




## Pardon Our Fringe

### Fringe Fest roundup: Featuring Poe, the Olsens, and the disembodied head of Sam Walton

published: August 15, 2006

As the 10th annual New York International Fringe Festival heads into the homestretch, reports continue to pour in from the *Voice's* Fringe operatives on the ground. Performances continue through Sunday. You can buy tickets in person at Fringe Central (27 Mercer Street), by phone at  212-279-4488, or online at [fringenyc.org](http://fringenyc.org), where you can also find a complete schedule.



#### **Billy the Mountain and Other American Card Tricks**

Henry Street Settlement, Harry de Jur Playhouse, 466 Grand Street  
Through Friday

In *Billy the Mountain*, Amanda Berg Wilson beautifully stages Frank Zappa's "operetta" about a mountain named Billy who decides to take his wife, Ethel (a "tree growing off of his shoulder"), on vacation, destroying everything in his path. This is intercut with several war themes, many well-conceived (e.g., a "terror alert" striptease). After he crushes Edwards Air Force Base, Billy becomes a government target; nevertheless, he is drafted.

The equation of the mountain to a soldier is, as choreographed by Annie Arnoult Beserra, almost disproportionately moving. But Matt Reed's totally unselfconscious performance as Studebaker Hoch, hired to handle the mountain situation, is the standout.

#### **Darren Reidy**

#### **I Coulda Been a Kennedy**

Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal Street  
Through Saturday

Dennis Trainor Jr.'s smart, suspenseful tale explores the dark side of the American dream with the O'Reilly family, a clan of Kennedy worshippers who put their hopes, dreams, and cash into making a president out of the youngest member, Devin. Presented by

photo: Sa Schloff



The mirror has two faces: Heather Riordan and David Kodeski in *Letter Purloined*

Details:

See also:

- [The Fest and the Curious](#)
- [An Opinionated Guide to the Festival](#)

hopes, dreams, and cash into making a president out of the youngest member, Devin. Presented by

the Rude Mechanicals Theater Company (of the Obie-nominated *Flu Season*), with solid direction by Ted Sluberski, the play fluidly follows Devin's tragic path to becoming "history book material." Of the strong 12-member cast, newcomer Kelsey Kurz is especially good as the 17-year-old Devin, who gets dumped by a Kennedy relation, disappointing his family. **Angela Ashman**

### **Letter Purloined**

Henry Street Settlement  
(Closed)

Edgar Allen Poe's obituary announced that his death "will startle many, but few will be grieved by it." However, *Letter Purloined*, a cryptic collage of Poe short stories, Lacanian interpretations, and *Othello*, occasions little grief. This production by Theater Oobleck, who once graced the Fringe with *The Complete Lost Works of Samuel Beckett . . .*, is an aleatory amalgam of 26 scenes performed in random order. The form's clever, as is the dialogue scripted by David Isaacson, but as in many a post-structuralist essay, the endless deferral of meaning quickly progresses from the confusing to the tedious. **Alexis Soloski**

### **Olsen Terror**

The Flea, 41 White Street  
Through Saturday

The name Olsen might conjure a pair of waifs in overpriced dirty-hippie garb, dodging paparazzi and gulping venti soy mocha Frappuccinos, while running their multimedia conglomerate via bejeweled pink Razr. The last thing you would envision is a bearish 40-year-old man, singing catchy folk-pop tunes about turning into said twins. Mary-Kate and Ashley serve as catalyst for Chris Wells's ruminations on America's obsession with celebrity and power, intertwining hilarious monologues with songs (co-written with guitarist Jeremy Bass) to create this minimalist musical. Though *Olsen Terror's* no-frills tactics leave you feeling like something's missing, you'll find more laughs here than Olsen products at Wal-Mart. **Ryan McWilliams**

### **Puppet Government**

Players Loft, 115 MacDougal Street  
Through Sunday

Already the concept feels tired. Set on a countertop, Bush is a can opener, Cheney a Cuisinart, Rumsfeld a juicer, Condi a rice cooker, etc., ably manipulated by puppeteers. A salesman peddles Bush additional equipment (like a war blender) as the need arises. The appliances explain themselves through song parody (e.g., "Eye of the Tiger," now "I'm the Decider"); these are almost as clever as your usual stoned high schooler badinage. The non-song stuff—i.e., everything else—is worse. Regurgitating facts in a sarcastic voice isn't satire, especially when many of those facts are being misunderstood. This is like watching a carpenter with a bucket of 16d's trying to re-nail a coffin lid and missing every time. **D.R.**

### **Rainy Days & Mondays**

DR2 Theatre, 103 East 15th Street  
Through Friday

Andrew Barrett's exploration of mid-'90s gay circuit-party culture follows three celebrants searching for something more. Brian (Michael Carbonaro), an improbably poetic mama's boy, can't get over his deceased ex. David (Benjamin Gabriel), ostensibly a sexually adventurous bohunk, gesticulates unnaturally and says "K-hole" like it's today's secret word. Show-stealer Janyl Dobson, as a Miss Fierce hedonist who has a trust fund and isn't afraid to use it, foreshadows the lifestyle's ultimate

emptiness (re crystal: "It's gonna be all the rage on the circuit soon enough"). But drugs are mere metaphors; all these boys really want is to be loved—a facile observation of a scene that deserves more. **Joseph McCombs**

### **A Small Hole**

Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway  
Through Thursday

Playwright Julia Jarcho's "mutation" of *Mansfield Park*, with its Sadean overlay (the Marquis's *Justine* replaces the German Romantic play *Lovers' Vows* as the internal theatrics), does its best work in showing how utterly commonplace such corseted trappings can feel: Jane Austen's problem child, as presented (a major portion of the script is taken from her text), has enough reserves of sex and politics on its own—e.g., men who believe a glass of Madeira is the fix for any female ill. The poor and virtuous Fanny spends much of the play in a box, and Elena Mulrone's portrayal goes from faintly annoying to Ibsen-level powerful in seconds. With the startlingly choreographed ball scene and its evocation of Austen's past, the performance affirms the potential for inventive transformation. **Phyllis Fong**

### **Some Kind of Pink Breakfast**

The Flea, 41 White Street  
Through Friday

An excellent, charismatic storyteller, playwright-performer Chris Harcum dives into his one-hour journey back to high school with warmth, humor, and loads of fun '80s references. Trying to decide whether or not he should go to his 20-year reunion, he recalls his most awkward moments, from being bullied as a five-foot, 98-pound sophomore to his first sexual experiences with an emotionally unstable 17-year-old girl. His only prop is a chair that, among other ingenious uses, cleverly stands in for his girlfriend during sex. **A.A.**

### **The Tell-Tale Heart**

The Studio at Cherry Lane Theatre  
Through Saturday

Edgar Allan Poe's classic tale of homicidal paranoia is set to an imaginative score in this self-proclaimed "musicabre." The adaptation rarely deviates from the original text, but the overall production suffers from a number of setbacks, primarily a lack of engaging directorial choices and hoarse vocal cords from an overextended actor (Danny Ashkenasi, who wrote and produced the show, also stars). The story is brought to life through the aid of three cellists who prove to be the highlight of the performance. Ella Toovy, Tara Chambers, and Maria Bella Jeffers invoke the spirit of the macabre and their contribution effectively resurrects the corpse onstage. **Elizabeth Coen**

### **Walmartopia**

Henry Street Settlement  
(Closed)

Wisconsinite creators Catherine Capellaro and Andrew Rohn take on the discount conglomerate, exposing its underbelly and giving it a good poke, resulting in a musical that is genuine Fringe fun. The production is at times campy and bizarre, with choreography that rivals the best of Christopher Guest's *Waiting for Guffman*, but the concerns of heroine Vicki Latrell, single mother and overworked Wal-Mart employee, are addressed with sensitivity and care. The diverse cast of 17 embraces the duality of the satire and sings with dedication and clarity throughout. Anna Jayne Marquardt, who plays Vicki, gives an especially gorgeous vocal performance. **E.C.**

## **The Yellow Wallpaper**

13th Street Repertory, 50 West 13th Street  
Through Friday

In Brian Madden's adaptation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's most famous short story, history repeats itself. In 1892, a woman suffers from postpartum depression and goes mad as she stares at the yellow wallpaper that adorns her room. In the present, a woman suffering from the loss of her daughter appears to be haunted by the same room adorned with the same yellow wallpaper. The hypnotic power of the walls appears to render both women immobile and that is precisely why this production can get tedious. Neither of the women do anything but act depressed, and the plot point that connects the two is never made quite clear. Scenes from the past are woven in with the present, causing clunky transitions for the actors that are never mollified by the director. **E.C.**