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Art attack The Infringement Festival is set to infiltrate several locations with conventional and offbeat events over 11 days

By Anne Neville

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The theme of Buffalo's Infringement Festival is "11 days of art under the radar." But with more than 110 projects in 20 different locations, most in Allentown, it's questionable how it can remain under even the most rudimentary radar.

Kurt Schneiderman, leader of a loose collective of about a dozen volunteer organizers, laughs when this is pointed out.

"If the 'under the radar' work can be on the radar for 11 days, that would be great," he says. "Art is such an untapped resource for this city. Part of reinvigorating the city is playing to its assets, and that's what we're trying to do here."

The festival includes dozens of types of art ranging from 10 live music showcases over the 11 days, to conventional and experimental theater and performance art, including some improvisational shows that will involve passers-by. Many of the events are one-of-a-kind, and range from a nudist talent contest to a late-night performance of "Shakespeare in the Parking Lot."

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>Part of a rebellion

Not surprisingly, the Infringement Festival is part of a rebellion against the longer-established Fringe Festivals held worldwide. Schneiderman says he was underwhelmed by the cost to artists and the quality of the art in a Toronto Fringe Festival a few years ago. Like other Infringement Festivals, Buffalo's, now in its second year, is free and relatively open to artists.

"Anyone who wants to be in the festival and proposes a project that is both physically possible and legal is in," says another organizer, Ron Ehmke. "There are no entry fees, no committee. That can be incredibly exciting for audiences and also incredibly frustrating -- if you go to one show out of 100 and you hate it, that's that.

"But if you look at it as a festival, look at the things that sound most appealing to you and check them out, the odds are good that you'll see a lot of work that you like," Ehmke says. If an event sounds interesting, "take a chance, go to it. Nothing costs more than \$10, and a huge number of things are either free or by donation."

The festival will begin with a seven-hour free live music showcase of the "bestest, weirdest, infringing-est bands in Buffalo," starting at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Soundlab, 110 Pearl St.

Merlin's Pub, 727 Elmwood Ave., will host three rock nights: "Igneous," on July 29; "Sedimentary" on Aug. 4; and "Metamorphic" on Aug. 5. Each showcase runs from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m. A \$4 cover charge will be collected at each one.

A Hip-Hop Showcase is scheduled from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. July 29 in Soundlab. A cover charge of \$5 will be collected to see "all the best of Buffalo's indie experimental hip-hop scene."

Nietzsche's, 248 Allen St., will be the site of many festival musical events, including a Musical Brunch from noon to 6 p.m. July 30 with a \$3 cover charge. Nietzsche's will also be the site of the free closing-night party, which will run from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. on Aug. 6.

Even Kenmore Lanes Bowling Alley, 1691 Kenmore Ave., will get into the act with a "Rock-n-Bowl" combination of live music, visual art and bowling from 9 to 11:30 p.m. Aug. 4. The charge is \$5 for music and \$10 to include unlimited bowling.

Ehmke says this event is "one way to kind of broaden the circle" outside the Allentown neighborhood.

"Anything that gets people to check out places they haven't been before -- to get people from, say, the theater community to go check out Soundlab -- I'm all for it," he says.

>Theater gets main role

After live music, theater performances are the most numerous festival events. The Real Dream Cabaret, which says its work "provides audiences with a skeptical, sometimes absurdist, always participatory approach to media, culture, gender issues, politics and art," will present a "loose, abstract adaptation" of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde.

The presentation of "The Picture," for which the collective says they "are breaking tradition this time by actually reading the book they are adapting," will run from next Thursday to July 30 at Squeaky Wheel, 712 Main St. The group is asking each member of the audience to donate the equivalent of one hour's wage for admission.

Other theater performances include Nickel City Co-Op's five stagings of "The Staircase" by Buffalo writer Timothy McPeck in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and six performances of "Sincerity Forever" by Mac Wellman put on by the Subversive Theater Collective in the rear courtyard of Quaker Bonnet Eatery, 175 Allen St.

On Aug. 4, the festival will infringe on the site of more established art when performers showcase a "melange" of art from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery's free weekly Gusto at the Gallery.

The popular "Shakespeare in the Parking Lot" performance will return this year, with its wacky interactive "late-night self-serve Shakespeare soiree." The hourlong Bardfest starts at 10 a.m. Aug. 5 in the parking lot of the Allen Street Hardware Store Cafe. Participants may bring their own scripts, props and costumes, or share the ones available.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, festival organizers have even more ambitious plans for next year.

"The possibilities are virtually limitless as to how the festival could grow," Schneiderman says.

Although he's happy with the amount of live music, not to mention the theater, "poetry, film screening, multimedia stuff, musical theater, fire dancers, two gallery exhibits, our live pirate radio broadcast, and even a juggling group," he says, "I'd love to see more of the whole spectrum of art get developed."

But that's for next year. This year, starting Thursday, we have a cornucopia of arts spread before us. Dig in.

WHAT: Buffalo Infringement Festival

WHEN: Next Thursday through Aug. 6

WHERE: Various locations

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