

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

A Fringe look at a Bush twin

Jenna's a not-so-bright party girl trying to grow up in one-woman show 'Miss Education'

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By CHRIS VOGNAR / The Dallas Morning News

★★★★★

NEW YORK THEATER

NEW YORK – The living room is a mess.

Budweiser tall boys lie strewn on the floor. A red bra hangs from a keg pump. A purple bong sits on the coffee table, next to a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Someone had a big party last night.

And not just any someone. This is the apartment of one Jenna Bush, First Twin, as imagined in Melissa Rauch's new one-woman performance *The Miss Education of Jenna Bush*. The show, which premiered Aug. 13 and wraps up Friday, is part of the New York International Fringe Festival, a two-week explosion of downtown underground madness now in its ninth year.

The festival runs Aug. 12-28 and features 180 productions. Other buzz-worthy shows include *Shakedown Street*, a noir Grateful Dead musical; and *Silence! The Musical*, a song-and-dance send-up of *The Silence of the Lambs*.

The Fringe Festival is not to be confused with Howl!, an East Village-based, Beat-inspired smorgasbord of offbeat performance that starts today.

"The Fringe is just a great opportunity for edgier productions, and it's a great opportunity to get your production out there," says Ms. Rauch, 25, a regular on the VH1 series *Best Week Ever*. "They do an amazing job of getting into venues like this. It would be in my parents' basement if it weren't here."

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"Here" is the Village Theatre, one of many scattered Fringe venues. It's a subterranean black box house; there's air conditioning in the theater space, not so much in the lobby. Ms. Rauch is taking a break from rehearsal on a sweltering Thursday afternoon, just two days before the *Miss Education* premiere; this rehearsal, being taped by New York 1, is the first time Ms. Rauch and her director, Tom Wojtunik, have shared the stage at the venue. "That's how it's done on the Fringe," says the show's publicist, Bill Coyle.

In *Miss Education*, Ms. Rauch, a petite blond New Jersey native who studied theater at Marymount Manhattan College, dons a UT sweatshirt and a pair of shorts with the word "Texass" on the rear end. She's a party girl who speaks in a Texas chirp and loves to crack jokes at the expense of herself and her family, particularly sister Barbara, the "uptight" half of the Bush duo.

Ms. Rauch got the idea for the show when she and some friends watched the Republican National Convention last year. She was already trying to craft a show about "the weird phase right after college when you don't know what you're doing," and she grew smitten with Ms. Bush during the twins' introduction of their dad, which included hipster references to OutKast and *Sex and the City*.

"She was just cracking all these jokes," recalls Ms. Rauch. "There's one point where she turns to her sister while the audience is laughing and says, 'They are *loving* us.' Her sister fits the mold of what you'd think a first daughter would be like. Jenna breaks that mold. She's a girl you would party with and want to be friends and hang out with. She just seems really down to earth, like your normal college girl."

Miss Education takes place in the Georgetown apartment shared by the twins. It's the day after a raucous party celebrating Jenna's upcoming debut as a teacher – the real Jenna is slated to start at Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School in September. Jenna is hung over, craving Chinese food and nervous about her first day.

Today's rehearsal focuses on two scenes. In the first, Jenna gets a good-luck chalkboard delivered from Condoleezza Rice. She talks about all the drinking games you can play watching Fox News, and tells a politically incorrect story about the first time she met the current secretary of state.

In the other scene, Jenna pulls out a "Draft the Bush Twins" T-shirt, which she bought at a Texans for Peace march. This didn't sit well with Dad, who considers TFP members a bunch of "oxhead morons" (one of many inspired malapropisms in *Miss Education*).

Miss Education has its share of Bush jokes, and it doesn't make Jenna look like a genius. But it's also a rather touching story about a young woman on the verge of the rest of her life. She can't get her famous father on the phone, she's aware of her own fun-loving immaturity, and she's not certain what comes next.

"I would feel terrible if she thought this was just a pure roast of her," says Ms. Rauch. "She's really the heroine of the show. She's going through what every early-twenty-

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something goes through. She's realizing that her parents are real people, and she's exploring the relationships within her family. It's all in good fun. You can really see the love Jenna has for her father."

Ms. Rauch, who performed stand-up in Texas several times and tape recorded plenty of Texas gals to get her accent down, would even like to see Jenna on the Fringe.

"We'd love for Jenna to come and laugh with us," she says. "We totally think she's great. We're just having fun, and we think she'd really like it.

"But I don't know how her father would feel about it."

The Miss Education of Jenna Bush

Through Friday at the Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. at Thompson, New York City. \$15.
1-888-374-6469 or www.fringenyc.org.