2019 KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival Breaks Record with 100,000+ Attendees

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ROCHESTER, N.Y. (PRWEB) November 07, 2019 -- The 2019 KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival broke attendance records again, this time with upwards of 100,000 visitors – more than 25% over last year’s estimated 78,000. Ticket sales were also the highest ever.

“We’re thrilled that our eighth annual Fringe was the best yet in terms of attendance as well as acclaim,” says Founding Festival Producer Erica Fee. “Over and over, though, I heard how much joy it brought to people. It’s very gratifying to hear that – we all need joy in our lives.”

A 12-day event for the first time (September 10-21), Rochester’s Fringe featured more performances and events than ever – 667, of which 219 were free of charge – in 25+ downtown venues. Fringe also debuted a new Fringe Finale Weekend that featured last year’s Friday and Saturday on the Fringe headliners: the U.K.’s Massaoke. The global singalong sensation headlined both evenings with two different shows that included the U.S. premiere of "Massaoke: Night at the Musicals" on closing night. Other popular free events that weekend included the Fringe Street Beat dance competition and Kids Day activities.

Weather was in Fringe’s favor this year, on all but Friday the 13th, when high winds forced French street theatre company Plasticiens Volants (pronunciation here) to cancel its spectacular "Pearl: Secrets of the Sea" show (also a U.S. premiere) at the last minute. That didn’t stop attendees – many of whom were still waiting in lines – from joining the festive crowd and sampling the many assembled food trucks. And the following evening, thousands more gathered for two stunning performances of the immersive, undersea adventure that played out in the downtown night sky. When a giant, inflatable sea serpent slithered across Main Street and attacked an enormous octopus, the roar from the crowd sounded like a touchdown at a football game.

“Free, spectacular, outdoor experiences like "Pearl" are absolutely unique to this festival – none of the world’s other 200+ fringe festivals have anything like it,” adds Rochester Fringe Festival Board Chairperson Justin L. Vigdor. “These performances draw a much more accurate cross-section of the population than ticketed, indoor events do, and they provide unparalleled public access to the arts – one of our non-profit Fringe’s important missions.”

Another important Fringe mission is to provide a platform for artists to share their ideas and develop their skills. Missy Pfohl Smith, artistic director of local dance company BIODANCE, and director of the 2019 Fringe show "The Fragile Corridor: BIODANCE, Harris & Burritt" at the Rochester Museum & Science Center's Strasenburgh Planetarium, reflects:

“Year after year, I am so grateful for Rochester Fringe and the opportunity it provides for me to take creative risks, to step outside of the theatre (box) and into a challenging but inviting space like the Planetarium, and to make something altogether new alongside amazing artists and collaborators.”

“This festival supports and encourages creative exploration, and as an artist with a penchant toward the
ridiculous and interactive, it has provided me with so many opportunities to experiment and be seen,” adds Abby DeVuyst, a frequent Fringe performer who created and starred with comedic co-conspirator Kerry Young in this year’s total sell-out, "Bushwhacked British Bake Off" in the Spiegeltent.

Hundreds of visitors were drawn to that glowing, magical Spiegeltent each night to check out its charming Theatre Bar, free Pedestrian Drive-In movies, giant games, outdoor lounge seating, fire pits, and much more. Ticketed headliners in the adjacent Cristal Palace Spiegeltent – "Cirque du Fringe: D’illusion," "Shotspeare," Silent Disco, Disco Kids, and the debut of Drag Brunch – were total sell-outs. Comedy headliner Mike Birbiglia at Kodak Hall and Peabody-nominated podcaster Nate DiMeo’s "The Memory Palace Live" in Kilbourn Hall drew full houses as well.

Attendance was also up at Fringe’s independent venues, which book the vast majority of Fringe performances and events from applications received during the submission process: The Avyarium, Blackfriars Theatre, Eastman School of Music, Garth Fagan Dance, George Eastman Museum, Geva Theatre Center, Java’s Café, Central Library of Rochester, The Little, The Lyric Theatre, Multi-use Community Cultural Center (MuCCC), RIT City Space, RMSC’s Strasenburgh Planetarium, School of the Arts, and Writers & Books. Two new 2019 venues – Nox Cocktail Lounge and Joseph Avenue Arts and Culture Alliance – report successful debuts:

“The festival was great on our end,” says Nox owner, Aaron Metras. “We had 11 shows sell out and…[brought] in just under 1,200 people total. We have received great feedback from all of the shows, and great exposure from new customers. I heard the phrase, ‘I had no idea this room was here’ dozens of times…All in all, it was a fantastic two weeks, and we very much look forward to doing it again next year!”

“Hosting KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival performances…[in] the heart of the Northeast Quadrant highlighted not only the best of our community, but showcased the immense transformative power of the arts,” says Joseph Avenue Arts and Culture Alliance Executive Director David J. Pacific. “Hundreds joined us in the Joseph Avenue neighborhood – many for the first time – and it was a testament to the vibrancy of the Fringe and of our city…We were honored to be a part of the Fringe and look forward to 2020!”

Fringe also partnered with several new community organizations this year, including Rochester’s Puerto Rican Festival for a kick-off of Hispanic Heritage Month in the Spiegeltent. A collaboration with the Gateways Music Festival resulted in "A Celebration of the Life of Paul J. Burgett Through Music," which was also enthusiastically received.

“It’s vital that we continue to engage and partner with diverse audiences and participants, so that we grow as a festival that truly serves and reflects the community,” explains Fringe Board of Directors member Thomas Warfield, who chairs the festival’s Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility Committee.

Attaining important Fringe missions like these are possible only with the support of many funders*, including the festival’s title sponsor.

“We congratulate our KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival partners on reaching this attendance milestone,” says KeyBank Rochester Market President Phil Muscato. “Fringe has become part of the fabric of Rochester and we are so happy to see it grow each year.”

The 2020 KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival will again run for 12 days: Tuesday, September 15 through Saturday, September 26, and show submissions will open in February.
Rochester Fringe Festival, a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 corporation, is made possible with support from New York State through Market New York/Empire State Development under the Regional Economic Development Council initiative. Other 2019 Fringe sponsors include: KeyBank; I LOVE NY; New York State Council on the Arts; University of Rochester; RIT; Rochester Area Community Foundation; Waldron Rise Foundation; City of Rochester; Ames Amzalak Memorial Trust; National Endowment for the Arts; Imagine Monroe; Estate of Marianne L. Rohack; Richard U. & Elaine P. Wilson Foundation; Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation; Nocon & Associates; Konar Properties; SUNY Geneseo; Ronald Fielding; Mary S. Mulligan Charitable Trust; Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation; Hyatt Regency Rochester; The Pike Company; Louis S. & Molly B. Wolk Foundation; Big Slide Creative; 13WHAM TV; CITY Newspaper, D&C Digital; Broccoli Tree & Lawn Care; McCarthy Tents & Events; Nazareth College; The College at Brockport; St. John Fisher College; The Rubens Family Foundation; Genesee Beer; Wegmans; Fred & Floy Willmott Foundation; Gouvernet Arts Fund at the Rochester Area Community Foundation; Visit Rochester; Wilson Foundation; ESL Charitable Foundation; Hamilton A/V; Scott Miller; House of Guitars; City Blue; Yelp!; WXXI; KidsOutandAbout.com; Midtown Athletic Club; Mary Cariola Children’s Center; Canandaigua National Bank; and the YMCA of Greater Rochester. Also supported by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy.

From its five-day debut in 2012, the KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival has become one of the fastest-growing and most-attended fringe festivals in the U.S. as well as the largest multi-arts festival in New York State. As a bifurcated festival, it allows for a combination of headline entertainment curated by the non-profit Rochester Fringe Festival as well as an open-access portion programmed by the venues themselves. Renowned among the world’s 200+ fringe festivals for its spectacular, outdoor, free events as well as its large number of free performances in general, Rochester’s Fringe was also the first in North America to feature a Spiegeltent. From comedy to theatre, from music to dance, from visual art and film to spoken word, and from children’s entertainment to multi-disciplinary collaborations, the festival’s diversity also extends to venues that span the gamut from parked cars to grand theatres.

Rochester Fringe Festival connects and empowers artists, audiences, venues, educational institutions, and the community to celebrate, explore, and inspire creativity via an annual, multi-genre arts festival. It was pioneered by several of Rochester’s esteemed cultural institutions including Geva Theatre Center, the George Eastman House and Garth Fagan Dance; up-and-coming arts groups like PUSH Physical Theatre and Method Machine; and higher-education partners such as the University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology. The organization’s overarching mission is to make arts readily accessible to audiences, as well as to provide a platform for artists to share their ideas and develop their skills, while stimulating downtown Rochester both culturally and economically.

ABOUT KEYBANK: KeyBank's roots trace back 190 years to Albany, New York. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, KeyCorp is one of the nation's largest bank-based financial services companies, with assets of approximately $146.7 billion at September 30, 2019. Key provides deposit, lending, cash management, and investment services to individuals and businesses in 15 states under the name KeyBank National Association through a network of over 1,100 branches and more than 1,400 ATMs. Key also provides a broad range of sophisticated corporate and investment banking products, such as merger and acquisition advice, public and private debt and equity, syndications and derivatives to middle market companies in selected industries throughout the United States under the KeyBanc Capital Markets trade name. For more information, visit https://www.key.com/. KeyBank is Member FDIC.
Media please note: High-resolution photos from the 2019 KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival may be found here, or visit https://rochesterfringe.com/press for complete 2019 Press Assets.
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