

Chicago Tribune

Best of Chicago's fringe theater scene in 2011

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This time of year we're inundated with reminders to shop local, but there's never a bad time to check out smaller local theater companies who specialize in innovation, guts, and sometimes just sheer blissful goofiness. These artists mostly work for love, not money — and their damn-the-torpedoes commitment to craft over the bottom line makes our weekly voyages “On the Fringe” a homegrown adventure. Here are our top shows from 2011.

Nina Metz's picks:

“Superman: 2050” (Theater Un-Speak-Able): No matter how dazzling the special effects may be in the upcoming cinematic remake of “Superman,” none will feel as witty or clever as the analog efforts of creator Marc Frost (as Clark Kent/Superman) and his six fellow actors — all clad in blue body-hugging spandex — crammed onto a platform the size of a parking space for this winking yet utterly sincere and high-energy version of the Superman myth. Never has physical theater embraced pop culture so wholeheartedly. Using zero props and zero set design, they created an action-packed story — from Smallville to the offices of the Daily Planet — using only shifts in body language. The budget for this thing couldn't be more than a couple hundred dollars at most. Now that's a fringe show. *Up next: After touring the Midwest over the summer, Un-Speak-Able will perform “Superman” in New York next month as part of the Times Square International Theater Festival; un-speak-able.com.*