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WINNIPEG FRINGE FINISHES BIG WITH BEST WEEKEND EVER



WINNIPEG, July 25, 2011 – Theatre lovers from Winnipeg and beyond have done it again. BIG TOP FRINGE yielded the highest ticket sales in Winnipeg Fringe history and broke attendance records several times, with more than 9,500 indoor tickets sold in a single day for the first time. The 24th annual Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival featured 1,201 performances in 24 indoor venues, as well as bands, buskers and street performers on the MTS Outdoor Stage and Fringe Fairground on Albert and Arthur streets. Indoor attendance reached 87,845, up 1,128 from last year’s final attendance of 86,717. There were 121 sellouts, and \$630,029 in box office revenue was returned to the performers.

“This year’s festival was a bit like walking a tight rope,” Festival Producer and Ringmaster Chuck McEwen said. “We started off strong, beating our record for opening day attendance, and followed that with a record-breaking weekend. We saw our attendance dip at the beginning of last week due to the extreme heat but thanks to our loyal patrons, we regained our balance and sailed through the weekend with the highest indoor attendance the Winnipeg Fringe has ever seen. I’m very happy that so many people came out to support independent theatre, and artists from Manitoba and around the world.”

This year, BIG TOP FRINGE required 798 volunteers to juggle tasks, tame the crowds and clown around in a variety of roles. On behalf of the festival, McEwen thanked them all for making the show go on without a hitch.

“So many people make our festival possible, and without them, we wouldn’t be the second-largest Fringe Festival in North America,” McEwen said. “Our large group of volunteers are truly stars, including our billeters who take in travelling performers and give them a home during the festival. I would also like to thank our sponsors, funders and the media for their efforts and contributions in making BIG TOP FRINGE a truly spectacular event.”

The Winnipeg Fringe was a hit online as well, with *#wpgfringe*, *@WinnipegFringe* and *Fringe* trending locally on Twitter from before the festival began, straight through the last day. Social media provided a venue for festivalgoers to share their show recommendations and reviews with other patrons, as well as post pictures and connect with performers. It also provided the festival with valuable feedback, as patrons were able to share their thoughts directly with festival administration.

BIG TOP FRINGE closed on Sunday evening with the presentation of the Harry S. Rintoul Memorial Award for Best New Manitoban Play. Rory Runnells of the Manitoba Association of Playwrights (MAP) presented the award to the youngest recipients ever to receive it: Jessie Ardern and Ariel Levine for the play *Sigurd the Dragonslayer*. They received \$500 from MAP and a 2012 Festival Super Pass donated by the Fringe. The Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival will celebrate its 25th anniversary next year from July 18-29, 2012. For more details, visit www.winnipegfringe.com.

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