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The Fringe Festival is theater's counterpart to the San Francisco Blues Festival, which over the years evolved from a modest, grass-roots affair into a major event, respected around the country.

The Fringe adds character to the role the Tenderloin plays in San Francisco's theater district. The neighborhood's northeast fringe has long been The City's theater district. Now, with the EXIT Theatre and its multiple venues emerging as a major player in the San Francisco theater scene, the TL's southeast side is anchored by more than the major league Golden Gate Theater and the Warfield.

"The best thing about the Fringe is that it stirs up theater and turns it on its head," says Sabrina Klein, former executive director of Theatre Bay Area, now executive director of Julia Morgan Center for the Arts in Berkeley. "If you have a strong, wild idea, you can do it at the Fringe. You can test ideas in front of a live audience."

How Klein fringes: "I don't pour over the calendar. I just pick a night that I'm free and go from place to place. That's the thrill — it's potluck."

**It all started in Edinburgh**

Fringe festivals are held worldwide, though in the typically wacky world of Fringe, no one agrees on the number. The Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals' Web site lists 21 festivals in Canada, five in the United States and one each in Australia, Scotland, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

Fringe's genesis is more certain: The granddaddy of all is the Edinburgh, born 53 years ago in Scotland.

Eight theater groups showed up — uninvited — at the first Edinburgh International Festival, a cultural event whose organizers hoped would reunite post-World War II Europe. The interlopers began performing "outside" at more unconventional venues.

Next year, in 1948, an Edinburgh

journalist unknowingly dubbed a movement: "Round the Fringe of the official Festival drama there seems to be more private enterprise than before. . . ." Today's 22-day Edinburgh Fringe is huge, 600 companies performing 1,400 shows at 198 venues.

"The Fringe," wrote Jim Haynes, founder of Edinburgh's Fringe Traverse Theatre, on the edinburghguide.com Web site, "has spread to all corners of the world, from Hong Kong to Sydney to Colombia, from a cloister in Avignon to Xaviera Hollander's living room in Amsterdam."

And to San Francisco's Tenderloin, where 8,000 to 10,000 people are expected this year.

**Anything goes**

Like Edinburgh's Fringe and many others in Canada and Europe, S.F.'s Fringe is noncurated and noncensored, pretty much anything goes. Audiences take potluck with what they'll see, though most festivals put out informative publicity to guide audiences. S.F. Fringe's show descriptions have caveats such as "naught for children," "nudity," "coarse language" and even the tantalizing "mature content with strobe effects," but also include the helpful "children over 10 could enjoy it" and "14 and up."

Noncurated means no one culls applicants ahead of time. Artists and companies register, pay an entrance fee and climb aboard, more or less on their own, when the festival starts. Besides publicity, they get some help mounting their productions and receive varied box office proceeds — in San Francisco, performers get the entire gate, the assistance of one technician and a two-hour tech rehearsal. For performers, it's just one step up from a busker's life.

The on-line magazine Stage Directions quotes an artist who played here a few years ago: "It takes great coordination and thinking on how to load in,

set up, perform, break down and load out. You feel like you're planning a bank robbery."

In Seattle, whose Fringe started a year before San Francisco's, making it the oldest in the United States, artists get up to \$6 per admission and one technician. Seattle's 11-day 2000 Fringe featured 79 companies playing at nine venues with an estimated audience of almost 20,000.

The Minneapolis Fringe began in 1993, and New York, Philadelphia and Atlanta launched Fringes in the late 1990s. But the shows are curated — or juried, or adjudicated — the Fringe world cannot agree what to call a sensitive selection vs. first come, first served.

Curated vs. noncurated is a hot-button topic to Fringe organizers and contributes to the confusion about the number of "authentic" Fringes. According to the official Edinburgh Web site, www.edfringe.com, when the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society formally organized in 1958, its constitution laid down the law: "Artistic vetting is to have no place in the society's aims, a decision which still remains central to the development of the Fringe today."

San Francisco has followed that lead, and added more — Spontaneous Musical Moments, or "gorilla Fringe" performances, that will erupt unexpectedly on sidewalks, buses, restaurants throughout. There'll also be free entertainment at Club Fringe (in front of EXIT Theatre) where, an hour before the day's shows begin, performers and audience can mingle informally, eat, drink, be merry.

For Fringe times, venues, performers, show titles and descriptions, pick up a program at Exit Theatre, check out the daily newspapers, or go to the Web site — www.sffringe.com.

"Harry"

written and illustrated by Carl Angel

Hello there! I'm Mr. Roache, and I'm running for district 6 supervisor



You want to keep the rats out of district 6? Well, put a bug in office! This is my turf--



--I've been in the neighborhood so long I make the other candidates look like carpetbaggers.

LATER ....

...If you want some real change, vote for me! I'm your ma- uh, bug.



Who is that guy?



I think he's a performer in that Kafka musical, *Les Metamorphosis*.

Misunderstood in my own time. Won't you vote for me?



TO BE CONTINUED ....

Fringe Festival performances

**Shows by San Francisco Companies and Performers**

- Beatrice and Virgil in Paradise
- Breton's Dream
- Chain Reactions
- Counting the Ways
- Crazy Lady
- The Devil, Doctor Faustus, and Raymond the King of Hungary
- Disengaged
- The Condensed Works of Frank Cullen
- Double Counterpoint
- It Came from Beneath the Kilt!!!
- Jack the Ripper Slept Here: An Underground Comedy
- The Male Diva
- Ma-Ma-Mammalia
- Opium
- The Regular Show
- Slam! Bam! Thank You Ma'am
- Sole Searching
- The State of the Empire Address: As Delivered by His Majesty Norton I on This First Day of January in the Year of Our Lord Eighteen-Hundred and Eighty Stew!
- Thicker Than Water
- Tim's Magic Lantern Show
- Treachery
- Withering Glances
- Zewski's Folly

**By Other Bay Area Companies and Performers**

- An Evening with Olaf Oakland
- Don't Tap on the Glass Oakland

- Happy Endings Are Overrated Oakland
- Hold Me! Novato
- The Myth of Sisyphus Oakland
- Run Jenny Oakland
- The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus Hayward

**By Companies and Performers Nationwide**

- Angry Yellow Bubbles — The Revenge New York
- The Anything Show Chicago
- The Benefit of Doubt Holliston, Mass.
- The Floating Bone Seattle
- Imbecillus: A Lunatic Quest Juneau, Alaska
- My Penis — In and Out of Trouble Los Angeles
- nEO- sURREALISTS SYSTEMS PRESENTS: THE SYMPHONY MECHANIQUE Los Angeles
- Number 2 New York
- Seeds of Longing: Humankind's Role in the Continuing Education of God Durango, Colorado
- Ten Philadelphia
- Theatre/Plague Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Trailer Trash Tabloid!: The Mobile Homo Sex Scandals, Murders & Other Unnatural Disasters of 1964 Orlando, Florida
- Woven Santa Barbara

**By Companies and Performers From Outside the U.S.**

- Avalanche South America
- Chasing Rabbits Melbourne, Australia
- Cultural Refugee Sydney, Australia
- Dr. Constance Cumming Wants to Help You Get Laid Canada
- First Woman Plural! Toronto, Canada
- The Kiwi Stand-Up Experience New Zealand
- That Dorothy Parker Toronto, Canada