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ART ON THE OUTSKIRTS Creative experimentation finds a welcoming home at the Buffalo Infringement Festival

By **ELIZABETH SIMINS**

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Take any kind of art, add every kind of artist, throw it all together in Allentown, and you have the Buffalo Infringement Festival.

The Infringement Festival may have originated underground, but in the years since its inception in 2005, it has blossomed beyond all imagining. This year, a few of the festival's colorful characters took some time to tell us about what inspires them, how to be more than just a spectator and canine undergarments.

Jason Klinger, 'Zombie Loves Vampire'

"Freddy vs. Jason," "Alien vs. Predator," even the recent "Monsters vs. Aliens" -- a great deal of the films with "vs." in the title have hit it big. But why, wondered Jason Klinger, does it always have to be versus?

"I wanted to do something that was a horror movie," says Klinger, "and I said, 'Why not love?'"

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And that's how "Zombie Loves Vampire" was born.

The film is 15 minutes long and chronicles the budding romance between a zombie and a vampire, who just happen to be native to Buffalo. Klinger filmed the short during February to capture the winter cold, and fellow locals will recognize some of the names and faces that pop up throughout the film.

Though Klinger describes "Zombie Loves Vampire" as a horror film, it is primarily a satire. It features an argument about how annoying vampire-idolizing teenagers are and people who turn into food (I'm talking chicken legs and hotdogs) when being eaten by the zombie. And even though his budget was only \$400, Klinger didn't forget to throw in some profound social commentary.

"A punk kid and a goth kid have a hipster rivalry [in the film]," he says, "and they both end up dead by the end, thank God."

"Zombie Loves Vampire" will be showing at various times and locations throughout the festival. See **www.infringebuffalo.org** for details.

Ron Ehmke, 'Self Infringement'

Not an artist? Not a problem. If you feel like getting in a little infringement of your own, just stop by Rust Belt Books.

"The festival should have little traditions," says Ron Ehmke. And for the last few years, along with Brian Milbrand, Ehmke has created one of these very traditions.

"Self Infringement" is more a do-it-yourself artwork than anything. Just reach into the box (it will be in the window of Rust Belt Books), pull out an envelope, and follow the directions inside for your very own performance.

Some of the performances may seem trivial, but in the past, "Self Infringement" has sparked some interesting work. Once, an envelope contained a blank book and instructions to fill the book, then return it to Rust Belt. Turns out that the new owner of the blank book was heading on a trip around the world -- the book eventually returned from Australia, filled with a story more interesting than Ehmke could have imagined.

But you don't have to go to Australia to participate in Self Infringement -- if you don't like the instructions in your envelope, you don't have to participate at all.

"You'll either do what's on your piece of paper, or you'll ignore it. No one will ever know," Ehmke says. "And that's the magic of 'Self Infringement'!"

"Self Infringement" will be ongoing during the festival.

Janna Willoughby, The Bloodthirsty Vegans

Janna Willoughby isn't a vegan. In fact, nobody in the Bloodthirsty Vegans is a vegan.

"You don't have to be a vegan," Willoughby says. "You just have to be bloodthirsty."

Also known -- with a healthy dose of irony -- as MC Vendetta, Willoughby sports two eyebrow rings and a smile as she explains the origins of the band. Started in a Unitarian church, the name "Bloodthirsty Vegans" was conceived by kids in the church choir, because they thought it sounded cool. Hence the lax attitude toward the eating habits of its members.

Willoughby's musical history, though, goes back way further than the Bloodthirsty Vegans, which she joined only last year.

"I started writing poetry when I was 5," she says, describing how she used to see poems as pictures, then draw the words as she saw them. "It's kinda weird. It comes from somewhere else. It's freaky."

She started performing her poetry when she was 12 and, at a friend's suggestion, began rapping in college. That was when she came up with her MC Vendetta alter ego.

"We just thought it was funny," she says, "and that people would know it was a joke." But alas, MC Vendetta's audience took her seriously, and Willoughby started an unlikely hip-hop career.

The Bloodthirsty Vegans play a combination of rock, hip-hop and ska (what Willoughby describes as "skip-hop"). "It's the most fun band in the universe," Willoughby says, "scientifically proven, by science."

The group is scheduled to perform during the Mixed Bag, which begins at 7 p.m. July 25 at Burnwood (885 Niagara St.); the Lawn Disco, from 7 to 10 p.m. July 26 at Ol' Wondermoth (208 North St.), and at the Gathering of the Rhymes, at 9 p.m. July 30 at Nietzsche's (248 Allen St.).

Kilissa Cissoko, 'JFK, The Musical' (workshop)

"I already have the songs and the choreography in my head," says Kilissa Cissoko. "I just need bodies."

It was after a 36-hour layover in JFK Airport that Cissoko had an epiphany: She should write a musical about this. But, as she put it, the strange part wasn't that she decided to write a musical -- it was that she actually followed through with it.

"JFK, The Musical" tells the story of the various quirky people whom Cissoko got to know throughout the lengthy wait for her plane. "Each song is a character portrait," she says, and each is in a different musical style, ranging from disco to a love ballad.

Cissoko isn't the first person to write a musical based on her experiences. What makes the Infringement Festival performance of "JFK" unique is the workshop aspect. During the festival, Cissoko will be staging the first-ever performance of "JFK" -- and anyone is welcome to be part of it.

"The audience will be the event," Cissoko says. Aspiring actors, actresses and crew people take note: If you put in the work and the enthusiasm, Cissoko may keep you on for the non-workshop version of "JFK:" "I'm going to tell people there's no guarantee, obviously, but some people might be really motivated."

The workshop is scheduled to take place from 6 to 8 p.m. July 30 in the Gateway Gallery (141 Elmwood Ave.).

Pat O'Keefe

"My dog's not wearing underwear," sings Pat O'Keefe, intently strumming his guitar.

For O'Keefe, comedy was his escape from boredom while living in Korea. He then performed while in the Peace Corps in Kyrgyzstan. As multilingual as he is worldly, O'Keefe sometimes sings in Spanish or Russian, and he even has some songs that transition between languages, playing on common translation misunderstandings.

"I like to call my genre 'all-original acoustic comedy,' " he says. "I'm trying to coin that term."

Most of all, O'Keefe writes and sings about cats and dogs -- according to him, pets and animals are something everyone can relate to. Not that O'Keefe has any pets himself. In fact, in one of his songs, "Cog," he sings about having trouble choosing between a cat and a dog, thus deciding on a cross between the two.

"I keep it clean, too," he says, emphasizing the family-friendly nature of his work and performances. "It's PG-13 at the worst."

O'Keefe is soft-spoken when he isn't performing, unconsciously plucking the strings on his guitar as he talks. But when he is in front of a crowd, he knows how to make them laugh.

"Because he's naked!" he sings, "and he knows that he's breaking the law."

Pat O'Keefe will perform from 4 to 5 p.m. July 25 at the 224 courtyard (224 Allen St.); from 6 to 9 p.m. July 25 at the Western New York Book Arts Center (468 Washington St.) as part of its opening reception; and from 7 to 8 p.m. Aug. 1 at Buffalo Barfly (162 Elmwood Ave.).

WHAT: Buffalo Infringement Festival

WHERE: Various locations throughout Allentown and beyond

WHEN: Thursday through Aug. 2

INFO: www.infringebuffalo.org