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T.O. arts festival revealing its saucy side

Sir Richard Wadd is set to unload a startling combination of Shakespearean linguistic flare and pornography on the theatre-going public of Toronto.

Sir Richard Wadd, Pornographer, is just one of more than 1,000 shows being presented at the 17th annual Toronto Fringe Festival, which opens today at 12 venues across the city.

The festival aims to showcase a variety of independent theatre and performance art from Canada and around the world.

Sir Richard Wadd, Pornographer is the debut stage production from writer, director and producer Shawn Postoff, best known for writing credits on Showtime's Queer As Folk.

It follows Wadd, a gay porn producer played by Cinderella Man cast member John Healy, as he explores the aesthetics of arousal using a combination of sexually explicit language and iambic pentameter — a common literary meter used by William Shakespeare and his 16th-century contemporaries.

"I wanted to take porn and iambic pentameter and smash them together," Postoff says.

As for mixing the Bard and the bedroom, the director says he was inspired when he began to wonder why Shakespeare's signature technique had fallen out of favour with modern writers.

"I see iambic pentameter as bringing out the best qualities of the English language," he says. "It brings out all the natural linguistic rhythms."

Mixing sexuality, Shakespeare and modern technology — specifically the web-cam variety — is highly unusual for theatre of any kind, but not when it comes time to Fringe. Postoff's play is just one of the many shows to make their way to the small stage this year.

Others include director Lindsay Leese's The Magnificent Robertsons, about a stage manager having difficulties mounting her husband's vampire musical, as well as the Rumoli Bros.' SARSical — a satirical look back on the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in Toronto in 2003, which kept tourists away and had politicians fighting to save the city's battered image.

According to Fringe Festival producer Bridget MacIntosh, this year the 12-day event will feature a record 134 independent theatre companies including 17 international shows by troupes from Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States.

And new for 2005 is a \$37 5-Play Pass intended to make diverse Fringe-ing a bit more enticing and affordable.

"We're hoping the pass gets people to experiment a bit more and to see things they wouldn't normally see," MacIntosh says.

For ticket or other information, go to www.fringetoronto.com.

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