

THEATER

Review: Three Fringe solo shows take a self-deprecating look at life





San Diego International Fringe Festival programs in a stand at the Marie Hitchcock Puppet Theatre in Balboa Park on May 21. (Pam Kragen/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

San Diego International Fringe Festival continues through Sunday in Balboa Park and the Midway district


BY PAM KRAGEN

MAY 23, 2023 5:39 PM PT

One of the hallmarks of the San Diego International Fringe Festival, which opened May 18 and continues through Sunday in Balboa Park, is solo shows. Actors, comedians, musicians, magicians and more travel the global Fringe circuit with little more than their words, a few props and maybe a thumb drive for their PowerPoint presentation.

I caught three Fringe solo shows on Sunday at the Marie Hitchcock Puppet Theatre. While the shows were unique in content, they shared a common DNA — self-deprecating humor that was both achingly personal and universally relatable. Here's a look at all three and their remaining showtimes at the Marie Hitchcock theater.





Matt Harvey in “I Got Bit By a Monkey Once” at the 2023 San Diego International Fringe Festival. (Courtesy of Michael Prine)

‘I Got Bit By a Monkey Once’

Australian stand-up comedian Matt Harvey is a veteran international Fringe presenter, so his well-oiled, 55-minute show is consistently entertaining, with four hilarious and true “poor life choices” stories and a warm, impish stage presence.

The best of the four is the title tale, where a tropical vacation goes horribly wrong after a monkey at a wildlife park nips his hand and he ends up in an infectious disease ward. Also cringingly funny is the story of his drunken and ill-advised belligerence toward a public safety officer at an Australian train station. Budget travelers will relate to his tale of fear and ickiness on a 36-hour “megabus” bus ride from Las Vegas to El Paso for a Jewel concert. And finally there’s a robbery story about three taunting, balaclava-clad muggers with excessively high standards about what’s worthy of their thievery.

Harvey’s a charming raconteur and the show will end before you’re ready to say goodbye. Upcoming shows: *9 p.m. Thursday; 4 p.m. Saturday*



Mark Vigeant performs his solo show “Mark Pleases You” at the 2023 San Diego International Fringe Festival. (Courtesy of Michael Prine)

‘Mark Pleases You’

Writer-director Mark Vigeant’s wildly frenetic solo show is jam-packed with clever ideas and boundless energy. It could use some focus and editing, though, to make the storyline more clear and concise.

Vigeant plays himself as a struggling comedian/juggler/actor who dies onstage and ends up in Hell, where Satan tells him he lived an inauthentic life in his desperation to please others.

Given the chance to visit his chubby, ultra-nerdy 13-year-old self — who the audience

sees in an old photo onscreen — dead Mark tries to convince teen Mark to be true to himself and treat others with honesty and respect. But along this winding journey, dead Mark must also confront other versions of his younger self, and he doesn't like what he sees. While there's plenty of humor in this show, there's also deep pain in the brutally self-aware story. 7:30 p.m. Wednesday; 9 p.m. Friday



Miyo Yamauchi in “How to Be Japanese: My Normal is Not Your Normal” at the San Diego International Fringe Festival.” (Courtesy of the San Diego International Fringe Festival)

‘How to be Japanese: Your Normal is Not My Normal’

L.A. storyteller Miyo Yamauchi moved to Orange County from Osaka, Japan, in 2004. She came to California, she said, to study Spanish but instead ended up becoming an expert in computer programming languages.

Her hourlong show covers topics including her struggle pronouncing “Rs” and “Ls,”

her distaste for Hello Kitty merchandise, the Japanese tendency to be excessively polite; and her grandparents' survival of the nuclear attack on their native Hiroshima, Japan.

Yamauchi's stories are entertaining, but her voice is soft and she doesn't always project to the back of the room. Theatrically, her show sometimes feels more like a TedTalk than a complete piece of theater, but it's an enjoyable show. *2:30 p.m. Saturday; 4 p.m. Sunday*

San Diego International Fringe Festival

When: Today through Sunday

Where: Marie Hitchcock Puppet Theater, 2130 Pan American Road San Diego; Centro Cultural de la Raza, 2004 Park Blvd., San Diego; Les Girls Theater, 3970 Riley St., San Diego.

Tickets: \$10 per show. \$5 onetime badge fee

Online: sdfringe.org



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