did not receive any of the various Fringe awards. A popular actor here, often at the Centaur, its opening attracted a near "who's who" of local actors. It has the briefest summary of any of the entrants listed in the program, so I am going on his track record and my own gut feeling



Piaf and Brel: The Impossible Concert

Piaf and Brel: The Impossible Concert

By and featuring **Melanie Gall**

As a great fan of both Edith Piaf and Jacque Brel, it was pre-ordained that I would include this show, which was a sell-out at the Edinburgh Fringe. Internationally known, this Alberta born performer has also presented shows of two other of my personal faves: Irving Berlin and Vera Lynn (still around at 102!)

Four interesting local shows

Make It A Musical

A group of improvisers has managed to corral popular teacher/musician **John Gilbert** as its musical director. They burst into Broadway-style song while enacting your favourite non-musical movies. Gotta dance, gotta sing? This may be up your alley.

Lear in Limbo



Happy-ish: Russian Immigrant's Guide to Smiling

Shakespeare's King Lear reappears in Montreal as an aged father with three daughters, one of whom is a puppeteer. This world premiere includes high drama, music, puppetry and comic relief. As I recall, these three sisters were not quite as quiescent as Chekov's creations.

Happy-ish: Russian Immigrant's Guide to Smiling

Another world premiere by **Vadim Gran**. This title reminds me of the testimony to the House Committee on Un-American activities (by Ginger Rogers mother!) that Russians rarely, if ever, smile. So transition to cheerful Montreal must be a culture shock!

Edging With Mike

By and starring **Mike O'Brien**. Mike, the cheerful ticket seller at many a Mainline Theatre show, here demonstrates his knife sharpening skills. He promises to provide "gritty truths and sharp observations". With frequent life commentator jem rolls from England absent this year, perhaps Mike's patter may fill the gap. "Steel yourselves", sez he, "It's gonna be a hell of a grind."



The Immaculate Big Bang

Six from Canada or USA

Toronto has sent only 2 entries this year, but the Vancouver area has 9, while the USA lists 8 from 6 different cities.

Ink

This Vancouver bit is a must see as it co-written by **Allistair Knowles** of *James and Jamesy* fame, so popular on several prior Fringe appearances. Co written by **Stephanie Morin-Robert**, it also lists local wunderkind **Jon Lachlan Stewart** as a collaborator. Features 10,000 square feet of paper but only one pen. A bittersweet adieu to the era of putting pen to paper.

Blindside

Stephanie Morin-Robert (above and below) is a busy gal this year with three of the Vancouver entries. In this one, a one-eyed comedienne narrates her life as a feisty seven- year-old who wields her glass eye as a super power. Rave reviews from CBC, National Post and Theatre in London.



Suffering From Scottishness

Eye Candy

Another **Stephanie Morin-Robert** show from Victoria this time. Directed by prior Fringe stars **Ingrid Hansen** and **Jon Bennet**. Ms. Morin Robert was a hit in Montreal with earlier shows *Merkin Sisters* and *Bushel and Peck*.

The End of Politics

From New York, **Bob Bell** brings his international show for its Canadian premiere. He intertwines US politics with his personal experiences in a “brutally funny way”. Hard to compete with Trevor Noah, Steven Colbert, The Young Turks and many others, but worth a look-see.

The Immaculate Big Bang

From New York, Comedy Central's **Bill Santiago** searches for answers from science and religion as to understanding existence of life, death and the number 33 (?).

The Dk Effect: Over Competent And Under Qualified



Zack Adams: Love Songs For Future Girl

From Portland, Oregon, **DK Reimer** explores, in his hit Orlando and Calgary Fringe shows, how “Confidence equals Ignorance equals Comedy”.

Two From Overseas

Suffering From Scottishness

From Glasgow, Scotland playwright **Kevin Gilday** invites the audience to take part in a discussion on the very future of the nation. A world premiere. Mr Gilday is an award winning spoken word artist.

Zack Adams: Love Songs For Future Girl

From Perth, Australia, **Shane Adamczak**, a frequent and popular Fringe visitor to Montreal, brings us this time “a cross between a rock concert and group therapy”. “Hilariously funny” says CBC.

Individual tickets range from \$8 to \$10 plus a \$2.50 Government tax each.

Best to get a multi show card and pay the \$2.50 once.

Cards are \$36 for three shows, \$72 for six and \$115 for ten. Unlimited shows are \$325.

514 849FEST

Montrealfringe.ca

Images: courtesy of the St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival



Go Fund Me for Mumbai survivor Michael Rudder



Michael Rudder

The popular Montreal actor **Michael Rudder**, who survived the horrific attack by Pakistani-based terrorists on the Mumbai hotel he was staying at as a tourist back in November 2008, has, despite his partial recovery, sadly exhausted his savings and fallen upon hard times. Friends have started a [Go Fund Me](#) campaign to raise \$25,000 to cover his dental needs (delayed 8 years), roof repairs to his humble abode and current living expenses.

Michael has gratuitously read in some mini benefits I have organized over the years, such as a live reading of Orson Welles *War of the Worlds* for Breast Cancer Action-Montreal.

I urge all readers to visit [Go Fund Me](#) and donate what they choose, however small (they all add up).

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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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1. Alain Goulem
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3. Bill Santiago
4. Bob Bell
5. Byron Toben
6. DK Reimer
7. Ingrid Hansen
8. John Gilbert
9. Jon Bennet
10. Jon Lachlan Stewart
11. Keir Cutler
12. Kevin Gilday
13. May Ebbitt Cutler
14. Melanie Gall
15. Michael Rudder
16. Mike O'Brien
17. Shane Adamczak
18. St. Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival
19. Stephanie Morin-Robert
20. Vadim Gran

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