

the Jenny Revue

20TH ANNIVERSARY!

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When Life Gives You Flowers, Make Bouquets!

Over the past 24 years of the Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, not a Festival has gone by that I haven't looked upon the performers with a mixture of respect and amazement. Whether they are performers from our own city and province, or from afar, I am grateful for the efforts they make to enter this Festival, and to entertain me and my fellow fans of live theatre. They will spend months creating and preparing a show, often losing a lot of sleep in the process. In addition, there are the countless hours raising the necessary monies to put on their show, even more if they are touring the cross-Canada Fringe circuit. And they do all this without the assurance of reward—not just monetary, but in the form of positive reviews, good crowds and appreciative applause. For many performers, it's a crapshoot. So why do they do it? Why Fringe? I began seeking answers from a number of performers this week and whether they were veterans or newcomers to the Fringe, the responses were basically the same. Here are some examples: "Because they let us play and it's fun," said one, with a twinkle in his eye. "It's a big party environment," said another. Okay, I expected those types of answers. Please continue: "Because you can do so many different things in your shows at the Fringe that you can't do anywhere else," said one earnest young lady. Yes indeed... experimenting, pushing the envelope, teetering on the edge. I love the excitement of those shows. Over to you, sir: "It's a great way to network, talk shop and share ideas," said a veteran performer. Not to be a snoop, but I admit to overhearing many such conversations over the years. So what's the appeal of the Winnipeg Fringe? This question was mainly for out-of-town performers and the first answer I got was very telling. "There's a sense of 'home', a sense



of community. The people who run the Fringe, the volunteers, other Winnipeggers... they make you feel like you're part of a family. You want to keep coming back," said a U.S. actor/playwright. A long-time Canadian performer added, "The audiences are so generous. After a show, no matter which way I turn around Old Market Square, someone will come up to me, say how much they loved the show and want to talk about it." There were several other answers having to do with the layout of the Winnipeg Fringe – a feeling of intimacy with Old Market Square being the hub and many venues only a short walk away. Many respondents were taking care not to besmirch other Fringe Festivals they appear in and requested anonymity (I made everyone anonymous), but there were quite a few comments made regarding how unique the Winnipeg Fringe is, how efficiently it operates, and the high degree of talent and skill of everyone behind the scenes, with many plaudits for the technicians. Of course, over the years, we have to admit there

have been a few disgruntled performers for various reasons, but hey! You can't please everyone and besides, we're only human. However, when some visiting performer whispers in your ear, "Psst! You didn't get this from me, but you guys here in Winnipeg are the best!" well, you can't help but feel a little cocky.

Attack Of The Metal Folding Chair—

At their performance of *Sofa So Good* last Sunday at MTC Warehouse, clowns Sheshell and Rocket accidentally found a new way of breaking through the fourth wall and engaging their audience. During a segment in which they were using two folding chairs as props, something went amiss, and one of the chairs collapsed and went flying towards the front of the stage directly at the Jenny scribe (yours truly)

who was seated in the front row taking notes. I barely had time to turn in my chair, hoping that only unessential parts of my body would take the blow. Fortunately, I came away from it with nothing more than a sore knee. But Sheshell and Rocket were at my side immediately to see if I was injured. Bless their hearts, they stayed in character the whole time and after I assured them I was okay, they continued with the show as if there had been no interruption. A couple of nights later, they spotted me while they were out flyering in costume and to the amusement of curious onlookers, they put on a little show of helping me step down from a curb and keeping me upright. In return, I joked that I would instruct them in "How Not To Get A Bad Review". Rule Number One: "Never throw heavy objects at the local Fringe reviewers." But I did get a nice kiss from Sheshell and I made two new friends and that, for me, makes for another wonderful Fringe experience.

Robin Chase

The Jenny Revue is a proudly independent publication NOT affiliated with the Winnipeg Fringe Festival

