

- NINA MOINI:** It's that time of year again when Twin Cities theaters turn their stages over to the Minnesota Fringe Festival. From the funny to the frightful, this year's lineup includes a show that takes viewers into a zombified post-war world of corporate professionals to about Elvis stirring up trouble at a real estate agency. That's just two of the more than 100 productions showing this year. Minnesota Fringe executive director Dawn Bentley has been busy behind the scenes getting everything ready for opening tonight. She's here to tell us more about what you can expect from the 10-day festival. Thanks for being with us, Dawn.
- DAWN** Thanks for having me.
- BENTLEY:**
- NINA MOINI:** We're also really thrilled to have Jen Scott, who's going to be performing her one-person show tonight called *Sound and Noise and Bodies*. Sounds exciting, Jen. Thanks for being here.
- JEN SCOTT:** Thank you so much. Thank you.
- NINA MOINI:** It's amazing to have both of your perspectives. Dawn, the very first Fringe Festival, if you took us back to 1994-- that's incredible-- how would you describe what makes this year's slate of shows unique?
- DAWN** I think with every Fringe Festival, it is really nascent work that is reflective of the times. Most of it is brand new.
- BENTLEY:** And so we have a gamut of shows available in a variety of genres that maybe speak to stories that Minneapolitans and other Twin Cities natives can really relate to after Operation Metro Surge, and then we also have all the way on the other side of the spectrum people being silly, fun, and goofy, poking fun at theater, poking fun at what scares them or Elvis or anything in between. And they'll be dance and puppetry and stand up comedy and serious theater and really something for everyone at Fringe.
- NINA MOINI:** Dawn, can you tell us a little bit about how you choose who gets to take part?
- DAWN** Well, this is a-- unique to Fringe Festivals is that they're open access festivals, and there are more than 300
- BENTLEY:** Fringes around the world. Ours is chosen by random lottery. So nearly 600 people applied for about 100 spots in the festival. That really demonstrates our popularity in Minnesota and the amazing talent that we have here just like Jen. And so we put a number in a bingo cage, and we literally just pull out ping pong balls with numbers on them, and so it's completely random. But that's the adventurous part.
- NINA MOINI:** And so, Jen, I understand you've been part of the shows for a long time. You're a Fringe veteran, but this year you're doing a one-person show. Is this your first one, or how did you decide on that?
- JEN SCOTT:** Oh, thank you so much. I've always had it in my back pocket that I was like someday should do a one person show and then got into the Fringe this year. It was like, well, better do it. And so I was very lucky to be given the chance.
- NINA MOINI:** Yeah, does that feel any different for you being up there on your own? I always feel like that's very vulnerable.
- JEN SCOTT:** It-- I've been performing for a while. I'm very old and--
- DAWN** Experienced.
- BENTLEY:**

JEN SCOTT: Experienced! And it is such a funny thing. Last year, I was able to get in and did a ensemble piece, and doing tech was silly and fun because we all had each other to rely on and doing it. Just one person with my intrepid director, it's a different experience, but it's good. I'm excited to try it out.

NINA MOINI: Can you tell us a little bit about what it's about?

JEN SCOTT: Oh, yeah.

NINA MOINI: *Sound and Noise and Bodies.*

JEN SCOTT: Basically that it's stories-- it's personal stories of going over my relationship with my husband, who is hard of hearing, and some of the wins and losses we've had. And also just personal stories for myself and how it relates to a bigger picture. Sounds very general. And then I write music, and so I wanted to have my music be a part of it, too. So it--

NINA MOINI: Cool.

JEN SCOTT: Original music is of interspersed throughout the piece.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. Well, Dawn, I don't want to leave you out either because I understand that you have created your first ever show for this year's festival. Are you going to be on both sides of things? How is that going to be for you?

DAWN BENTLEY: I think it's going to be busy and challenging, and I've never written a play before. I have never been in a play before other than maybe being in the pit orchestra because I'm a violinist. But I had a story that was percolating inside of me, and I wanted to tell it. And I shared it with a few of the Fringe veterans that I've met along the way. And when I did share it, they said, hey, I would want to see that story.

And so I reached out to a few people, Jen Scott included, and said if I make this story, will you help me. And really great people agreed to do it. So I'm nervous. I am concerned if something happens with the festival while I'm on stage. I'm just going to have to let that roll.

NINA MOINI: Yeah.

DAWN BENTLEY: But it's only five performances, and I really get to check this off of a bucket list that I didn't even I had.

NINA MOINI: So cool. Yeah, you're someone else is going to handle this. This is my year.

DAWN BENTLEY: Just let it burn, guys.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, yeah. But to your point earlier about how people are bringing in personal stories, people are bringing in the good, the bad, difficult things that they may have been through, and we know that a lot of arts organizations have lost quite a bit of federal funding in some areas. Has that impacted the festival, Dawn, or the way that people are bringing their ideas and their shows to life? Maybe they don't have another avenue.

DAWN BENTLEY: Yeah, actually as funding changes in the arts, artists themselves find it harder to find and fund performance space. And what Minnesota Fringe does is provides a platform for anybody along their artistic spectrum to platform their work. And it also affects the Fringe Festival directly and indirectly.

Of course, financially we may not have availability of grants that we used to have or people-- who people in corporations who used to give to the arts are no longer doing that because other things are taking priority, mutual aid and things especially since in the most recent year with Metro Surge and stuff. And then maybe we're in an economic downturn, and so people don't have extra money. So we're really struggling financially in the artistic spaces, but also indirectly venues that we used to rent and that used to be a part of our festival no longer exist.

And so it makes it more difficult for us to provide those beautiful platforms for those wonderful artists. There's just fewer of them. And we'd love to be able to rent every theater in town and just blow up Minneapolis and St. Paul with art, but we can't afford that unfortunately.

NINA MOINI: OK. Well, thank you for setting that scene. I think a lot of people listening may be thinking I didn't even you could do that. I want to be creative, but I've never done this before. Or I'd love to ask just both of you and maybe you first, Dawn, what advice would you give to someone who is trying to figure out how they can become more creative or what types of shows they should focus in on checking out since there are so many, around 100, for inspiration.

DAWN
BENTLEY: Well, I think if you are curious about the Fringe and you know you like maybe a certain type of performance, maybe you're a fan of Shakespeare or you love comedy or improv, just go to the website and use the selectors to filter out, find a show, and then just look at what's in the slot before and after it or at the neighboring theater next door because most of them are within walking distance.

Grab a friend. Maybe go to the bring a friend to Fringe page and find those two for one tickets and just have a sense of adventure because they're one-hour shows. It's really low stakes. You've done worse for an hour. You've watched something terrible on Netflix for an hour.

And you might learn something about yourself. I know from myself, I didn't even what bouffon clown was, but there's now a bouffon clown in my show because I saw bouffon clowning at the Fringe a couple of years ago and I thought that's really cool.

NINA MOINI: I'm going to Google that later.

DAWN
BENTLEY:

NINA MOINI: Jen, what about you? What do you think the-- how should people make a plan of action of what they want to check out?

JEN SCOTT: Oh my gosh. Yay. Absolutely what Dawn said. Go around. Check a genre out that you might be interested in. Also much like in the spirit of being selected for the Fringe, try something random because if you do have this-- if you yourself might want to make your own show, I always say do it.

And it also to see all these different options give you an idea of what is possible. It doesn't have to be perfect.

NINA MOINI: I love that.

JEN SCOTT: And it doesn't have--

DAWN Yeah.

BENTLEY:

JEN SCOTT: Yeah.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Everybody I think could use a little bit of that creativity. Go out on the Fringes and have a good time. Dawn and Jen, thank you both so much. Have a great time.

JEN SCOTT: Thank you.

DAWN Thank you so much.

BENTLEY:

NINA MOINI: That was Minnesota Fringe executive director Dawn Bentley and producer and performer Jen Scott.