

WINNER: Bravest Show- 2017 Victoria Fringe Festival

Monica vs the Internet: Tales of a Social Justice Warrior by Monica Ogden and Ann-Bernice Thomas

They're loud, proud, intelligent, and they refuse to shut up and go away because some troll on the internet wants them dead.

Welcome to a world where your very existence, every facet of it—from your smile, to your feminist views, to your “whiteness” or lack of it—is criticized. Where every time you state an opinion, someone seeks to, at the very least, minimize or erase it.

Monica Ogden, a former UVic theatre student, member of the Parliamentary Players, partner in NickelPumpnickel and improviser with Paper Street Theatre is a young disabled woman of colour and founder of the YouTube channel *Fistful of Feminism*. Ann-Bernice Thomas is the former City of Victoria Youth Poet Laureate, a Youth Slam Champion and VACCS Community Recognition Award Recipient. With humour and a light touch, via a sprightly ditty and video clip, Ogden introduces us to the (mostly) angry straight white men who subscribe to her channel. The vitriol is over-the-top.

However, in *Troll and Real Life*, an audience participation game where people guess who made the comment, the issues take on a reality far removed from the computer screen—how would it feel to have every aspect of your physical being examined? And when she recounts her time in the theatre department and a discussion around the appropriation of roles by young white actors—most people would agree there is still work to be done.

In a world, and at a time (still!) when the word feminist raises the hackles of a fair number, where intersectional and second wave feminist cannot always find common ground, shows like *Monica vs the Internet: Tales of a Social Justice Warrior* are important, allowing audiences to build empathy and see life from another angle.

It's not enough to say that Fringe theatre is uncensored, unjuried and accessible—for the voices to be heard, theatre-goers need to come to the shows. It's not as simple either as “well, if there's so much hate on social media, why use social media?” Somehow, together, we need to find a way forward.

In a community as white as Victoria, where theatre (and this is, admittedly, (very) slowly changing) remains predominantly white, those of us with privilege needs must champion the voices on the margin. *Monica vs the Internet: Tales of a Social Justice Warrior* is sharp, incisive, funny, well-constructed and devastating.

Thanks to the creators for challenging our assumptions and teaching us that responsibility for taking the next steps in our awareness remain ours. It's no longer enough to say “I didn't know”.

Read my interview with Monica Ogden here:

<http://janislacouvee.com/monica-vs-internet-tales-social-justice-warrior-victoria-fringe-2017-interview/>

Local YouTuber champions social justice in Victoria Fringe Festival

Monica vs. The Internet presents “the gross underbelly of life online”

Morgan Cross/VICTORIA NEWS

Youtuber Monica Ogden brings some of her best and worst YouTube comments to stage as part of her new performance at the Victoria Fringe Festival this month.

A self-proclaimed social justice warrior and Victoria resident, Ogden has as many supporters as she has opponents. Those two factors fuel her excitement and apprehension for the show, which begins at the end of August.

Monica vs. The Internet (Tales of a Social Justice Warrior) is a one-woman performance that takes a stand-up approach to giving voice to women of colour. The show explores some of the physical and online challenges Ogden has personally faced as a mixed-race Filipina woman, delving into the highlights and drawbacks of being an outspoken feminist online and in the physical world, and aiming to disrupt exclusionary narratives and behaviours in online and theatre communities.

An actor, improviser and feminist, Ogden hopes to put on a funny and enlightening performance for Victoria; though one, she cautions, that will not appeal to all audiences.

“[The show] is a lot of me poking fun at the stuff that happens to myself online,” Ogden said, adding that a lot of storytelling is involved.

“I think, given the current political climate of the world, centring marginalized voices is so important right now. It’s important we centre all women of colour about their experiences, because they’re the experts on what racism is and what systemic oppression is.”

Taking a page from her own book, Ogden has created her show with the help of an entirely female – primarily of colour – creative team.

In Ottawa’s Fringe Festival two months ago, Ogden and Tony Adams collaborated for their experimental and comedic show *Lub Dub*, which focused largely on social awareness as well. Ogden said the performance received backlash and there were instances of covert racism and harassment.

Despite that experience, she promises that *Monica vs. The Internet* will be an honest show and she has no plans to hold back while on stage. “This is most certainly a show for people who have experienced marginalization, and if you can’t relate, you should probably listen. I think it is for everyone, but it’s going to challenge some people more than others.”

The 12-day Victoria Fringe Festival is one of Vancouver Island’s largest theatre events, with 58 shows from across the world celebrating indie and alternative performance.

Monica vs. The Internet plays at the Downtown Community Centre (Fringe Venue 2, 755 Pandora Ave.) on Aug. 25, 26, 27 and 30 and Sept. 1 and 2 at various times. For more information on Ogden, or show times and ticketing details for the Fringe Festival, visit intrepidtheatre.com.

Niko Mumford, Showbill

CW: sexual assault, anti-asian sentiment, PTSD, colonial violence

Monica vs the Internet (Tales of a Social Justice Warrior) is a funny, yet hard-hitting testimony to navigating the often violent online world as a Filipina social justice vlogger. Performed and created by Monica Ogden, creator of *Fistful of Feminism* on YouTube with additional creator credit to Ann-Bernice Thomas, 2016 Victoria Youth Poet Laureate, the show provides in-depth reflections on the real life struggles of an intersectional feminist with an online persona.

Through R-Rated sing alongs, video, and real comments from her YouTube channel, Monica provides frank and accessible analysis on the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and ability. By adopting a

conversational tone whilst addressing the audience, and encouraging audience participation, a feeling of safety is developed between audience and performer, creating a unique space for raw discussions on violence and privilege.

An astonishing accomplishment of the show is the balance between intensely personal storytelling and the exploration of oppression within online and theatre communities. Speaking directly her own experience, Monica challenges white supremacy and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous material within the Victoria theatre community. Using online comments as a starting point, Monica also explores the true effects of hate speech on the internet, calling upon her own struggles with PTSD, anti-asian sentiment, and sexual assault. Refreshingly, , Monica acknowledges her own privilege throughout these discussions, making it clear that the stories of some oppressed people are not fair game for any artist who has been oppressed. Through this perspective, Monica succeeds in analyzing the problematic facets of white feminism, including the refusal to acknowledge colonization and racism within feminist communities. Monica's effectiveness as a social justice activist is evident throughout the piece, although arguably the most powerful aspect of her exploration is accepting the genuine struggle of facing daily violence online. She reflects upon the hateful push back online and in real life against her activism and comfort in identity, producing an honest claim to the struggle of continuing to be vocal in the face of racist and misogynistic threats. Through such a raw exploration, Monica reclaims the title of Social Justice Warrior, speaking directly to the battle being fought daily as an oppressed individual speaking frankly on her experience. The result of such exploration is a hilariously honest, heartbreaking account of how online hatred has true effects on the often oppressed individuals pushing against it.

Monica vs. the Internet succeeds in exploring the challenging reality of existing as an intersectional feminist online and in real life. Through quirky music, hard-hitting humour, and raw personal accounts, the show leaves its audience not only informed, but invigorated and passionate, renewing the rage within the activists in attendance. It would be a true shame to miss the opportunity to hear the testimony of this talented, unapologetic warrior.

From [Rose Jang](#):

"After a weekend of Fringing, my must-see show of [#yyjfringe](#) is Monica vs. the Internet. For anyone who cares about social justice, who knows what a YouTuber is, who believes in intersectionality, or who wants to be a better human, this show dares to be bold, vulnerable, and truthful. Essential viewing in this conflict-full age."