

# BACK STAGE

THE ACTOR'S RESOURCE

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## NYC Fringe Fest Unveils Summertime Productions

By Leonard Jacobs

Nine years after its humble beginnings on the Lower East Side, the New York International Fringe Festival's unveiling of its list of scheduled productions is one of the more eagerly awaited news items of springtime.

This year, the artists who will participate in the Fringe—running Aug. 12–28 at more than 20 venues below 14th Street—come from 22 states (three more than in 2004), including Alaska, Hawaii, North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Colorado, and Minnesota. And at a time when it is increasingly difficult for international performers to obtain artist visas, eight foreign countries—the same number as last year—are expected to be represented, including South Korea, Australia, Italy, Denmark, and France.

According to press spokesman Ron Lasko, the festival, as in 2004, expects roughly 80% of the shows

invited to actually come to New York and open. While in the past the festival has been reluctant to release attendance projections, Lasko said that last year's total of 60,000 is expected to rise to at least 70,000 this year.

The Fringe often boasts productions—and titles—designed to pique the attention of audiences and, many hope, commercial producers as well, and this year's roster continues the tradition with "Bridezilla Strikes Back!," "Conde Nasty," "The Last Two Minutes of the Complete Works of Henrik Ibsen," "Silence! The Musical," "The Miss Education of Jenna Bush," "Unspeakable: Richard Pryor Live & Uncensored," "Sex With Jake Gyllenhaal and Other Fables of the Northeast Corridor," "Byzantium," and "Billionaires for Bush—The Musical."

And while many of these works are by artists and companies unfamiliar to New York audiences and

critics, some are on the local as well as national radar: "The Last Two Minutes..." is by Chicago's renowned Neo-Futurists; "The Miss Education of Jenna Bush" is by Melissa Rauch of VH1's "The Best Week Ever"; and "Conde Nasty" signals the return of Wendy Weiner, a performer from multiple previous Fringe festivals.

Closer to home, shows from a number of Off-Off-Broadway companies are also slated for 2005, such as Inverse Theater's "The Banger's Flopera—A Musical Perversion,"

Genesis Repertory Ensemble's "The Comedy of Terrors," Emerging Artists Theatre's "The End of the Party," the Oberon Theatre Ensemble's "Feasting on Cardigans," and Woman Seeking...s "Ponzi Man."

Actors take note: Some Fringe productions are cast and some are not. And some are in various stages of preproduction. Be sure to look for casting notices in the weeks and months ahead.

To make Equity Showcase-level producing in the Fringe easier, Elena K. Holy, producing

artistic director of the Present Company, which mounts the festival, inked a "side letter" agreement with Actors' Equity Association last year, allowing shows to perform in venues with more than the 99 seats limited by the union contract. While Equity showcases can run for up to 16 performances, the festival schedules most works for just four to six performances. But under the side letter, a successful production may offer up to 11 additional performances on its own within eight weeks of the end of the Fringe.