

# SKUNKWEED (TRIPLE BYPASS PRODUCTIONS) 2015 TORONTO FRINGE REVIEW

JULY 2, 2015 S. BEAR BERGMAN LEAVE A COMMENT



Have you ever, in your long and lucky life, met someone who just smiled at you and somehow their smile hit you right in the heart? I have. But never has such complicated, raw, needy nonsense ensued as is acted out in [Skunkweed](#), my first [Toronto Fringe](#) show of 2015 (playing at Theatre Passe Muraille in the Mainspace). This production of [Skunkweed](#), an [Eric Bogosian](#) play, is 100% Bogosian in plot (sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll) and in theme: what would happen if you stopped behaving as you were supposed to, and did what you wanted instead? Because [id](#) and instinct reign supreme, [Skunkweed](#) is a test for a company – actors and director alike. There's a risk of too much stage

business clouding the emotional truth of the show, and an equal risk of playing the bits so low-key that it's hard to see where it's all coming from. This production hits the sweet spot. There's a remarkable groundedness in the acting, enough to fully sell even the most outlandish plot turns while also letting the emotional landscape of the play be really present.

I cringed and bit my knuckles and groaned and shook my head, but I also thought about the times I had wanted, dearly and deeply, to behave as honestly as the characters. To take a flyer, to say the thing, to be the one who *does* something when no one else will. I couldn't begin to detail the plot (the spoiler issues alone would derail me in three sentences) but imagine the most train wreck morning-after story you've ever heard in your whole little life, and add... well, add everything.

Director Adam Bailey, who also helmed last year's Fringe Pick [Assassination of Robert Ford: Dirty Little Coward](#), deserves kudos for this, as do the entire cast. Though everyone was great, I would be remiss if I didn't give extra attention to Chris Whitby, playing Jerry, who manages more with the set of his shoulders than I have seen some actors do in an entire monologue, and to Jenna Harder as Rainbow, who is a little underused considering how obviously talented she is.

I might also have turned the emotional intensity on Chet (played by TJ Chelsea) down a hair, or at least given him a volume control — he blazed out full throttle and left himself nowhere much to go, but that could be as much opening night as anything. It's a minor critique, and the show as a whole is good stuff.

You might not typically see a 90 minute play during Fringe, especially if it's not an original work. You might shy away from shows with mature language warnings and endless drug references. But don't be fooled — [Skunkweed](#) is far more tender than it seems from the Fringe guide and overall, quite pleasing.