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Infringement Festival celebrates offbeat Buffalo

By Deidre Williams

Jul 29, 2013



Elsi Omara spins seven hula hoops Sunday during the 11th annual College Street block party, as a part of the Buffalo Infringement Festival.

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It's not easy to sum up the Buffalo Infringement Festival, even for its most ardent supporters.

“I don’t have a clue, but it’s everywhere,” said Don Dudowski, an Allentown resident who has been attending Buffalo Infringement events since the festival started in 2005.

“I’m not 100 percent sure,” said Larry Gardener, who was on his way to Rust Belt books to take in some performance art. “It’s for people who are really underground, Bohemian.”

“It’s whatever you want to do as long as it’s art,” said Eric Santiago, an Allentown resident and street merchant selling plants that do not require soil to grow.

Dudowski, Gardener and Santiago were a part of Sunday’s Infringement activity. The festival, which kicked off last Thursday and runs through Aug. 4, is a celebration of all types of offbeat, off-performance and exhibition art and artists. The acts range from dance companies, puppeteers, poets, comics, musicians, cabaret acts and digital designers to “miscellaneous insurrectionists,” as its website reads.

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Some of the material during Sunday’s events was a little racy, like a graffiti-reading performance that’s part of an actual play.

Other events – like the band performances at the annual College Street Party – were on the lighter side. They kept audiences dancing and entertained on Sunday.

A full slate of street art, performance art and visual art events is scheduled throughout the festival, as well as some interactive pieces.

“It’s a week and a half of subversive art,” said Rhode Island Street resident Heather Gring. “These artists are on the fringes of society.”

So if you have to ask what the festival is about, it’s not for you, said many festival-goers on Sunday.

“If you’re in tune with the arts community, you know this was going on,” Gring said.

“It’s not like the Garden Walk. There are no maps,” said Gring’s friend Andrew Delmonte.

“It’s really important for this sort of festival to take people out of traditional art venues, whether it’s music or theater,” he added.

Gring and Delmonte were on their way to Rust Belt Books for the graffiti reading, in which artist Susan Peters copied all of the graffiti that appeared in the ladies room of Nietzsche’s restaurant.

On Sunday, real actors delivered the messages in a reading performance.

Some of the sayings from the bathroom wall waxed poetic like “Life isn’t always about missing the story. It’s about learning to dance in the rain” and “Everything is OK until it’s not. What can you do?”

Others phrases like “Stay Classy Buffalo” and “If I loved anyone, it was you,” were sentimental and encouraging.

Many were humorous, such as the one that read, “Hold me closer, Tony Danza” and “If I knew a real Nietzsche quote, I wouldn’t be at this bar.” And many more were sexually explicit.

“We’re under the radar all week,” said Andrea Porto, who was visiting from New York City to attend some of the Buffalo Infringement events.

A schedule of events is online at www.infringebuffalo.org.

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