

AROUND TOWN

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The arts, from kid-friendly to fringe

Fans of theater, dance and performance art are in for a treat with this summer's trifecta of festivals

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STAFF REPORTER

With the commencement of the summer holidays, the Taipei Children's Art Festival (台北兒童藝術節), which opened last week, is providing a remarkable range of entertainment for the young and young at heart. Celebrating its 10th anniversary, this event has proven enormously popular once again, performing to full houses throughout its first week. The official program runs until Aug. 2.

Adults can indulge their artistic proclivities with the outstanding program that makes up the Taipei Arts Festival (台北藝術節), which opens on Aug. 29 and runs through Sept. 6. Tickets are already selling fast, and several shows are booked out. The festival prides itself on bringing cutting-edge international performances to Taipei, but if the program feels too mainstream, an alternative is the mayhem of the Taipei Fringe Festival (台北藝穗節), which opens on Aug. 29 and runs until Sept. 13. As many of the shows will be in small venues, tickets for popular acts are likely to go fast.

The second Taipei Fringe Festival was officially launched earlier this week at an event at which 60 of the 80 participating groups each presented a 30-second sketch of their shows. As the policy of the fringe festival is to admit all comers, the quality was necessarily uneven, ranging from the polished to the inept. A knife-juggling act almost led to a press photographer being impaled by an errant blade.

The styles of performance are equally varied, ranging from serious experimental theater to schoolroom sketches, from folk

dance groups to break dance teams, from the stridently political to the humorous and even risqué. There is belly dancing, flamenco and Punjabi dance. There is something for everyone.

The total of 246 performances will be scattered over 14 venues, and artistic director Wang Wen-yi (王文儀) of the Taipei Culture Foundation (台北市文化基金會) said that this was an opportunity not just to nurture performance groups, but also to develop alternative art spaces, so in addition to well-known locations such as Guling Street Theater (榕蔭街小劇場) and Taipei Artists Village (台北國際藝術村), venues like Paris Night Club (夜巴黎大舞廳) in Ximending, normally associated with performance of a totally different kind, have agreed to open their doors for the festival.

While there was probably more enthusiasm than talent on display at the official launch event, Taipei Fringe is an opportunity for smaller performance groups or individual artists to go before the public. Wang said that a new departure this year is the inclusion of a critic's corner with its headquarters at the South Village (南村巷) cafe off Shida Road (師大路), where reviews by professional critics and comments by audiences can be posted.

But before the free-for-all of the fringe, there will be the remainder of the Taipei Children's Art Festival and the Taipei Arts Festival, both also organized by the Taipei Culture Foundation. The former is in its 10th year, the latter in its 11th, and both events already have an established following.

This year's Children's Art Festival is in particularly celebratory form, having, said Carrie Kao (高薇嘉), the marketing

manager for the Taipei Culture Foundation, greatly expanded the opportunities for children to appreciate and engage in performance art.

While most of the festival's paid performances are already sold out, this year's festival includes an extensive program of free community performances.

"The theater performances and the community performances serve different functions and also have a different atmosphere," said Kao. "The community performances bring theater to kids and parents who might not otherwise visit the theater. We go to them. Perhaps in the future, they might come to a performance at a theater ... The community performances also allow for more interaction between the performers and the audience," she said.

The performance lineup for the community events includes many of Taiwan's top children's theater groups such as Puppet Beings Theatre Company (木偶偶劇團), Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company (太原偶劇團), Little Giant Chinese Chamber Orchestra (小巨人絲竹樂團) and Song, Song, Song Children's and Puppet Theatre (九歌兒童劇團).

"There is a huge variety in the community program ... because it's free and close by. It's a chance for children to see types of performances that they might not normally encounter. It's the first step toward a wider

appreciation of art," said Kao. A detailed community event schedule can be found at the festival's Web site.

Until Aug. 1, a children's film festival has daily screenings at Taipei Puppet Museum (台北偶戲館) located at 2F, 99, Civic Boulevard Sec 5, Taipei City (台北市市民大道五段99號2樓), featuring cartoons, all dubbed into Mandarin with Chinese subtitles, from many different countries. Admission is free.

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Top right and center right: Scenes from productions by Nova Scotia's Mermaid Theater, one of the groups participating in the Taipei Children's Art Festival. Above: Ad Hoc's Farewell, Mark, one of the shows at the Taipei Fringe Festival. Center left: Josephine Clown Team will stage *Clown Playback* at the Taipei Fringe Festival. Below: Sheu Fang-yi in *Ode to Joy*, on the program for the Taipei Arts Festival. Top left: Teatr Biuro Podrozy of Poland will perform *Macbeth — Who is That Bloodied Man?* at the Taipei Arts Festival.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI CULTURE FOUNDATION

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: Taipei Fringe Festival (台北藝穗節)
WHEN: Aug. 29 until Sept. 13
ON THE NET: www.taipeifringe.org

WHAT: Taipei Children's Art Festival (台北兒童藝術節)
WHEN: Now until Aug. 2
ON THE NET: www.taipeicaf.org

WHAT: Taipei Arts Festival (台北藝術節)
WHEN: Aug. 12 until Sept. 6
ON THE NET: www.taipeifestival.org

