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Women On The Edge: Astoria's Addition To Fringe

by Carol Forget



Jessica Lynn Johnson leads a frenetic comic exploration of media's influence on female identity in "Oblivious to Everyone," one of nine Queens based performances at this year's Fringe Festival.

If the recent power outage and unrelenting heat have unraveled your sanity, take comfort in two plays spotlighting unbalanced women written and acted by Astoria residents. They're only a nibble from the feast of emerging and innovating talent featured at this year's New York International Fringe Festival.

From psychological drama to a fast paced one woman comedy, playwright/performer Jessica Lynn Johnson's "Oblivious to Everyone" (Love Creek Productions), speaks through Carrie, a Paris Hilton in training, to show the media's portrayal of women and its influence on their identity.

Carrie is a TV talk show addict, clicking through a line up of male and female characters: Botox Beauty, Elimidate Pervert, Springer Trailer

Trash—10 in all—as if responding to a remote control. "Growing up I always watched a ton of TV," said Johnson, 24, who moved from St. Charles, Mo. to Queens a year ago. At Missouri State University, she studied, among other things, dialects, though she's always done voices and characters. Sometimes she would wind and rewind a tape of "The Ricki Lake Show" to practice mimicking a guest.

Leave the kids at home for this one. "It's a comedy, but definitely a dark comedy," said Johnson of her first play, which began as a minute and a half long monologue. The current 75 minute version has twice as many characters and was honed by relentless workshopping. Adult themes such as eating disorders, body image issues and sexuality abound.

The play's director, Christopher Sorensen, has a link to the first FringeNYC. In 1996, he was an original member of the Present Company, a fledgling off Broadway ensemble, with a role in Brian Parks' "Americana Absurdum." While preparing to take that production to the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, the company's artistic director, John Clancy, questioned the wisdom of traveling to Scotland to gain recognition back home. Why not establish a festival in New York? The rest is theater history.

Originating with a small core group, this is the Present Company's 10th year of producing FringeNYC, which features emerging talent and innovative, experimental plays and performances. Nine Queens based entries are among the more than 200 national and international offerings that will be hitting 20 downtown Manhattan stages Aug. 11 through 27.

For the complete schedule and tickets, visit www.fringenyc.org or call (212) 279 4488.