



[Member Login](#) | [My Account](#)

GO!

HOME [Boston](#) [Chicago](#) [DC Metro](#) [Florida](#) [Las Vegas](#) [London](#) [Los Angeles](#) [New York](#) [Philadelphia](#) [San Francisco](#) [Seattle](#)

[BROADWAY](#) [Kids](#) [Nightlife](#) [TICKET DISCOUNTS](#) [LISTINGS](#) [NEWS](#) [VIDEO](#) [REVIEWS](#) [STORE](#) [RESTAURANTS](#) [GOLD CLUB](#)

TM REVIEWS

[EMAIL A FRIEND](#) [EMAIL A FRIEND](#) [PRINT THIS PAGE](#) [ARCHIVES](#)

FringeNYC 2006 Roundup 1

Reviewed By: [Dan Bacalzo](#) and [David Finkle](#) · Aug 15, 2006 · New York



Matthew Hopkins, Jordan Seavey, TJ Witham, Geoffrey Decas, and Terri Gabriel in *The Deepest Play Ever* © Brandon Wolcott

[Ed. Note: This is the first in a series of TM review roundups of shows in the 10th annual New York International Fringe Festival.]

The Deepest Play Ever is overly ambitious, often hilarious, somewhat pretentious, and dynamically performed. In short, it's a perfect show for the New York International Fringe Festival. The production boasts a hodge-podge of literary and pop culture influences -- most notably Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, and such films as *Night of the Living Dead*.

Written by Geoffrey Decas and presented by Collaboration Town, the show is set in the near future, during the fifth World War. Mother LaMadre (Chinasa Ogbuagu) -- accompanied by her three children Swiss Cheese (TJ Witham), KitKat (Boo Killebrew), and Golden Calf (Christopher Ouellette) -- is on a mission to collect all of the remaining books left in the world. Her tale converges with that of Dalvador Sali (Decas), a loser who makes a Faustian pact with Mephistopholis, represented by a large red puppet protruding from actor Jordan Seavey's pants. There are a number of additional subplots, but it would take too long to go into them all.

The 16 cast members, directed by Ryan Purcell, throw themselves full-heartedly into the show. Decas' deconstructive script combines Elizabethan language and verse with Brechtian song and dance numbers, not to mention battles with zombies. It could certainly use

some trimming, particularly in the monologues delivered by Mother LaMadre and the show's narrator, Time (Phillip Taratula). But *The Deepest Play Ever* is still fun to watch.

-- D.B.

Although ex-police officer Michael Tester is no Oscar Wilde, he understands that earnestness sparked with wit can be entertaining. The combination works through most of his perhaps too cutely titled *Blue Balls*, the autobiographical tale of what led up to his joining the New York Police Department, then leaving the force and deciding to re-commit himself to his first love, the theater. The piece is an illustrated stand-up routine with writer-performer Tester in the center and actors CJ Dion, Alexandra Bosquet, and Vincent Ortega dervishing around him as they play everyone else in his life.

A gay man with several cops hanging on his family tree, Tester recounts his childhood and adolescence (when he was just no good at throwing a ball), his decision to follow his predecessors into police work (although his father was a professional clown), and the unexpected incident that led him, after surviving the police academy, to be ostracized by his colleagues (except for a number of lesbian officers). During a street dispute between his partner and a Muslim vendor, Tester seemingly froze, and he never recovered his reputation.

This was the end of one brief career and perhaps the beginning of another, although Tester's success as a playwright and performer is questionable at the moment. He has some fun sharing the early part of his story; "I don't do drugs, because my reality is distorted enough," he says during a job interview. The dispute and aftermath sequences are less assured, and whether or not Tester can play anyone other than his giddy self remains to be seen. The troupers circling him, directed by Rye Mullis, are required to change personality and costumes (coordinated by Timothy J. Conway) in green-apple-quick time -- and they couldn't be funnier at it. Tester's moral lesson, eventually stated explicitly, is that we should all treat each other nicely. You can't argue with that!

-- D.F.

Teresa Willis is a self-described "civil rights child." Growing up in Kentucky during the turbulent 1960s, she owned a desegregated Barbie doll collection, befriended the one black girl her age at the skating rink, and bonded with the African-American piano tuner who tickled the ivories while she danced "like a little, white, spastic puppet." *Eenie*

MOST RECENT FEATURES

By George!

Lauren Bacall, Mario Cantone, Boyd Gaines, Jane Krakowski, Euan Morton, Julia Murney, and Tommy Tune help the cast of *Sunday in the Park with George* celebrate its opening night.

With Perfect Kander

Ann Reinking, George Hearn, Hunter Foster, Will Chase, Natascia Diaz, and Terrence McNally help John Kander kick off *Signature's Kander & Ebb Celebration*. Plus: Phil Collins, Michael McKean, and Sara Ramirez!

Photo File

John Waters, Stephanie J. Block, Michael Emerson, Joanna Gleason, Harriet Harris, Kristen Johnston, Adriane Lenox, and a host of other stars catch up with our cameras.

[More Features »](#)

sponsor

If You Purchased
Airborne Products,
You Could Be
Entitled to Money.

Click Here for Information.

MOST RECENT REVIEWS



New York
Sunday in the Park With George

Daniel Evans and Jenna Russell give touching performances in Sam Buntrock's aesthetically stunning revival of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's musical.

Reviewed by: [David Finkle](#) »

[Celebrity Autobiography: In Their Own Words](#) New York »

[Mame](#) Seattle » [UNCONDITIONAL](#) New York »

[Julius Caesar](#) Boston Metro » [Macbeth](#) New York »

[The Jazz Age](#) New York » [Crimes of the Heart](#) New York »

[Maureen McGovern: A Long and Winding Road](#) New York » [Next to Normal](#) New York »

[Rum & Coke](#) New York » [Lari White: Love Letters](#) New York »

Meanie, written and performed by Willis, is a humorous and at times moving account of one white woman's complex relationship to issues of race and racism.

The solo show gets off to a bit of a rough start. Willis bounds in, employing a cartoonish and cringe-inducing "child" voice meant to convey that she's playing a five-year-old. But as the piece moves forward in time, her voice matures and her mannerisms become less caricatured. More importantly, Willis' perspective on race shifts as her worldview evolves; wide-eyed wonder gives way to a naïve empathy, to an indifference born of self-absorption, to shame, to fetishization, and more.

Willis isn't afraid to display her own shortcomings in the stories she tells. In one sequence, she talks about the terror she experienced when an unknown black man approached her just prior to curfew during the time of the L.A. riots. Later, she argues passionately with her father about his bigoted attitude toward African-American families at a relative's graduation ceremony; at the same time, she is not open with him about her own three-year relationship with a woman because she fears alienating him. Willis' perspectives are contradictory, flawed, and all too human. The writer-performer demonstrates the power of ingrained social attitudes even as she aspires, with intermittent success, to overcome them.

-- D.B.

There are two ways to write a musical about 1890s French music-hall performer Joseph Pujol, whose specialty was breaking wind musically -- yes, you read that right! -- and whose imitations of myriad everyday sounds delighted the Moulin Rouge set for a while. The first approach would be going for broad comedy pretty much as did Aristophanes, who in 400 B.C. was delighted to tell a fart joke or two. The alternative way of presenting the curiously talented garçon would be with the elegance and sophistication that Cole Porter brought to a tuner. (It was Porter, with librettist-director Abe Burrows, who ran up the Montmartre-based *Can-Can*.)

The creators of *The Fartiste*, about a can that really can, have gone the Porter-Burrows route. Unfortunately, the results pretty much come across as, well, canned. This retelling of the Pujol story -- the man's quirky history is followed closely here -- pays such fealty to traditional musical comedy that one of songwriter Michael Roberts' tunes, "Give 'Em What They Want," bears just about the same title as the opening number of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and makes the same cynical showbiz point. Although the show's subject matter is offbeat (and hollowly titillating, as so much Fringe Festival fare has been since *Urinetown*), the treatment that Roberts and book writer Charles Schulman have given it remains relentlessly uninspired. The only clever fillip is having Pujol (Kevin Kraft) squat and gyrate while Steven Scott, a very special special-effects man, stands at a stage left microphone and provides Pujol's output.

Although a good deal of money has already been put into *The Fartiste* -- *Le Petomane* was how Pujol was actually billed -- and director John Gould Rubin is clearly striving to give the show the old ooh-la-la, its only other virtues at the moment are emcee Nick Wyman's oomph and Kraft's game efforts. Otherwise, this oddball can-can can't.

-- D.F.

[EMAIL A FRIEND](#) [EMAIL A FRIEND](#) [PRINT THIS PAGE](#)

[digg this](#) · [add to del.icio.us](#) · [add to reddit](#)

Further Reading:

- [Take Ten](#) Feature
- [FringeNYC 2006 Roundup 2](#) Reviews
- [FringeNYC 2006 Roundup 3](#) Reviews

more: [New York International Fringe Festival 2006](#)

0 Comments - [View All](#) - [View Recent](#) - [Post a Comment](#)

Insider Comments:

There are no comments yet.

[Site Map](#) · [Broadway Shows](#) · [Discount Tickets](#) · [Sign Up](#) · [Archives](#) · [About Us](#) · [Contact Us](#) · [My Account](#) · [Unsubscribe](#)

By providing information about entertainment and cultural events on this site, TheaterMania.com shall not be deemed to endorse, recommend, approve and/or guarantee such events, or any facts, views, advice and/or information contained therein.

©1999-2008 TheaterMania Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use](#) & [Privacy Policy](#)

Click here for a current list of [Broadway shows](#) and [Broadway ticket discounts](#).

11:52 AM

PETER FILICCHIA'S
DIARY UPDATED EVERY MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, & FRIDAY
[CLICK HERE](#)

SAVE ON TICKETS!
 GET GREAT DEALS ON HIT SHOWS
JOIN NOW FOR FREE
AND YOU COULD WIN TWO TICKETS TO A HIT SHOW!
[CLICK HERE](#)