

CALGARY FRINGE

Calgary Fringe Festival shows offer energy, talent, intensity

JANET MACKENZIE, SPECIAL TO THE SUN

FIRST POSTED: SATURDAY, AUGUST 02, 2014 10:06 PM MDT | UPDATED: SATURDAY, AUGUST 02, 2014 10:11 PM MDT



Calgary's Mark Ikeda performing in *Sansei: The Storyteller* at the Lantern Church gym in Inglewood. (Vindaloo Arts Photography/Courtesy Calgary Fringe)

Day One at the Calgary Fringe Festival!

I was excited to see the three plays I had been assigned to review and, being an avid fringe dweller for the past five summers, I was well fortified with cold drinks and ice packs to ward off the inevitable heat.

Of course it turned out to be cooler than expected but I shall arrive similarly fortified each day.

I'm taking no chances with some of the venues.

With all three plays, I was struck by the quality of the writing and performing and in just how much of themselves each artist poured into their presentations.

Although my assessments of the three plays differed, I felt a great deal of respect for the work of all three performers.

I was particularly looking forward to seeing *Smartarse*, a one-man show from the energetic and talented Brit Rob Gee.

I have been a huge fan since I saw his highly successful show last year, *Fruitcake — Ten Commandments From the Psych Ward*. That show was one of my top favourites, partly because of the subject matter, and partly because his writing and performance were both, in my opinion, brilliant.

Smartarse didn't live up to last year's writing for me, although Gee's performance was once again high energy, entertaining, and amusing.

It seemed that his stories of "several childhoods" were not as interwoven and compelling as those he told last year, although I loved the opening segment about what school children answered when he posed the question, "What would you do if you had an invisibility cloak?"

This year I was at times distracted, whereas last year I was mesmerized throughout.

For me, *Lolita's Lounge* was just not a great venue for Gee's storytelling.

I have to ask myself how much of my distraction was due to the noise of waiters dropping trays and dishes, and stomping loudly up and down the stairs just outside the entrance where I was seated?

I would certainly recommend Smartarse, but would suggest audience members try to sit as far as possible from the stairs and the entrance.

== == ==

My second play *Sansei: The Storyteller* at the Lantern Church Gym opened with writer/performer Mark Ikeda telling the audience he is not a very good story teller.

My initial reaction to that was a combination of “Surely he is being ironic,” and “uh oh this doesn’t bode well.”

Ikeda uses a combination of dance, stories, recorded interviews, and music to tell the stories of his family history and the history of the Japanese internment camps Canada in the Second World War.

Although I found some parts of the recorded interviews a little difficult to hear clearly, Ikeda’s production was an interesting comment on a less than illustrious chapter in Canadian history.

Ikeda’s performance was quietly sincere, and featured some particularly nice moments during some of the dance/movement sequences.

Calgary’s own Ikeda showed himself to be a talented and understated performer.

== == ==

Undress Me which is performed in the Festival Hall is described as “drama, comedy, storytelling.”

The drama is intense and intriguing, the storytelling fascinating and well-written and the comedy very dark.

Performed and written by Keven P. Gabel, Undress Me is an R-rated story of a seemingly narcissistic man whose outer persona cracks open to reveal the sadness and pain within him.

Gabel’s performance rings true; his story is both real and compelling.

As a psychologist who has conducted therapy with clients very similar to Gabel’s character Julian, I found the writing and acting sincere, honest, and extremely true to life.

The description in the festival program states “narcissistic, alcoholic, sex addict.”

Julian is all of that, but so much more, due to Gabel’s deft writing and skilled acting.

This monologue rises above a story about a man who drinks too much at the rehearsal dinner preceding his brother’s wedding and behaves badly.

It is so much more than that and so very worth seeing.

Google Advertising
google.com/AdWords
Attract More Visitors to Your Site. Sign Up for
Google AdWords Today.

SPONSORED LINKS



Calgary Sun Contests

Enter to win amazing
prizes!