

NEWSLETTER

Nestruck on Theatre: Kingston's Festival of Live Digital Art is one performance festival that never needed to pivot



J. KELLY NESTRUCK >
PUBLISHED MAY 11, 2021
UPDATED MAY 12, 2021
FOR SUBSCRIBERS

1 COMMENTS ← SHARE - A A+ TEXT SIZE 📖 BOOKMARK 🔊

▶ ○
00:00 Voice 1x ✕



Come From Away will be reopening in New York on Sept. 21, but a return date for the Toronto production will be announced 'soon.'

MATTHEW MIIRPHY/THE CANADIAN PRESS

It's a flood of theatre announcements out of New York right now, where Broadway is set to get back to business in the fall.

Hamilton, *Wicked* and *The Lion King* – that holy trinity of biggest hits – announced this morning they are reopening on Sept. 14.

Come From Away, meanwhile, announced yesterday that its official New York reopening date would be Sept. 21 and teased in its press release that a return date for the Toronto production would be announced “soon.”

When is “soon” up here? There will be some theatre season and festival programming announcements in the next weeks that will give us more of an indication of what might be coming down the pipeline across Canada – whether, after some outdoor theatre this summer, there will be more “pivots” in the fall or live performance will start to return to normal indoors.

A pleasant exception to this will-they-won't-they discourse is FOLDA, a.k.a. the Festival of Live Digital Art, based out of Kingston. I like to call it the one performance festival that never needed to pivot. The four-year-old festival has always been geared, at least in part, for an online, at-home audience. It was ahead of its time.

FOLDA is announcing its 2021 line-up tomorrow and let me have a sneak peek of what's on offer.

Three significant Canadian digital works from the past year you may have missed will be available again from June 9 to 13: *Speculation* by Leslie Ting, which involves recorded video and a livestreamed participatory performance of John Cage's *4'33"*; *Katharsis* by Yvette Nolan, a film from Winnipeg's Prairie Theatre Exchange that will be augmented for FOLDA with a live post-show discussion; and *Frequencies*, a much talked about creation from Nova Scotia's Heist that is described as “one part live techno concert and one part autobiographical confessional in mixed reality.”

A major international presentation is *Zoo Motel*, which will be performed by creator Thaddeus Phillips over Zoom from his studio in Colombia. Adrienne Wong, one of three rotating artistic directors at the festival, describes the play – which involves puppets and playful camera work – as an essentially hopeful piece about “the possibility of making a small change to avoid catastrophe.”

Like almost all the work at FOLDA, *Zoo Motel* is not simply a “Zoom reading” or a digital adaptation of a stage work, but a piece of performance specifically designed for a digital platform that explores the poetics of its new medium.

Last summer, FOLDA went free, a decision that boosted its virtual attendance to 32,000 views, a significant jump for a festival that had been niche just a year before. (I tuned in for the first time and one show ended up on my top 10 list for 2020.)

This year, it's going back to selling tickets and passes. Wong says it's important to “create a sense of value” for digital performance – which makes sense. They're one of the few festivals committed to backing the evolving artistic form for the long run.

Another season announcement officially coming tomorrow is from the Montreal theatre company Infinithéâtre. It will be the first by its new artistic director Zach Fraser, who was recently passed the baton by founding artistic director Guy Sprung.

On the bill next fall: The English-language premiere of *Omi Mouna* (Nov. 4 to 14), described as a “poignant and playful semi-autobiographical tale” about creator Mohsen El Gharbi's voyage to Tunisia from Montreal to meet his paternal great-grandmother; and *The Sighlence of Sky* (Nov. 25-Dec. 5), a non-verbal mask and mime piece created by Anana Rydvald, the artist behind a previous solo show called *Love, Child*.

Infinithéâtre plans to produce these show live and in-person at KIN Experience, a flexible venue housed in the old Sam The Record Man building in the Quartier des Spectacles. (The theatre company's traditional home, the Bain St-Michel in Mile End, has just begun 12 months of major renovations and plans to re-open in summer of 2022.)

This is no big surprise: Quebec's *salles de spectacles* are even now home to live, in-person, indoor theatre as a result of that province's distinct restrictions and government programs that make it less of a financial risk to produce.

Which reminds me: It's the last week for *Every Brilliant Thing* at the Segal Centre in Montreal.

What I'm listening to this week: *We Are Here* by Erin Shields is a read-along audio experience only available through Crow's Theatre until May 15. I'm not sure why I haven't listened to it yet, but I better get on it: Shields (*Paradise Lost*, *If We Were Birds*) is a poetic English-language Canadian playwright who is never afraid to take risks in her work, and one of my favourites.

Keep up to date with the weekly Nestruck on Theatre newsletter. [Sign up today.](#)

More From The Globe and Mail

The Toronto Arab Film Festival didn't need to adapt to virtual events - it was born into the pandemic world 



FILM REVIEW

Mads Mikkelsen finds his Liam Neeson moment in offbeat revenge film Riders of Justice 



Programs open door for Indigenous people to get work as stunt performers



FILM REVIEW

Supernatural drama The Corruption of Divine Providence revels in the sins of Canadian history



May 20: 'Justin Trudeau is ... threatening national unity.' Readers react as Ottawa supports Quebec on language reform, plus other letters to the editor



OPINION

Toronto billboard features heroic portrait of panhandler Jimmy James Evans

KATE TAYLOR



© Copyright 2021 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.

351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1

Phillip Crawley, Publisher