

Shining a light on the year's best

A look back at 10 unforgettable Vancouver stage productions from 2013

BY MARK LEIREN-YOUNG, SPECIAL TO THE SUN DECEMBER 26, 2013



My favourite theatre pieces are the ones I'm still thinking about the next day or, better yet the next week, month or year. Here are 10 shows from 2013 I am wishing I could see again.

You Should Have Stayed Home: A G20 Romp Firehall Arts Centre

This wasn't the best play staged in Vancouver in 2013 but it might have been the most important. Each night up to two dozen people volunteered to share a cell with Tommy Taylor as he recounted his arrest at the G20 Summit. On opening night I was in the cell with some Raging Grannies and I'm still haunted by the idea that there were grannies just like that, with their wrists zip-stripped together, in these makeshift prisons in Toronto on a day when civil liberties were suspended and martial law was enacted without ever being declared. Taylor wasn't the most polished performer but his story - which he'd lived through - should give any Canadian nightmares.

The Daisy Theatre The Cultch

Ronnie Burkett's writing and improv skills are so brilliantly honed that the fact that he's one of the world's most skilled puppeteers, and crafts marionettes that are impossibly lifelike and lovable, is almost beside the point. When The Cultch offers their "see it twice price" for a show, just book tickets for at least two nights. I wish I had.

Micro Performance Series 2013 Granville Island

Boca Del Lupo's four micro performances each lasted for less time than it normally takes to find a parking space on Granville Island - but they were all worth an evening out. All the boundary-pushing mini-productions were fascinating but the experience of being stuck in a metal crate and briefly experiencing life as human cargo was haunting.

Hamlet

Bard on the Beach

Hamlet's got an iPad and he's not afraid to use it. This wired production of Hamlet built around and by two of the founders of the Electric Company (director Kim Collier and Jonathon Young as the Great Dane) was the Bard show everyone was buzzing about.

The God That Comes

The Cultch

As I watched Hawksley Workman spin across the Cultch stage retelling and reinventing the story of the Bacchae, I wasn't sure if I'd ever seen anything quite like it. And it has been a long time since I could say that about anything I'd seen in a theatre. A mesmerizing blend of Shaman and huckster, Workman worked the stage and the audience with total conviction.

The Farnsworth Invention

Jericho Arts Centre

The Canadian premiere of Aaron Sorkin's play about the invention of television featured over 150 characters, with director Matthew Bissett managing to juggle them all beautifully with a cast of just 12. The Ensemble Theatre production was ambitious, energetic and constantly entertaining. Yuriy Kis was delightfully dislikable as David Sarnoff, the man who "stole" the Farnsworth Invention (TV).

How Has My Love Affected You?

Revue Stage

Brave, sweet, raw and kind of heartbreaking, Marcus Youssef's exploration of his challenging relationship with his mother is the type of show you'll rarely see on one of the city's mainstages. Youssef is one of Vancouver's more singular and brave theatre artists and it was a treat to see him get his due on an Arts Club stage.

Mump & Smoot

The Cultch

The Canadian duo who redefined clowning in the 1990s returned to Vancouver with a greatest hits package. Seeing the "clowns of horror" for the first time is such a magical experience it's easy to forget they're no less brilliant the fifth time.

Avenue Q

Granville Island Stage

A polished script, a killer concept (the Sesame Street characters enter the real world), some of Vancouver's top comic actors and probably the raunchiest sex scene ever staged at the Arts Club.

Terminus

Performance Works

My first thought when I heard that Mark O'Rowe's script utilized rhymes and called for Canadian actors to perform with Irish accents was "do I have to go?" I'm sure Terminus wasn't an easy sell. I'm also sure almost everyone who saw Pi Theatre's production, which dominated the small theatre Jessies earlier this year, was as glad they went as I was. Pippa Mackie, Leanna Brodie and John Emmet Tracy (who won a Jessie for his work) were superb.

