

# Boulder International Fringe Festival: burlesque, puppets and other independents

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## Entertainment

### Event's former executive director, David Ortolano, now a performer

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David Ortolano, pictured at Longmont Museum in 2015, is the former executive director of Boulder International Fringe Festival. This year the festival will feature his production "The Man Who Sold the World." (*Matthew Jonas / Staff Photographer*)

## If you go

**What:** 13th Annual Boulder International Fringe Festival

**When:** Aug. 16-27

**Where:** Performances at venues across the city: Trident Booksellers, Wesley Theater and Lounge , Pine Street Church Sanctuary and Community Room, Community Dance Collective and Kelly's Barn.

**Cost:** Individual performances are \$8-\$15; student and senior discounts available

**More info:** [boulderfringe.com](http://boulderfringe.com)

David Ortolano wanted to make sure that Boulder figured on his international itinerary.

Ortolano's original theater production, "The Man Who Sold the World," had won a coveted spot in the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals' 2017 touring lottery. As the writer and performer of one of only five qualifying shows, Ortolano had his pick of cities across North America where he could perform his piece, a "pre-apocalyptic dramedy" penned in 2001.

It didn't take long for Ortolano to finalize a slot at the [Boulder International Fringe Festival](#), a festival for which served as executive director for many years, which will run from Aug. 16-27 at seven venues across the city.

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"It was important to me mainly because I feel like the show was birthed in Boulder," Ortolano said from Calgary, Canada, where he was presenting his original production earlier this month. "It's my community, and I know a lot of people in Boulder who have been asking to be a part of the show. It just makes sense to come home and unpack."

Ortolano is among the 20 artists featured in Boulder's annual iteration of this global celebration of independent performance. Thirteen years ago, Ortolano, who trained and taught at Naropa University in Boulder, was one of the local artists who helped establish the festival in Boulder. He said the genesis of the event stemmed directly from an unserved creative need in the community.

"A big part of the reason why I felt motivated to instigate the Fringe had a lot to do with the surface level of Boulder being a little bit trapped in a bubble. I felt like calling it 'international,' inviting artists from all over the world to self-produce and to dictate their true creativity," Ortolano said, pointing to the independent, unjuried fringe fest model, which offers artists of all backgrounds and orientations equal access. What's more, 100 percent of the ticket revenue goes to the artists. "At the time, there wasn't something in Boulder that was groundbreaking in this way, something that was really artist-centric instead of program-centric."

## Fans travel Fringe to Fringe

More than a decade later, that focus on the artist still animates the spirit of the Boulder Fringe Festival. The 2017 lineup features performers of all backgrounds, interests and mediums — the program includes burlesque troupes, puppet shows, cabaret performances and musical revues, all set to run at community venues spread across downtown, stages that range from the spacious (The Wesley Theater) to the intimate (the Trident bookstore).

But individualism is only part of the formula when it comes to the Fringe Fest. According to Lisa McClellan, who's serving her first year as the festival's organizer, the unifying concept behind the event is a strong sense of community.

"As much as it is about the artists, it's also a whole event and a whole community," McClellan said. "It's making these connections and being incredibly amazed by the support all around ... I think there are audience members who travel from town to town, Fringe to Fringe. We also have artists doing the Fringe tour — this is one of their stops."

Ada Cheng, a storyteller and performer out of Chicago, and one of this year's featured artists, is performing in Boulder for the first time. Cheng's piece, "Not Quite: Asian American by Law, Asian Woman by Desire," explores themes tied to immigration, identity and language. A longtime college professor at DePaul University, Cheng recently decided to pursue performance full-time. The fringe festival format allows Cheng to offer insights and tackle tough questions in a manner that's much more immediate than what's possible in a college classroom.

"I'm still teaching. I'm just using a much more powerful tool," Cheng said. "I use stories to highlight the debates and the issues. I take people on the journey and describe my feelings and my thoughts. Hopefully through this process ... the stories show how theories and constructs actually function and work in detail." She added, "I want people in different cities to hear my messages. What better way to do it than through the Fringe?"

Ortolano is one of many local performers featured in this year's festival, and he sees "The Man Who Sold the World," which will run at the Wesley Theatre, as a good fit for Boulder audiences. Though it was written in 2001, the show's vision of a divisive and self-destructive political climate has plenty of contemporary parallels, and Ortolano sees the Boulder International Fringe Festival as an ideal platform to fully explore the show's possibilities.

"This show really pokes at how you define truth and reality and facts," he said. "It's my educated opinion that Boulder is fairly astute when it comes to politics and art ... I feel like I'll have a strong audience."

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