

EYE WEEKLY.COM

FEATURES



Selling the solo

BY PAUL ISAACS July 02, 2008 16:07

EVERY GIRL WANTS A SKIRT LIKE FRIDA'S

Written by and featuring Paula Rivera. Directed by Jerry Ciccoritti. Presented by Arriba Las MaNos. July 5, 2pm; July 6, 11pm; July 9, 9:45pm; July 11, 12:15pm; July 12, 8:45pm; July 13, 1pm. Factory Studio, 125 Bathurst.

www.fridasskirt.com.

ONE-WOMAN SHOW

Featuring Marco Timpano. Written by Daniel Shehori, Steven Shehori & Marco Timpano. Directed by the Shehori Brothers. Presented by Pine Grove Productions. July 4, 5:45pm; July 5, 7pm; July 6, 1:15pm; July 8, 10:30pm; July 9, 4pm; July 10, 7pm; July 13, 3:30pm. Robert Gill Theatre, 214 College.

www.onewomanshow.net.

See also: [Fringe Best Bets](#)

From *A Girl Named Ralph* to *The Zombie Dialogues*, there are almost 150 shows playing at the Toronto Fringe. Choosing what to see can be tricky on a limited budget. Usually, though, once you've been to the Fringe many times, you start to develop an odd, almost precognitive sense about which shows to catch — and which show to avoid circa 1986.

Once you've been properly schooled, scanning the Festival's gigantic program is a cinch. A sequel to *Antoinette* is a buy some tickets yesterday. A debut play by The Globe and Mail's theatre writer, Michael Posner? Sure — a play to be constructed in full sentences. Too much face-mugging and a *Napoleon Dynamite* reference on the postcard chocolate ice cream with diamond sprinkles on top.

And then there are all the one-man and one-woman shows. This is where things get especially tricky. There are practiced monologists like TJ Dawe and Jem Rolls, who are always worth a shake of the dice. But a bad one-woman show is an excruciating in a special way that no other performance can match. "The fear as an audience member going to a one-woman show is, if you don't like the lead actor within the first five minutes, nobody else is going to come out," says writer Daniel Shehori. "That's it. No one is coming to save this, and you've still got another 55 minutes to go."

Together with his brother Steven and actor/improv comedian Marco Timpano, Daniel Shehori has a new comedy duo. What is it? Why, it's a one-man show, of course. And what's the name of the production? *One-Woman Show*, a hilarious deconstruction of the clichés of solo confessional plays. *One-Woman Show* features Marco Timpano, a wholly self-aware female writer and actor, whom we follow as she waits in a theatre dressing room to begin her performance.

Eileen, whose previous works include the groundbreaking *Mom*, *You Make Me Want to Shoot Myself in the Head*, and *Vehicle for the Shehori Brothers* (who co-wrote the Fringe hit *Swiss Family Guy* Robinson) to lampoon the tired and tired conventions of one-person shows. For maximum sexual irony, Eileen will also be played by a man in a blue-collar dude in an American Eagle sweatshirt.

"We're definitely not poking fun at one-woman shows in general, but at bad one-woman shows. And that's the fun," says Steven Shehori. "Since we started writing the script, a lot of female performers have offered us advice. Tired clichés drive them crazy, too. They're like, 'Don't forget to talk about PMS! And waxing! And mothers! Married!' It's good to have that kind of encouragement from your female peers."

At the other end of the spectrum are director Jerry Ciccoritti and actor/writer Paula Rivera. Ciccoritti, who has worked with Sky Gilbert, and who these days mostly works in film and television, decided to return to his debut work as a writer in the one-woman show *Every Girl Wants a Skirt Like Frida's*.

In *Frida*, a semi-autobiographical work, Rivera plays Honoria Delgado, a Canadian immigrant from Mexico City. It's Halloween, and Honoria has c

again. While waiting for her friend to arrive to take her to a party, Honoria slowly gets boozed up on tequila, and reminisces about her family, he and her failed marriage. "A Mexican wearing a Frida Kahlo costume is like a Canadian dressing up as a beaver," says Rivera. "It's so obvious. And because whenever she wears the costume, people love her. But to her, she's a walking cliché."

Ciccoritti and Rivera are both aware of the pitfalls of autobiographical work, especially in solo performance. "We've both seen a lot of one-person shows that are good, but most of them are terrible," Ciccoritti says. "I'm totally a jerk when it comes to being an audience member. If I read a news story about a year-old boy and a kitten trapped in the sewer for 24 hours, that's gonna make me cry. But if I see a one-man show about the same thing, but the direction sucks, your staging sucks — that doesn't work for me. You've still got to be affected by a story as a piece of art."

Rivera feels the same. The play has changed significantly since it was first read at a Summerworks workshop last year. It began as a more close-to-the-body piece but as Rivera grew in confidence as a writer, she says she grew more playful, adding more jokes to the script and making it less abstract. Like the play, Rivera instinctively understood that she wanted to avoid the hoarier elements of the one-person show style.

"Summerworks was the most embarrassing experience I've ever had in my life," she says. "But I slowly understood that for a personal piece to have some distance from your real life. I don't like when people put their tragedy in my face. It becomes almost masturbatory. I like to see fiction detached. And I like to feel moved by being detached."

The Shehoris aren't just targeting one-woman shows. They pretty much hate a lot of one-man shows, too. One sequence in *One-Woman Show* pokes fun at the misogynistic shtick-iness of certain male performers. "One-man shows really irk me," says Steven. "Men who do that shtick where they're like, 'I'm a dude, and why won't women cut us some slack?' That whole thing of pitting men against women drives me bonkers. It's so hackneyed of that as well."

The Shehoris do have some positive things to say about one-person shows: at least they're not six-person shows. "We once did a show with a cast of six. The cast were great, but the process was a nightmare. Trying to get the cast together to rehearse at the same time was impossible. Since then, we've done shows with one actor each. That wasn't a coincidence."

In fact, the company almost missed out on performing *One-Woman Show* altogether. The show was written in 2007, and the trio were ready to go to the Fringe lottery but didn't get a spot. "This year, we almost forget to enter the lottery at all," says Timpano. "It was 9 o'clock, the night before I was supposed to go, and I was all drinking in the Diesel Playhouse bar when I remembered it. I had to borrow a laptop off the bartender to submit our application."

Timpano says their show was never intended to be cruel, but "parody without bite falls flat. As a performer who does comedy, I feel there are no shortcuts. We've said that, the Shehoris will be doing a careful test run of the show. They've invited several female actor friends to do a read-through of the script to get their opinions about what to tweak and change before the performances begin this week.

"We'll be watching how they approach the material differently from Marco," says Daniel. "And we'll see what we can steal from them."

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEKLY.COM
625 Church St, 6th Floor, Toronto M4Y 2G1