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The Cannonball makes a raucous comeback to Philadelphia Fringe for the third time

An improv dinner, a Black trans reimaging of Adam and Eve, Jewish folklore introspection, a rave show for kids, and more make up the Cannonball programming this year



Ben Grinberg (left) with Hazem Header in "Fix Me," part of the Cannonball hub of the Philadelphia Fringe Festival. Grinberg is one of the producers of Cannonball.

submitted by Artist

by Jane M. Von Bergen, For The Inquirer
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The Cannonball — the most consistently experimental part of the Philadelphia Fringe Festival — is roaring back with more than 600 performances in several Fishtown venues, all within walking distance of each other.

Last year, Cannonball presented 65 shows, culled from 88 applications. This year, the festival vetted 300 applications to stage 150 different works, Sept. 1-30.

“There’s lots of energy around peer presentation,” said Ben Grinberg, core producer and program manager of the Cannonball Festival, which is a festival within the Fringe Festival and produced by Almanac Dance Circus Theatre.

Audiences can expect tremendous variety — an improv dinner with clowns selling cookbooks, a Black trans reimagining of the story of Adam and Eve, something about a vagina named Pete, six shows sorted into the category of Jewish folklore introspection, a rave show for kids (with techno and hip-hop), lots of stuff about sex and sex workers, and plenty celebrating people of color and LGBTQ+.

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It’s all sliced and diced on the [Cannonball](#) and [Philadelphia Fringe Festival](#) websites.

How does Cannonball fit into the Fringe?

When it comes to the performing arts, ideas abound, but so do barriers. Aside from money, an obvious one is finding the right space. There are others — lighting, sound, stage management, marketing — and the crews to handle all that.

Many artists who bring their works to the Philadelphia Fringe Festival solve those issues on their own, but Cannonball performers can count on the crew provided for

“space, web attention, technical support, a stage manager who designs the lights, runs the sound, and video crews,” said Grinberg. “We have all of the shared resources.”

The artists pay an entry fee, but also get a cut of ticket revenues.

Grinberg attributes the increase in Cannonball applications to a scarcity of other presenting opportunities for independent theater artists. In the past, there had been industry showcases where representatives of venues filling out a season of varied performances could shop for new cutting-edge shows.

One of the biggest, Under the Radar at the Public Theater in New York, canceled its prestigious new-theater event in 2022. It came back in 2023, but, said Grinberg, it made more artists more motivated to find ways to present their own and each others' work.

“We can pool resources ourselves and make these opportunities for ourselves,” with both artists and curators turning to Cannonball to both show and see new theater, dance, and circus in all their permutations.

How is Cannonball contributing to diversity?

Cannonball raised money to underwrite grants for categories of artists or types of shows.

The BIPOC New Work Track awarded \$2,750 grants to five Black, Indigenous, and artists of color. Audiences can expect to see *Misket*, a play about a queer romance between two traditional male Turkish dancers from Turkish artist Faysal Can Dakni and *Manflor*, by Santi Castro, described as a “queer Latin-Indigenous journey of self-discovery across Philadelphia,” as well as three other works.

Toni Cannon, a Black trans artist, won Cannonball’s \$5,600 CSAW (Connecting Circus Students Around the World) award for new work by circus artists of color for his multimedia acrobatics and circus work in *ReFlection*, about self-acceptance.

Knowing there was a full roster of salacious shows (curated as “After Dark”), Cannonball, under the leadership of program manager Sam Tower, encouraged performances for young audiences with \$750 grants. Five recipients will perform their works at Liberty Lands Park. Among them is Eliana Fabiyi, whose *Socrates* details the extraordinary adventures of a normal everyday sock (puppet).

Five artists earned \$600 Snack Track stipends for small audiences and immersive work, including *Privy Privy* — involving a glory hole, ice cream, and an unexpected physical encounter with a stranger — by Donna Oblongata and Patrick Costello.

What else is fun?

Want to meet a new friend? Cannonball offers Blind Date nights. For \$15 on top of the ticket price, you will be matched with a fellow theatergoer and issued a drink voucher, a goody bag, some suggested icebreakers for a preshow conversation and questions for a postshow discussion.

FYI

What: Cannonball Festival from Almanac Dance Circus Theatre, a hub within the Philadelphia Fringe Festival.

Where: Maas Garden, Maas Cottage, Maas Studio at 1320 N. 5th St., Phila.; the Icebox Project Space, 1400 N. American St., Phila.; Fidget Space, 1714 N. Mascher St., Phila.

Info and tickets: Cannonball information: 856-441-2837 or cannonballfestival.org
Tickets via the Fringe, 215-413-1318 or phillyfringe.org.

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