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# Nine intriguing U.S. fringe festivals

By **Marie Glancy O'Shea**, Special to CNN  
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Core Project Chicago was among the acts at the 2013 St. Lou Fringe in St. Louis.

## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

U.S. fringe festivals showcase unconventional performances

"Fringes are supposed to be risky," says one festival organizer

Edinburgh's festival is the grandfather of fringe

(CNN) -- Who wouldn't be interested in a choose-your-own-adventure sex farce or "Top Gun: The Musical"?

Those are just two of the performances on tap at fringe festivals this summer.

Such festivals have their roots in Scotland. Upon its launch in 1947, the Edinburgh International Festival of performing arts was eclipsed by a more grassroots event.

In makeshift venues around the city -- "round the fringe" of the official performing arts festival, one journalist put it -- artists began mounting small-scale, independent performances.

The "fringe festival" concept was born.

This freewheeling style of celebrating the arts is finally gaining a foothold in America: the U.S. Association of Fringe Festivals lists 24 annual events in its directory; of these, half are 5 years old or less.

Fringes are generally distinguished by short, unconventional performances, low-cost tickets and a large share of ticket sales

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For a country that ditched monarchical rule, America has some of the most intriguing "castles" in the world.

returned to artists. Many open their stages to amateurs as well as seasoned acts.

"Fringes are supposed to be risky, even for the organizers. Otherwise, what's the fun?" asks Atlanta Fringe's Chris Alonzo. Most festivals sell buttons or badges for a small fee that act as a festival pass; individual shows are priced separately.

Here are nine U.S. fringes you might dip into for your dose of culture this summer:

#### **Orlando International Fringe**

*May 14-27 in Orlando*

Perhaps appropriately, given its Disney proximity, the country's longest-running fringe also encompasses the largest kids' fringe in the United States. It's also notable for its international reputation for "innovative LGBT content," says festival producer Michael Marinaccio.

This year's tag line is "Over 100 Shows Rated G Through OMG." Among them, all chosen by lottery: a "choose-your-own-adventure sex farce," a historical magic show and a play about a soul-searching Aqua Man. Buttons are \$9; show tickets are \$3-\$11.

[www.orlandofringe.org](http://www.orlandofringe.org)

#### **PortFringe**

*June 24-29 in Portland, Maine*

Since 2012, tourists have had another reason to descend on Maine in summer. Portland's PortFringe includes 60 acts and more than 100 performances, held in a variety of bars and clubs as well as theaters.

With staggered show times, patrons can be seen "running from one venue to another...[it's] a level of energy and excitement you don't normally associate with theater," says co-founder Deirdre Fulton.

Acts are selected by lottery, with local artists heavily represented; the tentative schedule ranges from puppet improv to "The Rantings of a Very Hungry Frenchman" who hands out cheese samples. Tickets are \$10, with discounts on multishow passes. [www.portfringe.com](http://www.portfringe.com)

#### **Hollywood Fringe**

*June 12-29 in Los Angeles*

Taking a "free-for-all approach," this California festival does not select artists, but instead facilitates cooperation between would-be performers and willing venues.

With more than 800 performances and 17,000 seats, its menu is extensive; this year's includes a TED Talks-skewering play called "Death by PowerPoint" and a one-woman "comedy tell-a-thon/telethon" dedicated to "Combating Adult Virginity."

Shows are held at small theaters, studios and cafes; buttons are \$5 and get you \$1 off tickets, with other perks. Performers and venues determine show length as well as ticket prices (generally \$10-\$15); many shows have pay-what-you-will performances. [hollywoodfringe.org](http://hollywoodfringe.org)

#### **Capital Fringe**

*July 10-27 in Washington*

Taking place within three downtown blocks in Washington, Capital Fringe is headquartered with offices and a pop-up "gypsy tent bar" near Mount Vernon Square.

This year, a series of inaugural site-specific works have been

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selected, such as Madeleine Cutrona's "Bargain Basement University," a peddler's cart Cutrona will use to distribute "advanced degrees" to passersby around town. Buttons are \$5 in advance, \$7 during the festival; show tickets \$17. [www.capitalfringe.org](http://www.capitalfringe.org)

#### St. Lou Fringe

June 18-22 in St. Louis

"Hyperlocally focused," according to founder and executive director Em Piro, the St. Lou Fringe is concentrated into just a few clustered venues in an effort to bring the larger St. Louis community together.

"We're trying to build that critical mass," Piro said. "We want people to come to the grounds and linger."

Selection is determined through a mixture of first-come, first-served and lottery. This year's offerings include a didgeridoo performance, an improvised biography by a comedy troupe and a burlesque show entitled "A Pastie Home Companion." Badges are \$5; tickets are \$12 or less. [www.stlfringe.com](http://www.stlfringe.com)

#### Minnesota Fringe Festival

July 31-August 10 in Minneapolis and St. Paul

Since its 1993 founding, this Twin Cities festival has remained uncensored and uncensored. This year's lineup includes a Bollywood dance show, a Tennessee Williams adaptation and "Top Gun: The Musical."

"It's not uncommon to see groups of people (often strangers) huddled in a lobby or on the sidewalk exchanging reviews ... or trying to figure out what the must-see show of the festival is," says Executive Director Jeff Larson. Tickets are \$12 adults, \$5 children; adults also need a \$4 button. [www.fringefestival.org](http://www.fringefestival.org)

#### Atlanta Fringe Festival

June 5-8 in Atlanta

This festival picks acts out of an honest-to-goodness hat. The idea is to ensure "that the festival isn't limited by our own personal biases," says marketing manager Alonzo. This year 22 shows will cover belly dancing, stand-up comedy and cabaret, among other genres.

A preview party on the eve of the festival offers three-minute excerpts from each show. Buttons are \$3 and are good for Atlanta arts discounts year round; tickets are \$10. [www.atlantafringe.org](http://www.atlantafringe.org)

#### New York International Fringe Festival

August 8-24 in New York

Not surprisingly, the city that's home to the Off-Off Broadway movement -- a reaction to large, commercial theater -- hosts the country's biggest fringe.

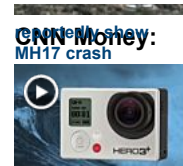
Like New York, this festival is busy, encompassing 1,200 performances; it's also high stakes, with commercial producers and casting agents scouting around (festival alums include Bradley Cooper and Mindy Kaling). Entry is adjudicated, with about 20% of applicant companies accepted to perform.

Established writers, directors and actors participate, but ticket prices are still low by New York standards: \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door. Shows cover everything from multimedia and mime to opera and ballet; full schedule announced in July. [www.fringenyc.org](http://www.fringenyc.org)

#### Sideshow Fringe

July 31-August 3 in Nashville

This Nashville festival takes its name from its area of special



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emphasis: variety and circus arts.

"We have been fortunate to have a strong community of aerial dancers, jugglers, puppeteers and more that join us each festival," says program director Jessica Malone.

Previously open-access, entry is now juried except for three lottery-determined spots (lineup TBA). Buttons are \$5; tickets are \$10. [www.sideshowfringe.com](http://www.sideshowfringe.com)

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**St Lou Fringe** · 3 months ago

Good luck PGHFrige! We're pretty young too---our third year is next month! Did we mention that we're the only Fringe Festival in the United States that will be taking place next to an Eddie Izzard show? #quelle chance #executivetransvestitesforFringe

5   · Reply · Share

**PGHFRINGE** → **St Lou Fringe** · 3 months ago

Eddie Izzard!

2   · Reply · Share

**Jon Paterson** · 3 months ago

Wow. A lot of Fringe slaggins going on here. It's a THEATRE FESTIVAL PEOPLE! You know, like a outdoor music festival, but for theatre. And, no, it's not only about eccentric nudity, but unfortunately the media latches on to those shows. I saw a Cirque performer and a Shanley play last year.

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**floyd schrodinger** · 3 months ago

Get naked, act weird, you've got a fringe show.

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**gio6666** · 3 months ago

They forgot the the DC Fringe Festival, where amateurs are picked to run govt for 8 years. It is a real goof ball comedy

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**UninterestingCrap** · 3 months ago

wow this has to be the least amount of comments I have seen for an article on CNN... just sayin.

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**Jon Paterson** → **UninterestingCrap** · 3 months ago

That's because theatre is a niche interest. I'm sure more people read about knife attacks but if CNN didn't diversify, every article would be about mainstream interests.

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**Jon Paterson** → **Jon Paterson** · 3 months ago

Just sayin', not attacking

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**Jon Paterson** · 3 months ago

You might also consider checking out the Canadian Fringe Festival circuit where North America's Largest (Edmonton) and second largest (Winnipeg) Fringes are (Edmonton is also the third largest in the world). Not to mention Toronto and Vancouver who's Fringes have a decent box office take. Orlando, however, is pretty awesome. Oh, and New York's FRIGID!

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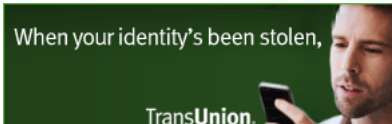
**PatMoe** · 3 months ago

What ever

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**JaimeLobo** · 3 months ago

No one owns the "Fringe" moniker, so anyone can call themselves a Fringe Festival,



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