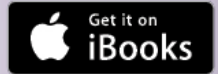


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Great entertainment that deserved more attention in 2017

With so much great entertainment out there, we can only cover so much. Here are a few things we overlooked the first time round.



The Beaches, opening for Death From Above 1979 on Dec. 1 at the Phoenix Concert Theatre sounded like the rock stars they deserve to be, writes Ben Rayner. (VANESSA HEINS)

By **STAR STAFF**

Sat., Dec. 30, 2017

NOT SO ANCIENT HISTORY

Oklahoma City begins with a black screen and audio from a water resources board meeting that ends after a horrifying explosion.

It's 9:02 a.m. on April 19, 1995. Minutes earlier, Timothy McVeigh parked a Ryder truck in the loading dock of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The rental vehicle was a killing machine, the result of a five-ton bomb McVeigh meticulously built with fertilizer, fuel and a seething hatred for his government.

It's been more than 22 years since McVeigh committed the worst act of domestic terrorism in American history: 168 killed and 675 injured. He was executed by lethal injection in 2001. He never felt remorse.

Oklahoma City is [a documentary](#) that opened at Sundance, earned a theatrical release, aired earlier this year on PBS and is [now streaming on Netflix](#).

Haunting and insightful, it's worth your time.

Director Barak Goodman masterfully weaves the rise of anti-government and neo-Nazi militias in the early '90s and explains how two flashbulb events for these groups — the deadly standoffs with federal agents at Ruby Ridge and Waco — inspired McVeigh to see Washington as the enemy.



The bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995 is the basis for an astounding new documentary. (JIM ARGO)

Sound familiar? That's because the influences that pushed McVeigh into mass murder — far-right agitprop, hate literature, conspiracy theories, racial resentments, an escalating paranoia the government was out to destroy Christians and gun owners — are more prevalent today than in 1995.

Just watch 10 minutes of Fox News.

And that's what makes *Oklahoma City* so compelling: grafted atop this frightening history lesson is an even scarier cautionary tale.

—*Vinay Menon*

AN EPIC WALK IN THE PARK

Heaven knows you can't be everywhere, and worse, not even everywhere you'd like to be. I have a list as long as my arm of things I'd dearly loved to have written about, but neither had the time nor manual durability to gather them all in.

Though it's near impossible to choose just one, I especially regret not having had the opportunity to engage more deeply with [Tracing Decolonization](#), a late summer project from Toronto's Public Studio. Its two principals, Elle Flanders and Tamira Sawatzky, hiked the full 900 kilometres of the

Bruce Trail, joined at intervals by artists, thinkers, writers and academics to muse on the nature of the ground beneath their feet, who could claim it and why. It was a long-running conversation about decolonization and all its hows, ifs and whys, in the full embrace of the land and water at issue.

It struck me as brilliant for all those reasons, but also its commitment to time. These things aren't rectified in briefs and meetings in boardrooms or Parliament, but in deep communion with a scarred past and in the presence of what's truly at stake. Beautiful.

—Murray Whyte



Tapestry Opera's *Bandits in the Valley* made good use of its location at Todmorden Mills. (SYSTEM)

DON VALLEY GIOVANNI

Tapestry Opera mixed history with new creation around the Labour Day long weekend with *Bandits in the Valley*, [an opera set](#) at Todmorden Mills, which sits at the base of Pottery Rd. in the Don Valley.

The opera, with a book by Julie Tepperman and score by Benton Roark, placed the action indoors and out, cleverly using the site's natural beauty and the buildings' history for a parody of Gilbert & Sullivan operettas and Victorian balladeering. It was fun, whimsical and, I am told, relatively mosquito-free, while freeing opera from its usual boxy confines and the need to hire a set designer. That's the sort of creative thinking we can always use more of.

—John Terauds



Ben Caplan in *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story*, which will be playing in New York City in February, then tour the U.K. and Canada. (STOO METZ PHOTOGRAPHY)

CANADIAN FRINGE GOES GLOBAL

This year was a benchmark for the international profile of Canadian theatre. You've read in these pages about the [huge Broadway success](#) of *Come From Away* and about how well [Soulpepper's summer season](#) in New York went.

But though [we broke the news in May](#) about CanadaHub, a new venue dedicated to Canadian performance at the Edinburgh Fringe, we haven't yet followed up on that venture.

The answer is: it went really, really well. Productions presented at CanadaHub won four major Fringe awards and a number have gone on to considerable touring success. 2b Theatre Company's *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story* will play seven weeks in New York City beginning in February, is touring the U.K. in the fall and will return to Canada for further touring.

Quote Unquote Theatre's *Mouthpiece* has booked several runs in London and a European tour. Theatre Conspiracy's *Foreign Radical* has picked up a multi-city U.K. tour and there is conversation about taking it to Australia.

This is exactly what CanadaHub producer Michael Rubinfeld had in mind: "creating international opportunities for Canadian artists." For Rubinfeld, several factors were key to the success of this pilot year: a robust partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts; the fact that this was a dedicated venue for Canadian work, not just a season or programming strand; and, of course, quality productions.

“At the end of the day the work had to be good, the curation had to be good and it had to be visible. There’s a lot of people who bring interesting work to Edinburgh that gets completely lost.”

CanadaHub will be back next year, bigger and better, says Rubinfeld. “I want to see how we can be an umbrella for more work and more conversation,” he says. “The venue we had this year could support five shows only and we were already pushing beyond that.”

The show that proved to Rubinfeld that boffo Canadian success was possible in Edinburgh was *Counting Sheep*, Lemon Bucket Orkestra’s immersive folk-opera reliving the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine, which he brought to the Fringe in 2016. As that production continues to tour internationally, the profile of its creators, Mark and Marichka Marczyk, is on the rise: their next show, *Balaklava Blues*, a concert/theatre performance also about contemporary Ukraine, will premiere at the 2018 Luminato Festival.

—Karen Fricker

AN EXPLOSIVE DOUBLE BILL

Believe it or not, after more than 20 years of going to shows for a living, I often still get pretty excited about going to shows. And I was reasonably excited about this one, having spent much of the fall mainlining both Death From Above’s terrific third album, *Outrage! Is Now*, and the Beaches’ altogether smashing and smile-inducing full-length debut, *Late Show*. Both are proven live bands. It was a Friday night. It was a safe bet.

What I got hit with at the Phoenix on Dec. 1, however, were two bands operating at the absolute, bruising height of their powers after a month and a half on the road together and the all too rare experience of witnessing two hometown acts absolutely kill it in the midst of an uncommonly unhinged Toronto crowd that, for once, actually let down its collective guard.

The four early-20-something ladies [of the Beaches](#) came on as if they were the headliners and already the rock stars they deserve to be, sounding sturdier and more self-assured than ever, and suspiciously like they might have picked up a few tricks on how to make bass and drums sound as wallopingly huge as possible after touring with a bass-and-drums duo.

Jesse Keeler and Sebastien Grainger of DFA, meanwhile, exhibited a ferocity onstage that I don’t recall being equalled even in the legend-making, young-and-hungry days before they split up, spent five years hating each other and then had to reform because the legend that they’d left behind when they were young and hungry simply refused to go away. This was not a Death From Above coasting on post-reunion goodwill; this was a Death From Above that appeared to have realized, six years into that reunion, that its best work [might yet lie ahead of it](#) and revelling in that epiphany.

There was rampant crowd-surfing. There was localized mosh-pittery. The Beaches’ Eliza Enman-McDaniel came out in sparkling evening wear to hammer the drums on “[Romantic Rights](#).” I couldn’t stop yelling “This is f---in’ awesome” in my friend’s ear. I came home drunk and giddy, played records until sunup and passed out on the couch with *Outrage! Is Now* screaming in my headphones the way I would have done 20 years ago.

It's good to remind yourself you're a music fan once in a while.

—Ben Rayner



Tim Carroll is artistic director of the Shaw Festival. (SHAW FESTIVAL)

SHAKING UP THE SHAW FESTIVAL

One of the biggest theatre stories in 2017 was the arrival of Tim Carroll as the Shaw Festival's new artistic director, affectionately known as TC by all Shaw staff with almost alarming consistency. His first season at the festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, one of the biggest and most influential theatrical producers in the country, had some hits, some misses and some pretty radical approaches to transforming the ways in which his stable of actors perform (specifically, making them as unstable as possible).

One season obviously isn't enough to form a consensus on the new artistic director's tenure, so eyes will be on his second season in 2018, which is already noteworthy for one show in particular. Next summer will host the world premiere of *Mythos*, a trilogy of solo plays written and performed by Stephen Fry. Touted as a big get for Carroll, as well as an ambitious leap in the festival's development of new work, Fry's inclusion in the season has apparently already boosted ticket sales. It also earned the festival a \$300,000 donation from Tim and Frances Price, part of a larger \$3-million endowment fund to support new play development at the Shaw.

Within the arts community however — typically skeptical of anything too reliant on celebrity appearances, especially celebrities from overseas, especially when those celebrities receive major financial support from donors — reaction has been more cautious. The optics of an artistic risk with *Mythos* diminish when looked at plainly: they are three separate one-man shows staged in the signature 856-seat Festival Theatre.

Luckily, we'll get the chance to follow up on this story when it opens next summer.

—Carly Maga



George Jones eats salted raw potatoes in bed, in Mike Judge's new animated series *Tales from the Tour Bus*. (BELLMEDIA ART)

REAL LIFE STRANGER THAN COUNTRY MUSIC

“There’s nothing worse than a hillbilly with a hit record,” a musician says in *Mike Judge Presents: Tales from the Tour Bus* — but he says it with undeniable affection, and it’s a fondness that is everywhere in the eight-part series.

Judge’s latest creation arrived [on HBO Canada](#) with little to no fanfare, which is curious given the man’s comedic track record (*Beavis & Butthead*, *King of the Hill*, *Silicon Valley*, and a couple of beloved movies). And make no mistake, this is mostly comedy: portraits of the biggest hellraisers in the history of country music, as told by sidemen, agents, lawyers and lovers, animated after the fact.

The animation, interspersed with live-action clips, allows for re-enactment of anecdotes, and what anecdotes they are: Jerry Lee Lewis spraying the ceiling with a machine gun to pep up weary partygoers; a disgruntled fan, or someone, firebombing Tammy Wynette’s house after her divorce from George Jones; Johnny Paycheck jailed for shooting a man in a dispute over turtle soup . . . actually there are a lot of guns involved, which won’t surprise you. Also a lot of amphetamines and a certain recurring role for the Hells Angels.

Some of the backing musicians emerge as secret stars here — loyal, wry raconteurs who know they’re lucky to have survived it all. The half-hour running time per episode distills each of the big names to a couple of core traits, from the compulsive antisocial behaviour of Paycheck to Jones’ firm resistance to personal refinement. (The man ate salted raw potatoes.) And the snippets of

music sell these artists wonderfully — the appeal of Waylon Jennings, in particular, emerges undated.

Judge has suggested in an interview that a second season, if any, might dwell on the early days of gangster rap — a tantalizing prospect, but don't wait for it; the first season is available on the TMN Go app.

—*Garnet Fraser*

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