



**FRINGE PLAYERS:** Eric Bleyendaal, left, Kara Crabb and Josh Flynn star in *Meaning*, which will part of this summer's Fringe Festival.

Star photo: Scott Webster

# Fringe features top-class talent

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Windsor's newest summer festival is bringing dozens of independent plays, cabarets, musicals and children's shows to town.

The inaugural Windsor International Fringe Festival takes place July 19-27. Throughout the festival, 27 independent theatre companies will put on shows at five downtown venues.

"This is really exciting for the arts in Windsor," said Mona el Baroudi, the festival's director.

"Fringe festivals are really well known in the rest of Canada."

Fringe theatre began 50 years ago when a handful of theatre groups were not allowed to perform at Scotland's prestigious Edinburgh Theatre Festival, and instead put on shows in the "fringe" or outskirts of town.

Now, independent theatre has found its niche. Thousands attend yearly festivals in London, Toronto, Saskatoon and Edmonton. Half of the Windsor performances will be by festival veterans, who spend their summers on the Canadian fringe circuit.

Windsor-native Zandra Bell has been performing her one-woman comedy show at fringe festivals since 1995.

"In cities like Edmonton, people will take their vacation to immerse themselves in the fringe," said Bell. "The neat thing is you are treated to world-class theatre, but you don't have to pay big ticket for it."

Windsor's newest festival also provides exposure for local talent. Eighteen-year-old Eric Bleyendaal wrote, directed and will act in his play *Meaning*.

"So much talent"

"There is so much talent in Windsor that people don't know about," said Bleyendaal, a Grade 12 student at Walkerville collegiate. "It's extremely exciting to be a part of this."

The fringe plays will hit the stage at the Art Gallery of Windsor, the Room, the Boom Boom Room, and two venues at the Capitol Theatre.

"If people get behind this festival, it could make a difference for Windsor's downtown," said Bell.

"A fringe festival can draw throngs of people."

Everyone attending the festival must purchase a Fringe Fest button for \$3, which supports the non-profit Actors Theatre of Windsor.

Show tickets are \$9 for adults, \$5 for children.