

## SHOWBILL.CA

Victoria Fringe Festival 2017  
Grace "Ashyvaane" Eccleston

### ***Wild, high energy, and intimately memorable***

*In Waking Life* is an emotional roller coaster from its goofball beginning to its shell-shocking end. Lauren Welchner and Monica Bradford-Lea deliver a truly unique experience as the "Synsk Sisters"; psychic siblings born and raised in a clever gray area between Norway and Sweden. Even given a shy crowd, this pair was entirely capable of engaging with quirky, exaggerated personas and smooth musical jokes. They easily set the fast-pace with an infectious silliness.

To begin with, one can't be entirely sure of what is meant to be happening, as the Sisters are disguised as the leaders of an odd little book club meeting. However, they came to discuss dragons and eat finger sandwiches – and they were all out of sandwiches. Off comes the ruse, and out flares these fairy-snowflake personas – ultimately, girls driven by their interests, including but not limited to fortune-telling tropes and love. Loud, juvenile, but easily relatable to every person in the room.

The deeper one goes, the more you begin to appreciate how connected the Sisters are to their goat roots and largely inanimate Aunts, Uncle, and cousins. For the short amount of time they have to work in, it is perfectly clear what the Sisters value most; family. This only adds to the power of the story climax. The change is instant. It could be felt in the air; the sibling squabbling and jesting camaraderie disappear under the weight of a tragedy that every person has known. It brings the whole experience together. All of a sudden, throw-away lines are deeply meaningful, and wacky props are more than just thoughtless whims.

*In Waking Life* is a story of important life struggles and values, hidden behind a burst of wild, high-energy laughter. Check yourself in for a memorable experience!

<http://victoria.showbill.ca/wild-high-energy-intimately-memorable/>

*In Waking Life* @ VCM Wood Hall (Friday, August 25th)

**APT613**

Ottawa Fringe Festival 2016

Jennifer Cavanagh

# Fringe Review: In Waking Life

By [Jennifer Cavanagh](#) on June 17, 2016

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**60 mins | Comedy | PG**

*In Waking Life* is a lively two-handed improvised performance piece that successfully mixes banter, musical numbers and audience participation. It's an overblown fortune-telling romp celebrating off-the-wall humour and oddities.

The Norwegian-born psychic Synsk sisters, raised by a mother goat and surrounded by "family members" made up of a crystal ball, uncle 8-ball and the many cutie-catcher cousins are here in Ottawa to share their visions and delve in to their audience's future. The Bring-Your-Own-Venue location in the basement of the Royal Oak on Laurier St E lends itself perfectly to production providing a cozy, old-world setting as the heavily-accented psychics "welcome" their clients.

The structure of the play has enough hooks to provide consistency in the quality of the improvisations and the performers easily stepped in to the breach when the audience members were slow to respond. Creator/performers Monica Bradford-Lea and Lauren Welchner bring unbridled energy to their character performances: one sister manic and forthright, the other airy and scattered, both side-splittingly funny in turn.

It's a cavalcade of non-stop action that appears random but is planned and executed well in a seemingly haphazard manner that suits the characters and engages the audience. One attendee was comfortable enough to share a Guinness session that led him to pee in his own luggage so disarming is their appeal. Another particularly memorable scene had the sisters reading astrological texting advice from AstroGirl magazine which as they will be very pleased to tell you is "so stupid, but so fun."

Dreams are dissected, love matches made, questions answered and fortunes told as the Synsk Sisters deliver a truly one-off psychic experience like you have never seen.

Previously improvised performance pieces leave me cold but with the Synsk Sisters *In Waking Life* you'll have a ball.

*In Waking Life*, BYOV – The Royal Oak 161 Laurier St E.

<https://apt613.ca/fringe-review-waking-life/>

**APT613**

Ottawa Fringe Festival 2018

Travis Facette

# Fringe Review: *The Brotherhood*

By [Travis Facette](#) on June 15, 2018

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## **The Brotherhood**

**by Monica Bradford-Lea and Lauren Welchner**

**Spicy Day**

*50 min / Comedy / Mature*

*The Brotherhood* is, on its surface, a comedy magic act. Much of the show (produced by Spicy Day) is exactly what you'd expect from this kind of performance—card tricks, sleight of hand, some reluctant but smiling audience members being pulled out to pick a card, any card. All of this is enjoyable and well-executed.

Some tricks earned genuine gasps from the crowd, which is exactly what you want at a magic show. Bradford-Lea and Welchner are clearly both experienced performers, they're having fun on stage, and their raunchy humour gets consistent laughs (even in a small space, which can be very challenging for comedy).

But that raunchiness, and the broader premise of the show, hint at something else. These two magicians are here to perform for a secret evaluator from the eponymous Brotherhood of Wizardry, who has blended into the audience to judge their audition. The tension is already there: why is it called "The Brotherhood" and what does that mean for two women who are applying?

It's not long before you realize that their raunchiness has an edge to it, that these two young women in little black dresses are very conscious of how they present themselves, and their flirtatious smiles start to look a little strained, their jokes a little aggressive. The mask slides off a bit, and sometimes a pointed question about the gender dynamics of their industry slips out. The audience is still laughing, but ruefully, and a bit more quietly. We all know what's been happening in the news, in our communities, in the

performance industry, and we know magic is a perfect example, with its traditional scantily clad assistants as living props.

This sense of dread creeps through the back half of the show, producing almost the same feeling you might get on a bad date, especially as a woman—what was fun and titillating starts to get uncomfortable, and your smile turns sour and slides off your face. A saucy dance number becomes a surreal, troubling commentary on how young women are objectified. It's an entertaining, genuinely funny performance, but it's also a pointed feminist critique. By the end of the show, nobody was laughing anymore.

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*[The Brotherhood](#) by Monica Bradford-Lea and Lauren Welchner is being performed in Knot Project Space inside Arts Court (2 Daly Ave) until Saturday June 23, 2018. Tickets Cost \$12. Visit [ottawafringe.com](http://ottawafringe.com) for the schedule and box office info. Read more reviews at [apt613.ca/fringe](http://apt613.ca/fringe).*

<https://apt613.ca/fringe-review-the-brotherhood/>