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## F#@king Up Everything

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July 16, 2011 By [Larry Bangs](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

Not everything at the Fringe Festival is “hungry” – produced on a dime for the sheer joy of creating live theatre. *F#@king Up Everything* (let’s call it *FUE*), in spite of what the title conjures up, comes to us with a list of support personnel that fills one entire page in the program. These folks know how to put together a musical and they are deadly serious about doing it right.



There are two very important personages on this list. Casting Director Daryl Eisenberg has done a superb job. The casting is practically perfect in every role. Producer, Charlie Fink, founder of the not-for-profit [New Musical Development Foundation](#) should be awarded a medal of some kind. What he has done is just flat out wonderful and gives me honest to goodness hope for the future of American theatre, not to mention the human race.

*FUE* is a delightful, cleverly written romp using the Brooklyn indie pop/rock/hip-hop scene as its backdrop. Nothing even remotely serious or profound happens here — just an hour and a half of pure, unadulterated fun. The book has already won an award at the New York Musical Theatre Festival. The music is good — not great, but who cares? The show grabs you from the get-go and keeps you on the edge of your seat or doubled over laughing until everyone is happily paired (or ménage-a-troised) up at the end.

This is a seriously funny musical with one of the finest comic performances I have witnessed in a long, long time. Lee August Praley, as the central character Christian Mohammed Schwartzelberg, kills it. He plays the lovable nerd brilliantly. He expends no effort in attempting to convince you of his nerdiness. He just exudes NERD and is flat out hilarious.

Effective comedy has three steps – the set-up, the punch-line and the reaction. Praley is a master of all three.

He deadpans a line as well as Walter Matthau and reacts with the aplomb and nuance of Spencer Tracy. If there is an award for best comic performance at Capital Fringe, I nominate and will go to the mat for Lee August Praley.

He is also a budding playwright and headed for graduate school in dramatic writing. We need new talented playwrights, but if Praley gives up his acting career to focus exclusively on playwriting, it will be a crying shame.

The rest of the cast is uniformly crackerjack right down the line. Crystal Mosser as Juliana is a drop-dead gorgeous blond – every pubescent male’s fantasy in the flesh. But a stunningly beautiful actress has a problem. Her beauty is a constant threat to overwhelm the authenticity of the character. Not a problem for Mosser. In the same way that Praley just simply is a nerdy, hilarious guy, Mosser is just a girl like any other girl looking for something real in a relationship rather than life being one big chemistry lesson. She carries it off beautifully rather than showing off her beauty.

Actors hate to be written up as “also included in the cast were....” The fact is that John Fritz as Jake, Alex Aucoln as “Drummer,” Crystal Arnette as Arielle and Dani Stoller as Ivy were uniformly excellent in their roles, both acting and singing. Not a flaw anywhere in sight. Stoller was particularly appealing in a difficult role that requires a not-so-subtle transformation. I see a bright future there.

A musical like this can get to be too much of a good thing. David Eric Davis (music, lyrics and book) and Sam Forman (book) are much too street savvy to let that happen. They found the perfect foil in the character of a stoned out, mellower than yellow, bass player, Tony, impeccably performed by Jason Wilson. His two featured numbers, “Me and My Bong” and “Getting High” provide a much needed change of pace from the driving, rock and roll freneticism of much of the rest of the piece. They were damn funny as well and were it not for the remarkable performances of Praley and Mosser, he easily could have stolen the show.

There is only one thing, in my opinion, that slows down the hilarity and exuberance of this very well written and finely performed musical. The title of the show itself and the title tune of the same name do not do justice to the rest of the piece. This musical has a genuine sweetness about it in addition to being great entertainment. It debases itself with an in-your-face (which is to say in the audience’s face) f-bomb dropping opening number that somehow made its way to becoming the title of the play itself.

It is very similar to *Urinetown* which I put off seeing for years only to be delightfully surprised when I finally did. The title turned me off and, quite frankly, it still does. Even if Neil Simon has declared unequivocally that words with the letter “k” are funny, the f-bomb, as far as this writer is concerned, has lost its shock value and any humor that might have come with it. It has become old, stale and, for theatrical purposes, meaningless.

This is my seventh and final review for the CFF. If I might be allowed a brief personal note, it has been one of the most exhilarating theatrical experiences of my 63 year-old life and a love for theatre that began somewhere around the third grade. It goes way beyond the fun it is to just let your hair down and set loose whatever theatrical demon or daredevil has been bubbling below your psychic surface.

The Capital Fringe Festival is tremendously important to the role that art and theatre play in our lives and in our culture. It deserves our wholehearted support and to be shared and promoted far and wide. Heartfelt thanks to Julianne Brienza, the board, staff and volunteers who make Capital Fringe Festival possible.

And a big hug for Lorraine Treanor, Editor of DC TheatreScene.com. Her wry sense of humor, compassion and encouragement have made it possible for a number of us to attempt the utter ridiculous, in my case review seven shows in nine days. I would not have missed it for the world.

You have no excuse for missing this one. *F#@king Up Everything* has 23 more performances at Woolly Mammoth Theatre, 641 D Street NW, Washington, DC.

[Tickets](#)



Larry gives this our top rating, making it a Pick of the Fringe.

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